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COMMENTARIES ON THE GENERAL CONSTITUTIONS C.P.

CHAPTER V

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FORMATION FOR OUR LIFE

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INTRODUCTION

The vitality of the Congregation depends on the genuine call of its religious and on their authentic formation. These two determine their success or failure in accomplishing God's will, as well as their contribution to the Congregation and to the positive benefit for the people of God.

In eight chapters of his Rule, our Founder laid down specific guidelines for discerning the vocation of candidates, their testing and formation, incorporation into the Congregation, intellectual development and their ongoing formation (1).

In the present text of the Constitutions this matter has been synthesized into one single chapter and complimented by a chapter in the Regulations. The fundamental elements for a uniform formation policy throughout the Congregation are there contained, despite the pluralism in different areas of the Congregation. However, specific guidelines are lacking, since these are left to a general formation plan and a more specific one in each province.

1. VOCATIONS TO THE CONGREGATION

“Each of us is responsible for the vitality and continued growth of the Congregation” (Const. 79). No religious, therefore, can delegate to others his commitment to the vitality of his Congregation. Whether at home or away, each religious must realize that his faithful living of assiduous prayer, penance and activity, as the Constitutions direct, constitutes a valid means for obtaining vocations from God, and for offering young men a persuasive invitation to our life (cf. Const. 79).

Number 87 of the Constitutions confirms this corporate responsibility: “Each of us has a serious obligation to promote vocations to the Passionist life.” In addition, it declares that in fostering vocations the apostolic needs both within and outside one's nation be kept in mind.

While the Regulations reemphasize this personal responsibility of praying that the Lord “will send labourers into his harvest” (Reg. 45), they also state that each province must realize the importance of vocational recruiting and plan a productive programme. The Provincial, with his Council, is primarily responsible for guiding this work and harmonizing it with that of the Church.

All this simply corroborates our Founder's total commitment to vocational recruitment. He asked our religious and others outside the Congregation to pray for good and numerous vocations. He corresponded with possible candidates and he asked the cooperation of priests who were directing the youth in their parishes (2).

2. DISCERNING VOCATIONS

Discerning the various stages of a vocation falls primarily to formators. They must discern whether candidates have an authentic call from God, and whether they possess the necessary gifts for the Passionist Congregation.

Formators must aid the candidates in personally discerning whether they truly feel called to this way of life, and whether they have the necessary health and qualities to live it (Const. 78).

This initial and indispensable evaluation takes place through personal contact, during an orientation period, away from our houses, or in seminaries, or in spiritual centers according to the directives of provincial authority (Const. 87).

A more thorough discernment is made during postulancy. It is important that the candidates begin the novitiate with clear ideas regarding the Passionist vocation, their call to this life, their physical, psychic and spiritual ability to respond to this call (Const. 88).

After studying the report of those who have been in contact with the candidate and after his own personal interview with him, the Major Superior evaluates the candidate's readiness to commit himself to the Passionist way of life.

Presuming the call is genuine, the novitiate also serves to evaluate whether or not the candidate should be admitted to vows. This discernment ascertains the novice's effective will to live the nature and demands of the Passionist vocation, as well as his intellectual, psychic and spiritual capability to live it.

Following province norms, the Major Superior and his Council juridically and definitively evaluate the candidate, after consulting the formators and the community where the candidate resides (Const. 89, 93).

It is most important that this discernment judiciously evaluate the candidate's "human, moral, and spiritual gifts...as well as...physical and psychic health" (Const. 82). It is important that it also considers whether he possesses a steady and self-controlled personality, whether he is sociable, balanced in judgment and responsible in assuming the demands of his Passionist vocation.

This discernment meets our Founder's preoccupation that candidates be authentically called by God and be generously and strongly willing to embrace this way of life. For this reason he insisted that the demands of the Passionist life be concretely explained to the candidate so that he could make a clear decision. He also required that the candidate be seriously, but charitably, tested to see whether he would be capable to live the daily ascetical, community and apostolic demands of the Congregation (3).

3. GOALS OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION

The Congregation has always had our Founder's instructions well in mind, namely, that formation must help the candidate become "a man totally of God, entirely apostolic, a man of prayer, detached from the world, from temporal goods, and from himself, so that he can truly call himself a disciple of Jesus Christ, and be capable of the apostolic mission proper to the Congregation" (4).

The Constitutions affirm that the Congregation intends to collaborate with the Holy Spirit in forming “a faithful follower of Jesus Christ, a man of the Gospel” (Const. 77).

This demands that the candidate acquire a profound understanding and experience of Jesus Crucified as his “highest Good”, his “Genuine Good”, as our Founder used to say, so that Christ, crucified and risen, may become the unifying element of his life and apostolate (cf. Const. 5).

The candidate must be guided so that he may demonstrate that he desires and can follow the goals of community and apostolic contemplative life, as indicated in the first four chapters of the Constitutions.

A most important part of formation is that the candidate acquire, and quasi experience, the sense of psychologically belonging to the Congregation as the family to which God has called him. If he feels such a belonging, one can hope that he will enthusiastically live his call and genuinely commit himself in contributing to the spiritual, community and apostolic vitality of the Congregation (Const. 81). Such a psychological feeling of belonging will contribute in attaining that human maturity for balanced decisions in the light of Christ Crucified, and for judging social events in the light of the Gospel and one’s own vocation. These are necessary requisites for a peaceful community life, for authentic contemplative life and for generously and competently fulfilling the mission proper to the Institute (Const: 28, 32, 37, 38, 65, 66).

4. ATTAINING THE GOALS OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION

a) The Congregation’s Task

With its formation plan the Congregation offers an accurate understanding of its nature, character and purpose by continual recourse to biblical, liturgical and theological reasons, and by assimilating the theological development offered by the Magisterium of the Church (cf. Const. 78, 85). Among the motivating reasons given the candidate, it is important to present effectively the outstanding lives of past and present Passionists. These religious have cooperated with the action of the Holy Spirit and have exemplarily lived the Passionist life in diverse times and situations (cf: Const. 78, 86).

The Congregation offers candidates the means to attain the goal of each stage of formation: postulancy (Const. 88; Reg. 46); novitiate and post-novitiate (Const. 89); the period before perpetual profession (Reg. 50); and opportunities for ongoing intellectual and spiritual education (Reg. 57).

The Congregation thus selects competent personnel to aid the candidates in gradually growing to mature Passionist religious. It is also committed to selecting religious “spiritually and psychologically mature....solidly grounded in sound doctrine, and suitably experienced in pastoral work, well versed in the knowledge of the spirituality and history of our Congregation” (Const. 81).

Finally, the Congregation endeavors, as far as possible, to place candidates in communities where they will be accepted as called by God to contribute to the Institute’s life and apostolate. It also does what it can to offer candidates an environment where they can experience the value of the Passionist life (Const. 80).

b) The Candidate's Task

The candidate should keep in mind that he is primarily responsible for his formation. Without his sincere cooperation the Congregation's task in formation would be frustrated. He must develop the fundamental attitude of cooperation and charity toward the brethren with whom he wishes to be united. If he doesn't sincerely love them, he cannot ask to be received. If he doesn't desire to receive and assimilate the experience and doctrine of those whom God has called into the Congregation before him, he does not manifest an appreciation of the vocation God has gratuitously given him. He would, in effect, be refusing the necessary training that renders him fit for the Passionist religious life.

Therefore, he must concretely manifest the ability and determination to adapt himself to the brethren with whom he wishes to be united. He must work together with them in accepting the directives and limits that competent authority can and should charitably place on him (Const. 83; cf. also Const. 22, 24).

In a manner consonant with modern psychology, the candidate should be given concrete opportunities for demonstrating that he is comprehending the Wisdom of the Cross, for he will vigilantly foster this in the Church by his specific vocation (5).

c) Evaluation before Incorporation into the Congregation

A genuinely charitable evaluation of the candidate and of the Congregation's role is indispensable so that individuals be accepted who are truly fit for the Passionist life, and who can glorify God, sustain the Congregation and validly benefit the Church. Our Founder desired that the candidate's good health be sufficiently verified, and especially that "he be tried by strict inquiry, whether he has a fixed purpose of using his utmost efforts to acquire Christian perfection according to the prescription and rule of our Constitutions". What also has to be verified is whether he has manifested a strong resolve to "earnestly endeavor to amend" (6).

Actually, there is no specific mention of the examination of candidates before admission to vows. However, it is clear that the evaluation must consider the gifts mentioned in Const. 82, 83, 89. Among these gifts great emphasis must be given to acquiring the spirit of solitude-silence, of poverty-penance, of prayer-recollection, of zeal and a lively interest in committing himself for the salvation of others according to the proper mission of the Congregation. If interior unity is not sufficiently realized on a spiritual and psychological level, the individual runs the risk of not sufficiently attaining the goal of his Passionist vocation.

After consulting the persons or groups indicated by provincial authority, the Major Superior with his Council makes the final evaluation of the candidates. The Master of Novices, or Director of Students or of Postulants, and the community where the candidates reside play a prominent role in this decision (Const: 93).

5. GOALS OF CULTURAL AND PASTORAL FORMATION

Cultural and pastoral formation must guarantee all religious adequate doctrinal education in the sacred sciences and sufficient preparation in the theory and practice of the Congregation's proper

apostolate according to different ministries. However, the formation requested by Ecclesiastical Authority must be added for candidates to the ministerial priesthood (Const. 85, 86; Reg. 54, 55).

What should be emphasized is that our apostolate demands “a high degree of competence” (Const. 84), especially in knowledge of the Passion and of people, in order to efficaciously keep alive the memory of the Passion of Jesus (Const. 65). Following the tradition of the Institute and meeting the urgent needs of our day, this competence must extend to the preaching most proper to our Congregation, to spiritual direction, to administration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and to missionary and ecumenical work (Const. 74-76; Reg. 33-38).

For attaining this goal, there are periods of participation in the apostolate during formation. Our Founder had already introduced this practice during novitiate and early student life, but only within our community or in our churches. In the final year, they went out of the religious house, but always under the guidance of an experienced religious (7).

Following Canon Law, and for understanding the candidate better, the Constitutions permit limited apostolic experience during novitiate and a greater participation later during temporary vows. These apostolic experiences must be planned, attentively followed and periodically evaluated to see whether or not they help attain pre-determined goals.

In addition, sufficient time must be allotted for study, for personal and community prayer. It must also be remembered that during novitiate and early years of formation, candidates must learn to live in silence and solitude. They must know how to remain in community diligently attending to prayer, penance, serious study, the demands of community life, and validly experience a truly apostolic life according to our vocation (Reg. 56; cf. Const. 54). Thus the candidate will be better prepared to balance the demands of apostolic activity with community life (cf. Reg. 29).

6. ONGOING FORMATION

a) Spiritual

All are reminded of the need for ongoing education “for deepening his faith, nourishing his prayer life, and preparing himself to be an effective apostle” (Const. 84). The goal of this updating concerns specifically Passionist “human, intellectual, religious and apostolic formation” (Const. 85, 86; Reg. 57).

Each province will offer its religious the opportunity and the time to attain what was once offered at the weekly theological conference or moral case (8).

7. RESPONSIBILITY OF THE GENERAL AND PROVINCIAL SUPERIORS

Formation is the most important work for guaranteeing the unity and faithful development of the Congregation in its spiritual heritage.

By ordinary jurisdiction over all religious and houses of the Institute (Const. 131), the Superior General has the “chief duty to ensure that... the Constitutions... are being carried out by our religious, in a spirit of faithfulness to our Passionist charism... foster and safeguard by suitable measures the spiritual, doctrinal, and cultural growth of the Congregation” (Const. 142).

Therefore, after study and discernment, he has the duty to approve the general formation plan of every province (Const. 85).

To guarantee that initiation to the religious life takes place in fitting surroundings, according to the needs of the specific vocation of each Institute, Canon Law reserves to the Superior General the designation of the novitiate house (Can. 647; Const. 92).

There is nothing saying the Superior General has to designate houses for post-novitiate formation. This increases the risk of not having a continual formation from novitiate through the years following, or simply that, after novitiate the candidates be left excessively on their own as if they had already completed their formation years. There is also the danger of not receiving sufficient knowledge of the Passion of Christ and the spirituality of the Congregation as is needed for their intellectual and spiritual growth (cf. Const. 86).

The Superior General can reduce this real danger by his vigilance when approving adaptations in the formation plan (Const: 85), as well as during his pastoral visits (Const. 141), and in his communications and directions given to provinces (Const. 143).

The Provincial Superior has the greater and more immediate responsibility in this matter. His Council, but especially formation personnel, will assist him in this duty. Therefore, the efficacy of his work of promotion, his encouragement and vigilance depend largely on his selection of these religious. No less great is his responsibility in prudently selecting the centers of learning where the religious will be sent. He must ascertain whether the religious are earnestly following their studies, are faithful to the Magisterium of the Church, growing in their sense of belonging to the Congregation, and progressively assimilating Passionist spirituality.

The Provincial Superior has the duty to admit candidates to the novitiate, to first profession, to renewal of vows and perpetual profession, as well as to the diaconate and priesthood (Const. 93).

Aware of forming religious for the Congregation, of which the Province is a part, the Provincial will animate everyone to follow diligently the general formation plan and the directives of the Superior General. He will thus ensure that the province will be in vital communion with the Institute (Const. 125).

CONCLUSION

The chapters in the Constitutions and General Regulations contain doctrinal and practical elements that can well guide an efficient and updated formation. They can also make it possible for the candidate to become “a faithful follower of Jesus Christ, and a man of the Gospel”(Const. 77), faithful to the charism of Saint Paul of the Cross. This will be realized, however, on condition that the formators continually keep in mind the opening chapters of our Constitutions and read them in the light of our Founder’s Rule. The general formation plan, too, should develop more clearly the various elements that are taken for granted or hardly mentioned in this chapter we have considered (Const. 85).

It will be necessary to make more explicit the contemplative-mystical elements that are clearly present in our Founder’s text. Not only does his experience permeate the text, but also the hope

that those called to the Congregation can live a deep contemplative life as a dimension of their specific vocation and mission.

REFERENCES

1. Cf. Rules and Constitutions, 1775, Chapters 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 22.
2. Giorgini, F., Storia dei Passionisti, Vol. I; Edizioni “Stauros” – Pescara, 1981, pp. 203-208.
3. Ibid, pp. 209-213.
4. Ibid, p. 216. Giorgini, F., S. Paolo della Croce, La Congregazione della Passione di Gesu: cos'è e cosa vuole. Ricerche di Storia e Spiritualita Passionista - I, notizia, '47, n. 3; Curia Generale Passionisti, Roma 1986. Cf. also Amedeo della Madre del Buon Pastore, Lettere di S. Paolo della Croce, Vol. III, (hereafter cited as Lettere; Roma, p. 440.
5. Our Founder required that the candidates manifest a strong will to share the experience of the Passion of Jesus. If he is strongly resolved to die to self, to the world and to his evil tendencies, in order to live only with God, in God and for God, hiding his life in the life of Jesus, cf. Rules and Constitutions, 1775, op. cit., Chapters 6,8. Cf. Lettere, Vol. IV, op. Cit., pp. 234-236; and Storia dei Passionisti, Vol. I, op. cit., p. 213.
6. Rules and Constitutions, 1775, op. cit., Chapter 10. Storia dei Passionisti, Vol. I, op. cit., pp. 224s.
7. Storia dei Passionisti, Vol. I, op. cit., pp. 249s.
8. Ibid, pp. 252-256.

SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Do you feel responsible for the vitality and growth of the Congregation? Do you become involved in community and provincial projects for vocations? Are you sufficiently committed to these projects?

2. Are candidates sufficiently examined in the gifts needed and in the practice of virtue?
3. Is Passionist spiritual formation sufficiently provided for?
4. Are candidates growing in Passionist community life and its proper activity? Are they helped in acquiring a balanced vision and practice between the various essential elements of our life?
5. Do you feel that there are sufficient aids to ongoing education, and that they are well utilized by the religious?
6. Does the formation program offer valid evidence for the human, spiritual, cultural and apostolic growth and maturity needed for our Congregation?

FORMATION FOR OUR LIFE

Rev. Norbert Gonzalez, C.P.

INTRODUCTION

Now that the Constitutions have been definitively approved by the Holy See and published, their significance and contents should be examined in greater depth, so as to grasp and assimilate better the spirit that animates our life.

A quick and superficial reading of Chapter 5 may be misleading, for one may be led to think that it deals with merely juridical matters, that it is supplementary, or that it is just the mere codification of the spirit and structure of formation.

However, as one penetrates deeper into the contents, fundamental aspects come to light which give value and substance to the theme, and, at the same time, we are provided with the possibility of better understanding and appreciating Passionist life. It is for this reason that in dealing with this theme a well-defined approach must be adopted. The Constitutions already indicate this approach in the title: **Formation For Our Life**.

The best criticism and explanation of the title and of the very topic of formation has been developed around the statement our holy Father and Founder made: “This poor Congregation has the purpose of forming zealous workers, full of the Spirit, so that they will become skillful instruments in the powerful hands of God, instruct the people in virtue and eradicate vices with the all-powerful instruments of the Holy Passion” (Noticia, 1768, n. 2). It is thus a specific and distinctive formation, one that is clearly defined.

THE VALUE OF THIS CHAPTER

This chapter includes all the basic ideas and prescriptions necessary for the operation of a formation community and for the adequate formation of aspiring Passionists and of the religious themselves. It points out the way to live fully the charism of the Congregation within the Church.

This chapter in itself gives the impression of being rather condensed and synthetic, providing mere general guidelines. And this impression is warranted, given the complexity of the issue of formation, the universality of the Congregation and the different criteria that are currently used. All this, together with the diverse methodologies, teaching systems and ideologies in this field, may lead to the underestimation of formation, which is considered as a marginal activity or as nothing more than one of the many stages of one’s life. But it is not so. In the framework of their total existence as Passionists, the chapter provides a complete plan of formation for the religious. It looks to the present and to the future, capturing that which does not change; it concerns life and the apostolate. Moreover, through principles and concrete suggestions, it tries to get to the heart and the very life of the religious, in helping him to be “a faithful follower of Jesus Christ, and a man of the Gospel. Our Congregation thus undertakes to help each religious to a free, conscious offering of himself to God and to the service of the Church” (Const. 77).

But it is impossible to understand all this, if the chapter is read by itself and is seen in a separate context from the ones that precede it. The preceding chapters are necessary points of reference, for they indicate what a Passionist must be. This chapter, on the other hand, points out the direction to follow in order to reach this goal, that of adequate formation.

It brings to light the theological, spiritual, charismatic and human values that go along with being a Passionist. It illustrates the challenge posed to the Congregation and to each religious by such doctrinal contents and by their progressive assimilation throughout every individual's entire life.

This entails a purification or catharsis of the idea and image frequently associated with formation, with its meaning and with the means that are employed in its never-ending process. It furthermore gives new value to the tradition of the Congregation in the formation process, which is certainly different in terms of the methods that are used and the prevailing systems, but identical in terms of contents.

BASIC STRUCTURE

If the themes treated in Chapter 5 are understood and appreciated, then it will be possible to establish a dialogue between the ideal and reality, the project and life, and to see formation precisely as the path to pursue. In order for this to occur, it is necessary to follow the guidelines provided by the Constitutions in their basic principles, as well as the guidance and accompaniment offered by the formators and the Congregation itself that is seen as a welcoming and living community. All this provides an evangelical orientation and purpose, which is illustrated in the mystery of salvation as a principle of life and theme of proclamation.

Nowadays, in the historical era in which we live, the following words of the Council assume a particular significance: "The suitable renewal of religious communities depends very largely on the training of their members....Throughout their lives religious should labor earnestly to perfect their spiritual, doctrinal, and professional development" (PC 18).

In preparing candidates for Passionist life, formation is programmed according to this need, this universal dimension and this orientation. Number 84 of the Constitutions is clear evidence of it. The formation activity is centered around the entire life of the religious and around the doctrine required, which is seen as being "professional" regarding sanctity and the apostolate.

The new Code of Canon Law underscores this concept when it indicates that: "In individual institutes after first profession the formation of all members is to be continued so that they may lead more fully the proper life of the institute and carry out its mission more suitably" ©. 659,1).

OUTLINE

In order to understand and evaluate better the theme of formation, particular attention shall be devoted to the analysis of the underlying and animating ideology, which gives life to each number. Thus, a systematic study of the numbers will not be undertaken. The analysis will be divided into four sections:

- theological aspect,
- charismatic inspiration,
- juridical prescriptions,

- anthropological perspective.

I. THEOLOGICAL ASPECT

God Calls - We Seek to Respond

Given the general perspective in which the Constitutions were developed, the numbers of this chapter being an integral part of them, this section will illustrate the theological aspect of what was previously mentioned.

The entire chapter is in line with the perspective illustrated in the document of the Holy See on *The Contemplative Dimension of Religious Life*: “The different stages of religious formation, initial and ongoing, have the main purpose of introducing the religious to the experience of God, and of helping them to perfect it progressively in their life” (n.17). This ideology enables us to understand better the whole formation process and its principal guidelines in our Passionist life.

Number 77 of the Constitutions gives a very quick overview and a complete summary of the essential principles of formation, and is very clear regarding the relationship to God. It concentrates on the fundamental aspect of vocation.

The religious is, first of all, one who has been called by God, a chosen one. All formation does is to help him discover, evaluate and follow the precise call he has received. He implements it in Passionist life, which provides him with the adequate means for this purpose. It is the greatest honor and commitment, both for each individual and the whole Congregation. We find ourselves before a task assigned by God in which we all cooperate. He took the initiative and put this vocation into our hands and into those of our brothers who have received the same call. It is our duty to translate it into reality and into a concrete possibility. This is the basic point of departure for the task of both the formator and the one being formed. Their personal effort will now lie in the attempt to focus their own existence around the supernatural design of God, which is beyond all of us, but that we have to fulfill in time and in a specific period of history.

The greatest and strongest motivation to follow God comes from hearing his call. This induces one to adopt a definite and clear attitude towards oneself, towards life, towards risks, dangers, sanctity, etc. The awareness of having been called by God must direct one to faithfulness to the Lord’s will and follow it concretely by being faithful to Christ on the Cross and to his work of salvation in the world.

On God’s part, his will, which becomes his call, is always certain and unchanging. But we come to realize it while we follow our path as believers. “That is why each one of us and the Church, as we walk in our direction, must ask ourselves every step of the way what the will of God is at that time, and we must realize that the will of God can be fulfilled in its entirety only when we reach the end of the path. This humiliates and, at the same time, comforts us, because it means that perfection cannot be achieved at once; perfection lies in our constant walking towards the full will of God” (Card. Ratzinger, Pastoral of Dec. 8, 1982). It is an illuminating paragraph that makes us see our path of constant, infinite searching, so as to follow faithfully our own vocation and answer the call.

The purpose of the entire formation process is precisely that of helping us to search for and fulfill the will of the Lord. It is for this reason that the synthetic overview provided in this chapter

deserves special attention, since it lays the foundations for, and gives substance to, all the points that are raised in it.

God is our Guide

God does not call us and give us our vocation once and for all. He himself walks with us and guides the formation process. He is the first formator (cf. Const. 77). To a large extent, he does this through the people and the signs of the times, both aspects being considered in the Constitutions. With regard to the signs of the times, we read: “These younger religious should be guided to an ever-increasing knowledge of the currents of thought that underlie contemporary events...” (Const. 82).

The Lord reveals himself and is constantly present through the circumstances of His own life, that of the Church and of the Congregation, as well as the life of human society itself. He constantly shows us that he relies on us. He does all that is in his power to enable us to discover his will and to feel his presence in our lives. It is up to us to know how to walk with him along his path, so that we may become his instruments at the time in which he needs us and when he wishes to use us, both as individuals and as a Congregation. This is why we initially receive formation, and in an uninterrupted fashion.

God Avails Himself of Intermediaries

On a human level, there are a number of individuals and concrete means that operate in the formation process. Meditation is an essential aspect which God wants to rely on. At this point, we can evaluate the precise role of formators in the formation process and we come to see the need for an open dialogue that will help us to search for the will of God together. The Constitutions speak of this dialogue, especially in terms of its purpose (cf. Const. 83).

It has been stated that a dialogue among the members of the People of God is not an arbitrary trend, but a theological necessity to guarantee the coming together of the different manifestations of the divine will. It is not easy to discover it accurately at each moment. Thus we all join together as communities of faith and search for it, according to the purpose we have within the Church. We help one another in this multiple dialogue established in the Congregation, in the formation community, etc., through interpersonal relationships, which are based on an openness to God and to our brothers. It is a wonderful service that we provide for one another, for which we can never be grateful enough. The Constitutions mention this and speak of the service provided by the Congregation (n. 79), the communities (nn. 80 and 82), and the formators (nn.79 and 82). God relies on all of us to fulfill this task, and we must all contribute in solidarity (n.79).

Other Perspectives

Having looked at such concrete aspects, we easily realize that other theological elements are implicit and have animated the contents of this chapter. We read about the will of God over our lives and over the world, about becoming aware of this will and freely accepting it, about personally adjusting to a community of faith in which God reveals himself, about the salvific mission that is at the core of formation and of Passionist life, and its supernatural purpose, about being inspired by Christ on the Cross, etc.

The theology of religious life which the Council presented in *Lumen Gentium* (nn. 42-47), as well as the norms of *Perfectae Caritatis*, are perfectly illustrated in this chapter. This theology is reflected in the perspective of: “Our Congregation thus undertakes to help each religious to a free, conscious offering of himself to God and to the service of the Church in Passionist community life” Const. 77).

Without the support of this theological and ecclesial basis, our formation would remain something merely human; it would remain on a scientific or social level, according to mere personal utility. But we try to fulfill God’s creating and redeeming design with regard to the individual and the world. Day after day we are better able to discover it. It becomes our call and duty in our experience of the Passionist charism, the gift of the Spirit.

II. CHARISMATIC INSPIRATION

Formation and our Identity

The charismatic aspect of formation is highlighted by the terminology that is used in this chapter. Words such as Congregation, community, our life, Passionist vocation, etc., are used constantly to describe the concept of formation in relation to our identity. And it is logical, since our identity is the fundamental element enabling us to respond consistently to God. “The first duty of each Institute is to know its genuine identity. In other words, it must know its own and unique vocation in Christ and in the Church, faithfully maintain its character according to the beliefs of the Founder and his spirit, and fulfill with zeal its own special purpose in the forms required by the times” (J. Beyer, *Los Institutos de vida consecrada*, 70).

“The formation for our life prepares us for the particular style of sanctification and apostolate that create a typical tradition” (*Mutuae Relationes*, 11).

This reminds us of the teaching of Saint Paul of the Cross, so dear and well-defined on this point. The image of the Institute in the Church necessarily reflects the formation of its members. The Institute must be faithful to the mission that the Church has assigned it and, consequently, the formation of its members must be carried out according to the sanctifying and apostolic effectiveness required by its charism and by its mission. Numbers 77, 79 and 82 clearly state this and make us aware of it. Although they are brief, they are full of ideological meaning.

Discernment

Another important theme treated in this chapter is that of discernment (Const. 82). It is presented as a necessary element for both those in formation and the formation personnel, precisely in the fundamental area of vocation. Furthermore, discernment certainly illustrates the quality of vocation.

Even when there is no further literal mention of the theme, it continues to develop in subsequent number’s. It is something that is differently applied in the entire formation process. Certainly, a correct application of discernment will be the best service that the Congregation and the Church require of the formator and those being formed. It is something that should be carried out in on-going and systematic fashion.

“Man must find his way in life according to the present situation. It is for this reason that his attitude adapts to the particular situation, which for him, in all cases, is unique” (Kierkemans, Pedagogia general, 459). This concrete and unique reality is charismatic for us. It is an ecclesial, theological, human reality that is stressed by the realism expressed by the numbers in this chapter of the Constitutions. Consequently, the progress and development that take place must be governed by this discernment (Const. 85 and 86). Concrete cases such as the preparation for a certain apostolate, health or time-related needs, the adaptation to cultural or personal changes, etc., fall within the framework of the right discernment as stated by the Constitutions, thus indicating its flexibility and foresight (cf. Const. 84).

Our Founder’s Thought

It is time that we asked ourselves: what is the concrete charismatic inspiration that the Constitutions offer us regarding this theme of formation? There is only one answer to this question: that which we find in the thought, proposals and actions of our Founder. Numbers 78, 79, 82 and 86 admirably summarize all this, yet without exhausting the theme. They express the goals, motivations, centrality of the Paschal Mystery, etc. However, two things especially stand out in our Founder’s thought:

- a) The formation of apostles;
- b) The Paschal Mystery in formation.

a) The Formation of Apostles

The Rule of 1746 already indicates in chapter XXIV that in the monastery they dedicate themselves to study “so as to be subsequently sent, according to their skills, to serve in ministries for the good of the people.” This is perfectly in line with the thought of our Founder, although it is expressed less vigorously than in the phrase that opened our commentary. There is a similar sentence in the Brevis Notizia of 1768. Both passages clearly illustrate our Founder’s concept of formation with regard to the apostolate.

However, he was not only concerned with the profound and technical apostolic formation of his religious. In n. 3 of the same Rule, he stressed that the perfection of the individual and union with God are achieved through charity. In his letters and in his teaching, he left valuable instructions and suggestions on the spiritual formation in different virtues, especially in prayer.

Now, the essence of this mentality is perfectly captured in different expressions and in another context. We find ourselves within the framework of the dynamic unity which the Council accustomed us through phrases like: “their apostolic activity should result from an intimate union with Him (God)” and “the entire religious life of the members... should be penetrated by an apostolic spirit” (PC 8). We need no further details. These sentences seem to have been taken from our spiritual heritage. Passionist formation is for the apostolate, according to the substantial elements that characterize us as an evangelical living community (cf. Const. chapter I), and give us our image in the Church.

b) The Paschal Mystery in Formation

The Passion of Christ is the element that creates unity in our life and apostolate (cf. Const. 5). Through formation we thus expect to “become more and more aware of the demands of their (our) Passionist vocation, and to see it in the wider context of the saving mystery of Christ

Crucified” (Const. 82), and to attain the complete vision of the mystery of the Passion and of the spirituality of the Congregation (cf. Const. 86). It is a long task requiring our full commitment, yet it is always fascinating. We undergo formation so that the redeeming work of the Lord on the cross may always be reflected in our lives and in our apostolate.

The commitment of formation that we undertake makes us focus on a very special duty “that has the same characteristics as a mystery of faith, because the imitation of Christ is something more than the imitation of a model that is beyond us...; it especially means that he is the source from which our life springs.” We give these words written by a contemporary author a meaning of special charismatic essence; and we see that they come to acquire special significance in our lives. The focus of our reflections and our lives lies in the Crucified Christ (cf. Const. 4,5,6,65,66, etc.). He converts himself into the “sacrament” of the encounter of the Passionist with God. In him we find the way of giving our personal response to the Father.

The praxis of the Congregation has increasingly emphasized this unique and irreplaceable aspect in formation. Here, in this chapter of the Constitutions it is underscored once more. The chapter places particular emphasis on the doctrinal and historical elements included in the previous parts, so as to attribute a special significance to them and give them a precise orientation.

Elements of the Council

In concluding this section, it is appropriate to recall the perfect harmony of the principles and the assimilation of the orientations of the Council. Thus freedom, subsidiarity, the respect for the individual, obedience to the Spirit, etc., are stressed and constantly integrated. This implies that we not only offer but also guarantee the conditions for human and religious maturation in the process of growth in Christ, according to the principles of the Church.

III. JURIDICAL PRESCRIPTIONS

Importance and Necessity

The Constitutions also define juridical prescriptions, since we follow Jesus within the human society and communities of faith, in which people need some sort of regulation and direction.

The juridic contents of this chapter offer a formative and pedagogic spirit rather than a scheme to be studied. Each prescription reflects within its own context the spiritual heritage that we have received. All of them try to help us live and project the history of salvation into the personal and collective history of all of us who have accepted the commitment of following Christ Crucified. This is important. The rest of the norms are those commonly established by the Church with regard to the formation of those who have been called. Therefore, the juridic aspect of formation is very important, but only when it is guided by the spirit that animates it and that expresses fundamental principles.

In this chapter, we find a minimum number of norms, which are almost always generic or a repetition of common law. Nothing else is defined. All we have are the necessary norms, for example on the time of profession, duration of formation, conditions for admission, etc. The goal is to achieve the common good and promote the maturity of the individual until it reaches the adequate level.

Subsidiarity

It is in the juridical part that the principle of subsidiarity is clearly applied. The importance of such a principle becomes manifest in numbers 80, 85, 90 and 92. The principle of subsidiarity entails the effective application of the law of gradualism in formation. This is an approach of great value throughout the entire chapter. It makes us feel as if we are constantly walking towards God, learning and adapting. It is a dynamic process that leads us to integrate into our own personal lives the gifts of the Lord, as well as the culture and different experiences, like Saint Paul of the Cross.

The concept of gradualism is also stressed in different aspects with regard to formators and those undergoing formation. The religious is presumed to be learning constantly, in a process of ongoing formation.

The principles animating formation that are presented in the Constitutions should make us correctly evaluate the juridical principles with which we are provided. In an era like ours, in which there is a certain obsession with prescriptions and laws, we should not strip them of their contents but view them in the right perspective.

In the Congregation

To illustrate our specific formation, we earlier referred to our Founder, the history of our Congregation and to the entire spiritual heritage that has been passed on to us.

Saint Paul of the Cross availed himself of the Rule, introducing an increasingly greater number of juridic and formative elements. The chapters dedicated to study and especially the one on the Master of Novices illustrate his concerns and mentality. The latter chapter is probably the most original and the one in which he best expressed himself.

Aside from this, he rapidly went on to develop a Formation Plan or Project. He prepared it in 1746 with the help of Father Marco Aurelio and Father Struzzieri, two eminent religious. Then he tried new experiments in formal study, Houses of Study, etc.

The juridical element in the history of the Congregation always seems to go along with the changing circumstances of the times, pointing out adequate adjustments. Particular attention should be attached to the prescriptions regarding general chapters, which Father Giorgini elaborated in his work “*Decreti e Raccomandazioni*”; the letter on “*The Study of the Passion*” by Father Leo Kierkels; the last *Ratio Studiorum* of 1959; and finally the General Formation Plan which Father General, subsequent to the General Chapter (1982), proposed to the entire Congregation *ad experimentum*. We find neither lack of continuity nor historical gaps. (Editor’s note: Since Fr. Gonzalez wrote this Commentary, the 1986 General Synod of the Congregation endorsed the present General Formation Plan with no changes necessary).

IV. ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Healthy Humanism

The Constitutions, furthermore, offer us a healthy christian humanism, which is based on the dignity of the religious. He is considered to be conscious of his call to the Congregation, responsible for his own life and destiny, as well as for the vocation that he has received. At the same time, however, he is seen as someone who “develops those human and spiritual gifts that render him fit for religious life” (Const. 83).

We are people who are constantly learning. The development of personality is a fundamental process in the psychology of learning and it is closely related to the very concept of a human being (cf. Alport. *La personalidad*, 139). For this reason, the formation and development of the personality of the religious is the first duty of the Congregation, so that he is better able to respond to his divine vocation and live it faithfully. Most of the numbers in this chapter are based on this thought.

Active and Personal Pedagogy

We are thus provided with a clear picture of the value of the individual, who experiences the search for and fulfillment of the Lord’s will, that is marked by “service of the Church in Passionist community life” (Const. 77). In this framework, formation is offered as something very personal and predominantly active. It is active pedagogy, which is now the leading method in all formation and educational processes. That is why in referring to the formators we encounter such words as: accompany, guide, discern, inspire with ideas, etc.; or words like: the development of virtues, the acceptance of guidelines, benefitting from formation, cooperation when referring to those in formation. In their own context these words reflect the attitude governing the entire formation process.

An alienating legality and depersonalization were avoided by focusing formation on the essential and the basic: the religious individual, who is called by God and freely cooperates by bringing his own identity to formation. According to this outlook, “man is his own person. But in practice, he cannot fulfil his destiny without the help of his neighbor and of heaven” (Kierkemens, *Pedagogia General*, 11).

Formation is planned in such a way as to help those who try to walk towards maturity and full responsibility. It especially aims to help those who, like the religious, seek sanctity and the good of others. And, as previously indicated, we all contribute to this process. However, we should remember the elements and means provided in the Constitutions, for, although generic, they should not be overlooked. For example, we read about the offer and commitment of the Congregation regarding adequate formation. We are told about the community in which are embodied the human and ideological elements of the charism that are assimilated by the individuals undergoing formation. We read about the appreciation of the religious for those undergoing the process of formation, etc. Life itself is converted into a teaching and a contribution to formation.

Elucidating Concepts

Before concluding, we should make a technical point, for it may help us to evaluate the formation process in itself as well as the chapter we have just discussed.

Earlier in this commentary, we spoke of learning. But formation is not just a process of learning. Formation itself is part of education. Education, in turn, is composed of three elements: INSTRUCTION, through which one acquires the skills that are necessary to fulfill a task; FORMATION, which provides theoretical and experimental knowledge that will transform the individual's existence; and AWAKENING GOD DISPOSITIONS in one's will, when decisions are to be made. These three elements are very clearly defined in the different numbers of this chapter and are not reduced to mere contents of the second section. All these concepts are expressed not by grandiose formulas but simply with commendable accuracy and conciseness. This is especially evident when in the following passage the religious is urged to become the complete individual described in number 82: "Candidates should be helped to mature as steady and self-controlled personalities, balanced in judgment and responsible in behavior. Their advisers will aid them to become more and more aware of the demands of their Passionist vocation and to see it in the wider context of the saving mystery of Christ Crucified."

CONCLUSION

It's time to make more concrete reflections and applications, in order to answer an important question and challenge: will the religious and apostolic future of the Congregation depend upon the enhancement of formation, according to the program offered by the Constitutions?

The Constitutions provide us with an updated and renewed image of formation for Passionist Life. At this point, we are responsible for the implementation of the guidelines. We must undertake a serious congregational and personal commitment; there is no room for passiveness or inhibition.

Formation is presented to us as a task on both the personal and community level. It is something initial and at the same time ongoing. Living and giving a present dimension to the Passionist charism requires that everyone be committed to the process of formation through the constant development of initiatives which are in step with ongoing life.

In his Paschal Mystery, Christ is the center of inspiration and the strongest motivation in Passionist life and formation. We are devoted to the Gospel of the Passion. Its contents are the object of our formation because we want to know and announce the wisdom of the Cross. This implies that Christ has become the CENTER of CONTEMPLATIVE EXPERIENCE and the vital part of the religious' existence.

A renewed formation cannot leave us in the individualism of mere personal fulfillment. It induces us to feel "called by God to the Congregation, whose life and apostolate they (we) enrich" (Const. 80). We must know how to unify personal aspirations and the needs of community life, always according to the mission that we have in the Church.

The whole formation process aims to make us mature as individuals, and precisely in our highest reality as such: in God. He is the center of our existence and our purpose. Our personal responsibility lies in responding to the Spirit, who, through the Passionist charism, has summoned us to sanctity and to the apostolate.

Formation becomes a constant challenge to us before the Church, the Congregation and our own conscience. It challenges us to feel as if we are always undergoing formation, as if we are

constantly progressing. Formation turns into the need to reply “today” to our charism and to the needs of today’s world through our life and apostolate. We undergo formation to become saints and apostles.

We should not look at formation in terms of “the lessons that I am imparted”, but rather in terms of “what I acquire and assimilate.” It is our basic duty to feel that we are active subjects in personalized formation. Formation will always be an orientation and not an imposition in line with the vocational charism. Through this, we discover that tradition is always creative.

POINTS FOR REFLECTION

The previous points of reflection are suitable for various forms of personal or community reflection. To facilitate the process, we provide the following outline:

1. INDIVIDUALLY

- a) **STUDY** the theme we treated in the light of the charism of the Congregation and of one’s own reality. This may induce one to look for texts written by our Founder, orientations of the Superiors General, authorized commentaries, etc.
- b) **EVALUATE** the personal response that we are currently providing in our formation. Examine the concrete and practical aspects, look at our possibilities, discover the quality of the elements we are using in formation, etc.
- c) **PERSONAL PROJECT.** It’s worth developing a personal formation plan – despite one’s age - that is demanding in terms of themes, time and means. It will be the cause of constant growth.

2. ON A COMMUNITY LEVEL

- a) A planned study that could be directed by someone capable of contributing material, basic ideas, information and perspectives.
- b) Specify the role that formation plays in our lives, the importance we attach to it, the references that we find in it and the influence it exerts or should exert on community life.
- c) See what we can contribute on a community level to understand, develop and make the theme of vital importance. It is a serious attempt to make concrete the formulas and orientations, for this is always enriching.
- d) Translate into concrete terms what should be done, what is considered to be possible here and now, for the good of the community and of the people. This part should be complemented by studies, courses, conferences, books, publications, etc.

FORMATION FOR OUR LIFE

Rev. Bernard Lowe, C.P.

“TRANSITUS”

Chapter Five echoes very clearly the overall ‘key’ to the work of the General Chapter 1982, namely the idea of paschal transition.

It was a memorable moment that morning at the Chapter when we were trying to define our present reality and to move toward the future. Gradually, within a short enough period, a kind of diagnosis was sketched around the unifying theme of transition, of passover, of passage. The emerging consensus around this strongly symbolic theme came as a gift, unplanned, presenting itself, not as a mere catch-phrase to ‘well’ the work done to absent brethren, but as an accurate description of this present moment of our salvation history as Passionists. It also seemed a strong invitation to live fully this moment in union with Jesus Crucified and “the crucified ones” of our world.

The full text is in our Planing Project (1), but it can be summarized as follows: “It is hard for us to make a total conversion. Such a conversion includes the theological, cultural and pastoral transmission of our specifically Passionist values, which are summed up in a life centered on the following of Jesus Crucified, into models of life and activity which creatively join together our traditions and the modern inspirations of the Spirit of the Church...so that the Congregation will journey in a vital way toward the year 2000...” (2). The Planning part of the General Chapter is intended to offer a stimulus to our living of our new Constitutions which themselves are one of the main instruments and guides in that ‘transitus’ to a new era.

Chapter Five on formation brings out this transition element in three ways:

- a) by deleting the word “young” in nn. 77 and 85, making it quite clear that when it speaks about formation it has in mind a process that embraces the whole of our religious life as Passionists. From our first entry until death, the whole is involved in this many-leveled conversion-passover which is the characteristic challenge of our time as Passionists.
- b) by calling (in n. 85) for conscious planning Congregation-wide in order to support each in this ongoing response to the Lord in life and apostolate. This response from each is crucial to what the Church is asking of us and ought not to be simply a vague hope but created with what wit and energy we have.
- c) by stressing the quality of life the young (our future) should find when they spend time with us. After all, what they find will reveal (or fail to reveal) the reality of our transition in terms of relevance and of joyful meaning and work.

In our day, statements like the following have become almost commonplace: “The next 50-100 years will be a great era of radical change in the social system throughout the world, an earthshaking era without equal in any previous historical period, calling for great struggles which will have many features different in form from those of the past,” (3). The implications, however, for our Passionist lives only very gradually dawn on us. We are not sealed off from this turbulent world, nor would we wish to be.

The ‘passover’ theme shows the realism with which we are called to enter into this paschal moment of our Congregational history (the ‘diagnosis’ speaks of other moments in our history that were paschal too). But the ‘passage’ isn’t automatic. Time passing doesn’t effect much. Other charisms than ours have flourished for a time in the Church and have ceased to exist. The ‘transitus’ to new relevance and vitality in offering their gift to God’s people didn’t happen; there was no break-through, no entry into richer life. The General Chapter diagnosis makes the point: “the difficulties of living our charism are not so much in the theoretical identifying of it as much...as in the courage to live that charism coherently in forms which, even though they may be new, are as demanding and difficult as those at the time of our origin” (4).

We recognize, more and more, that the structures that formed us, and formed us well, will not help young people today who aspire to join our life. When we ask ourselves, apropos of initial formation, what is the “end-product” of such a formation we realize that there is no “end-product” (though there is an ideal, a corporate image sketched afresh and with lucidity in our new Constitutions). Our formation is “on-going” as we try to rediscover in our time the same fire that consumed Paul of the Cross, “from this river of fire, that we are born... and the capacity for enthusiasm that the Passion of Christ frees in us” (5).

“FORMATION”

If we view formation as teaching, preparation, instruction we will see it as relevant primarily in the early stages of religious life but growing less and less necessary in much the same way as a good teacher makes himself redundant because the pupil can now go forward on his own. In this way of looking at it, ongoing formation would mean an occasional ‘topping-up’ and updating seminar or course from time to time, especially to help with the professional side of our apostolates.

If, on the other hand, we see formation as all that goes into the shaping of our response to a God who calls us in Christ, then there is certainly an initial stage but there is also the developing awareness of the Lord’s action in our lives and in our world, enlarging our capacity or this form of life and making possible all the responding we are capable of, relative to the stages of our maturing in Him (6).

The latter is the way our new Rule envisages formation. We are never “done,” never finished, never simply ‘formed.’ In a sense, formation could be seen as that ongoing and specific application to our Passionist lives of the broad program enunciated by Micah: “This is what Yahweh asks of you, only this, to act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with your God” (7).

Brief Historical Background

It was debated at the recent General Chapter whether or not the 1741 Inspirational Rule should be included with the text of our new Constitutions. It was agreed to let each Province, Region, decide. CRIS has indicated its desire that the 1741 Rule be included in all the translations of the new Constitutions as a reminder that the new Rule is inspired by the same values.

That text of 1741 was itself revised four times within the life-time of Paul of the Cross. (And we remember that he himself made sure that the 1720 Rule, the one written during his founding retreat as if someone were dictating to him, was burned.) More rigorous men than Paul prevailed in the 1775 revision over what he considered more prudent provision, on some points, for the future - though, of course, he accepted the will of the Chapter. So, ironically, the very Rule he would have wanted to change lasted the longest, 155 years, until 1930. But the same basic language continued to be used right down to 1959. By then it was felt that piecemeal revision had gone as far as it could go and, in the wake of Vatican II, the important and courageous decision was taken to completely rewrite the Holy Rule in the language of our time.

After much consultation (we remember the big Questionnaire), prayer and heart-searching, the General Chapter Document 1970 (from here on simply CD) was produced. The then General, the late and beloved Fr. Theodore Foley, described it as “the very heart of our Rule of life. It is an authentic interpretation of the spirit of St. Paul of the Cross...” (8).

The communitarian and pastoral tone of CD hardly disguised its real bite and challenge, a challenge that (along with other things) precipitated no small crisis among us. The present Fr. General summarized the elements of this crises of renewal as: firstly, the difficult beginnings of renewal, then an anti-authority period when laws and practices were weakened, a counter movement of resistance to change, with the resultant conflict, and for many, weariness of it all. During this period people were judged by their thinking, their ideology, progressive or traditional. After a prolonged and painful period religious started sharing their common faith and ideals and Passionist values. Most rediscovered the basic values of their Passionist vocation and began to try to live them in contemporary ways. “The process followed the familiar Christian pattern of suffering, death, burial and resurrection. It has led to a renewed interest in our roots, a desire to know more about the Passionist spirit and history. Religious are grateful for and appreciative of their Passionist vocation and are eager to be believable expressions of the Passionist charism. This resurgence of joy in the gift of our Passionist vocation is a most significant characteristic I have found almost everywhere” (9). Signs that the paschal transition is in process... but not yet complete!

The CD won substantial support from the vast majority of the brethren and formed the bedrock foundation for the work carried out both in 1976 and 1982, this final document that the Church has now approved.

Perhaps we will find, after such a prolonged period of experimentation, that it is hard to live under a Rule of Life again – though the more hard-bitten among us will wonder when we ever gave a Rule that much attention! Fr. Theodore Foley, in one of his interventions at the 1970 General Chapter, spoke of the specific demands that we expect a Rule to make upon us, reminding us of responsibilities already freely taken up. We accept that a Rule will continually challenge our human tendency to settle for less than we once promised. Many of the specific demands made universally on the entire Congregation in even as late a text as 1959 are now wisely remitted to Provincial authority and even to local communities. The “how” of the living out of the values enshrined in our new Constitutions is left to local and regional adaptation, but the living out itself is not optional, and cannot be - not if we are to retain any credibility at all, as a human group, not to say a religious one. We have the 1741 Rule attached for its ‘inspirational’ value but in its own day it was more than that and made demands that were far from merely ‘inspirational’; perhaps in some future century, say 2200, our ancient 1982 Rule will be among

the ‘inspirational’ material supplied to our space-travelling confreres, but just now it is more than inspirational and binds us, freely, within the Church as the call of the Lord to live in our time its evangelical demands.

St. Paul of the Cross constantly spoke of the Congregation as a “work of God”, not something of his own creation but something God was forming in the Church... and this, surely, continues to be true, for our call comes from Him who gives each one of us both the will and the capacity and the actual answering in all its details (10). There are many possible expressions of Passionist charism. We are those expressions, not one paper, but in life and behavior. If it exists today, it exists not in the new Constitutions but in ourselves. Many of us have deep convictions about our Passionist vocation... convictions shaped by our own experience of men we have been privileged to live and work with down the years and whom we regarded as true images of what St. Paul of the Cross was about. In our turn, we hope by God’s grace to be some such encouragement to the young, to attract them to Jesus Crucified by being “careful to present ourselves just as we are, in the simplicity and joy of our life” (11).

Formation Plan

Since the General Chapter ended, Fr. General has sent around copies of the Formation Plan for the Congregation. This document is the fruit of a lot of work, a lot of consultation and modification. It deservedly received the very substantial support of the General Chapter. As Fr. General explains in his introductory letter it arose out of numerous requests from around the Congregation for guidelines especially on initial formation, but the actual Plan embraces very consciously the ‘continuing formation’ perspective also. As so much is already contained so richly in it, I will now be confining my own remarks to just the main points of chapter 5. Many of these ideas have sprung from discussions at or after the General Chapter, so they are a collaborative enterprise, shared in by many brethren!

Commentary

Formation in General: an umbrella heading for numbers 77-86. Some numbers (81-83) deal primarily with initial formation but can be understood without too much strain in an ongoing sense, too. The rest refer to formation for all, throughout life.

n. 77

Based substantially on CD 92 but with important changes, notably in the first sentence. We plunge into the heart of the mystery in acknowledging God’s call and invitation as the source of our being together at all. The Congregation is not the source, nor is the individual religious but rather the Spirit of God, active and creative within the life journey of the person. The Congregation “collaborates” with God, indicating a somewhat awesome process of genuine Christian discernment rather than any narrower concept of ‘training’ as in a military academy.

“Faithful follower of Jesus Christ” etc., a reminder of the evangelical source of our religious life and the context of discipleship of Jesus Christ (additional to CD but echoing another phrase added to the very first number of the Constitutions, “to live their lives like apostles,” a phrase of St. Paul of the Cross by which he indicated the ‘vita apostolica’ modeled on the ministry of the apostles as they followed Jesus preaching the Kingdom and sharing together in his life). No

founder is without evangelical roots but in Paul they are especially clear. Hence that basic reminder that each of us is to be simply ‘a man of the Gospel’, deeply rooted in Jesus Christ.

The collaboration of the Congregation is spelled out: “to assist our religious” etc. The “young” of CD is deleted so as to underline the fact that God’s call and the formation that is our response is ongoing, lifelong. Congregation does not create the vocation, nor does it create the response, which must be free. Sociologically we are a group of adult volunteers, each freely entering in and freely remaining, responsible for himself and supportive of the others. “Gradually” is added to CD in last sentence in order to keep the idea of lifelong process which had been dropped from CD first sentence.

The first sentence on formation in the 1741 Rule (n. 8) deals, as this number does, with the primacy of God’s call, and the need for discernment: “Before any servant of God is admitted to the Congregation let him examine well whether God is calling him to it.” And one of the last numbers (108) of 1741 says somewhat starkly: “The corpse shall be placed on a bare board on the ground, the head sprinkled with ashes, and a crucifix placed in the hands. It shall be buried in the appointed place, according to the rites of the Holy Roman Church.” Again, the lifelong journey hinted at, until the final paschal transition, dying into the Lord’s death and rising, the crucifix placed in the hands. It is in and through our human experience, our life journey, our personal story in all its stages that the Lord calls us and shapes us. The Congregation wants to be a community that welcomes, listens to, collaborates with that process to enrich it and be enriched by it, placing all at the service of the Lord and of his people.

n. 78

Same as CD 93 except that “our religious” of CD becomes a simple “we.” Again context is fairly general and inclusive of ongoing formation. A living that springs from fundamentals. No bypassing of the human; grace builds on, integrates nature and we never find them apart except in theology books. “What was taken up (in the incarnation) was changed.” Human bases: Vatican II spoke of the relative autonomy of the sciences; we need to use the human sciences that help us understand ourselves in these changing times. Whether we like it or not we are as subject as anyone else to all the laws of the human psyche and of human groups, etc. Also the religious bases: we are a specific way of life within the Church, evolving, searching, always particular, Passionist, Franciscan, Mercy, etc.

Not just intellectual knowledge, important as it is, but “assimilation”, a personal living-into the fulness of our gift, grounding it in the reality of the Word of God, of worship, of praxis. There are bases: there were for Paul and he expressed them in the thought-patterns of his time and these bases grow and develop through the abiding Spirit in the Church, with the development of doctrine, of insight, of understanding. So with all that, and our own experience as a Congregation we are richer than in Paul’s time. We continue to be challenged. As the ground of our human and social life changes so the ground of our religious and ecclesial life necessarily changes and needs to be re-thought, re-expressed (not because it has become untrue but because it may no longer mediate an adequate personal or social framework either for ourselves or for others.)

If the charism exists in our living members and nowhere else, the “actual forms by which the life...is lived” ought to bear the tell-tale marks of our identity. In reference to the young this is developed in nn. 79 and 80 as the key to growth and support in our vocation.

n. 79

Same as CD 94 except again that “all our religious” becomes “Each of us.” Again focus on each but with a witness value, a radiance, that becomes an invitation to the young. All responsible; we are a free, volunteer group with no guarantee of permanence. Fidelity to our gift (some of the symptoms of which are mentioned here, others are in Chapter One, more fully teased out) constitutes the best hope for growth.

The Rule of 1741 in nn. 16 and 17 speaks of the joy inherent in our life as the candidate is clothed with habit, cross and crown of thorns and is welcomed with joy by the brethren; also Fr. Fabiano Giorgini quotes a letter of Paul: “This Congregation may seem frightening from a distance, but seen from close up, it brings consolation and joy... Let them (the postulants) take heart and come with good will, with a right intention... and they will find out from experience how sweet is the yoke of Christ and how light his burden. They will experience true peace of heart, and, on their arrival, they will see this peace shining in the faces of their fellow religious. They will see...the mutual affection, which exists among all the religious, who are all united as in one single heart in Christ Jesus” (12).

The opposite of what is put before us here (and in the following number) is in danger of counter witness, mentioned with specific reference to formation in some of the Chapter discussions. Our weakness need not surprise us; after all, Vatican II made the more general point that Catholics often have “more than a little to do with the birth of atheism” (13). If we don’t live what we preach, or live it with so little joy or enthusiasm, or in a constricted fashion, we are counterproductive.

Note meaningful work...not meaningful overwork, or interior joy goes out the window!

n. 80

Mostly CD 95 but with part of CD 96.

When the invitation (n. 78) is responded to, young members are welcomed into a shared fraternal communion, recognized as called by God, helped forward in their vocation. “Schools of prayer” is an addition to CD, echoing the prayer emphasis of numbers 1, 4, 35, 62. Happily “school” also governs “fraternity,” making for a learned brotherhood, revealing the Gospel assessment that community is a project, a task and not something we can presume will just be there. Pope Paul VI spoke of charity as “an active hope for what others can become with the help of our fraternal support. The mark of its genuineness is found in a joyful simplicity, whereby all strive to understand what each one has at heart” (14).

Fraternal help: not acting meanly towards newcomers as if the “burden of proof” rest wholly with them to convince us of their earnestness; far from being misguided, the large heartedness recommended here greatly enhances the possibility of true discernment, and more quickly.

n. 81

All of CD 97 and part of 96.

More directly on initial formation and focusing on the formators, presenting their role as a very real apostolate, a genuine pastoral care for a very special group, a service to someone already

called by God. We can't create vocations but rather we can be with and support people in their listening to what the Lord is doing in their lives.

Any enumeration of qualities runs the risk of reading like those lists we make up at Chapters detailing the qualities required in the Provincial, etc., whom we're about to elect. But the qualities presented here are realistic enough – as long as we're not looking for some elusive perfection. In fact, directors who are far from perfect and can be at home with their limitations and weaknesses in a real way offer a more accurate and helpful vision of what its all about. Strong suggestion of genuine teamwork (harmony) and again joy and enthusiasm for our vocation. Hopefully, all leading to a progressive experience of deepening membership and responsibility. "You" gradually becomes "we," first in the heart and then on the lips of the candidate.

N. 82

Same as CD 98 with an additional phrase in the first sentence, "and working with them toward an authentic discernment," indicating both the mutuality involved and a sense of time, of pacing, of process. The document on formation to religious life, *Renovationis Causam* (RC), points out that those in formation ought to understand the process they are going through.

Fr. Luigi Rulla (15) reporting on some detailed studies of people in formation over a period of four years found that the great majority of them, after that time in formation in a post-Vatican II context, showed little personal growth or significant increase in understanding of their basic conflicts. And there is no evidence that pre-Vatican II formation did any better. The finding is disturbing even if on reflection it rings true. Many of the crises of our life's journey have revealed us to ourselves more fully, but the seeds of those responses were already truly present within the man we were on our student and novitiate corridors had we more help in discovering them. Perhaps we can find ways, early on, of helping candidates understand themselves in the truth of their lives, their emotions, their deeper motivations, within a context of the Lord's loving knowledge of them and also of what in his love and our support they can become...help them to this more clearly, more gratefully, with less refusal, less struggle with the wrong things. Later on, when life finally reveals the more accurate truth of how we are made, the choices are narrowed and more difficult, like the arteries. RC encourages a genuine self-knowledge and self-possession so that we can make the gift of ourselves more authentically to the Lord and his Church at profession. (The above is not meant to suggest the impossible task of twisting an old head onto young shoulders... there are stages of life, true, almost with time-locks...but simply to do all that is possible in a relatively new but important area).

Passion aspect is dealt with in this commentary under n. 82.

Important too, especially today, to develop in ourselves (and in our candidates) a deepening ability to read our rapidly-changing times in the light of that Gospel of the Passion, that paschal mystery, for it is in this world that we live and to it in all its confusion and complexity (including our own) that we are sent by the Lord.

n. 83

Same as CD 99.

If n. 82 spoke of formators ‘helping’ and ‘guiding’ this number places the responsibility for his life squarely on the candidate. The atmosphere is one of mutual trust and respect, the Congregation collaborating (n. 77) with the action of the Spirit in the candidate, but since he is the one being addressed in this action, he is the one who alone can respond – a sobering thought in the ‘continuing formation’ field too, for we are that candidate throughout our lives, the rest of the brethren (the Congregation) helping, supporting us to gradually perfect our initial response. Each of our situations is like having a vocation within a vocation. Easy enough to keep superiors, Provincials, etc., happy and to lead a half-normal religious life...but the continuing call of the Lord to me, uniquely, within all that...that’s another question.

n. 84

Substantially CD 100 with last sentence dropped.

Numbers 84-86 return explicitly to all stages of formation. This number deals with the implications of our apostolate for both initial and ongoing. When we remember that the “field of labour” is the world of our times we can see that mere input, important as it is, is not enough and that the levels of preparation involved have more to do with the empowering Spirit of God working in us than with seminars and courses. So the need to reach down to the core of our call, to deepen our faith and prayer, allowing the Lord to engage us in his desire and love for the people to whom he sends us. Such an engagement, expressed in a generous apostolate, is our best invitation to young people (n. 79) and, when they come, our best way of developing them to be “profoundly aware of her mission to evangelize”(n.80).

n. 85

Based on CD 101 but with important differences.

“Human” was added before “intellectual, religious and apostolic” and “youth” was deleted. The plan is now for all, and Congregation-wide, to be adapted by the Provinces and Regions. Many Provinces have already built up useful initial and continuing formation policies and this number encourages a searching look at these and a development of them, illumined by the Constitutions, the Regulations, the General Chapter Planning and the Congregations’ Formation Plan.

Brothers’ formation has not been mentioned. Indeed, Brothers are not mentioned explicitly in this chapter at all, and this because everything said here and in the whole Constitutions and Regulations applies to all. The generic “religious” is used throughout, emphasizing the unity of our one Passionist vocation. At the same time the General Chapter was concerned that we ourselves should become more aware of the significance of our Brothers’ vocation and promote it as an integral part of our Passionist life. Regulations nn. 37 and 55 deal explicitly with our Brothers, the latter specifying an adequate formation course. A General Chapter recommendation (see PIB No. 47) encourages our reflection during the Planning stage on the Chapter Study on Brothers, the document that was the basis of discussion during 1982 Chapter. Fr. General remarked in introducing the Congregations Formation Plan (16): “I am not aware of any area of the Congregation which has an articulated program of initial formation for brothers” – a situation that seriously needs to be addressed.

n. 86

Same as CD 120 but there it comes under the heading of post-novitiate studies. Here, under a wider umbrella, we may take “all our religious” to mean just that, and “plan of formation” to be as inclusive as n. 85 is. In which case this n. 86 links up with all those others in the Constitutions that spell out our involvement in the Passion (17).

We do indeed need, as Fr. Brovetto points out (18), to work out a Passionist theology that will illumine our charism and dynamize our apostolate. But at the personal level that lived theology must grow out of our prayer and our response to the situations in which the Lord places us. We can't help but see that most of Paul of the Cross' theology was done on his knees as he allowed the Crucified Lord to fashion him. There is nothing here that we can merely read ourselves into.

Vatican II opened up our perspectives on the Passion by stating: “we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery” (1g). If this is true of every man it is true of me. Might not my prayer help me to discover where and how the Lord is offering me that paschal partnership, how does it look in life, how does it feel, what shape has it? (Surely I must allow it to relate fully and courageously to the call of the Lord that has taken up so much of my inner and outer life, namely my Passionist vocation?) Finding this mystery of Christ within my own life I am better able to help others discover the Lord at work in the apparently empty, confused, suffering depths of their lives. Doesn't number 5 of our Constitutions say that we “seek the unity of our lives and our apostolates in the Passion of Jesus”? A unity beyond the apparent tensions between being active and being prayerful, between being mystical and being socially concerned, beyond partial ideologies to a discerning and self-transcending love that echoes the love of our surprising God who while we are still sinners and uninterested in him handed over his Son for us. This unity is surely one of the hopes of formation, a place where call, life experience and apostolate are one, (apostolate being no longer a mere function), where our whole selves are at the service of the Church, where we allow ourselves to be with the poor and the marginalized, allow their situations to really impinge on us, to disturb us and to change us (20).

We may, on occasion, lament the passing of so many earlier forms of external asceticism, the discipline, culpa, fasting, abstinence, etc. (some of which are still helpful and necessary), but can we doubt that what the Lord is calling us to in our day, and now very clearly through our Constitutions, is even more demanding, more crucifying of flesh and spirit? If we respond generously, we will have no lack of asceticism!

nn. 87-96

These numbers have to do with specific initial formation areas and may yet be added to, as CRIS wanted some numbers that were put into the Regulations brought back to the Constitutions(21).

During the General Chapter of 1982 the following numbers from CD were transferred into the Regulations. (Editor's note: The enumeration was changed in the present edition of the Regulations. Unfortunately, Fr. Lowe's Commentary arrived during the interim before the final printing).

106 (Reg. 52)

107 (Reg. 51)

115 (Reg. 54)

116 (Reg. 59)

117 (largely gone, but partly in Reg. 59)

118 (Reg. 55)

119 (Reg. 60)

121 (Reg. 61)

122 (Reg. 62)

113 and 114 were dropped because promises don't appear in the new Code of Canon Law.

n. 87

On promoting vocations. Besides the fundamental way mentioned in No. 79, many forms of specific vocation animation are possible. "The Conclusive Document" (Rome 1982) is full of helpful guidelines and suggestions drawn from the experience of religious the world over (22).

n. 88

A period of postulancy has been required by the Church for some time. The document *Renovationis Causam* (RC), 1969, spells out the arguments quite fully. The Church is taking more seriously than ever the need to develop the human and emotional maturity not only of candidates but of religious themselves as well.

n. 89

On the novitiate. RC states: "For each candidate the novitiate should come at the moment, when, aware of God's call, he has reached that degree of human and spiritual maturity which will allow him to decide to respond to this call with sufficient and proper responsibility and freedom. No one should enter religious life without this choice being freely made....Most of the difficulties encountered today in the formation of novices are usually due to the fact that when they were admitted they did not have the required maturity" (23).

RC goes on to speak of one of the main tasks of the novitiate to develop "that cohesive unity whereby contemplation and apostolic activity are closely linked together" (24). A unity we see realized fully in Jesus in his Passion, where his life and his 'work' become more than ever one and he was able to say from the Cross: "Now it is finished." Allowing our lives to be touched by this love, to be shaped and directed by it, we seek our unity, our peace, our integrity in the Cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

nn. 90-96

These are some canonical requirements that it is necessary to have here on the grounds that the Constitutions ought to give not only the 'spirit,' the inspiration, the values, but also something of the incarnating of those in necessary structures, essential to any human group.

REFERENCES

1. PIB 1/83, N. 47, January 6, 1983, Pp. 3-5.
2. Ibid, p. 5.
3. Mao Tse-Tung, speaking in 1967, quoted by Tom Berry C.P. in Riverdale Papers.

4. PIB, 1/83, op. cit., p. 4.
5. Stanislaus Breton CP “Is there a Specific Passionist Apostolate?” in The Passionist, (Province of Holy Cross, Chicago), n. 7, 1979, p. 75. See also, Paul M. Boyle, C.P., “Reflections On Our Passionist Vocation,” Circular Letter, October 19, 1978, p. 11-12, where he quotes a challenge from Breton who asks: “The question is: are we free and flexible enough to realize such historical visibility in our contemporary world?”
6. Paul Molinari SJ, Supplement to The Way No. 41, p. 4.
7. Mi: 6:8.
8. Chapter Document, 1970, Forward, p. v.
9. Paul M. Boyle, C.P., Circular Letter, Christmas, 1977, p. 2.
10. Cf. Phil. 2:13.
11. Breton, op. cit.
12. Giorgini, F., C.P., Conditions for Becoming People of Prayer in the Teaching of St. Paul of the Cross; Studies in Passionist History & Spirituality N. 15, p. 3. Passionist General Curia, Rome, 1983. Cf also Paul M. Boyle, C.P., Circular Letter, Christmas, 1977, re: “on joy in our vocation”.
13. Gaudium et Spes, N. 19.
14. Pope Paul VI: Evangelica Testificatio (Apos. Exhortat. on Relig. Life, N. 39).
15. Luigi Rulla SJ: 1971, Depth Psychology and Vocation. 1976, Entering & Leaving Vocation: intra psychic dynamics. Pontificia Universita Gregoriana, Rome, and Loyola University Press, Chicago, 1979, with Imoda & Ridick: Psychological Structure & Vocation, Villa Books, Dublin. A shorter book summarizing findings of other two.)
16. PIB 4/83, N. 50, February 27, 1983, p. 76.
17. Numbers in Constitutions regarding our Passion participation: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 38, 39, 42, 49, 50, 56, 57, 62, 64, 65, 66, 77, 82.
18. Brovetto, C., C.P., The Spirit and the Values of the New Constitutions; Studies in Passionist History & Spirituality, N. 4, Appendix II, pp. 20-25. Passionist General Curia, Rome, 1983.
- 19 Gaudium et Spes, N. 22.
20. Cf. Smith, A., C.P., Passion for the Inner City, Sheed & Ward, London, 1983: for some challenges on this; not to mention Puebla Conference, Religious and Human Promotion, 1980, etc.
21. PIB 11/83, N. 57, November 21, 1983, pp. 176-178.
22. The Conclusive Document, May, 1982: developments of pastoral care or vocations, (published by Veritas, Dublin).
23. RC No. 4.
24. RC No. 5.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION/DISCUSSION

Some of these may be useful for discussion, others are better being reflected on personally in solitude and shared (if at all) rather than discussed.

1. Reflect on your Passionist life as a continuing call from the Lord (vocation within vocation): what has been your experience of call, your vocation story? How has the Lord continued to draw you (inner and outer experiences, your temperament, your gifts, limitations, sins, changes of community and apostolate, deaths, prayer, friendships, love, pain)? What are for

you the most significant' moments of that journey? Where are you now, what is happening at this stage? Write if you find that writing helps.

2. Reflecting on your life as an ongoing call/response dialogue with the Lord and with his people, what do you consider would help your response most at this stage? What kinds of support, guidance, presence, courses, etc., do you feel you need most... no matter how simple or how unlikely they seem? Have you asked for that support? Does anyone know it is a need of yours? Could you ask for it?
3. Reflecting on the early stages of your vocation, first intuitions, leaving home, initial formation years, what were the main positive influences? What did you find, or do you realize now, was unhelpful? How did you see "the professed" then? In what way have times changed the initial formation area and what do you feel would help young men coming to us today? If your nephew, of say, 22, came to you expressing a desire to join the Passionists, what would you say to him?
4. If you were asked to devise a policy on continuing formation for your area, what would your five main concerns be? What would you consider the key element among them? What would you do to implement it?
5. "All of us are responsible for the vitality and growth of the Congregation" (Constitutions No. 75). Do you feel this? How do you try to give it expression?
6. In this whole area of initial and continuing formation, what are your personal convictions?