

## The Role of Psychology in Formation

**1) Primary Objective/Fundamental Goal of Priestly/Religious/Monastic Formation** is internal transformation: **For the Priest: personalizing** of Christ's Priestly Ideals which enables the priest to be configured to Jesus Christ which allows him to act sacramentally "*in persona Christi*". **For the Religious/Monk: personalizing** of Christ's Evangelical Ideals/Monastic Ideals which enables the consecrated person to conform to (i.e. *imitate* and become a true sign of) Jesus Christ.

**2) The personalization of Priestly/Evangelical Ideals:** This is based on *two important theological presuppositions*, i.e. (i) the priestly vocation is a gratuitous gift of divine grace and cannot be properly understood except within the context of revealed faith (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, nn. 35-36: AAS 84, 1992, 714-718). (ii) That **divine grace is normally offered and mediated through the structures and dynamics of the human psyche** of which God, the Creator, is the author. Therefore it is baseless to pretend "that grace supplies for the defects of nature in such a man" (*Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* of Pope Paul VI, 1967, n. 64).

There are **3 processes** which help to explain why people adopt or change opinions, attitudes and ways of acting:

**Compliance** (when the adaptation of attitudes is influenced by the desire to gain a reward or to avoid punishment) e.g. a priest or a religious: accepting a difficult appointment/transfer because he is afraid that he will lose the bishops/superiors favour. Examples: going to prayers due to fear, rejection; saying the 'right' answer, agreeing to gain approval; not questioning to appear 'good'; saying 'yes' to avoid problems; doing an act to pacify a superior; pleasing the mother, avoiding the father's punishment. Formation Model: the emphasis is on reward, punishment, control by the emotions; fear of not conforming; being disliked, 'kicked out'; Behavioural model: formator as approver. Dependency and insecurity are encouraged.

**Identification** (when the adaptation of attitudes is influenced by the desire to be part of a group or to maintain a relationship with an important, admired or loved person). e.g. I obey because the superior because he happened to be my friend/classmate/ or because I feel that he is fond of me. Examples: Living the values of a club because of the name gained...a gang, high class school, well-respected group, social class; being a priest due to its status; a Brother as they wear special clothes, run a good school...Formation Model: Team work, togetherness, being with; being like...; we do it this way....we are good; belonging, modeling; 'do this because he does it'; fear of being outcast; focus is on the group and the group forms the group.

**Internalization** (when attitudes, opinions and ways of acting are adopted and maintained because the person understands that this is the right thing to do. The person's attitudes, actions and decisions are congruent with his personal beliefs and value system). Examples: Prayer is seen as an essential part of my life, linked to my relationship with God, my call, my vows, the meaning of my life; I work with the poor, due to the spirit of the gospels, a preferential option for the poor, my own belief that is part of my life. Formation Model: Focus on the presentation of Values, and processes to assist their Internalization, challenging Compliance and some forms of Identification. Emphasis is on individual growth; reflection on emotions and experiences in the context of the gospel values.

All these three processes are typically found in normal human life. For example, a person may observe the road code for fear of getting caught (compliance), share certain opinions/prejudices with his sporting friends (identification), and tell the truth because he knows this is the right thing to do (internalization).

**3) Difficulties Encountered in Internalizing Priestly/Religious Ideals:** Internalization refers to personalization of values and ideals proposed by ones Religious Charism & the Church. It's an inner transformation. Here the motivation is from within and based on "What is important in itself" (the real good) and not on "What is important for me" (the apparent good). When God calls man remains free to respond to Him in generosity or not. The expected response is, sometimes, met with '**psychic resistances**'.

Traditionally, seminary educators and formators have recognized 2 kinds of struggle in the lives of candidates: '**lack of desire**' (an age-old struggle between virtue and sin) and '**lack of capacity**' (the tension, born of the struggle between normality and psychopathology). Studies in modern 'depth psychology' has revealed a third kind of struggle: '**LACK OF AWARENESS**'. It's an existential state where it is possible for a basically normal person to consciously profess certain religious beliefs and ideals (such as celibacy for the sake of the kingdom) while, without being aware of it, being moved by unconscious forces (e.g. sub-conscious motivations) which may be contrary to those same ideals (e.g. affective dependence). Like a revolving door with several compartments, the person is effectively saying a conscious 'yes' and a hidden 'no' at one and the same time without awareness of what is taking place. It's a conflict/struggle between consciously desired ideals and values (in the ideal self) vs unconscious driven forces (in the actual self). Thus the root causes of these difficulties remain hidden. "*..It seems that it would be impossible to understand and explain the human being, his dynamism as well as his conscious acting and actions, if we were to base our considerations on consciousness alone. In this respect, as it seems, potentiality of the subconscious comes first; it is primary and more indispensable than consciousness for the interpretation of the human dynamism as well as for the interpretation of conscious acting*" (Wojtyla, Karol Józef, Card. *The Acting Person*. Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publ. Co. 1979a, P. 93).

**4) Classification of Consistencies/Inconsistencies:** This creates a state of internal tension, a dichotomy within the psyche, leaving the person in a situation of frustration called 'Vocational Inconsistency'. The person is inconsistent in the sense of being **moved/pulled by two sets of opposing forces**, one being *the ideals that are consciously desired and chosen*; the other being *the underlying needs by which the person feels unconsciously driven*. They are of 4 types: (i) **Social Consistency** [when a need, conscious or subconscious, is in harmony with vocational values (interiorly adapted) and with also in harmony with its corresponding attitude, the action tendency (outwardly adapted)]. For example a religious proclaims **poverty as a value (Value+)** (interiorly adapted). His **need to acquire (Need+)** is low. Therefore the person lives **a simple life using with whatever is necessary for him to survive (Attitude or Behaviour +)** and not being driven to acquire things and hence (**socially adapted**). He will experience integration and wholeness because his values, needs, and attitudes are in the same direction. Here the individual is socially well adapted and is called social consistency. (ii) **Social Inconsistency** [when a subconscious need is not in harmony with the values and of vocation (interiorly unadapted) while the attitude obeys the need more than the values (outwardly unadapted)]. For example a priest who has promised **celibacy (V+)** is driven/pulled by a strong need for **affective dependence (N-)** which is not in harmony with values proclaimed (so interiorly unadapted); and is also in continuous search to distract himself by engaging in various types of relationships/friendships and as a result **neglects his prayer life (A-)** (socially unadapted). (iii) **Psychological Consistency** [when a subconscious need is in harmony with vocational values (Interiorly adapted) but not in harmony with its corresponding attitude (outwardly unadapted)]. For example a religious holds high the value of vow of **chastity (V+)** and wishes to be unattached to anyone. This seems to be leading her for a wanting **autonomy (N+)**. In the meantime she is reluctant to participate in programmes where **involvement with members of the opposite sex** is needed (A-). (iv) **Psychological Inconsistency** [when a subconscious need is not in harmony with both the values and with its corresponding attitude which is to say that attitude is in harmony with the value]. (Interiorly unadapted while outwardly appear to be adapted). For example: Someone who wants to follow Jesus by washing the feet of others in perfect **service (V+)** as a result she always goes out **visiting families and enjoying meals with them (A+)**. But she is led by a subconscious need for **Succorance** which is to be helped by, to be taken care of and to

be served by others (N-). Here the need is **incompatible**/not in harmony/not in agreement with the **values** professed in religious life. This need is also **incompatible**/not in harmony with his **attitudes** (action tendencies), because as religious they should be directed more in the opposite direction of forgetting ones comforts). This individual, exteriorly a good religious, is psychologically inconsistent. She manifests **a tendency to help others, but in fact** has a need of a defensive nature, since in the last analysis; **she wants to give in order to receive**.

Therefore "Formation should involve the whole person, in every aspect of the personality, in **behaviour and intention**" (Vita Consecrata, 65) and the need "**to perceive the candidate's true motivations**" is of prime importance (Guidelines for the use of Psychology in the admission and formation of the candidates for the priesthood, Congregation for Catholic Education, No 4).

**5) The research conducted by the founding father of the Institute of Psychology at the Pontifical Gregorian University, Fr. L. M. Rulla SJ.** Most candidates entering seminaries and religious life, though psychologically normal, are influenced by underlying inconsistencies (second dimension: lack of awareness) which have a negative influence on their vocational growth and especially their growth in affective maturity. The motivation to enter, to persevere or to leave the monastery, all said to be influenced by subconscious dynamics.

**The conscience motivation for entrance:** *personal and institutional ideals (what they would like to become than on the basis of what they consciously are).* They **attribute to the institution the qualities of their ideal self**. E.g. I join to work in the Lords vineyard or to serve the Lord or to serve the poor or to work for the kingdom or to preach the Good News. However **man is not motivated solely by his ideals**.

**The subconscious motivation for entrance:** The lack of realism prevail at the entrance is related to the presence of **unconscious needs dissonant with proclaimed vocational values** (unconscious inconsistencies). Therefore the choice of a vocation and a decision to enter may not only be the fruit of a freely chosen ideal but also the result of unconscious needs. Some individuals without knowing it choose a religious vocation **with the aim of gratifying their needs, or in a defensive effort to resolve their conflicts or inconsistencies**. The vocational motivation of a great no. of candidates (60-80%) was marked by attitudes at the service of subconscious needs: attitudes maintained either to defend the self against these needs or to satisfy them. Therefore the **ideals formed consciously may be a result of subconscious forces**.

An examples: "I join the seminary to serve the poor, to serve God's people, I am a people-oriented priest (**conscious**) – I want to be close to people, to be **affectionately loved and cared by them**; I get upset when I don't receive a wish or greeting or a card for my birthday" (unconscious/subconscious = affective dependence/fulfills dependency needs).

**The prevalence of subconscious motivation:** between 60% and 80% influenced by subconscious needs and dynamics which, in turn, limits their capacity to internalize and personalize priestly/evangelical ideals. These unrecognized internal tension leads to many other complications such as effectiveness of vocation, frustrations, attachment issues, psychosomatic and sexual tensions, ambiguity to reduced interest in ministry etc.

**The persistence of vocational inconsistencies:** At the moment of entrance 86% of the male religious and 87% of the female religious were ignorant, totally or in part, of their central conflict/s and after 4 years of formation, 83% if the men, and 82% of the women were still ignorant of such conflicts.

**Regressive repetition:** The subject in his current relation with authority, or with his peers or with his subjects **relives a relationship he had with members of his family during infancy or adolescence**. The results show that **69% of the male religious and 67% of female religious** seem to establish some **transference relationship** in the

course of their formation (and even later as grown-ups). **Some formators/superiors/priest/religious, due to their own subconscious dynamics at work, can encourage the perpetuation of a 'transferential relationship'**

**The motivation for persevering in Religious Life:** It has been seen that the ideals (especially as self-transcendent values), and not the dimensions, are the psycho-social mediators which prevail in the process of entering while **for perseverance it is, not the ideals, but the influence of the first two dimensions (and especially the second dimension)** which are factors exercising a prevalent and predisposing influence. As a disposition the second dimension seems to be at the root of vocational crisis because it makes the balance/imbalance between the first and second dimensions very fragile and so can undermine some of the values which are basic to vocation.

Examples: "I have become an erudite preacher and an exotic healer so much so day and night I am surrounded by people coming for healing (conscious). I want to receive good comments about my sermon or recognition for my education qualifications as I am led by **need for exhibition** (Subconscious).

**The motivation for leaving Religious Life:** the characteristics of the individual personality i.e. influence of the individual psychodynamics (prevalence of vocational inconsistencies); there is a correlation between the prevalence of vocational inconsistencies and subsequent leaving of vocation. Therefore, the greater or lesser capacity for internalization of values, determined by the consistencies and inconsistencies, seems to be one of the decisive elements for perseverance in a person's vocation.

Example: "I am fed up with my Congregation and the Superiors for **the way I'm be treated** (conscious). I am leaving the Convent. But behind my decision to leave is a psychological dynamic of **Abasement** which is an '**inferiority complex**' (subconscious).

#### **The 4 Groups:**

**The immature who leave (the driven) (1):** These are those who have left the vocation but are out of it because of their immaturity/inconsistency. (62%)

However, it is not necessary to conclude that all who are inconsistent leave the religious life after some time.

**The mature who leave (the changed) (2):** If, for example, a more profound knowledge of the institution shows them that it does not respond to the ideal that they were proposed, they are able to make the mature and objective decision to seek another way. (18%)

**The immature who remain:** on the other hand, inconsistent candidates will remain in the religious life despite their unconscious conflicts. Such people are called (3) '**Nesters**'. (14%)

**The mature who remain/persevere:** they are called (4) '**Non-Nesters**': (6%) those who persevere and who are favourably disposed to internalisation by their maturity in the 2<sup>nd</sup> dimension.

-Those candidates affected by a possibility of serious, or moderate, or slight pathology (20%).

**6) The Role of Psychology in Formation:** Until now it has been used *for diagnostic (selective) and the therapeutic purposes*. This approach alone is not sufficient. Our study calls for the Positive use of Psychology in order to *increase/enhance the capacity to internalize vocational values* by means of progressive growth in developmental and spiritual maturity. The most dynamic use of psychology in formation is *pedagogical and integrative*. i.e. helping the candidates to recognize and overcome the inconsistencies (**insight work, i.e. helping to gain insight**) that hinder human and spiritual growth than to wait for such difficulties to develop to the point where they become almost irreversible. Therefore one should not make a dichotomy between psychology and

spirituality. Formation has to present to the candidate the necessary spiritual nourishment, but it has to also assure him *the capacity to assimilate and to internalize* this nourishment. Without this integration between the human and the spiritual, the ideals proposed, instead of favouring growth, may become a source of frustration and alienation.

### **The Church's duty to discern vocations**

-“God calls all to holiness, but not all to a religious vocation. Someone who might make a good Trappist would not make a good foreign missionary, and vice versa. If one could use appropriate testing to determine reasonably that an individual is not suited for a particular vocation – or for religious life at all – that individual may avoid much suffering while the institute or diocese saves considerable expense and complications for the other candidates entering at the same time” (Fr. Benedict Groeschel CFR)

-“The desire alone to become a priest is not sufficient, and **there does not exist a right to receive sacred ordination. It belongs to the Church** - in her responsibility to define the necessary requirements for receiving the sacraments instituted by Christ - **to discern the suitability** of him who desires to enter the seminary, to accompany him during his years of formation, and to call him to holy orders if he is judged to possess the necessary qualities..... In order to admit a candidate to ordination to the diaconate, the Church must **verify**, among other things, that the candidate **has reached affective maturity** (*Congregation for Catholic Education, Instruction Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies in view of their Admission to the Seminary and to Holy Orders*, No. 3).

-“The Church, “begetter and formator of vocations”, has **the duty of discerning a vocation and the suitability of candidates** for the priestly ministry” (*Congregation for Catholic Education, Guidelines for the use of psychology in the admission and formation of candidates for the Priesthood*, No. 1)

-“It is possible that the candidate – notwithstanding his own commitment and the support of the psychologist, or psychotherapy – **could continue to show himself unable to face realistically his areas of grave immaturity** – even given the gradual nature of all human growth. Such areas of immaturity would include *strong affective dependencies; notable lack of freedom in relations; excessive rigidity of character; lack of loyalty; uncertain sexual identity; deep-seated homosexual tendencies*; etc. If this should be the case, **the path of formation will have to be interrupted**” (*Congregation for Catholic Education, Guidelines for the use of psychology in the admission and formation of candidates for the Priesthood*, No. 10).

-“Those who are discovered **to be unfit** for physical, psychological or moral reasons should **be quickly removed** from the path to the priesthood” (*Sacerdotalis Caelibatus, Encyclical of Pope Paul VI*, no. 64).

-In the spring of 2002, amid revelations of child molestation by priests in the Archdiocese of Boston, pope John Paul II met in Rome with a dozen U.S. cardinals. Hundreds of priests across the country had resigned amid renewed criminal investigations of decades-old abuse cases. Seeking to restore confidence in the church, the pope declared that “**people need to know that there is no place in the priesthood and religious life for those who would harm the young.**”

-**The call to Holy Orders or Consecrated Life implies a discernment of the presence of divine grace.** The responsibility for discernment finally rests with the candidate and either the Ordinary of the Diocese (C. 241,

1025) or the Major Superior of the Religious Congregation (C. 641) whose judgment should be based on all the available evidence.

-“The strain of your regular evaluation of students is worth all your efforts...Be just and understanding. You are able to help the student mature as a human person, of course, but for the purpose of serving the church as a priest. When uncertainty about a candidate’s suitability to serve the People of God persists, **the church always gets the benefit of the doubt**”. (Archbishop Jean Jadot, Apostolic delegate to the USA, from 1973-1980)

#### **Tasks of the formator:**

- i) To immerse themselves deeply in the mind and heart of the Church, faithfully implement the Church’s vision, laws, and formation procedures. Therefore the future formators should be given the systematic preparation, required by the Church, necessary to undertake this ministry.
- ii) To operationalize the goals of priestly and religious formation and help the candidates to internalize the core values of his vocational calling while addressing both the conscious and unconscious dimensions of the candidate’s life,
- iii) To coordinate three basic formative activities: **proposing** core vocational values (through liturgy, retreats and spiritual exercises, teaching systematic themes, talks, community celebrations and especially the personal witness of the formators), **understanding** (understanding what has been proposed requires a personalized response which takes into account the capacities of each individual. This could be done through suitable pedagogical and formative methods such as propaedeutic/preparatory studies, guided reading, written assignments, questions and answers, class presentations, careful selection of visiting speakers, and encouraging the candidate to bring the material to personal prayer and reflection) **and internalizing** the core vocational values of priesthood and consecrated life (which is the most difficult, delicate and elusive phase of the formation process. This could be done through the formative instrument suggested by Fr. Rulla called ‘vocational growth sessions’ (VGS) which helps the candidate to gain ‘insight’ and address the resistance and blocks which can limit the person’s capacity to live fully his vocation..

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