

# ADMISSION AND FORMATION OF FORMATORS

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TO DAMIEN

## Introduction

It is truly a great pleasure to stand before you today to speak to you about a theme so important in consecrated life: admission and **being a formator**. It is a service that is not highly regarded in the eyes of many consecrated persons, as it yields nothing but the wages of criticism. That is why many men and women religious do not readily accept this service.

And yet, you are the **backbone of consecrated life**. You are the first ‘head chefs’ of religious life. You are like the ‘Potter’ spoken of in the Old Testament, with the sole difference that your role is limited to the form, for the substance is the work of God and the Holy Spirit. You are the **‘simultaneous interpreters’** of the charism of the foundation and the mission of the Congregation today. Therefore, you are ‘second founders’, or rather the water from the spring that nourishes the tree of the Congregation.

This is why your service is both noble and difficult. Noble, because you give the Church and the Congregation daughters, sons, or rather religious, in accordance with the spirit of the founders, for the good of the Church. Challenging, because you must first immerse yourselves in the Spirit of the founders, the mission of the Congregation today, the social context of our future religious, and the challenges of the modern world—a world in crisis yet full of hope. All of this is your mission.

**My talk will consist mainly of three parts:**

- a. **Admission**
- b. **Formators**
- c. **Those in formation**

As I am not a specialist in consecrated life, I can only offer you the fruits of my observations as a former formator and former Major Superior. We can enrich one another, for this forum is based on such mutual enrichment.

Without further ado, let us turn to the first point:

## ADMISSION

This is an important moment in the life of both the young person and the Congregation. Thus, following the example of Jesus when choosing his disciples, every admission must be preceded by a time of prayer and discernment (Lk 6:12–16).

This time of prayer helps the ‘decision-making’ members to have no other criteria in mind except the good of the Church and her People.

However, the Church provides us with certain objective elements to help us better understand the choice to be made: human, religious and ecclesial criteria.

**a. *Having a vocation***

The appropriate verb would be 'to be'. One might say: I am a vocation, in the sense that I am one who is called. The first indicator is the candidate themselves. They must demonstrate their 'vocation' through certain key elements such as: a deep desire to dedicate themselves to God, a love of prayer and the spiritual life, a willingness to serve the Church and its people, especially the poorest. In short, the call to be a religious. One demonstrates a deep desire to dedicate oneself to God (attending Mass, reading the Bible and the lives of the saints, giving to the poor, etc.)

**b. *Having a deep and firm faith***

Faith, although it is a personal gift that God gives to his children, is a solid pillar for living one's vocation more fully. A religious vocation without faith is like a fine building built on sand. Any wind or storm can shake it. The first step in this faith, for those beginning their formation, is to verify **their baptism** and the other sacraments of Christian initiation.

Saint James shows us that faith is intimately linked to works (James 2:14-17). Candidates must demonstrate their works through the extent of their commitment to the life of the Church and their love for the People of God. They are invited to open themselves to the teachings of the Church (retreats, publications, its doctrine, etc.)

**c. *Possessing sound human, emotional and even sexual maturity***

Religious life is founded on community life. Candidates, at every stage of their formation, must demonstrate their ability to live in community and to participate actively within it. A candidate cannot live as a solitary individual.

Throughout the formation, we are called upon to provide them with the tools to better manage their impulses and emotions, to handle conflicts and frustrations effectively, and to grow in their inner freedom.

***Human maturity*** is:

**Human maturity** is a very important criterion for admission to and perseverance in religious life. It enables a person to live a balanced life of community, mission and the **evangelical counsels** within the Catholic Church.

Here are some **key criteria for human maturity** in religious life<sup>1</sup> :

**1. A good understanding of oneself**

The person must:

- Be aware of their strengths and limitations.

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<sup>1</sup> Caught up in AI

- Recognise their weaknesses without becoming discouraged.
- Be able to question themselves.

This self-awareness helps them to grow and improve.

## 2. Emotional balance

A mature person is capable of:

- Manage their emotions.
- Maintain healthy and respectful relationships.
- Avoid emotional dependencies.

This is particularly important for living a life of **consecrated chastity**.

## 3. Inner freedom

A person must be able to:

- Make decisions freely.
- Not be dominated by fears or external pressures.
- Act out of conviction rather than under duress.

## 4. The ability to live in community

Religious life requires:

- A spirit of brotherhood.
- The ability to listen.
- Respect for differences.
- The acceptance of correction.

## 5. A sense of responsibility

A mature person:

- Stands by their commitments.
- Carries out their duties faithfully.
- Respects the rules of the community.

## 6. The ability to manage conflicts

In any community, there can be tensions.

Maturity is demonstrated by:

- Dialogue.
- Patience.
- The pursuit of reconciliation.

## 7. Consistency in decision-making

A mature person does not constantly change direction.

They show **perseverance in their decisions and commitments**.

## 8. Openness to learning

Maturity involves:

- The humility to learn.
- Acceptance of advice from formators.
- A desire to grow as a person and spiritually.

Emotional maturity is:

- **Self-awareness** (see the Enneagram)
- **Emotional stability:** this is the stage where one becomes capable of understanding and regulating one's emotions without being overwhelmed by them. It involves:
  1. Recognising your emotions (naming what you feel is a step towards the solution).
  2. Avoiding reacting in the heat of the moment: take a good deep breath, give yourself a moment.
  3. Expressing what you feel, rather than bottling it up (it can build up inside, leading to illness...)
  4. Look after your body (an exhausted body is emotionally uncontrollable).
  5. Accept that you are not perfect (perfection is an exhausting endeavour. That is why we must ask God for the grace of holiness).
  6. Have a strong inner life (values, a healthy spiritual life and a sense of purpose).
- **The ability to love without dependence:**

It means being able to say to yourself: I love you, but I choose myself. It means distinguishing between 'love' and dependence (I can't live without you, I'm afraid of losing you). When your happiness depends purely on the other person, it is no longer love. It means being personally resilient (your self-esteem, your plans, your values, your social life...). Two whole people love each other better than two people who miss each other. And accepting that you cannot control everything (accepting 'no', change, difference, absence...)
- **The ability to embrace solitude:** it's the ability to feel good about yourself when you're alone. To do this:
  1. **Redefine what loneliness means: it's** not just about being alone, but having time for yourself.
  2. **Learn to enjoy your own company:** if you can't manage it, solitude becomes a prison. If you can, it becomes a refuge.
  3. **Fill your solitude with something good:** not social media or films, but a good book, writing, prayer, walking, ...
  4. **Accepting the emptiness caused by loneliness:** it might make you want to cry, scream, masturbate... and realise that loneliness doesn't have to lead to isolation. Instead, it should help you 'grow': it is in silence that we discover our true worth as human beings. Being alone does not mean being useless.

- **The ability to manage conflicts:**

Managing conflict is different from avoiding problems. It is the ability to seek a solution, rather than fighting to be right. We realise that conflict is normal. We must find a solution. So, it is better to get to the heart of the matter before responding (give yourself time). When faced with a conflict, talk more about yourself (I feel, I sense, I think that...). Always look for the solution, not the culprit, and move forward. And learn from every conflict (what did I discover, what could I have said?). Every conflict should make you a little more mature.

**d. *Be in good physical and mental health***

With the exception of religious families whose vocation is to care for people with disabilities, all other religious families require good physical and psychological health at every stage. This provides a solid foundation for living more fully within the community, for better fulfilling one's commitments and apostolate, for carrying out one's mission more effectively, and for entrusting candidates with certain responsibilities.

**e. *Ability to live in community***

Whatever stage the candidate is at, they must be able to live with others and contribute to a good community atmosphere. Religious life is not for toxic people or those who make others' lives miserable. It is a place of joy, peace and forgiveness, in the words of Jean Vanier. Candidates learn to share their lives, to forgive, to take part in community services, to grow in fraternity, to contribute (for those who receive a salary), to listen to others and the community (timetable, life plan, etc.), and to be open (dialogue, accompaniment).

**f. *A sincere intention***

The candidate must not be responding to the vocation of a family member. Their intention should be upright and free from coercion. They must demonstrate a certain suitability. Formators must check that candidates are not there to resolve a particular personal problem (security, disappointment, for example) or to shirk responsibility.

**g. *A certain intellectual level***

This criterion varies according to religious families and the conditions set out in the Formation Plan. What is clear is that a candidate must possess a certain level of intelligence to understand things and be able to pass them on to others one day. Let us not forget that today's world demands more formation. Whilst AI is already replacing many professions, we must take care that it does not succeed in replacing us in the proclamation of the Gospel. The consecrated person is called to a higher level of intellectual formation.

#### ***h. Acceptance of the Congregation's mission (charism)***

Every religious family has its own specific mission within the Church. Candidates are called to love and accept the mission of the congregation. This is why the mission must be clear (especially from the Novitiate onwards) so that, in complete freedom, candidates can say yes to God's call within the religious family. This acceptance goes hand in hand with a sense of belonging.

#### ***i. The signs of a 'good vocation'***

It is with great caution that one can speak of a good vocation or an authentic vocation. God alone is the true Master of discernment. However, there are certain internal and external signs that can help you admit a candidate:

- A stable inner calling. Despite the difficulties the candidate may encounter, this calling remains stable. They always speak of their consecration to God
- The joy of an intense inner life: the candidate does not neglect their life of prayer, even in difficult times. They respect, as far as possible, their personal life plan and their times of prayer
- The joy of giving oneself to God and to others: this joy should be progressive, and the candidate must make an effort to ensure it does not wane.
- The desire to serve: God, others, the poor – in short, the Church.
- The ability to live out the religious vows
- Human, emotional and even sexual maturity (given the prevalence of abuse today)
- Perseverance on his vocational journey
- The Church's confirmation (through formators, the people of God and superiors).

#### ***j. Some difficulties to be aware of for sound discernment***

These difficulties or obstacles may stem from the candidate themselves, their environment or certain inner fears. This is why formators are called to be attentive to each candidate in order to better help them continue on their path (personalised formation).

- Helping candidates to know themselves (their motivations, wounds, expectations, qualities, limitations, family history, etc.).
- Helping candidates purify their motivations throughout their formation.
- Helping candidates feel free (without pressure from society and those around them).
- Helping candidates overcome their fear of commitment (especially today, when everything is fluid, superficial, etc.).
- Helping candidates to heal their wounds (which we all have).
- Allowing candidates time during spiritual guidance.

### ***k. The involvement of specialists***

Involving **psychologists in the formation of religious** is now considered very useful, even necessary, for several reasons linked to the human, emotional and relational maturity of candidates for religious life. Here are the main reasons:

#### **1. Fostering human maturity**

Religious life requires **solid human maturity**. Psychologists can help formators assess whether the candidate possesses:

- A good understanding of oneself.
- The ability to manage one's emotions.
- Psychological stability.
- Inner freedom in their choices.

They can also help the candidate to better understand their personality, strengths and limitations.

#### **2. Assisting with vocational discernment**

Discerning a vocation involves not only the spiritual dimension, but also **the psychological dimension**. A psychologist can help to determine whether:

- The desire to become a religious is free and authentic.
- It is not motivated by emotional wounds, fears or a desire to escape the world.
- The person is capable of living up to the demands of religious life (celibacy, community life, obedience).

#### **3. Preventing emotional and relational difficulties**

Community life requires a high **degree of emotional and relational maturity**. Psychological support can help candidates to:

- Manage conflicts.
- Develop empathy.
- Communicate more effectively.
- Avoid emotional dependency or toxic relationships.

#### **4. Prevent abuse and inappropriate behaviour**

In the current climate, where there is much discussion about abuse within the Church, the support of psychologists is important for:

- Identify psychological vulnerabilities.
- Preventing abusive behaviour.
- Train religious to build healthy and respectful relationships.

#### **5. Addressing past trauma**

Some people arrive at the novitiate with **family, emotional or traumatic wounds**.

The psychologist can help to:

- Recognise these wounds.
- Heal them gradually.
- Prevent them from negatively affecting religious life.

## 6. Complementing the work of formators

The formator is often **a priest or religious**, specialising in spiritual guidance. The psychologist brings **scientific expertise on personality and human behaviour**, which complements the spiritual guidance.

The psychologist's involvement does not replace spiritual guidance. It **complements it**.

It helps ensure that the person entering religious life possesses **sufficient human, emotional and psychological maturity** to live out their vocation faithfully.

In short: it is important to know that **God's grace builds upon human nature**. If the human foundation is solid, the religious vocation can flourish more harmoniously.

### Other objective admission criteria

We all have criteria for admitting a candidate, at any stage of their formation. These criteria must be known to all formators and frequently reiterated in our meetings. A lack of criteria can lead to subjectivity, a source of many conflicts in consecrated life (the local lad, a young person from my neighbourhood, my candidates, etc.). Objectivity gives you peace of mind and a clear conscience. Among these **objective criteria**, we can mention: age (for beginners), attendance at meetings and support sessions, test results, physical fitness, moral character, the length of time spent integrating, etc.

### In conclusion:

The Formation Plan requires regular review, in line with changes in society, the directives of General Chapters, and the contributions of local culture.

And each stage must meet a specific objective known to the entire formation team. This objective is a light that illuminates the formation process in its darkness. And each stage must have objective criteria.

Another important factor is the role of the community in which the formation takes place. We are called upon to make our communities **increasingly formative**. This is because young people do not often look to the formators. They are in more direct contact with other members because of their distance from the 'so-called relationship'. Yet these members play an important role in the growth of our young people. Sometimes, these members feel isolated and leave everything to the formators. The best formation takes place in daily life (where the other members are also present). A formative community supports candidates through their difficulties; it creates a good atmosphere for formation (prayer, community life, work, apostolate, etc.)

## Second stage

### THE FORMATION LEADERS

#### *As the 'spirit of the founders'*

Even if your work and your commitment do not always receive glorious recognition from your fellow brothers or sisters, you must never forget that you are the 'laboratory technicians' of religious life. It is you who select the candidates for the survival of the Congregation, discerning the good from the less good. You embody the spirit of the Founders, for through you we can say that we have 'Sacred Hearts' who live as 'Sacred Hearts'. If you neglect this founding spirit within you, you produce individuals who are of no use to the Congregation or to the Church.

Your primary mission is not merely to pass on the knowledge or Tradition of the Congregation. It is also to accompany the candidates so that they may, in complete freedom, come to serve God and his people better. It is in this spirit that I first offer you certain personal tools for your 'apostolate'.

- 1. A deep spiritual life:** Father Germain Fresan SSCC used to tell us all the time that we are not 'monks'. This does not mean that we do not need a spiritual life. Formators are called to be 'people of prayer', to live a life that reflects (in all aspects of consecrated life), to be witnesses in the daily lives of those being formed, and to recognise that **'your example is more formative than your words'**.
- 2. A stable and wise person:** the formation house enables young people from different backgrounds to come together. As Professor Kamuiziku says: 'two children, two problems'. Formators are called to be emotionally balanced, to know how to manage conflicts that may arise within the group, to be inwardly free (not to judge or view problems through the eyes of others), and to be emotionally mature (especially in today's circumstances, where anything can happen). Their wisdom also leads them to be discreet (inner peace is a treasure to be guarded throughout one's life).
- 3. A person with a great capacity for listening:** to support young people better, we must listen to them and even listen to the 'unspoken aspects of their words'. Listening is a gateway to better support. Without listening, support becomes a 'bureaucratic' exercise. Formators are encouraged to create a climate of trust with young people. What are the **conditions for good listening**:
  - Be fully present when the young person is speaking to you (a sign of respect)
  - Respect what the young person says (without interrupting them, without imposing your own views)
  - Be empathetic (put yourself in their shoes, understand their suffering, joys and sorrows)
  - Create an atmosphere of trust (do not judge or criticise, but be welcoming)

- Pay attention to body language (not everything is said with words)
  - Give them time (don't rush them or look at your watch. Let them speak freely)
  - Rephrasing what the other person has said (this builds their confidence and shows them you weren't distracted)
  - Discretion (trust must be earned)
  - Humility (through listening, we may realise we don't have all the answers)
  - Dialogue (a final space where you speak openly and honestly about the subject)
4. **A person with keen intuition:** they must always ask God for sound discernment. The lives of young people, the Church and the Congregation are in your hands. You are called to detect the signs of a genuine vocation, the young people's motivations (according to the stages), their qualities and limitations, and their potential, so that they may reach a mature decision free from any external or internal pressure. The young people must be convinced of their calling, thanks to your help.
  5. **Learning to develop certain educational tools:** as I said earlier, you are the spirit of our Founders. We need to know how to pass on our spirituality to the young people, convey the values of religious life (the role of the community, the vows, the family spirit, the charisma, etc.), draw up a support plan for each young person according to their development, and carry out assessments with them and with the formation team
  6. **Growing in team spirit:** no one can claim to form young people on their own. The principal formator must take others into account for better formation. Thus, he or she is called to work as part of a team. Everyone's contribution is a benefit even for the principal formator themselves. This is how tasks should be shared in a House of Formation.
  7. **Growing in patience:** personal development is a long-term endeavour. Unless there is a repeat offence, formators are asked to exercise a great deal of patience. In exercising this patience, please also make a point of encouraging young people in their endeavours (even when they try and fail). For anything that warrants reprimand or correction, please do so with kindness, and not in a spirit of humiliation or denigration. Let us never forget that tomorrow they may be in our place. We risk reaping what we have sown.
  8. **Consistency of life:** let us not educate through words alone. It is our actions that capture the young people's attention most. They observe, see and sense what we do, and this in your daily life. Whatever we tell them to do, let us be the first to do it. Your attitudes, your way of living and participating in the community, your experience of the vows, etc., are all under the scrutiny of your young people.
  9. **Avoid triumphalism:** we often hear formators say, 'It is now that formation begins', as if those who came before them had done nothing. Triumphalism kills

formation. It is also in this regard that we say to ourselves, “These are my children.” You protect them as the apple of your eye. Once they have completed their initial formation, you continue to mentor them even in the absence of the current formator. This is a seed of destruction in initial formation.

## GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FORMATOR

### A. Formator, know yourself

You cannot claim to be a good formator if you do not know yourself. The first step is to embark on this journey within yourself. Discover your strengths and your limitations. This will prevent you from frequently projecting onto the trainees or thinking that they must be exactly like you. The Enneagram helps us too. We are made up of many facets in our lives, but one of them may seem like a ‘model’ for living. We **all develop a main ‘facet’** that becomes familiar to us and makes us feel comfortable, especially if everyone admires it. This facet gives us a ‘place’ in the eyes of others.

The big question regarding our personality is not whether ‘Turkey’ is in Europe or Asia, but ‘to know in what ways it is European and Asian, and which aspect it needs to develop to be more of one or the other if it so wishes<sup>2</sup>’.

The effort would be to identify **the ‘false self’** and its limitations in order to reach the essence of the self. This essence is discovered in the ‘subtype’ of the Enneagram (path of transformation).

The first step for a formator is to be ‘true’ to oneself. To discover one’s ‘true self’. Not the one we quickly present to the world, but the one that brings us true peace and true personal happiness.

### A.2. The formator in consecrated life is a woman or a man of unfailing **human maturity**.

The girls and boys do not come primarily to be the formator’s friends, let alone the formator’s slaves. They are not there to make up for what the formator lacked in their family or to extend their biological family. The girls do not come to formation to find **an immature formator** (see *TikTok* today).

As you know, maturity does not come solely with age but with certain aspects of life: one’s way of thinking, reacting and living with others.

### A.3. It is a woman or man who **is being formed** (intellectual formation). I am not just talking about a woman or man who is educated (with numerous qualifications), but one who is being formed. Formation is ongoing. Theology evolves every day. Finding the time to cultivate oneself and stay up to date. Understanding the challenges of the present day. By being with young people, one must understand youth culture whilst seeking to purify it in order to better respond to God’s call today. Without this formation, one risks being out of touch with young people and becoming a ‘dictator’ within the Community, or even

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<sup>2</sup> Philippe Halin, *The Enneagram: 9 Paths to the Best in Yourself and Others*, p. 4

developing a certain (inferiority) complex, especially if the young people are well-educated.

**A.4.** This is a woman or man with a **sense of accompaniment**. A sense of discernment and listening needs to be developed. You know that accompaniment takes many forms in consecrated life. We do not accompany a candidate, a postulant, a novice or a junior in the same way. The objectives of each stage differ, and expectations increase at each stage.

**A.5.** A woman or a man with an **open and missionary spirit**. The formator is called to integrate the dimension of **cultural diversity** into their 'human calendar'. We move from the culture of each individual, through the culture of young people, to better live the 'culture of the Congregation'. All these cultures intermingle and enrich one another. An open mind also leads to a missionary spirit: "Go into all the world and preach the good news." I have always been moved by the missionary spirit of Little Thérèse (Patroness of the Mission) without ever leaving her convent.

**In short**, a formator is someone who guides, directs, bears witness, educates, trains and practises what they preach, in accordance with the Congregation's mission and the spirit of the founders. For every formator is a 'translator' of the founder's spirit today.

## **B. How should we form people in today's context?**

As young people ask themselves today: "**navandi na bino mabe**<sup>3</sup> "?

Our mission, for all of us, is to bear witness to Christ and his love in this world. Every religious family bears witness to this Living Christ. Ours is no exception to this rule.

The main tool for better formation **is the heart**. Formation must touch the hearts of young people. Everything you give them (retreats, days of recollection, prayer of the Breviary, spiritual reading...) must contribute to the transformation of the heart.

### **Let us listen to Pope Francis speaking to us about the Heart of Jesus (Dilexit Nos)**

We cannot claim to be 'the repairers' if we fail to touch the heart of man, or rather the inner man. **The Heart is the centre of desire and the place where man makes the important decisions of his life** (no. 3). It is the place of sincerity where one can neither deceive nor conceal (no. 5).

#### *a. Our first mission: to return to the heart*

We live in a 'liquid' society where nothing is solid anymore. The world encourages us to be more consumers than people who stop to think or reflect on their inner lives. As the Pope says, **'the heart is lacking'** (no. 9). We see this in our country, in our world. Everything is just a pretence 'in the meantime'. No one takes account of the other's heart. There are no more 'heart-to-heart' encounters. Selfishness is taking hold, individualism is in full swing. We are in a heartless society dominated

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<sup>3</sup> A Lingala expression meaning: 'What kind of relationship have we had?'

by **'narcissism and self-referentiality'** (no. 17). The heart is the **seat of love**, with all its spiritual, emotional and even physical components (No. 21)

Looking closely at what **is happening in our society** (misappropriation, theft, killings, Kuluna, poisonings, endless war, the race for power, division within our families, etc.), one can certainly say that 'we have lost the dimension of the heart' in our society. The heart is truly lacking. One of the fundamental questions we, as consecrated women, should ask ourselves is: **'Do I have a heart?'** (no. 23)

*b. The world can change from the heart*

If we manage to touch the heart and unite our own with that of Christ, we will and we can **'work the social miracle'** (no. 28). Change in our hearts and from our hearts can bring much to our society. Let us ask the Heart of Christ to have compassion for our world, where dehumanisation, the misuse of technology, and a lack of love reign. All this is possible if our hearts are converted to the true love of Jesus Christ. A true path of reparation.

**C. Gestures and words of love (nos. 33–47)**

In our mission as 'reparators', Christ also invites us to choose acts and words of love that touch our hearts deeply. Christ did not wish to explain his love for people or humanity at length. He performed acts that demonstrate this and which can help us build a society of love, a society with a heart. He calls us **'his friends'** to show us that he is one of us and that he came to live amongst us (Emmanuel). He approaches everyone, as in the case of the **Samaritan woman** at the well, and strikes up a conversation (Jn 4:5–42); he goes to meet **Nicodemus**, who fears being seen by others; he allows a **woman of ill repute** to touch his feet and wash them with her tears (Lk 7:36–50); he does not condemn the **woman caught in adultery** (Jn 8:11); he calls **the blind man** whom his disciples had prevented from seeing him, and gives him what he needed: sight (Mk 10:51).

All these acts of Christ touch the heart first and foremost and show just how close God is to us. On several occasions, Pope Francis invites us to **a revolution of tenderness**. And to the **holiness of the neighbour next door**. Our acts of love speak louder than any speech. Our acts of love do more good than all our prayers without a life lived in witness. Jesus invites us to **be attentive to the needs** of our brothers and sisters, just as he himself did (he gave them food so that the people would not die on their way home). *'How beautiful it is to know that even if others are unaware of our good intentions or the positive things we do, Jesus is not unaware of them; on the contrary, he admires them'* (no. 41). **In our ministry, if we manage to touch the heart of a person, we have thereby saved the whole person. If we manage to draw a person's heart back to the heart of Jesus, we have saved all humanity.**

There is no stratum of society or specific sphere—be it in politics, culture, cuisine, or any other area—that is exempt from conflict and division. All these spheres are in need of 'reparation'. For us as Christians and members of the Congregation, every conflict

or division is a wound inflicted upon the Sacred Heart of Jesus. And conflict breaks the relationship between people, or between nations. In the Gospel of Saint John, Chapter 17 (the High Priestly Prayer), Christ prays for unity. He is our unifying principle. Through reparation, we wish to fight against all **structures of sin** in our society and in our personal lives.

The Pope invites us to ‘**make amends**’ by ‘building a new civilisation of love on the ruins we have left in this world through our sins’ (no. 182). Our good intentions are not always enough to make amends. The Pope invites us to **forgiveness**. Acknowledging one’s sins before others is not a sign of weakness, nor is it a humiliation; “it pleases the Lord” (no. 188).

#### **D. Some tools for better formation**

1. **Loving the Congregation and consecrated life:** what we love, we pass on with joy and peace of heart. Following the example of Saint Paul in 1 Cor. 13
2. **Loving your role as a formator:** telling yourself that despite others’ criticism, you contribute significantly to the growth of the religious family and the life of the Church
3. **Loving those in formation:** there may be a natural antipathy or a natural sympathy. Those in formation are there for the good of the Congregation. You are called to love them all in the same way, and to be aware that the one who rests her head on ‘your chest’ can destroy community life.
4. **Learning to be yourself in formation:** one learns more from examples than from words. Put into practice with joy and simplicity of heart what you teach the young. They are watching you and they know you.
5. **Form them in freedom of heart and mind:** the law is good for everyone, but charity and compassion are better than anything. Those in formation must feel welcomed and free to express themselves.
6. **Train them to love God, their neighbour and the Church:** consecrated life is full of ‘calculators’. Let us not be consumers of God, but His children whom He can trust.
7. **Train them to love the consecrated life:** a life chosen for its beauty and its mission
8. **Forming them to love God from the heart:** for what we love with our hearts is always well protected. To be a woman of prayer, a woman of action and a woman of heart.
9. **Forming them to love community life:** true community is physical, not virtual. True community is made up of people, not angels.
10. **To form them to love the poor and poverty:** public opinion teaches us that the poor are a hindrance to our spiritual growth (state of mind), that they prevent us from prospering. Diaconal ministry emphasises this phrase: to give to the poor is to be in God’s debt. Following the example of the Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Young Man, let us love the poor.
11. **Forming them in respect:** for the common good, for the elderly, for workers, for themselves, and to respect their dignity (not chasing after money).

## **Formator, who are you?**

You are that voice crying out in the wilderness. You are the path that Christ charts for the life of your religious family. You are that instrument of Christ's love for the growth of young people. You are Christ's love in daily life for young people. You are the voice of the founder for the Congregation today (just like the General Superior). You are the daily example of consecrated life for young people. You are a guide, a companion, an elder, a mother, an educator, an example of life.

My formators, you may forget everything I have just told you, except this one sentence: **'form the hearts** of young people **more** than their minds'. All too often, we limit ourselves to intellectual formation. If the heart is not in it, the formation has failed. Form consecrated women who are filled with zeal for the mission and who live with a good measure of hope, which never disappoints.

Being born into a crisis does not make you a woman or a man in crisis. Even if consecrated life is going through a crisis, consecrated women are called to serve their Lord with joy and love. Christ is not in crisis.

## **E. THE ROLE OF THE FORMATION TEAM**

This role is clearly defined in our various Initial Formation Plans. What is important here is to know how to maintain, nurture and update our Formation Plans.

The quality of the formation team depends largely on its members and how they work together. A good team must seek ways and means to reflect together and reach certain joint decisions for the good of the young people.

Members are called upon to stand shoulder to shoulder, despite internal differences of opinion. What matters most is the young people's well-being. As the saying goes: 'It is better to be wrong together than to be right alone'.

This is a place of ongoing formation and mutual support. It is a place where discretion reigns supreme. Be aware that the details you share with a young person about your discussions and proposals can leave a lasting impression.

Young people must sense a certain positive camaraderie within the formation team, rather than a rift that they could easily exploit to widen.

The formation team must pay close attention to the formation process. No formator can ignore what has been done in previous stages. This promotes continuity in the young person's development.

## **F. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE FORMATION TEAM AND THE GOVERNMENT**

From the outset, the relationship is based on collaboration, sharing and shared responsibility. Canonical authority rests with the Provincial, the Regional Superior and their Councils (appointment, organisation, decision-making). Thus, the team leader is called upon to share information regularly on the young people's progress with the

relevant Superior, and not to wait until the last minute. This would avoid a great deal of conflict. This information covers the trainees, the needs of the formation house and the formators, and the difficulties faced by the young people.

Before any decision is taken, the formation team discerns and gives its opinion to the Superior, who, together with his Council, will take the appropriate decision. Sometimes, this may be contrary to the opinion of the formators.

The Government is called upon to support the formation team so that it can carry out its work more effectively (sufficient staff, funding, ongoing formation, etc.) and will ensure strict adherence to the Formation Plan.

The Government will respect the team's pace, whilst recognising that each member plays their part in a spirit of complementarity.

In short, the formation team is composed of the Province's or Region's technical advisers on formation matters.

**In the event of a conflict (caused by a lack of communication, interference, failure to fulfil one's role, abuse of authority, immaturity, unrealistic expectations, disciplinary issues, or a lack of spiritual life):**

- Encourage open dialogue (do not resign or disclose the conflict to the young people).
- Clarify the role of each party (conflict of jurisdiction).
- Prioritise the common good (the Institute and those in formation).
- If the conflict persists, refer to the Superior and the FI documents.

## **G. A CERTAIN DISCIPLINE**

I have always been taught that a formator is someone who sits back and reduces the number of outings. The formator's primary discipline is to be present for the young people. An almost constant presence (especially in the Novitiate).

- They must be the first to respect the house timetable (**spiritual and community discipline**).
- We live in a culture of waste. Formators must emphasise the proper use of communal goods, as the tendency is to damage things so that we buy more and more. (**Economic discipline**)
- At every stage, train the young people to contribute something to the Community (however small): through work, through the gifts they have received, etc. The general mindset is that religious life is a place where one takes (even without sowing).
- Also prioritise **moral discipline** (respect young people, even in the way you speak; avoid abuses of authority, etc.)

In short: Be a credible witness to the young people (**pedagogical discipline**). Even though we know that Christ alone remains our Master.

### ***Third point***

## **FORMS**

The last General Chapter of the Brothers gave young people a prominent place. It invited the congregation to listen to young people and to be convinced that young people also have something to contribute to the Congregation.

We can say almost the same thing about our young people in formation today. To form them better, it is important for us to get to know them, to learn about their culture and way of life so that all this may be a path of spiritual growth and a source of strength for their apostolic mission.

Here are some key features of contemporary youth culture<sup>4</sup> :

#### **1. Digital culture**

Young people live in a world heavily influenced by technology:

- Constant use of mobile phones and the internet.
- Communication via social media.
- Rapid access to information.
- The influence of digital media on opinions and behaviour.

#### **2. The quest for freedom and independence**

Young people today place great importance on:

- Personal freedom.
- Expressing their opinions.
- Independence in life choices.
- Questioning certain traditional authorities.

#### **3. The culture of instant gratification**

Many young people are used to getting what they want quickly:

- Instant communication.
- A desire for quick results.
- Sometimes finding it difficult to be patient and to cope with delays.

#### **4. Sensitivity to justice and human rights**

Today's young people are often sensitive to:

- Social justice.
- Equality between people.
- Human dignity.
- Environmental protection.

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<sup>4</sup> I drew inspiration from artificial intelligence, adding my own experience to it.

## 5. The importance of relationships and emotional connection

Young people place great value on:

- Friendship.
- Love.
- Acceptance by the group.
- Expressing emotions.

## 6. Cultural diversity

Today, young people are exposed to a variety of cultures:

- International music.
- Varied fashion styles.
- The influence of different traditions and ways of life.

## 7. The challenges of today's culture

Youth culture also presents certain challenges:

- Excessive influence of social media.
- Crisis of moral and spiritual values.
- Peer pressure.
- Individualism and materialism.

Today's youth culture is dynamic, open and creative, but it also presents significant challenges for education, the family and religious formation.

For formators, it is essential to understand this culture in order to accompany young people with realism, patience and wisdom.

### Some challenges to consider

- Responsible use of social media (lack of silence, inner reflection, rapid influence, personal reasoning, etc.).
- Prioritising community life (as the trend is towards individualism; building virtual communities).
- Working on consistency in commitments (as the world is fluid, short-lived and full of temporary experiences).
- The challenge of a deep spiritual life (as society leads us towards superficiality) by building a good relationship with God and with Jesus.
- Acceptance of authority (autonomy makes it difficult to accept authority. This can even lead to fraternal correction: 'Who are you to tell me to change?')
- The challenge of integrating religious culture: they already have their own. We need to help them embrace a religious culture that requires: multiculturalism, internationalism, unity in diversity, etc.

## MAY YOUNG PEOPLE BE TRAINED IN INNER FREEDOM

**Inner freedom** is linked to our state of consciousness, to our way of conceiving the world or of positioning ourselves in relation to the world. It is our great capacity to remain true

to ourselves in the face of the world's conditioning, in the face of external or internal pressures, in the face of emotions—in short, in the face of ourselves. It is the victory we grant ourselves in the face of everything that might make us 'slaves' and lead us astray from our 'true self'.

I am increasingly convinced that if we are free within, the more we will live out our religious vows in joy, peace and love.

### **What path should we follow to form them in inner freedom within consecrated life?**

#### ***Discovering oneself in the sight of God:***

To discover myself in the sight of God is to have the desire to encounter God and to present myself to him as I am, in an attitude of poverty, humility and openness, for He presents himself to me as a father full of tenderness and love. It is being aware that God's love is greater than my weaknesses and that He loves me with a unique and unconditional love. Wisdom tells us not to wait until we are holy to encounter, serve or love God.

My freedom begins when I accept myself as I am, with my limitations, my disappointments, my failures, my successes, and even my sins. In this attitude of acceptance of myself, I discover that God's love for me is stronger and greater than my vulnerability. A sincere encounter between God and me will foster trust, hope and gratitude. Surrendering myself to God brings me back to my origin, which is God himself.

#### ***Expressing oneself truthfully in relationships***

I must therefore learn to express my feelings as something that belongs to me and is independent of the other person's feelings. I am aware that my freedom is conditioned by that of the other, for from the moment I am face to face with the other, my actions must take account of this new presence: the person in relationship with me is entitled to respect, and I must avoid hurting them. But reacting truthfully means expressing my feelings as I feel them, without fearing the other person's judgement or harbouring prejudices against them. And if I do end up changing my attitude because of the other person's presence, this change must not affect me negatively; I must do so freely.

**Freeing oneself from certain forces:** such as attachments (to any object in an excessive way, to the opinions of others, to the effort to please only others, to the pursuit of results), and letting go (stopping wanting to control everything, accepting what is beyond our control, and trusting). Thus: accepting one's limitations (wounds, failures); not clinging to what hurts or imprisons us (fears, grudges, expectations); giving up the desire to control everything (over others, the future); and trusting in God. (ChatGPT). We express this when we say to God, 'Thy will be done' (Mt 6:10).

**Growing in meditation and silence:** this is the longest journey one can undertake within oneself, and it can only happen in silence and meditation. We forget the importance of these two practices in our lives as Consecrated Persons. An invitation to take seriously if we wish to experience true inner freedom.

Formation in inner freedom is a path to peace and love towards our religious vows and the fulfilment of our mission as consecrated persons. It is also a sound direction towards **responsible accountability**.

### **MAY THEY BE FORMED IN A SPIRIT OF BELONGING AND THE SHARING OF GOODS**

The fundamental question is whether we really have young people who feel, body and soul, that they are members of our religious family? How can we foster this spirit of belonging within them? A sense of belonging goes hand in hand with the sharing of goods.

When we speak of the ‘sense of belonging or spirit of belonging’, we imply: the fact of having a strong, even very strong and deep feeling of being part of a religious family, which we might call ‘**a spiritual “we”**’. In this “spiritual ‘we’”, we share the same **aspects of our identity** with others (the same charism, apostolic vision, community life, etc.). This “spiritual ‘we’” is also expressed through our religious habit, through the logos or symbols of the congregation...

This spiritual sense is founded on our common calling (the same vocation), in which we recognise that we will walk a shared path with our fellow brothers. We can also experience this sense of belonging through our own rites or prayers, or even the way we celebrate certain events (profession, taking the habit, etc.). This **spirit grows over time** and is called upon to become stronger despite difficulties, tensions, trials, doubts or crises. For if we do not make an effort, this sense of belonging may disappear or become dull. Hence the importance of ongoing formation and care for the brothers throughout their lives. In short, the sense of belonging must be nurtured, for it has its ups and downs. It is often a gradual process, growing stronger, taking shape, and yet it can also become fragile. This is why every stage of formation in consecrated life must be carefully attended to in order to foster a solid sense of belonging.

But **true belonging** is when one experiences a sense of being rooted (oyo libota nanga, meaning: this is truly my family); one’s religious identity becomes stable (one no longer doubts either one’s vocation or one’s religious family); one accepts one’s religious family as it is (with its limitations and its qualities); one feels responsible for one’s religious family (one commits to passing on the values of one’s religious family to others, one is deeply committed to everything and puts one’s heart into it); one moves from ‘**I am part of this family**’ to ‘**I carry this family, I am this family**’ (Just as I am Goma, I am Charlie).

We thus move from a legal sense of belonging (because of the vows) to an emotional sense of belonging (we love our religious family).

#### **As for sharing**

We have a fine example in the Acts of the Apostles (**Acts 2:44–45**). The believers of the first Christian community held **all things** in common. There is no document of ours (Rules of Life, Constitutions, etc.) in which we do not find this spirit of the first Christian community.

Canon 600 explicitly calls on us to live in poverty (through the sharing of goods) by renouncing the individual, autonomous management of goods and by sharing them in accordance with the institute's own law. And **Canon 668, §3** states that 'everything a religious acquires through his work or on behalf of the institute belongs to the institute'.

Our sharing is not merely functional; it is meant to be lived out in an evangelical spirit. Our sharing is a witness we offer to the world, following the example of Our Saviour.

Thus, every religious family is called to have a '**shared vision**' regarding the vow of poverty and the sharing of goods. Have we managed to better define what constitutes needs and what constitutes comfort? This would help each member to live out the sharing of goods, not as a purely administrative exercise but as a source of joy, strength and love for the Congregation and the Church (the poor). For true sharing is shared with the poor.

## **HOW TO MEET THE CHALLENGES FOR A PROSPEROUS RELIGIOUS LIFE**

The challenge of belonging and the sharing of our goods are closely linked. These challenges must be addressed from the very start of initial formation. If we look closely, we will see that many of us are still at the level of *legal or effective belonging*.

### **A. The conversion of our hearts (moving from 'mine' to 'ours')**

Pope Francis was right to emphasise the conversion of the heart, for in his view, a heart that is converted brings about a great social miracle. Religious must realise that a lack of belonging and/or of sharing impoverishes the community and weakens the common mission. Let us be rich as a community and poor as individuals.

### **B. Clarity in our accounts (budgets)**

Our accounts (personal, community or provincial) must be clear. It is our money. When things are not properly explained, it leaves room for rumours.

### **C. Accountability in the management of our assets**

The documents tell us that 'everything' we earn belongs to the Congregation. We are all accountable to our religious family. This is a responsibility for everyone, without exception. It eliminates suspicion and , and strengthens mutual trust. It is a matter of practising **transparency** in our management.

### **D. Forming our young people in home economics**

We are all familiar with the saying: 'obedience brings competence'. This is not always true. The management of common goods requires a certain level of formation: intellectual, moral and spiritual. One of my Superiors used to say: 'good spirituality begins with economics'. Managers are primarily responsible for our good spirituality. Our young people must learn the basics of household management.

E. **Equal treatment of members** (taking into account health, age or mission). Understanding that equality is not uniformity. Working to ensure there is a little more 'community justice'.

F. **Establishing times for evaluation**

Regular evaluation of our resources (savings, apostolate, Congregation – as is the case with the Chapter) is a valuable exercise. This evaluation must be well prepared. Even our community life needs to have moments when we discuss ourselves. For our community meetings are often organisational meetings: who does what, when, how, with whom...

**In conclusion**

I am convinced, at the risk of being wrong, that a religious family whose members lose their sense of belonging and the sharing of goods retains only the term 'congregation' as a structure but loses the very essence of religious life.

It is up to you, as formators, not only to set an example but also, and above all, to instil this in the young people. We give only what we have received, as the saying goes. May the young people learn that there is more joy in giving than in receiving (Acts 20:35).

**A. A LITTLE DISCIPLINE IN OUR FORMATION HOUSES**

We flaunt our simple lifestyle everywhere as a unique hallmark within the Church. There is nothing wrong with being simple and living simply. However, simplicity must not overshadow discipline in a formation house. Let us understand 'discipline' here as *'a path towards inner freedom, towards human maturity and towards fidelity to one's vocation'*.

1. **Spiritual discipline** (the very heart of formation): participation in the Eucharist, personal and communal prayer, adoration, spiritual direction, spiritual readings, and even our conduct in our chapels, etc.
2. **Community discipline** (living with others): everything relating to community life, language use, looking after communal areas and one's personal space, the habit of sharing at mealtimes, etc.
3. **Personal discipline** (time management): study, social media, honesty, moderation, etc.
4. **Emotional discipline**: learning true love for others (fighting against all forms of abuse).
5. **Apostolic discipline**: care for one's apostolate and its impact on one's life.
6. **Discipline in following rules**: how one lives out obedience in the small things of daily life.
7. **Nurturing talents**: young people have them, and these must be developed during formation to better channel them.

## **GENERAL CONCLUSION**

Whatever the stage, I firmly believe that our Constitutions provide us with sound guidelines for how we form young people. Ensuring that 'the attitudes, choices and works of Jesus' become the attitudes, choices and works of our young people in formation.

The topic has been very broad and could be developed according to each person's own inclinations. I have shared my experience and my intuition with you. What may be missing is the next step to add to the topic.

I wish you every success in your role as formators.

***Father Camille SAPU MALANGU, ss.cc.***