

FAITH, FORMATION, AND VOCATION – ANY LINK?

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Abstract

There is an apparent disconnection between formation processes and the acquisition of faith today. Looking at some candidates for formation in our seminaries and formation houses, and at some young priests and consecrated persons who have passed through our seminaries and formation houses in recent history, one would wonder whether formation impacts or impacted positively on their faith respectively. After years of formation, many still suffer from bouts of crises of faith. Ordinarily, formation is expected to improve candidates' level of faith. After all, formation is majorly about faith formation. Unfortunately, however, many candidates enthusiastically embrace a feeling of vocation and go in for formation, but come out with less zest and overgrown self-doubt. This raises questions. Does formation really increase faith? Or does it merely decrease it? Are we just training in apologetic rhetoric and lifestyle, in acquisitive elitism and survival tactics? This paper seeks to enquire into the relationship between vocation, formation and faith and to explain the role of formation in the advancement of faith especially in the lives of priests and consecrated persons. Finally, it suggests what should be done to make formation lead to transformation.

Introduction – Faith and Character Formation

Human formation begins with faith formation. Faith or belief is the first character a child acquires. According to Eric Erikson, an American psychologist, basic trust is the first thing a child learns in life (Erikson, 1950, 1963, p. 247ff). Faith, as basic trust forms the foundation of all later forms of faith, defines all stages of character formation and determines the development of the entire human person.

By way of clarification, we must differentiate between *natural faith* and *supernatural faith*. As children, we begin to learn to trust and believe

our parents and other people, based on what they say and do to us. Depending on what the child experiences from the people in close contact with it, it may begin to acquire basic trust and form basic belief about the people and environment. If the child is treated fairly, it learns to trust; if not, it acquires distrust. All this happens at the level of natural faith. Then as we grow and mature, and seek to understand the meaning of reality, we begin to believe what we are being told about God, and what we experience about him. This is religious or supernatural faith – belief at a spiritual supernatural level.

Supernatural faith differs from natural faith, but both are mutually related (CCC 153ff). A sound natural faith is the stepping stone towards the acquisition of authentic religious faith. So, crisis in natural faith can lead to crisis in religious faith. Faith has thus natural and supernatural dimensions. It is to the extent somebody trusts people that he or she can trust God and develop an authentic faith in Him. While natural faith can be learnt overtime across the length and breadth of the development of the human person, supernatural faith is a gift from God, a grace that we are called upon to embrace.

Though every human being is a religious being, equipped to relate to God, not every person has the privilege to recognize God as the trustworthy author of life. Faith is a supernatural gift of God that enables us to trust Him completely. Faith in God occurs when one hears God's call (either through direct personal experience or through the historical and biblical revelations) and then responds to it with total conviction and trust. When the trust cannot be totally because of certain distractions and personal interests, crisis of faith ensues. Essentially, faith is firm confidence in God and total self-surrender to him.

Challenges to Faith in Modern Time

All through history distractions to authentic Christian faith abound, paganism, persecutions etc. But the modern time seems to have a lion share of threats to faith. In addition to wrestling with the historical enemies of faith, the modern person has secularism/relativism, materialism/consumerism and globalization to contend with. As a result, the candidate for formation is hemmed in between the negative influences from the global world and from our own local environment. The modern person is a subject of the Western Cultural Revolution, which has not only practically edged God out of the stage of reality, but has also, in His place, declared science, technology, freedom and pleasure new gods. As the Western persons try to dethrone God and strip him of his absolute authority, they position “liberty” as the god everybody must now worship. For the Western mind, God has become a relative instance, and freedom an absolute reality, a dogma which supersedes

every other value. This is pure *relativism*, which Joseph Ratzinger, Pope Benedict XVI, severally identified as the major crisis of faith and religion in the modern world (Ratzinger, 2006 p. 34 ff).

The problem of secularism and relativism is compounded by globalization, which now, empowered by Information Technology and all the sundry social networks, exposes the rest of the world to the negative impact of the Western Cultural Revolution. The entire world is now globalized and subsequently shrinking into a single global village with virtually no boundaries. Distances have become negligible, since the farthest part of the world can just be but a goggle search away from us. The repercussion is that good and bad ideas, tricks and fashion are pushed around across the globe influencing the rest negatively or positively. The ongoing covid-19 pandemic corroborates this point.

The tragedy of globalization is that traditional and religious values, as well as indigenous cultures lose out in the encounter with the more dominant pop culture from the Western world. Traditional morality, sacredness of creation and sense of sin are now considered archaic in the face of rampaging consumerist, individualist and materialistic culture from the Western world. As a result of the overwhelming influence of the Western pop culture on our society, our values are now in flux and our taste almost insatiable; nothing (including products) seems to have lasting values anymore. We are out seeking “the latest (*fashion, gadgets, mobile phones, and best things in the market*), and quickly discarding ‘old’ ones even when they can still be used” (Chima, 2010). This has much impact on the young people.

Another major threat to faith, spirituality and morality is the so called *new global ethic* (Peters, 2007), which seeks to legitimize all sorts of *consumerism* and *bestiality*. This new ethic equally proposes a type of gender ideology that tends to determine the right to life based on human conscience and pleasure. For the proponents of this view, it is not God, but hedonism that decides who has the right to live. The aim of such a gender ideology coming from the Western feminists is to neutralize society, make it asexual, without masculinity and femininity, and make it open to irresponsible libido propagated by homosexual and lesbian interest groups. Men now marry men, women marry women; very soon people will begin to marry their dogs and pussies cats and demand the status of marriage.

The combination of relativism and consumerism looks like a conspiracy against the spiritual dimension of the human life. Apparently, the faster technology moves, the more materialistic and consumerist we become, and the less spiritual and moral we become too. The major problem here is that the new ethic encourages technology without a sense of responsibility and sustainability (Ratzinger, 2006, p. 27). Since,

technology is naturally poised towards achieving all that man *can* do, not what man *ought* to do, it follows then that if we do all we can do, then we will destroy ourselves one day, because we possess the power and skill to kill ourselves in the most sophisticated manner. Hence, globalization, relativism and consumerism are modern threats to faith emanating from the Western world and culture.

There are also threats within our ranks, arising from our socio-cultural context, African Traditional Religion and African brand of Pentecostalism. Under the influence of our own African socio-cultural context, the average African believer ends up living in ambivalence in matters of faith – adopting a half Christian, half pagan mentality. Our *socio-cultural context* exerts much pressure on the practice of faith and especially on the formation process of young men and women who feel called to consecrate themselves to the Lord. As the Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama, once rightly observed, “the environment in which the seminarian grows plays a determining factor in what he becomes later – a good priest or a bad priest” (Kaigama, 2005, 6). The Nigerian society, from where most candidates come for formation, has lots of socio-cultural problems. Much corruption, cheating, duplicity, dishonesty and sundry crimes characterize our societal landscape. No matter the side you face in our society, dishonesty is the order of the day – in the family lives, in education, in business, in the government, and even in religion the story is the same. There is something like an erosion of values in our society, such that many people no longer know what is virtuous and what is vice. The candidates who come for formation have been under the influence of our corrupt society.

In a 1995 publication, Fr. Emmanuel Obuna paints a gloomy image of the societal background of most of the seminarians and aspirants who come to us for formation. According to him, the candidate who comes for formation today

“is most likely to have passed through a primary school where teachers come to school once or twice a week and spend the remaining days of the week attending private businesses at home, in the farm, or in their shops – buying and selling; where pupils in primary schools are pressurized into paying illegal levies to their teachers in order to be allowed to stay in class; where teachers who are also parents bring in outsiders to sit the final examination for their own son or daughter who is not intelligent enough to pass, etc.”

“Having passed out of this primary school (of primary corruption), our candidate then goes on to secondary school (of secondary corruption) where question papers are on sale a week or two before the final exams; where students themselves collect levies to pay off principals, teachers, invigilators and even the policemen sent to

maintain law and order during the examination; where some teachers make ... (almost the equivalent of their annual salary) from bribes paid by students on the spot to persuade them to solve questions in the examination hall.

“From this secondary school of corruption our candidate now moves up to the University for a Bachelor’s Degree in corruption. If the testimony of our undergraduates is anything to go by...the situation in our universities today is such that you can personally negotiate with the lecturer for any grade you want in any examination...depending on how much you are able to pay in cash or kind.” (Obuna, 1995,58-59)

What this suggests is that the environment from where candidates come is saturated with corruption – a corrupt environment produces corrupt candidates. Such candidates are likely to be problematic in the process of formation; they may even wriggle safe through the entire system and get ordained or professed. With such a background, it should not be surprising when a large number of formandi do not show signs of authentic faith.

Similarly, many candidates for formation come into the formation houses with a backload of many elements of the *African Traditional Religion*. Many of them have the traditionalist’s values, expectations and tenets stored in their subconscious, irrespective of the fact that most of them are not new converts, but children of the first and second generation Christians. At points of deep emotions of sadness and joy, challenges and leisure, most Africans act out pagan fears and fancies. The one obvious effect is unintended *syncretism* – the subtle mixture of Christian values and the African traditional habits. A candidate with such a background may find it difficult to internalize the culture of Christ, such as total trust in God and dependence on him, sacrificial love and acceptance of one’s daily cross. In that case, formation may become an impossible task.

The impact of African Traditional Religion on some candidates for formation shows up in the type of *Pentecostalism* they aspire to practice. Many candidates have gone Pentecostal and Charismatic, and are frantically in search of miracles. They have become so gullible that they suspect the devil in everything and practice a magico-religious type of spirituality. Even the materialistic tendency evident in the African Traditional Religious worldview, with all its this-worldly eschatology, is imbibed and allowed to flourish in the consciousness of a number of candidates. This certainly makes them focus attention on worldly, rather than transcendent values. Rather than encouraging a good, moral and sacrificial life, prosperity is preached as the only type of God’s blessing. Moreover, some of them come into the seminary in a triumphal mood,

believing either that they have already gotten all it takes to be successful priests or that they know it better than the seminary authorities. The result is that they close themselves to formation, disregarding what is delivered in the lecture halls, but rather organizing their own private group classes on the homiletics of influential Pentecostal pastors. These candidates buy their books and listen to their videos and disregard classical Catholic spirituality and theology. By implication, candidates who had been under the influence of modern Pentecostalism before entering the formation houses are often closed to formation processes; they are very likely going to be stubborn with regard to respecting authorities, rules and regulations.

The Tasks of Formation

Simply put, formation is about subjecting candidates to training and discipline that would help them acquire the basic values of Jesus Christ, his culture, which consists essentially of the disposition for self-emptying love. Like clay in the hands of a potter, candidates are to be molded in the formation houses to become water-tight personalities, able to transmit the message of Jesus Christ without adulteration and misrepresentation. Apart from the primordial selfishness, which begins from the cradle, persons accumulate lots of harmful habits as they grow up in dysfunctional families and societies. The project of formation is to prune such personalities and purify their intentions, to make them worthy Disciples of Christ. In the post-Synodal Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, dedicated to the issues of religious life, the object of formation has been defined as “the preparation for total consecration of oneself to God in the footsteps of Christ, at the service of the mission” (John Paul II, 1996, 65-71) In other words, formation is all about getting ready to place one’s entire self at the service of God in the style of Jesus.

The consecration of oneself to God demands complete submission of all our human faculties to him. To that effect, authentic formation is a holistic venture, which tries to engage all aspects of our being; it is not done with partial or cosmetic changes, but with a total remolding of one’s entire personality. The body, the spirit, the intellect and one’s commitment to service are subjected to formation. Attractions, sentiments, emotions, dreams, strength, weaknesses, feelings, needs and desires are submitted for purification, integration and transformation in the houses of formation.

The Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, understands formation primarily as preparation and insists therefore that “Preparation has to be human, cultural, spiritual and pastoral, paying special attention to integrating the various aspects” (John Paul II, 1996, 65). Earlier, the post-Synod Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (1992), outlined

four various forms of formation: *human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral*. For want of space, it may not be necessary to elaborate on each of these forms of formation here. It suffices to say, not just that all the four areas of formation are intertwined, but also that the successes of the spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formations depend on the accomplishment of the human formation. The goal of all forms of formation is to effect growth in faith, intimacy with God and Jesus Christ. Formation involves changes, but not all changes imply formation.

We can only begin to talk about effective formation, when the changes effected in our lives lead to growth in faith. Growth of authentic and informed faith, balanced in act and content, is the measure of true formation. In other words, true formation must lead to growth in virtues, in intimacy with Jesus Christ, in the understanding of divine wisdom, and in the effective application of our faith in the day to day interaction with people. Formation must be holistic, ensuring growth in the human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral spheres of the candidate's life. Growth is to be understood here, not just as the unfolding of our life and personality, but primarily as the break with our negative past, and the onward consolidation and integration of the positive values we have been able to pick from our past experiences.

This is akin to what Bernard Lonergan calls *conversion*, the process that removes blockages in our life (Lonergan, 1972, 237ff, & Mueller, 1984, 13ff). Consequently, formation works on our past experiences. According to A. Cencini, it touches upon the past, the present and the future of both the person and the institution (Cencini, 1999, 9). Formation can succeed or fail, depending on what we carry along from our past experiences and environment. If the candidate comes to the house of formation with a genuine desire, openness to the truth and with some level of flexibility, suppleness and adaptability, there is the chance that he or she can experience conversion – a movement from an enthusiastic but less informed faith to a more reasoned and internalized faith. If however, the candidate is hardened and closed up, he or she remains impervious to the impact of formation. When we encounter consecrated persons or priests who do not measure up to the demands of discipleship, one begins to wonder what went wrong in the formation program, the method or the candidate.

How successful is the Formation Process in Nigeria Today?

Without intending to sound as an alarmist, the quality of life lived by many priests and consecrated persons passing out of our seminaries and formation houses today leaves much to be desired. People are beginning to wonder whether formation has any positive impact on the priests and religious of our contemporary time, whether formation increases or

decreases faith of the candidates. Those who argue that it decreases faith give instances of people who went into the seminary very pious and apparently very innocent, coming out later as priests and religious who have lost all sense of the sacred and the horror of sin.

Many of our seminaries and formation houses paint an ugly picture of the conduct of candidates in formation, who are now capable of committing worse crimes than their counterparts in the tertiary institutions. Lack of openness to formation, growing signs of deep-seated dishonesty, dubious motivations abound; a conformist attitude to the rules and the seeming focus on being seen to be doing the right thing with the sole purpose of avoiding sanctions are on the increase. The simple fact is that dishonesty, pretenses, aggression and even theft are on the increase in houses of formation today. Some go as far as forming cliques, shielding partners in crime, to subvert the authorities and regulations

The situation becomes even more worrisome, when we look at the conduct of many religious men and women trained in our seminaries and vocation houses. There have been cases where priests and even male and female religious resorted to physical violence in order to settle their differences. Some others have been caught stealing or misappropriating funds meant for projects. Some flout every regulation in their diocese or congregations and break all the vows of evangelical counsels with impunity. There is a noticeable increase in the chase for money and wealth, even among the religious who have vowed poverty. *Materialism* has become the order of the day for many priests; they use sacraments and sacramentals, prayer houses and ministries to accumulate wealth for themselves. Pentecostalism and the prosperity Gospel have special appeal for many priests and religious, who have an insatiable appetite for miracles and cross-less Christianity that denies the salvific dimension of suffering in our lives. Added to this is the sexual indiscretion that is today common among priests and religious, seminarians and other candidates in formation.

Evidently, these are all signs of grave loss of faith, rooted in selfishness – the lack of readiness for selfless service, self-renunciation and total surrender to the will of God on which radical discipleship can be built. Where radical surrender is lacking, the vow of poverty, chastity and obedience turn to empty promises – a sure sign of hypocrisy. It is evident that selfishness and self-seeking abound amongst the clergy and religious today. This raises doubts about the effectiveness of our formation programs.

Possible Reasons for Failures in the Formation Programs Today

The fact that the products of our seminaries and formation houses are not up to the standard expected suggests that something is wrong somewhere. Something is wrong, not just with the formation method, but also with the formators and formandi. Let us first consider the candidates for formation

The *Formandi*: The young men and women pursuing vocation today in our formation houses are definitely different from their counterparts about seventy years ago. Then it was clear that the candidates were already groomed in faith before entering the seminary and had lesser distractions from the society. But the candidates of today are under pressure from the demands of modern time, ranging from technological and liberal cultures, materialism, secularism to Pentecostalism. Many come from a socio-cultural background saturated with corruption and consumerism, from dysfunctional families and societies prone to competitive life-style. People from such backgrounds are likely to have problem discerning their vocations and might even seek formation for a very wrong motivation.

In fact, many candidates have other motives, different from what they gave as reasons for seeking admission into the religious houses or seminaries. Some may consciously hide their real motivation and declare as reason that they wish “to serve God and humanity”, when, in truth, they have come for the benefits and privileges attached to religious vocation, and would want to be served rather than serve. Some others may be unconscious of what motivates them to enter the seminary. They may honestly desire to serve God and humanity, but deep within them they are driven by some undisclosed desires about making life better for themselves. Both groups of persons may be excellent seminarians or novices in the formation houses, ready to comply to the rules and identify with the authorities in order to remain in formation, but they are rarely able to internalize their experiences in the formation houses. However, as soon as they get ordained or professed, they begin to show their true colours. It has often been humorously said that some seminarians fear God while they are in the seminary; but when they become priests God begins to fear them. This is particularly true of persons with mixed or falsified motivations, whether male or female. One would certainly need a more rigorous formation program, other than the conventional one, in order to be able to access such candidates, to unlock their pretenses and help them discern their vocation early enough.

Another obstacle to formation with regard (Akubeze, 2010,1) to candidates is the issue of number. While in the Western World there is a record of decline in religious vocations, here in Nigeria, we experience

surplus number of vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life. Since about the past sixty years, there has been a steady increase in vocations and a multiplication of seminaries and religious houses. Nobody seems to know the exact number of young men and women being formed in our seminaries and houses of formation. Many of these institutes are merely coping with, what has often been termed, the “tyranny of number”. As a result, many formandi live in anonymity till they pass out of the seminaries and houses of formation. If this situation is to be arrested, not only must the population of the formandi be drastically scaled down to a manageable size, but also that a more rigorous selection and discernment program must be put in place.

The Formators: The high failure rate of formation process in Nigeria has often been correctly attributed to the insufficiency of the number of formators in the formation houses and also to the incompetence of the available ones (Okeke, 2011, 26). There is hardly any seminary in Eastern Nigeria, for instance, that is not understaffed in terms of the number of formators on the ground. The few available ones are intelligent teachers and lecturers, but no formators, who are noted for their didactic presentation of materials, but not for mentoring. Spiritual directors are often too few and poorly empowered to take adequate care of the candidates. A good number of the so called formators have neither pastoral experience to their credit, nor good enough signs of faith in their lifestyle and utterances that would make them stand as models to the formandi. Some simply parrot off their lessons without any sign of internalization, others merely treat Church views and Roman documents with disdain in the attempt to sound academic. As a result the candidates receive lots of confusing signals (Okeke, 2011, 26; this leaves them undecided as to what to believe.

Moreover, bishops and religious superiors have a penchant for appointing young and inexperienced priests and sisters as formators and vocation directors. To compound the problem, a number of them have never had any training or formation as formators (Iperu, 1995, 58). Many have not been able to manage themselves, and as such cannot really contribute much in the formation of the candidates. Such ones are terribly ill-equipped to take into their own hands, the formation of the contemporary candidates as described above. This is contrary to the specifications of the Synod Fathers, echoed by Pope John Paul II in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*:

The Task of formation of candidates for the priesthood requires not only a certain special preparation of those to whom this work is entrusted, one that is professional, pedagogical, spiritual, human and theological... For this ministry, priests of exemplary life should be chosen, men with a

number of qualities: human and spiritual, maturity, pastoral experience, professional competence, stability in their own vocation, a capacity to work with others, serious preparation in those human sciences (psychology especially) which relate to their office, a knowledge of how to work in groups (John Paul II, 1992, 66).

Similar things are required for formators in the formation houses. To make the matter worse, despite the much talked about ongoing formation and formation of the formators (Nwabeke, sine datum), not much is being done in this regard. In the view of the challenges facing formation today, it is grossly inadequate for somebody to act as a formator without any formal training. Again due to poor funding of the seminaries and formation houses, poor remuneration of the formators, many able priests and sisters who would otherwise have liked to be absorbed into the formation apostolate, refuse to get involved.

Formation Method: Most seminaries and formation houses are still using the traditional formation method, whose justification has been overtaken by the demand of contemporary modern culture. The culture of establishing seminaries and formation houses took a centre stage in the period between the 17th and 20th centuries when the primary concern of the Church was to train men and women who would be able to give an apologetic response to the threat of Reformation and Modernism. Seminaries and formation houses concentrated on apologetics, emphasizing academic ability and the capacity to study and store information. The passing of examinations and collection of certificates counted more than strength of character. Moreover, due to the emphasis on the hierarchical nature of the Church, “Unquestioning obedience and compliance with the orders of the day were the primary obligations of priests and religious. They were not expected to think and reflect much beyond this. They did not have to make many choices for themselves and develop their initiative ... Discipline, not maturity, was what counted here.” (Iperu, 1995, 13) The method of formation then was more of lectures and conferences, and of course ongoing supervision of the candidates to see whether they comply with the rules and regulations. As a result, students learn how to comply and identify, even when they are not convinced, all in the attempt to avoid expulsion. The internalization of the program is hardly achieved.

This traditional model paid more attention to intellectual formation, which mainly took the form of passing information about doctrines and morals. It had little or no provision for the human development. People grew dissatisfied with the traditional method, particularly because it was one-dimensional and devoid of holistic integration. The Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Training of Priests, *Optatam Totius*, specifically

called for a radical change. It emphasized Spiritual and Pastoral training (Vat II, nos 8-16,19-21). Then, in 1988, the entire Catholic world together with Pope John Paul II deliberated on new methods of formation. The result is what we find in the Apostolic Exhortation, *PastoresDaboVobis*, which not only identifies the four main forms of formation, but also pleaded for a holistic integral formation.

For some seminaries and formation houses, these recommendations remain mere theories. Their formation method is still business as usual: study, lectures or spiritual conferences, and little or no exercises in human development. Given the numerous challenges to formation today, the traditional model can hardly meet the demands of the contemporary time. Didactic approach is grossly inadequate; one must supplement it with something near “therapeutic” approach, so that the candidates can be helped to attain maturity. We dare not forget, as the Iperu Formation Team puts it, that “The general stance of the Church in its relationship to the modern world and to other religions has shifted from that of defensive vigilance and suspicion to that of openness and dialogue.” (Iperu, 1995,13)

The Shift We Must Make If Formation Should Succeed

Though the Church has made a lot of recommendations with regard to changing our formation method to the better, bishops and major superiors, seminaries and formation houses continue, in practice, to pay more attention to academic qualifications rather than maturation processes; as a result intellectually bright but psychologically weak candidates and formators are chosen for the formation process. (Iperu, 1995,13) The major concern of formation houses today should be how to achieve human maturity, not just on the part of the candidate, but also on the side of the formators, because, as *PastoresDaboVobis* affirms, the success of every form of formation depends on the proper formation of the human personality.

We need to focus on human maturity, as that aspect of human beings that ensures the harmony of elements and the integration of all tendencies and values in the human person. The Sacred Congregation for the Catholic Education recognizes the role human maturity plays in a healthy spirituality and appreciates its complexity and comprehensiveness in the following words:

Maturity is a complex reality which cannot be easily or fully defined. In general, however, one can judge a man mature when he has brought to reality his vocation as a man; in other words, a person who has acquired a ready and habitual capacity to act freely; a man who has integrated his developed human potential with habits of virtue; a man who has acquired an easy and habitual emotional self-control by integrating his

emotional drives and placing them at the service of his reason; a man who enjoys community living because of his willingness to give himself to serve others; one who devotes himself to his profession steadily and calmly; one whose conduct obviously follows his conscience; a man who uses freedom to explore, investigate, and develop; who can mould events and bring them to future fruition; finally, a man who has succeeded in bringing all his specifically human possibilities and potentialities to their due development. (The Sacred Congregation, 2002,18)

If the crisis of faith is to be avoided in the lives of the candidates, the future priests and consecrated persons should be made to grow in *vocational maturity*. This means that there should be a shift from the didactic and defensive approach – which merely transmits information – to the therapeutic, dialogue and more comprehensive approach – which aims at transformation and growth in maturity. Only the latter approach can handle the complex issue of formation in the contemporary world. Ultimately, the task of formation is not just to *in-form*, but primarily to *trans-form*, so that the candidates can *per-form* better in their vocation. In other words, the project of formation, should not just aim at delivering information, but basically on effecting transformation in the candidate, so that he or she should be able to put up a nice performance in the ministry, in the discipleship.

The drive towards maturity is a motivation towards transformation and “conversion of heart” (CCC 1206). As St Paul was telling the Ephesians, it is only at a high level of human maturity that we can attain the “unity of faith and the knowledge of the Son of God” and form the community necessary for the body of Christ (Eph. 4:13). Similarly, only with maturity can the formators create a formation community, provide the accompaniment on the road to discipleship, so that the candidate themselves can grow in vocational maturity.

If the candidates are to acquire vocational maturity, they need training in the three areas of the psyche – the cognitive, the affective, and the volitional.

- Formation should aim at making candidates develop *cognitive maturity*, that is, the ability to grasp truth in a more dynamic way. This would entail, not just gaining knowledge of things, but also knowledge of the truth about themselves, the knowing subjects – about the development of their minds and moral conscience. Much could be learnt from the advancements in human science, especially from Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg, who have proven beyond doubt that moral reasoning is not a static possession, but something that must be acquired through a developmental procedure.
- Formation should equally lead candidates to the growth in *emotional maturity*. This should make them be aware of their feelings and how

these feelings, whether conscious or unconscious, influence their actions. The regular pious admonitions from lectures and conference would certainly not be enough. It would rather require the involvement of a competent formator and a huge investment of time and energy both on the part of the candidate and the formator, for one to grow in awareness of what type of feelings and how such feelings motivate one's actions. It should be an attempt to expose the defense mechanisms and replace them with much more mature and purposeful skills in rechanneling emotions to positive use.

- Candidates should equally learn how to grow in *volitional maturity*, i.e. the ability to delay or deny the gratification of certain desires inconsistent with the core values of one's vocation. This would entail teaching them how to engage in responsible freedom: allowing them to be free in making their choices, but at the same time take responsibility for the result of their choice or actions.

When all these are in place, candidates would be better prepared to attain competence in ministry; live a life that is an expression of authentic faith, rather than disbelief. With a mature personality, the religious or priest becomes a bridge that connects people to Jesus Christ. And when all these rigorous formation processes are in place, it will become easy for the formators to identify those candidates who do not qualify for the ministry, and redirect them elsewhere before ordination or profession.

Conclusion

In the contemporary time, secularism and atheistic culture exert a lot of influence on life. This has its root in the Western Cultural Revolution, which propagates *relativism* – the trend of thought that denies God and the Supernatural absolute authority in the interpretation of reality – and makes human right to freedom and pleasure the criteria for moral judgment. This, no doubt, introduces crises in Religion and in the life of faith, which, with the help of globalization, is tossed around in the world.

The youth, more than any other group, is exposed to the current wave of religious and faith crises, which is compounded by other negative influences from the contemporary Nigeria society saturated with materialism, corruption, superstition and sundry vices. As a result, candidates coming for formation today have a troubled background, which compromises their faith, and places much pressure on the traditional methods of formation.

Though formation should transform the candidates, it is being observed that many pass through the formation houses, and come out with lesser signs of authentic faith. The thrust of this reflection has been that if formation is to help in confronting and solving the problem of crises of faith, a more holistic and integral form of formation must be followed, not

just in principle, but in practice, aiming not just at information, but at transformation.

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