

RECOLETOS

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update

Formation Year 2019-2020



**Dialogue and
Accompaniment**
The Ceaseless Search for Truth

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The **RECOLETOS UPDATE** is the official publication of the Recoletos Formation Center, Order of Augustinian Recollects, Province of St. Ezekiel Moreno, Quezon City, Philippines, that is published once a year to share the reflections, reports and updates of the formands and formators. Opinions published are of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the ideas of the editor.

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UPDATE

Editor's Message



Dear Friends and Brothers,
Greetings of Peace!

The theme proposed by the previous editor for this year's publication is "Dialogue and Accompaniment: The Ceaseless Search for Truth." And to what else could I illumine more when the term speaks of itself the truth of the matter? What else to explore when the theme is as clear as the sky? And so, I remember Pilate asking Jesus, "And what is the truth?" It perplexes me because I realized such a question is not only's Pilate but asked on behalf of us, seekers of truth. Like Pilate, I realized we have been asking the wrong question. It is never a 'what' but a 'who.' For truth is something that one needs to look for, discover, and find. Truth is neither created nor is made up. Truth is hidden in experiences, encounters with persons, in celebration of sacraments, and even in most dreadful and most inhumane situations like the pandemic.

Who is the truth, and how do I find the truth? Perhaps the early disciples could enlighten us because when asked to be fishers of men, they immediately left their livelihood and loved ones. I assume that an immediate response to such an invitation would mean that they found the truth. For the truth is irresistible. As for us, simple professed religious who made the vows before the altar of the Lord, to where did we make the vows and to whom we commit to follow? Indeed, we have all the resounding answers – to Jesus Christ, the Word of God. He is Messiah written in Sacred Scripture and witnessed by the Apostles. He is the Person who accompanied and formed the Apostles.

So, while I understand that Christ alone is our true Formator, in His physical absence, we are gifted with our elder religious presence in our Order, not only of those in the formation houses. The religious life, by whom Pope Benedict XVI calls "the living exegesis of the Word of God," is now our new model. Following this logic, this model though imperfect they are is now the one who would accompany us in our journey towards fully embracing the very life of Christ.

Hence, through this publication, it is my honor and great desire to raise awareness on the importance of dialogue and accompaniment in the formation. But more importantly, for each religious to realize his delicate role and place in the formation of the future clergy. Dialogue certainly benefits not only those in formation but also those under the on-going formation. There is no other best avenue and best place to learn from the old or learn from the new other than in friendly dialogue.

May we all find the truth we ceaselessly seek. And in finding Him, we may listen and follow Him!

Fray Rey Jay U. Quevedo, OAR
Editor-in-Chief



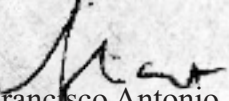
Master's Message

Dialogue is an important venue whereby the formators and the formands establish open communication. It is an essential medium where the formators and the formands learn from each other.

Having lived decades more of the life of the formands, one of our important roles as formators is to share our life experiences in dialogue and how God worked in our life's journey. Dialoguing and sharing our experiences with the formands can drive away their fears and break down barriers as we motivate them with our experiences.

Sharing our experiences and about how God worked in our lives can give the formands assurance and hope. For in the process, the formands may just realize that what we have gone through can just be the same situations they are facing. This assures the formands that God will get them through it, too.

We have rich experiences in life that could be barrier-busting, inspirational, and motivational to our formands - but only if we are willing to share them and the formands on their part, are willing to listen to our life stories and learn from them - a life often dotted with joy and sorrow, success and failure, exuberance and pain, opportunities and challenges.


Fray Francisco Antonio, OAR
Assistant Master of the Professed

Rector's Message



Formators agree that present-day formands need “constant accompaniment”. This urges today’s formators to also learn the art and science of accompanying candidates to religious and/or priestly life. And “dialogue”, as experienced by members of formation community and priests or religious assigned in seminaries, is still the best tool for the formation process.

I thank God in you and the staff. You added “Ceaseless Search for Truth” to “Dialogue and Accompaniment” to constitute the theme of this edition of *Update*. This reminds me of Augustine’s use of “dialogue” as “ascent to God”;¹ and how such “ascent” is possible when we remain and become “church”, the Body of the Head, who is Christ. He is the Truth we ceaselessly seek and desire to live. “The agents of formation fulfill their mission if they teach their students to desire to live the truth fully”:

“Desire is also a form of prayer, and he who does not desire is mute to God. Desire and love attract man ceaselessly and these longings must be nourished by goals attained, always ascending toward horizons of totality. This desire, search and love are at the center of communitarian life and apostolic action. From them arises the need to cooperate and to work together toward the acquisition and sharing of those authentic goods which lead to human plenitude, and out of which a constantly renewing happiness is born.”²

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lauro', written in a cursive style.

Fray Lauro V. Larlar, OAR
Prior of the House

¹“Formation as a Permanent Process of Ascent to God”, PF-OAR (Studium Sapientiae) Part 1, Section 2, p.34 ff.)

² Studium Sapientiae 42



WAY OF *Discipleship*

Fray Renz Calex C. Soriano, OAR

The cross is our identity as Christian Disciples. Whenever we make the sign of the cross, we recall the death and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ and we profess our faith as his followers. The cross reminds us that Jesus Christ suffers for us to deliver us from our sins and to restore our friendship with God. To be nailed on the cross during the time of Jesus Christ was a cruel punishment and a shameful experience that a person could experience. But Jesus Christ gives a new meaning to his experience of crucifixion. The cross that He carried is no disgrace but a symbol of life and grace to all his followers. Through the cross of Jesus, we are saved and are given the newness of life. When Jesus Christ dies, we also die to our sins. When Christ rises from the dead, we also rise with Him to new life and fullness of grace.

Jesus invites us to look into our relationship with Him. He tells us about the bond that connects every disciple to him and the value of unity that is more valuable than any relationship that the world can offer. Our love towards our beloved must

draw its weight from Jesus Christ who is the way, the truth, and the life himself. Loving in the Christian way is to put Jesus at the center of our life so that those who wish to follow Jesus will walk on the path that we have prepared for them to walk through—a path that leads them to eternal life.

The way to discipleship is to embrace Jesus Christ through the cross that he carried once and for all. Basically, a disciple is a follower. Thus, the disciples grow under the inspiration set by our Lord Jesus Christ. His very life equips every individual before he sends them to the mission. Through the help of the Holy Spirit, he dwells in our hearts, to win against the external challenges that might arise before our eyes especially in this present time and eventually, he prepares us to become more and more like him.

To follow Jesus entails carrying our crosses daily and being sustained by his word as man's spiritual nourishment and remedy to all transgressions. Moreover, Christ's followers are composed of both righteous and

sinners, that is why his grace has a big role in this journey. To become His genuine disciples, we must carry the cross that He once carried for us. We must be inspired by Him because if not, we are no different from those who see the cross as a burden and disgrace. The cross of Jesus is not easy to bear but it gives our life the happiness that is beyond our human understanding. Yes! All of us want to be happy. But true and lasting happiness can only be found in God. Jesus tells us always, "Whoever does not take up his cross and follow me, is not worthy of me." Without the cross, Jesus is not present and without the cross, salvation is devoid of meaning.

Jesus sends us to fulfill our mission as Christian believers who must traverse the same path that He passed during His earthly life. In our earthly journey, the presence of the cross must be demonstrated in our daily life so that we can reap a fruitful and faithful harvest. The heavier the cross, the richer the harvest. In everything we do, Jesus must be our source of strength. He says: "*Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*" Let us seek the will of God by following the footsteps of Jesus so that as we carry the cross over our shoulders, we touch the greatest mystery of our redemption that truly increases our faith, hope, and love in God. By doing this, we will be able to give justice to the identity that he gives us, that is, to become his worthy Christian disciples.

*"Yes! All of us
want to be happy.
But true and
lasting happiness
can only be found
in God."*

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FUNDAMENTALS OF HUMAN *and Christian Formation*

Fray Neil Robert M. Alilain, OAR

There was once a story about an old man whose sophisticated logic crumbled because of one particular boy. This child's innocence and sincerity refused to believe that a simple and little act of kindness is a vain thing. As the story goes, the old man was walking along the beach when he came across a young boy throwing something into the breaking waves. Upon reaching a closer distance, he realized that the child was tossing stranded starfish from the sandy beach, back into the ocean.

He asked, "*What are you doing, young man?*" The boy answered, "*If the starfish are still on the beach when the sun rises, they will die.*" The old man replied, "*That is ridiculous. There are thousands of miles of beach and millions of starfish. It doesn't matter how many you throw in; it doesn't make any difference.*" But the boy said, "*Still, it matters to this one,*" and as he threw another starfish into the waves, "*and also, this one.*"[1]

This story portrays not only strong altruism on the part of the boy but it also gives the readers a chance to wonder about certain things they value in life, that is, what matters most. In essence, the catchphrase '*what matters most*' is similar to that of the word '*fundamental*' (one of the minimum constituents without which a thing or a system would not be what it is).[2] Likewise, formation, in its every form, whether it is from a lay outlook or in a religious gamut, has also its fundamentals. But in particular, human and Christian formation can be summarized in three letters, the CCC (Maybe some of you assume or think that this means the Catechism of the Catholic Church but unfortunately, it is not). These three like-letters actually imply Christ, Charity, and Christian. But what makes these as fundamentals in human and Christian formation? Why omit or consider not the intellectual element, spiritual, or even just the apostolic aspect?

First, human and Christian formation has its roots in the life and teaching of Christ because, to begin with, the object of this kind of formation is Christ. Every human person or Christian is called to configure one's life to that of its object. But sadly, this goal does not often happen. Of all the retorts directed towards

the Catholics, Mahatma Gandhi's statement, probably and by far, is the saddest among them. He said, *"I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ."* It is easier to face persecutions from others because of one's beliefs and convictions but if that those things are already done for, what is the point of being a believer? Christ is not asking the faithful to study and learn intensively everything about the faith but He has only one plea, love unconditionally. The Church is built on this very foundation even in antiquity. St. Paul said to the Corinthians, *"Love never fails. If there are prophecies, they will be brought to nothing; if tongues, they will cease; if knowledge, it will be brought to nothing... So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love"* (1 Cor. 13: 8 & 13).

Aforementioned, love plays a crucial point in Human and Christian Formation and so, leads to another fundamental matter, charity. There will come a point that things would become seemingly meaningless and tiring. Most people assume that a man's enthusiasm normally dissipates in a routinely setting but the real issue here is that passion often lasts a moment. This is the case with those who view love or charity as a fire but not as light. Fire is one thing but what makes love similar to a fire is not its fleeting element but it is being a 'light.' Charity does not easily die down. *"It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things"* (1 Cor. 13: 7).

Last but not least is the primary agent itself, the Christian. Formation is useless without man's cooperation. St. Augustine explained that God, indeed, bestows grace to man and affects them to some extent but God's grace does not coerce. It is still up to the human person whether or not he follows the will of God. Just like the boy in the story, he did not let that old man's remark to be the end of his decision. Jose Ortega y Gasset, a Spanish author, once said that I am and my circumstance. Its lesson lies in the fact that what matters is not what people think but what one thinks of one's self and one's circumstance.

In a nutshell, the other important elements of formation such as having knowledge, being able to pray in a very solemn manner, or serving others are important but human and Christian life does not start with those aspects nor solely revolve around those standardized criteria. They are rather the extenders or secondary ingredients in the dish, CCC.

[1] The Starfish Story, <https://lifelifehappy.com/live-life-happy-stories/>. July 7, 2020.

[2] <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fundamental>. July 8, 2020.

"...man's enthusiasm normally dissipates in a routinely setting but the real issue here is that passion often lasts a moment."



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THINGS THAT *the Lockdown Opened*

Fray Rey Jay Y. Quevedo, OAR

C

ould something good come from evil? Well, to answer this let us look at how God revealed Himself based on the biblical narratives of ancient Israel. The Sacred Scriptures tell us how in the beginning the adversary of God co-existed with a man. The adversary whom we call the devil had been there in the form of a snake according to the book of Genesis. In the story of Job, the dialogue between God and His adversary is a clear manifestation that God allowed man to be tempted in every way by His adversary. But God has reason or purpose for this. This may be the reason why every time we are confronted with an undesirable situation, we take consolation on the following line, ‘Everything happens for a reason.’

The fall of the first human beings in the Garden of Eden is clearly an evil thing that happened to the whole human race. But out of this, we hear the cantor during Easter Vigil Mass, echoing the words of our holy father, St. Augustine, “the necessary sin of Adam... O happy fault...”. And these I think have already given us confusion. But in any less, let us traverse this difficult

journey together in searching for the truth. Let us go further. Peter Poitiers explained the distinction between the rite of baptism that is performed and the one who performs the rite. This means that he distinguishes the sacramental action of the rite and the minister. Then he compares the natural order in the sacramental action. “When the Jews put Christ to death, their deed was evil; but the death of Christ was approved and willed by God” (Sententiarum Libri Quinque 1, c.16). On the manner, Innocent III differentiates sacrilegious action and sacramental celebration: “Although the action of the one who acts (opus operans) is sometimes unclean, yet always the act is done (opus operatum) is clean. This also means that though the action is done badly, the result is untainted with it.”[1]

Now this pandemic, as much as I do not want to send a wrong message to all the victims and those who are hard-working day and night, who labored to control the curve, and who had sacrificed much on this effort, I cannot also help but point out the things that which I think had an impact on both

the Church and the State. After implementing the various levels of quarantine (a lighter term for ‘lockdown’), many opportunities I observed open.

First, we have seen how we lack in terms of educating our parishioners of the basic teachings of our faith. Our interactions with them are very much limited to the celebration of sacraments. We have forgotten the approach of the Lord where he visits family unto their homes and teaches them about the Kingdom of Heaven. The measure in which we can say that we are yielding fruits in the parish life is when we can get involved with our parishioners in the parish activities. But only when we can educate them properly that this happens. Unfortunately, this is not the case in some of our parishes. Too many parishioners, but how many of them are involved in the parish’s various ministries? How many volunteers we have who are not receiving compensation for the services rendered? We are blessed if we have, but as in this case, it is time for us to reflect on what we can do in terms of educating our parishioners not just the usual casual meetings during Sundays and other days.

Second, we have seen ourselves that we have been dependent on the people around us both in our personnel and parishioners. The absence of personnel and office staff almost paralyzed our daily life in the seminary or in the parish. We are almost alien to things we owned and the property we are supposed to take good care of. For instance, in the kitchen, at first, we struggle to find out how to light up the manual rice cooker, how to switch on the gas stove for cooking, and how to do things which are so basic and yet we are too far ignorant. Some of us might have been able to realize that the last time we have washed our clothes was when we were still outside of the seminary or perhaps when we’re still studying in Rome. Why? Because we have been long dependent on other people.

Third, we have experienced how this pandemic made us closer to one another even if physical distancing is imposed and observed. It is not the space that separated us, but our desires. Our desire to be somewhere else other than our community. Our desire to travel with friends outside our community. Our desire to be with the people who appreciate our pastoral work and our way of life for oftentimes community life is blind about it. But now, we have seen religious staying with our community, participating in all our activities, praying with us, dining with us, recreating with us. And such are the good things that this pandemic brought.

Fourth, we have been drawn to focus more on the essentials and let go of those that are not. The long-awaited

vacation, the anticipated year-end excursion, the scheduled travel with friends and family have been rubbed out from us. Even our small gathering on Friday nights, the paseo and quasi, and the monthly birthday celebrations were temporarily stopped. The reason is that we cannot be happy while the rest of humanity suffers. Now, we have seen that we have to be in solidarity with them. We cannot remain indifferent. We are not only ‘in solidum’ during our prayers and various forms of spiritual piety, but also in our sacrifices. And one distinguishing character of God that we must learn well, especially for pastors, is the ability to suffer.

These are just only a few observations I made and there are a lot more that this lockdown has opened. So I continue to hope that after all these struggles and sufferings we experienced, good things will be coming and in fact, they are already there. The pandemic may have brought devastation or have changed history. But we, religious and laity, as believers of an intervening God, who make bad things good, who effects good things from what is seemingly evil, can rely much on His providential plan for the whole world. And indeed, everything happens for a reason! That’s a hard fact.

[1]<https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/ex-opere-operantis>. Accessed Date: June 29, 2020.



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THE FRUITS OF TRANSPARENCY: *Interior Freedom and Healing*

Fray Julius James T. Tinapao, OAR

7

was on my way home. It was almost evening, but I still have a long way to go. Before me, the lengthy and winding road seemed to disappear in the horizon as the mist and clouds dusked the creeping twilight. I gazed around, and I saw people leaving for their homes. As I watched the last bus with the remaining passengers depart, I realized I was left alone. And upon seeing my situation, loneliness, uneasiness, and a child-like yearning to reach home rankled within me. I took a deep breath, clutched my baggage, and started following the road dimly illumined by the gray, cloudy night sky.

I know that I was following the highway to our home, but as I looked at the silhouettes of the tall grasses and shrubs at the roadsides, I realized that I was in a totally strange place. It was then that I instinctively felt that something inimical was pursuing me. The time and place I was in made me vulnerable to the tailing menace. So much fear surged in me, and I felt goosebumps all over my body. I immediately made the sign of the Cross and doubled my pacing.

Further on, I came upon a portion of the road carved at a rocky cliff that overlooks the vast open sea. The place could have been a quaint sight,

but the brooding storm in the evening sky gave the site a lugubrious tint. As I pass through that place, huge waves pounded the cliffside, splashing large volumes of water over the road. I got trapped, but I needed to reach home. Although I was overwhelmed with so much fear, I took the courage to go on my way. As I moved swiftly, another huge wave slammed on the road. I fell to the ground at its impact! As I gasped for breath, I realized that the water's surge was carrying me off the way to the turbulent sea below. I struggled to hold on to the rocks and stand up. Then I saw another huge wave rushing towards me. I panicked and scurried to leave the road with the thought, "I don't want to die this way!" The wave caught me again, but I managed to grapple for safety.

It was dawn when I arrived at our house. I had an exhausting journey, but the sight of our home comforted me. I was so excited to see everyone, and I hurried inside. But to my surprise, the house was empty and dark, and nobody was there... I mumbled to myself, "Was all this I came here for?" I felt so sad, abandoned, and lonely.

With a heavy heart, I sobbed. And suddenly, I woke up. It was just a dream.

I used to behold my dreams as mere products of my restless mind. From our class in Psychology, I learned that dreams could also manifest something from my unconscious self, but my rationalizations dislodged that thought. For years of my seminary formation, that dream I had almost always appeared in part or whole, or with similar settings and incidents nearly every night. I easily brushed it away, but sadness, fear, and loneliness increasingly crept within me. I felt disturbed; yet, the thought of the seemingly smooth-sailing years of my seminary formation and the people's expectation and positive regard of me led me to muzzle my interior turmoil.

I shared what I was going through to a few kiths to find somebody to allay my fears and confusion. But several of them left; others were transferred to another community. I ventured to share these sentiments with my other brothers and formators. While a few somehow shared insights on dealing with my situation, others remained like walls before me—firm and imposing in ideas, but reticent and cold in concern. Others would even comment that I don't seem to have a problem or insist that I must be ok because others look up at me. This reminded me of a lion's picture with the written phrase, "The problem with being strong is that nobody bothers to ask if you're hurt..." or even denies that you have pains, too. Perhaps, I had approached them in an inappropriate time, or simply the right person has not yet come. So I ceased sharing my experiences so as not to bother others anymore.

This eventually led me to recoil within myself. I kept all my experiences to myself and strived to suppress all their manifestations in my conduct. I felt content with what I have done and disguised everything with a smile. As I did this, I also resorted to the best means to refuge and defense—prayer. It was the conduit through which I poured outright to God all my experiences. However, as years went by, the fervor I had begun to wane, too. Spiritual life became a struggle for me as the sense of a vast internal emptiness diffused within. Then came a time when even God seemed to be so far... Yet, I went on with my life, believing still in the love and mercy of God, who is apparently distant as of the moment.

As I scamper to bring everything under control, my situation turned different. A sudden surge of profound sadness and abysmal emptiness enveloped me, especially in the late afternoon until evening. I suddenly wake up at midnight and remain sleepless and insensible until almost three o'clock. I became irritable and impatient. I also turned impervious to other's comments or criticisms. I no longer took my studies seriously, and I tend to forget things easily. The tasks I used to do in a matter of time turned out to remain unfinished for long. There were also instances when I became so overly sensitive to odors and sounds. Then others' mistakes became magnified before me and I tend to be so negative. I felt torn from within, and my life seemed pointless, but the hope that everything will come to pass and my apparently empty prayers urged me on.

Then my most awaited time came. Some of my

formators noticed some changes in me. Thanks be to God for our school requirement that manifested and pinned everything down. It was then that I opted to open myself without reserve, especially to one of our formators who, although he was later on transferred to another community, explained my situation to the rest of the formators who willingly and generously offered me direction and support.

I was given the opportunity to undergo a ten-day psycho-spiritual retreat, which helped me look into my life, trace my problems' roots, and address them. During this retreat, I saw the value of openness on my part and the importance of persons who can truly and be freely approached to be companions in my journey to God and not simply hearers who, since they were chosen out of courtesy, only act as their task demands and no more. My retreat was rather brief. Yet, it was a challenging moment of my life as I recall and acknowledge what I repudiated for long and so desired to forget. Nonetheless, it made me strong and capable enough to stand and confront my traumas and fears that stemmed way back to my childhood years. Upon my return to the seminary, I felt as if I got freed from an enormous burden. The gloom and distress I frequently experienced gave way to light and peace.

The unconscious side of myself continuously communicates to my awareness of my dreams as channels, as I get to know more and piece together my life shattered by my fears. But unlike before, I now cherish a sense of freedom within me. The gradual recognition, acceptance of, and reconciliation with my past and the companionship of my brothers and formators emancipate my interior self and guarantee my healing process. I have a long way to go, but the fruits of transparency brought me priceless gifts I never expected to have in my life's journey.



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RECREATING ENCOUNTERS *in the Self*

Fray Jose Enrico V. Gallego, OAR

Very often we hear of people experiencing mental health and psychological issues such as depression. More so at this point when everything is more uncertain than before – there is a greater risk for people to experience so much anxiety and fear. Yet, it is not something one must run away from but rather something to face head-on.

As easy as it sounds, it is not. One social media post says that, “sometimes the most difficult thing to do is to be alone in your head.” Left to ourselves, it would indeed be very difficult to deal with these things without the help of others whether they be medical professionals or spiritual directors. One may easily fall into choosing one over the other but they work hand in hand. Too much psychological treatment would be too humanistic and secular and too much spiritualizing tends to be out of touch with the reality of the human and psychological conditions. Interestingly, there are some who bridge the gap between

the two, recognizing the limitations that one and the other has which is complemented by the other. One psychiatrist says that ultimately, it is God who heals and professionals can only go so far.

True enough, it is God who heals man from whatever afflictions he has. But the question remains why God does not do so and perfect someone in an instant. He can truly do so if He would will it but there is another ingredient which would be missing, man. St. Augustine of Hippo would say, “He who made you without you cannot justify you without you.” This explains why one undergoes greater difficulty on the path to self-awareness and healing; a tumultuous journey wherein one meets himself as a stranger. More so if nothing can be seen and nothing can be done but grope in the darkness of oneself. Developing the inner man involves an encounter with oneself no matter how difficult it may be. More importantly, it is an encounter with God within. He can undoubtedly do it on his own, but without the

participation of man, the message of love and healing will not be conveyed. St. Thomas Aquinas explains that “grace does not destroy nature, but rather perfects it.” In this regard, grace is an initiative of God needing man’s free response so in turn, the perfection of the inner self is an exercise of freedom in the acceptance of grace in the encounter with God.

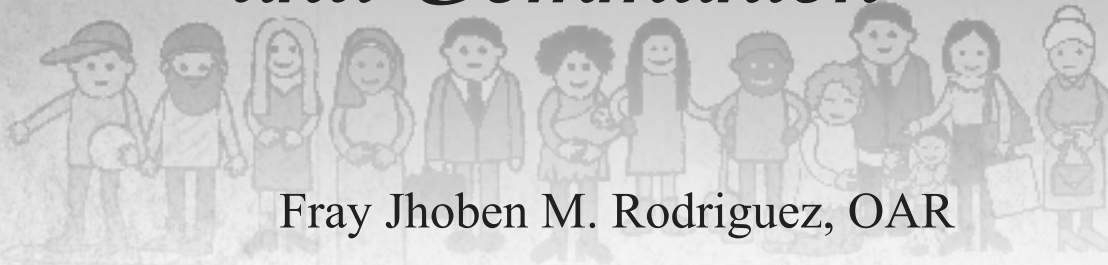
Truly, the development of the person is not done with man alone nor solely by God. The healing process in psychotherapy begins with acknowledging the problems and going back to their roots. Raising it into the spiritual level, the recognition of one’s shortcomings is the encounter in which man permits God into the picture to begin recreating and perfection. Having gone through all the difficulties in the search for oneself and ending up being healed by others and ultimately by God, gives one a reason to be thankful for the experience of healing love.

“Developing
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involves an
encounter with
oneself no matter
how difficult it
may be.”

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CLIMATE OF CLOSENESS *and Communion*



Fray Jhoben M. Rodriguez, OAR

7

I've been listening to people sharing to me their various life's struggles and of how they grope and grapple for them "to be." Others are actually achieving their dreams despite their situation. Many chase the shadow. There are also those who are at the point of giving up, and others who find no consolation even in their own family, workplace, and much more complicated situation that they are into. After listening to many of them whom I consider part of my journey, I felt some extent of exhaustion. I was absorbed by such anxiety to the point that I questioned my being, 'who I am?' At that point, I found myself lost in the middle of nowhere. The world is in chaos; people need a person who will listen to them; whom they can talk to and confide with. Each person needs an authentic friend who can be their companion in this broken world. I am just worried about the growing number of people being depressed nowadays. It seems that they feel that the world is against them. The sad thing is that they have no one to turn to — men are isolated in a crowd. Thus, I begin to reflect: Is there still hope to live harmoniously in the

society field with hedonism, violence, and individualism? How about unity in Diversity? How about living in common, to actualize the dream Holy Father St. Augustine?

Many would think that Augustinian community is only limited for selected individuals because Father St. Augustine elevated "common life" to the category of Vow. This seemingly suggests that it is intended for those who profess it. He even qualified it as the Magnum Votum (Great Vow). Despite that it is also good to know that to live in common is not limited to those who live in convents, but in reality, it is a call to all the believers. As a matter of fact, according to scholars 50 times Holy Father Augustine utilized Acts 4:32, and only 12 times that there were direct references to the religious or monastic life, and most of these were then addressed to the Church — the ecclesial community and communion.

The monastic community then is a call to the world to learn to live together. Community life is not merely physical togetherness. It is both attractive (welcoming,

loving, and supportive) and demanding (differences and challenges).[1] “How good and pleasant it is to see brothers living in unity.” In the contemporary world, most of the time people will assert themselves to the point that they no longer consider others, but only one’s ego. Selfishness is at the very core of the hearts of men. It distorted the natural desire to relate with others and to live in a community. A climate of closeness and communion cannot be achieved in community life with a mere community or personal effort. It is only God who is capable of gathering the scattered and of strengthening broken human relationships.

In achieving such a community, there is a need for openness and dialogue. As part of an effort to live in harmony, a person in the community should open up his heart to others through dialogue. Living in the Recollect community for more than eight years, I experienced and learned many things. I met various personalities, and I can say that without dialogue there will be no deeper understanding of the self and the others. The dialogue and openness are resulting to having a good relationship. The capacity to talk and listen to one another gives a beautiful picture of a community bearing each other’s burden. I remember my experience when we were assigned to live on an island in Palawan. There I realized that life is never a life without others. Who will assist you, whom you can intermingle with, and from whom you can learn from? It was for me an occasion to discover more myself, the brothers whom I lived with, and God himself who sent us in that mission. Fr. Lauro V. Larlar, OAR once taught us: “Community is build up when we start to sit down and listen to one another.” Rather than seeing each individual in competition.

Father St. Augustine would say that “There is a need to see each person as fellow pilgrims walking together: one in mind and heart moving towards God.” The most essential part of life in common is the Spirit of Love. Within the community relationships, everybody should be governed by love.[2] Its foundation is on the Gospel of Matthew 22, 36-40, i.e., the Love of God and neighbor. The model for this love is the Love of the Father and the Son –the Trinitarian Love. It is a vocation to love our neighbor the way God loves each person. Without God, in the community, it will collapse. Outside God, no one can survive. As a community, there is a call to remain in God. “God, from whom to turn away, is to fall; to turn to whom is to rise again, to remain in whom is to be secure, God, from whom to go forth, is to die; to whom to return is to live again; in whom to dwell is to live.”[3] Thus, in everything that the person does it should be done for only one reason, that is, God who is Love himself. God finds each person in the community empty so he sends the Holy Spirit to fill each one. The

Holy Spirit who is Love himself draws each member of the community to the Love of God and neighbor (Sermons 255, 4).

Openness and dialogue are both essential to create a climate of closeness and communion, but without Love, the community will still collapse. Human efforts in the community are needed but it is only God who puts everything into perfection.

[1] Theodore Tack, OSA, *If Augustine were Alive: Augustine’s Religious Ideal for Today* (Makati, Philippines: St. Paul Publications, 1990), 137-138.

[2] Enrique Eguiarte Bendimez, OAR, *Reflections on Community* Vol. 2, 22.

[3] Soliloquies 1,3.



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GROWING *into Christ-Like*

Fray James Eroid P. Gatinao, OAR

E

xpectation vs. Reality”. Social media has been filled with these funny memes that compare the big difference between what we expect against the real outcome. Life is filled with amusing contradictions. We picture in our mind a perfect image, for example, of a beautiful and healthy lifestyle program as a New Year’s Eve resolution. And then you realize that the year had flown so fast that what you have yet accomplished is the eating part and not the real workout. But, that’s life.

In the life of a seminarian, the expectation is not a stranger. Most people would expect an angelic seminarian who would only walk in a holy manner with their praying hands against their chest. A family was even shocked to hear that seminarians also play basketball as if seminarians are some kind of aliens who only know how to pray. Nonetheless, the cliché always comes up in these kinds of situations: *Tao lang din po kami* (We are also human beings) – this obviously expresses the reality of human imperfection but nonetheless should not be used nonchalantly as an

excuse or reason for various deliberate sins.

The seminary formation exists for this very reason. Nobody is born a priest or a religious. Rather, they are formed patiently in accordance to God’s call. It is a process of growth of vocation to be a more fitting image of Christ. The word “seminary” comes from the Latin word *seminarium* which literally means “seedbed”, “plant nursery” or “breeding ground”. It could be a pile, a pot, or a box with soil where seeds are grown until they sprout and are ready for replanting into the garden or field. Just like the seed, those who aspire to become religious and/or priests are initially planted in the seedbed of seminary formation where they are nurtured and prepared to be planted in the larger soil. The growth of the seed does not stop in the seedbed, so also the growth of the seminarians. A seed continues to grow even larger and faster when it is transferred into the garden or field. The seeds could only grow when the necessary nutrients are present or when it is planted in the rich and healthy soil. Nevertheless, not all seeds, however identical they may

seem, germinates in the same manner as the other. In fact, not all planted seeds sprout healthily or not sprouting at all. The farmer may have had spent a great amount of effort in that seedbed, but the reality is not always as it is expected.

In my younger days, my elementary teacher would assign us a seedbed and a small land area where we could grow the seeds that the school provided. The teacher used to say that we have to take the utmost care of our plants with dedication and patience. Perseverance was not yet known in my young mind but that was the lesson that task had taught me. Being in the seminary is like patiently growing a seed into a plant. Eight years ago, the seminary formation seems to be so long and the end is almost unattainable. Eight years later, the formation seemed too fast. My growth as a seed is not solely attributed to the self. The seed cannot grow by itself. It takes a good farmer in order to have good seed growth. It takes a good and suitable environment for the seed to grow. However, not all seeds are alike, and so the necessary conditions for them to germinate are different. This could be the reason why not all those who entered the seminary ended up being a priest or a religious. It is important to note that those who leave the seminary are not bad persons but they are simply a different kind of seeds that needs a different environment to grow. What is important is the growth to be more Christ-like.

“My growth as a seed is not solely attributed to the self... It takes a good farmer in order to have good seed growth. It takes a good and suitable environment...”

Real Talk: It is true that the seminary could be a perfect example of the polarity between expectation and reality. While there are still some of those who fantasized about the seminary as a kind of utopia, the reality is little less than that. While it is expected for the seminarians to be very obedient, very prudent, and very kind, there exist in the cloisters a considerable number of them who are hardheaded, rowdy, boisterous, and impatient. While all seminarians are expected to be prayerful and men of God, in reality, there are those who make excuses in order to skip the community prayers. While it is true that seminary life is very fun and full of meaning, it is not without its share of pain, disappointments, and even hate. The seminary is not a perfect world but could be a perfect example of expectation versus reality.

However, seminarians are like seeds which symbolize the hope of growth. The seeds will not become full-grown plants overnight, nor is it guaranteed that they will all become one. What is important is that there is a hope that they will become one. A hope that one day they will grow as the farmer sees it to be. Growth into Christ-likeness does vitally not depends on the human hands but in the nourishing graces that He bestows like that of the farmer to the seeds. Jesus said, “... as I have done for you, you should also do” (Jn. 13:15 NAB). The call to discipleship is not a common request but a command (cf. Mt. 5:48). The call to holiness should not only be dismissed as the idealistic expectation of discipleship but a concrete reality that should be lived out. Growth to become more like Christ is a tumultuous path (cf. Mt. 16:24-26), but he will never leave us alone in times of our sufferings and challenges (cf. Mt. 11:28-30). This call is universal. This is not only the reality of those who aspire to become religious and priests but for all who believe and follow Christ.

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A DIAMOND *in the Rough*

Br. Brien T. Panagsagan, ESHT

A scriptural passage that compliments the call for dialogue in the context of seminary formation is inclusive in the Gospel of Mark: “And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve, to be with him, and to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons” (Mk. 3:13-15).

There are three essentials here which compose the formula of religious life; being CALLED, being ACCOMPANIED, and being SENT. Like the apostles, every religious is called by the Lord to work in His vineyard and to be with Him. The latter words “to be with him” as noted by Pope Francis is a reference to Jesus “accompanying” the apostles for the sake of their vocation to prepare them for their mission to spread the Good News to the whole world. Before sending them out, Jesus saw the great importance of “preparation” which is translated in our modern

time as “formation.” This period of preparation ultimately refers to the process of development for a deeper relationship and communion with the Lord.

In religious formation, developing one’s personal relationship with Christ is a priority. As a prerequisite, this is where the art of dialogue comes in. Dialogue is a vital part of the integral growth of candidates for the priesthood or for those who aspire to perpetually profess the evangelical counsels. Thereupon, a correlation between the person under the initial stages of formation and his formator becomes necessary. Through dialogue, accompaniment is made possible. Every seminarian needs a formator, who in his own capacity is expected to guide, help, and accompany him to achieve proper discernment of his vocation. Accompaniment is like walking together, side by side, in all aspects of human life.

Every seminarian possesses

exceptional qualities which in time will be realized with proper care and support. Pope Francis describes formees/formands as “diamonds in a rough” which are capable of more through formation. The priestly vocation is precious and therefore highly deserves to be nurtured and taken cared of. In my case, I am grateful for the experience of accompaniment in my formation. I had gone through my lowest of lows in the seminary, but none of which succeeded to diminish my desire to receive the sacrament of holy orders because I had formators who constantly look up to my needs and are preparing me for the permanent formation.

Professing my temporary vows opened many doors of opportunities. Since then, I have been on a progressive movement; always a subject for growth and maturity. At the moment, I might still be a diamond in the rough but I remain fixated on my goal because every day I am a step closer to becoming the religious priest God has called me to be.

“Accompaniment
is like walking
together, side by
side, in all aspects
of human life.”


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THE BEAUTY *of Accompaniment*

Fray Ivan C. Cuison, OAR



Our journey through life confronts us with big waves and disasters in many kinds. Our journey will never be smooth; it will always be in a constant battle. Thus, in every journey, we need people to accompany us and share with us their lives, their stories, trusting that each has something to contribute to making our journey light, fruitful, and in the end successful.

In our seminary journey, we are called to continual growth. Every aspirant is to grow maturely as a person and grow in every aspect of formation and soon be worthy of being an *Alter Cristus*. But this will not be possible without the help of our formators. They are our companions on our journey. One needs to be aware of one's need to be helped and be accompanied. The basic rule of formation is that: the degree of growth achieved by the formator is what allows him to help the young seminarians in their own growth process. On the other hand, accompaniment and discernment are inseparable factors. One cannot exist without the other. The depth and ardency of accompaniment lead to a clearer discernment. Moreover, the goal is to achieve a true bond with

God by listening to his Word and a systematic bond with the one who accompanies us in God's name.

Every stage of formation focuses on something and is directed to a certain goal. Each has its own characteristics that place different demands on formators. Thus, it is not enough to have a generic approach to accompaniment, but one that is clearly defined and specific to each individual. "Each formator should be possessed of human, spiritual, pastoral, and professional abilities and resources, to provide a right accompaniment that is balanced and respectful of the freedom and the conscience of the other person, and that will help him in his human and spiritual growth"(RFIS,49). On the other hand, formands should be transparent and should trust his formators. Trust is an important element of accompaniment whereby one entrusts oneself to the other. But trust is hard if one lacks the key elements of respect, empathy, and listening. Usually, one needs a listener, and if we felt that we are first been listened to, we learn to give our life to another; we learn to entrust our deepest concerns. The one who accompanies

must learn how to listen, and not only to what he is communicating in words but also what is expressed non-verbally. This could allow a better understanding.

According to *Ratio Fundamentalis* the dialogue between formators and formands should be regular and frequent. The continuous dialogue allows the formand to attune himself to Christ and be open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. In effect, profound knowledge of ourselves should be attained to be able to recognize and embrace every aspect of our person, to develop our talents, to understand ourselves, and to have a clearer discernment of our calling. But the scope of accompaniment does not only include self-knowledge; it also allows us to reach the ideal who is Jesus Christ, the purpose of self-identification with him. It is to help us to grow gradually in likeness to him, so as to think more and more in the way he thinks, feel as he feels, live as he lived, conforming ourselves even more to him, so as to say with Saint Paul: "I live not now I but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20).

Moreover, accompaniment is a core part of the presbyteral ministry. The priest who has gone through good processing, dialogue, and accompaniment in his initial formation will soon be prepared to accompany his flock well. He can deal with real situations and understands them in the light of the word and which in turn has a good effect on the evangelization of the people.

Accompaniment must be present from the beginning of the journey and of formation and throughout life. Our journey to become shepherds of the flock in the future must be properly guided through the help and accompaniment of our formators. With a successful formation and accompaniment, formands will be led to an intensified discernment and soon be a priest prepared to accompany the people of God and be able to intensify the discernment of each member.

"One needs a listener, and if we felt that we are first been listened to, we learn to give our life to another; we learn to entrust our deepest concerns."

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WE ASK GOD *for Healing*

Rev. Virgilio Calalang, OAR

This is just another story of how Jesus works in people's lives.

One Thursday morning, I received a schedule for a house blessing in the afternoon. As I arrived at their house, a family member welcomed me. Then (whispering) she asked me to encourage her brother to take something to eat. It has been the fourth day since he had not taken anything to eat. I realized that it was not a typical festive house blessing but on the contrary, they are asking for God's blessing and His mercy because they are having difficulty with their lives. Looking at him, I can see how he is falling into sickness. I told them that Fr. Rex would visit him for the anointing of the sick.

On the fifth day (Saturday afternoon), Fr. Rex visited for the sacrament of anointing. Friends and family members were also present hoping to encourage him and urge him to seek medical help as his body is already deteriorating for not eating nor drinking for almost a week. I was hoping he would abide the following day.

On the sixth day, I called to know how he is doing. My hope failed.

They were not able to convince him to seek medical help. I knew that things are getting serious.

On the seventh day, I received a call from them. Still, it has been seven days since he had not eaten nor drunk water. Everybody was getting worried as he also began to dwell in silence. Everybody wanted to help but nobody could. Nobody knows why but only he himself. The only reason we know is that he just lost his appetite even to drink water.

I decided to visit and encourage him to see a doctor for his situation. I was thinking that my presence he would somehow be compelled to medical help. We already saw it as an emergency situation that needs medical attention. I somehow find it hard to believe that he would survive if he would keep starving himself seven days without food or water. There was desperation to see somebody in such a situation and we cannot help. His skin began to cling to his bones. In every moment that he would be asked "let's go to the hospital," he will just only sway his head for a "no". And "no" it is.

For a few hours that we were there, we looked for words to encourage him to stand up as we saw it as an emergency situation. Silence just ensues when there are no more words to say. The only thing I could do that moment was to go out of the house and breathe in some fresh air and pray.

Long Period of Silence.

Everybody was so silent and there was nothing to say. Maybe it is the will of the Holy Spirit for us to be in silence, that we might be able to listen to Him. In his presence, we give ourselves a reason to live and be nourished by Christ. I began to speak of some Gospel passages I could remember.

In the Gospel, we are told that there was a group of friends who wanted to help their paralyzed friend. They wanted him to be healed. So they brought him to Jesus. But upon seeing the house where Jesus was they saw how vast the crowd that they could not enter. But they had an idea of having him lowered from the roof.

With friends and family members were present we began to pray to Jesus. At that moment, it was as if we are lowering him under the roof that Jesus might heal him. We prayed that the little faith of those who were present be enough for God's mercy and compassion.

And so we continued with the story of a woman was suffering from a hemorrhage for 20 years but she never lost hope that one day she would be healed. In time she came to know Christ and wanted to be healed by Christ. But the crowd was pressing on Christ and she wasn't able to go near Him. But with her persistence and deep faith, she was able to touch the tassel of His garment. The miracle happened. She was healed.

There is no point in losing hope even if it takes 20 years. Jesus heals. As their family is in trouble, hope was a sure guide for healing. We assured him that we are there for him but no matter how we lowered him down the roof, Christ cannot heal him if he doesn't allow Christ heal him. There are many other miracles of Christ,

but at present, we are asking Him to heal our friend.

Jesus Christ is the good doctor that heals us. When we cannot reach the heart, He can. Whenever we suffer great anxiety, we call on Him with great trust. Let it be known that its little faith has saved us.

A day after that moment of gathering, I heard that the sick brother had already eaten something. After two weeks I was glad to know that he already attended the Eucharistic celebration, nourished by the Bread of Life.

“Whenever
we suffer great
anxiety, we call
on Him with great
trust.”

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THEOLOGICAL STUDIES:

An Accompaniment to a Theological Life

Fray Rey Jay Y. Quevedo, OAR

7

have been reading articles that I hope would lead me to understand the distinction between theological life and theolodal life. It was my first time to encounter the word ‘theolodal’ when my local prior introduces the term during one of our collaboration program meetings. Based on my research on the internet, some would say that theolodal and theological are one and the same. But interestingly, some affirmed that they are distinct in meaning and usage in the French language.

A Dominican priest, Romanus Cessario, whose name stood out most regarding the topic, made a distinction of the terms. In his book, “Christian Faith and the Theological Life”, he says, “to acquire knowledge about God is one thing; to commit oneself to him is another.” In such a one-liner remark, I already understood what he means and how the two differ. I am now more certain that one involves the acquisition of information or knowledge about God, that is, theological and the other is having an encounter with God, that is theolodal.

When I was studying at Xavier University, an ex-seminarian professor of Religious Studies would often challenge the seminarians to do well in our academic studies especially in that his course. He would often put us in the limelight, comparing our scores and outputs with those non-Christian students. I guess my professor is a little bit of a formator type, challenging us in such a manner. He would emphasize that we need to get over ahead of others and I guess we could not disagree more as seminarians.

What was my thinking back then? At my tender age, I knew that we have something that our non-Christian friends don’t have. They might have good grades in his subject, but we have a more personal encounter which I don’t find very prudent to spoil in open and brag about in the class. In silence, I confronted the issue thrown to us on the necessity of studying the basics of our Christian faith without refuting how we differ from them. I get to hold myself

on the urgency of saving our face and gaining back our esteem. Like our Lord who is meek and humble of heart, who willingly submitted himself to the altar of sacrifice, so I, together with my fellow seminarians, submitted ourselves to the challenge without realizing we were one step closer to living a theological life.

The Christian life is not a matter of learning God as a subject matter but learning to live a godly life knowing we are subjects that matter most to our loving God. There might be nuances on the two terms but it should not impede us on espousing its demand, always achieving the balance and how both interplays.

“The Christian life is not a matter of learning God as a subject matter but learning to live a godly life...”

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Chronicle of Events

Recoletos Formation Center 2019-2020



JUNE 8-12, 2019

OAR FORMANDS' CONVENTION

SOLEMN PROFESSION



September 7, 2019



November 25, 2019

RECOLETOS SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY



December 5, 2019

FOUNDATION OF THE AUGUSTINIAN RECOLLECTION AT SEMONORE



December 1, 2019

AR-OAR FORMANDS



December 8, 2019

MEDICAL MISSION

FEAST OF SAINT NICHOLAS OF TOLENTINO AT SNDTP



September 10, 2019



November 16, 2019

DIACONAL ORDINATION



December 8, 2019

PRESBYTERAL ORDINATION



January 29, 2020

FEAST OF OUR LADY OF MT. CARMEL AT SAN SEBASTIAN BASILICA MINOR



December 28, 2019

CAROLING OF THE CHAPEL YOUTH AT RFC FACADE



January 25, 2020

OPENING OF INTRAMURALS 2019-2020 AT RFC GYM



January 29, 2020

ONLINE FLEXIBLE LEARNING MODALITIES AND TECHNIQUES



June 25, 2020

RENEWAL OF VOWS

FORMATORS' PROFILE



Fray Lauro V. Larlar, OAR
Prior of the House



Fray Emilio Edgardo Quilatan, OAR
House Liturgist



Fray Leander Barrot, OAR
Vice Prior



Fray Hubert Dunstan Decena, OAR
Spiritual Director



Fray Feliciano Campomanes, OAR
Procurator



Fray Gideon Antolin Lagrimas, OAR
Parish Priest

FORMATORS' PROFILE



Fray Hector Gonzalez, OAR
Assistant Parish Priest



**Fray Kenneth Joseph
L. Onda, OAR**
Master of the Professed



Fray Radni Caparas, OAR
Dean of Studies



Fray Francisco L. Antonio, OAR
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