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## **FORMATION PROJECTS**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

This document deals with the provisions and guidelines proposed by the Dicastery and approved by Pope John Paul II in 1990 with a view to specifying the norms of the Law and promote their application. It contains legal prescriptions regarding formation in general, such as the steps for adequate spiritual, apostolic, doctrinal and practical renewal, in the light of Lumen Gentium chapter VI and the Decree Perfectae Caritatis of Vatican II and the teachings of Popes Paul VI and St John Paul II regarding the formation of the “inner man”. Equally valuable were the references to the Instruction Renovacionis Causam published in the same year, 1969. The document was of help for Major Superiors and Formation Masters when integrating the formation guidelines in Ratio Institutionis or formation projects.

Following the teachings of the Magisterium of the Church, starting with Vatican II, our Hospitaller Order has been concerned with the formation stages of the Brothers, as can be seen in the Constitutions, General Statutes and the “Formation Project for the Brothers of St John of God”. It has been particularly concerned with formulating the purpose of the pastoral ministry of vocations and part of Chapter VI of that document is dedicated to motivating the provinces to work in this vital area, knowing that the future of the Order depends on vocations’ promotion.

### **SYNTHESIS**

The whole document is important, but in this case special reference will be made to Chapter III, which describes the different stages of formation, starting with the pre-novitiate or postulancy, the stage in which the candidate gradually reaches human maturity as well as the balance he needs to establish mature interpersonal relationships, with psychological support if necessary, in addition to maturity in his vocational call. Candidates must possess an adequate level of basic general culture, clear motivations and the capacity to live in a community; “No-one may be admitted without adequate preparation”.

Initial formation should make it possible for the formation student to acquire enough autonomy to live his religious commitments with fidelity. The formation process is put into practice according to proper law. The document discusses the purpose of the novitiate, scholasticate and temporary and solemn profession, as well as ongoing formation, designed to be integral, human, Christian, spiritual, pastoral, tecno-professional and ecclesial.

It allows for apostolate experiences to be acquired during the novitiate. It also deals with the canonical conditions that must be observed for admission, legality and validity. The Master is responsible for helping each student, in keeping with his pace and capacities, beginning with solicitous spiritual accompaniment.

Temporary profession, the offering up of his life that the novice makes, united with the Eucharistic sacrifice, should be celebrated with due simplicity. Solemn profession has to be preceded by the period of temporary profession, all relevant provisions of the law regarding conditions of validity etc., being observed

Content, programmes and other means of formation must guarantee the real and integral growth of the religious. Apostolic commitment is necessary for this as well as progressive participation in ecclesial and social experiences, in accordance with the Order's charism. Those under temporary vows should have a spiritual director or advisor; this "cannot be replaced psycho-pedagogical means". Technical and/ or professional studies, as well as theological and biblical studies have to meet the Order's apostolic requirements, and be in line with the programme for that particular formation stage, in which spiritual life and ecclesial meaning are being taught. A special period of preparation should be allowed to religious before the taking of solemn vows and they should be freed from their usual daily occupations.

Ongoing formation as "an intrinsic requirement of religious consecration" (VC 69) is a life-long responsibility, a global religious renewal process, in fidelity to God, the Church, the charism and the signs of the times. It also ensures a unifying inner spiritual formation, in order to be true, living witness of the Kingdom of God. Ongoing formation needs serious amounts of space and periods of time.

## TEXT

### CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE

#### DIRECTIVES ON FORMATION IN RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES

#### III

#### THE STAGES OF RELIGIOUS FORMATION

##### A) THE STAGE BEFORE ENTRANCE INTO THE NOVITIATE

##### RATIONALE

42. In today's circumstances, generally speaking, it may be said that the analysis of *Renovationis causam* remains valid: "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."(111) It certainly is not required that a candidate for the religious life be able to assume all of the obligations of the religious life immediately, but he or she should be found capable of doing so progressively. The possibility of making such a judgment justifies the time and means employed in reaching it. This is the purpose of the stage preparatory to the novitiate, no matter what name may be given to it: postulancy, pre-novitiate, etc. It pertains exclusively to the proper law of institutes to determine the manner in which it is carried out, but whatever these may be, "no one can be admitted without suitable preparation."(112)

##### CONTENT

43. Taking into account what will be said (nn. 86 ff), with respect to the condition of youth in the modern world, this preparatory stage, which can be prolonged without fear, should aim at verifying and clarifying certain points which will permit superiors to determine the advisability of and the time for the candidate's admission into the novitiate. Care should be taken not to hasten the time for this admission, nor to defer it unduly, provided that it is possible to arrive at a certain judgment on whether the person is a promising candidate.

Admission is based upon conditions determined by the general law of the Church, though the institute's proper law can add others.(113) The requirements of the law are as follows:

- - a sufficient degree of human and Christian maturity(114) for undertaking novitiate without its being reduced to the level of a course of general formation based on a simple catechumenate. It can actually happen that some present themselves as candidates who have not completed their Christian initiation (sacramental, doctrinal, and moral), and lack some of the elements of an ordinary Christian life.
- - a general cultural foundation which should correspond to what is generally expected of young persons who have achieved the normal education of their country. It is particularly necessary that future novices attain a facility in the language used in the novitiate.

Since this is a matter of basic culture, it will be important to take into account the conditions of certain countries or social environments where the level of schooling is still relatively low, but where the Lord is nonetheless calling candidates to the religious life. Thus it will be necessary to promote the original culture carefully, and not assimilate it into a foreign culture. It is within their own culture that candidates, whether male or female, must recognize the call of the Lord and respond to it in a personal way.

- - a balanced affectivity, especially sexual balance, which presupposes the acceptance of the other, man or woman, respecting his or her own difference. Recourse to a psychological examination can be useful, taking into account the right of each individual to preserve his or her own privacy.(115)
- - the ability to live in community under the authority of superiors in a particular institute. This capacity certainly will be verified further during the course of the novitiate, but the question should be posed in advance. Candidates should be well aware of the fact that other ways exist by which to give all of one's life to the Lord, apart from entering a religious institute.

### FORMS OF REALIZATION

44. These can be diverse: reception into a community of the institute, without sharing all its life -- with the exception of the novitiate community, which is not recommended for this, except in the case of nuns; -- periods of contacts with the institute or with one of its representatives; common life in a house of reception for candidates, etc. However, none of these forms should give the impression that those who are interested have already become members of the institute. In every way, the persons accompanying the candidates are more important than the modalities of reception.

One or several religious endowed with the necessary qualifications will be designated by superiors to guide the candidates and to help them with the discernment of their vocation. These persons will actively collaborate with the directors of novices.

### B) THE NOVITIATE AND FIRST PROFESSION

END

45. "The novitiate, by which life in the institute begins, is ordered to this, that the novices better recognize their divine vocation and one which is, moreover, proper to the institute; that they experience the

institute's manner of living; that they be formed in mind and heart by its spirit; and that their intention and suitability be tested."(116)

Taking into account the diversity of charisms and institutes, the end of the novitiate could be defined, in other words, as a time of integral initiation into the form of life which the Son of God embraced and which he proposes to us in the Gospel(117) under one or another aspect of his service, or one or another of his mysteries.(118)

### CONTENT

46. "The novices are to be led to cultivate human and Christian virtues; they are to be introduced to a fuller way of perfection by prayer and self-denial; they are to be instructed to contemplate the mystery of salvation, and to read and meditate on the Sacred Scriptures; they are to be prepared to cultivate the worship of God in the sacred liturgy; they are to be trained in a way of life consecrated by the evangelical counsels to God and humankind in Christ; they are to be educated about the character and spirit, purpose and discipline, history and life of their institute, and they are to be imbued with a love for the Church and its sacred pastors."(119)

47. As a consequence of this general law, the total initiation which characterizes the novitiate goes far beyond that of simple instruction. It is:

- - an initiation into a profound and living knowledge of Christ and of his Father. This presupposes a meditative study of Scripture, the celebration of the liturgy according to the spirit and character of the institute, an initiation into personal prayer, so that its practice becomes habitual, and a relish for the great authors of the Church's spiritual tradition, without being limited to spiritual reading of a modern cast;
- - an initiation into the Paschal mystery of Christ through detachment from self, especially in the practice of the evangelical counsels according to the spirit of the institute, an evangelical asceticism joyfully undertaken, and a courageous acceptance of the mystery of the cross.
- - an initiation into a fraternal, evangelical life. It is, in effect, within a community that faith is deepened and becomes communion, and that charity finds its numerous manifestations in the concrete routine of daily life.
- - an initiation into the history, particular mission, and spirituality of the institute. Here, for institutes dedicated to the apostolate, there enters the fact that: "to complete the formation of the novices, in addition to the time mentioned in n. 1 (that is, the twelve months to be passed within the novitiate community itself) the constitutions can determine one or several periods of apostolic exercises to be spent outside the novitiate community."(120)

These periods have the purpose of teaching the novices to "realize in their lives, in progressive stages, that cohesive unity whereby contemplation and apostolic activity are closely linked together, a unity which is one of the most fundamental and primary values of these same societies."(121)

The arrangement of these periods should take into account the twelve months to be passed within the novitiate community itself, during which the novices will not be occupied with studies and duties which do not directly serve this formation."(122)

The novitiate program of formation should be defined by the institute's proper law.(123)

It is not advisable that the novitiate be conducted within a milieu foreign to the culture and native language of the novices. Small novitiates are actually better, provided that they are rooted in this culture. The essential reason for this is to avoid a multiplication of problems during a period of formation in which the

fundamental equilibrium of a person should be established and when the relationship between the novices and the director of novices should be comfortable, enabling them to speak to each other with all the nuances required at the outset of an intensive spiritual journey. Further, a transfer into another culture at this particular moment involves the risk of accepting false vocations and of not perceiving what may be false motivations.

### PROFESSIONAL WORK DURING THE COURSE OF THE NOVITIATE

48. It is worth mentioning here the question of professional work during the course of the novitiate. In a number of industrialized countries, for motives which are at times justified by an apostolic intention, and which may also be in keeping with the social legislation of these countries, candidates who are receiving a salary only ask their employer for a one-year leave of absence "for personal convenience," at the time of their entrance into the novitiate. This enables them to regain their employment if they should return to the world, and they do not, as a consequence, run the risk of becoming unemployed. At times this also leads to the resumption of their professional work during the second year of the novitiate under the guise of apostolic activities.

We believe that the following principle should be stated in this regard. In institutes which have two years of novitiate, the novices can exercise their profession full time only under the following conditions:

- - that this work effectively corresponds to the apostolic finality of the institute;
- - that it is assumed in the second year of the novitiate;
- - that it corresponds to the exigencies of can. 648.2, namely, that it contributes to perfecting the formation of the novices for life in the institute, and that it is truly an apostolic activity.

### SOME CONDITIONS TO BE OBSERVED

49. The canonical conditions for licit and valid admission on the part of both the candidate and the competent authority must be rigorously observed. Conformity with these regulations can avoid many future difficulties.(124) With respect to candidates for the diaconate or priesthood, special care should be taken at this time so that no irregularity later affects the reception of Holy Orders -- it being understood that major superiors of clerical institutes of pontifical right can dispense from irregularities not reserved to the Holy See.(125)

It should also be remembered that superiors must consult the proper ordinary and ask for testimony from him before admitting a secular cleric into the novitiate (can. 644 and 645.2).

50. The circumstances of time and place necessary for the fulfillment of the novitiate are indicated by law. Its flexibility should also be kept in mind, always remembering, however, that prudence can advise what the law does not impose.(126) Major superiors, and those responsible for formation, should know that current circumstances, now more than ever, require conditions of stability sufficient to enable the novices to grow and advance in spirit in a profound and peaceful way. This is all the more important because of the fact that many candidates have already had experience of life in the world. Novices actually have a need of being trained in the practice of prolonged prayer, of solitude, and of silence. For all this, the element of time plays a determining role. They can have a greater need "to withdraw" from the world than "to go" to the world, and this need is not merely subjective. This is why the time and place of the novitiate will be organized so that the novices can find an atmosphere that is favorable to becoming deeply rooted in a life with Christ. But this is only achieved by becoming detached from oneself, from all that which opposes God in the world, and even from those goods of the world "that undoubtedly deserve to be highly valued."(127) As a consequence, making the novitiate in an inserted community is completely discouraged. As was stated

above (n. 28), the demands of formation must take precedence over certain apostolic advantages of insertion in a poor milieu.

### PEDAGOGY

51. Not all the novices enter the novitiate at the same level of human and Christian culture. It will therefore be necessary to pay very close attention to each individual so that each advances at his or her own pace, and so that the content of formation and the way it is communicated, are suitable to the one receiving it.

### THE DIRECTORS OF NOVICES AND THEIR COLLABORATORS

52. The care of the novices is reserved solely to the director of novices under the authority of the major superiors. He or she must be free from all other obligations that would impede the complete fulfillment of the role as educator. If he or she has collaborators, these depend upon the director in what concerns the program of formation and the conduct of the novitiate. Together with the director, they have an important role in discernment and decision.(128)

When secular priests or other religious from outside the novitiate, and even laymen or laywomen, are brought into the novitiate, either for teaching or for the sacrament of reconciliation, they work in close collaboration with the director of novices, each keeping complete discretion.

The director of novices is the spiritual guide appointed for this purpose for each and all of the novices. The novitiate is the place of the director's ministry, and he or she should thus be permanently available to the novices. The director will be able to fulfill this task readily only if the novices are entirely free and open in his or her regard. Nevertheless, in clerical institutes, neither the director nor his assistant may hear the sacramental confessions of the novices unless, in particular instances, they spontaneously ask him to do so.(129)

Finally, directors of novices should remember that psycho-pedagogical means by themselves cannot substitute for an authentic spiritual direction.

53. "Conscious of their own responsibility, the novices are to collaborate actively with their director so that they may faithfully respond to the grace of a divine vocation."(130) And, "members of the institute are to take care that on their part they cooperate in the work of training novices by the example of their life and by prayer."(131)

### RELIGIOUS PROFESSION

54. During the course of a liturgical celebration, the Church, through the competent superiors, receives the vows of those who make their profession, and associates their offering with the Eucharistic Sacrifice.(132) The Ordo professionis(133) gives the outline of this celebration, but it also leaves room for the legitimate traditions of the respective institutes. This liturgical action manifests the ecclesial roots of profession. Beginning from the mystery celebrated in this way, it will be possible to develop a more vital and profound appreciation of consecration.

During the novitiate, both the excellence and the possibility of a perpetual commitment in the service of the Lord will be brought out. "The quality of a person can be judged by the nature of his bonds. Consequently, one can joyfully say that your freedom is freely attached to God by a voluntary service, a loving servitude. And, as a consequence of this your humanity attains its maturity. 'Extended humanity,' as I have written in the encyclical *Redemptor hominis*, means the full use of the gift of freedom which we have received from the Creator when he called man, made to his own image and likeness, into existence. This gift finds its full realization in the unreserved donation of the human person, whole and entire, in a spirit of

nuptial love towards Christ, and, with Christ, towards all those to whom he sends men and women who are totally consecrated to him according to the evangelical counsels."(134) One does not give one's life to Christ on a "trial" basis. Moreover it is he who takes the initiative in asking this of us. Religious bear witness to the fact that this is possible, thanks first of all to God's fidelity, and to the fact that this renders them free and happy, if their gift is renewed each day.

56. Perpetual profession presumes a prolonged preparation and a persevering apprenticeship. This justifies the Church's requirement that it be preceded by a period of temporary profession. "While still retaining its probationary character by the fact that it is temporary, the profession of first vows makes the young religious share in the consecration proper to the religious state."(135) Consequently, this time of temporary profession has as its end the strengthening of the fidelity of the young professed, whatever may be the human satisfaction which they receive from their daily life "in the following of Christ."

The liturgical celebration should carefully distinguish the perpetual profession from the temporal profession, which should be celebrated "without any particular solemnity."(136) On the other hand, the perpetual profession is made "with the desired solemnity, and in the presence of the religious and others,"(137) since "it is the sign of the indissoluble union of Christ with the Church, his Spouse (cf. LG 44)."(138)

57. All the legal dispositions with respect to the conditions for validity and for the time of temporary and perpetual profession must be observed.(139)

### C) FORMATION OF THE TEMPORARILY PROFESSED

#### WHAT IS PRESCRIBED BY THE CHURCH

58. With respect to the formation of those who are temporarily professed, the Church prescribes 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. Therefore, proper law must define the program of this formation and its duration, keeping in mind the needs of the Church and the circumstances of human persons and times to the extent this is required by the purpose and character of the institute."(140)

"The formation is to be systematic, adapted to the capacity of the members, spiritual, and apostolic, doctrinal and at the same time practical, and when it seems opportune, leading to appropriate degrees both ecclesiastical and civil. During the time of this formation, duties and jobs which would impede the formation are not to be assigned to members."(141)

#### SIGNIFICANCE AND REQUIREMENTS OF THIS STAGE

59. First profession inaugurates a new phase of formation, which benefits from the dynamism and stability derived from profession. For the religious, it is a matter of reaping the fruits of the preceding stages, and of pursuing their own human and spiritual growth through the courageous execution of their responsibilities. Retaining the spiritual enthusiasm given by the preceding stage is all the more necessary, since, in institutes dedicated to the apostolate, the move to a more open life style and to very demanding activities often runs the risk of disorientation and aridity. In institutes dedicated to contemplation, the risk is more apt to be a matter of routine, of weariness, and of spiritual laziness. Jesus taught his disciples through the crises to which they were subjected. Through his repeated prophecies of his Passion, he prepared them to become more authentic disciples.(142) The pedagogy of this stage will therefore aim at permitting young religious to make real progress by means of their experiences according to a unity of perspective and of life -- that of their own vocation, at this time in their existence, with a view toward perpetual profession.



### THE CONTENT AND MEANS OF FORMATION

60. The institute has the grave responsibility of providing for the organization and duration of this period of formation, and of furnishing the young religious with favorable conditions for a real increase in their donation to the Lord. In the first place, it will provide them a vigorous formational community and the presence of competent instructors. Actually, at this level of formation, in contrast to what was said regarding the novitiate (cf. n. 47), a larger community, well provided with means of formation and good guidance, is better than a small community without experts in formation. As in the whole course of religious life, religious must make efforts: to better understand the practical importance of community life in keeping with the vocation proper to their institute; to accept the reality of this life and to discover within it the conditions for their personal progress; to respect others in their differences; and to feel personal responsibility within this same community. Superiors will specifically designate one to be responsible for the formation of the temporarily professed, extending in a specific manner to this level, the work of the director of novices. This formation should last for at least three years.

61. The following suggestions for programs are only indicative, and they do not hesitate to propose a high ideal, considering the need there is for forming religious to meet the requirements and expectations of the contemporary world. It will be up to the institutes and to the formators to make the necessary adaptations to individuals, places, and times.

In the program of studies, special attention should be given to biblical, dogmatic, spiritual, and pastoral theology, and in particular, to deepening a doctrinal understanding of consecrated life and of the charism of the institute. The establishment of this program and its functioning should respect the internal unity of teaching and the harmonization of different disciplines. There are not many sciences, but only one which a religious should be aware of learning: the science of faith and of the Gospel. In this regard, a cumulative diversification of courses and disciplines should be avoided. Further, out of respect for individuals, religious should not be introduced prematurely into highly controversial questions if they have not as yet completed the courses needed to approach them peacefully.

The program will aim at suitably providing a basic philosophical formation that will permit religious to acquire a knowledge of God and a Christian vision of the world, in close connection with the debated questions of our time. This will show the harmony which exists between the knowledge of reason and that of faith in the search for truth which is one. In such conditions, religious will be protected from the ever threatening temptations of a critical rationalism on the one hand, and of a pietism and fundamentalism on the other.

The program of theological studies should be judiciously conceived, and its different parts should be well defined so that the "hierarchy" of the truths of Catholic doctrine is brought out, since they vary in their relationship with the foundations of the Christian faith.<sup>(143)</sup> The establishment of this program can draw inspiration from an adaptation of the suggestions made by the Congregation for Catholic Education on the formation of candidates for the priestly ministry,<sup>(144)</sup> taking care not to omit anything that could assist in acquiring a good knowledge of the faith and a Christian life within the Church: history, liturgy, canon law, etc.

62. Finally, the maturation of a religious at this stage will require an apostolic commitment and a progressive participation in ecclesial and social experiences in keeping with the charism of their institute, and taking into account the aptitudes and aspirations of individuals. In the process of these experiences, religious should remember that they are not primarily pastoral ministers, but that they are in a period of



initial formation, rather than one that is more advanced, and that their commitment to an ecclesial, and especially a social service, is necessarily subject to the criteria of discernment (cf. n. 18).

63. Even though superiors are rightly described as "spiritual directors in relation to the evangelical purpose of their institute,"(145) religious should have a person available to them, who may be called a spiritual director or spiritual counselor, for the internal, even non-sacramental, forum. "Following the tradition of the early fathers of the desert and of all the great religious founders in the matter of provision for spiritual guidance, religious institutes each have members who are particularly qualified and appointed to help their sisters and brothers in this matter. Their role varies according to the stage reached by the religious but their main responsibilities are: discernment of God's action; the accompaniment of the religious in the ways of God; the nourishing of life with solid doctrine and the practice of prayer; and, particularly in the first stage, the evaluation of the journey thus far made.(146)

This spiritual direction, which "cannot in any way be replaced by psychological methods,"(147) and for which the Council claims a "due liberty,"(148) should therefore be "fostered by the availability of competent and qualified persons."(149)

These provisions primarily intended for this stage in the formation of religious, should continue for the rest of their lives. In religious communities, above all those which are large and especially where the temporarily professed are living, there must be at least one officially designated religious to assist their brothers and sisters with guidance of spiritual advice.

64. Some institutes have provisions for a more intense period of preparation prior to perpetual profession, which includes a withdrawal from one's usual occupations. This practice merits encouragement and extension.

65. If, as is provided for in the law, young professed are sent to study by their superior,(150) "such studies should not be programmed with a view to achieving personal goals, as if they were a means of wrongly understood self-fulfillment, but with a view to responding to the requirements of the apostolic commitments of the religious family itself, in harmony with the needs of the Church."(151) The course of these studies and the pursuit of degrees will be suitably harmonized with the rest of the program for this stage of formation, according to the judgment of major superiors and those responsible for formation.

### D) THE ON-GOING FORMATION OF THE PERPETUALLY PROFESSED

66. "Throughout their entire life religious are to continue carefully their own spiritual, doctrinal, and practical formation, and superiors are to provide them with the resources and time to do this."(152) "Each religious institute therefore has the task of planning and realizing a program of permanent formation suitable for all its members. It should be a program which is not simply directed to the formation of the intellect, but also to that of the whole person, primarily in its spiritual mission, so that every religious can live his or her own consecration to God in all its fullness, and in keeping with the specific mission which the Church has confided to them."(153)

### REASONS FOR ON-GOING FORMATION

67. On-going formation is motivated first of all. by the initiative of God, who calls each one, at every moment and in new circumstances. The charism of religious life in a determined institute is a living grace which must be received and lived in conditions which often are new. "The very charism of the founders (ET 11) appears as 'an experience of the Spirit,' transmitted to their disciples to be lived, safeguarded, deepened and constantly developed by them, in harmony with the Body of Christ continually in the process of growth.... The specific charismatic note of any institute demands, both of the founder and of his

disciples, a continual examination regarding fidelity to the Lord; docility to His Spirit; intelligent attention to circumstances and an outlook cautiously directed to the signs of the times; the will to be part of the Church; the awareness of subordination to the sacred hierarchy; boldness of initiatives; constancy in the giving of self; humility in bearing with adversities. Especially in our times that same charismatic genuineness, vivacious and ingenious in its inventiveness, is expected of religious, as stood out so eminently in their founders."(154) Permanent formation demands that one pay close attention to the signs of the Spirit in our times and that religious allow themselves to be sensitive to them in order to be able to respond to them appropriately.

Moreover, continued formation is a sociological factor which in our days affects all areas of professional activity. It very frequently determines whether one will remain in a profession or be obliged to take up another.

Whereas initial formation is ordered towards a person's acquisition of an autonomy sufficient for faithfully living a religious commitment, on-going formation assists a religious in integrating creativity within fidelity. This is because a Christian and religious vocation demands a dynamic growth and fidelity in the concrete circumstances of existence. This in turn demands a spiritual formation which produces inner unity, but which is also flexible and attentive to the daily events in one's personal life and in the life of the world.

"To follow Christ" means that one is always on the road, that one is on one's guard against sclerosis and ossification, in order to be able to give a living and true witness to the Kingdom of God in this world.

In other words, there are three basic motivations for permanent formation:

- - the first arises from the very function of the religious life within the Church. There it plays a very significant charismatic and eschatological role that presumes on the part of religious men and women a special attention to the life of the Spirit, both in the personal history of each one and in the hopes and anxieties of others;
- - the second comes from the challenges which arise from the future of the Christian faith in a world that is changing with increased rapidity;(155)
- - the third concerns the very life of religious institutes, and especially their future, which depends in part upon the permanent formation of their members.

### ITS CONTENT

68. Continued formation is a global process of renewal which extends to all aspects of the religious person and to the whole institute itself. It should be carried out, taking into account the fact that its different aspects are inseparable from, and mutually influential in, the life of each religious and every community. The following aspects should be kept in mind:

- - life according to the Spirit, or spirituality: this must have primacy, since it includes a deepening of faith and of the meaning of religious profession. The annual spiritual exercises and other forms of spiritual renewal are thus to be given priority;
- - participation in the life of the Church according to the charism of the pastoral activities in collaboration with others involved in that activity locally;
- - doctrinal and professional updating, which includes a deepening of the biblical and theological perspectives of the religious, a study of the documents of the universal and local magisterium, a better knowledge of the local cultures where one is living and working, new professional and technical training, when appropriate;

- - fidelity to the charism of one's institute, through an ever increasing knowledge of its founder, its history, its spirit, its mission, and a correlative effort to live this charism personally and in community.

69. Sometimes a significant amount of permanent religious formation takes place in an inter-institutional context. In such cases, it should be remembered that an institute cannot delegate to external organizations the whole task of continued formation for its members, since in many respects that formation is too closely tied to values proper to its own charism. Each institute, according to its needs and potentialities, should therefore create and organize various programs and structures for the formation of its own members.

### SPECIAL TIMES FOR ON-GOING FORMATION

70. The following stages are to be understood in a very flexible manner. It will be useful to combine them concretely with those which may arise as a result of the unforeseeable initiatives of the Holy Spirit. The following are regarded as particularly significant stages:

- - the passage from initial formation to the first experience of a more independent life, in which a religious must discover a new way of being faithful to God;
- - the completion of about ten years of perpetual profession, when the risk of life's becoming "a habit" occurs with the consequent loss of all enthusiasm. At this time it seems imperative that there be a prolonged period during which one withdraws from ordinary life in order to "reread" it in the light of the Gospel and the mind of one's founder. Various institutes offer their members such a period of intensifying their religious life, in what is known as the "third year," "second novitiate," "second probation," etc. It is desirable that this time be passed within a community of the institute.
- - full maturity, which often involves the danger of the development of individualism, especially among those of an active and vigorous temperament;
- - a time of severe crisis, which can occur at any age as a result of external factors (change of place of work, failure, incomprehension, feelings of alienation, etc.), or more directly personal factors (physical or psychic illness, spiritual aridity, strong temptations, crises of faith or feelings, or both at the same time, etc.). In such circumstances, a religious should be helped so that he or she successfully overcomes the crisis, in faith;
- - a time of progressive withdrawal from activity, when religious feel more profoundly within themselves the experience which Paul described in the context of moving toward the resurrection: "We are not discouraged; and even if, in us, the outward man is being corrupted, the inner man is being renewed day by day."(156) Peter himself, after he had received the immense task of feeding the flock of Christ, heard him say: "When you are old, you will stretch forth your hands, and another will gird you, and lead you where you would not wish to go."(157) Religious can live these moments as a unique opportunity for allowing themselves to be penetrated by the Paschal experience of the Lord Jesus, to the point of wishing to die "to be with Christ," in keeping with their initial choice: "that I may know Christ, the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable to his death, in order to come, if possible, to the resurrection from the dead."(158) Religious life follows no other way.

71. Superiors should designate someone as responsible for permanent formation in the institute. But it is also desirable that religious, all during their lives, have access to spiritual guides or counselors in accord with their course of initial formation and in ways adapted to their greater maturity and their actual circumstances.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- 1. Jesus commanded us to “ask the Lord of the harvest to send more labourers to his harvest” (Mt 9, 38). Am I able to say, as a brother of St John of God, that I have fulfilled this desire of His, in order to respond to the needs of the Church and the Order, praying for new vocations? Is it a concern of your community?**
- 2. There are young people and adults ready to live a way of life at the service of the Gospel, health and life, and God keeps calling. What should we do so that, from our experience and witness of hospitaller life, we may be called to those who are looking to follow Jesus in the manner of John of God, giving their lives meaning?**
- 3. The widespread shortage of vocations is evident in the Order and is a matter for concern to us. Does this state of affairs worry you? Do you feel that your community and province are really life-generating, and therefore likely to arouse enthusiasm and attract vocations, like St John of God?**