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HUMAN MATURITY AND RELATIONSHIPS IN PRIESTLY FORMATION TODAY.



by Fr. Andrzej (Andrew) Szablewski, p.s.s.

Today, as always, every seminarian is very enthusiastic when he enters the seminary and wants to be apostolically effective. He follows the directions of his bishop, the diocesan vocation director and the seminary team in order to pass successfully through seminary formation. And so he plunges into intellectual realm, while striving to balance it with the spiritual and pastoral aspects. Human formation with its intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions has, since *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, steadily won its proper place in seminary formation as well as in the ongoing formation of priests. *The whole work of priestly formation would be deprived of its necessary foundation if it lacked a suitable human formation.* (PDV, # 43)

After almost 20 years we are slowly realizing the extension of human limitation or lack of freedom when it comes to realistically and contritely responding to God's priestly call, and to living it in a mature or Christ-like manner. We refer to the findings of Luigi M. Rulla (*et al.*, as well as to similar studies by Baars and Terruwe, or Kennedy and Heckler, with comparable results), which invite us to reflect seriously about having the great majority (60-80%) of the candidates checked about attitudes in the service of subconscious needs: attitudes maintained either to defend oneself from these needs or to satisfy them. This subconscious motivation seems to be an important element in the decision to enter in priestly or religious life as well as to persevere in the vocation. The unknown or perhaps ignored motivations would be inconsistent with formally expressed personal or institutional self-transcendent values. They are incongruous with the call of Christ to love and to be loved, and in some existential expressions dissonant with the call to be a "man of communion." (cf. Luigi M. Rulla *et al.*, *Anthropology of the Christian Vocation*, Rome, Gregorian University Press, 2 vols., 1989).

But what does it mean in practice? Here too, our thoughts could run immediately to the action to be undertaken, but that would not be the right impulse to follow. Before making practical plans, we need to promote a spirituality of communion, making it the guiding principle of education wherever Christian individuals are formed, wherever ministers of the altar, consecrated persons, and pastoral workers are trained, where families and communities are built. (John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 2001, # 43)

John Paul II forewarns us once more about a mentality of activism and functionality which is seen so

often in the secular ways of this world and encourages us to grow in freedom to choose and “to be” rather than “to do,” as well as to fix our eyes on Christ and grow in holiness by choosing “what we ought to be” and not “what we are.” In other words, that we choose “what is intrinsically good” rather than “what is good for me.” We do not speak here about psychopathology, but about certain lesser or greater degrees of social and psychological immaturity between the “ideal self” and how one actually lives and strives for objective holiness (Rulla *et al.*, 1989).

Human maturity, and in particular affective maturity, requires a clear and strong training in freedom, which expresses itself in convinced and heartfelt obedience to the “truth” of one’s own being, to the “meaning” of one’s own existence, that is to the “sincere gift of self.” (...) Affective maturity presupposes an awareness that love has a central role in human life. (...) We are speaking of a love that involves the entire person, in all his or her aspects – physical, psychic and spiritual – and which is expressed in the “nuptial meaning” of the human body, thanks to which a person gives oneself to another and takes the other to oneself. (PDV, # 44)

Most of the psychological studies today focus on the “filial” dimension of our existence, that is, how a child’s early experiences might influence personality formation and the style which one will adopt in living one’s priesthood or marriage.

On the anthropological and theological levels, we often find the priesthood described in unidirectional accents on “filial-fraternal” dimension, in unbalance with coexistent “spousal-paternal” dimensions. This often results in apostolic partiality or even incompetence or ineffectiveness.

Therefore each dimension: filial, fraternal, spousal, and paternal, has to find its expression in the life of the candidate in training as well as in priestly ministry and life. From our filial relationship with God, flows also our filial relationship with our bishop, our spiritual director, as well as the “fraternal” relationships with other seminarians and members of the presbyterium, particularly with the seminary formation team. In Christ’s “spousal” relationship with the Church is rooted our “spousal” relationship with all Christ’s members, in all its faithfulness, unity, exclusivity or totality. And finally, in the priestly “nuptial self-offering of love” one expresses the “paternal” dimension of his vocation. Even if this is in the supernatural order, it still has all its psychological richness and relational aspect.

God has loved us first (1 Jn 4:10) and upon this Love (Jesus Christ) is built the circular dialectic of love: to love and to be loved.

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