



E-BULLETIN #222

29-May-16

"Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5, 16)

item 418

spiritual discernment and accompaniment: important elements in formation

The account of the young boy Samuel's call and the spiritual guidance of the prophet Eli is one of the moving and inspiring stories that can tell us a great deal about the significance of spiritual discernment and accompaniment in formative ministry. Young persons in the process of formation in our many seminaries and convents are like Samuel. In fact, there are also many young people in the world who hear that distant call from God, personally naming them and inviting them to dedicate their lives in service of Him and to His people. Many are disturbed and perturbed by this inner movement of an unknown force challenging them to undertake a more noble and challenging path, leading to life and lasting joy. Yet the voice can be so confusing and vague that they hardly realise these noble aspirations are coming from the Divine Image imprinted in them. How many young people get lost in that inner confusion - desolate and desperate!

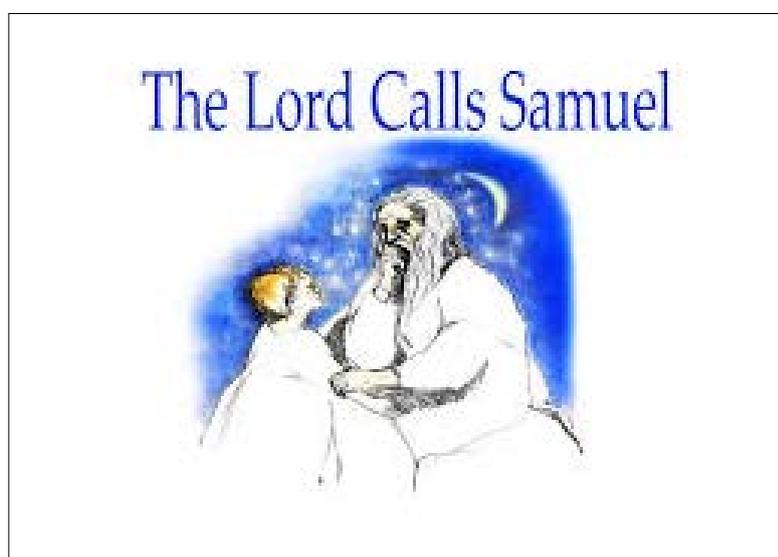


This speaks of the importance of spiritual discernment and accompaniment in vocation promotion and formation. This means having persons and formators who are experienced and trained in the art of spiritual discernment and accompaniment. These are the persons who need to have not only the knowledge but also the experience of the dynamics of the human person as well as the workings of the Holy Spirit in the life-history of individual candidates. A sound knowledge of the human sciences, especially of psychology as well as spiritual and theological studies, is absolutely necessary for such accompanying persons.

There is yet another requirement for such formators and spiritual directors. They must be persons who have experienced and confronted, in the light of the Word of God, their own humanity with all its fragility and brokenness. They must have re-lived the Paschal Mystery in their own lives. Following the example of Jesus, who took upon himself our human weaknesses and made himself obedient until death, every formator must have made their own personal Exodus, trusting in the infinite mercy and love of God. Unless one has had the experience of brokenness, he or she will never have the compassion and empathy to enter into the lives of other persons and become healers. Hence we need to ask ourselves if we have such humane and faith-filled

formators or do we entrust our candidates to those who have only some intellectual, pedagogical or theological training.

When we speak of formation, we are speaking about both the candidate and the formator. A well-integrated and prepared formator is able to see the aptitude of the candidate and provide the necessary help he/she needs to make a life choice. The formator must come to understand the motivation of the candidate – why is he/she choosing consecrated life, in order to help the candidate make an informed and mature decision. While there may be evidence of a true vocational choice there could be other motivations at an unconscious level of which the candidate is not aware, leading to the corrosion of the first motivation and ultimately to a decision to leave consecrated life after many years of dedicated service to the church and the congregation. If that point is reached it is not the time to criticize the formator or the formation program, for it is too late even to regret. But such situations can provide us with matter upon which to reflect and to consider taking preventative measures, learning from the experience and correcting what may have gone wrong during the formation process.



The Bible passage of ‘the call of Samuel’ touches on two important points of religious formation: spiritual discernment and accompaniment. The former speaks of the person who aspires to follow Jesus. The latter is for the one who is following Jesus. In the spiritual discernment, the candidate needs a guide who can lead him/her to choose a way of life that is designed by God for him/her, an example being with those candidates who are willing to participate in a “come and see” program. Here the responsibility of the formator is to help the individual to discern the path of one’s destination and explain the ways and the consequences of one’s choice, because in every decision

there is a consequence and renunciation that ultimately leads to one’s final goal - holiness. These are the indicators which would lead the way to a final destination. In the words of philosopher Lonergan, “it is a process of decision making” where the candidate has an *experience of understanding* what it is he/she is looking for, and this understanding provides the knowledge to make a *judgment*, leading one to come to a *decision* and finally to *act* on it.

This process also touches three levels of human life: affectivity, cognition and behaviour. So the candidate needs holistic formation in order that all the aspects of personal growth are included. This is what is expected when we speak of accompanying a person in formation. The purpose of such formation is to foster the overall growth of suitable men and women toward a life of dedication and consecration to the Lord. One is not formed all at once nor born with a personality already formed, but is formed gradually through a step by step process. “The primary objective of formation is the preparation of the person for total self-giving to God, following Jesus Christ”. Ongoing formation is meant to be a constant personalization or interiorizing of Christ’s life. Therefore it is a lifelong disposition of allowing oneself to be formed throughout one’s life. Keeping in mind the above-mentioned objective, both formator and candidate have to ask themselves “Am I fulfilling the responsibility of reaching the objective of formation”?

The formator has the responsibility to accompany the person entrusted to his/her care. Here we have the example of Jesus, walking with the disciples who are heading to Emmaus. They are weak and frightened; they are running away from the difficulties of their chosen life. There could have been a second motivation for the disciples to follow Jesus, as we read in the Gospel; they had great expectations of Jesus and about their

future. The teaching and miracles of Jesus now seem to them as nothing, the objective of giving their total self to God has been changed under the pressures of circumstances. In such situations the attitude of Jesus is something different. He decides to silently walk along with them, helping them to think and reflect on what is happening to them. He asks them to speak of what happened, not because He was unaware of what happened, but because Jesus is giving them a chance to relive the past they are frightened of, from which they are running away. The attitude of disciples are not passive as they are open to what Jesus is asking.

This kind of openness is what is expected of the candidate towards the formator. When the disciples began to tell their story by reviewing the past, there was an internal transformation, which they later try to recall. The breaking of bread opened their eyes, they are aware of their objective of formation, they accept their weakness and limitations, they are transformed into strong men by the presence of Jesus, and they gain the courage to return to Jerusalem. This is what is expected from a formator, to walk along with the candidate, in order to open their eyes; to give them encouragement in their weakness and limitations so that they can gradually be transformed into a total giving of self.

As I reflect on my studies of the past four years in psychology, at the “Institute of Psychology” at the Gregorian University in Rome, what I appreciate most was the accompaniment I received. Why is such accompaniment necessary in formation? I would say from this experience that it is to be free from unconscious needs and to work on any secondary motivations which can reduce the individual’s original enthusiasm and zeal for consecrated life – or whatever life is chosen. A journey into one’s past is painful. It deals with issues such as tempering of affect and forgiveness. It also touches on one’s relationship with God and enables the person to live the vocation to love more maturely and authentically as a total person with their whole heart, soul, strength and mind, gradually responding freely to the call with conviction and with a value oriented life.



By revisiting, accepting and transforming the past, the person becomes ever freer to live the present as a gift that prepares for the future. There is an internal change, a change of motivation. Instead of continuing to be dictated by unconscious forces, the person is invited to be guided by values, and to internalize them. It is to say, one changes not only the what, but also the how and why, which is achieved only through the grace of God, by holding on to the virtue of humility and forgiveness. This is what enriches my practical work at the institute by listening, walking along with whom I accompany mostly consecrated men and women.

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item 419

homily - closing Mass:
UAC General Coordination Council Meeting 2016

“Nothingness and Sin” – how often do we see in his writings St Vincent Pallotti referring to himself in this way?! It is something that, in today’s age of good self-esteem, we seem to move away from. We want to be affirmed for our abilities, our talents, our goodwill, our generosity. If we are not affirmed in these ways, then we may become resentful.

Pallotti believed that he had a struggle with pride as well as with anger. It was something that, he said, he combatted against over the course of his life. In this and other ways, he saw himself as sin. Seeing himself as nothing, he was able to grow in compassion, love, and mercy particularly toward his fellow human beings, especially the poor. God is all for Pallotti. The Holy One drew Pallotti toward less focus on self and more focus

on neighbor, toward holiness “in every aspect” of his conduct as the Letter of St Peter tells us today (1 Peter 1:10-16).

Pallotti, who called himself “nothingness and sin,” did not see his own holiness. Others saw it in his words and especially in his deeds. His witness was giving up everything and passionately working for the “salvation of souls,” or in other words, assisting all toward greater holiness.



During this *Jubilee Year of Mercy*, we are challenged by Pope Francis to “become last” and put others “first” (Mk 10:28-31). Is this not what Pallotti was about as well? When did he try to make himself first? Are we not continually called to the same as members of the Union? Our lives are not about us, they are about Jesus Christ, Apostle of the Eternal Father. Our lives as members of the Union are a call to witness in the way of Pallotti and as envisioned by the *UAC General Statutes*:

“The Union is inserted into the dynamic process of the merciful love of the Holy Trinity: God gives himself to humankind and to all creatures in order to reconcile all things to himself and all things among themselves, thus bringing all of humanity and the entire creation to salvation and perfection in Christ (cf. Eph 1, 10; Col 1, 20). Like St Vincent Pallotti the members of the Union wholeheartedly allow themselves to be permeated by God’s infinite love (cf. Mk 12, 30), they give themselves to a life of service and to fulfilling His will which is revealed to them above all through the Sacred Scriptures, the teaching of the Church and the signs of the times.”

As disciples and apostles of Jesus Christ, may we look beyond ourselves, our concerns, our problems, and give ourselves even more for the sake of Christ and the Gospel. May we recognize that we are “nothingness and sin,” urged on by the charity of Christ to experience the Infinite Love and Mercy of God so that we can live more fully a life of holiness, a life of service to God and neighbor for the Infinite Glory of God.

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sac asia oceania e-bulletin

you commented...

on #221 Many thanks for this...heartening to read of hope in a terrible situation in Iraq.

MB 23.06.16