

STUDY

Ongoing Formation of Religious

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Introduction

The purpose of this intervention, “Ongoing Formation of Religious,” is to be situated in the general context of the problem of religious who are facing difficulties in their consecrated life and could be specifically considered as a means to meet the problem of vocation crisis, or more particularly the crisis of fidelity in one’s vocation.

There could be a number of specific motives for which a religious could have difficulties with religious consecration or with the vocational call. They could be on account of the problems that one has in the living and in the practice of the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. There could also be a problems of community living and of interpersonal relationships. Some difficulties could also arise from some doubts about one’s religious calling, problems of prayer, or an intimate relationship with God or with Jesus Christ. All these are specific issues and have to be tackled directly and, at times, with specific therapeutic interventions including spiritual direction, psychological counseling, personal or group therapy and the like.

Ongoing formation of religious could, in particular instances, include even such services. But, the overall emphasis of this contribution is more in the lines of visualizing ongoing formation as a means that could offset the presentation of doubts, or problems, or difficulties with regard to one’s vocation. Hence, it would be better to consider this proposal of ongoing religious formation as a preventive means to thwart a crisis in one’s religious vocation.

We will first clarify what is meant by formation, ongoing formation and ongoing religious formation, with an in-depth analysis of the dynamics inherent to ongoing religious formation. An important aspect that I intend to elaborate is the transformational character of ongoing formation, and this will be examined from the

psychological and the spiritual points of view. This analysis will be followed by an examination of the dimensions and the content of ongoing formation. Finally, to conclude this excursus, we will see some practical suggestions from the pedagogical point of view.

1. Clarification of Terminology

First of all we need to clarify the meaning of the word “formation.” Etymologically, it is derived from the Latin verb *formare*, which would mean “to mould.”

In pedagogical literature, however, there are three words that should not be confused with “formation,” although they have a similar meaning and action. These are “education,” “instruction” and “learning.”¹ While “education” touches the entire person in his/her process of socialization, “instruction” is the educative act on the part of the educator who aims at transmitting a content of knowledge, and “learning” is the act on the part of the one who is educated in response to what is being offered in the act of education.

The term “formation” goes beyond these three concepts and its scope is a much more engaging notion both on the part of the formator, as well as on the part of the one in formation. In a way, formation could be identified with “education,” but, in its full sense, it has an aspect and a dimension that is much more demanding. This is so, because “formation” is not a particular act, that is done at some particular time of one’s life (as in the case of education or learning). Nor is it a simple communication of any particular content (as with teaching). “Formation” should be understood as a process that brings about a transformation in the person and that affects that person’s entire mode of existence.²

In this sense, “formation” is a lifelong process. For practical purposes various stages of formation can be envisaged, programmed or facilitated, but by its very concept “formation” lasts all through one’s life and hence it can be said that “formation” ends only at death.³ The full sense and meaning of “education,” and in our case of “formation” consists in creating human beings who are capable of

¹ Cf. C. NANNI, “Formazione,” in J.M. PRELLEZO - C. NANNI - G. MALIZIA (Eds.), *Dizionario delle Scienze dell’Educazione* (Elle Di Ci: Leumann [Turin] 1997), p. 432.

² Cf. SACRED CONGREGATION FOR RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR INSTITUTES, *The Religious and Human Promotion (12 August 1980)* (St. Paul Editions: Boston 1980), n. 33.

³ Cf. K. BELSOLE, “A Question of Models in Ongoing Formation,” in *Spirit and Word* (1995) 17, p. 76.

integrating their lives.⁴ Since our lives are constantly being modified by various events, happenings and relationships, this task of integration has to be done constantly, all throughout one's life, and that leads to reorganizing and restructuring one's life.

The formation of religious is the development of the human person to the point where one attains a sense of his/her responsibility in the use of freedom.⁵ What is expected is that the religious strives to grow in the life of the Spirit in faith, hope and charity through following Christ intimately and in constant conversion of heart. Hence, in this sense, religious life is a continuous learning process in which one should advance unceasingly in awareness to better serve the Lord. The consistent teaching of the Church is that religious should be committed all throughout their lives to develop and complete their spiritual, doctrinal and technical or professional formation with care and constancy.⁶

2. Understanding Ongoing Formation of Religious

The ongoing formation of religious is understood as the constant personalization or interiorization of Christ's life. Consequently it is a learning process, which involves change, growth and the transformation of the person. We are told that from the point of view of Canon Law, "perpetual profession, [is] the point of arrival, and at the same time it is the point of departure in religious life, integrally and progressively lived in the institute, and calls for the continual deepening of formation by responding to ever new necessities, thus rendering the religious capable of dynamic fidelity to God's design in the ever-changing circumstances and needs of the Church and the world."⁷

It is in this sense that ongoing formation is most popularly considered to begin only after initial formation is completed, when the religious is a mature adult and possesses a deep motivation and capacity to renew and perfect himself/herself permanently. However, it should be remarked that strictly speaking ongoing formation should more precisely be understood as an action that has its beginning right from the very start of religious formation, and is

⁴ Cf. J. KRISHNAMURTHI, *Education and the Significance of Life* (Krishnamurti Foundation India: Madras 1953), p. 14.

⁵ Cf. H. GRAY, "Integrating Human Needs in Religious Formation," in *Review for Religious* 53 (1994) 1, p. 134.

⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

⁷ E. GAMBARI, *Religious Life. According to Vatican II and The New Code of Canon Law* (St. Paul Editions: Boston 1986), p. 250.

composed of different levels of learning each of them having intermediate goals as the individual acquires knowledge, skills, abilities and competencies. Each of these levels caters to the complete formation of the individual by creating favorable conditions of time and place and providing the necessary input for growth in religious life.

Thus, we should consider formation as ongoing, even though in practice it could be broken up in different stages. Hence, we can have formation in the pre-novitiate period, which has its specific goals to help the candidate prepare for the novitiate. The novitiate in its turn provides the specific formation to help the novice prepare for the first religious profession, which is followed by a post-novitiate formation which also has specific goals to help the young religious to put into practice and deepen the principles given in the earlier periods of vocational growth.

At different stages ongoing religious formation provides professional skills, preparation for new responsibilities and also a re-reading of one's personal life, so that every religious, helped also by external factors, may be able to reach a level of human and spiritual maturity and is able to carry out the work he/she must do in his/her life. The individual is expected to know the situation, the challenges and the demands of the vocational call that he/she has received.

Thus the entire action of formation is a process where the individual becomes more and more a disciple of Christ.⁸ In this way formation becomes a continuous process of conversion and of transformation. It takes into consideration the adoption of a certain style of Christian life, with its own expectations and responsibilities and the development of a specific spirituality.

Ongoing formation thus becomes the facilitation of the continuing growth of the whole person so as to promote a deeper and fuller commitment to the person and mission of Christ. It is not simply to give more information or knowledge or to produce people who are better informed. That is only part of the picture, but it is above all to help the person to believe more in oneself, to believe more in life, and to believe more in Christ. This demands a continuing conversion as a person moves forward in growth towards a more complete realization of the fullness of the person of Christ within oneself.⁹

⁸ Cf. D.F. O'CONNOR, *Witness and Service. Questions about Religious Life Today* (Paulist Press: New York 1990), p. 61.

⁹ Cf. K. McALPIN, "Conversion. A Summons from the Word of God," in *Review for Religious* 61 (2002) 1, p. 49.

3. The Reasons for Ongoing Formation of Religious

On the practical level, we can list three reasons that tell us that ongoing formation is important for religious life. The primary and basic reason for ongoing formation of religious is related above all to the challenges that contemporary culture and society present to a constant fidelity to one's religious vocation. We are living in times of radical and swift cultural changes which necessitate a constantly renewed way of facing the demands of culture.

The constantly changing times also call for new and fresh ways of reading, discerning and interpreting the signs of the times. This is the second reason that justifies the need for such an ongoing formation, where the religious is faithfully updated with the means of reading, discerning and interpreting these signs.

Finally, as the individual grows and matures in the human and in the spiritual life, the new elements that become part and parcel of one's experience need to be accommodated within the general perception and living out of one's vocation. It calls for rethinking one's vision of life and the meaning of religious vocation. This is the third reason that warrants a constant updating which is effected through ongoing formation.

Complementing these reasons in a more essential and existential way, it should be noted that John Paul II in his apostolic exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, pointed out that whether in the case of institutes of apostolic life or of contemplative life, in either case ongoing religious formation is an intrinsic requirement of their consecration (VC 69). In his opinion, religious formation is not the prerogative of any particular age group, but that because of human frailness and limitations no consecrated person can claim to be completely formed for that way of life. Through religious consecration, the individual is expected to bring to life the "new creature," who in every circumstance of life reflects the very mind of Christ. This is a lifetime project that requires a basic disposition and readiness on the part of the individual to be formed every day of one's life.

4. The Dynamics of Ongoing Religious Formation

A deeper and more profound analysis of the actions involved in ongoing religious formation reveals the dynamics of this activity. Experts on education and formation provide us with an analysis of the process of formation from different points of emphasis and they highlight different aspects of the same reality. Broadly, there are three emphases and, although we mention the names of only three experts: Paul Gréger, Sante Bisignano and Amadeo Cencini, in

reality these three aspects are shared by many others. We will now examine these three emphases and, eventually, we will try to synthesize them in order to build up our understanding of ongoing religious formation as a preventive means to offset the crisis in vocations.

4.1. The Process of Becoming

Paul Griéger's understanding of ongoing formation grew in the context of secular formation. In that context he observes that an individual is not to be regarded as a static being, nor even as one whose acquired abilities and strengths deteriorate or decline. He believes that the individual in response to the educative stimuli is in a process of evolution and development of personal strengths, which comprise physical, psychic and spiritual components. Hence, essentially the human person lives a life of growth, of development and of maturation.¹⁰

There is a driving force within every human being to move towards becoming a mature adult and a responsible person, and this is complemented in the professional objective that every educator has. In this process of growth towards maturity in education, as well as in formation, there are four stages through which the individual has to pass, because they comprise the fourfold stages in the process of education or formation: knowing (*sapere*), knowing how to do (*saper fare*), knowing how to be (*saper essere*) and knowing how to become (*saper diventare*). In order to enter into the dynamics of ongoing formation it is imperative that the individual supersede the simple desire to learn (*imparare a imparare*), which is characteristic of initial formation, and should nurture the desire to learn to become (*imparare a divenire*).¹¹

The human being from birth to death never stops becoming and being guided. The desire to strive for perfection pushes one to constantly become better and to be more qualified, and this is a very important characteristic for a healthy and feasible process in ongoing formation. In order to respond to these personal characteristics, the process of ongoing religious formation and those responsible to provide occasions for such a formation should guarantee the

¹⁰ Cf. P. GRIÉGER, "La formazione permanente problema nuovo per gli Istituti religiosi," in COLLECTION, *La formazione permanente nella vita religiosa. XII Convegno "Claretianum"* (Editrice Rogate: Rome 1987), p. 12.

¹¹ Cf. P. GRIÉGER, "La formazione permanente negli istituti religiosi. Organizzazione pedagogica," in *Vita consecrata* 18 (1982) 3, p. 197.

existence of specific and different pastoral and professional capabilities. The doctrinal or theoretical aspects should be reformulated to meet the new ways of adult thinking. There should be new skills offered at all levels to meet the new responsibilities that the individual has to assume.

4.2. A Three-fold Fidelity

In the opinion of Sante Bisignano, an individual is continuously in a process of maturation, and this process goes on up to the very end of one's life. The same is true also with regard to the consecrated person. There is a continuous process of growth of all the constitutive elements of religious life and, therefore, ongoing religious formation is to be understood within this perspective. Ongoing formation cannot be limited to some definite chronological moment when some formative service is provided; nor can it be restricted to some intensive periods in the life of the religious (a spiritual retreat, an updating course, professional training program, etc.).¹² But, ongoing religious formation is intimately connected with the regular process of growth of the consecrated person and at every moment of his/her existence.

For a full understanding of ongoing formation, one should visualize it as an integral growth of the individual. Just as the individual is in a continuous process of maturation, so also the aspects connected with his/her consecration are in continuous maturation towards the full realization of the self in Christ. Within a specific religious institute this maturation is colored by the specific charism of the founder of that institute.

There are different elements that make up the consecrated person's life (interior life, apostolic life, affective life, interpersonal relationship, intimacy with God, etc.) and, in the process of growth and maturity, each of these elements, and all these elements should likewise grow. Such an integral growth will take place through the continuous assimilation of the evangelical values, of prayer and of the study of the Word of God, and of full participation in the sacraments.

In terms of integrated growth, ongoing formation should be addressed to the full maturation of the consecrated person. This will certainly take into account the psychology of the individual as well as

¹² Cf. S. BISIGNANO, "Itinerario di formazione alla vita religiosa," in COLLECTION, *Vita consacrata un dono del Signore alla sua Chiesa* (Elle Di Ci: Leumann [Turin] 1994), p. 314.

the intensity of one's spiritual growth. Therefore, the individual is the measure of this growth, because the individual is also the principal subject of formation. Consequently, there is need to clarify the main objectives of formation. It is for this purpose that he speaks of the threefold fidelities that comprise all these objectives.

In the maturation and growth of one's consecration there are three points of reference, and each of these three elements is to become evident and visible. 1. The following of Christ is the first and fundamental criterion of consecration; namely, to follow Christ poor, chaste and obedient in day-to-day life situations. 2. The second criterion consists in living out, as best as possible, the Gospel message and the Gospel value to the point of being a valid witness and testimony to the world. 3. The third criterion consists in the commitment to the ecclesial mission through the fulfillment of service to humanity in the world.¹³ These three fidelities become reference points of the maturation process of the religious: fidelity to Christ, fidelity to humanity, and fidelity to the Church.

4.3. Integrated and Unified Growth

Analyzing the development of the term "ongoing formation," Amadeo Cencini understands it as an unique way of favoring the real growth of the human person, which does not remain at the mere intellectual level, but becomes unified and integrated in one's personality. The lack of such a continuous formation could therefore have a debilitating and a frustrating effect on the human person, because the constitutive elements of consecration remain un-integrated and disjointed.

For the purpose of religious ongoing formation, Cencini highlights the need to work in order to build up a unity and integration in one's life. For this purpose, personal motivation and conviction on the part of the individual are important factors that spur one towards such a formation all through life. Since involvement in daily life tends to dissipate one, there is need for a continuous action in favor of focus and centrality with the intention of giving coherence to one's life. Thus, ongoing religious formation is to be understood as a process to recover and restore to a unified whole what is really central in a person's consecrated life. The key word would be "radical belonging,"

¹³ Cf. S. BISIGNANO, "La formazione permanente linee fondamentali, criteri e itinerari," in COLLECTION, *La formazione permanente nella vita religiosa* (Editrice Rogate: Rome 1984), pp. 54-55.

so that all the elements of one's life are focused, centered, integrated and unified in the choice and in the living out of one's vocation.¹⁴

When this intention to unify and integrate is nurtured and the individual is docile, then the principal agent of formation, God the Father, is able to patiently build and rebuild the consecrated person into the image of his Son, Jesus. Such an action covers one's entire life, and it demands a daily readiness on the part of the religious to respond in conversion, renewal, self-gift and holiness.

It is for this reason that Cencini considers constant docility and readiness on the part of the religious to be in continuing formation as a fundamental requirement. This docility is expressed in specific attitudes which should always accompany the individual: vigilance, discernment, asceticism, prayer, study, involvement in the apostolate, participation in community life, and evaluation on the personal and on the community level. These attitudes should accompany the religious all through life.

5. Ongoing Formation as Transformation

The ongoing formation of religious is often understood as a "consolidating" action by which the initial response of the individual to the vocational call is through different phases of formation further clarified, strengthened and made constantly mature. As the individual begins to respond to the religious call, he/she begins to be aware and to understand step by step and stage by stage the deeper implications of that call and of the corresponding response.

Thus, there is a gradual deepening and a continual growth of that initial response towards the fullness of the imitation of Christ and a slow and steady growth in becoming perfect just as the heavenly Father is perfect. All this comprises the consolidating dimension of ongoing religious formation.

However, there is another aspect of ongoing formation, which should not be lost sight of, and that concerns "transformation." Besides consolidating the response through a continuing ongoing formation, the individual in his/her growth in vocation realizes the need for a constant transformation in the process of the imitation of Christ and in becoming perfect as the Heavenly Father is perfect. What really is this transformation? What are the implications of transformation?

¹⁴ Cf. A. CENCINI, "An Institution at the Service of Formation," in F. IMODA (Ed.), *A Journey to Freedom. An Interdisciplinary Approach to the Anthropology of Formation* (Peeters: Leuven 2000), p. 438.

Discovering the etymology of the word *transformation* gives us a better understanding of what it implies. The word *transformation* is made up of two Latin words, *trans* and *forma*, where *trans* could mean “across, over, on the other side.” In combination with *forma* it would literally mean “a change of form” and, according to its use, it could refer to any type of change, as for instance, a change of character, or of clothing style, or even more importantly of consciousness.¹⁵

It is this kind of transformation that we will look into now; however, at the very outset, it should be pointed out that it is a complex process involving thoughts and feelings. Transformational learning has far-reaching consequences on personality, more than any other kind of learning. It is a learning experience that shapes the learner and produces a significant impact to the point of affecting the learner’s subsequent experiences. In a transformational learning process one’s “meaning perspective” changes; “meaning perspective” refers to one’s overall world view, which comprises specific knowledge, values and beliefs. Usually one’s meaning perspective is passively formed right through one’s life experiences in childhood, during the youthful years and in young adulthood. These elements serve as a filter in perceiving the present reality and in determining how to organize and interpret one’s current experiences. Through the process of ongoing formation the religious should acquire self-knowledge and, by rational discourse and critical reflection, explore the depth and meaning of the elements that make up one’s worldview in order to produce a more inclusive worldview. The success of the outcome is rated by the development of greater autonomy as a person,¹⁶ which in a way also defines the condition of adulthood.

Transformational learning can be attained only to the extent that one uses the tools of critical reflection and rational discourse in order to arrive at a self-knowledge that is total, deep and long-lasting (psychological effects). In the same strain it should be added that this transformational learning reorganizes one’s perspective and will seriously affect the intimacy of relationship and vision that one has of God and other spiritual realities (spiritual effects). “The full development of religious values and Christian sanctity in a soul is

¹⁵ Cf. M. STEIN, *Transformation. Emergence of the Self* (A & M University Press: Laredo 1998), p. 51; see also: B. BAYNHAM, “Transformation,” in M. DOWNEY (Ed.), *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality* (Liturgical Press: Collegeville 1993), p. 967.

¹⁶ Cf. J. MEZIROV, *Transformative Dimension of Adult Learning* (Jossey-Bass: San Francisco 1991) pp. 145-146.

inconceivable if a man does not start out with a healthy mind, well balanced in its activities.”¹⁷ This affirmation seems to imply that any deficiency in mental health would be an obstacle to full spiritual development. It further assumes that psychological growth and spiritual growth are interrelated. The greater the psychological maturity acquired, the greater are the possibilities for spiritual development.

5.1. Psychological Aspects of Transformation

From the psychological point of view, transformation is a process that brings about a new form of life, something different from what preceded it. It does not mean that the personality is changed, but that there is a new inner centre of value and direction. There is a new consciousness in that person. Erick Erikson, Erich Fromm and Carl Rogers explore the factors that accompany personal transformation. These psychologists believe that human maturation is a lifelong process and an outcome of lifelong experiences. They insist that transformation is a gradual growth that is done in freedom. They also stress one's openness to experience and they consider self-realization as a goal of life.

5.1.1. *Erick Erikson*

To better comprehend Erickson's understanding of transformation we need to have an ample grasp of his proposal of the eight stages of the lifecycle in reaching mature adulthood, and through these stages he gives a panoramic view of the psychological growth of the human being. In each of them he enumerates the positive and negative attitudes, together with the emerging basic strengths and basic antipathies at each stage.

His basic assumption is that a human being's existence depends at every moment on three processes of organization that must complement each other. There is the biological process of the hierarchic organization of organ systems constituting a body (*soma*), then there is the psychic process of organizing individual experience by ego synthesis (*psyche*) and finally there is the communal process of the cultural organization of the interdependence of person (*ethos*).¹⁸ The development of the individual takes place in various

¹⁷ M.J. O'BRIEN - R.J. STEIMEL, *Psychological Aspects of Spiritual Development* (The Catholic University of America Press: Washington 1965), p. 23.

¹⁸ Cf. E. ERIKSON, *Life History and Historical Moment* (W.W. Norton: New York 1975), p. 19.

stages, and one's personality growth is the task of the ego and of the social process together to maintain that continuity, which bridges the inescapable discontinuity between each of the stages.

The eight stages in the psychosocial development of the human being are: infancy, early childhood, play age, school age, adolescence, young adulthood, adulthood and old age. Each of these stages is characterized by a specific developmental task, and society requires the subject to master that task at a given stage. This creates a conflict or crisis in the developing individual. "Crisis" here is understood by him as a "turning point" or a "second birth," with heightened potentiality for healthy personality development. Only in crisis does the best in a person reveal itself. Erikson's understanding of crisis is important. It gives light to see difficulties and obstacles as ways to grow in an authentic way and the chance to see one's own capacities.

Linked to this is the key problem of identity. Through one's growth to adulthood, there is the formation of identity, which involves a process of simultaneous reflection and observation that takes place on all levels of mental functioning. It is a dynamic process, always changing and ever-developing. It is a stage of being and becoming. In this process of growth, true religious identity depends heavily on the support received from the collective sense of identity from the religious community. Identity formation is relatively successful in ongoing religious formation, because psychological development leads through the fulfillment of adult phases to a final integrity.

In the ongoing formation process, the period of adulthood can be either very enriching or just the opposite, both at the personal as well as at the community level. It could benefit both the older and the younger religious. The older religious can contribute their deep life experience to the younger generation, and the youngsters can also contribute their modern values to the older religious. In this way both personal life and community life will be enriched.

In ongoing formation, in the restructuring of the personality, it is extremely important to give opportunity to the individual to see his/her personality at its deepest level and to reconstruct his/her life in the light of the Gospel. It is also very important in the ongoing formation process, even though late, to provide chances and knowledge to integrate life and to avoid despair. For this a community needs to include professionals who can assist the religious to be capable of leading one's life in the light of Christ and bring integration while approaching old age.

5.1.2. *Erich Fromm*

Fromm's contribution to our study of ongoing religious formation begins with the difference he makes between two components of personality: the first is temperament, which comprises one's inherited psychological qualities and gifts; and the second is character, which is made up of one's acquired qualities. The basic tools for the development of the character of one's personality are those gifts and qualities that one has inherited and which are permanent constitutional elements of a person's psychic makeup. The conscious effort made on the part of the individual is also modified by socio-cultural influences in the environment. The character of a person is expressive of the degree to which one has succeeded in the art of living, and it is in this domain of character that one's personality is stabilized.¹⁹

There are two basic patterns, according to Fromm, that typically exist side by side in every individual. One is the productive character, which concentrates on giving to others through love and work. The other is the non-productive character, that is not only not able to produce, but has to receive from others what he/she needs. This can happen either by one's passive behavior or by some active effort. In the development of character, there are, according to Fromm, two factors that influence this process. One is socialization, by which a person relates to others and one's self and is willing to offer care. The other is assimilation, by which one acquires or assimilates desired objects. A well-adjusted person possesses a character based on a fairly permanent pattern, in which the two processes have been properly blended.²⁰

Basically, the life of a consecrated person is a call to be at the service of others. Hence, it is obvious that religious should be productive at the personal and at the community level and at the level of the apostolate according to the charism of the institute. Through the continual exercise of love, one is able to develop this productive character. Discipline, concentration and patience are, in the opinion of Fromm, the qualities that one needs to practice love.²¹

One of the chief contributions that Fromm makes to psychology in one's growth towards becoming a productive personality is his insistence on some basic existential needs. 1. The need of relatedness,

¹⁹ Cf. E. FROMM, *The Sane Society* (Rinehart & Company: New York 1958), p. 32.

²⁰ Cf. E. FROMM, *The Art of Loving* (Harper & Brothers: New York 1956), p. 23.

²¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 108-110.

which refers to the necessity to unite with other living beings. He considers being related to others as an intrinsic need in so far as one's sanity depends on the fulfillment of relatedness. 2. The need for transcendence, which implies the need to rise above one's sense of being a creature and becoming instead a creator in one's own right by furthering or engendering life. 3. The need of rootedness, which refers to affective ties with others. Without such strong ties, one would suffer from utter isolation and feel lost in this world. 4. The sense of identity, the need for which stems from the very condition of human existence and is the source of most intense strivings. 5. The need of orientation, or at least, that one has a frame of orientation, and is in touch with one's reality in an objective way.

If ongoing formation can provide the religious with ways to reread the rootedness of their existence, it will assist them in deepening this human need to be rooted. Even in the uniqueness of the charism of the institute, this rootedness will find its centre in the Gospel values and in the teaching of Jesus. Timely verification such as monthly recollections, annual retreats and similar occasions will help the religious to deepen this rootedness.

5.1.3. *Carl Rogers*

Rogers' contribution is based on the full functioning of the human person. He believed that every human person has vast internal potentialities and is called to realize them. He called this process of realizing them "self-actualization." Personal choice plays an important role in this process of becoming oneself and in one's self-actualization.²² To actualize one's true potentials, one must follow the inner guidelines provided by an organic system of values. This self-actualization is achieved by positive recognition from others. Thus ongoing religious formation programs should help the individual religious to focus on the importance of finding one's own potentials and also become one's real self.

In the modern world there are different ways of achieving self-actualization. Work, drugs, loneliness and prayer are some of the means people have used to become self-actualized. Rogers gives importance to the process of the formation of an organic system of values. According to his theory, a self-actualizing person is in touch with the inner experience that is inherently growth-producing. Experiences are valued in terms of growth, and this force becomes a subconscious guide that helps the individual to choose those that

²² Cf. C. ROGERS, *On Becoming a Person* (Mifflin: Boston 1961), p. 13.

promote growth and reject what inhibits growth. This attitude he called, the *formative tendency*, which he contrasted to the other tendency to randomness.²³ Without an authentic witness of living testimonies it is not easy to highlight the Gospel values. Hence the importance of communities and individuals, who give witness in the way they follow Christ.

Rogers proposed another aspect that helps us to understand the process of becoming a mature person. He referred to a discrepancy between the “ideal self” and the “real self.” The real self contains a person’s true or real qualities, which he termed the actualizing tendency. He called the conflict between the real and the ideal self *incongruence*. A person experiences the real self as threatening when there is incongruence. But, when there is freedom one can move in one’s thinking and feeling and being, in whichever direction that person intends. By this process the individual sheds the false masks, fronts, roles of the ideal self, and gradually discovers something more basic and true in the real self.²⁴ Moving towards the real self is a way for a religious in ongoing formation to become a mature personality and a fully functioning person.

For this purpose one needs openness, first of all, with regard to one’s own experiences. The first step in this direction is readiness to be aware of one’s self, and this can be done by shedding barriers and inhibitions. These barriers, like the false concept of self and the non-acceptance of others, are eliminated by self-awareness and by an openness to others. For a positive change to occur the person must perceive the three characteristics that Rogers regarded as essential to any successful relationship: genuineness (i.e., to be in touch with one’s own inner experience and to be able to express it when appropriate), empathy (i.e., to understand the other person’s feelings and beliefs) and unconditional positive regard (i.e., a non-judgmental and non-possessive respect and caring for the other person’s self-concept and feelings).

5.2. Spiritual Aspects of Transformation

From the spiritual point of view it should be pointed out that transformation is primarily attributed to the grace of God, but it also involves human cooperation. In this sense, transformation could

²³ Cf. C. ROGERS, “The Foundations of the Person Centred Approach,” in *Education* (1979) 100, pp. 98-107.

²⁴ Cf. C. ROGERS, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 339.

also be called conversion.²⁵ The deeper and more authentic the experience, the more profound are the changes in the person. It is difficult for one who has had a true experience to resist change. In the same coin it could be said that it is difficult to change one's life if significant experiences are absent.²⁶ A spiritual person is one who has decided to respond to God's call, which he/she has experienced, and then strives to make that call the centre of activity and of choice. In other words, the call becomes the integrating factor for that person. Hence, the truth that spiritual life becomes the work of a lifetime can be reemphasized.

Spiritual transformation is the consistent conviction of the ever-abiding presence of God rather than a particular experience or even a set of experiences. It is a restructuring of one's consciousness in which the divine reality is perceived to be present. One can grow towards physical adulthood merely by continuing to breathe, but more is required of emotional development and maturity and much more is required of full spiritual development. It is not by simply *knowing* God that one is transformed, but by being fully united with him that one reaches one's ultimate destiny.

5.2.1. *Stages of Spiritual Transformation*

Time and space are needed for spiritual transformation to take place. An individual goes through a number of phases in the whole process of becoming a spiritual person. The person must experience crisis, resistance, surrender and integrity.²⁷ When the consecrated person begins to integrate the different experiences and elements of life, then transformation begins to take place.

The first stage is that of restlessness, or crisis. The individual is faced with a number of existential questions, like: Who am I? What is my uniqueness in this world? What is my special mission? It is in these moments of crisis that the individual has to answer the questions to verify one's own existence. When one finds one's core self or true self, transformation is taking place.

The next stage could be one of struggle. It is sometimes called a desert experience, when one has to struggle to let go of things, which

²⁵ Cf. B. BAYNHAM, "Transformation," in M. DOWNEY (Ed.), *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality* (Liturgical Press: Collegeville 1993), p. 967.

²⁶ Cf. E. ALBERICH - J. VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms. Handbook of Fundamental Catechetics* (Kristu Jyoti Publications: Bangalore 2004), p. 77.

²⁷ Cf. C. SERRAO, *Discernment of Religious Vocation. Formation Towards Transformation* (Dhyanavana: Mysore 2004), pp. 140-142.

are comfortable for that person, and to which one has been accustomed. The price of letting go is very high, because there is insecurity and uncertainty.

Surrender to God is the next important stage. In that situation of struggle, the individual feels the need for an unconditional and total abandonment to God. It is a difficult stage, but peace flows once one surrenders. This surrender to God includes a renunciation of all delusion, of false images of self, of an exaggerated assessment of one's capabilities and by giving in to God's will one finds peace.

The final stage of spiritual transformation is integration. Integration means the capacity to unite all the aspects of life, even in the midst of one's struggles. Fundamentally, it is a call to reality, or to radicalism. Total spiritual transformation is in this radical reorganization of one's life.

5.2.2. Goals of Spiritual Transformation

The life of the consecrated person is not a static one, but it is dynamic and in continuous becoming, where the ultimate and final aim of one's consecration leads that individual to a spiritual transformation. This transformation to become a spiritual person is a gradual process, with day-to-day commitment towards one's own mission and call. Configuration to Christ and intimacy with him call for a continuous process of conversion, or spiritual transformation. In actual fact, the goal of spiritual transformation would be the integration of the mature personality. The midterm goals would be the small steps that one has to traverse to reach the final goal.

1. *Radical Conversion*: Conversion is the radical transformation in all the dimensions of human experience. They comprise the affective, moral, socio-political, intellectual, somatic and religious dimensions. Of all these dimensions, the spiritual dimension is central and comprises the fullest meaning of conversion. The movement of radical conversion is a movement of faith, which is a gift, and it begins within one's being. It is important that the individual be open in faith to receive this gift, so that conversion may be realized radically and affect every element of the individual personality and life.

2. *Configuration with Christ*: The life of the consecrated person and his/her development to maturity are to be understood in terms of configuration with Christ. This is the starting principle and the goal towards which every aspect of the consecrated person's life tends. It constitutes the fabric of the entire life of the consecrated person and of the community. This configuration should be realized in such a

way that by the testimony of the religious the world is made aware of Christ and of his Church. Every attempt of the consecrated person to be a disciple of Christ (*sequela Cristi*) makes this configuration more real. The living out of the evangelical counsels — poverty, chastity and obedience — is another help to a real configuration with Christ.

3. *Growing Intimacy with Christ*: This is another important goal of spiritual transformation, as it encompasses the meaning of religious consecration. In order to acquire intimacy with Christ, one has to develop the capacity to relate deeply with Christ, which in turn requires other intimacies, as for instance, with self, with others and ultimately with God. This intimacy with Christ is expressed by a generous self-giving and self-surrender to Christ both in the community and in the apostolate.

4. *Integral Growth of the Personality*: The full meaning of spiritual transformation is in the ability of the individual to attain personal integration and wholeness. On the practical level, spiritual authors suggest a number of steps to achieve this integral growth of personality, each according to their spiritual orientation. As for instance they could be: awareness, sensitivity, acceptance, reflection, conviction, decision to change, commitment, action and evaluation.²⁸ Another suggestion consists in a fourfold fidelity: fidelity to Christ and the Gospel, fidelity to the Church and to its mission in the world, fidelity to religious life and the charism of one's own institute, and fidelity to humanity and to our times.²⁹ Still another could see integration as a fivefold awareness of and unity with: self, God, community, society and nature.³⁰

5. *Contemplation*: In the mind of great spiritual masters like Saint John of the Cross and Saint Theresa of Avila, spiritual transformation reaches its highest degree and perfection in an intimate union and a total identification with Christ, which leads to contemplation of the Lord. Contemplation means to see things as God sees them. In contemplative vision one perceives the transformative work of God in the world. The state of contemplation is thus the ultimate goal of spiritual transformation and the fullness of religious consecration. This could also be called, living in the awareness of God's presence.

²⁸ Cf. P.J. ABRAHAM - B. PARANGIMALIL, *Images for Human Wholeness* (Pangaya Publications: Bangalore 1995), p. 49.

²⁹ Cf. A. PARDILLA, *Christ's Way of Life at the Centre of Formation of Religious Life* (Rogate: Rome 2005), p. 271.

³⁰ Cf. D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Integration and Interiorisation* (Anjali Ashram: Mysore 1990), p. 10.

5.2.3. Sources of Spiritual Transformation

Spiritual transformation takes place when the human person collaborates with God's grace. God's grace is particularly available to the consecrated person through four major sources, and with their assistance one is capable of a profound spiritual transformation and being open to transcendence and hence to a relationship with God and Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. The following are the four powerful sources for spiritual transformation.

1. *The Word of God*: The Bible, which is the font and source of the Word of God, has played an important role in the personal spiritual lives of many people down through the centuries. A prayerful listening to the Scriptures opens one's heart to hear not only words about God, but words from God. It is thus a means of grace to help one's life journey to a sacred relationship with Christ and a sacred fellowship in the Trinity. The Holy Spirit also plays an important role in understanding the Scriptures. The prophets, in their call and in their response to that call, show the power and the centrality of the Word of God. The Word has the power to enlighten and transform life. One who is touched by the Word of God is personally transformed, and this transformation has an effect also on one's life in the community and in the apostolate.

2. *Charism*: This is God's special gift to a religious institute for the good of the Church. It is the Holy Spirit's way to show the richness of the practice of the evangelical counsels in a specific way. Charism can also be described as a window on the Word of God, or a framed vision of people following Jesus that attracts them to do so in a similar way. Though founders and foundresses desired to live the whole Gospel, they were generally struck by some particular Gospel passages, and based their lifestyle and apostolate on those passages. The grace and call to live the founders' charism forms part of God's wonderful plan for the salvation of the world. The consecrated person who lives out these charisms finds in them the potential to transform his/her life and to become more a spiritual person through his/her life and service.

3. *Apostolate*: God's call of the consecrated person is a gift to be shared with others. This sharing is the apostolate. Just as the Lord gathered his disciples to be with him and then he sent them out to preach (Mk 3:14), so too we can speak of two parts of the process of participating in the mission: the first part involves union with Christ, or centering one's life on Christ, and the second part is the involvement in the mission, which consists in proclaiming Jesus to others. Thus, the apostolate also has its place in the spiritual transformation of the religious, because it demands a union with the

Lord before involvement in the apostolate. It is the intensity of one's clinging to the Lord that will render fruitful roles and activities exercised in the service of others. It is profound union with the Lord that enables one to communicate and confirm, with his/her life, the message of Christ to humanity in a language that can be understood.

4. *Sacraments*: The sacraments are channels of grace and the power of Christ and are the most powerful sources for the spiritual growth and maturity of the consecrated person. In a particular way the Eucharist becomes the heart of spiritual transformation. Religious are able to nourish their lives from this central sacrament of Christian life. Above all, the Eucharist brings about communion with Christ and strengthens the commitment of the religious. Confession and the Eucharist ought to be, especially for the consecrated person, irreplaceable instruments of purification, strength, illumination and union with God.

6. Dimensions of Ongoing Religious Formation

Ongoing religious formation concerns the consecrated person at all stages of life and thus, besides being all inclusive as far as the stages and the moments of the life of the religious are concerned, it is equally all inclusive even in so far as it concerns the entire person. Two premises need to be affirmed before entering into a discussion of the dimensions of ongoing religious formation.

First of all, any moment or stage in the process of religious formation embraces all the dimensions of the individual because anthropology requires one's integral promotion.³¹ It would be a lopsided way of looking at a person in formation, where only one dimension is considered to be formed, leaving all the others unaffected. As for instance, when a religious is undergoing professional training, or is engaged in studies, it would be improper to consider that only the intellectual dimension is being formed, without having any consequence on the spiritual life of that person, or on cultural aspects, or on the apostolic effectiveness of that person.

Secondly, it should be borne in mind that any formation process is primarily a learning process, which involves change, growth and a transformation of the entire person, and therefore touches the different dimensions of the individual.³² Although we agree

³¹ Cf. L.M. RULLA, *Anthropology of the Christian Vocation*, Vol. 1 (Gregorian University Press: Rome 1986) p. 33.

³² Cf. M. ANATHARACKAL, *Psycho-Spiritual Dimensions of Formation* (Dharmaram Publications: Bangalore 2001), p. 218.

and reaffirm an earlier mentioned conviction that one of the characteristics of ongoing formation is that it is integral, only for the purpose of a deeper insight into the different aspects influenced by this formation process, we will consider the different dimensions of the process of ongoing religious formation separately.

We will examine the following five dimensions of ongoing religious formation: human, spiritual, doctrinal, cultural and charismatic.

6.1. Human Dimension

Vita Consecrata asserts that formation should involve the whole person, in every aspect of one's personality, at the level of behavior and at the level of intention (VC 65). Since the human person is a conscious and free being, who is called to grow in self-fulfillment, this should lead to self-mastery in freedom, and it entails the personal responsibility to live it interpersonally, striving towards the fulfillment of self and of others.

Life is a constant journey towards maturity, which cannot be attained except by constant reminders of this fact through formation. The human dimension of the consecrated life calls for self-knowledge and the realistic awareness of one's limitations. Relationships with others hold a particular place in one's living in community and working in the apostolate. Hence, special importance must be given to the inner freedom of consecrated persons through their affective maturity, their ability to communicate with others with serenity, especially in their own community, and in compassion for those who are suffering, both in the community and those with whom they interact in their field of apostolate.

Both for community living as well as for the work in the apostolate the consecrated person requires a certain level of intelligence, which comprises the ability to grasp the essence of what is happening in relationship and in work. Forming of intelligence comprises four principle functions: to analyze, to synthesize, to relate and to judge.³³ This intelligence, it is true, could sometimes be called *common sense*, and thus, intelligence could be understood as the conscious exercise of this *common sense*.

Together with the formation of intelligence, the way to human maturity would also require the formation of one's will. A person's will is where one sets a course that will guide and control one's entire

³³ Cf. M. MARCIEL, *Integral Formation of Catholic Priests* (Alba House: New York 1992), p. 26.

being. Forming the will comprises the exercise of wanting to do good, wanting to do it earnestly, wanting to do it effectively and seeking constantly to practice it. Another aspect of the formation of one's will includes the renunciation of one's whims by responsibly choosing to fulfill one's duty and to give up one's personal plans freely in order to uphold the dignity and liberty of the choices of others.

Another aspect of human formation and growth consists in the responsibility of developing one's God-given potential and talents. One's life itself is a gift from God and the complete living out of this life requires the full collaboration of the individual to bring it to fruition by putting to good use one's life, one's talents and capabilities both for the good of others in the community and in the exercise of the apostolate.

With the strong conviction that spirituality cannot be developed without humanity, personal development must start with a well-grounded human formation. A healthy personality development is the most fertile soil in which grace can take root and grow and produce fruit. Human growth takes place in stages, with each stage presupposing that the previous stage has been well constructed and building the next stage of human development upon that. This principle requires that every individual know where he/she is and be deeply committed to proceed forward, stage by stage, on one's personal journey.³⁴

Finally, the religious has to keep in mind that this personal human growth and maturity should proceed also in accordance with the spiritual patrimony of the institute. The fullness of the individual's call and commitment is in being in agreement with the specific style of carrying out the apostolate. The charism of the institute will find its full flowering in an individual when there is an integrated maturity of the different constitutive elements of personality.³⁵

6.2. Spiritual Dimension

The *Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes (Potissimum Institutioni)* present three basic motivations for spiritual ongoing formation: 1. the vocation of a consecrated person itself requires a special and a personal attention to the workings of the Spirit; 2. the

³⁴ Cf. A. WILKIE, "The Teaching of Spirituality in the Formation Programme of Religious Orders," in *The Way Supplement* (1995) 84, p. 55.

³⁵ Cf. B. MARINELLI, "Contributions Towards the Integrated Formation of the Person," in J. COTTON (Ed.), *Growing Together in Christ. Personal Development in the Religious Life* (New City: Dublin 1988), p. 123.

rapidly changing context in which we live requires that the consecrated person have deep spiritual roots; and 3. the future of every religious institute is strongly linked to the spiritual formation of its members.³⁶ It, therefore, opts for the formation of the spiritual dimension of consecrated persons.

According to the very nature of the vocation and life of a consecrated person the search for God and the development of spiritual life acquire a particular importance, which has its expression particularly in different forms of asceticism and spirituality. As a matter of fact, all other dimensions of formation find their fulfillment in spiritual formation. The exercises needed to develop the spiritual dimension are: listening and meditating upon the Word of God, a thirst for prayer, responsiveness to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, commitment to the service of others, willingness to make sacrifices and the desire to deepen spiritual experiences.

Theologically speaking the end of spiritual formation is the perfection of charity. God is love, and hence pursuing the spiritual dimension comprises constant fidelity to the development of an intimate relationship with God, expressed in a fellowship with Jesus Christ and culminating in an intimate union with him.³⁷ There is no denying the fact that spiritual formation is motivated first of all by the initiative of God who calls each one at every moment and in every circumstance of life. Therefore the basis of the spiritual dimension in the religious is precisely the awareness that one's vocation is from God. Hence, it is necessary to constantly discern this call and follow with fidelity this call; i.e., be constantly faithful to the will of God in every moment of one's life.

Coupled with this awareness is the special role that the charism of the founder has in one's spiritual life. It is a gift of the Spirit that is to be received, safeguarded, deepened and constantly developed by the religious. For this purpose one needs to pay close attention to the signs of the Spirit and be sensitive to respond to them appropriately. Just as the founders and foundresses of religious institutes were sensitive to the mysterious signs of the Spirit, even the consecrated person today must be sensitive and docile to that

³⁶ See: CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, *Potissimum Institutioni. Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes* (2 February 1990) (Libreria Editrice Vaticana: Vatican City 1990), n. 67.

³⁷ Cf. M. KATO, *Christian Self-Surrender. Spiritual Transformation in the Paschal Christ* (Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas: Rome 1988), p. 20.

same Spirit and allow himself/herself to be guided by that Spirit. An important help to the full development of this charism is a continual examination of conscience to ensure fidelity to the Spirit who is active in one's life.

6.3. Doctrinal Dimension

The *Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes (Potissimum Institutioni)* once again give some clear ideas about this doctrinal updating by suggesting a deepening of the biblical and theological perspectives of the religious. This document recommends also the reading of ecclesial documents, both of the universal magisterium as well as those of the local Church.³⁸

In the case of priest members, it would be important that they be constantly updated in their doctrinal, biblical, theological, liturgical and moral knowledge. While the reading of books is important and helpful, they should not forget that they should go to the original sources to acquire this knowledge: Sacred Scripture, Tradition, Fathers and Doctors of the Church and the Magisterium.

Provincial communities could offer their members occasions for the ongoing formation of their doctrinal dimension by organizing courses or conferences of a theological, biblical or spiritual nature for the updating of their members. The local communities on their part could also offer their contribution to this ongoing formation of the doctrinal dimension by providing a well-stocked library in the community, which should also be easily accessible to the members. There should also be subscriptions to theological and spiritual journals and reviews and other similar material, so that members may have easy access to information that could help their intellectual ongoing formation.

6.4. Charismatic Dimension

In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelica Testificatio*, on the renewal and adaptation of religious institutes, Pope Paul VI made a direct reference to *charism* as the patrimony of every religious institute.³⁹ The charism of a religious institute, a gift of the Holy

³⁸ Cf. *Potissimum Institutioni* n. 68.

³⁹ See PAUL VI, "Evangelica Testificatio. The Renewal of Religious Life According to the Teaching of the Second Vatican Council (29 June 1971)," in A. FLANNERY (Ed.), *Vatican Council II. The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents* (St. Paul's: Mumbai 2001), n. 11.

Spirit to the Church, provides a constant orientation to that institute and to each of its members, and permits, at the same time, scope for internal growth according to the changed times.

Founders and foundresses interpreted the charism they received from the Holy Spirit in the light of the Word of God and in accordance to the demands and needs of their own times both in society and in the Church. These charisms, which are distinct, though not separate, from personal gifts and qualities, whether innate or acquired, form part of the apostolate and way of living of that religious institute; i.e., in action and in organization. They are a profound way of being conformed to Christ and of giving witness to some particular aspect of his mystery.

Each and every member of a religious institute in the initial period of one's life should assimilate this institutional charism and experience it practically in the apostolate. Subsequently one should assess the significance of that charism and re-express it in the changed circumstances of one's life. This patrimony which is now reformulated and re-expressed in terms of the contemporary needs of society is then transmitted to the next generation. Ongoing formation would require that members have the time and occasion to personally study one's charism, to reflect on one's experience of it, and to share these reflections with others.

The charism of an institute intrinsically comprises a communitarian dimension. It can only be understood and reconstructed in all its richness of values and content together with other members of the institute, because all of them are jointly depositories and bearers of that charism.⁴⁰ A help in this regard could come from occasional sharing of these experiences and reflections in community assemblies and in prayer.

6.5. Apostolic Dimension

The ongoing formation of the apostolic dimension of a religious would involve a constant review of the objectives of the apostolate and a regular updating of the methods employed in apostolic works, but always in such a way that it is in fidelity to the spirit of the institute and the aims and the charism of the founder. It will be a form of activity, which, on the one hand, will be responsive to the

⁴⁰ Cf. F. CHIARDI, "The Charism of Founders and Foundresses, as Word of Life, Always Remains Uncontaminated, Prophetic and Current," in *Formation of Consecrated Life* (Associate Members of General Curia: Rome 2000-2003), [unpublished], p. 313.

rich historical traditions of that religious institute, and, on the other hand, will have an ever-present sensitivity and attention to the changing cultural conditions, both at the general level of society and at the local levels of the apostolate.⁴¹

There are two sides to this apostolic dimension: one consists in maintaining what pertains to tradition, and the other concerns the updating of methods and forms of ministry and apostolate in agreement with recent developments in the pastoral field.

Ministry demands and consumes energy and enthusiasm. One must have adequate provision to support and strengthen the efforts in ministry lest one manifest a lack of motivation and a loss of meaning to those for whom one works. Closely related to this is the need to evaluate one's corporate ministries to determine the level of their continuing responsiveness and relevance to current and developing needs. The apostolic dimension of religious life challenges not only individuals, but also communities to periodically examine the actual needs being met through individual and community services.⁴²

Thus, the apostolic dimension of the life of a religious becomes one of the most important areas that demands a constant updating and renewal both at the personal level as well as at the community level.

6.6. Cultural Dimension

We are exhorted by John Paul II in *Vita Consecrata* that the formation of the cultural dimension be based upon a solid theological training, which provides the means for wise discernment, which involves continual updating and special interest in the different areas to which each charism is directed (VC 71). This approach will assure that consecrated persons keep themselves as intellectually open and adaptable as possible, so that the apostolate will be envisaged and carried out according to the needs of one's own time and circumstances and making use of the means provided by cultural progress.

It should be remembered that, as far as the cultural aspects of society are concerned, the society in which we live is marked by

⁴¹ Cf. J. CASTELLANO, "The Founders Today. A Gift and a Challenge for Our Time," in J. COTTON (Ed.), *Growing Together in Christ. Personal Development in the Religious Life* (New City: Dublin 1991), p. 19.

⁴² Cf. J. GIALLANZA, "Continuing Formation. Perspectives from *Vita Consecrata*," in *Review for Religious* 66 (1997) 5, p. 474.

a tension between secularism and an authentic life of faith. This tension could take different forms and it requires a multifaceted approach to overcome them. Among the challenges that this secularized society presents, and which could be cause for many to abandon their religious vocation, we could list mediocrity, indifference, the temptation of efficiency and activism at the risk of fidelity to the Gospel values and eventually to the weakening or even the loss of spiritual motivation.

Another challenge of contemporary culture is the individualistic tendency in modern culture and the narcissistic inclination of postmodern culture, which could erode the communion of brotherly love in religious communities. For this purpose, religious are called to awareness and to convert these moments of difficulty and challenge into moments of grace and spiritual growth. This is possible by an effort to rediscover the true meaning of the religious values of fraternal love in community, as against the individualistic propensities of culture. The rediscovery of the meaning and quality of fraternal love in communities is realized in the events of everyday life in community. Constancy and fidelity in practicing the evangelical vows and brotherly love in the context of the community and dedication to the mission in the apostolate are guarantees of this rediscovery.

7. The Content of Ongoing Formation

It is difficult to refer to the content of ongoing formation mainly because ongoing formation is not to be understood only in terms of an intellectual content that is to be transmitted. Again, one should not lose sight of the fact that this examination has a lifelong character, which has been constantly echoed and reechoed in various ecclesial documents.

Acquiring information and updating this information regularly is fundamental in the life of the religious, especially in this modern world, which is characterized by an avalanche of information and knowledge. The religious who is not updated with this information is left behind and isolated in this contemporary world. Participation in seminars, courses and classes help make religious alert to the social and cultural challenges and help them to be ready to face them.

Furthermore ongoing formation touches each and every dimension of the religious, and, in this sense, the content should refer to all the dimensions of the human person. Thus, content is viewed as something that is all comprising, because it should accompany every stage and every moment of the life of the religious. In this sense, we could refer to content as rooting one's life in the

Paschal Mystery, the foundation and basis of consecrated life, personal maturity seen in one's attitudes, the stability of values and professional qualification.

7.1. The Paschal Mystery

The Paschal Mystery is the most basic aspect in the life of a religious, and it should be, so to say, the heart of the program of ongoing formation, because the Paschal Mystery is the font of life and maturity of religious.⁴³ It is not merely an intellectual content, but the spiritual and real foundation on which the new person is formed. The life of a religious is centered on Jesus, because the religious shares in the same mission that Christ Himself came to fulfill; namely, to build up the Kingdom of God, and thus the religious represents Christ in and through the community and acts in the name of Christ.

The meaning of religious life and the essence of the spirituality of religious life are both connected with this intimate union that one should have with Christ. According to the depth of intimacy that the religious is able to develop with Christ, the personality of that religious will also become more in accordance with the personality of Christ, and, thereby, acquire the goals of the consecrated vocation and the spirituality of religious life. Since Christ is the only and ultimate model of the personality of the consecrated person, this intimacy is the only means to help the religious become like Christ, in his personality, in his attitudes, values and teaching. Such a union is founded in and fostered by the Eucharist.

Through the celebration of the Eucharist, religious participate closely in the Paschal Mystery. It is also through that same celebration that they receive the strength and the help to become intimate with Christ and thus participate with him in his Paschal Mystery. When a religious allows Christ to become the centre of his/her life, not only will that religious person's lifestyle change, but that person will also be ready, like Christ, to give his/her life for others through service in apostolate and ministry. Religious formation, and particularly religious ongoing formation, is an itinerary of change and conversion towards perfection in charity. It is a journey that lasts the whole of one's life and will be completed only in the final consummation of life.⁴⁴

⁴³ Cf. A. PARDILLA, "Biblical Aspects of Formation in Religious Life," in *International Union of Superiors General* (1997) 96, p. 38.

⁴⁴ Cf. A. BEGHETTO, *Crescere insieme in Cristo. La formazione permanente del religioso* (Città Nuova: Rome 1989), p. 79.

It is in the paschal event that the new person is born by the religious consecration, and again the growth to fullness of that new person also takes place in the continual participation of the celebration of that paschal event. Just as Christ's passion, death, resurrection, ascension and the descent of the Holy Spirit are the central events of the Christian reality, so also, in the life of the religious, these same events, namely, the Paschal Mystery, have a central position and they give meaning and vitality to the religious.

7.2. Personal Maturity

Personal maturity cannot be understood, nor described, in objective terms, as though it were some kind of a goal that all consecrated persons are expected to acquire or reach. Since each one is unique and has particular experiences and since also each one has a specific context, the arrival point of maturity would obviously be different for each one. This term, "personal maturity," could be better understood as the full development of one's potentiality, a control of emotions, a realistic understanding and assessment of self, an ability to form interpersonal relationships, the capacity to resolve problems and a pragmatic self-confidence. In relationship with others, a mature person is open to criticism, ready to receive observations from others and willing to be corrected by others. The mature person is also able to make decisions with a sense of responsibility.⁴⁵

Personal maturity is not acquired in a day, but it takes time and effort. First of all, one has to be conscious of the need to become mature, and one should so treasure this goal that no suffering, nor conflicts, nor problems should be able to thwart that desire. Secondly, maturity cannot be a lopsided growth, but should touch the whole person — intellectual, spiritual, human —, namely, it should be an integral growth. Thirdly, it is essential that growth to maturity be holistic in order to guarantee the genuine growth of the individual. Finally, the principle of graduality, namely, steadiness and constancy, should also accompany growth to maturity.⁴⁶

Growth in personal maturity involves also change in attitude, which, in the case of the consecrated person, means growing up to acquire the attitude of Christ (*Vita Consecrata* 69). Attitude, which is central to a person and is deeply ingrained in the individual, refers to

⁴⁵ Cf. I. PUTHIADAM, *Religious and Maturity* (Asian Trading Corporation: Bangalore 1989), p. 135.

⁴⁶ Cf. R.A. COUTURE, "Facing the Challenge of Continuing Education," in *Review for Religious* 32 (1973) 6, p. 1333.

the way one perceives a particular situation and which urges one to behave in a specific way. Because of a deeply ingrained characteristic of attitude, a change in attitude would involve a threefold action: 1. it first consists in letting go of the old outlook and old behavior; 2. it then looks out for a new frame of reference, new knowledge and new behavior models; and 3. it finally consists in establishing this newly acquired outlook and behavior in such a way that this new attitude becomes a permanent part of the person's functional capacity.

7.3. Stability of Values

For an individual, values refer to those choices in life that one treasures and are considered important within the frame of reference of the goals one expects to achieve in life; hence, they are of fundamental importance in one's life.⁴⁷ Values could be long term values (or terminal values), because they propose a life ideal and the purpose of one's existence; or, they could be instrumental values, in so far as they serve as strategies or ways of behavior in order to achieve these terminal values.⁴⁸ In this sense, the "imitation of Christ" is for a consecrated person a terminal value; whereas the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, as also fraternal love in community and the apostolate are instrumental values, because they are means that help the professed person to achieve that terminal value.

Vita Consecrata broadens this terminal value and says that the values of consecrated life and the goal towards which consecrated persons strive are the imitation of Christ and union with God (n. 2). The means and the tools to achieve these values are more specifically mentioned. They are charity as a sign of liberty of heart to better serve others and to be available for the Kingdom, obedience to the divine plan as an expression and means of the imitation of Christ, and poverty as a fruit of love for perfection and communion with the poor. To wish to lose oneself for the sake of the Kingdom is an authentic realization of the vocational values which allow the religious to realize their full potential.

With regard to the stability of values, it is required that the individual, in growing to maturity, should be able to internalize these values, so that they become stable and established in the individual. Thus the individual should move from an intellectual knowledge

⁴⁷ Cf. B. GOYA, *Bisogni e valori, consistenze e inconsistenze vocazionali* (UPS: Rome 2000), [unpublished], p. 9.

⁴⁸ Cf. L. RULLA, *Antropologia della vocazione cristiana. 1. Basi interdisciplinari* (Piemme: Casale Monferrato 1985), p. 338.

of these values, and then pass over through a mere emotional acceptance of these values, and arrive finally to putting them into practice, or living them out and acting according to those values. This would be an important task in continuing and ongoing formation of the religious.

A life that is clearly marked by correct values is important, because they provide motivation for vocation and the building up of the character of the person. Internalizing values is neither easy nor spontaneous, and the acquisition of values usually requires the following four stages: 1. have sufficient knowledge of the value, 2. experience that value by putting it into practice, 3. reflect upon the value to appreciate its effects, and 4. develop an attitude by which one lives according to that value.⁴⁹ As such, it is clear that the process of acquisition of values calls into play all the human faculties: cognitive, emotional and operational. Not only should the learner be enabled to know the right and the good, but also feel the appropriate emotions, concerns and commitment, and likewise exercise the will to do the right thing.

Through constant value learning and acquisition, the consecrated person becomes more and more like Christ, which is also the goal of religious consecration. Only when one becomes mature can one understand the importance of the stability of these values in life. Thus the acquisition and stability of the right values help the consecrated person to become a more authentic religious.

7.4. Professional Qualification

Acquiring professional skills and competence is absolutely essential in the maturity not only of lay persons, but it is particularly so in the case of consecrated persons. Living one's consecrated life includes, as well, living the professional aspect of one's life whether for service in the apostolate, or for service in the community. This professional aspect of a consecrated person begins with the selection of one's professional career, which should normally be done in accordance with one's personal interests, ideas, values, meaning of life, and, of course, capability. This is then followed by the whole process of becoming truly professional in that aspect. When that happens, one is in the process of becoming a more mature person.

The responsibility of qualifying one's professional competence includes and comprises all that any professional career would

⁴⁹ Cf. H. CASTELLINO, "Paths to Value Education," in *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 66 (2002) 4, p. 280.

demand. One needs to find the opportunities for study and training, and also take the necessary initiative in professionalizing those services, so that one can render a qualified function both in the community as well as in the apostolate. This would obviously also involve striving to become better and more competent, to take the necessary risks and not to be discouraged by eventual failure. It is in such cases especially that community support is necessary to help the member go ahead with constancy and determination.

The ongoing formation of religious with regard to professional qualification would include a proper level and degree of study, suitable training opportunities and the appropriate means to achieve the competence that is needed for one's professional career. Knowledge is an important component in professional qualification. Together with knowledge there is also the vast area of exercise and practice, which are important to acquire expertise and competence.

Developing competence in one's professional life cannot be limited only to periods of study and training, but, as in every career and profession, it should be extended to include the whole of one's life. It is, so to say, as though one's life is like a school, in which there are continuous occasions and opportunities to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities, and, by doing all that, to slowly become proficient in that field.⁵⁰

8. Pedagogical Dimension of Ongoing Religious Formation

Every living being has an inner drive towards growth, maturity and self-realization. To grow means to leave behind the security of the present and move into the unknown future. This requires faith, hope and courage to keep ever growing and maturing. Growth is not static and immutable; it is a continuous event, an ongoing process, which is not complete before death.⁵¹ Formative pedagogy bridges the ideal and the praxis with practical situations. Transformation means growth, maturity and conversion and, in the case of religious transformation, it is inspired by Saint Paul's ideal "to be transformed into Christ" (Rom 12:1). Furthermore, all religious are called "to be perfect as my heavenly Father" (Mt 5:48), and only a lifelong dedication to perfection will lead one to transformation.

⁵⁰ Cf. C.O. HOULE, *Continuing Learning in the Profession* (Jossey-Bass: San Francisco 1996), p. 34.

⁵¹ Cf. M. IRAGUI, *Maturity in Religious Life* (Pontifical Institute of Theology and Philosophy: Alway 1972), p. 43.

8.1. Necessary Personal Conditions

Pedagogical action in favor of transformation consists in assisting the subject of ongoing formation to be able to enter into the dynamics of transformation. For this purpose one needs to encourage the individual to acquire and nurture the following conditions.

1. *Open to Growth*: This means a life of total dedication to the truth and, hence, an openness to self-examination and a willingness to be personally challenged. Above all, this will comprise the individual's life of relationships, on the individual level, on the interpersonal level and on the transcendental level. Openness to growth means the process of becoming less defensive and rigid and more creative and open to feelings. The dynamism of life challenges religious to the openness of growth.

2. *Personal Evolution*: The best opportunity for growth is the courage to face change and to take the decisive step to change and to evolve. To evolve is to become, to move from what one is to what one could be. Personal evolution is not easy because it requires an inward journey. It is a response to a call to know oneself and to understand one's relation with the significant persons of one's life, God included. The mature personality evolves a sense of cohesiveness and personal identity of his/her own. Love is the decisive element that makes one evolve, and this love makes one act and react with creativity.

3. *Ready to Restructure*: With all the changes that are taking place in today's high-tech world, everyone is called to accommodate and change and therefore restructure one's life style. Maturity consists in making wise and correct choices and decisions. By personal involvement one discovers how to fashion a dynamic and balanced life in which there is room for solitude and community, work and leisure, autonomy and intimacy, personal transformation and social reform, prayer and play. To restructure life one needs to have a clear vision of what one's life should be like, what one's attitudes should be like and, consequently, with the spirit of adaptability, restructure one's life in accordance with the new situation.

4. *Inner Freedom*: Freedom is one's basic human right, but, in order to assure transformation, one must exercise discernment to be able to recognize the stimulus that calls for change and make the right decision in order to respond in freedom. This requires courage and constancy to act on these decisions freely. Responsibility is another necessary quality in order to exercise inner freedom. Thus this inner freedom implies honesty, courage, transparency, authenticity, maturity and responsibility.

8.2. Necessary Spiritual Conditions

In order to provide pedagogical help for spiritual transformation in ongoing formation, one should also facilitate the presence of some spiritual attitudes and conditions. These regard some very important inner qualities and functions that should be present in the subject.

1. *Unconditional Self-Acceptance*: When this condition is present the road is opened to growth and transformation. The individual should be available to reflect on personal experience through the stages of internalizing, learning and growing in awareness of one's needs and values. When this is present, one is able to achieve a personal transformation into Christ. With self-acceptance one is able to achieve self-integration, and this self-integration liberates that energy which enables one to carry out the actions that implement a re-oriented striving towards life goals.

2. *Docility to the Holy Spirit*: This condition contributes to the knowledge of self, God and the world. Docility to the Spirit is the ability to discern the voice of the Spirit and be led by that voice. The voice of the Spirit may appear at times to be silent, but its message is of great importance in one's life. The inner voice invites one to follow as it leads toward a sense of purpose and meaning. Rational thinking alone does not work, hence, the need for faith and honesty. These will remove egotism, prevent inner conflict and lead to peace of mind.

3. *Identification with Christ*: The principal objective of religious life is this identification with the attitude of Christ in proceeding to the Father. It must be a person-to-person relationship if one wishes to enter into the mystery of Christ's life, passion, death and resurrection and work towards living it interiorly and exteriorly. Identification with Christ and a maturing of relationship with him take place mainly through faithful exercise of the evangelical counsels. Prayer and contemplation are also helpful in obtaining this goal of religious life — identification with Christ.

4. *Intimacy with Christ*: It is the experience of closeness or union between two persons and is the fruit of a long-term relationship. As one grows in intimacy with Christ, there is also a growth in grace, a surrender to the action of the Holy Spirit and growth in likeness of Jesus. For a worthwhile intimacy, the consecrated person needs to have a clear religious identity.

9. The Institute's Role in Ongoing Religious Formation

In my opinion, the best way to conclude this intervention would be in terms of seeing how, on the practical level, a religious institute can help the ongoing formation of its members. This Formation Meeting, with regard to confreres in difficulty held at the international level, in my opinion, is already a clear indication of the seriousness you give to this issue. As for me, I wish to conclude this presentation, by giving some general and practical suggestions for ongoing religious formation. There is no doubt that you, participants of this meeting, are in a better position to be more specific and concrete in your formation planning and decision-making.

9.1. Formation Plan of the Institute

To guarantee the full participation of the consecrated person in ongoing formation, the institute should formulate and make known to the members the *Ratio institutionis*, which should contain a precise and systematic description of its plan of formation. This *ratio* should comprise the comprehensive formation design in all its details so that the members get a complete picture of their life. The *ratio* should describe in ample particulars the qualities that the members should have, making reference to the different dimensions — human, spiritual, charismatic, apostolic, and cultural. These qualities will be the working tools to help, especially, the middle-aged and senior confreres attend to and plan their ongoing transformation.

9.2. Capable and Trained Formators

Members should also be made aware that one cannot be over-confident and live in self-sufficient isolation; rather they should be convinced that no one can be so secure and committed that he/she does not need to give careful attention to making specific and positive efforts to persevere in his/her vocation in faithfulness. Hence, the institute should identify the profile and the role of formators at different stages of one's life, but in a particular way in the initial stages of formation. These formators should have the necessary training and regular updating to be able to accompany the members in their efforts to identify their lives with Christ and acquire an intimacy with him.

9.3. Provide Formative Moments

Updated and qualified information is very important, so that one does not get stagnated about the demands of the consecrated vocation. Hence there should be occasions like seminars, conferences and study sessions which provide ample and updated input on various topics: biblical, liturgical, spiritual, charismatic, psychological and apostolic. These sessions will arm the members and make them better disposed to use the experiences of their daily lives, both in the community and in their apostolate. Such special moments will also help them to proceed with their continuing religious formation and respond to their religious call with psychological and spiritual transformation and thus move ahead towards fullness in their consecration.

9.4. The Role of the Religious Institute

The local, provincial and international communities also have an important duty and service for the ongoing religious formation of their members, in order to foster in them the desire to be continuously transformed and be better disposed to conform their lives to that of Christ. Each of the communities (local, provincial and international), in its own way has a very important role to play in this regard by careful planning and execution. They too share in the responsibility of the ongoing religious formation of their members. This is true in a particular way for local communities in so far as they have daily occasions to accompany their confreres/sisters in their continuing formation.

9.5. The Role of Prayer

Through one's participation in prayer, personal and communitarian, purification can be achieved, and thus an inner transformation, a *metanoia*, the basis for ongoing formation. The general attitude to prayer would include one's awareness of the presence of God, and a general availability, response and generosity to his unconditional love. At specific and regular moments of prayer, the Word of God should have a primary place and one should be inclined to listen to God's Word, meditate on it and be generous to respond to it as the Spirit inspires. Occasions of *lectio divina* and participation in it will help the process of transformation. Regular meditation and contemplation also deepen the possibility to be in contact with the divine and offer an occasion for self-knowledge and growth. For this purpose, one's personal life and the community timetable should

be so organized as to foster total availability to personal and to community prayer. This would include also the liturgy, with a particular and central place given to the celebration of the Eucharist, which should not be just a ritual and a duty. The celebration of the Eucharist develops personal intimacy with Jesus. The celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation is also a powerful means for personal self-searching with a call to conversion.

When consecrated persons accept the occasions to achieve the goal of their religious call and life, they will be more conformed to Christ and will be able to deepen a close intimacy with him. In this way they are engaged in a lifelong ongoing formation. They will be always in the spirit of the newness of their religious call. Every effort on their part to imitate the life of Jesus will contribute directly to keep themselves faithful to him. With the awareness of the constant need for conversion and transformation, they will always be open to the richness of the promptings of the Spirit, will benefit from the various helps that are offered, and thus will be engaged in the process of transformation and continuing formation. They will likewise be strengthened to be always faithful to God's call, and no difficulty will be so strong that they cannot overcome it.

Rome, January 2007