

The Gift of Accompaniment in Formation

Introduction

A person who is lucky enough to be closely accompanied by an interested and capable mentor in any walk of life is gifted indeed. From a pedagogical perspective one to one mentoring is an optimal way to grow and develop.

Research in education generally, points to the fact that the school-going child will learn more quickly in a smaller rather than in a larger class. Similarly at university level, a student will learn while listening to a lecture in a large and crowded lecture hall. However, his learning increases exponentially when he finds himself in the more intimate setting of the tutorial or course seminar. If it happens he receives one to one mentoring, for example at doctorate level or for the supervision of the practical work he does, then his understanding of the material he studies deepens and becomes more personalised.

In the same way, the initiation of a new member into a religious congregation or a seminary is facilitated and strengthened by *one to one accompaniment* during the formation period. As in any pedagogical situation a good initiation lays a solid foundation for future growth and development.

The goal of formation in religious life

The primary objective of the formation process is to prepare those starting out on the journey to ordination or religious profession for the *total consecration* of themselves to God, in the following of Christ, at the service of the Church's mission"¹. The emphasis in formation is on the growth and development of the *whole* person which presupposes an integration of his intellectual, emotional, sexual, behavioural and spiritual capacities.

Since Vatican II the practice of *one to one vocational accompaniment*, as an important pedagogical method, has gradually come to the fore in the formation process. This is due, in part, to the need to personalise initial formation and to ensure that internalisation and integration of day to day choices and Christian values are taking place. This is important so that the formation years are not simply a "*tunnel experience*" lived at the level of compliance with what is required, while the person simultaneously avoids any responsibility for the accompanying struggle for conversion and transformation that is essential to growth.

In the first place the candidate must take his or her own personal responsibility for making every effort to mature in his response to the call from God.

The formation process generally and the *one to one accompaniment* also presents challenges to the formator who walks the journey with the candidate, so as "to disclose the beauty of following Christ and the value of the charism by which this is accomplished"²

¹ John Paul II: *Vita Consecrata: Post Synodal Exhortation*, 1996, Paulines Publications, Kenya, 2009, 65.

² *Vita Consecrata*, 66.

This lofty goal requires that spiritually the formator is familiar with the path of seeking God himself and is sensitive to the action of grace. Humanly it requires that he is capable of understanding another person and able to point out those human obstacles to growth in vocation that are less obvious to the candidate himself.

The religious or seminary community within which formation takes place is also challenged to take up its responsibility for supporting the process. In its spiritual life, it provides a healthy context for growth of all its members if each in his own way is trying to live his commitment honestly and with integrity. On the human level, the community as a group needs to be cohesive³ so as to be flexible in its capacity to welcome new members. The community while open and respectful of the contribution brought to the group by the presence of the new member is also aware of the treasure it has to offer in its own right from years of experience of living the charism of the congregation or life in a seminary community.

This paper as it unfolds will attempt to explore four basic questions in relation to *vocational one to one accompaniment*;

1. **Why** emphasise *vocational accompaniment* in the formation setting?
2. **What** is *vocational accompaniment*?
3. **How** is *vocational accompaniment* carried out?
4. **Who** is responsible for *vocational accompaniment*?

Section 1 Why emphasise *Vocational Accompaniment* in the Formation Setting?

We are now within touching distance of the celebration of the **Second Vatican Council's** 50th anniversary. During this half century a significant number of Church documents have been published about formation in the seminary and/or in religious life⁴.

In the very early documents following Vatican II, there is little⁵ direct reference to the need for *vocational accompaniment* on a one to one basis in the formation process. What is found instead is an increasing emphasis on the formation of the **whole**⁶ person in his or her human, Christian and vocational aspects. In **Sacerdotalis Caelibatus**⁷ and the follow-up document, *A Guide to Formation in Priestly Celibacy*⁸ reference is found to the need

³ Cohesive in this context is taken to mean a healthy sense of “esprit de corps”

⁴ Many of the documents mentioned here refer to priestly seminary training. However, all the important documents in relation to religious life contain the same thread of development, thought and emphasis. Some of the documents referred to for this paper include: *Guidelines for the use of Psychology in the Admission and Formation of the Candidates to the Priesthood*, 2008: **Starting Afresh from Christ**, 2002: **Vita Consecrata**, 1996: *Instruction on Fraternal Life in Community*, 1994: *Directives concerning the preparation of Seminary Educators*, 1993: *Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes*, 1990: **Pastores Dabo Vobis**, 1990: *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, 1985: *Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching as Applied to Institutes Dedicated to Works of the Apostolate*, 1983: *A Guide to Formation in Priestly Celibacy*, 1974: **Evangelica Testificatio**, 1971: **Perfectae Caritatis**, 1965: **Optatam Totius**, 1965.

⁵ Documents such as **Perfectae Caritatis** or **Evangelica Testificatio**, 1965, 1971.

⁶ Paul VI in his Encyclical “**Summi Dei Verbum**” 1963, called attention to the “necessity of the simultaneous formation of the man, the Christian and the priest” affirming that “the formation of the man must go hand in hand with that of the Christian and the future priest”.

⁷ Paul VI, **Sacerdotalis caelibatus**, 1967.

⁸ Congregation for Catholic Education: *A Guide to Formation in Priestly Celibacy*, 1974. 41

for human and spiritual direction and **personalised** education in the area of sexuality. This text goes on to say that:

“The educator should lead the candidates to the discovery of making a fundamental option in their lives, guiding and helping them to see chastity as something good, to see it as something good for them, helping them to transform this option into action and finally assisting them to persevere in its practice in such a way that it becomes second nature and a normal characteristic in their lives”⁹

Pastores Dabo Vobis¹⁰, in articles (36, 37, 38 PDV) points out the important role of the human intermediary in bringing the one called to Jesus is highlighted. Just as Andrew brings Simon, Philip, Nathaniel, so too the formator leads the student into a deeper and more personalised relationship with Jesus, the focus of his trust and love.

Discernment of Vocation

A vocation to the priesthood and/or religious life is something to be *discerned* by the Church. This means that the call to religious life needs to be understood as a journey of **mutual** discernment. It is the formator’s (Vocations Director) responsibility to ensure that the candidate knows and understands this from the outset¹¹.

It is at the outset that the prospective candidate learns that in discernment the end point of the journey is not evident, but unfolds as one walks the path. Not every person who wishes to become a religious or a priest is suited to the way of life. Not everyone who wanted to follow Jesus was accepted by him¹², just as not everyone called actually followed him.¹³

SECTION II

What is *Vocational Accompaniment*?

The nature of *accompaniment*

Vocational Accompaniment as understood in this context has to do mainly with facilitating the internalisation of Christian values rooted in all levels of human functioning. This *vocational accompaniment* (sometimes called Vocational Growth Sessions)¹⁴ takes the form of a face to face, one to one dialogue between the candidate for priesthood or religious profession and his formator. It is an essential element of the formation process; it is never missed except for very specific or serious reasons. In this is found is an asceticism which is formative.

Accompaniment is not based on an equal relationship, roles are clearly differentiated. The basis of the relationship is respect for the other which is essential for both parties. *Vocational accompaniment* intrinsically seeks that the candidate takes responsibility for

⁹ *A Guide to Formation in Priestly Celibacy*, 41

¹⁰ John Paul II, **Pastores Dabo Vobis** *Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation*, 1992.

¹¹ *Guidelines*, 2009, 1

¹² Lk 8:38, 39. “The man ... begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away saying, “Return to your home and declare how much God has done for you”. (NRSV).

¹³ The Rich young man in Mt. 19: 16-23.

¹⁴ Rulla, L., *Anthropology of the Christian Vocation*, Volume 1, Rome, Gregorian University Press, 1986, 388, 389.

the material that is discussed. Therefore it is the responsibility of the candidate to initiate the conversation and sustain it by ranging over all aspects of his vocational life in a way that is real and appropriate for him, and he is willing to do so in season and out of season, meaning when he feels like doing it and when he does not, when he thinks he has something to say and when he believes he has nothing to discuss

The role of the formator is to accompany the candidate, patiently and with tact, enabling him to probe more deeply into areas of life that he brings up for discussion through skilful questioning, clarifying, confrontation and encouragement. The formator creates an atmosphere of trust and safety in which it is possible for the candidate, however hesitatingly, to explore how he lives out the divine call in day to day life.

The ultimate purpose of *vocational accompaniment* is the integration of lived reality seen in the myriad of choices made in the course of a day with the values that the person proclaims. Into this comes the basic human dialectic¹⁵ in which the person struggles to live what he proclaims so easily in all areas of his life. With St Paul¹⁶ all humans attest to the inner struggle to do good and to avoid evil. Very often on the vocational journey, the greatest struggle is not so much between good and evil, as between what is a real good which in terms of following Jesus Christ closely can be costly for human nature and an apparent good which, though not sinful, is more pleasing humanly and so tends to pull the candidate away from deepening his love relationship with Jesus and his self-surrender to God and focuses him more on himself and what pleases him.

A practical example might be that of a candidate who finds that he habitually browses the internet, spends more time doing so than he can really spare in his daily round of activities and as a result his time for personal prayer and/or study is shortened or even bypassed altogether. Browsing the internet is not sinful but it can become harmful for vocational growth if it focuses the candidate on personal satisfaction to the extent that the things of God become difficult or even distasteful.

In summary it can be said that the process of accompaniment aims at helping the candidate change his capacity to change; to change his tendency from choosing himself outwards towards choosing God and his neighbour.

Role of the formator in accompaniment

The capacity to continually learn from the experience of living Christian values is something that takes place over the whole of a lifetime. *Vocational accompaniment*, when offered, can provide a means for the candidate to gradually come to know himself or herself, even in the subconscious areas of being. This knowledge allows him in time to review his motivation and to try to untangle the skein of competing motivations that lie behind every major decision the human person takes. Through these sessions, it is the candidate himself who gradually builds up a **vocational identity**¹⁷ of his own, which is

¹⁵ Galatians 5:17; “For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh: for these are opposed to each other to prevent you from doing what you want”.

¹⁶ Galatians 5:17; “For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh: for these are opposed to each other to prevent you from doing what you want”.

¹⁷ Religious make a certain evangelical value (the original inspiration of the founder) the centre of community life. In this way he realises the charism of the founder in his own time and place.

centered on the person of Jesus Christ, which is lived in truth and love and is characterised by the constant effort to grow up in all ways into Christ “who is the head”¹⁸. Gradually, as time goes on, the candidate learns to bring all his experience of life, the good and the bad, the old insights and the new, the challenges and the successes in handling emotions and feeling, the struggle to change attitudes and to take action; all of his life is brought into the light of God’s loving presence. In learning to be open and transparent in the presence of another human being the candidate is being prepared for the very same openness and transparency in every aspect of his living before God.

As was mentioned regularly in the Vatican documents on formation, *vocational accompaniment* can be **personalised**. The candidate is challenged by the objective and revealed Christian values that are proposed and is enabled to respond according to his own effective freedom¹⁹ to do so.

Discouragement can set in if the candidate feels overwhelmed by the greatness of the values proposed. On the other hand he can, “keep his head below the radar”, escape the notice of formation personnel and thus live his early years in formation as a “tunnel experience” where the motivating force would seem to be compliance²⁰ and the seeming improvement is merely an outward adaptation to what is required. There is no inner accompanying struggle to bring his own personalised response to the situation at all, no effort to face the implicit challenge of conversion. Once ordination or profession is made very often the true level of maturity in living values can appear very quickly on the surface. How otherwise explain the situation where an exemplary candidate suddenly decides that the way of life is not for him in the first few years after ordination?

Finally, if a person wishes to grow and to open to new horizons, it is a fact that he must be helped by another person to do so. He cannot do this by himself. As human beings we

¹⁸ Ephesians 4:15

¹⁹ According to Lonergan, B., in *Insight*, London, Longmans Green, 1958, p. 619 ff, “man is free essentially inasmuch as practical courses of action are grasped by practical insight, motivated by reflection and executed by decision” *Effective freedom* is present when essential freedom is exercised in a choice among various alternative and possible actions. Simply put for our purpose here, *effective freedom* could be described as the person’s capacity to grow in freedom from himself in order to be more open, free and surrendered to God in the choices he makes when responding to the demands of everyday life. This is what is understood by *growth in vocation*. It closely resembles Von Balthasar’s description of discipleship “*Effective listening to the One who calls and growth in freedom for the expected response*”, in *My Work in Retrospect*, San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1992, 51

²⁰ Internalisation of values is influenced not only by the internal psychodynamics of the person but also by interpersonal or social influences he encounters. This factor was identified by H. Kelman (1958, 1960, and 1961). In his research on motivation, Kelman distinguished between **Compliance, Identification and Internalization**. *Compliance*, according to Kelman, means that one may accept a value without wanting to, actually refusing consciously or unconsciously to be changed by this value. The person accepts the influence of another person or the group in the hope of having some reward or avoiding some punishment. The value is accepted externally not for its own worth but because of what the person will receive as a result. *Identification* according to Kelman means that the person accepts the values proposed not because of their intrinsic worth but because they are important for the person himself. This acceptance is internal to the person and so is different from compliance which is an external acceptance. By identification the person accepts values because they are important for his self-esteem. *Internalisation* of values is understood as the internal acceptance of the value because of its inherent intrinsic worth and not for some other motive which is either external or internally self-satisfying.

are remarkably adept at being able to deceive ourselves and the objectivity that the perspective of the other brings, while it may not always be palatable for proud human nature it can very often be quite salutary and helpful for growth and self-understanding.

Counselling

The goal of counselling is to foster a capacity in the person to help himself and to grow in responsibility for his own personal choices and actions and to professionally help a person to use the human resources that he or she has in order to be able to cope better with life. It also aims to increase the person's awareness of those things in life that cause him anxiety so that being more conscious of their influence he can learn to deal more effectively with them.

Probably one of the salient features of the counselling situation is that it focuses on specific difficulties and situations that are problematic for the client with the aim of enabling him to become better adjusted in living, for example, marriage counselling or addiction counselling. The reasons why people seek out a counsellor usually stem from difficult life situations. The person may find that he has to cope with a serious illness like cancer either in himself or in a close family member. A situation like this can be experienced as traumatic and the person finds that his usual coping skills are not adequate to see him through the crisis.

As has already been mentioned for *vocational accompaniment* and which applies also to spiritual direction, what is needed in a counsellor is the capacity for:

- **Empathic** understanding
- **Respect** for the client's current states of being
- **Genuineness** – being genuinely interested in the other person's welfare.²¹

Spiritual Direction

Spiritual direction always presupposes a faith life and a basic desire explicit or otherwise to grow in openness and in depth in that life. Dyckman and Carroll describe the spiritual direction relationship as follows:

"an interpersonal relationship in which one person assists others to reflect on their own experience in the light of who they are called to become in fidelity to the Gospel"²².

Similarities

Spiritual direction aims at guiding the person in his spiritual life. As with *vocational accompaniment* spiritual direction is a good school in which to learn to reflect on life. Some wise person has said "an unreflected life is a life not worth living" and to Soren Kierkegaard is attributed the maxim "we live our lives forward, we understand them backwards". In and through it we begin to see connections and find meaning that carries

²¹ Nelson Jones, R., 2005, 9.

²² Dyckman, Katherine Marie and Carroll, L. Patrick, *Inviting the mystic, supporting the prophet*, New York, Paulist Press, 1981, 20.

well beyond what we were able to grasp or understand while we were in the middle of the lived experience.

Spiritual direction, like *vocational accompaniment* takes place within the context of an interpersonal relationship with all the implications such a relationship has for personality dynamics. The director assists the directee in exploring that element within the person that goes beyond his natural and social life and that cannot be hemmed in by intellect and reason and which at the same time is present to all of them.

This then is the heart of spiritual direction, it keeps our gaze turned upward and outward to the True Reality that attracts and which, in the long run, is what can ultimately satisfy the restlessness of our hearts.

Differences

Vocational accompaniment deals with the external forum, whereas spiritual direction opens into the person's "internal forum"²³. This brings into focus the element of conscience, sinfulness, forgiveness and conversion, none of which can be discounted.

Finally, a candidate may choose his or her spiritual director. When it comes to formation, a candidate's formator is assigned to him and he has to learn to work with this person in spite of emotional appraisal or transference difficulties. This may be difficult initially, but it is also true that such a difficulty encountered very often calls forth resilience of character and a depth of inner strength that might never become visible to the candidate if he or she were allowed follow their own inclinations all the time.

SECTION III

How is *vocational accompaniment* carried out?

Methodology

- Drawing on various schools of spirituality and psychology this section will deal with a number of ways of conducting an *accompaniment* session.

Basic Structure of the *accompaniment* session

Accompaniment in formation works best when it is established formally. Since it is seen as one of the basic structures in the formation process today, it is treated with due seriousness. The time and place for the meeting are settled between the formator and the candidate in a way that is mutually convenient for both. The meeting time is not changed except in very exceptional circumstances. *Vocational accompaniment* happens at regular intervals, usually according to the need of the candidate and the time constraints of the formator. Ideally it should happen once in a week and never less than once two weeks.

²³ By "internal forum" is meant the inviolable right every penitent has to the "seal of confession". **The Catechism of the Catholic Church**, 1994, 1446, says;

"the Church declares that every priest who hears confessions is bound under very severe penalties to absolute secrecy regarding the sins that his penitents have confessed to him. He can make no use of knowledge that confession gives him about penitents' lives". The Code of Canon Law (1983, can. 985) says: "the director and assistant director of novices and the rector of a seminary or of any other institute of education, are not to hear the sacramental confessions of their students resident in the same house, unless in individual instances the student of their own accord request it"

The situation whereby a candidate can “keep below the radar” can happen in a formation setting where there are very many candidates; where the ratio of staff members to the student population is beyond what is humanly possible in terms of being able to get to know each candidate personally. Since it is generally accepted that one of the best ways for a formator to get to know the candidates is through the *one to one accompaniment*, it follows that the number of candidates for whom a formator has responsibility needs to be such as to allow regular meetings of suitable length. This means that staff ratio to candidate population must always be taken into account.

Listening.

In the *accompaniment* encounter **active listening**²⁴ is probably the most important activity that happens at any time in any session. In an ordinary conversation between two people there is rarely great listening. No sooner does one person begin a topic than the other comes in quickly with his own experience in the same area and takes the conversation away in another direction more congenial to himself. Listening is also more than simply hearing. We can hear every word another person says, be in a position to repeat verbatim what was said and yet we may not have understood what the person was really trying to communicate. Communication happens on many levels including that of non - verbal body language as well as through the words spoken. Listening takes place between the formator and the student and also within each of them. One is listening to the other and at the same time each one is listening to what is going on within oneself.

Active listening enables the building of a connection and rapport between the formator and the candidate. Through this active listening trust is actually built up between the two people involved. This in turn facilitates disclosure as it can bridge the differences of generation, gender and race.

Through active listening it is also possible to gather information about a specific situation. For example, a candidate’s enthusiastic description of an event in which he or she fails to mention the role of a person important to him, who was also present at the event, alerts the formator to the possible existence of a stress or strain in that relationship. The enthusiastic report about the event can serve to hide the tension in the relationship.

Active listening also helps to create an influence base for the formator because he is learning more about the person than the person actually realises. It also gives the candidate the opportunity to assume responsibility for himself.²⁵ As he listens to himself describing a relationship or a situation, he is often struck by connections he failed to make when he was in the middle of that situation or the relationship.

²⁴ This term was coined by Thomas Gordon and appears in his book *Parent Effectiveness Training: The Tested New Way to Raise Responsible Children*, New York, Wyden, 1970.

²⁵ Nelson-Jones R., 2005,

Like the other helping professionals the formator **listens**²⁶ so that he can understand the other. To deepen this understanding he engages with the candidate through asking **the “further question”** in the *accompaniment session* with the view ultimately to exploring with the candidate (his) certainties, beliefs, attitudes, feelings, behaviours. This is in order to be in a position to discern the origin, effect and direction of these human movements, in the light of the values proclaimed by the candidate by the very fact of his presence in religious life or the seminary.

Listening also requires that the formator;

- *Create an atmosphere* of respect and hospitality towards the other by creating a safe space in which the person feels free to open up and speak his mind without fear of being judged. The implication for the formator is that he can hear the other through to the end and mirror back or re-phrase what has been said. He does this without resorting to offering his own insights on the topic. The other person can continue freely to explore what is happening for him and come to his own understanding of his specific situation, in his own time.
- Make every effort to face the challenge of having *patience and openness* in taking the time to understand where the candidate is coming from, which in its turn allows the candidate the freedom to choose where he believes he should go in terms of altering behaviour or changing attitudes.
- Show *empathy*²⁷ especially when the candidate is faced with looking at difficult and painful aspects of his life. This requires generosity of spirit and hospitality of heart in the listener so that he puts aside his own thoughts and feelings in order to be able to enter into the world of the other. For example, if the candidate is speaking about experiences in his early family relationships which may or may not correspond with what the formator himself has experienced but to which he is open to hear and to empathise.
- Be able to *broaden the candidate’s horizon*; to do this the formator in the accompaniment setting needs to learn how to reflect back what he has heard, in a way that the person hearing it can recognise as his own, and at the same time is helped to look out beyond the response familiar to him, in order to be able to imagine and put into action another mode of thinking, of feeling or of being. In this sense it is important to reflect back feelings first before reflecting back thoughts, in case the person loses contact with the feeling. Feelings may often be the more important indicator of what is happening in the person but they are much more fleeting than thoughts. In *accompaniment* attention is directed towards feelings, thoughts and behaviour in that order.

²⁶ The formator learns to listen also with the ‘third’ ear. This means listening to the tone of voice, and watching the movements of the body when a particular topic is being talked about. For example, the formator must ask himself what is going on if a candidate speaks only of his father and seems very uncomfortable when it comes to talking about his mother, or talks only about his family and has nothing to say about friendships.

²⁷ According to Carl Rogers the capacity to “*sense the client’s inner world of private personal meanings as if they were your own but without ever losing the “as if” quality. That is empathy*” in Rogers C.R., ***On Becoming a Person***, Boston, Houghton and Mifflin, 1962, chapter 3.

Defense Mechanisms

Defense mechanisms are strategies that a person uses to avoid conscious recognition of certain thoughts and feelings that would make him to feel anxious.

Isolation is a defense mechanism used by a person who finds it very difficult to express feeling directly and so will describe it rather than express it. For example a man may not be able to say to the woman he loves, “I love you”; what he will say instead will be something like “You mean a great deal to me”. In the *accompaniment* session the person who is inclined to use isolation as a defense will give a lot more attention to what he thinks and very little attention to what he feels.

Reaction Formation is another that can push the person to give responses that are exactly opposite to what he is really feeling; unacknowledged feelings raise anxiety levels uncomfortably high and so cannot be expressed openly by the person. For example, if a woman is angry with her mother, instead of admitting to it, she insists on reiterating statements like “how could I be angry with my mother, she is always so loving”.

When **Repression**²⁸ is used defensively the person is very well able to talk about what he feels but is unable to pay any attention as to **why** he might feel so. If he is asked why he feels the way he does he will quickly say “I don’t know”.

Another very effective way to resist uncomfortable subjects is to use **silence** defensively. When prompted to say what is passing through his mind the candidate’s response might be something like “I really have nothing to say today”. Often this can happen as a consequence of a particularly fruitful previous session and especially if the person tends to be conflictual around the intimacy/isolation axis.²⁹ Simply put, this means that if in an accompaniment session the candidate opens up and talks about a subject he or she has never spoken about before to another person, anxiety about the consequences of this opening up can so affect the person that he “withdraws into his shell” in the next and possibly subsequent sessions. He uses silence as his defense until such time as the anxiety abates and his basic trust in the other person gets the upper-hand of his anxiety again.

Resistance

Resistance is also a form of defense. At some point the candidate becomes temporarily unwilling or unable to engage in the process any further. When he is resisting the candidate will start the session saying that he has “nothing to say” or something of that nature or he may lapse into silence. On the other hand he might start to talk abstractly and inconsequentially about things that have very little importance for his real life situation. In a word he ceases to communicate his real thoughts and feelings freely. At the same time he can become resistive to the formator and no longer listens to what is being said to him. Both the sending and the receiving aspects of communication are blocked for him.

²⁸ There is a sense in which Repression is ‘normal’ in that it permits the human person to deal with the constant stimuli that comes in day to day living. Normal repression allows the person to distinguish between inner and external reality. When Repression fails a person is said to be psychotic.

²⁹ Erikson, Erik, *Childhood and Society*, (1950), London, Vintage, 1995, chapter 7.

Understanding one's resistances can be more helpful for growth and self-knowledge than one's recollected experiences.

Weiner³⁰ speaks of four different sources of resistance:

- Resistance to change
- Resistance to content
- Transference resistance
- Character resistance

Resistance **to change** occurs because the person already gets some emotional satisfaction even if his behaviour is disturbed or maladaptive and so he does not want to change.

Resistance **to content** is easily seen and accepted especially if the candidate is dealing with aspects of life that are very painful like childhood memories of abuse or trauma.

Transference resistance comes from the feelings, either positive or negative, towards the person of his formator which the candidate experiences as a result of displacing onto him attitudes he felt towards important people in his previous life. Positive transference impedes candid communication within the *accompaniment* setting and a negative transference can produce passive depressive reactions which in their turn impede honest communication as well. It is because transference feelings are often very embarrassing to admit that they often evoke resistance to their content.

Character resistance brings us into the sphere of personality and the habitual defense mechanisms a person is inclined to use.

Responding to Resistance

Weiner³¹ points to four elements that are important for dealing with resistant behaviour. In the first place he speaks of *allowing the resistance to build*, secondly, he talks about *circumventing resistance*, thirdly he refers to *exploring the resistant behaviour* and finally he discusses *breaking through the resistance*.

It is necessary to allow the *resistance to build* to the point that the candidate is able to see from solid evidence that some aspect of his behaviour is resistant to the process. For example the incidence of coming late to a session is often interpreted as a resistance. If a person who is never late arrives one day, five minutes after the agreed time, with the excuse that a phone call came in for him just as he was coming to the session, there are no grounds for saying that this behaviour is resistant. However, if three times in a row and especially after a difficult session or series of difficult sessions the person consistently declares that the reason for his lateness is because somebody else detained him then it will be necessary to bring it to his attention.

With some candidates it may be necessary to *circumvent the resistance*. This can be done by offering the person support in order to lower the level of anxiety he may be feeling in face of the material that is emerging. The formator may say something like: "I get the feeling that there is something on your mind that you are reluctant to talk about". In this situation the accompanier must also be ready to give firm evidence from earlier

³⁰ Weiner, I.B., Bornstein, R.F., *Principles of Psychotherapy; Promoting Evidence based Psychodynamic Practice*, 3rd edition, New Jersey, Wiley, 2009, 162.

³¹ Weiner, I.B., Bornstein, R.F., 2009, 210

observations that such is the case by saying something like: “this is the third time in a row that you have sat in silence for several minutes at a time”. Circumventing the resistance deals with the content material of the session

Thirdly, Weiner speaks of *exploring resistance*. This happens when there is no compelling reason to focus on the content material presented by the candidate and the resistance must be faced. In order to explore resistance the accompanier begins by helping the candidate perceive that there is a gap between what he wants to do in the sessions and what he is actually doing in the here and now by resisting the process.

Finally Weiner speaks about *breaking through resistance*. When the candidate accepts resistance and begins to understand why, this material becomes part of the working through process.

Making the best use of Questions in the *accompaniment session*

An important aspect of the *accompaniment* process is the ability to ask pertinent **questions** in a way that allows the student explore an issue. *Vocational accompaniment* focuses on the present rather than on the past. Therefore the questions asked may need to be open rather than closed. Closed questions limit responses to facts and to monosyllabic responses. The open question is more useful in that it allows the student to explore an issue and to come up with his own interpretation and his own conclusion. A closed question is framed as follows; “what did you feel in the situation”? An open question could be something like “what was that like for you”?

There are also *questions that help elicit feelings*. Integration³² of feelings is central to a person’s capacity to grow and develop, but many people strenuously avoid allowing feelings into awareness. The formator helps the person to experience, express and explore feelings by actively listening, paying attention to feeling words, body language and voice modulation.

Sometimes it is very helpful when the formator reframes the candidate’s question in a way that opens up a new horizon for the candidate and a way of looking at the situation which he had never imagined until then.

A question like “Why is that so important for you” is useful if one wishes to elicit a response that says something about what is personally significant for the individual.

The formator must also challenge the candidate if he finds that he is receiving inconsistent messages. For example, he may bring to the candidate’s notice a discrepancy between what the candidate is saying and his facial expression by saying something like: “you are speaking about being angry and yet you are smiling all the time”?

³² **Integration** of feeling means that the person has sufficient self awareness of what he feels in a given situation and has the ability to express that feeling in a way that is socially adaptive. Integration also leads him to behave in a way that is increasingly congruent with the basic values that he holds. Lack of integration happens when a person represses, meaning the person unconsciously pushes unacceptable feelings out of awareness. This is however a temporary solution as feelings must always find an outlet. Expression of feelings “without control” can leave the person throwing a tantrum of anger or frustration. When the “storm” has passed, the person gets “back to normal” but has learned nothing from the situation and will resort to “storming” again when frustration builds up once more.

There may also be a need to challenge distortions of reality for example when a student says “they are all out to get me”, the formator may respond with a question like “what evidence do you have for that” or “do you think that there might be another way of reading this situation”?

Clarification - an important basis for constructive challenge.

Requests for clarification of what is reported are essential so that sufficient information and knowledge of facts are gleaned. Clarification is a good basis for helping the candidate to broaden his horizons.

Constructive feedback.

Feedback is another important element in the *accompaniment* setting. It is helpful for the candidate to have a sense that he is moving in the direction of his hoped for goal.

The relationship between formator and the candidate in the *accompaniment* situation

The importance of the **relationship between the formator and the person in formation** is an important point to be explored. It has been already noted that the formator needs to be a person who is capable of being in relationship with another and has reached a level of maturity that he does not need the candidate to be a source of emotional supplies for his own narcissistic needs. There is a “professionalism” in the relationship that must be respected at all times. As with all relationships it will take time to reach an optimal working level for both people in the relationship. The values that each one holds are an unspoken powerful influence in this relationship³³.

Human values important in the encounter are:

- A deep respect for the individual person
- A deep seated belief that it is possible to grow and develop in one’s values and in one’s vocation
- A capacity to understand and empathise with human weakness and vulnerability while at the same time being able to challenge and call forth where necessary
- A belief in the basic goodness of the human person while at the same time not closing one’s eyes to the all too human tendency to look for the easy way out of things in life³⁴.

Boundaries in the *vocational accompaniment* setting

Respectful boundaries in and around the *accompaniment* setting must be maintained. This requires an ability to walk the fine line between a respectful and close relationship that does not compromise either himself or the candidate in any area of interaction. The formator may never engage in emotional blackmail or sexual acting out with the candidate. It is his responsibility to make every effort to ensure that the person grows into a mature interdependence as a result of the *accompaniment* sessions and is not lured into

³³ In *Guidelines 6*, the Church is very insistent on the fact that if a psychologist is to come in and help in the formation process, this person must have values that are in keeping with the values of the person being formed; otherwise a serious confusion and possibly undermining of the person’s values could take place.

³⁴ Nelson-Jones, 2005, 14.

a dependency relationship that leaves him less rather than more mature at the end of the formation period. In order to be transparent and exact in this area the formator needs regular good professional supervision as he or she tries to carry through on this delicate and important ministry.

One aspect of the maintenance of boundaries is that the formator guarantees confidentiality to the candidate, a confidentiality that cannot be absolute and which is limited in three important aspects.

Firstly, confidentiality is limited by the fact that the formator, at the end of a certain length of time, is responsible for presenting the candidate to his superiors as suitable or unsuitable for ordination or profession. This means that while the formator will not disclose verbatim what has been confided to him, he will have to share his informed opinion on the person's suitability or lack of it for the way of life. Therefore he must be able to communicate this in understandable language while at the same time not revealing personal details shared by the candidate. There are ways of describing levels of human maturity that can be understood in terms of suitability or otherwise for the way of life without entering into specifics.

Secondly confidentiality cannot be maintained if there is a danger that the candidate might seriously harm himself or others.

Thirdly, when there is a possibility that a minor may be in danger of being abused, then in the interests of the greater good confidentiality may have to be breached.

Multicultural variations in the *accompaniment* setting

It is important to respect the culture that the candidate comes from. Today, many formation settings are multicultural. This brings the challenge of enculturation which means not merely tolerating another culture but being open to being formed oneself by this culture. All cultures are challenged equally by the Gospel and the culture of the congregation.

Awareness of the influence, sometimes conscious but mostly unconscious, of perception, prejudice and the power of the dominant culture must always be kept in mind by the formator as he undertakes an *accompaniment session* with a person from another culture.

An aspect of the culture issue that does not always come to the fore is the intergenerational cultural diversity that exists in congregations and consequently in their formation settings as well. In some Western countries for example, the prevailing culture tends towards a negation of Christian values, a derisive attitude to choice and constancy, a reliance on consumerism and erroneous views on sexuality, all of which will have played their part in forming basic attitudes and values in the prospective candidate. The person who chooses religious life must become more and more aware that "he belongs to a minority and that he is in opposition to *many things* that appear good, obvious and logical to the spirit of the world around him"³⁵ The challenge of having to build a firmly rooted vocational identity in order to stand firm in such a context is not for the faint-hearted.

It might be helpful here to look at some other examples of how the dominant culture may have influenced the candidates who are entering religious life or the seminary around these years.

³⁵ Ratzinger, J., *Values in a Time of Upheaval*, New York, Crossroads, 2005, 113.

Many formators in novitiates and seminaries at present may have experienced their own formation in a period when the desire for change in the world and the Church was gathering momentum and finding expression in changing structures and mentalities which had been static for many decades. The people who choose religious life today were born into this spinning planet and now seek what will give a sense of identity and a sense of security. This can mean that their vision of what is helpful for their growth can be very different to that of their formators.

Secondly, new members today are formed in a world where connection is vitally important but real communication is often avoided. While a candidate may have many acquaintances, real friendships with people who come from outside close knit circles of family and childhood friends and that are based on a capacity for true psychological intimacy can be few and far between.

The tendency towards the avoidance of anything that creates internal disharmony is very strong and since young people have many ways by which they can switch from one activity to the next, they may never really have had the challenge of staying with themselves long enough to work through something that causes interior tension. All of these attitudes impact directly on the work of *accompaniment*

One of the most important things to be learned from psychology for formators is that the influence of perception is very strong and the human person tends to think that everyone else will perceive things as he does. This is a challenge to be kept in mind especially if the formator happens to be a member of the dominant culture.

Social constructivist theory highlights the importance of both environment and context. What we experience through being in the world affects our thought, emotions and behaviour and we make sense of what we experience in our own way³⁶. If the formator is accompanying candidates in a multicultural setting, then it is helpful to be aware that attending behaviour in the student may vary from culture to culture. For example, when listening to someone from the Northern hemisphere, direct eye contact is appropriate; when talking, eye contact is often less frequent. Some African –Americans demonstrate the exact opposite in that they show more eye contact when talking and less when listening. Another example is physical space, it is common in Arab and Middle Eastern countries to have a six to twelve inch distance for a conversation; this distance is uncomfortable for a European who is more inclined to stay at an “arm’s length”.

Time is another issue that reveals cultural differences; a North American sees it as important to be “on-time” for an interview. Several South American countries operate on a “being” view of time and do not necessarily hold to the time previously specified for the meeting. There are many other ways by which the differences in culture require understanding so that they do not obstruct the essential pedagogical effectiveness of *accompaniment*.

SECTION III

Who is responsible for *Vocational Accompaniment*?

³⁶ Ivey et al., *Counselling and Psychotherapy: A Multicultural Perspective*, 4th edition, Boston, Allyn & Bacon, 1997, 55.

A. The person who accompanies **The Formator**

The formator, who conducts the *one to one accompaniment*, is the person who has been mandated by the congregation **to walk alongside** the candidate on his personal journey of discernment and growth in vocation. The formator finds he is at the fulcrum point between the good of the candidate and the good of the Church/congregation.

The **formator needs fundamental capacities in the human sciences**³⁷ and The *Guidelines*³⁸ require that the **formator be able to**;

- Perceive the candidate's true motivations
- Discern the barriers that stop him integrating human and Christian maturity
- Pick up on any psychopathic disturbances present in the candidate
- Accurately and prudently evaluate the candidate's history
- Know how to evaluate the person in his totality not forgetting the gradual nature of development
- See the candidate's strong and weak points as well as the level of awareness the candidate has of his own problems
- Discern the candidate's capacity for controlling his behaviour in responsibility and freedom

The documents³⁹ go on to emphasise the importance of the **preparation of the formator** for this very demanding and delicate work and the helps necessary for him to carry them out.

There can be times too when the formator realises he is **out of his depth** in dealing with a candidate in terms of psychological wounds and at this point that he needs to be able to refer the young person to someone suitable who will be able to help him or her further along the path.

Understanding one's own motivation is not an easy process and so in order to be able to empathise and step into the shoes of another, the formator needs to have **done some work on himself** in terms of attending vocational growth sessions, so that he is in a position to be able to empathise with the individual candidate.

B. The person who is accompanied **The Candidate**

*Vita Consecrata*⁴⁰ tells us that it is "the inescapable duty of all who have been called" to take their own personal responsibility for growing and maturing in vocation. The candidate must consciously and actively take up his responsibility. Formation is not something imposed, it is something that must be undertaken in a joy filled adventurous spirit open to what God will reveal along the way. The virtues to be acquired by the prospective candidate "range from the personality's general equilibrium to the ability to bear the weight of pastoral responsibilities, from a deep knowledge of the human spirit to a sense of justice and loyalty"⁴¹ Some of these qualities include:

³⁷ *Guidelines*, 4

³⁸ *Guidelines*, 4

³⁹ *Guidelines*, 3, 4: **Pastores Dabo Vobis**, 57, 58, 59: *A Guide to Formation in Priestly Celibacy*, 35, 38.

⁴⁰ **Vita Consecrata**, 65

⁴¹ *Guidelines*, 2.

- A stable sense of masculine/feminine identity
- The capacity to form relations with individuals and groups
- A solid sense of belonging which together with a firm sense of personal identity are core elements needed for living in community
- The courage to take decisions and to stay faithful to them
- A knowledge of oneself, one's talents and limitations so as to integrate them with a self-esteem before God
- The capacity to correct oneself
- An appreciation of beauty in the sense of the "splendour of truth" as well as the art of recognising it
- The capacity to integrate one's sexuality according to the Christian tradition
- A trust that is born from the esteem of the other person and that leads to acceptance

These are just some of the qualities that a priest or religious must foster within himself or herself. Only a person who is narcissistic and who is unable to see any flaws in himself would dare imagine he could undertake this great work on his own without the help of the human intermediary.

Some problems⁴² in the candidate that block vocational growth include:

- Excessive affective dependency
- Disproportionate aggression
- Inability to undertake responsibilities
- Incapacity for serene relationships with others and difficulty in collaborating with authority
- Confused sexual identity

C. The Context of Accompaniment **The Formation Community**

The attitude of the *community* (formation community or otherwise) to *accompaniment* is an essential aspect of the fruitfulness of the formation process as a whole.

Conclusion

Vocational accompaniment is not something new in the life of the priest or religious. Down through the ages there have always been those who have personally walked the journey with the seeker, the spiritual director, the "anam chara", the soul mate. What is new is the way in which it has been brought into the centre of the formation process.

In conclusion it can be said that the formator knows and the candidate needs to grow into the awareness that there is **no shortcut to growth and maturation**. The *accompaniment* relationship is long-term as it takes a time to unravel motivation, especially if it is affected by the unconscious and each person is unique. Nothing can replace the patience, imagination and wisdom of the human mind and heart of the formator: patience to listen

⁴² *Guidelines*, 18.

and at great length, imagination to enter into the world of this particular person, which is different from all other worlds that exist; and wisdom to find a new way in co-operation with the grace of God at work in each one.

“I have planted, Apollo watered, but God gives the growth” (1Cor 3:6)

Thus each generation becomes a link in the chain of Love which unites us with each other in the Loving heart of God.

Sister Brenda Dolphin

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