

CONTENT AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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THIS DOCUMENT HAS APPEARED at a critical and exciting time for religious life. Having gone through a period of disaffection many orders are now searching the means to become prophetic voices in our tumultuous world—a world threatened by nuclear or ecological disaster because we lack the ability to live harmoniously as we struggle towards justice and peace. Thus demands have never been greater; and many religious are working at the coalface where they are confronted by personal distress, poverty, marginalization and injustice. They are, moreover, expected to be there as men and women of the heart, beacons of hope, bearers of faith and healers. But preoccupation with the inner life of others may dissipate the concentration of the mind. It is easy to become so engrossed during the journey that they forget or lose sight of their destination. So the grounding and continual renewal in all that gives meaning to religious life is essential, for there is much to distract us. To discover what we need for formation means we must be clear about the meaning of religious life; we need to be able to say what has now become meaningless or apostolically irrelevant. 'We do not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious' (Jung).

Because religious life has a calling to a prophetic ministry, it must be freed from those ecclesiastical structures which prevent an immediate, flexible and spirit-filled response to particular human and social needs. Moreover there is no blueprint for religious life in the gospels, they offer ends not means. So for example, the disciple is to be in the world but not of it. 'I do not pray that you should take them out of the world but that you should protect them from the evil one' (Jn 17, 15). Formation therefore has to aid a separation from the spirit of the world while encouraging a lived presence in it, mediating the love of Christ. God and God's action is there and needs to be discerned, rather than regulated for. Religious today need a commitment to the world rather than withdrawal from it, even if it is a risky business learning to find and uncover the good where evil is present.

The directive is good in that it is not over prescriptive: it will enable rather than inhibit. It seems that there is encouragement for

congregations to make a 'pick and mix' selection of what will help them, using insights drawn from their own experiences, traditions and charism which will hopefully bring religious nearer to the cutting edge of life, where that search and discovery may be the meaning of the parable of the hidden treasure (Mt 13,44). The document however is ambivalent about being in the world and especially about being with the poor during formation, yet there is clear recognition of the need for an option for the poor [28]. Nonetheless there are many positive aspects to be found, unity of life [17], an integrated spirituality, consecration and mission seen as one. The commentary on the counsels highlights their significance when lived within the context of the spirit of the beatitudes, and there is a recognition that the development of the whole person is part of the construction of the Kingdom in our world. Only when the sensitive area of sexuality is broached does an unfortunate sense of dualism creep in.

The document touches on the importance of experiments during the noviceship. These are primarily a time of involvement in the world, rather than enclosure in the rarified atmosphere of a religious ghetto. Such experiments can be a realistic way of coming to understand what it means to be a member of a particular congregation and a testing of teaching and life.

Christ's call embraces the whole person 'in that person's unique and unrepeatable personal I' [9]. This leads on of course to the responsibility that each individual has to take for their own formation [29] and for the living of religious life. An application of principles regardless of differing stages of development, age, gender and culture could be disastrous. The lived situation needs to be taken into account and constantly assessed through discernment, a vital tool which is neither fully expressed nor acknowledged. Commitment to a preferential option for the poor is stated [28], but there are very definite reservations about formation taking place in small inserted communities in a poor milieu. They are seen as 'places where an atmosphere that is favourable to becoming deeply rooted in a life in Christ' cannot be experienced [50]. And yet it could be that detachment from self, detachment, too, from the goods of this world and all that opposes God, could be more easily tested and fostered in just such an environment. It is in any event doubtful if all the conditions expected of the more institutionalized community will ever be found [27]. Lectures, liturgy and many other formation needs can be provided at centres apart from living space.

The *Directive* has been written for the universal Church, but it speaks with a Western voice (as indeed do I!). The need to be

universal has weakened its forcefulness, and raises the question, 'Is the document sufficiently aware of the world in which religious are incarnated—Christian, post-Christian, New Age, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, atheist?' Religious life, if it is to be meaningful, must be about how we live our relatedness to God, the world, the earth and our fellow human beings. Community, irrespective of the actual context, will have to be the supportive environment which enables religious to become committed Christians who witness to the radicality of the gospel as they explore, live and promote Kingdom values.

Community members are disciples first and foremost, consecrated and commissioned, even as Jesus was. They are dedicated to nothing less than laying down their life for friends if that be asked for. There will be multiple calls for such self-sacrifice in our milieux of want, created by unjust social structures which must be challenged in the light of scripture and prayer. The document offers a true insight in saying that the foundation of all Christian living and asceticism is to be found in the study of scripture which will inspire renunciation. But there is more to asceticism than regulated silence so frequently stressed by the document. Silence for what? Silence needs to be linked with the ability to sustain solitude, the ability to tune into God with a listening and discerning heart. The apostle needs both time for silence and times to be at the centre of the action.

The document seems to operate, even if somewhat tentatively, with Erikson's schema of development. He worked out a schema of eight stages based on experiences, observable behaviour and unconscious inner states, and stressed the influence of culture and relationships on both the child and adult in their development. The importance of culture has certainly been recognized in the document. Erikson identified eight psychological strengths or qualities, the development of which indicates that the person is ready and able to cope with the various demands to be met at different stages of life. These strengths are potential in us from birth, but mature fully only when circumstances call them forth. The growth of each quality depends much on external life structures; hence the importance of the right setting for formation.

There is a recognition within the document that the insights of the human sciences and psychology are necessary if a firm foundation for a continuous and integrated spirituality is to be laid [59], but fear of the psychological is also present. However, without some understanding of the unconscious there is real risk of dysfunctional

behaviour being perpetuated, inner freedom impeded, and with that, all that goes to help the development of a truly mature and wise person.

Erikson produced a much appreciated, ordered and coherent schema of human development, but like Kohlberg and Levinson, all based on male models. They have therefore all been criticized recently as inadequate, because there is no acknowledgement of the differences that exist between male and female. Where the document does recognize difference it is only to see woman as inferior, since women are treated unrealistically, as little more than objects. It seems that only woman is to be committed to finding her true nature and meaning, and that is to be found in relation to man [40/41]. Her identity apparently is to be discovered by owning that she is not male. To name that essential difference between the sexes is only a beginning, and though the consequences of this should be given [13] there is no recognition that these differences could or should have an effect on the way formation programmes are drawn up. In fact, the feel is that the document has been written from the stance of the male hierarchical Church. This is not surprising given the dominance of men in Church structures, but, if true, it is shocking, as there are today four times as many women as male religious, and there are clear distinctions in the development of men and women. For women to discover their identity they need to be in relationship, and to be able to handle attachment. The world for them coheres through connectedness, not through legal systems of rules. For men, their growth in identity is through an ability to handle separation, work and their need to achieve. If connectedness feels dangerous, silence and solitude is a natural need, not necessarily a spiritual one, it may result in a protective but dangerous isolation. Surely just this brief indication of some area of difference that exists is enough to show that differing approaches to formation for men and women are necessary. Differing strengths and weaknesses are going to require differing attention. For women insisting on interdependent relations, power becomes equated with giving of care and all that fosters relationships, and so makes for safety. Men's sense of power is centred more on assertiveness and success, so it does not seem alien to interrupt intimacy and generative needs for those of ambition and mid-life drives.

In general we can expect that the foundation stages in the formation of personality have already been laid before candidates reach the noviceship. We can therefore presume that novices know

something of struggles with mistrust, fear, shame, guilt, routine and inferiority. Later stages of adult development may not be always clearly defined, but that said, we also need to acknowledge that development tends to proceed in a spiral and there is a constant reworking of previous stages in the manner appropriate to age and circumstances. Identity continues to be reshaped throughout our life cycle. Novices particularly find themselves having to rename who they are and then form relationships out of a new identity.

Identity relies on the manner in which society identifies a young person. The search for and formation of identity is not mentioned in the document and this is a serious omission. The many demands of religious life, of community, of a life to be lived for others, can militate against self-acceptance and knowing who one is, because of the general expectation that novices are going to emerge as different people from the noviceship. However, if on arriving in the noviceship there is no clear sense of a personal identity, there is little hope of being able to form a religious identity or a true spirituality. There can be no real surrender of the will, no obedience, if there is no awareness of personal identity. 'The process of identity formation depends on the interplay of what young persons at the end of childhood have come to mean to themselves, and what they now appear to mean to those who have come to be significant to them.' Society has to give recognition, to take for granted that individuals are as they are. Here is an area of conflict. There is need for self-acceptance and the assuming of a radical new identity, that of a religious. A losing of life, in order to gain, but we can't lose what we don't already possess. We can only be before God the way we truly are, with all that that implies in the way of giftedness, sexuality, potential and weakness.

Erikson is very clear that the capacity for intimacy follows on from a sense of identity. There is ambivalence in the document in its approach to sexuality [39-41] and chastity [13] and there is still much fear present. If intimacy is not linked to an understanding of self, sex, friendship, infatuation and the ability to be truly loving persons, the whole quality and witness of a Christian commitment may well be undermined. Intimacy is still surrounded by much ignorance and, sadly, chastity is still conceived in negative concepts, though there are some hopeful glimmers!

The last two stages of Erikson's schema are essential—generativity and integrity. Generativity is totally opposed to self-absorption and the document's claim that the apostolate not self-fulfilment is the focus of life [65] is in tune with this. Generativity belongs to all,

celibate, single, married. It is a call to put the good of others before self-interest, offering quality care and refusing to succumb to stagnation. It is a call to agape, and a concerned empathetic love open to all, a concern for the outside world while not refusing attention to our own inner world, but without self-centredness. There is the recognition that middle age may well throw up a sense of failure, discontent, meaninglessness and boredom. Negative brooding and sterile thinking sap enthusiasm, and may turn into depression. This is truly a time for ongoing formation, and that at every level, emotional, apostolic and spiritual. Incidentally there is no mention made of the development of faith, making use for example of Fowler's categories.

The document may give the unfortunate impression that by the time of final profession a certain perfection will have been achieved, and thereafter religious must be on their guard against the dangers of a downward slope. Human development, as has been said, is not linear—a spiral is a more apt description of its progress but fits and starts, even some quite precipitous falls, are to be expected throughout life. When this is acknowledged, then both the individual and those supporting and guiding will be less shocked and more easily handle the crisis moments, especially if these occur in areas of sexual development.

During formation the development of an affective and adult sexual maturity is essential. Maturity can be defined as the ability to make free, autonomous decisions for the sake of a deeper relationship. This area of sexual maturity differs from sexual repression, and must acknowledge a personal sexual orientation [39]. If men and women complete their time of formation with a low self-image this may well be because their sexuality is still not integrated and they don't know what to do with it. Integrity and congruence in this area is a prerequisite during the whole of religious life, so some form of testing discernment is essential.

How do those in formation relate?

How do they seek their knowledge?

Subtle voyeurism, how is it present?

What about vicarious exploitation of sexual experience? TV?

Counselling of others in sexual difficulties, exercise of power and domination, fantasies?

What modes of compensation are sought?

All these are areas which need exploring, in order to avoid later acting out in uncharacteristic, even scandalous ways, the result perhaps of sexual fantasies and sexual energies never acknowledged.

Behaviour that is in discontinuity with the chosen life-style of a religious is perhaps due to the fact that there is no inner experience of being involved in a relationship, and therefore no sense of a vow being violated. Life, mission and personal sexuality are disconnected. Dissociated, the celibate's sexual desires can go underground, to emerge later only to be disowned.

The document may not be the place to highlight certain aspects which can lead to crisis, and which are connected with an understanding of relationships, sexuality and self-identity, but these subjects cannot be totally ignored. If friendships remain a rarity, hedged round with suspicion, then religious will not be instructed or supported in making relationships. Moreover women need to experience forging and sustaining relationships as something coherent and safe rather than dangerous. The document does infer that intimate non-sexual friendship is possible, though it speaks in guarded tones. Alongside the individual's capacity for sustaining relationships should certainly go an exploration of their capacity for solitude and self-discipline. Celibates are called to give witness to a life-giving intimacy which is redemptive, in which warmth, empathy and acceptance can all be experienced. We need to be present to those around us, not bypass them for the glory of God! Celibacy which is disembodied, spiritualized and otherworldly will have little credibility, for its meaning is acquired through relatedness. An ability to express feelings will be important, and to know also what are the emotional and sexual feelings being experienced.

Many candidates today may come to our noviceships marked by 'eroticism, violence and drugs' though there is, too, a much needed acknowledgement of the qualities and values which newcomers will bring with them [86-89]. Cleveland, Rochdale and, most recently, the Orkneys, have all alerted us to the horrendous facts of child abuse, and we can add to that numerous rape victims. These experiences may never surface in direction—for too long they have been denied and forgotten even, so great is the pain. Nevertheless they remain a profound influence in a person's life, and anyone with responsibility for formation should be aware that this hidden world can exist. It should not be expected that in such delicate and sensitive areas a religious in formation will necessarily feel free to ask for help or guidance from a member of the congregation who may also have authority over acceptance or dismissal and with whom daily life may have to be lived. Directors need to show enough trust so that appropriate help can be obtained from outside the congregation.

Even while being very respectful, on both sides there will be the need for delicate, emotive issues to be touched upon during the time of formation. Directors need to be endowed with much empathy, discernment and respect, and the document could well have said something about the qualities needed by directors and stressed appropriate training.

Many who enter religious life undergo a process of bereavement and emotional hunger as they experience the pain of transition. Help is critical at this early stage, for without wise guidance pain is not acknowledged and a pattern of evasion is established. Sadly the document offers little direct help to directors, and these initial problems have been overlooked. But young religious will not automatically integrate their apostolic endeavours and their newly directed spirituality. They will need help if they are to challenge past assumptions and successfully overcome periods of doubt, anxiety or even panic.

The formation process should be a prayerful journey into the world of gospel faith—hence the introduction of the pilgrimage theme [24]. The driving force behind a pilgrim is some indefinable force beyond the sphere of intellect and will—the impulsion of the Holy Spirit. Man the pilgrim, God the Way. If the concept of ‘journey’ had received greater emphasis there would be a stronger sense of the restlessness within, the fire in the belly which would move each one, and make it possible to contemplate the cost of discipleship. If there were more emphasis on the action of the Holy Spirit there would inevitably have been less stress on the *status quo*, and perhaps even a hint that the Church is in need of constant reform and renewal. This rather than Church law, doctrine, hierarchy and superiors might be a way forward, risking change rather than security, and moving forward with evaluation and discernment, neither of which are mentioned.

Linked to the theme of pilgrimage must be the sense of mission, without which obedience has little meaning. Religious have to be faithful to the mission entrusted to them by the Church, which has to be pursued in the world [17]. The gospel must be seen and experienced as existing everywhere. This means allowing for a cultural re-expression of the gospel. There is no hint of this. Initial formation is situated within the individual’s culture, so care must needs be taken that provincialism is avoided. Although culture is recognized as being fundamental to healthy development the document omits all discussion of diverse traditions. Yet there must be very

different understandings of authority, community, poverty from continent to continent, even from country to country. There will not be the same operational base, and this has not been acknowledged. It is true that each one needs to be clear about where s/he belongs, and about the culture in which formation takes place; otherwise there is a lack of differentiation, so a sense of fusion, and ultimately of confusion. The same point about confusion is made in connection with belonging to various ecclesial movements before being clear about the religious identity within a particular congregation [93]. Cultural competence is expected from directors, but that concept is not clarified [31]. There is no mention of the need for directors to have psychological experience and insight. Integral formation with its spiritual, physical, moral and intellectual needs is recognized, but the psychological and emotional dimension is not considered, yet such consideration is essential if we are to form the whole person. Young people show an unevenness between their secular level of knowledge, their psychological growth and their Christian and faith dimension. We ignore at our own risk areas not fully integrated, acknowledged or understood by the young (or not so young) seeker.

A more surprising lacuna lies in the whole area of prayer. 'Young' religious require guidance on different forms of personal and community prayer, encouragement in verbalizing and sharing their faith, which is essential for a true sense of mission. They may also need help if they are to reflect on the presence and action of God in global, national and personal events, leading to discernment and action and evaluation. It is as though nothing has been learned about 'doing theology' or about the formative experiences of other communities and groups, especially, perhaps, Basic Christian Communities. At least an unhealthy emphasis on piety (spiritual bandages for emotional wounds) has been avoided.

In this decade of evangelism we must work with the knowledge that to be missioned means to be sent to cross unknown borders in strange territories. Does one of these borders waiting to be crossed open onto an area of structural injustice and social indifference? All that touches the struggle for biblical justice, the basis for peace, must become relevant for formation. Mission means that the one sent must be able to dialogue, listen and hear so as to be touched, enabled to walk in another's moccasins. The presence in our midst of those of other faiths, and none, must presuppose an openness, a willingness to learn, to seek the truth, to be possessed by, rather than to possess it. More awareness of the Spirit breathing where it will would break

through a too narrow concept, with superiors and ecclesial authorities deciding and prescribing within their own authority. Today more than ever we need to break through institutionalization, legalism, insipid spirituality and excessive activism to find the vitality of Easter hope.

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The above books have all been useful, and acknowledgement needs to be made!