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SAINT KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA
A Closer Walk with Jesus

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Editorial

FORMATION

A Work of Art, a Police Action and the Little Monsters

Benny Paul Thettayil
Editor-in-Chief

On 29 November 2013, Pope Francis met 120 Superiors General of congregations for men at the end of their 82nd General Assembly. On the occasion, he responded to a few questions they posed about formation. During the session, he spoke of his priorities, which were based on the living relations he had experienced in life: “The formation of candidates is fundamental. There are four pillars of formation: spiritual, intellectual, communitarian and apostolic. The ghost to fight against is the image of religious life understood as an escape or hiding place in face of an “external,” difficult and complex world. The four pillars should be integrated right from the first day of entrance into the novitiate, and should not be arranged sequentially. They must be interactive.”

The Pope recognizes the fact that the challenges of formation today are not easy to face. He compares the early days with that of today and holds that the daily culture is richer and conflictual than that which he had experienced in his days, years ago. The culture was simpler and more ordered. Given this change and all that it has brought about, he invites the formators to encounter the students because problems are not solved simply by forbidding doing this or that. Instead, dialogue and confrontation are needed.

The Pope who had headed the novitiate training programme in his native Argentina in the 1970s, backed by his experience, warned the superiors of some of the drawbacks of the contemporary formation. On the part of some of the students, in order ‘to avoid problems, in some houses of formation, young people grit their teeth, try not to make mistakes, follow the rules smiling a lot, just waiting to be told that they have finished their formation.’ This, according to the Pope, is

hypocrisy that is the result of clericalism, cronyism and careerism among the clergy, which is one of the worst evils. He strongly feels the need to conquer this propensity toward clericalism in houses of formation. What is to be avoided at all costs is this hypocrisy, which is one of the main causes of the lack of maturity and Christian freedom in the people of God.

The Pope is concerned mainly about three important factors in formation. They are the size of the formation house, the number of the students that are housed in there and the competence of the formators. He notes that if the seminary is too large, it ought to be divided into smaller communities with formators who are equipped really to accompany those in their charge. Regarding the modality of formation he instructs that genuine dialogue must be a regular feature of a formation house. Moreover, this dialogue that is going on in the formation house must be serious, without fear and sincere. He reminds the formators that the language of young people in formation today is different from that in the past. As we are living through an epochal change, "Formation is a *work of art*, not a *police action*. We must form their hearts. Otherwise we are creating *little monsters*. And then these little monsters mould the People of God. This really gives me goose bumps."

The objective of formation has always to be kept in mind when the formators carry out their duties. The Pope insisted on the fact that formation should not be oriented only toward personal growth but also in view of its final goal, which is the people of God. While forming the young people, it is important to think about the people to whom these persons will be sent. "The formator should keep in mind that the person in formation is called to care for the people of God... Just think of religious who have hearts that are as sour as vinegar: they are not made for the people." He warns the formators of the end product of the formation houses saying that in the end the formation house must not form administrators, managers, but fathers, brothers, traveling companions for the people travelling towards the Kingdom of God. These might or might not be engaged in administrative and managerial works as they are ministering to the people.

Concluding his informal question and answer session on formation of the future priests and religious, the Pope cautioned against accepting a candidate who has been asked to leave a religious institute because of problems with formation and for serious reasons. Receiving such a candidate, according to the Pope, is a huge problem. He concluded his exhortation with the advice to have the courage to

approach personal formation as a serious challenge, always keeping in mind the People of God. The protection of the faithful is of great importance.

The Congregation for the Clergy in Vatican issued an updated instrument for the formation of priests towards the end of 2017.¹ The document titled *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* or 'The Gift of Priestly Vocation', is meant to provide guidelines for the formation of priests, which is in need of a revamp, renewal, and restoration. The opening line of the document reads that the gift of vocation, placed by God in the hearts of some chosen people, obliges the Church to propose to them a serious journey of formation.

The new norms of the document, which are the updates on the ones given in 1970 and were reviewed in 1985, seek to take into account the rapid evolution in historical, socio-cultural and ecclesiastical contexts. Much of the inspiration present in the document was drawn from Pope Francis' teachings and spirituality, especially on "temptations tied to money, to the authoritarian exercise of power, to rigid legalism, and to vainglory."

The document takes up the content, methods and orientation produced up to this day in the field of formation. The innovations that are suggested are not separate from the tradition of the Church but, they integrate it and enhance it. The document also draws on *Pastores dabo vobis* (1992) to promote an integral formation, which unites the human as well as the spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral dimensions in a balanced way. One important innovation that the *Ratio Fundamentalis* proposes is a propaedeutic period upon entrance to the seminary not less than one year or more than two and is meant to validate the vocation of candidates.

Ratio Fundamentalis also emphasizes the need for dioceses and religious orders to guard against admitting potential sex abusers into the system. It notes that the greatest attention must be given to the theme of the protection of minors and vulnerable adults, being vigilant lest those who seek admission to a house of formation, is not involved in any way with any crime or problematic behaviour. The document

¹The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life issued the *Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes* on 2 February 1990. The document has the gravity of an instruction according to canon 34 of the Code of Canon Law. It deals with provisions approved by the Holy Father and proposed by the Dicastery with a view to clarifying the norms of law in order to assist in their application.

restates the instruction of the Catechism of the Catholic Church on the ordination of persons with homosexual tendencies:

The Church, while profoundly respecting the persons in question, cannot admit to the seminary or to holy orders those who practice homosexuality, present deep-seated homosexual tendencies or support the so-called 'gay culture'. Such persons, in fact, find themselves in a situation that gravely hinders them from relating correctly to men and women. One must in no way overlook the negative consequences that can derive from the ordination of persons with deep-seated homosexual tendencies.²

The document has added three stages to formation: the stage of discipleship, stage of configuration, and pastoral stage, to each of which corresponds an itinerary and a formative content, orientated toward assimilation with the image of the Good Shepherd. This addition helps better human, spiritual and pastoral maturation in the candidates as they are guided in accompaniment.

Ratio Fundamentalis could be read in the light of Pope Francis' recent address to the Society of Jesus, in which he stated: "I am noticing the lack of discernment in the formation of priests. We are risking, in fact, becoming accustomed to 'black and white' and to that which is legal. We are quite closed, by and large, to discernment. One thing is clear, today in a certain quantity of Seminaries, a rigidity has been re-established which is not related to situational discernment." Out of the three stages of formation that the document deals with, in the present discussion, we focus on the first and early stage of formation.

Along with the young people in formation, their mentors are also invited first of all, to discern their own path as formators of the people of God, and with the purpose of preparing for ministry and of the initial and ongoing formation of the ministers and religious. They are called upon to deepen their own vocation, the fundamental motivations and the specific aspects of their own priestly and ministerial life. Finally, they are advised to grow by means of a thorough a careful review of life in the light of the gift of vocation received, to welcome the prompting of the Holy Spirit to develop their own life of discipleship leading towards a configuration to Christ (Rom 8:29). The release of the document is a valuable opportunity to stop, reflect, examine and assimilate the essence of the call and the intensity of the response. Moreover, it is a time for personal formation

²cf. *Ratio Fundamentalis* 199; CCC 2357-2358.

and for formation oriented towards service of the people of God in the Church. Finally, the document is an invitation to have the joyful experience of a life lived in fraternity and sharing.

In the following reflection, we focus on the initial stages of the process of formation. The formal formation process begins with the vocation promotion of the young candidates to priestly or/and religious life. According to *Gravissimum educationis*, the Declaration of 1965, the young people are "the hope of the Church."³ Although there are adult candidates who aspire to embrace religious life, the majority of candidates today are between eighteen and twenty-five years old in Europe and about 16 in India at the time of their entry in to a congregation. John Paul II notes that the Church has "so much to talk about with youth, and youth have so much to share with the Church."⁴

The Apostolic Exhortation titled *Christifideles laici* speaks highly of young people who aspire for religious and priestly life. The document admires their sensitivity that profoundly affects their perception of the values of justice, non-violence, and peace. "Their hearts are disposed to fellowship, friendship, and solidarity. They are greatly moved by causes that relate to the quality of life and the conservation of nature."⁵ Likewise, the youngsters have a thirst for freedom and authenticity. Generally, and at times ardently, based on their home base, they aspire for a better world. Some youngsters are engaged in their struggle against political, social, cultural tyranny through charitable associations in their attempts to contribute to the betterment of humanity. The candidates who enter the religious congregations are generally helped to foster all their aspirations to engage in their struggle for a better world. However, this natural positive capacity in these young people could be stunted if adequate formation and accompaniment is not given early on.

At the time of the entry, to a great extent, the candidates today have been influenced thoroughly by what is conveniently called modernity. At this stage, experienced hands and keen eyes can identify some of their common traits with sufficient accuracy. If the religious congregations are not driven by the number factor alone, which is the predicament of some of the shrinking orders today. They would do well if their vocation promoters and the formators who

³*Gravissimum educationis* 2.

⁴*Christifideles laici* 46.

⁵*Christifideles laici* 46.

guide the candidates initially have the right tools to identify and gauge these traits and help them choose their real vocation before it is too late. Since there is no universal model for selection, and each culture has to identify its strengths and weaknesses, and add touches to it that are required by its own uniqueness for the benefit both of the people of God as well as their own.

At least in some cases, as the congregations grab them, either they tend to lose these natural qualities or the communities smother their natural propensity to respond to these. Some of those conscientious candidates find these evils in the community they are called to be members of and either get institutionalized or get disillusioned. The challenge before the religious communities today is to prepare personnel, from the beginning, to challenge, enhance, and foster these qualities in the candidates.

Although some of the candidates are not always motivated by religious or philosophical principles, the sincerity of these young people and the depth of their generosity and commitment is to be taken into consideration. At least a few among them are marked by a profound religious sentiment, which itself is in need of evangelizing. It is incumbent on the initial formators to help them grow in their natural gifts and refine them, at the same time, augmenting what is lacking in their personality.

There are some others, and these are not necessarily in the minority in some countries, who lead a sufficiently exemplary Christian life and are courageously engaged in the apostolate, already experiencing what it means to "follow Jesus Christ more closely." Jesus Youth, Vocolare and Neo-Catechumenate and some of them, whose spirituality sometimes contributes to the spirituality of the community they come to be part of and some other times becomes a challenge for the religious community they come to join.

Although these young people have been practicing their particular spirituality in the places where they were active, their doctrinal and ethical frames of reference often tend to be relative since, in most of the cases, they do not know very well if there are solid points of reference for attaining the truth about humanity and the world. Usually, it is their training in philosophy lessons given in the religious houses and seminaries that make them put these into perspective. Philosophical lessons given to non-clerical candidates with right motivation enhance these natural gifts in them and consolidate them further.

The generation swing is another factor that the formators of our times are invited to cope with. In dealing with the natural gifts of the

candidates, the initial formators are invited to keep in mind the fact that some of the convictions of the candidates about the existence of good and evil, and the meaning of these words would seem to be at odds with respect to what it was for preceding generations or cultures to which the formators might belong. This is often the case with those religious communities which recruit their candidates from a place that has a culture foreign to theirs. Moreover, in the modern world, frequently there is a gap between the level of the secular knowledge of the candidates, which can be highly specialized at times, especially among the older recruits and that of their psychological growth and their Christian life.

In the modern urban societies, the young people are bombarded by consumerism, and many of them are saturated with the deceptions which it begets. Succeeding, often with much difficulty, in finding their place in the world, some let themselves be seduced by alcohol, violence, drugs, and eroticism especially in the social media. Certainly, there are those among the candidates who have had experiences of some of these and suffer from the hangover in various ways. These problems, which the variety and complexity of the modern human social and urban background poses for vocation promotion and formation demand urgent attention. Early detection of the traits, early help given, the psychological enhancement of personality and constant accompaniment of the candidates, especially the vulnerable ones are of paramount importance during the initial formation, both for the sake of the candidate and the institute to which he/she belongs.

The experiences that the candidates sustained in their family tell upon the time they take as they grow in maturity. The new Christian families and the *lapsed* Christian families are the ones in question. Not all may have had a happy experience within their family, considering the crises which sometimes afflict the institution of family in the modern times. This may be because the culture of the candidate has not been *deeply* influenced by Christianity, or where the culture is of a post-Christian type where there is an urgent need of a new evangelization, or even where the culture has long been evangelized. The candidates from these backgrounds, especially the tribal ones, learn more through images, and the present system of education encourages this at times, but they read less and write lesser. Hence, their culture is characterized by an absence of an historical dimension, as if their world began yesterday. In these cases, the initial formation system is to be revamped in order to accommodate these candidates

and to respond to their needs adequately until they are able to come to the mainstream.

Young people hesitate to say who they are and what they are called to become. Hence, the formator has to be equipped with effective tools for discernment of vocations. Some candidates for the religious life present themselves because of a more or less conscious search for social gain, professionalism and future security. Others look upon the religious life as an ideal place for an ideological struggle for justice. There are others of a more conservative nature who look upon the religious life as if it were a place for saving their faith in a world, which they regard as corrupt. In religious life they find an escape from the society. All of these vocations, irrespective of their initial motivation, could be enhanced provided the formation personnel have the right approach to formation, backed with prayer and discernment. These motives represent values, which need to be purified, corrected, directed and reoriented.

This stage, which comes before the entrance into the novitiate, is a crucial one because it is there that the foundation of the committed life is laid. In 1969, the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes issued a document titled *Renovationis causam* in order to make a better adaptation of the entire formation cycle. It dealt with the appropriate renovation of the training and preparation of persons for living the religious life and the immediate focus of the instruction was religious life. It makes a valid observation when it says: "Most of the difficulties encountered today in the formation of novices are usually due to the fact that when they were admitted (to the novitiate) they did not have the required maturity."⁶ The rest of the difficulties, however, are caused by the lack of accompaniment by competent formators to help the candidates to come to this maturity.

It is not required and certainly not expected that a candidate for religious life be able to assume all of the obligations of the religious life immediately, but he/she should be found capable of doing so progressively. The formators are invited to prepare the candidates in such a way that this ability is either generated in them or encouraged in those it is found. This propensity has to be made visible in them in the years preparing for the novitiate. The possibility of making such a judgment justifies the time and means employed in reaching it. This is the purpose of the stage preparatory to the novitiate, no matter what name may be given to it: aspirancy, candidacy, postulancy, pre-

⁶*Renovationis Causam* 4; Introduction, *Acta apostolicae sedis* 61 (1969), 103 ff.

novitiate, etc. It is usually left to the religious orders to determine the manner in which it is carried out, but whatever it may be, 'no one can be admitted to the novitiate without suitable preparation'⁷ in the initial years.

Initial formation of the candidates depends to a great extent also on the quality of the community. This quality is the result of its general climate and the style of life of its members, in conformity with the particular character, charism and spirit of the institute. The community is formative to the extent that it permits its numbers to grow in fidelity to the Lord according to its charism. Confusion with regard to the charism or any ambiguity thereof would disorientate the new candidate. This means that a community will be what its members make it, that it has its own requirements, and that before it can be used as a means of formation, it deserves to be lived and loved for what it is in the religious life, as the Church conceives it. An ideal formation of the candidates is impossible unless it is given from the lived experience of the charism of a community. The history and the vision of the founders of the congregations, inspiring as they are, do not suffice.

In an ideal community, where the candidates are formed, the members have a clear idea of why the community exists, and what are its basic objectives. Their interpersonal relationships are marked by simplicity and confidence, based primarily on faith and love. The community is continuously shaped by the Holy Spirit, judged and converted by the Word of God, purified by penance, constructed by the Eucharist and vivified by the celebration of the liturgy. It strengthens its communion by generous mutual assistance and by an unceasing exchange of material and spiritual goods, in a spirit of poverty and with the help of friendship and dialogue. The community finds joy in living the spirit of its founder and the rule of the institute profoundly. Superiors consider it their particular office to seek to build a community of brothers or sisters in Christ. Each of the members, aware of his or her responsibility within the community, is moved to grow, for self and for the good of all.⁸ It is here in such a community that religious in formation finds a spiritual atmosphere, austerity of life, and an apostolic enthusiasm, which are conducive to a joyful following of Christ according to the radicalism of their consecration. The community gives an impetus to the youngsters.

⁷*Codex Iuris Canonici* 597.2.

⁸Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelica testificatio* 32, 1971.

John Paul II speaks of what he calls a complete formation in his message to the religious of Brazil. He suggests that the young candidates, during their formation, reside in formative communities with atmosphere required for a complete formation, which includes spiritual, intellectual, cultural, liturgical, communitarian and pastoral. The Pope also advises the formators to draw from the pedagogical experience of the Church and enrich formation, in a community suitable to the individuals and to their religious and/or priestly vocation.

The candidates becoming part of those small religious communities inserted in a working class district, or in the remote or poorer areas of the country, is a significant expression of "the preferential option for the poor." These social insertions bring the future ministers closer to the hard realities that the masses face in their world. However, ideally, it is not enough to work *for* the poor but there is also the question of life *with* them and, as far as possible, *like* them. In India, these radical steps are seen predominantly among women religious. In these situations, always, the requirements of formation should prevail over the apostolic advantages of a poor milieu. One of the possible dangers of this contextual insertion and a life of activity for the sake of the poor tends to detach the candidate from their interior life. The candidates also need to realize and maintain solitude and silence, which are indispensable during the initial formation. The active life must be an outcome of the interior life and their interior life must prod them on to commit themselves for the poor.

Certainly, the initial formation programme must contain periods of apostolic activities where the active dimension of religious life can find expression. In these cases, the communities should assure their religious authenticity and offer the possibility of living a truly religious life in harmony with the charism of the institute. Moreover, in these communities, personal prayer, times and places of silence are maintained. Taking these factors into consideration, the danger of dissipation and unnecessary exposure to unmonitored and undesirable situations has to be avoided.

The basic culture of the candidate is of great importance. The formators must take into account the conditions of certain countries or social environments where the level of schooling is relatively low. It is necessary to promote the original culture of the candidate carefully, and not to assimilate it into a foreign culture even if the latter would seem superior. It is within their own culture that candidates, whether

male or female, must recognize the call of the Lord and respond to it in a personal manner.

The preparatory stage of the early formation can be prolonged as individual cases demand. However, the time spent should aim at the preparation the candidate verifying and clarifying certain points, which will permit the formators to determine the advisability of and the time for the candidate's admission into the further level. Moreover, the primary objective of this extended time is not ministry of any kind, but formation. Care should be taken not to hasten their promotion, nor to defer it unduly. All these enable the candidate to determine his/her own call and the formators to arrive at a certain judgment on whether the person is a promising candidate in terms of religious life. One of the dangers that some of the shrinking congregations are facing is that they are in need of personnel to man their institutions that they are driven by number, in which case, the administrative calibre of the candidate is also given importance, thus the system ends up promoting undesirable elements.

With regard to the expected outcome of the initial formation before the novitiate, the Canon Law has a few points to make.⁹ The expected outcome of this early stage of formation is a sufficient degree of human and Christian maturity for the entry to the next level (the novitiate). At least in some cases, it has been the experience that for the lack of the expected maturity in the candidates who are promoted to the higher level, the novitiate is reduced to the level of a course of general formation. Depending upon the formative system in place, the candidates of some religious communities are presented to the novitiate without adequate sacramental, doctrinal and moral Christian initiation. To avoid this tragedy, there has to be a criterion in place and common parameters have to be stipulated in this regard.

The emotional balance in a religious is of paramount importance. A balanced affectivity, especially sexual balance, which presupposes the acceptance of the other, man or woman, respecting his or her own difference. A psychological examination in the initial level was always highly recommended. This becomes mandatory today in the light of the events that in some quarters have become scandalous. This kind of psychological help certainly will increase the quality of the response that the candidate makes as he/she is freed from the shackles of the past negative experiences. Sometimes, it helps him/her choose another vocation which is better personally. These few years spent in the

⁹*Codex Iuris Canonici* 641-645.

community give the candidates the preliminary lessons of religious life and enable them either to grow deeper in the conviction of their call to live and serve God and his people in the community according to its charism or discern that their vocation is to another way of life. Candidates should be made well aware of the fact that other ways exist by which to give all of one's life to the Lord, apart from entering a religious institute. However, the formators have to take into account the right of each individual to preserve his or her own privacy.¹⁰

The overall objective in the years spent in formation before the novitiate is to lead the young candidates to cultivate human social values and to consolidate them in Christian virtues. Additionally, the candidates are prepared to cultivate the right aptitude in the worship of God in the sacred liturgy. Great importance in this stage is given to the education given in discipline of the mind and body, a solid footing in the basic history of Church and a deeper knowledge of the history of the religious congregation that they belong to. Insofar as the matter of discipline is concerned, experience has shown that a mild 'police action' for the sake of discipline, given in love, is sometimes required. Call *it* a work of art, without which, given in time, the candidates run the risk of growing up unruly and turn into little and later great monsters, who will cause more goose bumps. In a conscientious process of screening, the intention and suitability of the candidates must be thoroughly tested for their own sake as well as for the sake of the people of God and the result of a genuine evaluation must be reflected back to them. In any case, the formators are called to encourage the candidates to follow their heart and to help them to direct their lives in such a way that they would bloom even if they choose another vocation.

The present issue of the HE is titled *A Closer Walk with Jesus* looks at the various aspects of formation in priestly and religious life. The rationale behind the issue is that Chavara, along with Frs Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukkara, his own formators and companions, was a formator *par excellence*. We also think that it is high time that we looked at religious formation at close quarters. The discussion is opened by Maria Anto CMC as she dwells on the scriptural basis of religious life, where she finds a filial model of intimacy with God. The second entry, by Joe Mannath SDB deals with human formation. He discusses what formation means, who the stakeholders are, and how their respective responsibilities need to be spelt out. He considers the

¹⁰Cf. CIC 620.

three goals of religious life as personal growth, community life and mission. Antony Puthenangady CMI reflects on the ethical and legal issues involved in formation. Considering the ethical responsibilities of a formator, he calls the competence of today's formator in general into question.

Paul Kalluveettil CMI takes a fresh look at *Bes Rauhma* as a biblical symbol. The founding Fathers of CMI Congregation chose a hill to build up the first religious house. As heights generally evoke heaven, the abode of God, *Bes Rauhma* has a deep spiritual significance. Kuncheria Pathil CMI, reflecting on the ecclesial perspectives of religious formation, notes that in the period immediately after Vatican II, the Church faced a deep crisis in vocations and invites us into a spirit-filled *kairos*, which will lead the Church to ever new and wider horizons. Louis Malieckal CMI ponders on the CMI legacy of contextual priestly formation in the light of the vision of St Chavara, which finally leads to the CMI charism of contextual priestly formation, which the community inherited from its founding Fathers including Chavara. Finally, in a modern Indian religious community, which is a melting pot of various cultures and traditions, Christy Varghese CHF delineates a few strategies for a healthy multi-ethnic formation of the religious candidates and calls for a change in motivations and attitudes in the formation of candidates especially in the field of affective maturity.

The first three entries and the fifth are papers presented at a conference organized by Abraham Puthukulangara, a friend and confrere who lightens up the path of many a young Carmelite formees. We thank him for the permission to make these entries part of the present issue.

SCRIPTURAL BASIS OF RELIGIOUS LIFE Filial Model of Intimacy with God

Maria Anto CMC

Abstract: Maria Anto CMC dwells on the scriptural basis of religious life, where she finds a filial model of intimacy with God. Divine-human intimacy is a recurring theme in the Scripture, which portrays a God who is 'in need' of our intimate relationship. She considers vocation as a call to be more. In the reflection, Maria Anto considers following Christ of the gospel as the core of religious life where one deepens the intimacy as a sacrificial victim in daily life. If the members of the younger generation are motivated in the right way, and if they have the aptitude for a life of joy, right from the early moments of their formation, and are constantly clinging to that through the daily life, the relationship will be natural for them.

Keywords: scripture, religious, intimacy, vocation, formation, candidates, metaphors, disciples, orders, institutes, monasticism, discipleship, Yahweh, contemplation, Trinity, archetype, experience, *aggiornamento*, Christification, anamnesis, memory, icon, Eucharist, testimony, master, reconciliation, humility, orthodoxy, orthopraxy, humanity, liberation, renunciation, abnegation, victim, Peter, baptism, Father, Abba, monastery.

My vocation is to be more. When one correlates this maxim with religious life and especially with formation, which is an enabling process, in it, the candidates are enabled to be what they are or what they should be. What one should be is contained in what one is. It denotes that what one is or one's being is not anything that is statically given; but rather one can be what one is (being). If one can be what one is, then one ought to be so; and hence the trilogy, is-can-ought. What one is already is not merely to be preserved or maintained, but is to be developed by the constant process of becoming more and better of oneself. The challenge to be more and better is engrained in one's being. For an integral formation, this process of becoming takes place in all levels - physical, psychological, moral and spiritual - of one's

life. Basing on the Scripture, the present paper concentrates on the spiritual aspect with an emphasis to intimacy with God.

Divine-human intimacy is a recurring theme in the Scripture and right from Genesis to Revelation, the Scripture portrays a God who is 'deliberately in need' of human being's intimate relationship. More than humans after divine, God is after his people. Metaphors like 'father-son', 'mother-child', 'husband-wife', 'master-disciple', 'friend-friend' etc. were used to describe the depth of divine-human intimacy in both the Testaments. Here without setting aside the First Testament, we focus more on the Second Testament and go through the texts in which Jesus invites and demands from his disciples the same intimacy that he shared with his Father. Basing on that filial model, religious life is pondered over here.

1. Following Christ of the Gospel: Core of Religious Life

'Following Christ of the Gospel' constitutes the core of religious life. Holy Scripture especially the Second Testament offers solid ground for such following. The lifestyle of the Lord of the Gospel determines the style of life they ought to have in the world. The history of the consecrated life confirms this centrality of Christ and of his Gospel. Orders and institutes were born with the unique desire to live the evangelical life in full, following Christ of the gospels in his words and action. Primitive monasticism recognized the Gospel as the unique rule and proper norm of life. The call of the religious consists precisely in seeking to follow Christ of the gospels. If so, the sole purpose in the process of religious formation is to enable the candidates to follow Jesus as he is presented in the gospels.

The present article tries to bring up the way Jesus related with his Abba as the model for divine-human, master-disciple, intimacy which is the soul of religious life. The plan of procedure therefore is to look at both the life and teaching of him the perfect man who was constantly and intimately united to the Father and invited his disciples to keep up such close and constant relationship with him and thus to the Triune God in both life *ad intra* and *ad extra*. His paternal intimacy was so deep and strong that he could proclaim aloud, the one who sees me sees the Father (Jn 14:9). Religious life demands such an intimate relationship with the master where the face of the master must shine forth through the face of the disciples. It is a costly demand and it is one of the main challenges of religious formation in the contemporary web world. In order to become men and women of God in the world,

to become 'divine statues' and thus to make the Invisible visible, discipleship is offered to them.

2. 'Follow Me': An Invitation to Possess His Lifestyle

*Sequela Christi*¹ lies at the heart of all Christian thought, life and ministry. It is the biblical root of discipleship. Within the 'follow me' of the Son of God is the base and source of all states of Christian Life. The term 'follow' received a new meaning when Jesus uttered it, a meaning which it has nowhere else 'except in those passages of the OT which declare that one must follow either Baal or Yahweh (cf. 1Kings 18:21; Prov 7:22). Jesus does not propose but calls imperatively, displaying audacious personal authority in summoning his followers to join him in advancing the kingdom of God. Thus, his insistence on discipleship to whom it is given is compulsory, not voluntary.² It is not a simple question of personal generosity but a response to a demanding call. He confronted certain individuals with his imperious command to follow him, a command that tolerates no opposition or delay. Jesus' question "what are you looking for?" (Jn 1:38) implies more than a banal request about the disciples' reason for walking after him. It touches on the basic human need to turn to God.³ Jesus takes the initiative by turning and speaking. As Jn 15:16 will enunciate, "it is not you who chose me, but I chose you." The call is to be the 'apostle' of the Master, is to follow his lifestyle.

Those words addressed to the apostles primarily are also intended to all those who are the future followers of Christ. Even though, the command 'follow me' is meant for all Christians irrespective of their states of life in the mystical Body, some are called to follow the Son of God 'more closely'⁴ and to embody in a 'special way' the particular requirements of *Sequela Christi*, by embracing religious life. They have a special experience of the light that shines forth from the incarnate Word.⁵

¹In the NT the verb *sequela* (to follow) is used about 78 times. It is used always in the sense of following a person. With only one exception (Mk 14:13), this person is always Jesus Christ.

²F. Scott Spencer, "Follow me, the Imperious Call of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels", *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology*, 59/ 2 (April, 2005), p. 142.

³R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, New York: Anchor Bible, 1966, p. 78.

⁴LG 44, 46; MR 10.

⁵VC 15.

Biblical discipleship involves an uprooting and a close following which give identity to the disciples as disciples.⁶ The Christian and especially the consecrated, by definition, is a disciple who is called to remain so always. For him/her it is not a passing but a permanent state of life. "*Sequela Christi* includes much more than mere spatial or ethical connotations."⁷ One of the most comprehensive and concrete demands that Jesus poses when he utters 'follow me' is to possess and project his style of life as revealed in the Scripture. For that the person has to be 'seized' 'touched' and 'sustained' by the Son.⁸ A close contact, intimate union with him is very essential without which this state of Christian life will bear no fruits. Only a personal, intimate and exclusive encounter with the Son brings radical change in the one who is called. Adherence to both the person and fate of the Master is inevitable here.

3. Adherence to the Person and Fate: Necessary for Intimacy

Every vocation to consecrated life is born in contemplation, from moments of intense communion and from a deep relationship of friendship with the Son, from the beauty and light, which was seen shining on his face. A living model is there for such adherence, which is nothing but the life of the Master himself. 'Filial fervour' is one of the striking features in the personality of Jesus. Adherence to the Father was his concern not only in the immanent Trinity (Jn 1:18) but also in the economy of salvation (Jn 14:10). The state of Jesus consisted in being 'together' with the Father; even though he had come forth from the Father, in the world he never ceased being in the Father. To phrase it differently, the ex-centric dimension of the Son in the world could not cast the slightest shadow on the con-centric dimension of his being in the Father. The Spirit allowed him these two-fold movements of intro-version (toward the Father) and extro-version (toward the world). His entire existence was oriented toward the Father (Lk 23:46); he belonged totally to the Father (Jn 17:10). He lived on earth in

⁶The term 'disciple', which is derived from the Greek *mathētēs*, (literally means 'pupil', learner) appears about 250 times in the gospels and in the Acts of the Apostles. Jesus' associates are called disciples who belong to him alone.

⁷Otto Semmelroth, "The Christ-Event and our Salvation," in Otto Semmelroth et al., *Man before God: Readings in Theology*, New York: P. J. Kennedy and Sons, 1975, p. 209.

⁸VC 18b, 23c, 40a, 108b.

constant relation with his Father in the Spirit and revealed his adherence to the Father by his very life.

Jesus not only delighted in speaking about the Father-Son relation to his disciples but also was eager in getting them to hold on to that relationship. The purpose of revealing his Father was to introduce his disciples into the heart of the Father and into his intimacy. While Jesus never equates his personal relation to his Father with that of his disciples, he does want to bring the archetype and the copy so close together that the disciples become 'co-heirs with Christ' (Rom 8:17).⁹ The only begotten Son shares with them his life, totally oriented to the Father and enables them to penetrate with him into the unsearchable depths of the Father.

4. *Menein en* as the First Constitutive Element for Adherence

The core of the discipleship is expressed by the phrase *menein en*, which is used 11 times in Jn 15:4-10. The instruction by Jesus: "Abide in me as I abide in you" (Jn 15:4), is not merely a comparison between two actions, nor is one part of the command the causal condition of the other, rather, one cannot exist without the other. Remaining in Jesus and having Jesus remain in the disciple are parts of the whole, for there is only one personal relationship between Jesus and his disciples; if they remain in him through faith, he remains in them through love and fruitfulness. The total dependence of the disciple on the Master, which is a *leitmotif* of the Johannine thought is expressed nowhere more eloquently than here.¹⁰ Like the apostles, the consecrated ones are called nearer to join with the Master to be the closest followers of the Word incarnate. They are called away from their normal world (Mk 1:16-20; Mt 9:9) by virtue of his 'come and see' (Jn 1:39) and 'follow me' (Mk 1:17). Staying with the Master (Jn 1:39), to be with him (Mk 3:14), to abide or remain in him (Jn 15:4) is the first constitutive element of the call to consecrated life.

The consecrated person is called to have the same fundamental experience, which Jesus had. To have that experience he has to be caught up in the vision of the Master, being on fire with the fire of the Lord. As one reads in the Gospel of Thomas, "he who is near to me is

⁹Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. III, *The Dramatis Personae: The Person in Christ*, Graham Harrison (trans.), San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992, p. 258.

¹⁰Cf. R. E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John XIII-XXI*, New York: Anchor Bible, 1966, p. 678.

near the fire to be consumed by it.”¹¹ One becomes truly the disciple when he lives in the Master, totally being absorbed by the Lord. Here the identification is so complete and the great divide between the Master and the disciple is to be obliterated to the point, that now only the Master remains. The experience here is exactly that of Jeremiah, “you have seduced me, and I have let myself be seduced” (Jer 20:7). It means in simple terms a single-minded adherence to the Son apart from whom the one who is called has no autonomy or self-comprehension. The call is to become one living organism, like the vine and the branches (Jn 15:1-4).

This vertical aspect of ‘being with him’ (Mk 3:14) initiates the whole process of becoming disciples. This call, above all, is to establish a particular rapport without which, his proposals become stumbling blocks for them (Mk 6:3). Their returning to the place from where they are sent is not only to report all that they had done (Mk 6:30) but also “a returning to the place where they belong.”¹² Practically speaking, a constant and continuous return to ‘this place’ of their belonging is inevitable for a better sustenance of religious life. The time dedicated to mental and vocal prayers, the faithfulness to prayer life, being in His presence etc. are not out dated spiritual practices but the core of spiritual life as they assist the advance of the divine-human intimacy. An evaluation and a subsequent *aggiornamento* are needed in the spiritual practices of religious institutes today. Even though changes have been brought reading the signs of the time, an enthusiastic personal aptitude for interior life is lacking in many of the candidates aspiring for religious life. Its after-effect constitutes far reaching consequences.

However, the abiding enables the disciples to comprehend the identity of both the Master and of themselves and to proclaim the same ecstatic words of Peter: “Lord, it is well that we are here” (Mt 17:4) and of Thomas, “let us also go, that we may die with him” (Jn 11:16). Thus he becomes the only focus of their lives. Adherence therefore, is the *unum necessarium* without which the fate of Peter who followed the Lord at a distance (Lk 22:54) will be theirs too. The result

¹¹*Gospel of Thomas*, p. 86, quoted by John Fuellenbach, *Throw Fire* (Manila: Logos Publications, 1998): 92.

¹²Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life*, Mary Frances McCarthy (trans.) San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983, p. 140.

of this abiding is nothing but the transformation to *persone Christiformi*.¹³

5. Becoming *Persone Christiformi*: Fruit of *Menein en*

"I am in the Father and the Father is in me" (Jn 14:11). These words bespeak the *where* of the Son. He is at one and the same time both in the Father and gone forth from the Father (Jn 14:26). God the Father identified himself with the person of Jesus in such a way that the Son became the revelation of the Father; in his own person he reveals another person; his knowledge, his love and his activity have no other *raison d'être* than to serve this revelation. He expresses in himself the being and will of the Father. His constant adherence to the Father brought him to that merger with the Father. Although it is incomprehensible to human logic, it points to the configuration of the Father and the Son which takes place in the Spirit, the Trinitarian conformity.

"Where I am there will my servant be" (Jn 12:26). This phrase expresses the 'whereabouts' of the followers of Jesus. Jesus' invitation through the apostles to the consecrated 'to be with him and to be sent out' (Mk 3:14) also has this finality. They have no other thing to do than the identification with the person of Jesus, a progressive configuration with him. The images like stripping off the old self and clothing with the new self (Col 3:9; Eph 4:22-24) and to put on the Lord Jesus (Rom 13:14) are invitations to the consecrated to have this configuration with the Lord by coming out of themselves. They are thus destined by their very call to become conformed to the 'image' of the invisible God (Col 1:15). Every attitude and action at important moments as well as ordinary events of life must express that they belong completely and joyfully to the Lord. From this conformity, there emerges the identity and originality of consecrated life, as a life consecrated to Christ totally and absolutely. That is, it is a true and proper absolutization of the person of Jesus. His *persona* becomes the centre of their existence, both an acting role and an ontological person. In other words, "by their vocation to the state of Christ, they receive a definitive personal orientation by which all else is absorbed and made relative. Christ's form becomes for them nevertheless, as truly the form of their being as of their activity."¹⁴ Hence, for them 'life means Christ' (Phil 1:21) who 'is all and in all' (Col 3:11). Like Paul, they too then are

¹³Cf. VC 19.

¹⁴von Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life*, p. 212.

able to acclaim: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20). The Spirit has an active role in this *Christification*. The 'Christ-like existence' of the consecrated is achieved in virtue of their co-operation to the divine grace. John Paul II reminds the consecrated: "Do not forget that you, in a very special way, can and must say that you not only belong to Christ but that you have *become Christ*."¹⁵ This 'becoming Christ' constitutes the nucleus of formation in consecrated life. Following Christ is a leaving to be configured by him, to be the 'other humanity of Jesus'. To be his *anamnesis*, the living memory is the after-effect of becoming *persone christiformi*.

6. Being the Living Memory: Effect of the Fruit

The configuration of Jesus with the Father was the after-effect of his constant adherence to the Father. This conformation made him acclaim: "Whoever has seen me, has seen the Father" (Jn 14:9). His *incarnational* existence became the living paternal memory, the visibility of the invisible Father. As John says "no one has ever seen God; it is God the only Son ... who had made him known" (Jn 1:18). Making the Father present, which was the aim of his earthly life, thus is the after-effect of his constant configuration with the Father. Today the presence of the Son is 'invisible' in accomplishing the paternal salvific will and the consecrated are called to become the tangible seals of that invisible presence. They are called to become, even in their frail humanity, a living, transparent image of the mystery of Christ and living *icons* of Christ. In them the invisible presence of Christ is to be portrayed visibly and in an appropriate manner. In other words, the visibility of the invisible Christ today is achieved by the Christians especially by the consecrated. This call is to build up the figure of Christ in the world.

As the Eucharist, the memorial par excellence re-presents him and his act at the last supper and becomes the eternal memory of the risen Christ, the special call of the consecrated is to make him visible, to 'represent' him in the modern world. They represent the Lord

¹⁵VC 109. The theme of configuration or conformity with Christ is one of the prime concerns of the *Vita Consecrata* and it has been emphasized in various ways. For example, a particular communion of love with Jesus (15c), conformation of one's whole existence to Christ in an all-encompassing commitment, a profound configuration to the mystery of Christ (16), an explicit desire, a striving to become one with him, taking on his mind and way of life (18), a reflection of Christ's own way of life (32b), etc.

subjectively in their *life* just as the official priest is able by his power to make him objectively present in sermons, sacraments and pastoral ministry. In order to be the memory of Jesus, the configuration with him is inevitable. To be the presence of the paschal Lamb, the bread and wine have to become the body and blood. So too this 'becoming Christ' enables the consecrated to be his remembrance. The more they allow themselves to be conformed to Christ the more Christ is made present and active in history for the salvation of all. They are called truly to constitute a living memorial of Jesus' way of living and acting as the incarnate word in relation to the Father and in relation to the brethren; to be the living tradition of the Saviour's life and message.¹⁶ Their effort to follow the life of Christ contributes directly to his continuing incarnation in the world. Thus Christ, the universal and unique sacrament of salvation, is being presented or represented by them. It is a permanent call to be the living presence of the Lord above all by the 'splendid', 'varied' and 'striking' testimony of the eloquent language of a transfigured life, capable of inspiring the world.¹⁷ From their very life others perceive that in them someone else is at work. If they fail to be the living memory of the wonders God has wrought through the incarnate Word, their existence itself as consecrated will lack credibility.

7. Adherence to the Fate of the Master

To deepen the intimacy with the Lord, religious are invited to adhere to the person of Christ by adhering to his fate. To adhere to him also implies to know him closely and to follow him by choosing his own choice till the end of one's life, to share his fate (Phil 2:5-8) and to live in his spirit – born as poor, put himself in the line of sinners (Mk 1:9f), tempted (Mk 1:13), brought the reconciliation (Mk 2:1-17), the love and the new world (Mk 2:18-28) and thus became the liberator who evades our human reality. Divine kenosis stands at the core of his fate.

8. Kenotic *Sequela* to Deepen the Intimacy

The 'follow me' of the Son is *de facto* an invitation for a kenotic *sequela*. 'To be receptive' is the core of the filial kenosis. A descending kenosis of the Son can be traced well in the paschal mystery by which he revealed the selfless love of the Father. This revelation of God is fitted into man's category as he came down to their realm, humbling

¹⁶Cf. VC 19 b, 22c, 72; SAC 9.

¹⁷Cf. VC 20b.

himself. So human beings are able to follow his style of life on earth, his humility.¹⁸

Sequela Christi is a challenge for the consecrated to participate in this filial kenosis, the very life of God in Jesus Christ who freely set aside his heavenly glory and stepped down becoming one among humanity. John makes it clear: "whoever says, I abide in him, ought to walk just as he walked" (1Jn 2:6). To say differently, the one who encounters Christ and chooses him, finds it logical to give primacy to that which Christ has chosen in his earthly life. The person, career and destiny of Jesus become the meaning and destiny of the called one. Therefore, the icon in front of them in *sequela* is the kenosis of the Master in whom both orthodoxy and orthopraxy go hand in hand.

Kenotic *sequela* costs a great lot. Costly grace is the gospel. It is costly because it costs a man his life and it is grace because it gives man the only true life.¹⁹ The consecrated are called not only to contemplate the sublime mystery of the Word at the bosom of the Father (Jn 1:1) but to follow the Word who became flesh (Jn 1:14), lowered himself to regain the lost humanity. The aim of the call of the disciples, therefore, is to seek that God in eternity who decided to 'exit', to be *Immanuel* and to share the human destiny for the sake of humanity. By committing themselves to make their own the way of life practised personally by Jesus and proposed by him to the disciples they respond to the call and make their own that which he accorded supreme importance in his own life, which was totally for God and his people. That is, to live that vision, which the Master from Nazareth communicated – something to live for, to suffer for, to work for and ultimately to die for – by his life.²⁰ In Pauline terms to have the same mind of the Master (Phil 2:5) is the core of *sequela*. Albert Nolan portrays this mind of Jesus saying that he is a God who does not want to be given the highest possible rank and status in the society, but wants to take the lowest place and to be without any rank and status; a God who wants to be recognized in the sufferings of the poor and weak, irrevocably committing to their liberation. If this is the true picture of God, then God is more truly human, more thoroughly

¹⁸Cf. Thomas J. Norris, 'Jesus Crucified and Forsaken: the face of God for Modern world', *Communio* 26/4 (Winter, 1999), p. 894.

¹⁹Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, London: SCM Press, 1959, p. 23.

²⁰Cf. Fuellenbach, *Throw Fire*, Manila: Logos Publications, 1998, p. 21.

humane than any human being.²¹ Schillebeeckx's definition of God as *Deus Humanissimus* – a supremely human God – also refers to the same fact. The Gospel depicts some constitutive elements of such a response.

8.1. Leaving All

Leaving everything – the net, the father (Mk 1:16-20), the tax table (Mk 2:13-14), etc. – was the first challenge the men from Galilee faced, to respond to the call 'follow me'. Jesus' primary intention to win men to that personal following of himself thus starts with 'renunciation' as in the case of himself. He proposes something positive in his invitation to 'follow me'. He communicates this message so powerfully that those who are thus called feel as if they have been captivated and they leave everything for this Man from Nazareth. Leaving is the after-effect of a response to the call. The fundamental option of the consecrated as in the case of the apostles in favour of the Lord severs all their previous bonds and they throw in completely their lot with him. They are called to share the uprooted life of Jesus by breaking all family ties (Mt 8:18-22; Lk 9:57-62). By giving up all other ties they recall and remind everyone: "whoever does not hate father and mother, sons and daughters cannot be the disciple" (Lk 14:26). In biblical terms, to hate can mean to love less. The parallel passage in Mt 10:37 expresses it quite well – 'who loves father and mother more than me'. In Matthew, these words are followed by the saying about taking up the cross and following Jesus. The implication of this sequence is that giving one's family second place to the kingdom of God is one way of taking up the cross.

The leaving everything is to risk everything for Christ. That is, it is a call to descend from the 'mountain' with the Master to set off on the road to Calvary. Thus, renunciation becomes the reflection of the mystery of Golgotha, which is God's final kenosis. The intimacy with the Lord becomes stronger and stronger to the extent they are able to leave everything for His sake. This leaving everything also includes the setting aside of the self.

8.2. Abnegation

Abnegation is a denial, especially self-denial. God in Jesus Christ proclaimed that self-exaltation is contradictory to the divine nature itself. As God, his place with the Father has been from the beginning a

²¹Albert Nolan, *Jesus before Christianity*, Maryknoll: Orbit Press, 1992, pp. 166-167.

going-out from himself to be in the Other and others. In his short span of earthly life the Lord never clung onto his own interest, kept nothing for himself, but placed everything in the hands of the Father. In the Son one discovers the original blessedness of losing oneself and the depth of his *manifesto*: "if anyone wants to become my follower, let him deny himself" (Mk 8:34). Death to the 'self' is the radical command to the consecrated in *sequela Christi*. It is a call, and more than denying things to oneself which is asceticism and self-mortification, it requires the denial of 'self' itself. At the very outset, once and for all, the consecrated is called to say 'no' to certain things, and to say it to oneself. It is the leaving aside of human logic to be guided by a new and unfamiliar divine logic, the logic of the Master. So they do not have their own dispositions. This abnegation is an initial act without which the discipleship and intimacy with the master become impossible.

8.3. Being a Sacrificial Victim in Daily Life

The consent of the Son to the paternal will in the Spirit was so deliberate that Jerusalem became the aim of his whole life and his daily programme were steps towards that final destiny. Thus he showed that the way to the Father is the way of the cross and he offers the same to his followers. Only the cross can reveal the depth of *sequela* in its full sense. The gospels witness that each passion-resurrection prediction is followed by a discourse on discipleship and for the most part these conversations between Jesus and the disciples are centred on the qualifications of discipleship. By weaving the passion-resurrection predictions and discipleship discourses together into the narration of the Journey to Jerusalem the evangelists weave together the life of Jesus and the life of the disciple.²²

It is noteworthy that the historical disciples could not comprehend Jesus prior to his climatic fate on the cross. The passion announcements were in vein, none of the disciples could comprehend them. The rebuke to Peter (Mk 8:33) is not a personal attack on the apostle Peter but on any disciple. Thus, the climax of Jesus' career becomes the key to understand that career and as the cross-orientation of Jesus became the patrimony of the apostles, so too it must be of the consecrated. The cross of the Lord is their point of reference. If one deviates from this point of reference, the leaving everything has no

²²Cf. Augustine Stock, *Call to Discipleship: A Literary Study of Mark's Gospel*, Wilmington: Michael Glazier Inc., 1982, p. 146.

sense at all. Jesus' words for Paul: "for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name" (Acts 9:16), is addressed in the same force to all his followers in the future. The 'yes' to Christ's call is always associated with a death that gives actual expression to one's being buried together with Christ.

To be the active participants in the *sequela Christi* the invitation is to take up the cross *daily* (Lk 9:24). By qualifying it with the term 'daily', Luke has turned it completely into a metaphor. It calls for a daily sharing in the fate of the Master. It is a call to 'die every day' (1Cor 15:31). It means that one is exposed to the risk of death every day for Jesus' sake. The call here is to be a sacrificial victim in daily life. It demands a daily participation in the cross of the Lord, the immolated Pasch (1Cor 5:7) who calls to be immolated in daily life for him and for his people. This call often runs counter to one's own inclinations and expectations; after all who has ever had a natural aptitude for the cross? The moments of coming back to the daily reality from the 'mountain experience', where one sees only Jesus in the lowliness of his human nature is very common (Mt 17:1-8). The only surety here is that there will be nothing more to experience which the Lord has not experienced, because he goes always ahead (Mk 16:7), making the yoke easy to bear (Mt 11:30).

8.4. An Itinerant Life

Jesus was an itinerant Master. Starting from the bosom of the Father, until he reached back, his life was in constant motion. He was not only the Way (Jn 14:6) but was on the way.²³ The phrase 'on the way' is associated with each of the three passion predictions (Mk 8:27; 9:33; 10:32). Disciples have to follow the master on his way. To follow Christ is to commit to him without any guarantee other than that of himself; a total commitment to him without knowing in advance his plans, without knowing today what is going to be done tomorrow, without any personal programme. The insecurity and uncertainty from a human perspective are always there. "What am I to do Lord?" (Acts 22:10). Jesus' answer to this question of Paul was what he ought to do

²³In the Acts of the Apostles, the earliest self-designation for Christians was those who belonged to 'the Way' (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). Luke's great central section in the gospel (9:51 - 18:14) is structured as a journey. One of Paul's favourite metaphors to describe Christian existence is 'walking' (*peripatein*) (Gal 5:16; Rom 6:4; 13:13; 14:15; Phil 3:17; 1Thess 2:12). In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus is described as 'the Way' (Jn 14:6).

at the moment: "get up and go to Damascus" (Acts 22:10). This is often the manner of God's direction in *sequela*. He directs the person one step at a time instead of laying out the details of the grand plan at once. This uncertainty lies at the heart of an itinerant life. To have nowhere to lay one's head (Mt 8:20; Lk 9:58) in the case of Jesus was literally true. This 'nowhere' led him to arrive at a place 'outside'. As the letter to Hebrews witnesses, "he suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood" (Heb 13:12). His companions must be prepared to share the same uncertain lot. Their call also is to "go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured" (Heb 13:13). This 'no place' is having a place outside every human comfort this world can offer; a place that cannot be comprehended in any worldly sense. Before them there is only the following of him who calls himself the Way (Jn 14:6). From a worldly perspective, it is impossible to see where he is leading. So it is permissible to ask: "what then shall we have?" (Mt 19:27).²⁴

While walking with Jesus, the disciple learns that true discipleship means to take up one's cross, to lose one's life, to be last and least, to drink the cup that Jesus is to drink and to be baptized with Jesus' baptism. Thus his ultimate kenosis, which is the choice to be present in the world in and through his disciples, becomes real by their kenotic *sequela*, the finality of which is not death but resurrection, life everlasting. If one is bound with the person and fate of Jesus, one becomes the real disciple in whom He is well pleased and one's life will become a blessing to humanity.

9. Life in God

"My Father, ... My Blessedness, if not in You, how will I live?"²⁵ These are the words of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the *herald* from the East, the faithful disciple who became a blessing for the people of God, by being a man of selfless service to humanity, which was the fruit of his mystical love relationship with Jesus, his Abba. Jesus was his 'portion and cup', his 'food and drink', his 'breath of life'. Jesus could live his *ad extra* life on earth only in relation with his Abba, Father as was the case of his *ad intra* life in immanent Trinity. So too, only inclining constantly to Jesus his Abba, St Kuriakose could lead his religious-priestly life. He confessed in his *Colloquies* that he could call Jesus only *Abba* (*Appa* in Malayalam). He was a disciple who abided in the

²⁴Cf. von Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life*, p. 149.

²⁵CWC, Vol. II, 'Compunction of the Soul', II, 142.

master, remained constantly in touch with the master, walked side by side with the master as a good friend or companion and always conversed with the master. Therefore he could give practical advice to others in the same way. For example, to his spiritual daughters, the sisters, he said: "ah! Abide in the love of Jesus Christ. Remain constantly before his eyes. Walk side by side with him and constantly converse with him."²⁶

Since the Saint was united with his master so closely, he could imbibe the mind of the master always. For the master, *thy will be done* was the motto that boosted his life on earth. So too for St Kuriakose, the recurring slogan in life was *God's will be done. It will always be done*. Right from the beginning, until the end of his life, he could side up with the divine will both in favourable as well as non-favourable situations. Humility/gentleness was the virtue that the master from Nazareth demanded to learn from him (cf. Mt 11:29). St. Kuriakose, the disciple of that humble master was well known among the foreign bishops and missionaries, clergy and religious priests, nuns and lay faithful for his virtue of humility and soft talk.

It is not seven but seventy times seven, one must forgive (cf. Mt. 18:22), the master said and forgave from the cross praying: "Forgive them, Father! They do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34). St Kuriakose kept alive that spirit of his master throughout his life. Therefore, in his Testament he advised his fellow religious to help those families who had wronged the monasteries and at his deathbed he asked for forgiveness of all the members of the community. These are some of the effects of his being one with the master. This saint, by his very life challenges men and women religious and those who are in formation today, to be with the master and to imbibe his attitude and life style.

Conclusion

The intimacy with the person and fate of the Lord, invites religious to dedicate themselves to bringing others closer to God. Being with the Lord enables them to burn with not only the passion for God but also with that of humanity. One's closeness with the divine can be measured by his closeness with humanity and his dedication in service. Down through the centuries, many religious men and women by their very life witnessed this twofold relationships.

²⁶CWC, Vol. IV, 'Letters', No. VII/6.

The aptitude for intimacy, intimate relationship is natural for human beings. This spirit of relatedness is more visible in the younger generation. If they are channelled and motivated in the right way to take up the risk of keeping up the intimacy with the Lord, right from the early moments of their formation, if they get the aptitude for such a life very early and if they are constantly clinging to that through the daily life, the relationship will be natural for them. They are the religious.

HUMAN FORMATION

Joe Mannath SDB

Abstract: Joe Mannath SDB deals with human formation. He begins the discussion with what formation means, who the stakeholders are and how their respective responsibilities need to be spelt out. He considers the three goals of religious life as personal growth, community life and mission. He discusses the physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, pastoral and professional aspects as conditional for integral formation. A healthy enhancement of human formation must look into adequate health and capacity of the candidate for work, emotional balance, psycho-sexual integration, responsible use of freedom and contact with reality. Mannath also takes into consideration the role of the formator and how formators help in human formation. As qualities of a good formator, he looks into the integrated personal life, team work, sound judgement, effective communication, intelligence, academic ability, fidelity to the church, enthusiastic commitment, pastoral involvement and experience.

Keywords: formation, formator, formee, freedom, seminarian, priests, visionary, religious, candidates, community, experience, mission, diocese, superiors, novice-master, charism, priest vocation, methodology, context, awareness, languages, culture, skills, health, work, institutions, exhortations, emotions, relationships, colleagues, appreciation, multiculturalism, ministry, integration, celibacy, celibates, spinsters, bachelors, masturbation, pornography, friendships, fear, counselling, maturity, immaturity, honesty, integrity, values, prayer, team-work, judgement, communication, intelligence, fidelity, commitment.

The topic that we would like to discuss is human formation. Before we come to that, we would like to say a word on what formation means, who the stakeholders are, and how their respective responsibilities need to be spelt out.¹

¹The following articles of mine explore questions of formation in detail: Joe Mannath, "The Cost of Discipleship: The Challenges Facing Religious in

1. 'Formation': A Misnomer?

We are used to words like "formation," "formator," "formee," etc., as if these were self-evident terms. In fact, they are not. No one holds the key to a human being's heart and freedom. We can train a dog; we cannot really "form" a human being. For instance, if you have dogs, you can train them to do what you want them to do. They will do it exactly. We can train elephants to do what we want.

We cannot do that with human beings. Right now, for instance, I can talk, but you have the freedom to listen to me or not. And if you listen, I cannot make you agree with me, or do what I suggest. This is the mystery of the human heart. One person cannot make another do what that other person does not want to do. Under threats and coercion, many people do things out of fear, but, as soon that those external factors are removed, the persons concerned do what they really want. This can easily happen in formation settings.

I once wrote an article about the 70+20+10 formula. I first heard of this idea while talking with an experienced and much esteemed religious formator who later became the provincial. He told me: "In my opinion, formation depends seventy percent on the candidate, twenty percent on the formators and ten per cent on the programme." I would agree, though I am not sure of the percentages. A good programme does not necessarily lead to better priests or religious. More important than programmes are the formators. Most important is the person of the formee.

Once, when a former student of our seminary came back to meet us, I told him that I was happy to hear how well he was doing. His reply showed two strongly held convictions: (1) that it is not he who was doing great things, but God works in and through us. (2) that even when I was a seminarian, he was aware that you we could not form them; they formed themselves. True.

The formators can provide opportunities, can exhort, remind, correct and listen. They do not have the power to make anyone a good religious or priest. The seminary cannot make you good priests. This is

India Today. Part I," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, 64/7 (2000) 494-507; "The Cost of Discipleship: The Challenges Facing Religious in India Today. Part II," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, 64/8 (2000b) 583-591; "Priestly and Religious Formation in India: The Rhetoric, the Reality and Some Proposals," *Sanyasa* IV/2 (2009) 193-218; "Happy and Inspiring Religious Communities: Essential Elements, Distinguishing Marks and Formation Issues" *Sanyasa* V/2 (2010) 121-141.

strikingly true when we look at exceptional individuals. A great saint or visionary or creative genius is not the product of a system. Don Bosco seemed to have learnt more from his semi-literate mother than from the professors in his seminary. Mother Teresa is not simply a product of her Loreto training. Steve Jobs was a college drop out. He had no engineering degree. If you see that very interesting movie, "Karol," about the life of the young Pole who was to become Pope John Paul II, you will see that he hardly had any seminary training. The Nazi government had closed the seminaries.

The one thing formators may do well to keep in mind is this: Their role matters, but is not central. Their impact on the formees is less than that of their families and close friends. What the formators do and say does matter, but they do not have the power to make or shape any human being according to their plans. That is between that person and God, whatever he or she considers deepest and most central.

2. The Three Goals of Religious Life

When someone joins a religious order or seminary, this decision is very different from joining a club or some part-time activity. One is making this choice the central point of one's life. It becomes one's main commitment, even more important than family ties. If so, the congregation or diocese that welcomes this person has the duty of helping the candidate seriously to achieve his/her overall development.

A religious formation house or seminary needs to focus attention on three areas of the life of the candidates who aspire to become members of the community: personal growth, community life and mission.

2.1. Personal Growth

When candidates want to join a religious community, they and their families have the right to check whether joining this group will help to grow up, and become better. Will they be looked after physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually? Will they become a better and more mature human beings, or end up immature and silly? Will they become a holy priests and religious, or become worldly and corrupt? While a setting does not have full control of the decisions of a candidate, it can influence him/her a lot. The candidates can become better or worse, more mature or more immature, in a formation house. Paul Parathazham's study on formees shows that a good number of candidates find themselves more immature than their age group

outside. So, too, there are seminarians and religious who find and admit that they were better persons before joining than after joining the community!

2.2. Community Life

A candidate gets a sense of belonging only if he/she experiences a loving community. In community life we see whether the great theories we hear in conferences are actually lived in real life. In fact, the main contribution that the religious make to the world is not the external works like running schools or hospitals, or being engaged in social work that we do. For doing that, we do not need to be religious or priests. Our main contribution is the quality of our relationships, treating everyone, whatever their social status, or income, or ethnicity or gender, as God's beloved children, without prejudice or bigotry. This we need to experience in our community, before we preach it to others in ministry.

2.3. Mission

The religious come together as a community, not just to crack jokes or have a good time, but for a serious and worthwhile mission. A candidate learns the mission of an order or diocese, not from talks about the founder, but by seeing their superiors and formators live the mission. When the candidate witnesses how their superiors or novice master or rector live the charism, he/she understands what the charism and the mission of the congregation is.

These three goals do not develop as parallel lines. At the beginning, it is important to take time and efforts to build a loving community. Unless the formees feel at home, and feel happy, they will not get a sense of belonging. If they do not feel loved and cared for, they will become cynical about the religious order and the mission. Hence, it is very important that the formators become good community builders.

3. The Stakeholders in Formation

As I have explained in much greater detail elsewhere,² the three stakeholders in formation are: the formee, the formator and the

²Joe Mannath, *Formation for a Meaningful Celibate Life: Three Levels of Responsibility*, in Jose Parapuully SDB and Joe Kuttianimattathil SDB (eds.), *Psycho-Sexual Integration and Celibate Maturity: Handbook for Religious and*

religious order or diocese. Each has a distinct set of responsibilities. The Church makes it plain that the main agent of formation is the formee. This responsibility should not be assumed by someone else (e.g., by a formator taking vocational decisions for the formee).

For reasons of brevity and clarity, I would repeat in a few words what I have explained more at length in the abovementioned article.

The formee's responsibilities pertain to what, why, how. (1) *What* do I want to be? Do I want to be priest, or religious, or be part of this order? (2) *Why* do I want to join? Why do I want to be a religious or a priest? (3) *How* do I use the opportunities offered me. Only this will show how serious I am about my vocation.

The formator's role can also be summarized under three headings: Inspire, interact, instruct. (1) *Inspire*: The formator must be a person the formees can look up to, and feel inspired by. (2) *Interact*: As in parenting, the formator must live and interact with the formees, in all aspects of their life. (3) *Instruct*: The instruction comes within this life together.

The responsibilities of the religious order or diocese can also be summarized under three heads: Mission, Members, Methodology. (1) *Mission*: You will attract good young people if you have a relevant mission. (2) *Members*: Inspiring members will inspire younger people. (3) *Methodology*: A plan of formation.

4. Aspects of Integral Formation

Integral formation must really address all the aspects of a person's life. It includes the following eight areas:

4.1. Physical Aspect

(1) Food: learning to eat healthy and balanced meals; (2) Exercise appropriate to one's age and health; (3) Sleep: regularity; (4) Hygiene and cleanliness; and (5) Medicine: reasonable care, without being a hypochondriac.

4.2. Mental Aspect

(1) Adequate knowledge (languages, Bible, religious and secular subjects); (2) Learning to learn (Study skills, including memory, concentration, reading); (3) Learning to think creatively and critically; (4) Habit of reflection; and (5) Habit of reading and reflective writing.

4.3. Emotional Aspect

(1) Learning to relate at different levels (intimacy, friendship, kindness & courtesy); (2) Handling one's emotions (anger, sadness, fear, jealousy, facing criticism); (3) Psycho-sexual maturity: learning to see, and relate to, men and women with warmth, respect and proper boundaries; (4) Managing one's time and money; and (5) Taking decisions

4.4. Spiritual Aspect

(1) Acquiring Christ's values, esp. love and forgiveness; (2) Personal integrity (no lying, no cheating, etc.); (3) Justice, including rejection of discrimination; (4) Personal prayer that has an impact on one's life; and (5) Simplicity of life and detachment from power, pleasure and possessions.

4.5. Pastoral Aspect

(1) Compassionate concern for people, esp. the poor and the suffering; (2) Readiness to make sacrifices for people; (3) Interest in the mission of the congregation; (4) Effectiveness in working with people; and (5) Courtesy and good manners.

4.6. Professional Aspect

(1) Qualification/preparation according to the mission: e.g., medical or teaching degree; (2) Preparation for particular tasks and responsibilities: e.g., administration; (3) Readiness to keep learning: e.g., updating courses, reading, seminars; (4) Specialization when necessary for the mission: e.g., Doctorate or MS; (5) Joining and being active in professional bodies. For example, ITA, ACPI, CCPI.

4.7. Socio-Cultural (Context)

(1) Awareness of the context; (2) Realistic exposure in the context; (3) Familiarity with the languages, culture and needs of the area; (4) Critical appropriation of one's own culture; and (5) Openness to other cultures and groups.

4.8. Skills

(1) Speaking: both inter-personal and public; (2) Reading: e.g., how to read a book, a newspaper, etc.; (3) Writing: Good writing is correct, clear, concise, comprehensive, critical and creative; (4) Organizing: e.g., a sports meet, a drama, a feast, a liturgy, a seminar; and (5) Work-

related skills: computer-use, musical instruments, driving, first aid, swimming, cooking, art work, minor repairs and maintenance.

The last three (professional training, socio-cultural preparation and acquiring skills) are not generally considered separate areas of formation. They are elaborations of one's mental and pastoral formation.

5. Human Formation

The church itself admits – and complaints from lay persons are many – that the weak part of priestly and religious formation is what is called human formation. It combines several aspects of formation and comprises the following six areas:

5.1. Adequate Health and Capacity for Work

A candidate has to be sufficiently healthy to do all the normal duties without seeking exemptions, eat normal food, and fit in. It also means keeping oneself physically fit, so as not to become a burden for others. Care for one's physical fitness is not selfish or a fad. Our health is God's gift, and we need to take reasonable care of it. We do this by eating and exercising in a healthy way, by avoiding addictions, by practicing rules of hygiene, and having healthy habits of sleep and work. India leads the world in diabetes and heart disease. We need to do our part to stay healthy. Manual labour is a part of religious life, which all of us (formees and formators) are invited to do.

5.2. Emotional Balance

For success in any area of life, particularly in leadership roles, emotional maturity matters more than intellectual brilliance. A person of average intelligence who is emotionally balanced will do more and better than a cleverer person whose moods and uncontrolled emotions cause unhappiness, both to the person concerned and to others.

It is by no means sufficient that a future priest learns much theory in philosophy and theology, or is an eloquent preacher. Not enough that a sister learns much manual work and keeps the buildings spotlessly clean. If we give into uncontrolled anger, we will spoil our life and relationships. Jealousy can ruin institutions. Inability to handle grief or moodiness, can make a person a burden in community.

While we tend to give formees exhortations ("Don't lose your temper," "You must be more cheerful," "Don't be jealous of others," etc.), we seldom offer effective help to the formees in handling

emotions. Or we propose unrealistic ideals as solutions, as if faith alone will help us master our emotions, or that feelings can be ignored. A feeling will not go away because someone says it is bad (e.g., jealousy). A person will not become sweet-tempered just by being told to control his temper. A timid person will not become confident by hearing, "Don't be afraid." No, people need help to manage emotions.

The main reason why formators are not very helpful in this area is not malice or lack of good will. The truth is, the formator has received very little help in this area, and hence does not know how to help. In this way, we can have a priest with advanced degrees who cannot control his temper and hurts people. Or another who destroys someone else's reputation out of jealousy; or, a sister who is regular for prayer, but very moody, or very harsh with the girls in the kitchen.

Many formators in seminaries are professors who can teach several subjects. They may not be mature human beings who have gone through a process of personal discovery and growth, and in a position to understand and help others in their struggles and growth.

5.3. Relationships

Most of what we call ministry is about relationships. See the way Pope Francis has won the hearts of so many, inside and outside the Church by the way he relates to people. Good relationships are not something we put on for effect. They need to come from our heart. People can make out whether we are genuine or not.

Jesus did not teach us an ethic of cult, but an ethic of right relationships. Our faith is expressed best in the way we treat others. This needs no explanation here. A Catholic priest is not a *poojari*. He is a pastor, someone dedicated to serving the people. Correct and even devout celebration of the sacraments is not enough. We need make God real for people by relating to them lovingly and humbly.

In fact, I am of the opinion that candidates who repeatedly are a problem in communities, do not relate well, or treat people arrogantly or harshly, should be asked to leave. Such persons will do much harm. The quality of our relationships matters much more than raising and distributing money to the poor, or holding posts, or teaching great theories. For this, the formation house itself needs to be a happy and loving place, not one filled with fear or intrigue or politics. Only in loving and happy settings will people be themselves, learn with their whole heart and mind, and develop convictions. How we treat each other, how we deal with our workers or colleagues, with our students and patients, matters. It matters a lot.

Sadly, we hear of cases whether a formee or young religious, who is kind to a poor person (e.g., by giving them something to eat or talking to them kindly) gets a scolding rather than a word of appreciation. Or religious who are harsh with students or employees in money matters. We do not join religious life or the priesthood to make money for our congregation or diocese, but to be channels of God's love among people.

There are also cultural elements. Cultures differ in how people relate, and what is seen as proper behaviour. Two cultures will differ on people of different age groups relate, or how superiors deal with formees, or how men and women relate. Culture itself is an issue to be discussed responsibly. Multiculturalism is a huge factor in both society and Church. Some people relate mostly with those from their place, language group, caste or tribe. Others really have an open mind. In ministry, some tend favour one group over others. Others are comfortable with diversity.

The Gospels are basically counter-cultural. That is, they challenge us to treat everyone as beloved child of God, without dividing people into "our people" and "outsiders", or as higher and lower. This is a thorny issue, as well as a source of scandal, in the Indian church. Formation settings should help the formees to develop an open heart and mind, relate to people from different backgrounds, and be willing to work among others different from one's own background. They need to see this openness in the formators.

5.4. Psycho-Sexual Integration

Psycho-Sexual Integration is a huge topic, and we cannot even touch on the essentials here. The Church expects priests and religious to be celibate, but does not offer adequate and realistic training for living a happy and inspiring celibate life in today's world.

To indicate just one unhealthy sign of inadequate formation in this area is that sexuality is not something one discusses in an adult and responsible way, but more a matter for adolescent jokes and comments. As for women religious, many face real challenges in celibacy after their final vows, when they are in their 30s, 40s and 50s, rather than when they joined or were in initial formation. When in formation, a good number of women religious do not reveal their struggles or bad experiences to their formators, for two reasons: the fear of being sent away, and the fear that what they share will not be kept confidential. So, they either keep mum about it, suffer and do not grow up in this area, or they tell their confessor or retreat preacher.

If celibacy is not chosen from the heart, in response to a God-experience, or is simply seen as a way of getting work done, we will have unhappy and reluctant celibates, who become power-hungry and corrupt Church leaders or cranky, hard community members who are a pain to live with.

If you ask a young people to join your group, just to maintain your institutions, they will discover soon enough that, to do the work, they need neither celibacy nor a spiritual life. Then, gossip and politics will become the main interests, and commitment to God will be forgotten. As a sister who came across to her medical colleagues as a happy nun, said: "In every community, there are some celibates and some spinsters. The celibates are happy; the spinsters are not." The same goes for celibates and bachelors.

Celibacy makes sense, and is a happy choice, if Jesus and his message grip a person, and he/she sees this as one's way of living the gospel. To stay celibate just to do some work does not make sense, and, in most cases, would be an unhappy choice, often leading to double lives and bad example. In seminaries and religious formation houses, we need to provide a more thorough and more realistic formation for celibacy. Other countries, the United States, for example, started this after they were hit and shaken by the scandal of sexual abuse of minors by church personnel.

We need to learn, while in formation, to look at our sexuality with all its implications, see it as a beautiful gift from God, understand our dreams and struggles, and have people who help us in this area. Celibacy is not only or mostly about giving up marriage and abstaining from sexual relationships. It is about integrating - about bringing into our life the kind of love, sacrifice and generosity we have seen in our parents and married siblings. For this, we need inspiring examples of joyful and loving celibates.

Formators need to be aware of the sexual problems of young people. Masturbation is a commonly faced problem, especially in men's formation houses. Sexual abuse is an experience many candidates to convents have suffered before joining; some say more than fifty per cent of the candidates are young women with such experiences. Pornography is becoming a huge problem, spreading even to children, because of the Internet and smart phones. It has also affected a number of priests, seminarians and religious. This needs to be faced.

Another area that needs attention is celibate friendships. Healthy friendships between men and women can be a great help for growth;

unhealthy relationships do serious harm. We cannot train celibates today by teaching them to avoid others. We need to learn to relate to men and women in healthy ways.

5.5. Responsible Use of Freedom

The formators are called to train a group of young people, so that they will choose and do what is right, not only when they are with them, but also when they are more on their own. This question is of particular relevance in diocesan seminaries, since diocesan priests are so much freer after ordination that they ever were in the seminary. A rule of thumb: Do not rule through fear. Win their confidence through genuineness and love. Fear filled settings will assure external compliance, but it will not last. Once they are free, people will do the opposite.

5.6. Contact with Reality

Religious and seminarians, enjoying a cosy life with total final security, can become cut off from the needs and sufferings of people. This can also make us very demanding in matters of food, medical care, accommodation, etc. Hence formation years should include exposure to the lives of the poor, and ministry among them. Overprotection makes people childish and unrealistic.

The candidates also must be given some awareness of the political situation of the given country and the region, and instruct them to take their duties as citizens seriously.

6. How Formators Help in Human Formation

Formators contribute to human formation basically by creating the right atmosphere. Creating a happy and loving atmosphere is the formators' main task. All the rest will depend on that. The atmosphere is made when the formators are genuine, when accept criticism, when they affirm and encourage, when they give opportunities and demand, when they give helpful evaluation and feedback and when they do not betray confidences.

7. Formees Can Help Himself/Herself

Formees can help themselves when they are honest with themselves, when they can tackle their fears, when they get healed of their past hurts and wounds, when they make themselves fully known to someone, when they live meaningfully, not mechanically, when they

take responsibility for themselves, especially for their happiness and when they face their sexuality.

8. Training in Counselling and Use of Psychology

I would consider training in counselling a must in all formators. The formators need to be aware of the church documents on the use of psychology in seminaries. They need to have some knowledge of psychology – normal and abnormal behaviour, signs of maturity and immaturity. They also need to be clear about the use, limits and ethics of the psychological screening of candidates.

9. Qualities of a Good Formator

Unlike being a professor, qualities matter more than qualifications here. The following are the main qualities a formator needs to have.

9.1. Personal Life: The formator should be a person whom the students can look up to. The necessary qualities include: honesty, integrity, personal values, prayer life, simple life style and dedication to duty.

9.2. Team Work: The formator has to work well in a team. A good relationship to others (staff and students) is characterised by listening, sharing one's views, supporting as well as challenging others respectfully, accepting criticism, sharing the common work.

9.3. Sound Judgement: As someone called to assess and train candidates, the formator should show sound judgement regarding persons and situations.

9.4. Effective Communication: The formator should teach and preach well.

9.5. Intelligence and Academic Ability: This should be adequate for understanding and explaining the subjects to be taught clearly, correctly and with some ascendancy.

9.6. Fidelity to the Church: The formator's views and praxis should reflect a sound understanding of Church teaching and fidelity to it.

9.7. Enthusiastic Commitment: Adequate knowledge of the spirit and charism of one's religious order and an enthusiastic commitment to it.

9.8. Pastoral Involvement and Experience: Sensitivity to the needs of the people, especially the poor; availability for ministry.

9.9. Preparation for the Ministry: Training and periodic updating of formators are very much needed. The formator needs to be equipped with some theology and scripture, some training in spiritual direction and counselling, study of the congregation's charism and spirituality and some ways of praying.

10. Conclusion

In conclusion, the following points may be made:

- a. Human formation is basic, crucial and worth the trouble – whether a formee stays or leaves.
- b. Formation takes place in joyful, genuine and loving settings of mutual trust and respect.
- c. Example and interaction are its main sources of formation.
- d. In formation, Jesus is our model, norm and master. Your founder and other inspiring members can also show the way.

India has the largest number of young people in formation. This is a tremendous wealth for the Church, as well as a huge challenge. We need to train our formators, so that the young person who joins the seminary or a religious order is not damaged, or left to stagnate in immaturity, but really helped to grow into an inspiring, loving, happy and Christ-like person who can help others in their human struggles and their journey with God: a great and lovely task!

ETHICAL AND LEGAL ISSUES IN FORMATION

Antony Puthenangady CMI

Abstract: Antony Puthenangady CMI considers the ethical and legal issues involved in formation. He considers formation as a walk with Jesus who had, in spite of all the failures of the disciples, a place for them in his heart – he travelled with them, ate with them, prayed with them, discussed with them and commissioned and sent them as his ambassadors. Jesus was with them to save them whereas today, formators tend to eliminate people to avoid trouble, thus, often, going away from the way of Jesus. Considering the ethical responsibilities of a formator, Puthenangady calls the competence of the formator in general into question. He takes into account the psychological health of the formator, his/her spiritual maturity that enables him/her to make formative interventions. Equally important to him are the rights of the formees such as confidentiality, intimacy, right of informed consent and the use of diagnostic tools. He concludes the discussion looking at the possible legal issues in formation, especially at the time of the recruitment of the candidates and admission to novitiate.

Keywords: seminary, relationships, competitions, elimination, colour, power, language, state, influence, wealth, health, sex, formation, religious, service, transformation attitudes, values, behaviour, responsibility, vocation, personalism, dependability, emotions, evangelical counsels, candidates, perceptions, bonding, community, personality, competence, formator, maturity, institution, values, ideals, spirituality, charism, congregation, animation, interventions, psychology, community, insensitivity, inferiority, vocation, vulnerability, confidentiality, intimacy, consent, rights, duties, responsibilities, relationship, trust, information, tools, Superior, psychologist, legal issues, recruitment, authorities, consecrated life, novitiate, clerics, monastery, testimonials, typicon.

“Jesus did not send out any one from his seminary”¹ says Fr Sebastian Vadakkumpadan. He notes that we are living in a world of elimination rounds. We eliminate people, we eliminate relationships and we eliminate things from our life. Just as in competitions, there are elimination rounds in life too. We eliminate people on the basis of colour, power, language, state, influence, wealth, health, talents, sex, age, and so on. Jesus had Judas as his disciple who betrayed him. He did not eliminate him although he had plenty of premonitions about his character. Jesus walked along with him to the last moment to save him. Even at the last moment of his life, he did not evade the kiss of betrayal from Judas. There is no elimination round in the formation programme of Jesus. He had Peter who denied him thrice and there were James and John, sons of Zebedee who demanded the right to sit at his right and left in his kingdom. In spite of all these, he travelled with them, ate with them, prayed with them, discussed with them and commissioned and sent them to the towns, which he had to visit himself later. Jesus was with them to save them whereas we eliminate the people to avoid problems and to be more comfortable. Often, formators today, are going away from the way of Jesus.

1. Formation

“Formation is a path of gradual identification with the attitude of Christ towards the Father” (VC 65). The formation process must help the formee to be identified with Christ in mind, attitudes and values. Unless one is identified with Christ, the formative process remains futile and meaningless.

The formation of candidates, which has as its immediate end that of introducing them to religious life and making them aware of its specific character within the Church, will primarily aim at assisting men and women religious realize their unity of life in Christ through the Spirit, by means of the harmonious fusion of its spiritual, apostolic, doctrinal and practical elements.²

Religious formation is a life-long process in which the candidate acquires the capacity to discern for himself/herself and to advance towards wholeness in the Spirit of God. Religious formation is a process that is intended to transform the person, who is drawn to the

¹Sebastian Vadakkumpadan, “Jesus did not send out any one from his seminary” in *Prison Voice*; January 2013.

²Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Directives on Formation in Religious Life* no.1.

service of God and his people. The process of formation brings about a transformation that affects the individual's entire mode of existence. It is not simply a matter of training to fulfil certain apostolic functions, but involves an inner transformation of attitudes, values, patterns of behaviour tendencies and dispositions. The primary objective of a formation programme is to prepare the candidate for a total commitment to God through the radical entering into Christ's mystery. To say "yes" to the Lord's call by bearing personal responsibility for growing in one's vocation is the duty of all who have been called."³ Religious formation seeks to help a candidate to develop an authentic personality inspired by the Holy Spirit. The salient features of such a personality include: a) the capacity to face reality, b) the capacity to face tensions and still function normally, c) an inclination towards unselfishness, which transcends personalism, d) being free in giving and receiving, e) open and friendly relationship with superiors, peers and inferiors which is not characterized by over-dependence or independence but by dependability, f) stability in attitudes, values, emotions and behaviour. Another goal of formation is to prepare the candidate to witness to Christ in the world. A radical living of evangelical counsels reminds the world that God is all important in life and only he can fully satisfy the aspirations of human heart.

Formation in Christ is a gradual and gentle unfolding of the baptismal grace. To be formed in Christ opens up new horizons. To accept one's baptismal call to formation in Christ is only a point of departure. The Holy Spirit inspires us to grow in life of grace. Formation is a complex process. The new generation candidates are the children of media revolution. The youngsters have developed their own unique perceptions, behavioural patterns and problems. Because of this, formators struggle to understand and guide them in an appropriate manner.

2. Formator's Ethical Responsibilities

There are several ethical responsibilities that the formator takes upon him/herself.

³Mathew Anatharackal, *Psycho-Spiritual Dimensions of Formation for Priests and Religious*, Dharmaram Publications, Bangalore, 2001, p. 221.

2.1. The Bonding

Formator has the responsibility primarily to the formee because the formee is the one who is going to be affected positively or negatively by this formator-formee relationship. Leaving one's own family and all what he/she has, the formee is totally dependent upon the formator alone. The formator is now in the role of a parental figure. There happens a bonding – a trust relationship - between the formator and the formee at this level. The formee surrenders his or her total self in total trust. This trust relationship is the basis of the whole spiritual, psychological, intellectual, social and physical growth. This bonding slowly broadens up to the formation team, to the community in which the candidate is living and to the formation house, and later to the surroundings. If a crack appears in this bonding, it negatively affects the personality growth, resulting in psychosomatic illness and emotional disturbances.

2.2. The Competence of the Formator

As a basic ethical principle, the formator must be a qualified person who is competent in the field of formation. The research done by Paul Parathazham indicates that only 13% of the formators have some form of training in the field. This is a serious issue. An untrained, inexperienced formator may destroy the life and personality of the candidate. Formation is a specific professional help for which the formator has to be trained. In order to make the formation effective, every congregation must have a guideline with regard to the qualification and competence of the formator.

2.3. The Psychological Health of the Formator

A formator must be psychologically a well-integrated person who is very well aware of one's own strengths and limitations. He/she must be intellectually competent, spiritually mature, morally upright, psychologically integrated, physically healthy and socially acceptable who is ready to sacrifice his life for the formees. If the formator is psychologically immature, emotionally imbalanced, morally disturbed, the inadequacy affects the life of the candidate and the whole formation system.

2.4. Spiritual Maturity of the Formator

A formator must be a person who is spiritually grown and is growing. He/she must be aware of his/her own value system and ideals, must

be a person who finds joy in his/her vocation to religious or priestly life. In this discussion, it is highly relevant to refer to the research of Paul Parathazham, titled "Vocation and Formation of Priests and Religious in India, an Empirical Study." The study, which was done among the religious reveals that 50% of the respondents (including the unsure category) confessed that when they joined their respective communities, they were too young to make a mature decision. 55% of the respondents have stated that there have been times when they seriously thought about quitting religious life. Furthermore, one out of every six respondents categorically stated that if there is a chance to make a decision all over again, they would not opt for religious life. Including the unsure category this comes up to 33%. For the religious Brothers this figure is as high as 38%. Including the silent category (16%) 35% of the respondents said that they would not encourage their relatives and friends to become a priest or religious.⁴ A study conducted among the seminarians – both philosophers and theologians – titled "Healing the Inner Child," revealed that 22% of the seminarians have not grown up to the state of maturity required to take up the responsibilities of priesthood. Out of 22%, seven percent of them are immature and are not fit for priestly and religious life!⁵

A formator is the leader of the group. The leader's role is to animate and help the formees to sort out their own values in reference to the charism of the founder of the institution. If the formator himself/herself is not acquainted with the values, ideals and spirituality of the congregation and not living the charism of the congregation, the animation becomes non-effective.

2.5. Formative Interventions

A formator is invited to ensure that the formative interventions that he/she makes in the field of formation are appropriate to the physical, intellectual, psychological and spiritual maturity of the candidate. The formator must have some knowledge of developmental psychology so that the formator is aware of the challenges or crises of the developmental phase the candidate is passing through. This ability in the formator enables him/her to guide the formee to get better integrated in the community.

⁴P. Parathazham, *Jnanadeepa*, Vol 3, No. 1 (January 2000).

⁵A. Puthenangady, *The Effects of Healing the Inner Child*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, De La Salle University, Manila, 1999, p. 4.

2.6. Cross-Cultural Group

The formator does well when he/she is aware of the ethical implications of a community where the members are from different cultures. Every candidate's cultural, ethnic identity has to be preserved and respected. Forming candidates from culturally diverse backgrounds is a difficult job. It is possible that a formator is culturally biased. The formator must have some basic knowledge and background of the cultural setting of the formee in order to guide the candidate properly. Inappropriate dealings on the part of the formator can adversely affect the genuine vocation of a candidate and sometimes, insensitivity on the part of the formator can create strong inferiority feelings leading to crisis in vocation.

2.7. Vulnerability of the Formator

Ethically sensitive formators recognize the supreme importance of becoming aware of their own conflictual needs, areas of unfinished business, potential personal conflicts, and defense mechanisms, and their own personality types. If they are not aware of these, consciously or unconsciously they might project them on to the candidates and make the candidates vulnerable. The formator might also end up using the formees to satisfy his/her own needs. Hence, it is necessary that the formator has a spiritual director and undergo spiritual direction regularly for his/her personal growth.

3. The Rights of the Formee

3.1. Confidentiality

Every formator must be aware of the thorny issue of confidentiality of information where majority of our formators and spiritual directors fail. No genuine formation can occur unless the formees trust the privacy of their revelations to their formators and spiritual directors. A formator must be a person who can keep things confidential.

3.2. Intimacy with the Formee

It is unethical and professionally inappropriate to have any form of sexual intimacy with the formee. It is harmful to express affection or compassion in a physical way. Your look, your expressions of love and compassion could be misinterpreted by the formee. Formators who cross the boundary might endanger his/her own life and the life of the formee.

3.3. The Right of Informed Consent

By educating the formees about their rights, duties and responsibilities, you are both empowering them and building a relationship of trust with them. Assisting the formees to make informed choices consists of providing them with the information they need to become active participants in the formative process. The process of the informed consent includes the knowledge of general goals of formation, responsibilities of the formator towards the formee, responsibilities of the formee, the manual of formation, the helping services like spiritual guidance, counselling offered for the growth of the formee, the time period of that stage of formation, the level of academic/social, spiritual maturity the formee has to make within that period of time etc. Provision for informed consent tends to promote the active cooperation of formees in their formative plan.

3.4. Use of Diagnostic Tools

The Church has approved the use of psychological tools in the area of formation. "Instructions on the Renewal of Religious life" (*Renovationis Causam*), the decree published on 6 January 1969, reads as follows: "If in certain more difficult cases, the Superior feels, with the free agreement of the subject, that he should have recourse to the services of a prudent and qualified, psychologist known for his moral principles, it is desirable, in order that this examination may be fully effective, that it should take place after an extended period of probation, so as to enable the specialist to formulate a diagnosis based on experience."⁶ A diagnostic work will explain the formee's present behaviour difficulties, its background history, how these problems developed over a period of time, and how to help the formee, the type of psychological help and prognosis.

4. Legal Issues in Formation

The very word "legal" takes care of what is externally verifiable. However, the validity of this verification is called into question. Even a morally wrong act can be legally valid; for instance, abortion is legal in India. In the area of formation we are able to take into account what is externally visible.

⁶Vatican Council II: *The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Austin Flannery OP (ed.), Bombay: St Paul Publications 1975, p. 583.

4.1. Recruitment of the Candidates

Canon 22 reads: All the Christian faithful have the right to be free from any kind of coercion in choosing a state in life. However, there are reported cases of interference. It is reported that some of the ecclesiastical authorities strongly object to their entry into certain religious congregations. It is also reported that the parish priests deny the letter of their consent for the candidate if the candidate is not following their guidance. The Institutes of Consecrated Life can stipulate the norms of selection of the candidates according to their charism and apostolates.

4.2. Admission to Novitiate

The Canons 448-461 speak of the legal norms of Novitiate Formation. Canon 448: For one to be admitted into a monastery *sui iuris* it is required that the person is moved by the right intention, is suited for leading a monastic life and is not prevented by any impediment established by the law.

The canon 450 speaks of the following candidates who cannot be admitted: (1) Non Catholics, (2) those who have been punished with canonical penalties except those mentioned in canon 1426.1. (Unless another penalty is provided in the law, according to the ancient traditions of the Eastern Churches, penalties can be imposed which require some serious work of religion or piety or charity, such as certain prayers, a pious pilgrimage, a special fast, alms, spiritual retreats.), (3) those who are under imminent threat of a serious penalty on account of a crime of which they are legitimately accused, (4) those who are under 18 years of age, except if it is the case of monastery which has temporary profession, in which instance 17 years of age is sufficient; (5) those who are entering the monastery induced by force, grave fear or by fraud or those, who are admitted by a superior induced in the same way; (6) spouses, during a marriage, (7) those who are held by the bond of religious profession or any other sacred bond to an institute of consecrated life, unless it is a case of lawful transfer.

Canon 451 speaks of admitting members of other *sui iuris* church. No one can be admitted licitly to the novitiate of a monastery of another Church *sui iuris* without the permission of the Apostolic See, unless it is the case of candidates who are destined for a dependent monastery of their own Church as mentioned in can. 432.

Canon 452: (1) Clerics enrolled in an eparchy cannot be licitly admitted to the novitiate without consulting their own eparchial bishop nor can they be admitted licitly, if the eparchial bishop objects to it because their departure will result in grave harm to souls which cannot be prevented otherwise; or if it concerns those who are destined to the priesthood in a monastery but are restrained by some impediment established in law. (2) Likewise, parents whose help is necessary in raising and educating children cannot be licitly admitted to the monastery, as well as children who are obliged to assist a father or mother, a grandfather or grandmother who are in great need, unless the monastery has provided otherwise for this.

Canon 453: (1) It is the superior of a monastery *sui iuris* who admits to the novitiate after having consulted the council. (2) Superiors themselves must make certain of the suitability and the full freedom of a candidate in choosing the monastic state by using appropriate means. (3) In respect to the submission of documents as well as the various testimonials concerning their good conduct and suitability, the prescriptions of the typicon shall be followed.

Canon 455: The novitiate begins with the reception of the monastic habit or in any other manner prescribed in the typicon.

Canon 456: (1) A monastery *sui iuris* can have its own novices who shall be initiated into monastic life in the same monastery under the direction of a suitable member. (2) In order that the novitiate be valid, it must be performed in the monastery *sui iuris* itself, or, by a decision of the superior, after consulting the council, in another monastery *sui iuris* of the same confederation.

Canon 457: (1) In order that the novitiate be valid, it must last for three full and continuous years, but in monasteries, in which a temporary profession precedes final profession, one year is sufficient.

Canon 462: (1) The monastic state is definitively assumed with perpetual profession, which includes the three perpetual vows of obedience, chastity and poverty. (2) In the making of profession the prescription of the typicon and the liturgical books shall be observed.

Canon 464: For the validity of perpetual monastic profession it is required: (1) that the novitiate has been validly completed; (2) novice be admitted to profession by the superior of the proper monastery *sui iuris* with the consent of the council, and that the profession be received by the same superior in person or by another; (3) that the profession be expressed and made without force, grave fear or fraud; (4) that other requirements in the typicon for the validity of the profession be fulfilled.

Canon 471: (1) The manner of formation of members is to be determined in the typicon in such a way that they be permanently motivated to aim more fully toward holiness of life as well as that their abilities be developed through the study of sacred doctrine and the acquisition of human culture in accordance with the needs of the time, and that they thereby become more adept in the arts and tasks which are legitimately undertaken by the monastery.

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BES RAUHMA: A BIBLICAL SYMBOL I

Paul Kalluveettil CMI

Abstract: Every formation house is to be fashioned after the house built on a hill top. Paul Kalluveettil CMI takes a fresh look at *Bes Rauhma* as a biblical symbol. The founding Fathers of the first indigenous religious congregation chose Mannanam hill to build up the first religious house. Indeed, the sites of the first monasteries were hills. As heights generally evoke heaven, the abode of God, *Bes Rauhma* has a deep spiritual significance. Those who dwell in *the house on the top* were destined to see visions of God concerning cosmos and every created being, such as humans, animals, birds, trees and plants, sun, moon and stars, hills and mountains, streams, rivers and oceans and galaxies. It is here that the fragmented relationships are mended and a new Adam in a new paradise is found. The author goes on to make a comparison between the various biblical mountains and the *Bes Rauhma* and sees the biblical symbolism present in each of them. *Mount Moriah* is described as the place of self-sacrifice and a place of becoming blessed; *Mount Horeb* as a place of encounter and a place of vision and colloquy; *Mount Sinai* as a place of theophany and place of covenant and *Mount Zion* as God's dwelling place where petitions are heard, a place of praise, sacrifices and celebrations and finally, a place of blessing.

Keywords: Mannanam, monastery, hills, *Bes Rauhma*, *Darsanavîdu*, *Tapasubhavanam*, heaven, sages, visionary, creation, Chavara, poem, fragmentation, unity, concord, integrity, sin, animosity, disintegration, love, joy, confraternity, accusation, condemnation, hatred, rebellion, Paradise, *karma*, symbols, Moriah, Horeb, Sinai, Zion, Carmel, Tabor, Golgotha, Olives, Abraham, Salvation History, encounter, Moses, vision, colloquy, Commandments, solitude, silence, penance, prayer, Elijah, God-realization, self-realization, Theophany, Covenant, Egypt, affluence, politics, oppression, exploitation, triumphalistic, religion, desert, service, Baal, Jerusalem, Solomon, tabernacle, sacrifice, contemplation, celebration, vocation, Temple.

1. House of the Top

The Founding Fathers of CMI Congregation chose Mannanam hill to build up the first religious house. Indeed, the sites of the first monasteries were hills. Heights generally evoke heaven, the abode of God. The Founding Fathers also called the *Bes Rauhma Darsanavîdu* (House of Vision) and *Tapasubhavanam* (House of Penance). Both titles have deep spiritual significance. The inmates were destined to see the visions of God concerning cosmos and every created being, such as humans, animals, birds, trees and plants, sun, moon and stars, hills and mountains, streams, rivers and oceans and galaxies. Metaphorically speaking, all of them are the faces of the Creator. In them there irradiates the splendour, magnificence and radiance of God. In the divine destiny the earth was meant to be the mirror of heaven, matter spirit, secular sacred. In the early period of creation there took place the celebration of creation, God the main celebrant, Adam, and Eve the concelebrants, and the whole creation was taking part in this joyful and glorious celebration of praise. Adam (the Hebrew term is grammatically singular in form, but plural in connotation) had the role of the *maestro* of this cosmic orchestra. The eco of this festivity is seen in Ps 29; 19; 136; 148; Dan 3:29-68.

2. *Bes Rauhma* as *Darsanaveedu*

As already said, the inmates of *Bes Rauhma* were following the *tapas* style of life of the Indian sages. It transformed them into *rishûs* (visionaries) who nurtured and lived the Creator's original designs concerning the whole creation. There reigned in *Bes Rauhma* *êka nâda*, *râga*, *tâla* and *laya* (one voice, tune, rhythm and blend).

3. Means Used to Achieve *Darsan*

Kuriakose Elias Chavara (henceforth KEC) the youngest among the Founding Fathers, and the first Prior of Mannanam Monastery, has thus articulated the means to achieve *darsan*:

Abide in the love of Jesus Christ,
 Sit always before His eyes,
 Walk close to Him,
 Converse continuously with Him. (*Letters VII/6*)

In the poem *Compunction of the Soul* (henceforth CS) he longs for *darsan*
 Your sacred limbs, beautiful holy face
 Your sparkling eyes, nostrils bright
 Ruby lips, conch-shaped teeth

The honeyed sounds flowing from your lips
I am greedy to behold, to hear I long
Though steadfast to look, alas unworthy my eyes!
O furnace of love, you, my treasure of kindness
I am thirsty and greedy, alas my sin the hindrance! (V: 154-158)

The third canto of CS begins thus:

The Lord of mercy, the Son of God
His glorious splendour, I long to see (*kānākēnam*)

There are 49 objects for which KEC is athirst. For KEC, the *bhakta yogi* the world was divine milieu. This mystical poet could experience and enjoy the divine splendour in them and had given beautiful articulation to it:

The sky, the move of sun and moon,
The bright planets and the cluster of stars
The green grass and flowers of the earth,
Gazing at the universe entire
What the reason for their creation!
Seeing it I could understand your glory,
If you had set such fortune on earth
What wonderful blessings stored above! (CS II: 291-298)

4. Fragmentations of Relationships

As Adam tried to grasp the divinity by force, the existing harmony in creation was broken down. In the place of unity, concord and integrity, sin brought forth animosity, and disintegration of relationships between God and man, between humans, between man and animals and between man and earth. Human face was disfigured; it did not radiate the divine splendour. Instead of giving articulation to love, joy and confraternity, the human voice emitted the position of accusation, condemnation, hatred and rebellion.

5. New Adam and New Paradise

Despite Adam's disobedience, the Creator God did not forsake humans. He sent his only begotten Son to earth who took upon himself the sin, and shedding till the last drop of blood, redeemed Adam and the whole cosmos. He created a new heaven and a new earth (Rev 21-22), and once more human faces and voices could be transformed into divine face and divine voice.

6. The Karma Yogis of *Bes Rauhma*

The visionaries in the *Bes Rauhma* were engaged in dreaming the divine dreams concerning Adam and the whole creation. Their contemplation led them to action. They zealously set out to transform the disfigured faces and ugly voices into loving faces and celestial voices.

7. Biblical Symbols

This introductory part leads us to the proper theme of the study. *Bes Rauhma* symbolizes Mount Moriah, Mount Horeb, Mount Sinai, Mount Zion, Mount Carmel, the Mountain of the Lord Almighty, God's Mountains, Mount Tabor, Mount Golgotha and Mount of Olives.

7.1. Mount Moriah

Mount Moriah appears a faraway mountain to which Abraham is sent by God for the ultimate test of his faith. (Gen 22:1-18).

7.1.1. Place of Sacrificing the Self

Abraham who was leading a life of security, self-complaisance and comfort of religion, was asked to reject the past, make a radical break with it, become a destitute (*agati*), leap into the dark and cling to God for the day to day existence. The climax of such life style is depicted in Gen 22:1-18. Yahweh asked him: "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering..." Abraham's replied: "*hinneni* (here I am)". Then he went to Mount Moriah, bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on the top of the wood. As he took the knife to slay his son, the Lord forbade him. He was well pleased with the readiness of the patriarch to embrace a life of total *kenosis* (self-emptying). Jesus, the son of Abraham (who was the Father of Salvation History) perfectly realized this call. He became the victim, the sacrifice and the one who performed the sacrifice as well as the salvation itself.

The Founding Fathers of the religious community wholeheartedly hearkened to the special call of God. They left everything and their dear ones, searched for the pearl (Mt 13:44-46) of solitary place, found the *Bes Rauhma*, and zealously devoted themselves to prayer and penance. There they sacrificed themselves as a burnt offering, got rid of everything non-divine and inhuman, and clung to God for survival. KEC thus records: "From that day I have decided to become a total monk and separated myself from the blood relations, and made

incomes and expenses common" (*Chronicles*, pp. 70-71). He enumerates their daily devotional practices: "By the great zeal of Fr Porukkara we recited the Rosary of 153 beads at three intervals, the seven dolours Rosary and prayers to St Joseph and of Holy Scapular. On Sunday noon there was solemn High Mass, sermon, and Rosary. During Lent we recited the long canonical prayers of *Hudra*. That included the vigil songs (*qālā d'sahara*). After *Leliyā* (canonical office for the night) we added other prayers. At the end the inmates sang *santhar 'ālāhā* (the supplication of Simeon after he got the grace to see the Son of God and he take the Child in his arms: "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, now dismiss your servant in peace" Lk 2:29). In the morning, after the Holy Mass, all of us prayed the Litany of all Saints - a devotion we cherished, as we wanted to live on earth in the company of the inhabitants of heaven. *Bes Rauhma* was the pre-figuration of heaven (*Chronicles*). On Fridays after 3 pm we conducted the way of cross by erecting 14 crosses and treading through the stones and kneeling at each station. At the saying that Jesus climbed Calvary, we also, together with the people, reached at the top of the hill" (*Chronicles*, pp. 72-73).

7.1.2. Place of Becoming Blessed

The Lord said to Abraham: "I will in blessing bless you, and in multiplying I will multiply your seed (*zēr 'a*) as the stars of heaven and as the sand on the seashore... and in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because you have hearkened to my voice," vv.17-18. The Hebrew original uses the ablative absolutes twice, *bārēk abarekka, harba 'arbe*, in order to give stress to the intensity and thoroughness of action. Abraham was blessed (filled with the divine wellbeing, *kshemam, aiswaryam*), and was made a blessing being, like God himself. The reason for this grace was that his ears were attuned to the voice of God.

The Founding Fathers called *Bes Rauhma* a *coventum*, a term that comes from convent (originated from the Latin *convenire* = come together, a community of persons devoted to religious life under a spiritual head. Their continuous sacrificing of self, made them the children of Abraham, a community of the saved and the blessed ones and of the blessing ones. God gave them the grace to enjoy *sālokya* (being in the divine world), *sāmīpya* (closeness to the Divine), *sārūpya* (transformed into the Divine) and *sāyūjya* (united to the Divine). They called themselves *kūdappirappukal* (those who were born together, twins).

7.2. Mount Horeb

Three biblical texts that refer to Mount Horeb come into focus in this analysis: Ex 3:1-2; 34:1-14, 27-35 and 1 Kings 19:9-18.

7.2.1. Place of Encounter: Ex 3:1-2

“Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up” (Ex 3:1-2). Like Moses, the Founding Fathers were alone with the Alone (*solus cum solo*) in a desert-like place. They knew that God would speak only in solitude and silence (Jer 2:1-2). *Bes Rauhma* was like Mount Horeb. This house of the heights was close to heaven, according to the belief of the biblical times.

In his solitary days, Moses was exposed to extreme cold and hot climate. During this period he has clad in rough clothes and had to eat but dried bread. Moses could not enjoy the company of human beings. These factors slowly brought a change in his mentality. The former haughty and imperious prince of Egypt in him was meeting a steady death. The attitude of *agathi* (I am nothing, I have nothing) was slowly emerging in him. Moses has become a diffident fellow who has lost self-confidence. God was preparing him to become His representative, who has to draw out the Hebrew slaves from the sea of slavery, and to make Israel His covenant people, and to lead them to the Holy Land. At Mount Horeb the Lord appeared as a burning bush. Yahweh was undertaking upon himself the sufferings of the Hebrews. Like them he was undergoing the burning experience. But nobody can consume the Almighty. Thereby He was assuring the victims of exploitation that their oppressors will not be able to destroy them.

It was God who inspired the early Fathers to renounce the world and its pleasures. They embraced an ascetic life, in solitude, silence, penance and prayer. This new life style helped them to die to themselves, in order to let Christ live in them (Gal 2:20), who undertook upon himself the sufferings of humanity and became like the burning bush that was not burnt up. For the suffering people the early Fathers had to become the symbols of the burning bush. In order to appropriate this call, they took up the *Bes Rauhma* life style, so that they could be sent to draw the humans from the sea of sin, ignorance, poverty, marginalization, untouchability and eternal death.

7.2.2. Place of Vision and Colloquy: Ex 34:1-14, 27-35

As Israel worshipped the golden calf, the covenant with God was broken down. Yahweh punished them (Ex 32-33). Yet the Lord did not forsake them. He asked Moses to chisel out two stone tablets and come to Mount Horeb in the morning. There Yahweh passed in front of Moses proclaiming His name as the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin (34:6-7). All at once Moses bowed to the ground and worshipped, and pleaded with the Lord to forgive the wickedness and sin of the stiff-necked people, and take them as his inheritance. Then the Lord was willing to re-establish the covenant with Israel, and wrote down on the tablets the Ten Commandments. During the forty days of *upavāsam* (which literally means 'staying close to God') Moses forgot to eat and drink. Living in the company of Yahweh by fixing his eyes on the divine face, and tuning his ears to the voice of Yahweh, made his countenance radiant (34:29).

The life of solitude, silence, penance and prayer at *Bes Rauhma* provided the early Fathers the grace of divine vision; they spent their days in colloquy with God, in praise and worship, in intercession and petition. In the words of KEC, they abided in the love of Jesus Christ, sat always before His eyes, walked close to Him, and conversed continuously with Him (*Letters VII/6*). They followed the Indian *manthra* (maxim)

dhānamūlam Gurormūrti
manthramūlam Gurorvākyam
poojamūlam Gurorpādam
mokshamūlam Gurorkripa

(the root of meditation, the figure of the Master; the root of invocation, the Word of the Master; the root of worship, the feet of the Master; the root of salvation, the grace of Master). At this intense endeavour (*bhagīradhayatnam*) the Lord was pleased with them, graced them with mystical vision, revealed to them his dreams and aspirations concerning the Kerala Church and community. They, like Moses, humbly begged pardon for the lack of total commitment of the people and the clergy to Christ. They praised, thanked, rendered homage to the Lord in the name of humans. Because of their *upavāsam* their faces become radiant with the divine glory. Others recognized this transformation, called them men of God, and held them in great respect.

7.2.3. Place of Vision and Colloquy II: 1 Kings 19:9-18

The life of Prophet Elijah, the Father of the Carmelite Order can be summarized in his own words: "I have been zealously zealous (in Syriac *meten tenēs*) for the Lord, God Almighty" (1 Kings 19:10, 14). The idiom infinitive absolute is used to give articulation to the intensity and vehemence of his passion. Indeed, the Carmelites have taken as their motto these very words of Elijah. In the text, the prophet is said to have travelled for forty days and forty nights, being strengthened by the angelic food, reached Horeb, the Mountain of God, went into a cave, and stayed there in deep contemplation. Then the Lord appeared to him as "sound of sheer silence" and gave instructions concerning his future mission. Elijah obediently followed the command of his Master.

The early Fathers converted *Bes Rauhma* into the cave of Mount Horeb. There they spent their days in deep contemplation, being zealously zealous for the Lord, God Almighty. By the strength of being nourished by the bread from heaven these devotees were continuing their journey of life to the heavenly Horeb, an abode of adoration, praise, thanks and homage. In the cave of heart they heard the divine sound of sheer silence and see Jesus' face on which were imprinted the traces of agony and ecstasy. The inhabitants of *Bes Rauhma* bore the marks of passion and glorification. Their Beloved communicated to them their day to day apostolate, in the execution of which they found their God-realization (*Īswara sākshātkāra*) and self-realization (*ātma sākshātkāra*).

7.3. Mount Sinai

Two biblical texts (Ex 19:1-25 and 24:4-18) mention Mount Sinai as the place of Theophany and Covenant.

7.3.1. Place of Theophany: Ex. 19:1-25

After liberating Israel from the slavery of Egypt, that practiced an economics of affluence, politics of oppression and exploitation, and a static and triumphalistic religion, Yahweh led them to the desert of Sinai. Then He commanded Moses to prepare them to become the people of covenant. After enumerating what He had done in Egypt, and how He carried them on eagles' wings, the Lord exposed the covenant stipulations: "If you listeningly listen (*shamô'a tishme'u*) to my voice and keep my covenant, then you shall be to me the cherished

possession (*segullā*) above all people; you shall be to me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation" (19:5-6).

As Moses intimated Israel these words, all the people answered together: "All that the Lord had spoken, we will do." Thus they expressed oral consent to become Yahweh's covenant people. Pleased with this positive response the Lord announced that He will descend upon Mount Sinai. Israel is asked to sanctify themselves and wash their clothes. On the third day in the morning, the Almighty manifested Himself on Mount Sinai. There was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone trembled. The Lord descended in fire. The smoke bellowed up from the Mount Sinai like smoke from a furnace.

Yahweh made three covenant promises. Israel will be His cherished possession, with which He will never part. He will make them the kings and priests of the nations with the roles of shepherding over them, and blessing them. Further, Israel was elevated to the status of holy nation (*goy qadosh*), who belongs totally to Him, who spends the life to make other nations holy - they are separated for service.

The Lord manifested Himself in the traditional form of the Canaanite deity Baal, who wanted to engender fear among the people that would prompt them to serve him faithfully. Yahweh adapts himself to the existential situations of humans.

The Founding Fathers of the religious congregation considered *Bes Rauhma* as the new Mount Sinai. KEC gives it a long description in *Colloquies* (pp. 24-25). The titles given to the Lord give articulation to his own personal experience. The mystic thus addresses the Almighty: "Oh boundless Lord, filled with glory and brilliance, who is most supreme and without beginning and end," "Oh the Almighty who is the perfection of every virtue such as goodness, glory, might, brilliance and effulgence." the act of attributing designations after designations to the Lord do not make him content. As Moses, KEC hesitates to approach the presence of the Most Holy God: "How could I, a great sinner, ascend without fear this prayer room? When I look with keen attention at the room I see your greatest hatred for sin and in your eminence justice, and your fierce fire of anger is blazing on the wicked. How is one able to look at the burning fire that manifests the divine might?" Still, entrusting himself to the immeasurable mercy of the *Appan* (Father) the new Moses ascended the chapel.

At *Bes Rauhma* the early Fathers listeningly listened to the divine voice. In the name of the faithful these representatives continuously

repeated: "All that the Lord speaks, we will do." They functioned as covenant mediators, and stayed at *Bes Rauhma*, the new Mount Sinai, seeing Jesus, *Appan* face to face. They were elevated to the status of *segullā*, shepherds and priests, as well as the embodiment of holiness.

7.3.2. Place of Covenant: Ex 24:4-18

On the day of covenant making, Moses got up early in the morning, and built an altar, set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. Then burnt offerings and fellowship offerings were offered. Moses took half of the blood, and sprinkled it on the altar and on the people, saying, "This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you." He and a few chosen people of Israel went up, and saw the God of Israel, and they ate and drank in His presence.

The Founding Fathers of the religious congregation served as the mediators of the new covenant. They, like their *Appan* used to get up early in the morning, make themselves as living altars, where they sacrificed themselves as burnt offering and fellowship offering. They proclaimed to the faithful by word and deed that they were united to Jesus by eating the living bread and by partaking His blood. At the invitation of *Appan*, KEC and the inmates of the *Bes Rauhma* approached Him (*Colloquies*, pp. 26-27), and in his presence or together with Him, enjoyed the meals. The Lord blessed them by making them the earthly symbols of the New Jerusalem (Rev 21-22).

7.4. Mount Zion: 1 Kings 6-8

The temple that Solomon built on Mount Zion according to the instructions of Yahweh, served in the Old Testament as God's dwelling place, place of praise, worship, thanks and the place of divine blessing. 1 Kings 6-8 give details of the building of the temple, furnishing it, bringing the Ark of the Covenant to the temple, and the rituals of dedication of the temple.

7.4.1. God's Dwelling Place

Solomon's prayer of the dedication of the temple (8:22-61) is one of the most beautiful prayers of the Old Testament. Perhaps one can compare it to the prayer of Jesus, the new Solomon in Jn 17. He stood before the altar of the Lord in front of the whole assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands towards heaven. The following ideas could be seen in his prayer of dedication:

- Confession of Yahweh's uniqueness and faithfulness to the covenant made to David (vv. 23-24)
- Request to keep the covenant promise of an everlasting dynasty (vv. 25-26)
- Wondering how God, whom the heavens cannot contain, can dwell on earth (v. 27)
- Prayer to take heed to his plea for mercy (v. 28)
- Supplication to open the divine eyes towards the temple night and day, and hear the prayers of Israel turning to the temple, and forgive their sins (v. 29-30)

KEC calls the chapel in *Bes Rauhma* New Mount Zion, the glorious and majestic abode of the beloved *Appan*, *Colloquies* 34, 37: "Behold the *Appan* is seated with outstretched hands to welcome me and embrace me and is inclining his holy face to kiss me with affection." The early Fathers stood before the altar and spread out their hands towards heaven, as Jesus would have done during his earthly days. These covenant mediators, like Christ, confessed the uniqueness and fidelity of Christ to the eternal covenant clauses. They wondered about the mystery of the Lord of heaven and earth abiding in the tabernacle, and pleaded for the divine mercy to forgive the acts of unfaithfulness of the people.

7.4.2. Place of Petitions: 1 Kings 8:31-53

The dominant theme of Solomon's prayer is petition that is spread throughout. The following ones deserve special attention.

- Plea to judge between the guilty and innocent (v. 31-32)
- Petition to forgive when the people repent, and bring them back to the Promised Land (vv. 33-34)
- Appeal to end the draught when people of Israel confess their sin (vv. 35-36)
- Entreaty to stop the plagues, siege of the enemies, disaster and deceases (vv. 37-40)
- Request to hear the prayers of the foreigners, so that all the peoples of the earth may in fear acknowledge the Divine Name (vv. 41-43)
- Solicitation to help the people in times of war (vv. 44-45)
- Prayer to forgive Israel's unfaithfulness, because of which they were taken into captivity, and liberate them (vv. 46-51)
- Plea to listen to supplications of the king and the people, since Yahweh has chosen them as His own inheritance (vv. 52-53)

The inmates of *Bes Rauhma* had a keen sense of the justice of God. KEC shuddered at the thought of the final judgment. In the last petition of CS, he turns to the Lady of Immaculate Conception and asks for her intercession at the moment of death:

O benign mistress, succour me, your servant

At the hour of my death, kindly protect, save me. (CS. II 75-76)

The theme of mercy is the most pre-dominant theme in his works. He seems to have enjoyed a deeper insight into divine mercy whose incarnated form is Jesus, the *Appan*. The Founding Fathers spent most of their time before the divine presence, pleading for forgiveness. They recited the Litany of the Saints in which they begged to save all from draught, plagues, enemies, disaster, decease and war. KEC wanted to bring all the peoples to the fold of the good shepherd. Especially he sought protection from the snares of Satan.

7.4.3. Place of Praise: 1 Kings 8:56-61

Solomon praises Yahweh using the formula, "praise be to the Lord..." who has given rest to Israel and fulfilled his promises (v.56). There follows a set of 'may' clauses in vv. 57-60:

- May Yahweh be with us
- May He never forsake us
- May He turn our hearts to him to obey him
- May my words be near to Yahweh
- May He uphold my cause and that of Israel
- May all the nations know that Yahweh is the only God

Halleluiahs! Praise to Jesus Christ! The lips of the Founding Fathers incessantly poured out these words of praise. They became the living *Halleluiahs*, as the Son of Man, who in his body, that was the living Temple, rendered incessant praise to the Heavenly Father. It was they who taught Kerala Catholics to greet each other with the formula: Praise to Jesus Christ. This practice was integrated into the Keralite spiritual tradition. The early Fathers made the *may* clauses of Solomon's prayer their own and taught others to do the same.

7.4.4. Place of Sacrifices and Celebrations: 1 Kings 8:62-65

At the dedication of the temple, Solomon and the people offered to Yahweh a sacrifice of fellowship offering, namely 20,000 cattle 120,000 sheep and goats. Further, at the courtyard of the temple they offered burnt offerings, grain offerings and fellowship offerings. The whole assembly celebrated before Yahweh 14 days, rejoicing, eating and

drinking. After the festival they went home, "joyful and glad in heart for all the good the Lord had done for David and Israel" (v. 68b).

The inmates of *Bes Rauhma*, although were being engaged in continuous contemplation, prayer and penance, appeared to others as persons irradiating the divine bliss and heavenly joy. They resembled Jesus Christ, who became the sacrifice, victim and one who offered the sacrifice. He was the model of celebration, since his whole being was a hymn of joyful praise. According to them, the more one attains union with God, the more one becomes person of joy. The religious vocation is a call to become a celebrative being. In his works KEC delightfully uses the word brighten, beam (*teļiyuka*). Christians are children of luminosity (*teļivinte makkal*). The inmates of *Bes Rauhma* were continuously offering sacrifices, not animals, but themselves as burnt offering, grain offering and fellowship offering.

7.4.5. Place of Blessing: 1 Kings 8:54-55, 66

To bless means to fill one with the divine wellbeing, namely welfare, *kshēmam* and *kalyānam*. Yahweh alone can bless humans. He has entrusted this task to his representatives, namely to the community heads, namely liturgical (priest), of family (father) and of the kingdom (king). In the text, Solomon assumes the roles of the king, father and priest. "He stood and blessed the whole of Israel in a loud voice" (v. 55). At the end of the festival of the dedication of the Temple, the people is said to have blessed the king (v. 56a). It seems that they, the liturgical assembly, function as priests, in fulfilling the covenant promise of Ex 19:6.

The Founding Fathers of *Bes Rauhma*, represented Jesus. Through word and deed they brought the divine blessings upon the people. KEC in his *Letters* and *Chronicles* frequently has given articulation to the formula of blessing. Some instances:

- "May the Almighty protect you" (*Letters* VV/1)
- "In the Lord blessing (*svasthi*) to you" (*Letters* VI/3, 4)
- "May Jesus Christ bless you" (*Letters* VII/2)
- "Praise (blessings) to the Almighty" (*Letters* V/14)
- "May the Infant Jesus, showing you his beaming smile, bless you by uplifting his tiny arms" (*Letters* V/7)
- "May the praise (blessing) increase always to the Almighty, amen" (*Chronicles*, p. 139)
- "May you become the blessed in the Lord" (*Chronicles*, p. 179)

Jesus, the second Adam and Solomon, father, priest and king of the new creation, by words and actions showered the divine blessings on

humans, especially the marginalized of the society. He was the symbol of new Israel, the people (*'am*, grammatically singular in form but plural in connotation) of the covenant, who was elevated to the status of priests, performed the act of blessing, showering the divine well-being.

ECCLESIAL PERSPECTIVES OF RELIGIOUS FORMATION

Kuncheria Pathil CMI

Abstract: Kuncheria Pathil CMI, reflecting on the ecclesial perspectives of religious formation, notes that in the period immediately after Vatican II, the Church faced a deep crisis in vocations. Underlying the various reasons for this crises, there was a deeper theological reason. The Council presented and endorsed a new understanding of 'holiness' - every Christian is called to holiness or perfection. Then, why should one become a religious or a priest? A similar crisis has surfaced today in the formation of religious. The Jesus' community at its origins was 'Kingdom Community' marked by the Kingdom values of love, freedom, fellowship and justice. Hence, the Church right from the early period witnessed to powerful spiritual, prophetic and missionary movements led by several holy men and women. A consecrated life is a spiritual and prophetic movement, so it is historically and theologically a powerful missionary movement proclaiming the Kingdom of God and the Gospel of Jesus in a dialogical and liberative way. To effect this in India, religious formation has to be in the cultural, religious, social and ecclesial context of India with a spirit of dialogue or relationship with all the living religions of India. Religious have to function as leaven, salt and light in the Church and move ahead with new experiments and prophetic movements welcoming them as creative polarities and spirit-filled *kairos*, which will lead the Church to ever new and wider horizons.

Keywords: formation, Vatican II, vocation, religious, priests, ministry, disappointment, frustration, Church, bishops, convictions, Kingdom, repentance, Community, love, freedom, fellowship, justice, sin, guilt, fear, ritualism, legalism, greed, power, position, communion, *kerygma*, *koinonia* and *diakonia*, autonomy, autocephaly, presbyters, episcopoi, dioceses, provinces, parishes, metropolitans, patriarchs, provincial synods Ecumenical Councils, Religious Orders, Institutes, evangelical counsels, prayer, apostolic activities, community, mission, ministry, movements, solitude, deserts, mountains, spirituality, sign, sacrament,

servant, evangelization, missionaries, vows, consecrated life, cloister, apostolate, consumerism, individualism, market, competition, Mammon, Vatican II, proclamation, witness, prophetic movement, mediator, tensions, hierarchy, traditions, inter-religious, *kairos*.

1. Introduction

The period immediately after Vatican II witnessed a deep crisis in vocations, both in priestly and religious life. Between 1964 and 1974 about 20,000 priests and religious left the ministry, some with dispensation and others without dispensation.¹ The reasons for this exodus were diverse and very complex – disappointment, frustration and non-fulfilment in their life and ministry, ideological tensions in the Church between bishops and priests, bishops and religious, lack of faith convictions, difficulties of celibate life in a world where there is profusion of sex and hedonistic culture etc. Majority of those who left belonged to the intellectual elite. Underlying the various reasons for this exodus, there was a deeper theological reason. The Council presented and endorsed a new understanding of ‘holiness’. According to the teachings of the Council every Christian is called to holiness or perfection. It is not necessary to become a religious or priest in order to become perfect (LG, Chapter V “The Call of the Whole Church to Holiness”). The earlier notion was that priests and religious follow the way to ‘perfection’, whereas the ordinary lay people are called to ‘salvation’. The obvious question was that if any ordinary Christian can be as holy and perfect as a religious, why should one become a religious or a priest?

A similar crisis is there today in the formation of religious. There have been plenty of seminars and conferences on formation. They were focussed on who are we forming today and what for and how. Are we forming the candidates for ‘religious life and ministry’ or personnel for serving our institutions in order to manage them with maximum efficiency and success along the model of the multi-national companies? A multi-national company’s sole objective is economic profit and success for which they compete with other similar institutions. How do we discern the genuine call to authentic religious life? How do we nurture this religious vocation? Unless we define the objectives of religious life and clearly delineate the means and ways to reach this goal, our formation process and program will be futile

¹B. Kloppenburg, *The Priest*, Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1974, p. 5.

without any focus. In this paper, an attempt is made to highlight briefly the ecclesial perspectives of religious formation and introduce the subject in a very general manner.

2. Church and Religious Life

Origins of the Church should be understood in its historical, social, cultural, political and religious context. But to understand the specific spiritual nature of the Church we have to situate the Church in its religious context. The religious experience of Jesus and that of the disciples of Jesus played here the most decisive role. The core of the religious experience of Jesus may be characterized as the "*abba* experience," which Jesus proclaimed in the central message of the "Kingdom of God" (Mk 1:14-15). This Kingdom became present in Jesus himself. In Jesus God has revealed himself as the *abba*, the Father, as the Unconditional Love. "It is this revelation of God's love (God as *abba*) that is the true content of Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom... The Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus, then, is ultimately his *revelation of God's unconditional love*."² The gift or offer of God's love, symbolized by the Kingdom of God, demands human response. When Jesus demands "repentance", he means this human response. Repentance means turning to God and to the neighbour and allowing oneself to be transformed into a new being by this unconditional love of God.

The Church or Jesus Community at its origins was 'Kingdom Communities' marked by the Kingdom values of Love, Freedom, Fellowship and Justice. "It was a community that was free, all-inclusive, open to sharing, prepared for service and radically equal."³ In persons and communities transformed by love there will be total freedom, fellowship and justice.⁴ The coming of the Kingdom into one's life or the experience of God's unconditional love liberates oneself from all internal compulsions and external forces. He or she is liberated from sin, guilt, fear, ritualism, legalism, greed or cravings for power, position or possessions, as shown in the supreme example of Jesus. Freedom flowing from the experience of God's unconditional love leads one to

²George Soares-Prabhu, "The Kingdom of God: Jesus' Vision of a New Society," in *The Indian Church in the Struggle for a New Society*, D. S. Amalorpavadass (ed), Bangalore: NBCLC, 1985, pp. 598-599.

³George M. Soares-Prabhu, "Radical Beginnings: The Jesus Community as the Archetype of the Church," *Jeevadhara*, Vol. XV, No. 88 (1985), p. 318.

⁴Soares-Prabhu, "The Kingdom of God...", pp. 601-608.

love others and to commit oneself totally for others and thus to create communion.

Although the concrete structures and lifestyle of such communities are drawn from the society and culture of the time and place, these communities had a prophetic task of challenging the existing structures and lifestyle of the society and offered alternative models. The most important characteristic of the Kingdom Community or Jesus Community was its sense and commission of "mission". It was sent to the world to continue the mission of Jesus by proclaiming the Kingdom, by its *kerygma*, *koinonia* and *diakonia*. The Church was thus a spiritual movement, prophetic movement, social movement and consequently a missionary movement. The Church was primarily not an institution with a central administration, although the early Churches had a strong sense of unity and communion. Local/Regional Churches had their legitimate autonomy and autocephaly within the fundamental unity of Christian faith and sacraments, with common Scriptures and the Apostolic Tradition and ministry. The One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church was a Communion of different local Churches.⁵ The ministerial and organizational structures of the Church too came from the structures of the society of its times. 'Presbyters' (Elders) of the Jewish synagogue communities and 'Episcopoi' of the Greek civil administration became the sacred ministers of the Church. The administrative divisions of the Church into Dioceses, Provinces, Parishes and primatial authoritative structures, such as, Metropolitans, Patriarchs etc., and the system of Provincial Synods and Ecumenical Councils and so on were modelled after the Roman political administrative system.⁶

The history of the Church right from the early period witnessed to powerful spiritual, prophetic and missionary movements led by several holy men and women. They were clearly inspired by the Holy Spirit in response to the needs of the Church and they subsequently founded their own religious communities for their followers. All of them had practically the same motto, to follow Christ freely, intensely and radically and to continue the ministry of Jesus and that of the Church in their own particular historical context and needs. All of them were fascinated by the life and example of Jesus who was chaste, poor and obedient to the Father and by His absolute commitment to the Kingdom of God. Four main elements run through all the

⁵Kuncheria Pathil, *Theology of the Church: New Horizons*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2006, pp. 12-15.

⁶Pathil, *Theology of the Church*, pp. 15-28.

Religious Orders and Institutes, namely, practice of evangelical counsels, prayer, apostolic activities and community life. Intense and radical following of Christ entails not only following the life-style of Jesus by practicing the evangelical counsels but also continuing His mission and ministry by apostolic activities. As the Church is by its very nature missionary and prophetic, so also the consecrated life is essentially apostolic, prophetic and missionary.

Though the founders of the various Religious Orders and institutes had responded in their own times to their special spiritual call to follow Christ radically by a life of holiness motivated by the love of God and their neighbour, in a way those spiritual movements were equally a challenge and corrective to the Church of their times to return to the authentic Gospel and the evangelical way of life. Those religious Orders and Movements were the gifts of God to the Church for spiritual renewal. Those holy men and women under the guidance of the Spirit constantly urged the Church to purify itself, renew it and return to the Gospel. The consecrated life is therefore 'a spiritual movement 'in the Church raised by the Holy Spirit, and in the history of the Church it is 'a permanent element' both in the East and the West, though particular religious orders and institutes cannot claim any permanency (VC 5, 63).

Though the different Religious Orders are known by their own spiritualities, such as Ignatian, Carmelite, Franciscan, Dominican etc., the essence of the spirituality of consecrated life is one and the same. It is "the spirituality of Jesus" who is the way, model, guide and inspiration for the consecrated life. Jesus was constantly in communion with the Father. He often retired to the solitude of deserts and mountains, praying and communing with the Father the whole night (Lk 5:16; 6:12; 22:41; Jn 14:10; 8:29). But Jesus led an intensely active life (VC 74), being always with the people, teaching them, healing them, feeding them, with a compassionate heart. It is *an apostolic spirituality*, "a spirituality of action, seeing God in all things and all things in God" (VC 74). It is "understood as life in Christ or life according to the Spirit... (where) the consecrated person is guided by the Spirit and configured by him to Christ, in full communion of love and service in the Church" (VC 93).

The ecclesial dimension of religious life and the commitment of the religious to the mission of the Church are emphasized in the various documents of Vatican II (LG, PC, AG) and in the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*. The call to religious life is not merely a personal call for sanctification, but it is essentially an ecclesial and missionary call.

The ecclesial role of consecrated life is to be a sign in the Church constantly reminding the faithful the meaning of the Church as the Body and Bride of Christ. The presence of consecrated life in the Church reminds the faithful the eschatological nature of the Church to be a sign, sacrament and servant of the Kingdom of God. The history of the missions is a powerful witness of the role of the religious orders and institutes in the evangelization of the world. It was primarily the religious missionaries who brought the Gospel to the four corners of the world and planted the Church among the different peoples and cultures. Those who are called to consecrated life are “impelled by a love which the Holy Spirit has poured into the hearts of those men and women, who spend themselves for Christ and the Church, which is His Body... The more ardently they unite themselves to Christ, the more vigorously they live for the Church” (PC 1).

In religious life the following of Christ by the evangelical counsels or vows are practiced in the context of community life. It is the religious community which endorses and spells out the norms and practices of the vows. Hence, community life or common life is an essential element of consecrated life (VC 42). Though the religious community is not a natural family, Vatican II affirmed that religious community is a “true family” gathered together in the Lord’s name and rejoicing in his presence (PC 15). Consecrated life is a sign set within the Church, which is a sign of the unity and fraternity of the whole humankind. Fraternal life bonded in love in the consecrated life is an eloquent sign of ecclesial communion (VC 42). Today in the contemporary culture of individualism and hectic personal activities of apostolate, the community life in consecrated life is at stake. As the members of the community are very often outside the cloister for different kinds of apostolate, new ways and means have to be evolved for the strengthening of community life. In the context of mission today both in India and overseas, where many religious stay and work mostly alone, the concept and practice of community life have to be redefined and new orientation be given.

Our contemporary world and its hedonistic culture is distorted and fragmented with the trends of consumerism, individualism, market, competition etc. ‘Mammon’ seems to be the only God today. Man has become shallow, restless and fragmented. Humanity and the world today have to return to their spiritual roots for the survival of humankind and of our planet Earth. Therefore the call of the religious to become a sign in the Church of the Kingdom of God and to live its transcendental values is all the more important. Vatican II and *Vita*

Consecrata set the religious or the consecrated life at the very heart of the Church as a *sign*, which meant the prophetic witness of the religious to the primacy of God and the Kingdom of God. *Vita Consecrata* mentions the lessons from the history of the Church, where holy men and women, consecrated to God and inspired by the Holy Spirit, exercised this prophetic ministry speaking in the name of God to all, even to the leaders and pastors of the Church. They courageously announced the Word of God and denounced sin and evil even in high places without fear (VC 84).

Ever since the emergence of religious orders, there has been some tension and conflicts between the hierarchy of the Church and the religious communities. It is in a way inherent and arises out of their different call, nature and function. This phenomenon of a tension or polarization or clash between the institutional (hierarchical) and the charismatic (prophetic) is clearly evident in the dynamics of the history of the Church. Whenever the institutional/hierarchical elements became more dominant at the expense of the charismatic/prophetic in the Church, the latter reasserts itself in the forms of various spiritual and prophetic movements and persons/communities. The origins of various religious movements/institutes (Orders and Congregations) may be explained and understood as the assertion of the spiritual/prophetic vs. the extreme tendencies of the institutional and the hierarchical elements in the Church.

God acts in the events of history and *Vita Consecrata* asks the religious to discern the signs of the time and prophetically involve in the events of our time: "The consecrated life has the prophetic task of recalling and serving the divine plan for humanity by attending to the signs of God's providential action in history... it is through historical events we discern God's plan and effectively involve in the events of our time... but discerning the signs of the times must be done in the light of the Gospel... and by opening to the interior prompting of the Holy Spirit" (VC 73). The religious orders, institutes and communities have to make a serious introspection today, whether their proclamation, life and witness today is a credible prophetic sign or a counter-sign. Often the prophetic movement to which they originally belonged to has become a powerful and gigantic institution, which has swallowed up the prophetic movement. They became closely aligned to ecclesiastical structures and authorities and as a result they have lost their liminal and prophetic quality.

As consecrated life is a spiritual and prophetic movement, so is it historically and theologically a powerful missionary movement. The

specific mission of the religious is to be a sign within the Church, reminding the Church and the faithful of their spiritual and eschatological nature of the unbreakable union with Christ to be His Body and Spouse. As the religious remain in the heart of the Church, they also share in the overall mission of the Church. "The task of devoting themselves wholly to mission is therefore included in their call... By evangelical counsels they are made totally free for the service of the Gospel... sense of mission is essential to consecrated life" (VC 72). In the history of missions the religious always played a unique role by evangelizing different peoples and nations and building up authentic local Churches.

In the context of a positive understanding of religious pluralism and God's one plan of salvation which includes every one, mission and proclamation of the Gospel is not simply proclaiming the name of Jesus from door to door as some do, but *proclaiming the Kingdom of God and the Gospel of Jesus in a dialogical and liberative way*. However, this in no way excludes the direct proclamation of Jesus, the unique mediator, which may lead people to personal conversion and to joining the band of Jesus' disciples. The Church has to exist among all peoples as the sign, sacrament and instrument of the Kingdom of God. But first and foremost, the mission of the Church in a religiously pluralistic context is to create "a community of communities", cutting across all boundaries - caste, ethnic, cultural, social, political or religious. It is a mission of "bridge-making" between various communities, castes, cultural groups and religious groups and it demands new styles of living together as a community of communities.

3. Formation in Ecclesial Context

As the Church at its origins was a spiritual, prophetic and missionary movement, so was religious life, which originated in the heart of the Church as a sign continuously reminding the Church of its nature and mission. The various official documents of the Church on Religious Life affirmed the essential relationship of religious life to the Church. Formation should be therefore situated in the ecclesial context. I shall highlight some aspects of formation in the universal, eastern and Indian ecclesial contexts.

Communion (*koinonia*) is the heart and essence of the Church both in the New Testament and in the ecclesiology of Vatican II. The inner reality of the Church is the divine communion. It is a participation in the life of the Triune God in and through Jesus Christ. This vertical communion of ours is attained sacramentally in a historical human

community on the one hand, and on the other the divine communion is the ultimate basis for the human communion. In other words, the vertical or divine communion leads to the horizontal human communion and vice-versa. As Henry de Lubac has said, the *communio* in the *sancta* (holy things) gives birth to the *communio* of the *sancti* (holy people, saints).⁷ The communion of the Local Church was primarily expressed and realized in the Eucharistic celebration and it led to real communion in life by sharing both spiritual and material things and by building up community at a deeper level. Common sharing of goods and properties among the early Christians was an expression of the communion at all levels. In the early Church the communion, however, was never limited to the Local Church. Communion in the Local Church naturally led to the communion of the different Local Churches - *Communio Ecclesiarum*. According to Catholic ecclesiology, the Pope, as the successor of Peter, has a definite role to play in the Communion of Churches. He is a visible sign of unity and the bond of communion, the servant and instrument of unity. The formation of religious has to take place in the context of the communion of the Churches. Communion with the Pope and the local Bishops and a warm or intimate relationship with them are absolutely necessary for the ecclesial formation of religious.

There is an accusation that the hierarchical Church and the religious communities appear to function as parallel institutions. Local Bishops and Religious Congregations, especially of Pontifical right, have often mutual tensions, suspicions, misunderstandings and even confrontations. Religious Congregations of 'Pontifical Right' are functioning not directly under the local, regional and national Bishops and the latter do not have much control over the religious. The Bishops often complain that they do not know anything about the religious, their activities, mission and institutions. The religious, on the other hand, complain that they do not get enough support from the local Bishops and parish priests. They are not adequately represented in the diocesan meetings and forums, and sometimes the presence of the religious in the diocese is completely ignored. There is a grave situation today that as there are more than enough priests in the diocese, the religious are often unwanted in the diocese and their presence is even ignored. Such tensions, misunderstanding and unhealthy relationship between bishops and religious have to be

⁷Henry de Lubac, "Credo... Sanctorum Communionem", in *Int. Kath. Zeitschrift*, I (1972), 18-32.

rectified for the well-being of the whole Church in whose heart is the mission of the religious located. Formation has to be given in the ecclesial context in full communion with the hierarchy of the Church.

Religious communities originate in the Local Churches, and they are endorsed, recognized and approved by the local hierarchy. Their ministry is entirely at the disposal of the local Churches. But when religious communities grow and expand, their service is extended to other local Churches and to the Universal Church. In the process of their growth and expansion, they are approved by the Universal Church, and they get the status of Congregations of "Pontifical Right". It means that they are functioning directly under the supervision of the Roman Pontiff, and their service is generously extended to the needs of the Universal Church. Although the religious communities are born in one 'Sui Iuris' or Individual Church, Religious Congregations of Pontifical Right are called to serve all the 'Sui Iuris' Churches directly under the supervision of the Roman Pontiff and the Universal Church. Formation of religious therefore has to be under the guidance of the Universal Church and in the context of the Universal Church. Familiarity with the magisterial teachings of the Universal Church, adequate knowledge of the history of the Church and its universal mission are essential ingredients in religious formation. They have to be also familiar with the liturgical, spiritual and canonical traditions of all Churches both in the East and the West. The young religious have to be inspired to take up missions in all the *sui iuris* Churches and in all parts of the world. The candidates must be given enough opportunities to study the languages necessary for their mission and they must be introduced to different cultures in the new missionary context. Religious Congregations of Pontifical Right must be ready to start communities, houses, regions and provinces in the different "*sui iuris*" Churches whenever and wherever required.

The categories of Eastern and Western Churches and traditions have their origin with the division of Roman Empire into East and West after the death of Emperor Theodosius (395) and his two sons separately ruled the two empires. Thereafter the East and West developed their own distinct "ways" with different traditions, liturgies and theological thinking. Although the Persian Empire and the Persian Church remained outside this political category of "East", yet the Chaldean Church of Persia, its liturgy and theological thinking shared the general "Eastern culture and ethos". As the St Thomas Christians of India were ruled by the Chaldean Bishops of Persia from the 5th century till the period of the Portuguese, the Church of St Thomas in

India naturally became a 'hybrid Church' having the features of Indian, Persian and Oriental. The religious congregations or communities having their origins among the St Thomas Christians share this Indian and Oriental heritage. Therefore in the formation of these religious there must be sufficient space to imbibe the Oriental spirit by the study of the history of the Eastern Churches, their liturgy and spirituality. However, we shall not forget the fact that the Syro-Malabar Church today has been enriched immensely by its relationship to the Western Church and its liturgical, spiritual and theological heritage. Identity of a Church is not static and ready-made, but dynamic and processive in continuous relatedness to all other Churches, cultures and traditions.⁸ Identity of a Church is like that of any living being continuously growing in a process of giving and taking. Ecumenical approach and ecumenical learning by an open relationship is essential to religious formation today.

Finally, religious formation has to be in *Indian* ecclesial context. Though Christianity has been in India from the first Christian century itself and the Church of St Thomas might have been fully and authentically *Indian*, the concept and awareness of a Church typically Indian is of later origin along with the cravings for national independence. I shall not touch upon the history of the attempts for Indian Christianity, elaborated by different historians and theologians. I only want to point out here that religious formation in India has to be in our cultural, religious and social context. In many formation houses of the religious the students are trained in an artificial world separated from the actual world. God is meeting us and acting probably not within the high and secluded walls of our formation houses but in the midst of the world in the actual life and problems of humans in the concrete world of labour, toils, poverty, illness, bondage, sufferings, conflicts and tragedies. Formation of religious and seminarians has to be in this actual life context. The triple dialogue or immersion called by the FABC has this spirit of identifying with our life-world and its problems. It was a call to the Churches to be immersed in the life of Asia's poor, Asia's rich cultures and religious traditions.⁹ Formation of religious in India has to be in the living context of India's massive

⁸Kuncheria Pathil, "The Syro-Malabar Church in Theologizing: Context and Concerns Today" in *Syro-Malabar Theology in Context*, Mathew Manakatt and Jose Puthenveetil (eds), Kottayam: OIRSI, 2007, pp. 183-185.

⁹G. Rosales and C. G. Arevalo (eds), *For All the Peoples of Asia*, New York and Manila: Orbis/Claretians, 1992, p. 14.

poverty on the one hand, and its rich and flourishing religions and cultures on the other hand. In this regard, Pope Francis challenges us with new surprises every day. He invites us to see the face of Christ in the poor, the sick and the marginalized. Once our students are able to discern the face of Christ in such people in our own neighbourhood, then they will be able to see the face of Christ in the Bible they study and they will understand the meaning of the word of God in their theological courses and classes.

India has a millennia-old rich culture with a variety of sub-cultures with emphasis of unity in diversity. In the general overarching culture, reality is conceived as “cosmotheandric” - a unity of cosmos, God and human, which are inseparably united.¹⁰ One cannot be without the other two. Human (Atman) is the manifestation and reflection of the Absolute (Brahman). As this culture focuses on unity, it emphasizes ahimsa, non-violence and universal love. The whole cosmos points to God the Absolute and universal harmony. Protection of the earth and nature is the integral principle of this culture. Natural resources may be used for human life, but never exploited and wasted. Man is given the stewardship to protect the nature for the welfare of all. There is an accusation that Christianity in India has become to some extent alienated from this ‘Indian culture’ due to its affinity with the Western world and its consumeristic culture. Christian doctrinal, theological and liturgical systems are drawn mainly from other cultures. The ‘ecclesiogenesis’ and liturgical inculturation have not taken in a big way in India in dialogue with Indian cultural genius and ethos. In the formation of the religious more attention should be given to integration into our Indian culture and its life-style. More courses should be included in the curriculum on Indian history, philosophy and culture. Serious and sustained efforts should be made for inculturation in our liturgy, prayers, rituals and theological thinking.

Another vital element of immersion is dialogue or relationship with all the living religions of India. Some Christian missionaries in the past thought that other religions were evil and they had to be replaced by Christianity. Others thought that all the other religions are natural and imperfect and they will be fulfilled in Christianity. Today there is an increasing awareness on the value and validity of other world religions, as affirmed by Vatican II. The Council called Christians to acknowledge and promote the values of other religions

¹⁰The concept of reality as “cosmotheandric” was developed by late Raimundo Panikkar, the well-known Indian theologian and philosopher.

and to enter into a healthy relationship with them in dialogue. In a world threatened by religious fundamentalism, atheism, agnosticism and religious indifference all the world religions have to relate to each other in dialogue and collaboration for the welfare, peace, harmony and prosperity of the whole world. Therefore, it is inevitable that in formation the students should be introduced into all the world religions and their common foundations. They should be familiarized with the tools and skills of interreligious dialogue and collaboration. It is said that to be authentically religious today, one has to be inter-religious. Exclusion is replaced by inter-relationship and collaboration.

4. Conclusion

In the ecclesial perspectives of formation we have to hold together two views in complementarity: On the one hand, formation should be in harmony with the directions and teachings of the Church. We have to be with the Church and 'feel with the Church'. Religious have to be the agents and spokespersons of the Church. They have to be faithful missionaries of the Church. On the other hand, the prophetic role of the religious in the Church has to be emphasized today. Religious have to function as leaven, salt and light in the Church. They have to be the avant-garde in the Church by their prophetic witness and challenge. They have to move ahead in the Church with new experiments and prophetic movements. There may arise some tension when we hold together these two different postures and approaches. Such tension and conflict must be understood and welcomed as creative polarities and spirit-filled *kairos*, which will lead the Church to ever new and wider horizons.

CFI LEGACY OF CONTEXTUAL PRIESTLY FORMATION

Louis Malieckal CFI

Abstract: Louis Malieckal CFI looks at the legacy of contextual priestly formation in the light of the vision of St Chavara. He compares the vision of Vatican II on priestly formation with that of St Chavara, with the help of the Pre-Vatican form of formation on the one hand, and that prevailed before the time of the saint in Kerala on the other. The pre-Vatican II style of training and education of priests was divided into two types - the *apprenticeship* model and the *bank deposit* model. Priestly training in Kerala before 19th century took place in local centres under priest-teachers, who was given the title Malpan. Many such parish level systems of priestly formation slowly disappeared. Vatican II opting for contextualized theological training, directed local Churches to work out separate programmes of priestly theological education and formation of the students suited to the contexts of their country. More recent official directives on priestly education followed suit and treated priestly formation in the circumstances of the present day. However, going through the religious and priestly education of Chavara, one finds there trends leading towards reform and modernity. This would later, lead to a charism of contextual priestly formation which the community inherited from its founding Fathers including Chavara.

Keywords: Congar, Vatican II, Church, priest, renewal, formation, education, Trent, catechism, theology, malpan, seminary, clergy, Rites, vocations, curriculum, sacrament, educators, professors, doctrine, experience, Eucharist, *magisterium*, directives, priesthood, formative experiments, communion, ministry, inculturation, pluralism, liberation, *malpanates*, Palackal, Syriac, Malayalam, Tamil, Latin, Portuguese, Latin Rite, Chavara, priesthood, Thoppil, Hudra, Mundadan, pastor, reform, modernity, Sanskrit, caste, society, Kerala, Sree Narayana Guru, Pallipuram, Mannanam, printing press, Prelates, customs, traditions, Sankara, Roccas, schism, survey, seminary, Constitutions, animators, Koonammavu, Puthenpally, philosophy, theology, Chethipuzha, Dharmaram, Bangalore.

1. Introduction

Y. Congar, one of the great theologians of the Vatican Council II remarked: "The world will be what the Church is and the Church will be what her priests are."¹ That is why the Decree on Training of Priests (OT) of the Council clearly says that the desired renewal of the whole Church depends on priestly ministry animated by the Spirit of Christ. The Council Fathers, knowing well the Lord's saying, "New wine is poured into fresh wineskins so that both will keep in good condition" (Mt 9:17), took care to revise and update methods of priestly formation to suit the "new wine" of a renewed Church.

As we try to compare the Council's vision of priestly formation with that of St. Chavara, we need to know first, at least in a general manner, the Pre-Vatican form of formation on the one hand, and that before the time of the saint in Kerala on the other.

2. Pre-Vatican II Style of Training and Education of Priests

The period of pre-Vatican II formation can be divided into two types, namely time before the Council of Trent and that between Trent and Vatican II. Type 1 may be suitably called the *apprenticeship* model, to mean that during this time a seminarian would learn what may be called a 'catechism' theology under the sole guidance of the local parish priest in carrying out his priestly duty, understood at that time mostly in terms of cultic performances. In the 13th century, this situation had given rise to the presence of 'ignorant and unformed priests.'² Type 2 may be called *bank deposit* model, in which case theological education would be dumping information and data into the minds of students who have little interest to ponder and assimilate it. Naturally such education would not challenge students nor raise critical questions in them which is necessary to bring about social changes.³ The Thrust of the Council of Trent's Decree on Formation

¹Major Archbishop Antony Padiyara, *Journey in Spirit (Retreat Talk)*, Kochi: Cardinal Publications, 1994, pp. 1-2.

²In 1215, the IV Lateran Council decreed punishments for bishops who ordained such priests. See Tanner N. Ed. *Decree of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. I (Nicaea Lateran V), (Sheed & Ward and Georgetown Uni. Press, 1990), p. 248.

³Paulo Freire distinguishes two types of education - banking type and problem solving type, see Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New York: Continuum, 2007, pp. 45-50.

was to make sure the availability of a law-abiding and obedient group of clerics to do the bidding of the official Church.⁴

3. Priestly Training in Kerala before 19th Century

As in the case of priestly training in the Church, in Kerala also there was no systematic procedure for it. There were "local centres under priest-teachers, who was given the title Malpan, a Syriac term for a learned man or professor or doctor in theology."⁵ Fr. Bernard CMI lists a number of local seminaries like Kalparamba, Puthotta, Karakkunnam, Pulinkunnu, Mylacombe etc., apart from seven common seminaries that functioned in Kerala from 16th to 19th century.⁶ In these local centres the chief medium of instruction was Malayalam, the local language. But the subjects taught were derived from Latin, Western sources and had only an elementary standard.⁷ In this system, a candidate aspiring for priestly life had to get the *deshakuri* (recommendation of the parish assembly) which had certain responsibilities during the training of the candidate in the seminary, like meeting the expenses of the studies, if necessary.⁸ The newly joined candidate received instruction and spiritual formation from an elderly learned member of the local college of clergy, a malpan in a restricted sense. It can be seen that moulding of the clergy by proper discipline was not maintained perhaps at a standard which is considered very important in our times. Many such parish level systems of priestly formation seem to have slowly disappeared from the 16th century onwards.

4. The Council's Context-Friendly Approach

It is worth considering here the important texts from the documents concerned, accompanied by a running commentary to highlight the question at issue. Taking note of the context of pluralism in the world-

⁴See canon 14 of Trent in Tanner, *Decree of the Ecumenical Councils* vol II, p. 749.

⁵Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2008 p. 15.

⁶Bernard of St. Thomas, CMI, *A Short History of T.O.C.D in Kerala* (Malayalam), Mannanam, 1989, p. 265.

⁷Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, p. 15.

⁸Placid Podipara, *Our Rite* (Malayalam), Mannanam, 1943, p.17, quoted in Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, p. 54. In the case of St. Chavara, this expense was met by Malpan Palackal (see Mundadan *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, p. 54.

vision of the 20th century in general, which was quite different from that of the period between I and II Vatican,⁹ the Council directed local Churches and Rites spread out through different nations to work out separate programmes of priestly theological education and formation suited to their contexts.

4.1. The Council and the Contextualized Theological Training

The following is the instruction of the Council Fathers:

In such a great variety of peoples and regions only general laws can be laid down; so in each nation and rite a special 'programme of priestly formation' is to be initiated and determined by the Episcopal Conferences. The said programme is to be revised at suitable intervals and approved by the Apostolic See; thereby the general rules may be adapted to the special circumstances of time and place; so priestly formation may always match the pastoral needs of those regions in which their ministry is to be exercised. (OT 1).

The Council offers directives and remarks on how to foster priestly vocations, how to make changes in the courses taught in major seminaries, revise the curriculum of ecclesiastical studies, give more care to spiritual formation, and how to pay special care for pastoral training and on-going formation. The document instructs that in major seminaries "training of the students should have as its object to make them true shepherds of souls after the example of Lord Jesus Christ." (OT 4). The document then speaks about the need of training in the threefold ministry of the word, sacrament and shepherding. For this the Council lays stress also on the importance of "competent educators" and "professors" who should be "chosen from the best and should receive a careful preparation in sound doctrine, suitable pastoral experience and special training in spirituality and teaching methods." (OT 5). After emphasizing spiritual and pastoral training, the Council asks that the ecclesiastical studies be revised. However, the Council insists: "Before seminarians commence their specifically ecclesiastical studies, they should already have received that literary

⁹Towards the end of the 19th century, efforts were made to revise Thomism, which was the only accepted category of thinking in the Church. Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (1879) bears witness to this fact. Thomism/Neothomism and its ontology had to deal with a fast-evolving world; its ability to respond adequately to existential questions was limited.

and scientific education which is a prerequisite to higher studies in their country" (OT 13).

Presbyterium Ordinis dwells specifically on the ministry of priests as participation in the bishop's office of service (PO 2), which in *Lumen Gentium* has been set forth as comprising threefold action of preaching the word of God, administering the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and governing or shepherding the people of God, the Church (LG 25-27; PO 4-6). In PO 19, focus is on the need of pastoral experience strengthened by sufficient knowledge of secular affairs in order to be animators and facilitators for the people in their daily problems and difficulties. The following are the relevant portions of the document:

Moreover, if priests are to give adequate answers to the problems discussed by people at the present time, they should be well versed in the statements of the Church's *magisterium*... They should also consult the best approved writers on the science of theology. Secular culture and even sacred science are advancing at an unprecedented rate in our time. Priests are therefore urged to adequate and continuous perfection of their knowledge of things divine and human. In this way they will prepare themselves to enter with greater advantage into dialogue with their contemporaries.

To facilitate study and the more effective learning of methods of evangelization and the apostolate, every attention is to be given to providing priests with suitable helps... In addition, bishops, either individually or in collaboration with others should consider more effective ways of arranging that their priests would be able to attend a course of study at certain times, especially for a few years after ordination... Bishops should also be careful to see that some priests devote themselves to deeper study of the sacred sciences. This will ensure that there will never be any lack of suitable teachers for the education of the clerics. (PO 19).

4.2. More Recent Official Directives on Priestly Education

One of the significant Church documents on seminary training and theological education since the Council, issued in 1992 by Pope John Paul II as his apostolic exhortation was *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (PDV), which treated priestly formation in the circumstances of the present

day.¹⁰ This document takes into account what the Council had said about priesthood and priestly training, about other Church documents dealing with formation as well as the results of formative experiments carried out in certain seminaries and institutes of theological formation. While the document dwells on the different areas of priestly formation – human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral – following the Council, special emphasis is laid on human formation, saying that it is the basis of all priestly formation and adds:

So we see that the human formation of the priest shows its special importance when related to the receivers of the mission; in order that his ministry may be humanly as credible and acceptable as possible, it is important that the priest should mould his human personality in such a way *that he becomes a bridge and not an obstacle for others in their meeting with Jesus Christ the Redeemer of man*” (PDV 43 emphasis added).

Speaking about intellectual formation of the seminarian, special mention is made about his theological education. The document observes that the relationship between *magisterium* and theological education should not be one of conflict, but of cooperation because ultimately both “have the same goal: preserving the People of God in the truth which sets free and thereby making them a light to nations” (PDV 55). Besides, PDV considers the seminary as an educational community, built around people involved in formation, and notes that “the unity of the educators not only helps the educational programme to be put into practice properly, but also and above all, it offers candidates for the priesthood a significant example and a practical introduction to that ecclesial communion, which is a fundamental value of Christian living and pastoral ministry” (PDV 66). These and other criteria of priestly formation set down in PDV were matters of scrutiny by Rome during the apostolic visitation of seminaries in India in 1997-99. The results of this visitation may be found in its report: *General Norms and Recommendations*, which were taken note of by the CBCI in its meeting in Jalandhar in February 2002, and decided to revise the CPFI (1988), incorporating these recommendations. The Revised Charter of Priestly Formation (RCPF) was issued in 2004 by Archbishop Peter Fernando on behalf of the CBCI. It is a comprehensive document, covering all aspects of priestly formation at

¹⁰This exhortation is based on the material in preparation for and in the Synod of Bishops on the theme “The Formation of Priests in Circumstances of the Present Day,” held in 1990.

different stages; its concern for formation in the Indian context is spelt out in practical directives.

The Council's thinking on theological education and the response to it expressed by the National Seminar of 1969 gave momentum to a series of research seminars, think-tanks, ashram-living, experiments in liturgical celebrations, seminary training, inculturation of gospel message and so on. In particular the Indian Theological Association was founded in the year 1976, which ever since has been supporting efforts at creating a contextualized theology for India. Besides, the FABC (Federation of Asian Bishops Conference) having taken shape under the inspiration of Vatican II, supported the emergence of a Theology of Religions in the context of the reality of religious pluralism in Asia, after the visit of Pope Paul VI to India in 1970. Similarly, it also has been supportive of the emerging Theology of Liberation in the particular socio-economic context of Asia.

5. Priestly Formation in Kerala from the Time of St Chavara

The system of local/parish level training of candidates to priesthood continued for a long time as we noticed above, until about 1854, when Bernadine Baccinelli, the Vicar Apostolic suppressed the local/parish level *malpanates* and established four seminaries at Mannanam, Vazhakulam, Pulincunnu and Elthuruth, all attached to monasteries, and later also at Puthenpally.¹¹ At the time when Chavara was being trained for priesthood, the *malpanate* system was much in vogue and Fr Thomas Palackal was his malpan. He began teaching since 1818 at Pallipuram with six students, and young Kuriakose was one among them.

5.1. Fr Thomas Palackal: Malpan, Professor and Preacher

Fr Thomas Palackal was fortunate to study under the famous malpan Abraham Thachil of Kuthiathode, and soon after his ordination in 1807, he was appointed the secretary to the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly from 1808 to 1816 and ever since functioned as the consulter to the Vicars Apostolic. In both these capacities he gained the esteem

¹¹Cf. Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, p. 55. It may be seen that in 1890, the Holy See declared the Puthenpally seminary, as 'Central Apostolic Seminary', an inter-ritual institution of the whole Kerala Church. Since 1931/33 it was shifted to Aluva/Mangalapuzha cf. Mundadan, "CMI Legacy of Theological Education", in Kollamparampil *et al* (ed). *Christian Leadership and Integration*, Bangalore, Dharmaram, 2007, pp. 39-44.

and love of his superiors and associates alike. Later, as malpan of Pallipuram seminary, he commanded the respect and affection as well as admiration of his disciples. St Chavara reports that there in the seminary, not only did Fr Palackal teach the students but lived a community life, living with them, joining them in their spiritual exercises, and sitting with them long hours for study, until very late in the night.¹²

In the seminary, they followed a kind of Dominican way of life, which consisted in the dictum *contemplata praedicare* (to teach and proclaim what is learnt through contemplation), which inspired his seminary formation. With great zest he collected manuscripts and printed books in Syriac and Malayalam and other Indian, especially Tamil and foreign languages. He would read them, pray over them and convey their content to his disciples. Besides, he encouraged Chavara and a few other select students to learn languages like Latin and Portuguese. It was with such thirst for knowledge and with an open universal outlook that he formed the priest candidates, studying under his care. Moreover, as a well-known preacher, he had access to the Latin Rite churches as well.¹³

5.2. St Chavara's Upbringing in the 'School of Palackal'

Very early on, Fr Thomas Palackal, the visionary Malpan invited Kuriakose Chavara to priesthood. At the age of 13, Chavara joined the seminary at Pallipuram in 1818. Fr Palackal recognized the genius in the young boy and provided him with every opportunity for learning and nourishment for body, mind and spirit. The boy on his part, set his mind and heart on gaining knowledge.

At the untimely and sudden demise of the most dear ones of Kuriakose – father, mother and only elder brother – due to a small pox epidemic in the village, he was heartbroken. On hearing this news he was tempted from all sides to return home and take up the family responsibility, because he was the only surviving male member in the family. One of his uncles who did not favour Kuriakose going back to the seminary locked him up in a room. God sent Fr Thoppil, his maternal uncle whom nobody in the family dared to oppose. He claimed on behalf of Kuriakose: "Kuriakose has the prudence to make the right decisions, perhaps even more than we elders. He is not the little boy of eleven years who left for the seminary, but someone older

¹²Cf. Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, pp. 68f.

¹³Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, p. 70.

and wiser now. If he feels that he is called to the service of the Church, it is our duty to give him all support."¹⁴ Kuriakose was back in the seminary.

In the seminary, Fr Palackal asked young Kuriakose to compile the canonical prayers from various Syriac books like Hudra (prayers for all Sundays and movable feast days), Gazza (prayers for all immovable feasts) and Kaskul (prayers for week days), which he did at a pace that astounded the malpan himself. This prayer book compiled by him was being used by all Syrian Catholic priests for decades until its Malayalam version was published in the wake of the Council.¹⁵

5.3. Spirit-Filled Prophetic Character of St Chavara

When we look at the life of the saint closely we find that he was not only blessed with a noble birth and early family upbringing at the hands of ideal Christian parents, but also later with saintly and wise gurus like Malpan Palackal. God was preparing him to become a path-breaker in many areas of the socio-religious life of the Church in Kerala at that time. Z. M. Moozhur, CMI who has written extensively on the saint has indeed given a very significant title to one such important book as *Arupiyude Meloppulla Manushyan* (A Man on whom the Spirit has put his Seal), to mean that whatever plan or project the saint put forward, had on it the approval of the Holy Spirit; they had been undertaken under the inspiration and vision of the Spirit. They were relevant, timely and prophetic for both the Church and the society alike.

Mathias Mundadan, in his illustrious volume on St Chavara, makes the following telling remark: "What Dr Johnson said about Oliver Goldsmith, 'He touched nothing that he did not adorn', may be said about Chavara too."¹⁶ This appreciation can be seen verified in all the major undertakings of the saint. In the following lines, we take a look at some of them closely.

¹⁴Benoy P. Jacob, "Multi-faceted Life of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara," in John Mannarathara (ed.) *The Life and Legacy of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, New Delhi, Viva Books Pvt Ltd, 2015, 5-30, p. 8.

¹⁵Jacob, "Multi-faceted Life of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara," p. 9.

¹⁶Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, pp. 345-346.

5.3.1. Perseverance in Priestly Vocation

St Chavara's vocation was seriously tested after he had received the order of tonsure, when both his parents and his only brother fell victims to the epidemic, leaving behind his sister-in-law and her only daughter. His uncles and relatives advised him to return to the family and look after the family and maintain the lineage unbroken. However, he stood firm in his decision and made arrangements to take care of the orphan family.¹⁷

5.3.2. Diligence in Study and Knowledge-Acquisition

Chavara was fortunate to enter the Malpanate at Pallipuram when Fr Palackal was its Rector. Most probably he entered there in 1818 when he was only 13 years old. Even at this tender age he showed rare level of maturity, which was evident in the event of the untimely death of his dear ones, as we have noted earlier. Fr Palackal quickly discerned the genius and studious nature of young Kuriakose and provided him with every opportunity for learning and becoming an erudite priest. Chavara, being well aware of the importance of the knowledge of sacred sciences for the ministry of a good pastor made good use of the golden opportunity. Fr Leopold writes: "After this [reception of the tonsure], our young cleric understood that priests lacking learning are not only useless for others, but also can be the cause of their eternal death. Therefore from the reception of the tonsure on, he tried to become a minister of God through diligent and intense study."¹⁸

5.3.2. Chavara as Malpan and Rector

Chavara played an important role in the formation of the seminarians as Professor even before the demise of Fr Palackal. Even as a Deacon in the Pallipuram seminary, Chavara had some experience of teaching and managing the seminary, because Fr Palackal (Rector) used to entrust the charge of the seminary in his absence to young Kuriakose, including the task of giving some lessons to his classmates, as attested by Fr Philip Koyipallil.¹⁹ And after the death of Malpan Palackal, Msgr Francis Xavier, Vicar Apostolic of Varapuzha, gave Chavara in 1844 the patent letter constituting him as Malpan, and as Examiner of the

¹⁷Cf. Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, p. 62, referring to *Positio* 57.

¹⁸Leopold Beccaro, *A Short Biography of the Venerable Person who Wrote this Pious Colloquy* (Mal.), Koonammavu, 1871, p. ii.

¹⁹Cf. Philip Koyipallil, *Short Biography of Rev. Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Pulincunnu, 1929, p. 6.

priests of the Syrian rite of the Vicariate to give them approval for hearing confession and for preaching in the churches.²⁰

5.3.2. Towards Reform and Modernity

As Chavara was on the van guard of forward-looking movements of the 19th century Kerala,²¹ he played a role similar to that of Herman Gundert through his contributions to the advent of modernity in Kerala. Chavara started popularizing Sanskrit education in 1846, at a time when even people who had learned the Vedas and the Upanishads in Sanskrit had forsaken the language, perhaps under the false propaganda of the British Raj that Sanskrit was a dead language.²² By doing so the saint on the one hand took the first step towards Indianizing the Christian community, bringing it to the mainstream of India, and at the same time opened the door for upward social mobility of the low caste people, who had hardly any access to the portals of education in the caste-ridden society of Kerala. Chavara's plan of indigenizing Christianity included adoption of several practices in vogue among the Hindu brethren, like chanting twilight prayers (*sandhya namam*), use of rosary (*japamala*), lighting oil lamp at dusk (*nilavilakku*), encouraging learning of performing arts like *Bharatanatyam* or *Kathakali*, house-construction in the *nalukettu*-model, all of which in popular belief were restricted only to a particular community.²³

Chavara's unique initiative to bring about the uplift of the poorest and the lowliest was set in motion much earlier than similar endeavours by Gandhiji and Ambedkar. He also established orphanages, rescue homes and destitute homes. While women's

²⁰Cf. *Collected Works of Chavara* (CWC), Vol. I, p. 46.

²¹19th century in the history of India ushered in many progressive movements: The liberation struggle in India took some concrete shape for the first time in the middle of the 19th century. This period also witnessed the emergence of religious reformation movements, such as Brahma Samaj and Arya Samaj, which were primarily aimed at bringing about changes in the orthodox Hindu society of North India in states like Bengal, Rajasthan and Punjab. Later in Kerala emerged Sree Narayana Guru with his social mission that was backed by Chattampi Swamikal, Ayyankali, Sahodaran Ayyappan and others.

²²Cf. M. G. S. Narayan, "Precursor of Reformist Movements," in John Mannarathara (ed.) *The Life and Legacy of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, New Delhi: Viva Books Pvt Ltd, 2015, 37-41.

²³Narayan, *Precursor of Reformist Movements*, p. 40.

empowerment continues to be elusive even today, he established the Carmelite convent, with training schemes in handicrafts and rosary making, which were meant to create in them a sense of self-reliance. Besides, his unique practice of diary-keeping known as *Nalagamangal* proved to be highly useful for the future guidance of institutions.

Such novel yet revolutionary measures introduced by Chavara for the progress of the Christian community and people of Kerala make him a person who walked ahead of his time. When he began such reform measures, Sree Narayana Guru was only a boy of 9 or 10 years (1855-1928). Therefore it may be argued that Chavara's reform measures at least indirectly played a role in showing the path and doing the ground work for the social reforms of Sree Narayana Guru.²⁴

6. CMI Charism of Contextual Priestly Formation

When the almost 200 year-long²⁵ history of priestly formation in the CMI congregation is carefully considered, it can be seen that at all stages of its onward movement, it has always been context-friendly and culture-imbibing. The malpanate style of training the candidates under the well-known Malpan Fr Palackal at Pallipuram (1818) was according to the general *gurukula* pattern of training the seekers (*sadhakas*) in the whole gamut of Vedic Hindu tradition. The first Syro-Malabar common seminary established in 1833 at the monastery at Mannanam inherited this style of formation and carried it forward through Frs Porukara and Chavara. Both of them were raised to the honour of Malpan and Examiners, after the death of Malpan Palackal by Francis Xavier Pescetto, the Vicar Apostolic in the year 1844.²⁶ But soon followed the sad event of the death of Malpan Porukara in 1846, and then Chavara was left alone to bear the huge responsibility of carrying forward several unfinished dream-projects and programmes.

The tradition established at Pallipuram by Fr Palackal, the great Malpan, which was continued at Mannanam and other seminaries attached to the monasteries by his colleagues and trusted disciples like Chavara, marked a new paradigm-shift in the theological education among the St Thomas Christians. These centres of sacred learning

²⁴Narayan, Precursor of Reformist Movements, pp. 40-41.

²⁵The time-span is calculated from the foundation of Pallipuram seminary (1818) by Malpan Fr. Palackal to the present day (2016).

²⁶CWC (Malayalam Vol. I, p. 44)

were accepted by the authorities as competent to produce excellent results, replacing the many local seminaries.²⁷

An indigenous printing press, an indigenous monastery (religious community life) and an indigenous Church were three parts of the holistic learning/training process that Chavara was aiming at. The first one he got established; the second one he tried in his repeated attempts (though not fully successful during his time) to revise and contextualize the Carmelite rule of life imposed on the young religious community, including the title T.O.C.D instead of the name "Servants of Mary Immaculate", proposed by the community; and the third can be seen in his efforts to apprise Rome of the condition of the Church in Kerala, in the wake of the Roccas schism, and intimating to the authorities the genuine need of the Kerala Church to have its own Prelates who could guide her in the local language, customs and traditions.

Chavara saw that, in order to deeply influence and win the respect of the people, the priests must have good knowledge and spiritual insight. Only then would they be able to integrate Christian theology into the Indian context. He must have been aware that in Kerala, the proud inheritor of Adi Sankara's footprints, timid preaching by untrained priests would not create a social, cultural and spiritual synergy. Rather, he thought of a set of trained scholarly priests, who were competent in blending Christian theology with the traditional Indian spiritual outlook. Hence, the priests who were trained in the Mannanam seminary were Chavara's trusted lieutenants in fighting against the Roccas schism which almost eclipsed the Church in 1861.²⁸

7. Contextual Priestly Formation: Stages of Its Evolution

An honest survey of historical facts would show how the community inherited from its founding Fathers the charism of seminary training and how it was engaged from its very early beginnings in the

²⁷Many of the future prelates and prominent priests had at least their early training in these CMI seminaries. For example, Mar Aloysius Pazheparampil, Mar Augustine Kandathil, Servant of God Joseph Vithayathil and so on. See Mundadan, "The CMI Legacy of Theological Education," in Thomas Kollamparampil *et al* Eds. *Christian Leadership and Integration* (Festschrift in Honour of Prof. Dr. Thomas Aykara CMI), Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2007, 31-51.

²⁸Cf. M. Gopinath, "The Saintly Entrepreneur," in John Mannarathara (ed.) *The Life and Legacy of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, New Delhi: Viva Books, 2015, 198-208.

apostolate of theological education of both religious and diocesan clergy. Hence, the CMI Constitutions could rightly claim: "The theological training and formation of candidates to priesthood was an important field of our apostolate from the beginning of the Congregation. We shall preserve this heritage by making use of every opportunity for the ministry of forming spiritual animators of the people of God."²⁹

In the course of time and probably when CMI formation centre was shifted from Mannanam to Koonammavu in 1857, there took place a separation between the diocesan and religious students. Further, when in 1886 the seminary of Puthenpally became the central institute for the training of the diocesan clergy, CMIs needed only to take care of their own religious candidates. Besides, the inter-ritual focus in training also came to an end when the separation of the community into Oriental and Latin Rites congregations after 1887.³⁰

For some time after 1887, the CMIs made use of one or another monastery to cater to the educational requirements of its candidates,³¹ but finally both philosophy and theology courses were given at Chethipuzha until in 1957, the scholasticate was transplanted to Dharmaram Bangalore.

²⁹*CMI Constitutions & Directory* 2014, no. 74.

³⁰Cf. Mundadan, *The CMI Legacy of Theological Education*, pp. 46f.

³¹Philosophy was taught at Mutholi, theology was taught at Chethipuzha, and the pre-philosophical studies were done at Koonammavu.

A HEALTHY MULTI-ETHNIC FORMATION OF THE RELIGIOUS CANDIDATES

Christy Varghese CHF

Abstract: In a modern Indian religious community, which is a melting pot of various cultures and traditions, Christy Varghese CHF delineates strategies for a healthy multi-ethnic formation of the religious candidates. As the number of vocations to religious life diminishes, the mono-ethnic religious congregations are forced to welcome and invite candidates from various cultures and become multi-ethnic groups, which demands a greater challenge both in formation and in ongoing formation. Those religious communities who have initiated the multi-ethnic communities struggle to cope with the different cultures and traditions coming together. For the sake of these communities, she suggests few creative ways and means to maintain healthy multi-ethnic communities in the future, especially in the missions. Beginning with the recruitment, initial stage, novitiate and post-novitiate stages of early formation, she foresees the possible struggle that a candidate can undergo. She also speaks of the role played by the community and the formator who is to be a role model. From practical tips such as the use of common language, she wanders into the higher objectives of the community like vision, mission and charism of the community. Spiritual direction given at this stage is a great emotional assistance, which would lead the formees to face challenging ministries with personal responsibility. She also looks at the ongoing formation where various virtues come to play their roles. She ends the reflection with a few practical recommendations for innovative formation. In conclusion, she notes that some of the probable solutions to the problems arising in the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural communities are in changing the motivations and in living as *alter Christus* and having shift in the formation of candidates especially in the field of affective maturity.

Keywords: vocations, cultures, formation, communities, traditions, missions, recruitment, candidate, maturity, admission, transcripts,

recommendation, candidacy, novitiate, history, traditions, spirituality, novice, temporary vows, poverty, chastity, obedience, maturity, insight, formator, community, patience, tolerance, selflessness, experience, love, freedom, peace, language, vision, mission, charisma, confession, vocation, promoter, asceticism, austerity, radicalism, consecration, eroticism, consumerism, power, spiritual, direction, dialogue, psyche, ministries, exposure, transformation, emotions, counselling, responsibility, belongingness, *metanoia*, forgiveness, charity, humility, patience, sensitivity, loneliness, frustration, trust, creativity, initiative, dedication, diversity, gift, chastity, diversity, divisions, difference, indifference, appreciation, friendship, respect, festivals.

1. Introduction

As the number of vocations to religious life diminishes the mono-ethnic religious congregations are forced to welcome and invite candidates from various cultures and become multi-ethnic groups, which demands a greater challenge both in formation and in ongoing formation. Those religious communities who have initiated the multi-ethnic communities struggle to cope with different cultures and traditions. For the sake of these communities, we suggest few creative ways and means to maintain healthy multi-ethnic communities in the future, especially in the missions.

2. Recruitment

The quality of a congregation depends on the formation and the worth of its members. "Now the quality of the members will hang on how carefully they have been selected and recruited. We have to greatly consider the family and the faith background of the candidate. If the seed is not good, however hard one may try to cultivate it, one can never make it good. A coconut will not grow into a mango tree, nor will a mango grow into a coconut tree. The original quality remains. Postponing a problem does not solve it. If a disease is not healed, in course of time it becomes malignant and more troublesome."¹ Therefore the quality of the members is of paramount importance. A careful and selective recruiting should be practiced by all the religious communities. Points to remember in the process of recruiting are the

¹George Kaitholil, *Communion in Community*, Mumbai: St. Paul Publications, 2002, p. 30.

family background, faith practices, association with church, quality not the quantity, and motivation.

3. Initial Stage and Discernment

Since the candidates come from various cultures and traditions they require a quality time to form themselves. In some cases, sometimes it is necessary to prolong the period of formation in the initial stage. It is befitting that the promotion of the candidates should depend on their maturity and quality. The director of vocations or the formator will guide the candidate through her initial discernment. It is very important to check the motivation of the candidates when she enters into a congregation. Effective methods of screening will help to check the motivation of the candidates to a large extent. During this time, the following practices are desirable: The candidates will have regular meetings with a spiritual director or formator and they will experience some of the ministries of the Congregation at least in a limited manner.

During the admission of a candidate certain documents may be files for them individually. They include a completed questionnaire, a short autobiographical sketch, educational transcripts, medical/dental forms, letters of recommendation, results of psychological test and evaluation and a criminal background check.

3.1. Candidacy

Generally, the period of candidacy lasts three months to one year. The candidate lives in a designated religious house of the community. During this period, the candidate observes religious life in the community in an active discernment and members of the religious house might gauge the disposition of the candidate. The candidate is expected to participate in the prayer schedule of the house and observe the members of the house as they exercise their ministerial duties. The candidate continues to meet with the director of vocations and/or a designated member of the community to discern her readiness for novitiate. After consultation with the members of the house the director of vocations may recommend the candidate for the next step of formation.

3.2. Novitiate

Novitiate is the period of initiation into the institute and constitutes an irreplaceable and privileged stage in the formation. It is a time for the novice to prepare and deepen her commitment to Christ through the

profession of vows in the congregation. The preparation for this great commitment requires growth in self-awareness and self-acceptance. During this period, the novice studies the history, traditions and spirituality of the congregation. At the end of novitiate the novice professes temporary vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. As a vowed member of the congregation, the novice begins the last stage of formation – the post-novitiate.

3.3. Post-Novitiate

The goal of the post-novitiate formation is the personal development of the whole person, to help her grow in Christian maturity by becoming more aware of God's merciful love, to help her deepen her vowed commitment to the Risen Christ, to help her adapt her personal life in order to strengthen common life and to help her develop her gifts and talents so that she may use them in the apostolic work of the congregation. "Her spiritual life should not remain at the same depth, which is experienced during her initial stages of religious life. God should become more and more the one longed for."²

4. Formator

Formation is a process effected in the heart of the young candidate as she participates in the work of the Father who forms in her the attitude of the Son, through the Spirit. Religious consecration is in the call of God, who working through the Holy Spirit, is the principal agent in the formation. The same Spirit works through the formator. Hence, a great deal of humility and a penetrating spiritual insight are necessary to become a formator. Additionally, she should have much interior freedom. She is an elder sister in faith and in discipleship, who is prepared to give not only spiritual assistance but also psychological help. "In formation, the first factor is what the formator is, the second what she does, and the third what she says."³ A patient formator waits for God's hour and adapts to the rhythm of his grace, just as Jesus patiently educated the disciples during his public life. Formation depends largely on the formator. A formator has to be authentic, autonomous, secure, formed in spiritual discernment, firm but gentle, guided by the Holy Spirit, attentive to the candidates, serene, patient,

²Bhavaya, *Indian Women in Religious Life: A Formative Approach*, Holy Family Publications, Thrissur, 2003, p. 179.

³Cf. L. M. Rulla, *Anthropology*, Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1980, p. 399.

available, pastoral, understanding, approachable, mature, impartial and broadminded.

5. Role of the Community

Formation depends to a great extent on the quality of the community. This quality is the result of its general climate and the style of life of its members.⁴ It is fitting to recall here the words of Pope John Paul II's message to the religious in Brazil: "It will therefore be good that the young, during the period of formation, reside in formative communities where there should be no lack of the conditions required for a complete formation: spiritual, intellectual, cultural, liturgical, communitarian and pastoral; conditions which are rarely found together in small communities." Community is the place that would help the candidates in their growth even though at times there are difficulties in adjusting certain characters and personalities. Candidates would learn from the members of the community many good things like patience, tolerance, selflessness etc., and experience love and understanding.⁵

6. Role Models

The present generation looks for models as they are very much exposed to perceptions that come to them from all directions. Generally, they look upon somebody in the community by whom they feel inspired and driven to the Lord. Hence, the religious who are in the formation houses are to be authentic and committed to the Lord in their life than in their words. Everyone in the community has to contribute her best to the growth of the community by playing the different roles assigned and fulfilling them with a sincere heart. Candidates would be able to learn important lessons of religious life from a community where the members love genuinely and accept one another, where all are treated like adults, where there is tolerance, patience, understanding and appreciation, where disagreements do not disintegrate the community, where there is a spirit of freedom and inner peace, where there is forgiveness, sense of humour and joy in living.

⁴*Directives on Formation in Religious Institute*, Mumbai: St. Paul Publications, 1990, pp. 25-26.

⁵Kaitholil, *Communion in Community*, p. 34.

7. Use of Common Language

In a multilingual community, all the members need to agree on one common language of the community. This could be the language of the locality or the national language. Where this is not practical, the best choice would be English, which all members of the community learn to follow. "People can easily fall into the temptation to form, almost unconsciously and probably without malice, language-based groups. Therefore we should diligently avoid speaking in the community anything other than the common language. That is an important, though often forgotten, way to build up community. To break this rule is to break many hearts and community. That makes real communion among the members impossible."⁶ Experienced formators warn strongly against this tendency.

8. Vision, Mission and Charism

The candidates who join the congregation must be made aware of what religious life is, and what the vision, mission and the charism of the particular congregation are. Because personally one of my candidates has told me sister "I did not know this is what the religious life all about. I think I am not fit to be here." I was so happy to hear her sincere confession. It is the duty of the formator or the vocation promoter to give a clear cut idea what this life is meant to be.

9. Ascetic Life

There is an indispensable need of moderate asceticism in formation and in religious life. "Religious in formation should be able to find a spiritual atmosphere, an austerity of life, and an apostolic enthusiasm within their community, which are conducive to their following Christ according to the radicalism of their consecration."⁷ In a world of eroticism, of consumerism and all kinds of abuse of power, there is a need for witnesses of the Paschal mystery of Christ. The formators are strongly advised insert daily, personal asceticism into an integral programme of formation. Such a programme tends to be perennial and cannot go out of style. It is always contemporary and always necessary.

⁶Kaitholil, *Communion in Community*, p. 28.

⁷Directives on Formation in Religious Institute, pp. 26-27.

10. Spiritual Direction

The candidates who come to join a religious community may be compared to raw materials. They come from various cultures, traditions and levels of faith. It is only through frequent spiritual direction and solid dialogue that the candidate can grow in the love of Jesus and deepen their commitment to their vocation. Formators are invited to nourish the soul of the candidate solidly and assist them to discern their call.

11. Emotional Assistance

The candidates come from various family backgrounds which are nourished by various cultures. Often they carry several wounded feelings and scarred psyche, which only God can touch and heal. Hence, it is a must that they attend some inner healing retreats and sessions which would be a great help in their spiritual as well as community life.

12. Challenging Ministries

Direct exposure helps the young minds to capture the reality of life. Taking the candidates from multi-cultural background to various challenging ministries along with a reasonable input enables them to get a glimpse of the common issues faced by people. Additionally, this is an exposure to the vision and mission of the congregation. "Today Indian scene poses many challenges for the religious life. There are people around poor and struggling. The candidates lack knowledge about the world, its problems, evolutions and transformation, which are factors that necessarily influence religious life."⁸If the congregation intends to serve people effectively, the candidates need to understand the forces that are shaping the society today.

13. Psycho-Education

The candidates who enter into a congregation are endowed with different skills, strengths and unmet needs. "Some have very little capacity for genuine freedom because they are always conditioned by their conflicts and needs. Unless help is extended to them, they are unable to grow beyond a certain point of maturity. However hard they try, they keep falling back on their maladjusted behaviour. The candidates who progress are ones who have problems but who are

⁸Bhavya, *Indian Women in Religious Life*, p. 213.

able to move ahead with human help together with prayer and grace of God."⁹ Therefore, they should be given adequate psycho education. Of course, the candidates should get an opportunity to tell all their untold stories and give vent to their unexpressed feelings and emotions. Counselling is one of the means the formators might adopt.

14. Personal Responsibility

The candidates who are called by God give a response of love in their turn to Christ: "The candidate must not see herself as a passive, receptive object being moulded and shaped by outside forces; rather, she has a particular and very necessary role to play. She is the protagonist and the one responsible for her own formation, because she is the one called by God and who responds freely to the call of God."¹⁰ She is therefore invited unceasingly to give an attentive, new and responsible reply. The call is not something forced, rather a personal loving response with a great responsibility. The journey of each religious will recall that of the people of God in Exodus, and the slow evolution of the disciples who were "slow to believe," (Lk 24:25) but who, in the end were burning with fervor when the risen Lord revealed Himself to them. This indicates the extent to which formation of a religious should be personalized.

15. Multi-Cultural Festivals

Everyone loves and respects one's own nation, state, traditions and culture. It would do good if the formators keep in mind the fact that once the candidates are in the four walls of the convent all their individual culture and traditions are forgotten. Hence, it is fitting to celebrate the festivals of states from where the candidates hail. This creates a feeling of welcome and the community becomes more homely.

16. Ongoing Formation

Ongoing formation is an intrinsic requirement of religious consecration, for God calls each one at every moment and in new circumstances.¹¹ It should not be forgotten that the Paschal peace and joy of a community are always the fruit of death to self and the

⁹Antony Puthenangady, *Everyone's Inner Child*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2006.

¹⁰Bhavya, *Indian Women in Religious Life*, p. 179.

¹¹Bhavya, *Indian Women in Religious Life*, p. 139.

reception of the gift of the Spirit. A communion of purposes should bring the religious together in the bond of charity and make the religious house a sweet oasis of peace. Incorporation into religious community involves a formation of the heart that affects the attitudes and preference by which a person sets priorities and makes decisions. One has to pass through a continuous *metanoia*, conversion.

16.1. Forgiveness

Forgiveness is essential to community life. To forgive is not to suppress hurt feelings, but to be conscious of them and still accept the offender.¹² Community is what we make of it. In the community, the religious do have their difficulties, their ups and downs, as in a family. Nevertheless, thanks to a forgiving heart, all is well again. We must show the world that in our communities the peace of Christ reigns. "Let there be charity, humility and patience in us all."¹³ There is none among us who does not fail occasionally. We must "therefore be compassionate as our Father in heaven is compassionate" (Lk 6:36).

16.2. Sensitivity

Everyone has a need to be accepted, esteemed and loved. This is why St. Paul exhorts: "Accept one another, then for the glory of God, as Christ has accepted you" (Rom 15:7). The essential problem of the human person is that of love. The human person is created to love and to be loved. Love is the language that every human heart understands; in fact it understands no other language.¹⁴ We should never be cold or indifferent with the needs of the other which would result in isolation, loneliness and emotional frustration.

16.3. Risking Trust

Young and old, everyone alike, has an inner need to be trusted and to be entrusted with responsibility. "Active and responsible obedience is the mark of mature religious. It is necessary to recognize the creativity, initiative, and dedication of each member and her aspiration to assume a communitarian responsibility. All members must feel free to offer their precious contribution for the common good."¹⁵ In a community,

¹²Kaitholil, *Communion in Community*, p. 131.

¹³A. M. Mundadan, *The Writings of Mother Mariam Thresia*, Trichur: Ebenezer Printers, 1994, p. 120.

¹⁴Kaitholil, *Communion in Community*, p. 54.

¹⁵Kaitholil, *Communion in Community*, p. 54.

especially in a multi-cultural setting, forgoing all the prejudices, the natural capacities, supernatural gifts, insights and commitment of all the candidates are to be recognized. This recognition will lead to shared responsibilities for the good of the community.

16.4. Diversity as a Gift

The Universal Church is a communion of various individual churches that are diverse in nature, texture and expressions. "Christ needs a diversity of persons to carry on his mission."¹⁶ Since all the members of a religious community have dedicated themselves to Christ through consecrated chastity, their union with Christ unites them also among themselves. The edifice of a church is made up of various components like walls, windows, floors, doors, beams, steeple and so on. They have different functions and cannot all be the same, yet, together they make up the one church. The various parts form a composite whole. So too, common life is lived in diverse ways. However, a union is found in the joining of our spirits in the Holy Spirit.¹⁷ Diversities are not divisions, and a difference should not be permitted to lead to indifference.

16.5. Appreciation

Open recognition of the talents and qualities of all members of the community and expression of sincere esteem for each other and honour given to others for a work done well or for the progress made in a particular field, are the expressions of fraternal charity and human generosity. "We are obliged to become loving persons and give love and appreciation to others."¹⁸ Since the candidates for a religious community come from various intellectual backgrounds, excellence is to be measured not on the basis of their output, but the sincere effort that each individual makes.

16.6. Fraternal Love

Fraternal love and friendly relations should flourish among consecrated persons. "Real love has two aspects: love of God and love

¹⁶A. van Kaam, *Personality Fulfilment in the Religious Life*, New Jersey: Dimension Books, 1969.

¹⁷Kaitholil, *Communion in Community*, p. 55.

¹⁸M. Mundadan, *The Writings of Fr. Joseph Vithayathil*, Thrissur: Holy Family Publications, 2007, p. 161.

of neighbour. God has called us to love others."¹⁹ The religious who closely follow Christ who in total freedom came to serve human beings, should copy in their life his love, freedom and spirit of service. "The friendship and contacts of the religious should be like salt in food, medicine in illness and fragrance in the air. Their social contacts and personal relationships should bring goodness where there is evil, virtue where there is sin, and divine knowledge where there is ignorance. Their friendship should bring them and their friends closer to God."²⁰ Since fraternal love is the foundation of any religious community, the candidates must be loved and based on the love that they receive, they will learn to love the community as "the children of a mother."²¹

16.7. Acceptance for One Another

In a community comprising of members from multi-cultural backgrounds, the members must accept one another as each one is. The candidates from various backgrounds are in the community, not because they are what we want them to be or what we are or what we think we are. "Every individual is unique and unrepeatable. We must therefore, respect their differences of ideas, opinions, tastes, likes and dislikes. Many problems arise from one's inability to accept other members as they are. Unity is not the same as uniformity or even unanimity."²² Receiving a candidate in to the community entails receiving her into the hearts of the members as well.

16.8. Friendship and Sharing

The religious have come together, not on the basis of flesh and blood, nor under the influence of an emotional inclination to love. "The same vocation, the same obedience and the same spirit of service have brought them together. The spiritual dimension of community life is of capital importance. Love and closeness to the Lord and to his teachings is the measure of friendship and cordiality among the members. Since all the members of a religious community have dedicated themselves to Christ through consecrated chastity, their union with Christ unites them also among themselves. As all of them are marching towards the same goal, when they love and serve one

¹⁹Mundadan, *The Writings of Mother Mariam Thresia*, p. 161.

²⁰Kaitholil, *Communion in Community*, p. 85.

²¹Mundadan, *The Writings of Mother Mariam Thresia*, p. 124.

²²Kaitholil, *Communion in Community*, p. 139.

another, they share in the love of Christ himself.”²³ They grow and become capable of sharing that love with others as well.

16.9. Mutual Respect

Respect of personality in and by the community is another important need of all members. All expect to be taken seriously as unique and distinct persons. They feel and want to remain someone, and expect to be consulted and treated as valid counterparts in dialogue. “All want their individual freedom to be respected and their strictly personal matters to be left to their discretion. The most important issue is union and communion of life in which all members are equally sisters regardless of position, talents or past history.”²⁴ Mutual respect and concern should prevail in the members.

16.10. Community Meeting

Community meeting is meant to be a fraternal sharing of experiences, evaluations, ideas, and plans among the members. This helps the members to understand one another better, to participate in the life and activity of the community more meaningfully and deepens the fraternal communion in the community. When the young candidates are admitted to some of these meetings and given a taste of importance and a glimpse of at least a few aspects of the community life, they grow in the sense of belongingness.

16.11. Knowing One Another

The foundation of true fraternity lived in community is a communion in truth. This communion demands that each member of the community has a correct knowledge of oneself and others. “We should know our limitations as well as our value and merit. We are not able to really accept and welcome another if we do not know our own interior and exterior reality. To understand the person is something much deeper than to know what the person said or did.”²⁵ We can understand deeply only what we love. The one who loves, gathers the profound reality of the other and on its basis interprets her words and actions.

²³Kaitholil, *Communion in Community*, p. 84.

²⁴Kaitholil, *Communion in Community*, p. 55.

²⁵Kaitholil, *Communion in Community*, p. 140.

17. Recommendations for Innovative Formation

On the basis of the above analysis of the various aspects of formation of candidates in a multi-lingual community, the following recommendations are made:

Formation of a new person in the likeness of Christ: Take care to speak of Jesus by actions than by words. Do not contribute to the formation of persons to be powerful but to be humble, not to be successful but to be faithful. Spend quality time to intensify relations with Jesus Christ and with one another.

Formation should lead to identification: Help the candidates to learn their identity as a religious in a congregation and a local community. Bring them into contact with religious that are enthusiastic, joyful, committed and full of hope.

Formation programme includes psychological tests, counselling, spiritual direction, opportunity for interaction, faith sharing and exposure.

18. Conclusion

Consecrated life is a gift of God the Father to his Church through the Holy Spirit. The evangelical counsels were the hallmark of the life of Jesus the chaste, poor and obedient one. The principal purpose of formation at its various stages is to immerse religious in the experience of God and to help them perfect it gradually. Love is the heart of formation. Falling in love with the man of 33 of Galilee is important in religious life. When love is kindled, the religious will be ready to take up any asceticism, any risk, and any challenge for his sake. This life of total dedication and service of the religious, however, is not a bed of roses.

Some of the probable solutions to the problems arising in the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural communities are: not in changing the mode of life but in changing the motivations; not in choosing another way of life, but in living as *alter Christus* and not in having change in the form of life, but having change in the formation of candidates especially in the field of affective maturity.

BOOK REVIEW

Thomas Kochumuttom CMI, *Spirituality of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara* (Theological Studies on Saint Chavara I), Kochi: Chavara Central Secretariat & Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 560 029, India, 2017, pp. xxxi + 431, ISBN: 978-93-8464-76-4, Price Rs. 360; US \$ 30.

Thomas Kochumuttom's book *Spirituality of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, is a sequel to his earlier one titled *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara* (2014) in which the life story of the saint is dealt with, whereas the present one concentrates on discovering what may be called a Chavara spirituality by carefully examining more or less the same data of the life story but from a spiritual perspective. Moreover, this study is broader in scope with theological reflections, as it brings in some fresh data of his life bearing on his spirituality. Referring to sources like the different biographies of the saint, his writings, letters, prayers, circulars and relevant ecclesiastical documents, the author has brought to light various facets of the saint's spirituality.

The historical context, events and needs of the time play a great role in shaping the life-vision, attitude and also the spiritual outlook of a person. St Chavara who belonged to the Syro-Malabar Church of the 19th century, was part and parcel of the struggles and dreams of the Church and society of his time. God in his providence made use of these harsh realities in order to mould in the course of the century the magnificent image of Chavara the Saint, and Kochumuttom, the author has vividly captured this enchanting image and presented it beautifully in his present work (Foreword, p. xiii).

Apart from dexterously knitting together the different facets of the Saint's spirituality, the author offers also theological reflections on Christian spirituality, particularly of consecrated persons, priests and religious. Kochumuttom has based these reflections not only on the words, deeds and experiences of Chavara, but also on verses and texts from the Bible and from Scriptures of other religions, wherever relevant. His being a specialist in other major Indian religions, like Hinduism and Buddhism, his long years of life in solitude and recollection at the Jeevan Dhara Ashram, Jaiharikhal, in the

Himalayas, as well as his strenuous study of Chavara's life and works, jointly make these reflections truly relevant and worth considering.

According to the author, the saint's spirituality may be identified in terms of a few virtues, events and incidents that stand out in his life and in his writings. We shall indicate some of them here, giving references to the pages of this volume, without going to their sources, quoted by the author. The saint's most outstanding virtue is identified as his love for the Mother Church. To establish this point, in chapters 2, 3 and 4, he discusses Chavara's ecclesial concerns, his undertakings for the renewal of the Church, his historic intervention in defence of Catholic unity, his many innovative contributions for the good of the Church and society at large. In discussing these events and incidents, the author re-iterates that "they were selfless, having in mind nothing but the benefit of the Church and society. Even in founding the two religious congregations, one for men and the other for women, their primary objective was to serve the Church and society." (p. xvii).

Another very important aspect of the spirituality of Chavara is presented as his community spirit. In order to affirm this point, the author, in chapters 5, 6 and 7, discusses that by establishing an institute for consecrated life, what was added to the life of Chavara and other founders was the community aspect. Prior to this, they were already practising the 'evangelical spirit' of poverty, chastity and obedience, though not in terms of professed vows. But now, that is, after the establishment of the institute, they began to live, work and pray together as a community, having no private possessions and programmes, but everything in common. The practice of real Christian love in its fullest sense, began to flourish, not merely among the community members, but extended to all people irrespective of caste, creed and class.

In the next few chapters the author outlines the contours of the saint's spirituality centred on his religious life. Thus in chapter 9, he strives to set forth the "Ideals of Religious Life", envisaged by Chavara and others, by analysing the terminology, used by them to describe their thoughts about the new way of life now in progress. One of the original expressions in this regard was "withdrawn life", uttered first by Thomas Porukara (p. 81). Here the word used for religious life, namely *vana-vāsa*, need not be taken in the literal sense, which is clear from the subsequent words and deeds of Porukara. What was really meant was "a life withdrawn from the worldly affairs so that he could serve God and his people without distraction. In those days the word

'*vana-vāsa*' might have been a common expression among the locals including Christians for religious life." (p. 82).

Another mutually complementary double expression referring to the kind of their spirituality is *darśana-viṭu* (a house of vision) and *tapasu-bhavanam* (house of austerity). According to Kochumuttom, the first expression means, "The religious should be people of clear vision (*darśana*) about life and the principles of life, regarding what to do and what not to do. They should be equally persons of austerity and ascetical practices (*tapas*), leading a life that is simple and austere." (p. 84).

Still another expression, we get, throwing light onto the spirituality of consecrated life of saint Chavara and companions is *otungi-pārkkal*, literally meaning a withdrawn life, which in effect however would mean *a life in solitude*, keeping distance from the noisy and disturbing world, so that contact with God and prayerfulness becomes easier (p. 86).

Another ingredient of their spiritual life was 'involvement in the world' for the sake of the 'common good'. Bp. Stabilini, in his reply to the request of the founding fathers for permission to lead a withdrawn life, reminds them that such a life in solitude and silence can include also availability for pastoral ministry and other apostolates. Thus emerges the idea of a religious house in the midst of the people, *a monastery from which not only the members but others also may profit* (p. 88). In this development of the original charisma we find that Chavara lived and bequeathed to posterity the twin spirituality of contemplation and prophetic action.

Bes-rauma (house on hilltop) is yet another Syriac word, which they chose to christen the first monastery that was set up on mount Mannanam. It is indeed a significant expression pointing to the "elevated nature of the life that those in the monastery should live so that they become a symbol of Christian life for all others to look at and feel inspired and challenged." (p. 92). They were to be a city built on a hill that cannot be hid and a lighted lamp placed on a stand so that it gives light to all in the house (Mt 5:14-16).

In chapters 10 to 16, Kochumuttom discusses at length how Chavara and companions perceived and lived the evangelical counsels of chastity (*kanni-sukham/brama-cāriyam*), poverty (*agatitoam*) and obedience (*col-vili*). The three counsels "refer respectively to bridal mysticism, childlike trust in God and complete dependence on his providence, and unconditional surrender to his will, made known mostly through human agents." (Preface, p. xviii). Later, in chapters 10

and 11, consecrated virginity, differentiated as priestly celibacy, consecrated widowhood and consecrated virginity as such (*brahmacharya*) is discussed at length, noting that "Among the three religious vows, the most basic one certainly is that of chastity in the sense that the other two spontaneously arise from it."

Kochumuttom describes clearly the "dynamic, steadfast and fruitful" nature of the vow of chastity, precisely because vow of consecrated virginity is a question of love-relationship between Jesus and the religious, man or woman and because love is a dynamic reality in the sense that it undergoes a gradual process of growth and maturing, until it is finally all pure and totally selfless (pp. 124f). Similarly, he describes the steadfast and enduring nature of love in consecrated virginity to be modelled on Yahweh's love for the people of God in the Old Testament. In this connection, the story of Anastasia's martyrdom is presented to illustrate that the consecrated virgin's love for her divine Spouse survives even death (pp. 126f).

Kochumuttom then explains the third character of consecrated virginity, namely fruitfulness. Virginity does not mean barrenness, inability to become a parent. Presenting the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary, he argues that, because of her virginity she also became mother, greatest of all mothers, the Mother of God. If the vocation of a parent is to bring new life into the world, Mother Mary by her virginity brought life not of any particular individual, but the author of life itself, Jesus Christ. In a similar way, every consecrated person, by virtue of the vow of chastity must become a channel of God's love to flow to the people (pp. 130f). In this connection Kochumuttom also offers some relevant reflections on the signs of celibate life, based on the life experience of the late Swami Sadanand CMI, and holds that "solitude, silence, discipline, austerities, prayer and meditation, these indeed are the signs of celibacy for the people in India (p. 136).

In the next chapters 12, 13 and 14, Kochumuttom discusses at length Chavara's understanding and practice of the vow of poverty. He dwells meaningfully on the significant expression "*agatitvam*" (having no means to survive) to bring out the profundity of the kind of poverty they had practised. It means not only that they did not have any private or personal possessions, having owned everything in common, but also that even with regard to things in use, nobody would say "my pen" or "my umbrella" etc., but "the pen I use", "the room I use" etc. Moreover, Chavara, from the beginning of his seminary life, had adopted the motto, "The Lord is my portion" (Ps 16:5), which implied complete detachment from all that is not God. It

would appear that Providence offered him a chance to test his resolve when a deadly epidemic took away his parents and his only brother. By the grace of God he persevered in his resolve, and entrusting his family matters to his married sister, he renounced the family inheritance and pursued his priestly studies. We are at a loss to understand what made him to take these extreme steps in the practice of poverty, as we know that the idea of a professed religious life was nowhere in sight yet.

Quoting excerpts from the *Testament* of the saint, written to the members of the congregation towards the end of his life (1870), Kochumuttom affirms that these excerpts bear testimony to Chavara's understanding of religious obedience as the unconditional and total surrender of one's will to God's which in turn is the identity mark of a consecrated person (p. 96). In the next two chapters 15 and 16, Kochumuttom elaborates on this point under two significant headings "Obedience through Suffering" and "Obedience: the only Mark of a Religious". With regard to the former title, the author reminds us of the unfortunate incidents during the tenure of Archbishop Francis Xavier, the Vicar Apostolic who, under the instigation of Ezhunnuttikar, the so-called 'high class' families, became suspicious about the monastery project and decided to block its construction, by ordering a sudden transfer of Chavara from Mannanam as the Vicar of Pallipuram parish, and appointment of Porukara as the vicar of some parishes in the diocese of Kollam etc. In the case of Chavara's transfer, though the matter was presented to the Archbishop by Chavara for his kind re-consideration so that the construction works may smoothly continue, he turned it down and rebuked Chavara who then "with fear and trembling withdrew and at once obeyed the order, taking charge of the Pallipuram parish" (p. 180). As for the appointment of Porukara, "after discussing the matter in detail [with *malpan* Palackal who was ill] Porukara concluded that the Archbishop's order, even if it is issued to test their spirit of obedience, should be considered God's will, and therefore be obeyed forthwith without complaint. The *malpan* agreed and Porukara left for Kollam in tears." (p. 180). These two incidents caused untold suffering to the founding fathers, which were indeed test cases to prove the quality of their obedience, because later the Archbishop relented and took corrective measures to help construction of the monastery.

Moreover, the saint's encounter with the Archbishop with a request to relieve him free for the construction work and to appoint in his place Fr Varkey, a new priest of the same Pallipuram parish

brought him great shame, pain and suffering at the hands of the Archbishop, although the high quality of his obedience here again brought matters to a happy finale (p. 183).

More crucial tests and trials against obedience were on their way: The most difficult of them was the canonical approval of consecrated life in the tradition of the Malabar Church, which was delayed indefinitely for almost a quarter of a century (1831-1855). The Vicars apostolic came and went one after another - Maurilius Stabilini, Francis Xavier, Ludovic Martini and Bernardine Baccinelli. All of them were happy with the community, but would not readily give canonical approval, probably because they were prejudiced against the depth and rootedness in matters of faith and morals of the Syrian Rite people, including saint Chavara, as it would appear from some of the official letters, written to Rome by the Archbishop and missionaries in connection with an enquiry from Rome regarding the possibility of the prior's consecration as bishop. Certainly it could hurt the feelings of the community, and they could rightly feel that their basic rights as equal members of the Church were denied. But trusting in God's providence and in a spirit of obedience and respect for ecclesiastical authorities they patiently waited for God's time to redress their complaints and realize their dreams.

Finally, after a long waiting, when the approval came, the Archbishop unilaterally imposed on them the rule of the OCD Order, totally rejecting their request to adapt the rule to their Syrian and local traditions on the one hand, and not to destroy the original spirit and charism of the new congregation. This action was again a denial of their basic rights and disregard for their ecclesial identity. But they, under the guidance of Chavara, did not react, but decided to cooperate, in spite of the unfortunate incident of the withdrawal of 11 out of 22 candidates who were getting ready for professed life for fear of their inability to observe the unduly strict rule. Chavara gracefully bore the pain of the loss of so many members and the disgustingly cold response of the Archbishop, who said: "Only those of good will and determination need to be admitted. Don't worry about the dropouts. I shall pray for the remaining few." (p. 186).

To cap it all, now comes the senseless action of the OCD Superior General, who, most probably with the connivance of Baccinelli, the Vicar Apostolic, highhandedly, without any consultation, affiliated the new congregation as their Third Order (TOCD), thereby destroying its identity as an indigenous institute, depriving the saint of his position as prior general, thus throwing to the winds its autonomous character.

Surely many members must have risen protesting against the entire episode. But Chavara, trusting that in the course of time, God will put things right, kept his cool, and pacified his brethren. He was prudent, taking the whole situation into account, hence tolerant, forgiving and generously obedient (pp. 183-188).

In chapter 16, the author continues discussing Chavara's obedience under the title "The only Mark of a Religious". The bitter experiences and harsh treatment at the hands of persons in authority must have led him to conclude that obedience is the only mark of a religious. The author, while explaining the kind of "obedience as if one does not have one's own eyes and ears", advocated by Chavara, tries to situate it in the present-day understanding of what is called "responsible and creative versus blind obedience." While concluding the discussion, the author, interpreting the mind of the saint adds that, far from being authoritarian, the superiors must involve the subjects in the decision-making process, promoting among them responsible and creative obedience. In support of this, he quotes Chavara's code of conduct for superiors in a letter written to Fr. Kuriakose Porukara, vicar of Mannanam monastery (pp. 189-208).

In chapters 17, 18 and 19 the author discusses the theme of prayer and prayerfulness, austerity and other virtues practised by saint Chavara and other founding members of the community. In this connection, Chavara's mystical leanings and insights as well as some kind of mystical phenomena (pp. 227-229) reported by some eyewitnesses are also brought out. Chavara's intense devotion to the Eucharistic Lord is the theme of chapter 20, which the author has rightly titled as "Apostle of the Holy Eucharist". The author has devoted the next 4 chapters 21, 22, 23 and 24 to discuss Chavara's great devotion to Mother Mary, considering himself as Mariadas (servant of Mary), his conviction that she is an essential part of the Christian community and life as portrayed in his *Ātmānutāpam* (pp. 286f). The author presents Chavara in chapters 25, 26, 27 as a grateful as well as penitent saint, and deal with his instructions about common pitfalls in the life of the religious and priests; there are also practical reflections on confession and spiritual direction.

In the final three chapters 28, 29 and 30, the author by way of concluding the whole discussion, briefly mentions that the characteristic mark of Chavara's spirituality is his ability to be a contemplative in action (*karma-yogi*). This great ideal of spirituality is the key concept in Bhagavad-Gita, a spiritual classic of India, which Chavara, true to his rootedness in Indian, Carmelite and Eastern

traditions of spirituality realized in his person. The rest of chapter 28 is a summing up of what made him an 'Active Chavara' and a 'Contemplative Chavara'. Chapter 29 succinctly puts before us the story of the smooth transition from the initial Dominican ideal of "*contemplata predicare*" (to preach what is experienced in meditation) to becoming "Servants of Mary Immaculate of Carmel", when they made their profession of vows in 1855. Kochumuttom notes "that the change from being Dominicans to Carmelites was rather natural and inevitable." (p. 378). In the final chapter, he gathers up some "Practicalities of Chavara Spirituality."

While focussing on the spirituality of Chavara, the author has also considered that of the other founders and the founding communities of both CMI and CMC congregations. Hence, this work will be of interest to members of both the communities. Moreover, it is common knowledge that the Trio - Frs Palackal, Porukara and Chavara, are the progenitors of indigenous religious life in Kerala by founding the twin congregations for men and women, which in turn have inspired the emergence of so many congregations, especially women congregations after them. Therefore the present work of the author is very likely to be beneficial for them also, and even for all those who are committed to consecrated life, precisely because this study outlines broadly the contours of consecrated life as such.

In the Preface, Kochumuttom has already apologized, "I am aware of some repetitions of texts and narratives of events..." (p. xx), giving two reasons for it, one, that the same data when "viewed from different angles would yield different nuances of meaning relevant to different aspects of spiritual life", and two, that he wanted to spare the reader turning pages back and forth. Though the reasons may be valid, in point of fact, appearance of the same data (event/incident/story) again and again not only makes the book more voluminous, but also reduces its value for the reader who is already acquainted with such data. Similarly, while the saint's spirit and practice of poverty has been beautifully brought out, taking his expression *agatitoam* (having no means of survival) and his motto, "Lord is my portion" (Ps 16:5), the attempt to connect the motto also to the vow of chastity to make it the most basic of all the evangelical counsels, could have been avoided, because the connection seems to be too farfetched.

These are only some minor drawbacks, as indicated above which are not at all significant. The author's study has certainly brought out the predominant characteristics of the spirituality of Chavara. Focussing mainly on the important features of religious life. He has

shown that 'spousal love' blooms in the vow of chastity, the vow of poverty is an experience that the "Lord is my portion", and that 'obedience is the only mark of a religious'. Dwelling deeply on the original (Malayalam) words and expressions of Chavara, the author has highlighted the fundamentals of religious life, especially in the Indian context - solitude, silence, austerity, community life, prayer and prayerfulness, custody of senses, etc. Moreover, he has picked up Chavara's own words to qualify religious house as 'abode of clear vision' (*darsana-vidu*), 'house of penance' (*tapasu-bhavanam*), 'mirror of virtuous life' (*punnyattinte kannādi*) and a 'house built on hilltop' (*bes-rauma*). The author has also discovered Chavara as a person with deep mystical experiences. His unflinching love for the Church, heroic charity, unwavering trust in God's providence, filial devotion to Mother Mary, intense devotion to the Eucharistic Lord are the features of the saint's spirituality, well presented in this volume. The work has been a valuable contribution to the field of spiritual theology and to the promotion of spirituality of consecrated life at large.

Louis Malieckal CMI

BOOK REVIEW

Thomas Chirappurath, *Peripheries to the Centre: Launch and Growth of Chanda the First Syro-Malabar Mission - A CMI Initiative (1962-2014)*, ed. Benny Thettayil, Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2017, pages xviii + 804; ISBN: 978-93-84964-86-3; Price: Rs. 1,200 (India); US\$60 (Outside India).

Peripheries to the Centre, a work on the history of Chanda Mission is unique just as the CMI mission in Chanda was unique for the Syro-Malabar Church and the CMI Congregation. Both had no predecessors; they had nothing to imitate or to compete with; indeed, both remain a challenge of the times! Replicating the missionary style of Chanda as well as the missionary history narrative style of *Periphery to the Centre* would remain an impossibility. As more and more attempts at writing mission history would take place in the coming years, *Periphery to the Centre* would remain unique, as it sets a very high and unique standard in capturing the historical development of missions; for, it not only offers a recollection and retelling of the stories of Chanda missionary endeavours, but equally involves in offering a philosopher's distanced and critical scrutiny of the facts as well as a theologian's reflection on the events in the history of Chanda with a fundamental faith perspective.

Father Tomy Chirappurath, a missionary who is spiritually and emotionally involved in the evolving mission of Chanda through his own characteristic ways of contributions both as a missionary and a formator, has naturally spent years in dwelling into the inner recesses of the Chanda Event from its very inception. He has burned the midnight's oil in digging into the earliest records, dispersed in various locations and different types of sources, some of them so far untraced and unexplored; but, the dedication with which this project was undertaken merits our appreciation. It attests to the genuine commitment of the missionary zeal that Fr Tomy Chirappurath has; it attests to the unqualified dedication to truth that Fr Tomy holds dear to his heart; it attests to the inimical academic and research discipline that Fr Tomy has gathered over a period of time: indeed, all put together, this magnum opus of Fr Tomy Chirappurath will be a cherished possession of all those who are interested in mission of the Church in India, in Syro-Malabar Church, and very specially in the

lasting contributions of the CMI Congregation in the making of the Syro-Malabar Mission saga as well as the village-oriented missionary style that made the Chanda mission genuinely unique.

When the rich resources of the Chanda Mission were sequenced and interpreted by Fr Tomy Chirappurath and all those who associated with him in the process, its fine-tuned presentation for easy reading, scientific precision based on the documentation and listing of facts, and the literary finesse were ensured by the meticulous involvement of Father Benny Thettayil CMI as the editor of this monumental work. The generous involvement of Fr Benny Thettayil assured the final finish of the work. Interestingly, as Tomy and Benny joined hands together, supported by a whole lot of missionaries from Chanda or those who were associated with Chanda, the final content, style, and shape of the *Peripheries to the Centre* became so unique not only for its voluminous size but also for its fine and attractive presentation, factual and persuasive narratives, and detailed and scientific data that make this book what it is. When the missionary zeal of Fr Tomy, the Gandhian philosopher, may be compared to the zeal of Apostle Saint Thomas that made him reach out to the unknown peripheries of the Indian subcontinent with the message of the Gospel, we have in Fr Benny Thettayil, the Johannine theologian, the same zeal as it is epitomized in Saint Paul the Apostle, who stands out among the Apostles for his courage, unwavering commitment for truth of the Gospel, and inimitable oratorical and literary style that made his epistles unmatched classics in Christian literature. When Thomas and Paul together came to Chanda, its mission history was served in golden letters on a platinum plaque that is the *Peripheries to the Centre*. Congratulations to this philosopher-theologian combine: the Chanda Mission, the CMI Congregation, the Syro-Malabar Church and the entire Indian Church take pride in your combined effort in capturing and unveiling the history of the Chanda Mission, which will be retold to the generations to come with the support of the data gathered and presented in this work through your combined effort and commitment.

Indeed, *Peripheries to the Centre* tells us stories of missionaries and missions of Chanda that turned out to be trail blazers for the Christian missionaries in India as well as the rest of the Christian world.

We have many reasons to celebrate and be joyous and grateful to the Lord. As the celebrations continue, I believe that it is also time for a serious and critical review of our missions in our contemporary times; it calls for a genuine introspection on the part of individuals and

institutions to ensure that the mission endeavours of the Church in general and the Chanda Mission or all the CMI missions retain their original goal stipulated by the Lord himself and inculcated through the CMI charisma: that is, to preach the Good News of metanoia and to involve in establishing the Kingdom of God unconditionally.

Writing an extensive history for the first time is a decisive step. But that is only a beginning in the process of capturing the legacy of the missionaries and mission methodology or methodologies. More research should continue to take place if more nuances and details are to be captured. The grand narrative that Tomy Chirappurath has offered us in this volume could be further embellished and enhanced by offering many sub-narratives on the Chanda and Adilabad missions.

Moreover, critically dwelling on missionary achievements and failures would also give us opportunities to identify different models in mission, which would enrich Christian missionary legacy, especially based on the Indian experiences and experiments in establishing native Christian communities in villages.

Although Tomy has made strenuous efforts to ensure that *Peripheries to the Centre* is made to be as comprehensive as possible, there is a chance that some significant contributions of individuals or communities have not been given the prominence that they should have been given. I am sure that it is not purposeful on the part of the author and his team of collaborators, but due to human limitation originating from the fact that none of us is omniscient. Given this possible limitation, what is feasible in responding to this excellent work on Chanda mission history is to involve in a number of alternative narratives of mission experiences, which would try to describe and reflect upon the many stories that do not find a place in this work. I am sure that such attempts would not only complement the work of Tomy Chirappurath but would also make it possible to capture the mission history of Chanda Mission in the most comprehensible ways.

I am glad to understand from the opening statements made by many that a similar venture also is being planned to capture the missionary endeavours of the Adilabad mission, which was part of this Chanda Mission legacy. While I would look forward to such a work, I feel that similar initiatives must also be made by different religious congregations and other stakeholders, particularly also from the perspective of both the dioceses, who were involved in the development of Chanda Mission, as some of their stories will get their

due recognition only when they are told in a different context. Hence, as we celebrate the grand release of *Peripheries to the Centre* on the Chanda Mission legacy, with a special focus on the CMI contributions and the making of the Eparchy of Chanda and the Eparchy of Adilabad, my earnest request to all the major superiors of other religious congregations who have made their imprint in the making of the Chanda Mission is to retell stories of their missionary endeavours, which would naturally involve most of what has been described in the pages of this work, but would also bring in a lot of untold or unrecorded stories, complementing and supplementing this history of Chanda Mission by Father Tomy. Certainly, any such a move would call for quality investment of time and other resources by competent people; but it would be worth it!

Chanda has already made a ripple effect in the missionary endeavours of the Syro-Malabar Church, and everybody is proud of it. Let the ripples generated by the missionary endeavours of missionaries in Chanda continue to reverberate throughout the times; let the new generation missionaries learn from the achievements and failures of the first mission of the Syro-Malabar Church and that of the CMI Congregation. The mandate received by the Church remains the same and it weighs down upon us, those of us who are bestowed with the responsibility of preaching the Good News in the contemporary society. While we are proud of the achievements of our forefathers in mission, let us make our efforts more Christian and more other oriented so that we will be witnesses to the constant movement from the peripheries to the centre and from the centre to the peripheries at the same time.

On this unique day of celebrating the achievements of the Chanda Mission, captured in the pages of the *Peripheries to the Centre* by Fr Tomy Chirappurath, ably supported by Fr Benny Thettayil in its editorial work, and accompanied by the great support of the CMI Mar Thomas Province of Chanda, under the able leadership of Fr Benny Mukalel, the Provincial.

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