

BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS



**OUR LIFE
AS
BROTHERS**

La  Salle

OUR LIFE AS BROTHERS

Living is always a challenge. And it is even more so when we live our consecration in a community that is a sign of the presence of the Reign of God, and expresses it in the mission. These four aspects - person, consecration, community, mission - benefit from a healthy structure and vigilance. The complexity of our life is embedded in a reality full of novelties, new visions and new demands. The co-responsibility of all, as a whole, and for everyone is necessary to guarantee an ever more integral and full meaning for us Brothers in our community life and in our mission lived in a community of consecrated people.

The General Council, among the very broad mission received from the last General Chapter, wishes to give attention to the community life of the Brothers, to their consecrated life and their apostolic strength of all Lasallians. For this reason, the Council has decided to reflect on the issues of accompaniment, the reality of perseverance, departures and the happy option to be a Brother. To this end, it requested assistance from the Secretariat for Formation.

The Secretariat of Formation reflected on these vital aspects and decided to deepen three themes that you are receiving with this message: Celibacy for the Reign of God; Dynamic and Creative Fidelity in Religious Life; Accompaniment in Religious Life. Many Brothers have contributed in the elaboration of these themes. Consequently, although the texts have been written by one person more directly responsible for their writing. They represent the reflection and dialogue of the General Council and the Secretariat for Formation. The texts deal with different topics but are interconnected with the same person and the community where he lives.

The main objective of the texts is to help the Brothers and Communities to live a fuller life based on a greater understanding of our reality. This reality includes our option for celibacy that is a way to contribute to the Reign of God, a complex fidelity of following Jesus and commitment, and a broad and fraternal accompaniment.

We have included at the end of each title or subtitle a phrase and / or question to facilitate dialogue, reflection and prayer. The text is not exhaustive. Each Brother and Community can complete it. We suggest that from the dialogue, structures can be guaranteed to facilitate positive responses to what we are, how we live and how we are the mediators of God in the construction of his Reign.

Our fidelity encourages us and generates more life. This ever more fulfilled life is of great need for the mission we share.

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EVANGELICAL CELIBACY

The adventure of living celibacy with freedom, joy and maturity - identifying and following Jesus Christ - with God for his Reign.¹

Br. Paulo Dullius, fsc

The conscious and unconscious character of our life means that we live largely without knowing all our motivations, impulses, forces, ideals, fears and desires that are part of our decisions and life choices, as well as our option for celibacy or for marriage. That is why it is so easy to take the wrong affective options - or types of expression of love - that people make in their lives. At any time of life can emerge, for a celibate or married, ignored aspects of his affective world.

Contextualization

The evangelical celibacy is a chosen lifestyle. The lifestyle choice includes personal and institutional ideals. One option is motivating for its teleological content and its integrating capacity of life. The options carry a second aspect: leaving aside other possible options. Thus, the central point is not in what you have not chosen, but the option itself. No one can choose - for the central aspects of our life - among several alternatives at the same time without incurring a significant cognitive dissonance. Opting for celibacy involves having clearly stated the motivations to choose, making the final issue the first question, namely, the Reign of God as the center around which to make other choices. The option does not necessarily indicates the ability to do it well. The choice of evangelical celibacy is not just a question of celibacy, but involves the whole person. It is a chaste and respectful love for all that we are, around this motivation of realization

¹ Some ideas are inspired on: Morano, Carlo Domínguez, *La Aventura del Celibato Evangélico. Sublimación, o represión, Narcisismo o alteridad*, 2004, Ed. Frontera, Spain.

of the Reign of God. Love, therefore, and be sincere, total and respect the deep truth of the person. This chaste and respectful love manifests itself in the whole of life. It is also the approach by which chastity, poverty, and obedience must be assumed.

In our reflections that follow, we want to analyze the content and form of this option. All commitment and choice are a kind of adventure to live something meaningful. In this case, the evangelical celibacy. Therefore, we also say that it requires freedom, joy and maturity. Freedom and maturity are often arduous achievements that require energy, commitment for life, and are never fully achieved. The constant purification of the motivations and the integral growth is an ongoing challenge. In our option we not just want to be like Jesus the celibate, but to identify with him and follow him in his way of being, acting, presenting the Reign of God as the Father's Reign. Jesus is not the final goal of our choice as celibates when we follow him. Every Christian must follow Jesus Christ. The evangelical celibacy is not a privileged form of option, as if God liked more celibate or virgin people than the married ones. We make a consecration for the purpose of engaging our energies in the same cause as that of Jesus: the Reign of God. The realization of the Reign of God is also God's great plan for humanity. It is a historical project of transformation of reality, which Jesus called "Reign of God and His justice", surpassing every form of narcissism, personal projection, individualism, privileges and personal glory. Therefore, we can say that our option is to unite and insert ourselves in this plan with God for his Reign. This adventure and challenge always require more maturity to dispose of the energies for it, overcoming certain attachments, substitutions, transfers, or even escape from other alternatives, such as marriage and family.

Every day we make options, some more meaningful, some less; some more general and others more specific. The option for a celibate state of life has its characteristics. How can we understand the title and subtitle of this text? If we had to talk about it, what would we say?

Aspects involved in choosing the evangelical celibacy

Certainly, the choice in developing and expressing the forces of love in the engagement of the Reign of God is a wonderful, challenging and very personal choice. However, this choice needs to consider other aspects not easy to discern. The person is the set of his personal, familiar, cultural and contextual experience. In addition, this set interferes on your motivations, preferences and options. This set was formed through indications, identifications, comparisons, valuations from the beginning of life to the present moment. Even today, and also tomorrow, we receive external and internal interferences through indications, identification processes and other forms of valuation. Sensitivity to these aspects is closely linked to self-esteem, and reinforcement of context, knowledge and existential stimuli. Sensitivity, therefore, is educated through values, insists, knowledge, interests, ideals ... and becomes a connection between the inner world and the outer world. In the course of life, we find different objects to express our love. There is an internal dynamic that aims to express love and the person will select modes and objects of love. They cannot always be just people. They can be objects, causes, goods, art, and knowledge. However, true love requires its expression in people or God. Our affective-sexual world has much more to do with what happened in our past experiences than with the body configuration (man / woman). In the case of marriage, another person is the mediation of this expression of love. In the case of religious life, more energy is directed to the cause of the Reign of God. This cause is learned and valued by different forms of education in sensitivity.

We should always have all this structure and dynamics of personality when considering the choice of evangelical celibacy. Thus, family, cultural reality and the environment assume some importance in the ability and quality of choices. Good affective and intellectual structure predispose sensitivity to different forms of expressions of love. Even if the choice and the choice of evangelical celibacy may not be required or imposed by the individual, the family, or the broader context, the different mediations can interfere decisively, especially when there is greater emotional fragility in the person who makes the choice. We all want to grow in self-esteem and social recognition. In times of low appreciation of the transcendent dimension and the consequent appreciation of the immanent in its different forms, these times may suggest little sensitivity to the choice of evangelical celibacy.

The option for evangelical celibacy is a response to the will of God, discerned and assumed. It is not the best option, but it is the best for me, for each one of us in the community. This means that loyalty to this option depends on many factors. How do we link this option to God's will for our community and us?

The itinerary - journey - of discernment and fidelity

The choice of evangelical celibacy is a more spiritual level of option, with a worldview and emotional energy, intellectual and volitional, for the service of a more universal love. Even if the expression of models of love we know from our family are more concrete characterizations, such as expressions between men and women and within the family, the quality of the expression of love goes through a process of discernment.

The 'vocation' to love is for every human being. However difficult his life has been, one can never give up on the mission of loving. We can consider two distinct forms of expressions of love. A love that inspires the particular characteristics and opens to universality. People who marry are inspired by the experience of intimacy as an expression of their love. However, for love to remain alive and grow, it must open itself to others through its children, humanitarian service and engagement in the ecclesial community. Another form of expression of love focuses on the vision of universality, that is, the willingness to love everyone, express, and guarantee the dignity of every human being. This is the case of the vocation to religious life. However, this universal disposition must also be expressed in concrete engagement with the people with whom it coexists. This commitment to concrete people preserves the love of an artificialism or platonism that questions the quality of love. Love-agape has a connection with love-eros, respecting the specificity of the state or option of life. An example of universal love we have in Jesus Christ: totally open to the Father and to humanity, but deeply engaged with each person who was addressing him. He remained very free in the face of love and without prejudice and insecurities. Therefore: eyes fixed on the person of Jesus and not on the reality itself; not to be holy, but to follow Him properly. Evangelical celibacy is inspired by this universal kind of love of Jesus.

Therefore, a great first step is to discern which are the basic modes in which I

want to express my love. However, in this decision, I cannot be the only reference, but if we assume that it is God who sets the form of love. It is not so much a 'vocation' - family life, celibate or religious - but a commandment to love. We need a thorough process of discernment to know how to love and in which way. However, knowing it is not yet the decision and the ability to follow. The ability to follow will depend on my inner strength, values, my autonomy and freedom.

Another aspect: in order to be able to renounce a more intimate self - as in evangelical celibacy and not necessarily in marriage - it is necessary to have previously renounced the first objects of desire - parents - in infancy. One of our deepest desires is to try to regain a deep union and unity that we have felt with God since conception and lived in union with the mother before our birth. Progressively, autonomy and separation develop, but the intense desire for unity is maintained. We can never fully attain this unity, but we keep the desire of it. That union can be healthy expressed and does not destroy individuality. Even though there is so much commitment in union and difference, both reflect our reality and none of the aspects, in itself, expresses maturity or immaturity. It will depend on the motivational set used for the options in question.

To have some kind of union through the vow of chastity, there may remain a certain intolerance with psychic pain and concomitant allergy to the absence of gratifying and intense emotions. This can make it more difficult to assume the pain that loneliness entails. "We sometimes find situations in which we want, with a greater or lesser awareness, the relief of loneliness that the option of life assumed cannot satisfy. (...) More pitiable when frustration gives more archaic feelings such as abandonment and rejection, and produces regressive and childlike forms in relation to others"² Examples can be seen in people in whom loneliness appears as a need for recognition and attention, or a certain victimization. It is not easy to conquer a maturity of desire that makes it possible to assume solitude and choose the capacity to love. We all want to live and, therefore, underlies an intense and exclusive love for ourselves that we ought to have and preserve.

In this process of discernment enters the entire affective field, with its various impulses - including sexual - and the most immediate and deep desires that

² Carlos Domínguez Morano. Amores y desamores em la vida consagrada, p 29.

people have. There has been some writings about the importance of the model of distance and family reality to choose your own life and how to love. That is valid both for the married and religious life. It depends on the family experience if we are to be more capable to make our own choices - in the positive case - or if exaggeratedly we fix this model - in the negative case. In this sense, we may find it difficult to distance ourselves from parents, or we can also reject the family model and be afraid to take it. We can also - narcissistically - seek promotion, facilities, recognition. We can still live celibacy but the motivation for God's Reign remains quite fragile. Even more: it may happen to live celibacy following several alternatives: not living celibacy through an integration of genital in affective sexuality; living sexuality and celibacy, but by narcissism, and not for the Reign; living celibacy as an option for the Reign of God. Let us remember that no alternative is 'pure', since ambiguous motivations are often present.

Every Christian follows Jesus Christ. Jesus did not call us to be holy, but to follow him. Some do it pledging a marital life. The Reign of God is also a desire and commitment to them, but in their own way. They use a mediation as a closer object, a concrete "you" with whom they live with and exercise the development of sexuality dimensions. The celibate chooses to constitute the Reign as his most direct object of attraction, without mediation or the company of anyone in a unique, intimate and exclusive way that accompanies and shares the project. He wants to structure and facilitate in his person a special disposition to put himself at the disposition of this Reign. We reach the God of Jesus by following Jesus. In the love and following of Jesus we have the key that frees us from the danger that religious experience can bring, that is, it can become a privileged place for the appearance of fantasies linked to spiritual contents. "Only in a loving and joyful union with God and in the passion for the Reign can the consecrated person sustain his celibate option in a coherent and enriching way"³. These are the two pillars that sustain this option transformed into consecration: loving union with God and passion for the Reign. When passionlessness contaminates these two primordial bonds - mystical experience and commitment to the Reign - this option may crumble, however gleaming it may be.

Fidelity to this option is not a determinism, but a possible itinerary that requires

³ Morano. Amores y desamores en la vida consagrada, p 9.

renewal and strengthening of the dynamics arising from the choice made. It requires overcoming different cognitive dissonances that might appear. Greater inner freedom and greater affective autonomy facilitate fidelity. Favourable contexts, personal and institutional can be favourable stimuli to fidelity. In other words, we need to take some steps that require some refinement and challenge. First, to know God's plan for me, which requires a vocational discernment; Then the decision to want to follow the will of God as an existential position; Third, to overcome obstacles to following the will of God. Love always presupposes a prior identification. This means that, sometimes, existential situations are very delicate and conflicting, interfering with the specific identification, which increases the difficulties to follow. In addition, there are other models that identify today as social, ideological leaderships, whether they are individuals or groups. When the identification process arising from the religious option is fragile, it opens the way to other processes with different identity, structure and ideals. It follows the will of God not who wants, but who is able to follow. Finally, fourthly, decide to follow Jesus Christ with joy, in the cause of the Reign of God, as the best way for myself and others with a 'flame' similar to mine. It is not the best way as such, but it is best for me, for it is bound to God's will for me. The link with Christ - identification and follow-up - "unleashes an operational dynamics of follow-up in a historical project, in a concrete mission of commitment for the establishment of the Reign of God"⁴.

The option for evangelical celibacy is a true itinerary. It is a way of loving. It supposes to have left aside other forms of expression of love; it supposes also to leave behind other models. How are we clear that this is a way of loving, of an itinerary, of changing references and a process of a new identification?

Awareness of the obstacles and weaknesses

The choice of evangelical celibacy is not primarily a waiver but a specific expression of love. You can suppress sexual impulses and think it as being a virtue without feeling that, as a possible obstacle to the choice of evangelical celibacy.

⁴ Morano, Amores y desamores, p 82.

Impulses - mostly sexual - repressed, are not dead impulses. You do not renounce your sexuality, but some forms of its expression. The energy resulting from that is not contrary to other forms of expressions of love. You do not renounce either the sensibility to people, especially toward those who suffer any kind of suffering or lacking. Cannot be considered celibate for the Reign of God the person who lives in a comfortable way, selfishly, isolated, insensitive ... even if this person is faithful to a physiological celibacy. We disclaim certain expressions of intimacy and sharing that guarantee an attempted merger. However, we live understanding experiences of intuition, empathy and sharing with many people. We live increasingly in-depth emotional bonds. All this gives us more confidence in ourselves, in our autonomy and shared fullness. Even God can not be seen as one that fills my emotional needs. We must acknowledge that God is located in a different order than the realization of our world of desires. So, he will never be a substitute for a woman or a man, for those who are consecrated in the religious life. We must accept that God is not one that fills the gaps of our lack of affection. He is fully God for all and for each human person. In fact, the evangelical celibacy, or the Reign of God, is progressively taken over with joy and enthusiasm. We may feel affective fragilities related to the father or the mother and then transfer them to a narcissistic spirituality, of maternal or paternal dependence. The process of global growth prepare the preconditions for the option for evangelical celibacy.

Within a world where there are so many different stimuli of options for a universal love, those who opt for celibacy may face certain solitude, certain anonymity, certain fragility of power. We all want somehow, prestige, power, and economic resources. The more fragile the self-esteem, the more intense becomes the temptation to turn the choice of celibacy into something compensatory. "Self-esteem, necessary for personal development and for a healthy relationship with others, for many people has become the most important goal of their personal development. This is a mistake. It is not about gaining self-esteem at all costs, but about working for a healthy self-esteem that favors the ability to love and work"⁵ for a broad teleological cause of great humanistic characteristics, such as those of the Reign of God. We need the ability to love and be loved - more to love than

⁵ Morano. Amores y desamores... p 33.

to be loved - to weave a core of relationships that sustain the basic need for affection, care and communication. We also need a capacity to project our own existence into a commitment to transform reality that guarantees material sustenance and social transformation according to a broad vision of humanity that moves towards its fullness. From there, the importance of right intention in relationships and actions. In the religious life there is a direct connection between loving and working. The motivation and the intentionality in our actions need to insight in the way of being and acting and living of Jesus Christ.

Celibacy is not primarily a renunciation, but an assumed option. Celibacy may not indicate an option for the Reign. However, this choice must be for the Reign. What characteristics of this option can indicate be for the Reign and which are not sign of the Reign? How is Jesus Christ a model for us in the realization of the Reign of God?

Training the ability to love and choose the evangelical celibacy

The choice of evangelical celibacy does not cancel our affection or our intelligence, or makes us dependent on our decisions. On the contrary, after we discern our expression of love, of our universal love for the Reign of God, we structured our identity from this option. A great effort is required to learn to love as Jesus loved, being identified with him in his power, preaching the realization of the Reign of God. We follow him, not as a point of arrival, but as the great mediator of the Father. We engage with Jesus and the Father to realize the Reign of God. This is our preferential option - our fundamental option - and in it we center our existential energies. The commitment of our energies requires overcoming mediocrity to be meaningful. Mediocrity produces apathy, stagnation and discouragement. A major requirement, therefore, is to teach love overcoming processes of fear, escape, compensation, projections and transfers. There may be situations in which - even doing the option- that the person does not have the capacities to follow. The evangelical celibacy is for those chosen by God, who have capacities to follow with inner freedom. The condition of follow-up is entrusted to human endeavor and can not be attributed to an additional intervention of grace.

The celibate intends to implement how he follows Jesus in harmony with what were the specific dynamics of Jesus. His life project is the way he uses for his affection and instinctual energy. The way Jesus was celibate and lived as a man and his way to conduct his relations with others is also the paradigm of evangelical celibacy. This form of relationship with all kind of people by Jesus had, is possible only from a very free personal position on sexuality.

The path of renunciation and repression is a negative alternative distance from love and the Reign of God. Renunciation is not the centre of the option, but the option is central for the Reign of God, which absorbs the person free energies and those that can be released. Let us remember: A repressed desire - without conscience - is not a dead or cancelled desire. Sooner or later, it will bring its consequences for the person as a whole.

Training for the ability to love includes the education of affection; it includes a search and broad humanistic ideals for options; it includes directing the heart to the Reign of God. This ability to love is widely benefited from a community that makes similar options, and develops and executes highly evangelizing projects.

Repression, in itself, does not facilitate a celibate choice for the Reign of God. It facilitates more the free capacity to love. The commitment to increase our capacity to love, with evangelical motivations, is a way of discerning our fidelity. How can we accomplish this in our personal, community and social reality?

Our joyful option for the Reign of God, an evangelical celibacy.

Options based on renunciation tend to leave negative consequences for all involved, especially through depression, existential emptiness, bitterness, moralism, incomprehension and requirements. We can also include in these consequences: disease, auto destruction, deaths, compensations related to being and having things. "Evangelical celibacy is a decision that is based on listening to a personal vocation and serving the Reign, not because of a sacrifice that is supposed to be pleasing and pleasing to God. What is necessary to think is that God pleases the radical disposition of service in the following of Jesus, whether in the form of celibacy or marriage. Because one and the other - celibate and married - are called to this sequel with the same radicality and the same dignity.

We do not choose, therefore, in the consecrated life the 'best way', but 'the best way for us', from the discernment realized before God"⁶. Better or not, the difference is in fidelity to the way of love and in it is ever freer, more faithful and committed quality.

The full growth allows more objective and faithful choices related to the evangelical celibacy. We need to engage our affective, emotional energies in this option. The result is joy, enthusiasm, dedication, sensitivity to the poor and needy. Prayer and spirituality will be more like those of Jesus: He prays the Father, accomplish His will and prays and intercedes for his disciples so that they be faithful to the will of the Father. What can feed this spirituality is also a force that gives consistency to the Reign of God. We identify with Jesus, we follow to perform - with the Father - the Reign as it has been designed and experienced in the Gospel. The prayer of the consecrated celibate becomes a privileged time and space for deep internalization of that in which he believes and hopes: an opportunity to 'affectively' deep this project of the Reign to which he is consecrated. Carrying the cross every day in this option only makes sense if it is to follow Jesus: "From the passionate love for his person, to fully engage in his project of the Reign of God. It is this Reign of God and its justice that will condense the most decisive of our affective world. The work and dedication to this Reign of God and his justice in this world - whatever the charism and spirituality of consecrated life - justify and give meaning and fullness to the renunciation that the celibate carries out with his vow of chastity"⁷.

Community life, of course, can never replace a marital life, sons and family. However, it can and must provide support to a life in which one renounces that all. In many ways the community can offer an environment that is familiar, a place and environment where sharing and celebrating the same faith, a space in which fraternal interaction stimulates the commitment for the Reign and a space which favors peace, rest, relaxation. This implies being and living a healthy and candid life, not merely functional or utilitarian. Affection needs to find there its proper space. Psalm 133, 1 already reminds us: "How good it is, how pleasant it is to dwell together as brothers."

⁶ Morano, Amores y desamores, p 29.

⁷ Morano. Amores y desamores p 87.

We need to rejoice with our dedicated love in building the Reign of God, in the mission entrusted to us. All our community commitment facilitates this joy of serving and loving for free evangelical reasons. We can all strive to overcome frustration and rejoice in our free and integrated choice. We discuss about how to do it.

In summary

The option for evangelical celibacy follows a form of expression of God's will toward us. It is not so much a privileged option as it is an option that requires the commitment of the whole person. It becomes an itinerary that implies a certain overcoming of the familiar model in the sense of dependence on the father or the mother. An itinerary that implies overcoming affective desires and compensatory experiences in the dimension of a certain type of intimacy, of union; of certain immature visions of autonomy, of search for power, of prestige and of economic facilities and comforts; of narcissistic and status forms; of individualistic ways of organizing life. It consists in assuming altruism and mission to those who need it the most.

In short, the option for evangelical celibacy is a discerned adventure that includes many aspects to consider, but which can also be a joyful and free option for a form of commitment and expression of the Reign of God. We identify ourselves and follow Jesus to - with the Father - to realize the Reign of God. In this cause and project, we develop, concentrate and dedicate our energies and our love that includes our heart, our intelligence and our strengths.

How can we develop our life and a community project that is based on love and evangelical celibacy for the Reign of God?

DYNAMIC AND CREATIVE FIDELITY IN THE RELIGIOUS LIFE

A loving and respectful obedience with God, self and others

Br. Paulo Dullius

Fidelity is a complex reality that requires reinforcement, renewal and creativity. Promising a love that lasts forever is possible when we discover a purpose greater than our own fundamental plans, a purpose that permits us to wager our whole future on the cause of the Reign of God.

INTRODUCTION AND PLACING IN CONTEXT.

The question of fidelity in the religious life and in marriage brings us face to face with a very human reality that is not the result of natural instincts but rather the exercise of freedom and responsibility. Choices are ruled by realities considered as ideals, as ends to be achieved, which are the outcome of a personal or collective structure that is rooted in the past. Other choices exist, some more central, others more peripheral that seek to engage either the totality of the person or just one aspect of him.

Fidelity is one's capacity to maintain a commitment. There are no structures that can guarantee one's fidelity to a commitment. Fidelity depends on a complexity of factors coming from the past, the form of social and communitarian stimuli and the capacity to respond to the deepest conscious and unconscious aspirations of individuals and groups. Fidelity can be understood as a profound respect for the truth present in the life of each person. The response to this truth translates into a respectful obedience towards a loving God who desires fidelity to his love; obedience to himself and to the authentic development of his unique identity as a human person; obedience to the people to whom we are sent and whom we should love and serve.

Fidelity is a stimulating and joyful possibility of living one's promises made in either the recent or distant past and that continue today and into the future. Fidelity is one of the human characteristics that enables one to express maturity and freedom. However, it should go beyond its static dimension so as to assure a greater dynamism and creativity in life's itinerary, in particular because of the innovations that flow from personal and group life and also from those that emanate from external cultural and incidental realities.

In the past, societies were simpler and initiation rites created identity and stability. Today there is much evidence that insists on change -change of epoch and change of paradigms and even a change in the understanding of reality. The influence of this changing reality is reflected in a more vacillating identity and its features of permanence are diluted. Fidelity in this world of change is not well grasped and it has not been given sufficient structural space - fidelity, as traditionally understood is almost a counter-cultural choice. With the accent on change, fidelity can transform into something rare, difficult and without a significant meaning. Variables increase as do internal and external pressures which shake the stablest identity and can produce in the individual and the group insecurities that lead them to think of other choices that would be equally meaningful for them.

Today, even in religious life, the locus of understanding, interpretation and decision-making has shifted. In the past, it was the spiritual dimension that dominated and was used as the main interpretative variable that allowed one to foresee the possibility of either fidelity or a lack of fidelity. In this spiritual-dimension, fidelity was considered meritorious, and infidelity was perceived as more of a sin of betrayal of grace. While recognising the validity of this understanding of commitments, there is a strong invitation today to develop a more integrated vision of the person in the evolution of his/her life, especially regarding its physical, mental, spiritual, social and cultural dimensions. There is a certain sequential priority that demands particular attention to the physical dimension to begin with and then moving to the psychic and social dimensions, and lastly the spiritual dimension. This means that fidelity has something to do with the personal fulfilment, according to which individuals and groups live all the constitutive human dimensions. We know that we take a positive interest in the next phase of our development when we have performed the preceding

phases in a satisfying manner. To put it another way, we need to take account of certain presuppositions in order to ensure greater fidelity to projects undertaken by individuals, in societies and communities. In the past, it was the person who made the decisions and was faithful to them because the external context, especially the Christian culture, supported this kind of fidelity. It wasn't necessary then to be aware of unceasingly renewing one's commitments. Today however, fidelity requires daily renewal.

The factors or aspects that have to do with fidelity or infidelity to commitments have changed somewhat today. If it is possible to keep promises or vows it can be equally possible not to keep one's promises which is a lack of fidelity. We are more accustomed to value fidelity because it relates to the image and likeness of God. All persons and cultures are very sensitive about fidelity/infidelity. In general, they consider infidelity as a sort of betrayal without understanding the reasons for not maintaining one's commitment. The stronger the bond between fidelity and self-esteem, one's sensitivity to cheating is stronger. Infidelities always create a sort of dissatisfaction. This question of reasons for fidelity or infidelity is becoming very important today, especially when we wish to personally and institutionally safeguard a charism confided to us as a revelation about the human being and God, accomplished in Jesus Christ, and the engagement of each human being to participate in the construction of the Reign of God.

The term "fidelity" makes reference to the word "faith" in the sense of adhesion, as Silvano Buralassi says,⁸ that is to say, a systematic and sustained observation of a precept or a promise. This also means moreover an "interior and total engagement and having reference to the very fidelity of God."⁹ Fidelity is possible but it is not a biological, mental or spiritual determinism. It is the result of a complex elaboration of freedom and of the vision of a continuity of an identity that has some permanent features and others that change. Fidelity is a decision like a promise that defines the unity and connection of the important aspects of our life and structure. We are all conscious of being the same even while taking into account the major and minor changes that occur in our life. There are genetic,

⁸ Silvano Buralassi, in: *Diccionario de Pastoral Vocacional*, Salamanca, Ed. Sigueme, 2005, p 505. [Original Italian: *Dizionario di Pastorale Vocazionale*, del Centro Internazionale Vocazionale Rogate, Ed. Rogate, Roma, 2002].

⁹ Buralassi, *Diccionario de. Pastoral Vocacional*, p 505.

cultural and even educational aspects of early childhood that are “untouchable”. There are, however, other new facets and opportunities by which the person assumes bit by bit his/her identity. From this aspect, one can make decisions and gradually establish continuity amidst discontinuity. Paul Ricoeur has defined this difference of identity by the name of *identity idem* and *identity ipse*.¹⁰

To understand this topic better, we need to approach reality such as it presents itself today with regard to fidelity and to the abandonment of the commitment that happens in a religious institute. The question of fidelity and infidelity is a reality not only for the religious life but also for marriage and general life in society and it can embrace the both the significant and minor aspects with regard to the fundamental option. One may suppose that in general a major decision of fidelity - as with infidelity - is the result of small decisions and of continued actions in line with fidelity or infidelity.¹¹ Nothing is indifferent, that is to say, fidelity and infidelity are not unforeseen or momentary surprises but result from a complex personal situation that can be better understood by an analysis and a passage of time for a person or group. Both fidelity and infidelity depend on a variety of factors that are only comprehensible based on the history in which one is involved.

Within this complex reality, it is appropriate to deepen the question of fidelity. God reveals himself as a faithful God. History presents us with so many examples of fidelity. Persons who are significant today are those who one day said “yes” and have maintained their commitment for the good of humanity even if this initial “yes” has later included difficulties, obstacles, doubts, uncertainties and sacrifices. We all have within our memories so many “yesses” that have helped humanity, in the Old and New Testaments, in the history of the Church and of the Institute, They are “yesses” that express obedience to the Holy Spirit. “Fidelity to God manifests itself when one poses the question of life-choice. This must however be looked at again and then perhaps abandoned and renounced for a compromise that seems to exceed our capacity.”¹²

¹⁰ *Identity idem* refers to the more stable dimension and *identity ipse* to continuity within the interior of changing reality. See Paul Ricoeur, specially *Soi-même comme un autre* and *Parcours de Reconnaissance*.

¹¹ This can well correspond with the case of David and to a lesser degree of Judas: both will follow the logic of little infidelities and of a process of sin that ended in grave actions, as we know.

¹² Burgalassi, *Diccionario de Pastoral Vocacional*, p 510.

Fidelity follows the different stages of life and has its own characteristics and demands as functions of age, life's circumstances and the degree of maturity. In the passage from one stage of life to another, there can be moments of insecurity and fragility. This fragility increases when there are experiences that worked out badly in the preceding phase. Fidelity has its own psychodynamic and evolution that depend on human structure and on the way in which this structure is set up at the present moment, in the context of conscious and unconscious motivations, of current ideals both personal and those of the group, in the alternatives of possible choices and in affective, intellectual, professional and religious maturity. Also included in this perspective are the cultural, social and religious contexts, variables that can shape choices and the identity of the person.

Even if today we are witnessing a certain ease about not keeping commitments, we should still insist on fidelity and help persons to have the capacity for keeping promises as a reflection of their interior freedom and their joy in living out choices they made. Consequently, we should be putting the emphasis on what fosters dynamic and creative fidelity. Access to causes of abandonment can shed light on fidelity. "Fidelity is a task that demands overcoming difficulties, seeking new horizons, walking in the right direction and in good fellowship. Fidelity is linked to happiness and success."¹³

In dynamic and creative fidelity, personal and communal accompaniment is important in order to illuminate the meaning and purpose of life that each person is seeking and that can be found in institutions. This accompaniment includes some procedural directives for fidelity - the responsibility of the individual, of the community and of the institution in the broadest sense. Beginning with a broader understanding of the complexity of fidelity or infidelity, certain personal, communal and institutional engagements can be undertaken. These engagements do not guarantee fidelity but can offer reasons for fidelity. "The path of preparation for the consecrated state seems to demand stronger personalities, not too rigid, capable of receiving help from a human community that is religiously mature."¹⁴

The reflections that follow are aimed at deepening our understanding of fidelity

¹³ *Fidelity and departures in consecrated life today*, UISG, 66th Semester assembly (2006) p 3.

¹⁴ Buralassi. *Fidelidad*, in *Diccionario de Pastoral Vocacional*, p 510.

and the way in which it can be important for the individual person and for communities. While this reflection is focused more on religious life, the question of maintaining fidelity is to be found in every human organisation, be it religious life or married life. It is first of all a faithfulness to oneself and to the plan God has for each one of us. It is a respectful and loving obedience to God for self and for others.

Much has been written on this topic in recent times in several publications related to religious life, in particular, and also by big movements such as conferences and meetings of Superiors General. I am very grateful for the contributions of so many people on the subject indicating the importance of this topic. Special mention is due to the members of the Institute Secretariat for Formation and Mission, of the Brothers Visitor on the occasion of their meeting in June 2016, and of the International Union of Superiors General in two of their general assemblies.¹⁵

We all want to be faithful. Faithfulness is something to build that depends on a variety of factors. What aspects have facilitated my fidelity to this day?

The Question of Fidelity

Fidelity in the religious life refers to the positive and free manner of living the commitments of religious profession. It is possible to *persevere* in this state of life as opposed to expressing permanent *fidelity* to the project of the Reign of God. This can occur when there are contradictory motives that are central and permanent such as the need for personal security, a fear of life's challenges, a desire for comfort, and compensation for affective and economic deficiencies, the difficulty in finding meaning in life, or escaping from conscious or unconscious feelings of guilt. Some people would love to have a vocation but don't have one and want to force God to satisfy their desires. Many people consciously or unconsciously seek prestige, a sort of power and convenience and see in the religious institution a good occasion of making up for one's individual

¹⁵ *Fidelity and departures in consecrated life today*, Rome, UISG, 66th Semester assembly 2006 and *For a faithful consecrated life - challenges*; 67^o *Conventus semestralis*, Roma 2006.

deficiencies. Many people without adequate motives remain within a religious community because there is still a sort of security or personal satisfaction in staying but without remaining sufficiently faithful.

Father Luigi Maria Rulla makes a distinction between the perseverance of those who stay in religious life with freedom, apostolic efficacy and commitment to the Reign of God, and the perseverance of those who stay because it suits them, and who make the religious life a tranquil nest of security and comfort.¹⁶ There also those who leave this state of life - we cannot say however that they were unfaithful or did not persevere. Abandoning the Institute is a complex question that can best be understood case by case throughout the length of our considerations.¹⁷ Fidelity is dynamic and creative. It refers to our capacity for making lifetime commitments and promises as well as to those commitments that are for a period of time. The tendency is to consider one's commitment as definitive because in our deepest selves we know - and we have been taught - that fidelity comes from our human structure, made in the image and likeness of God. God is love and power. Therefore, that is how we understand it. Love's great characteristic is that it is eternal. Fidelity is an understanding of love and as a result we suppose that a promise is to be kept and we find it difficult to accept the lack of fidelity. "The faithful person experiences a profound joy and his/her life becomes fruitful. Contemporary culture puts too much emphasis on what is passing, disposable, unique, moving, changing and spontaneous."¹⁸ This is why we need to find creative means of fidelity. Identity ipse - the choice of continuity in discontinuity - applies equally to the religious life and its choice is: continuity in the diversity of cultures and contexts.

Faithfulness is to be creatively faithful to an assumed cause. Remaining in the realized option - religious life - does not automatically mean fidelity. How can we always transform our allegiance in a renewed way?

¹⁶ Cf LM. RULLA, *Depth Psychology and Vocation*.

¹⁷ We will see this when we deal with the matter further on in Point 7, where we base ourselves on various dialogues and reflections made by Major Superiors, some of these in *Fidelity and Departures*.

¹⁸ *Fidelity and departures...* p. 3.

Overall view: an exercise of freedom

I believe that it is proper to underline from the outset the question of freedom as being one of humanity's fundamental characteristics. There are many books about free choice and pure will, decisions based on a perspective that is broad, objective, and with spiritual, cultural and institutional references and decisions made based on criteria that are subjective, merely personal, composed of a mix of maturity and immaturity, of freedom and pseudo-freedom. We can all make decisions, and our decisions can represent our interior freedom or our immaturity under various aspects. Much has been written on the subject of human structure and its spiritual, psychological and philosophical dimensions¹⁹ with regard to freedom. It could also be possible to speak of exterior freedom and interior freedom. Exterior freedom can be juridical, geographical, social, cultural and religious. Jesus, at the end of his life, had no exterior freedom but he had his interior freedom that upheld his cause and his fundamental choice. This interior freedom is crucial for maintaining fidelity.

Fidelity to God and to God's Reign in religious life lived in a specific Institute with its charism and mission demands an elevated level of interior freedom in particular because of external constraints that could lead to a sort of obstacle and resistance to the effective exercise of interior freedom. In the present context, we need strong people, in good health, mature and having a great capacity to love God and people. This is the exercise of freedom that brings joy and development. This movement of interiority and of intimacy with God and his will facilitates dynamic and creative fidelity.

Faithfulness depends very much on the capacity for deep inner freedom and a process of growth to maturity. However, we want to be free to serve. Here is the challenge.

¹⁹ Anthropology has dealt quite a lot with the matter of freedom. See for example: *Liberdade, ponto crucial da antropologia*, in: PALUMBIERI, Sabino. *L'Uomo, questa meraviglia. Antropologia Filosofica*. Urb. Un. Press, Roma, 1999, p 241 ss. Something beneficial linked to this point can also be understood in João Batista Mondin, *Antropologia Teológica*, São Paulo, Ed. Paulinas, 1985, p 100-119.

God's fidelity in the history of humanity, the Church, the Institute and of each person

The model of our fidelity is the fidelity of God. It forms part of his essence and is one of the characteristics of God as Father: "I am the first and the last. I have loved you with an everlasting love and so I still maintain my faithful love for you." (Jr 31, 3). Silvano Burgalassi recalls for us many of the expressions of God's fidelity.²⁰ God's fidelity is linked to mercy as Pope Francis also reminds us.²¹ Christians base their assurance of being saved on God's fidelity. "You can rely on God, who has called you to be partners with his Son Jesus Christ Our Lord" (1 Cor 1, 9). God's faithfulness manifests itself fully in Jesus Christ. Jesus "having loved those who were his own in the world, loved them to the end" (Jn 13, 1). Consequently, every religious, personal and communitarian experience is the history of a double fidelity: God's fidelity and that of man. God's love and fidelity are infinite. Our fidelity is limited and subject to some form of infidelity. It is expressed in fidelity to God, to our Brothers, to the men and women of our times, to the poor".²²

This same fidelity of God can be confirmed in the history of Israel, in Christianity, in the Church, in the Institute and in each person. Our infidelities do not alter God's fidelity. The anthropomorphic language of God, especially in the Old Testament, would seem to indicate a certain changing and "infidelity" by God but that is our human way of seeing that sets this up and for the interpretation: "If we are faithless, he is faithful still" (2 Tim 2, 13). It is thus the possibility of infidelity that reveals human fragility, the fall and the enclosure within its limits, in egoism, in what is fleeting, in self-sufficiency, in the lack of interior freedom. The desire for fidelity becomes concrete in loving experiences. The more love is experienced and shared the more ways it is open to fidelity. In an ambiguous and fragile world such as ours, the capacity for loving has many alternatives but also many risks.

We perceive how clearly these risks are truly present and we confront them with fragilities and lack of love - this is why the possibility of infidelity can be more frequent. Let us not forget: in one way or another there will always be infidelities. Our real situation of openness to transcendence occurs in a human condition

²⁰ Burgalassi. Diccionario de Pastoral Vocacional, p 509.

²¹ Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus* - [The face of mercy]

²² Álvaro Rodríguez Echeverría, in: *Fidelity and Departures...* p 11.

where fragility is to be found and where some get shipwrecked making us understand the reality of evil and the different regressive forms where it is difficult to remain faithful.

History offers us many examples of faithfulness. We can also talk about personal fidelities and other testimonies of fidelity. Faithfulness has to do with building the Reign of God.

Called to follow your way and mission as a response within the framework of possibilities and fragilities

One of the forms of discernment is linked to the specific way of loving. Instead of thinking of the choice of religious life as a vocation, it is preferable to envisage human life within the commandment of love. In the human make-up, one of the essential points is the strong or fragile capacity for loving. This love has a concrete expression that transforms into a local mission and into a way of loving. Religious actualise this commandment of love by following the universal disposition to love everyone, especially the most fragile. Those who marry are more inspired by a particular model of loving. Thus, education in love and the capacity to give life with joy as the expression of the experience of feeling oneself loved make the person and the group come into contact with fidelity. There is no authentic fidelity without love.

"Fidelity of the person as response to God's fidelity presents itself as a fundamental choice or a life choice. It is only in the mystery of the knowledge of the divine mystery of salvation that the mystery of man is revealed."²³ This does not mean that the only one who can be faithful is the one who believes in the Christian God. Fidelity is not an abstract reality impossible to realise. It becomes concrete in the human person and must be promoted, protected, developed and understood. Even when understood we must remember once again that infidelity is not first of all a moral evil but a human condition in which there exists the possibility of remaining within what is limited, fleeting, in momentary advantages, in falling to the temptation to evil.

²³ Burgalassi, *Fidelidad* in: Diccionario de Pastoral Vocacional, p 510.

Every vital decision is a more central form of choice of existence and should move forward faced with an uncertain and obscure future. In the measure that we are convinced that our life has a positive meaning and that it has found its base in God, there then opens up the possibility of fidelity while following an energetic path. We look for certain satisfactions. If we do not find them, our tendency is to not insist and thus remain dissatisfied but rather to change or try other alternatives. That is why the experience of the love of God and of people should be lived as something joyful, happy and pleasant. When this choice is deepened and creatively taken on once again, we feel stimulated to continue to grow in this choice. Consequently, the will and the reality of renouncing this path carry with it a certain sort of spiritual, psychological, social and physical dissatisfaction that arouses the desire of looking for some satisfaction in other forms of living under minor aspects or in its entirety.

There is no need to be dreaming of a life without fragilities but to take on real possibilities that flow from our weakness and our possibilities, to make choices and keep them within the framework of what we can expect of ourselves and of what the institution can support and maintain in growth in fidelity. God trusts us; he is faithful to his promise of salvation.²⁴ This perception and experience become little by little a personal experience, and God and His Reign become the central references while Jesus becomes the gauge of our fidelity and the model of joyful service to neighbour.

We are all called to fidelity within human frailty. It is good to talk about weaknesses that compromise fidelity or overcoming them in order to have better dispositions to fidelity.

Aspects of fidelity: person - community - institution

We can open up the range of our fidelity by considering three variables that enter into the fidelity process. From the quality of each: person, community and institution, we can have elements for understanding apostolic effectiveness and its force in dynamic and creative fidelity. Instead of immediately considering the

²⁴ Burgalassi, *Fidelidad*, in *Diccionario de Pastoral Vocacional*, p 509.

mystery of grace, it is more suitable to think of these three variables and see their interrelation and influence in objective freedom for growing and faithfully following God, yourself and those to whom we are sent. God is a permanent and all-powerful presence in the person as well as in the community and the institution. His grace is his presence in the human structure. If there is some difficulty, it is not through lack of grace but through a lack of our effective disposition, of our capacity and lack of freedom to choose to follow the love of God.

We can agree to say that following Jesus in the religious life depends on many factors and not just on a personal decision. Following the choice of religious life with freedom and maturity is not just a matter of willing it, but being able to, and having the existential conditions, as Carlos Morano well says.²⁵ We need to consider the dialectical reality between person, community and institution. The person arrives with his identity already constructed by past experiences as we shall see further on. The community, with its affective, human and gospel values, is a support for fulfilment, including the spiritual dimension. The religious institution is decisive in the matter of charism, of the existential offering valid for today and tomorrow, and also for being an alternative for the fulfilment of personal ideals, including in them those arising from past human structure and those still continuing to offer ideals. Association for the achievement of spiritual ideals that give meaning to life is dependent on a unity between what the person deeply desires for himself, lived and stimulated in a community, and what is proposed by society at large that is committed to the concrete attainment of the Reign of God.

Awakening, stimulating and promoting personal growth, having a good community experience and engaging in an attractive apostolate can facilitate dynamic and creative fidelity. The opposite is also clear - lots of physical, psychic and spiritual conflicts, little communitarian support, a fragile apostolic project can all have harmful consequences for fidelity and for perseverance. The fragile person needs to be helped by a good community and support in various aspects. He/she also needs a good institutional mission project that offers assurance,

²⁵ See this question also in MORANO, Carlos Domínguez, *La Aventura del Celibato Evangélico*, Vitoria, Editorial Frontera, 2004.

identity and motivation for gradually overcoming existential aspects that can compromise dynamic and creative fidelity. Groups and communities based on models that are not mature can be obstacles to fidelity. The same goes for institutions that do not offer attractive and transcendent reasons for motivating the life of persons and groups.

A healthy person is one who is moved by a deep faith and an apostolic vision plus a community reality where the person finds welcome, understanding, dialogue and mature fraternal relationships that are expressed in an association for the mission of the charism. Likewise, the person needs an institutional structure that animates persons and communities, that reflects joint planning, that has apostolic projects that are motivating and important in which it is worthwhile having a life involvement. All this facilitates the project of dynamic and creative fidelity.

Faithfulness involves many aspects of life. It is facilitated by the personal, community and institutional dimension. Which of these dimensions are present in my life in a positive way and which ones could be strengthened?

FIDELITY AND STAGES OF LIFE

Fidelity has specific characteristics foreseen for each stage of life and for circumstances that are very particular and differentiated. We should all live each stage of life positively. In each stage, there are characteristics of love that facilitate growth and the passage to the next stage. The events and the aspects that have not been well lived in one stage are an obstacle to growth and arouse desires for recuperation or compensation. Something similar could be said when the good living of one stage of life is not allowed, when it is demanded that the person live the maturity of the following stage without sufficient preparation. Every type of disproportion causes anxiety and the possibility of repression and regression. At each stage of life, there is a need for love and profound respect.

We never complete each stage of life with enough love. When there are serious gaps, we are prevented from taking on further commitments because of the interplay in the process of promised and maintained fidelity. The possibility of love or a lack of love can occur in any stage of life but only a minimum of lived

love stimulates people to open up to other people and to other more mature stages. Love is linked to expressions of life such as acceptance, welcome, understanding, valuing, promotion, accompaniment and attention. Lack of love is characterised by forms of aggression, depreciation, rejection, isolation and repression. We need to keep this important distinction in mind, given that fidelity and steadfastness depend for many people on the love that the person and the group receive and show when engaged in an evangelical concern.

Fidelity is dynamic and accompanies the various phases of life, with its own characteristics. How have I expressed the fidelity in my life up to the present moment and how can I express it for the future?

Different stages of fidelity in the different periods of life

We owe complete fidelity to God, to self and to the accomplishment of God's will whatever the period of life, particularly during the stage one is currently living. Each stage of life has its particularities in the way it is expressed with regard to desires and to forms of living in community or family, or in a parish, school, and social or cultural community. This is not the place for us to develop each of the characteristics of life's stages,²⁶ but what we need to have in mind is that existential success in each stage prepares the person and groups to pass to the following stage with good motivation and great possibilities of success by dedicating oneself to it integrally.

We can distinguish the stages of growth in two ways: as a growth process - by distinct stages and sequences, and by the dynamic and change process from one existential stage to the other. We know the stages of the process of growth through books that treat the topic of human development.²⁷ The passage from one stage to another can be done with success or without complete success. It is therefore important to distinguish growth models that can be sequential or

²⁶ We all know books and various experiences where we can deepen knowledge of and approaches to the different stages of life in different epochs and cultures. It is recommended to have a good knowledge of these facts and requirements, and to get a better grasp of their possible interplay in the process of fidelity.

²⁷ The intuitions of Ausubel, S. Freud, Melanie Klein, Erik Erikson, L. Kohlberg, J. Fowler and others are very useful in this case.

hierarchical. The sequential models accentuate the variables that change without the person having been able to accomplish all the characteristics of the preceding stage. This model is very frequent and is certainly characteristic of the writings of Erik Erikson. The hierarchical model has some fundamental characteristics that must be completed; otherwise, the person remains in the stage where he/she is. It is the most frequent case with L. Kohlberg's model and its moral development. In the case of the sequential model, the person passes to and assumes the characteristics of the following stage but may have unresolved questions about preceding stages that stand in the way of an effective freedom needed for the current stage. These are affective wounds or the frustrations of desires. A qualitative growth requires the curing of the wounds of preceding stages. In the hierarchical model, the person can remain in a preceding stage and not evolve towards a post conventional adult stage. The person will not be mature enough for the commitments currently being assumed and will not have the capacity to be faithful.

To grow qualitatively, we need to have good experiences over a long time, in the corresponding stage being lived, to augment self-esteem, our assurance, and thus ready ourselves to make the step towards the following stage. Sacrifice can be considered healthy when it is at the service of love. It is, however, the expression of a teleological reality that becomes accessible even if it means a renunciation, a breaking-off or a sacrifice. Sacrifices accepted passively do not contribute to a healthy commitment. It is probable that a certain manner of infidelity to a promise is the result of a certain type of immaturity and acute dissatisfactions in the interior life, in community or in the mission.

In the case we are considering here, we can distinguish at least three very crucial stages in human development:

a) That of childhood whose centre is the physical dimension: the body, the body of others, material comfort, assurance of accommodation, and tranquillity of the environment. Love is going to be understood within this central aspect, and likewise the experiences that predispose one to move beyond such centralisation on the more material. Every experience of love - acceptance, security and material comfort - predisposes one towards growth and to the calm opening towards the following stage. The difficulties of this "material" interpretation are likened to a lack of love and leave negative effects. They therefore awaken desires

for revenge on oneself and others, for compensation or destruction of one's project and that of others. There can be some gap in this stage of life that leads the person to choose religious life as a locus of compensation. Even staying with this vocational choice, if love is not integrated into one's story his apostolic efficiency²⁸ will be fragile and of weak value.

b) Another stage of life is directed more towards socialisation and understanding of the world. Good community experiences, of acceptance of our way of being, access to culture can mean experiences of love. Parents and family can facilitate this initiation to social life. Feelings of inferiority, stemming from comparisons, judgements, and labelling cause people to become isolated and rigid. With time, they set up a rigid and repressive structure and use it in their social dynamics, even going as far as thinking that it is a matter of an action objectively correct because they learned it from the world of adults. Education in respect, in love and in dialogue is ultimately going to facilitate commitment in fidelity to a promise and to the humanisation of others. Setbacks in this process cause a person to repress and regress and yields immature forms of living. These immature forms can provoke searches for compensation and self-improvement but can also predispose one towards a certain dissatisfaction with not having been able to overcome obstacles. The person can then question fidelity and continuity of central options in life.

c) Another stage that can be cited is to be found in adult life where the person repeats the experiences from his/her own family in models assumed and interiorised. Access to visions of the meaning of life that are good are a form of experiencing love. A few frustrations and setbacks in the expression of a true altruism can create dissatisfaction and lead us to question the objectivity of earlier choices and probably awaken the desire to change decisions taken up until the present and to look for another lifestyle including that of another state of life.

The passage from one lifestyle to another - option of life - takes place once or twice in life in general. In what concerns the religious life, in addition to envisaging every process of human and Christian maturity that is rendered easy

²⁸ Efficacy signifies the power of values, especially evangelical ones that accompany actions undertaken. Efficiency refers more to an adequate methodology for attaining foreseen aims. Someone can be very efficient and not very effective. People of great interior quality are, in general, very effective from the apostolic point of view.

for us thanks to the understanding of human structure, of philosophical and theological anthropology, psychology, sociology and culture, in the same way in going beyond a stage that one is living so as to assume the following one more maturely, religious life should consider the complex reality of the family model in addition to the religious life model. Some writings of Carlos Domínguez Morano draw our attention to this existential experience²⁹ in the sense that in order to enter religious life as a gospel choice for the building of the Reign of God, one needs to be capable of leaving behind the family model. That is to say, he has to act with freedom following God's will and overcoming all the obstacles that make it difficult to make a radical option for God and his Reign.

The person has had experiences in family, with friends and in community. These experiences can include frustrations and successes. With regard to successes, it can happen that the person wishes to repeat them or to go headlong into things to pave one's own way based on other points of reference. Affective setbacks and frustrations provoke affective gaps that can cause problems in succeeding choices in religious life and compromise fidelity with freedom and creativity. Reactions can be of the most diverse kind as to the conception of religious life and family life. Successes foster fidelity and freedom and make people think there are several preconditions for opting for the Reign of God and remaining faithful to it.

The passage from the family model to religious life model takes on a particular importance. This will depend a great deal on the content and the method for making this transfer successfully without flight or repression but as a choice for a greater freedom and the expression of real growth. This passage requires particular attention from the person and the community. We must consider that the structuring proper to the religious life is based on the model of the family. The resemblance is repeated by analogy: religious life is a family, even if this analogy has its limits as Adrian van Kaam reminds us.

²⁹ See especially Carlos Domínguez MORANO, *La Aventura del Celibato Evangélico. Sublimación o represión, Narcisismo o alteridad*. 2004, Editorial Frontera, Vitoria/Gasteiz, España, and *Amores y desamores en la vida consagrada*, Vitoria, Ed. Frontera, 2014.

The dynamics of fidelity pass through various phases of life. The more I am aware of this dynamic, the better I can move on to my growth. Looking at personal and community life, how do these phases happen and how have they been overcome to the next stage?

Passing from a stage, the weaknesses and possibilities: existential variables

Passing from one stage to another always involves some unknown factors with regard to the future. This also means that there is a rupture with present reality. This rupture or separation always signifies a certain risk. We can affirm that we do not grow except with ruptures and/or overcoming developmental challenges. However, not every rupture means a growth. The loss of loved ones, the breaking of commitments, the loss of friendships, moments of discouragement in life which lead to regressive options, etc. are ruptures which do not signify a growth.

In general, the process of rupture or separation gives rise to periods of distinct dynamics. Passing from one phase to another can refer to a global and big question, and applies to the simpler situations of our daily lives. Some ruptures and passing often take place without our having anticipated them. There are forces which, for example, are strangers to us and which define our physical growth such as when we stop being children and become adolescents, adults, elderly persons and all of this is only in obedience to the reality of the body; but there are so many other variables which we must consider when it is a question of a qualitative passage in life from one stage to another. Each level has its own logic in changes and growth. The more universal the level - for instance the spiritual - the more the characterisation depends on a greater complexity of factors.

In the case of the religious life, we have three realities: the person before his entry, the process of entry and the concrete fact of belonging to a religious institution. We have therefore, three periods in the process of passage. Each period has its characteristics that must be well structured in order to positively satisfy its reality. It is a kind of rite of passage. Genep³⁰ claims that each rite of passage involves three phases: separation from the initial group, being on the margin of the new

³⁰ Genep, Arnold van, a french anthropologist studied the religious phenomenon, specialy in Africa.

group, and integration into the new group, that is to say a preliminary phase, a liminal phase and a post-liminal phase. In broad brush-strokes, these passages take place in the option for the religious life. The "separation" from the family model takes place from friends, from the context, from values, from the vision of life, from leisure activities, from culture and and from lots of other questions linked to this reality. Everyone must be helped to understand and follow this process. The second period, the "margin", is connected to the process of initial formation in which one has not yet accepted the new identity, nor the identity of the following group that receives us into the religious life with its community, affective, professional, and apostolic characteristics. This passage appears new, uncertain and surprising since it lets us progressively see the new construct bit by bit as we advance in the process of separation and as we approach the new reality. It is a profound period of structural transformation. Once a person successfully moves into the new reality, the reintegration takes place and the person acquires his new identity, his security, and so on.

This is significant for our consideration. Here there can be both achievements and difficulties in the separation from the family model as well as achievements and difficulties moving into the new model - religious life. All in all, in the phase of 'being in the margin' one does not have a sufficient identity and thus lives in a certain solitude and uncertainty. In itself, this passage is very delicate. One leaves one reality but one does not yet have the new reality. It is uncomfortable and this can lead to processes of anguish and regression as so well Melanie Klein in her writings reminds us. This insecurity can be interpreted as regressive: return to the preceding phase and flight (negative), or regression to the service of "me" (positive). Good knowledge, affective support, close and confident accompaniment facilitate this passage.

When we have had good family experiences, we are more disposed towards passing from this model and putting ourselves into the model that is for us that of the religious life. The passage from 'being on the margin' will not be dramatic if we have had positive stimulants on the part of the family and if we have a proportional welcome into a new model of family in the institution. We leave behind us the family, friends, motivating commitments, our goods, our certainties and we launch ourselves into a future that can be more attractive and corresponds to what God expects of us.

The fragility of the passage - liminality - can benefit from a good accompaniment as well as from an affective security and stimulants that can give assurance in this "crossing" from one model to the other. We need to 'undo' ourselves from the family model, separate ourselves from it to exercise our liberty and take on another model that welcomes us and confirms us.

The manner in which the group we are entering receives us in this process of reintegration, plays an important role and can facilitate the option and help us to find our new identity and security as well as foster fidelity.

The passage can be more dramatic and difficult if the opposite happens. Nevertheless, it is important and demands special attention from persons, the Institute and the formative itinerary. The sacred experience in this dynamic is present in its own structure of transformation and of freedom, as is the case with the Mass, the rites of the Sacraments, in the experience of God, as Dario Zadra³¹ notes.

This said, we need to be attentive to the stage of separation, such as when one distances himself from his family, in order to know something about the predispositions that are within the interior of the persons and the group. The family model refers to the form in which the family is structured and significant in the interior of a determined culture. We know that for certain realities, this structure or model is very significant and very present in ulterior decisions. In so far as this model favours the options, it should be valued. When the Gospel says that we should "hate our father and mother", it is not referring to a negative sentiment but rather wishes to say that the family cannot be an obstacle to growth in freedom and to the carrying out of the will of God. The last word on the options comes from God and not from the family. The family should help persons to discover the will of God and to be faithful to it.

There are people who have difficulties in detaching themselves from the family model because it represents a fragile security or because affective frustrations make these people - above all in an unconscious manner - decide to repeat this model in order to recuperate what they have missed when they were still children. Besides, fragile spiritual and altruistic values can close a person and the group from a loving and free giving of self to the Reign of God.

³¹ Dario Zadra, *Il tempo Simbolico: Liturgia della vita*, Brescia, Morcelliana Editrice, 1985.

Beyond this process of separation, fidelity and commitment in the new grouping are facilitated by the positive pedagogical and human form of accompanying the person in the process of separation, of "solitude", of searching for experiences of a new identity that corresponds to what one hopes for deep down.

The spaces of welcome, of proximity, of dialogue, of sharing, ensure a positive effect on the person who is making this passage from one model to another by making him feel encouraged and considering it a worthwhile alternative for his life. Some discontinuity in the religious life could be due to a poor process of separation from the family model or the new community was not secure enough, attractive or challenging.

There is a dynamic of passing phases or stages. It always implies some rupture and a step towards greater integration and freedom. It means separation, but done in a delicate pedagogical way. We can talk about it.

THE PSYCHODYNAMIC AND THE PROCESS OF FIDELITY

After having studied some aspects of the stages of life and the passing from one stage to another, we can explain a little the psychodynamic and the process of fidelity before considering the wider context of the facilitators of fidelity.

The person is the result of what he has lived up to the present and of what he proposes to live into the future, in the context of today and tomorrow. The question of fidelity in this context of the past and the future presents itself as a challenge that is never sufficiently foreseeable. The surprises of life coming from the past, the present and the future defy possible prediction or anticipation, in particular those done automatically. Between the stimulant and the response, the human being introduces a completely symbolic world, as Ernest Cassirer³² says. This symbolic world includes an anthropological psychodynamic complex that is structured starting out from psychogenesis and from a whole lived reality of today and tomorrow. People give responses that are immediate or more reflected, but always including the conscious or unconscious reality. People give more reflected

³² Ernst Cassirer, *Filosofia delle Forme Simboliche*.

or immediate responses³³, but always including conscious and unconscious realities. Even though one can engage in a conscious reflection on these issues, it is not enough to simply overcome the challenges present in the unconscious. When we speak of psychodynamics, we are trying to understand the human structure as a whole. We can be influenced and organise ourselves around the most varied motivations. Speaking synthetically, we are a unit sensitive to love as the human identifying core. This love is present in the physical, psychological, spiritual and social dimensions; in the potentialities of affection, intelligence and will; in culture, history, art; in technological conquests, in the construction of what is permanent and what changes. Around these differentiated areas is structured love or lack of love following the characteristics mentioned above.

This structuring is the psychodynamic and interferes in the decisions we make today and tomorrow. Now, a personal organisation within an institution can make fidelity easy or difficult and the experience of the promises made, and be a positive and healthy support of the state of life.

Fidelity implies in a broad growth of all human characteristics. We need to consider these characteristics into account when we want to foster fidelity. What vision do I have when I think of fidelity?

Essential foundation, conscious and unconscious, as motivation

Every experience contributes to our identity, whether we consciously know this or not and no experience is forgotten or destroyed forever. We have many intellectual data in our conscious and our unconscious. Everything can serve as potential or real motivation for actions at any stage of life. We need to emphasise here the unconscious as understood by Freud, who transformed it into true human data that must be included in culture³⁴. This means that there are unconscious data present in human life from the moment of conception up to the end of life, with differing intensity, depending on age and content and depending on the strength of the conscious.

³³ A immediate reaction is more instinctive, and follows unconscious contents present in the affective memory. More reflected reactions come more from the conscious level and values.

³⁴ For a deeper comprehension of that point, see: Paul Ricoeur, De l'interprétation: Essai sur Freud.

We also assume that the unconscious belongs to the whole person and is present in all the anthropological characteristics, especially in the psychological and spiritual dimensions of the person. We cannot assume that in the unconscious, the present contents are the fruit of repression as Freud claims. The unconscious is part of the human make-up and has its own laws. Given that in the unconscious are found the lived experiences of love or a lack of it with which the person has to confront in his family, his culture and his ideals, it is very wise to accept this human dimension and to find the best methods for accessing this. By better knowing our deep interior, we can avoid motivational surprises. We can also avoid having contents appear which can condition our behaviour and decisions. Following our theme, the unconscious can be one of the more central aspects in making decisions, the motivations for such decisions and the possibility and probability of fidelity. The contents of the unconscious can always surprise us if we do not have a minimum knowledge of its integration into our story.

The great passing from forgetting to conscious memory is a necessary challenge for the life of persons and of the group. We cannot understand what happens to us if we do not know it sufficiently. By understanding and knowing the unconscious, we can re-orientate the motivations and objectives of life and the options available³⁵. We can also discover the fragilities and the possible predispositions that could call into question our fidelity and our fundamental options. In fidelity - in the causes that facilitate the capacity for maintaining promises and adhesion to institutes/institutions - those which come from the unconscious can play a very important role. Today it is almost an indispensable requirement for religious, for formators and for religious superiors to have a sure access to and a wide understanding of the unconscious³⁶.

The unconscious and the conscious belong to the same person. The content and the dynamic of the unconscious do not always coincide with the data of the conscious. The brevity of this text does not allow us to develop sufficiently this connection and inter-relation. History and in particular the history of the religious

³⁵ Some aspects of this dynamic can be seen in: Paul Ricoeur: *La Mémoire, l'Histoire, l'Oubli*. Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 2000

³⁶ There are indirect methods of assessing unconscious. We know also more direct methods for assessing the unconscious. See: Renate Jost de Moraes: *As chaves do inconsciente and O inconsciente sem fronteiras*.

life has always favoured the conscious dimension which includes affective data, but above all the intellectual and volitional aspects. It has orientated this data towards the spiritual area around which it makes its options for life. The conscious dimension always remains important, above all in the responsibility for the choice of subjects, experiences and ideals that can favour fidelity to the options taken. If the unconscious contents, which also have affective, cognitive and volitional aspects, were fragile, in the sense that they would not support the options and the promises, fidelity could also be fragile. It is also valid, on the contrary, that as healthy affective, and intellectual content based on many values and options favourable to the state of life, can predispose one to a more mature, free and committed fidelity.

There is a personal and institutional co-responsibility for valuing the experiences, subjects and options that support the options taken by individuals and groups. These can facilitate this itinerary even though they cannot always guarantee it, given that there are other aspects that present themselves and are interpreted and elaborated upon in the affective memory that synthesises the general content of the unconscious. We can, however, opt for fortifying the conscious in order to create more unity insofar as it is an achievable option. Let us remember that there is no human action which is entirely conscious. There are always unconscious aspects that escape to the conscious.

This unity or correspondence between the ideal "me" and the means I use for supporting this ideal version ought to be completed with an integration of the unconscious dimension. No matter how valid the conscious effort to understand and animate our options, we can be surprised by the unconscious reality which identifies us also as a capacity for growth, for discernment, for choices and as regards the capacity for keeping decisions made.

The conscious and unconscious character of our life signifies that, to a large extent, we live without knowing and without being aware of all the motivations, impulses, strengths, ideals, fears and desires which are part of our decisions and options for life, of our option for celibacy or marriage and also in fidelity in following the decisions made. In addition, it is easy to be mistaken in affective options - types of expression of love - that persons take during their lives. At any given moment in life there can emerge in a married or celibate person and particularly in a religious, aspects of his affective life of which he was unaware. To

avoid too many surprises in life, knowledge of the conscious and the unconscious in culture, in collective and personal possibilities, is essential. All this can help us in better responding to the success so awaited, of fidelity to the end.

We often say that fidelity is a mystery of grace. This statement is not always valid. Conscious and unconscious aspects can help us to understand human reality so we will not be surprised at different aspects and options. How can we value the data of the sciences in this respect to help our fidelity?

Personal and group ideas and desires as an energy for diversity of options

In addition to the conscious and unconscious aspects of a person, which can help us to better understand the process of the dynamic and creative fidelity of the existential options, it is also useful to properly evaluate the personal ideals and desires and those of the group as a motivation and energy for discovering, carrying out and maintaining the decisions taken. The ideals could be essentially conscious while the desires could be conscious or unconscious. The stronger the unconscious motivation of the desires, more important they could be on decisions made or to maintain.

Ideals are stable aims that represent forms of being and the means for managing to interiorise them. Nietzsche said: "Whoever has a reason, an ideal for living or dying will, in general, find the 'how' for achieving it." However, ideals are not sufficient for finding the 'hows'. There are ideals which are the healthy expression of the interiority of a person and which are carried out in regard to the possibility of achieving success. However, there are also ideals that are the compensatory construction of contrary frustrations that are not realistic, which is to say they are impossible for the person or the group because the contrary fragilities are much stronger and more intense and threaten their capacity for success. This process has a lot to do with the question of fidelity.

Our motivations can have very diverse causes. Essentially, they come from the past or the future (ideals). Knowing the past well, what is archaeological, with its consequences for the person of today, including the ideals that he has established is very useful in evaluating the possibilities of fidelity. We must also count with the motivating force of clearly established ideals, ideals that are viable

and have altruistic aims. This is the teleological dimension. The importance of this archaeological and teleological aspect has been highlighted by Paul Ricoeur³⁷. Freud is the reference for what is archaeological while Hegel in "The Phenomenology of the Spirit" represents a more teleological dimension. The religious life has given a lot of importance to teleological motivation. In Aristotelian language, the final cause is the first cause. For us, following Jesus is the commitment for the Reign of God, constituting the motivating nucleus of the religious life. Identifying with Christ and following him is the aim and the ideal. The religious state of life is inspired from this teleological cause. We should therefore continue to evaluate the ideals which are significant in human life and which signify the options of flourishing as a human being. It is a lot but not enough.

What we can still do is evaluate the ideals in the totality of the person and the group in order to see their objectivity and avoid frustrations. We must avoid ideals that are the result of human frustrations whether these be affective, intellectual, social, economic or religious. The revision of ideals helps in reframing them and integrating them into the project of life as a big possibility for fidelity. The ideals continue to be a strong motivating force for acting. Fragile ideals can signify that the persons or the group have lived many frustrations in their ideals and that they have renounced them. Many apathetic and discouraged persons and groups were formerly idealists who had great projects. What happened that they could not accomplish these projects and ideas?

In several writings on the religious life and other domains, spiritual ideals were considered as values. Other domains, especially the physical, were considered, at most, as necessities. However, there is value in every human being. Nothing in the human being is intrinsically bad as regards its structure. The form of living and the organization of the aspects of life can signify and produce the presence of evil. The value to be found in the anthropological sense, is the positive development human life in each of its aspects and its unified fulfilment that is realized with and for others in just societies. There is a certain hierarchy of excellence but it flows from the quality of the human characteristic developed. Maintaining only spiritual ideals can create a greater difficulty in other domains

³⁷ In: Paul Ricoeur: De l'interprétation: Essai sur Freud.

and in life as a whole. The fact that some aspects of life are suppressed does not mean that they are dead. They potentially predispose us towards negative reactions.

There is a certain resemblance between desires and ideals. Desires are also motivating forces. Depending on the quality and the intensity of the desires we can understand something about the objective capacity of fidelity. We have two fundamental types of desires: some more anthropological and others more compensatory. Both are important for understanding the human dynamic, above all in regard to the predictability and capacity for fidelity to the wider promises and the everyday ones. Rather than creating desires, it is life's circumstances that awaken them. This possibility makes more concrete the diversity and flexibility of the human being.

There are desires that one would call anthropological. They are connected with the human constitution. Every human aspect has an inherent dynamic that wishes to see it put into action. Developing these potentialities positively is very important. The dynamic which wishes to be achieved, starting out from what is anthropological, transforms itself into a desire for achieving it and into an itinerary of fidelity, because it produces balance and satisfaction around an important cause. In addition, one of the challenges is that of having a good and wide human understanding and taking on a positive attitude with regard to all that is human³⁸. The achieving of what is human will also depend on other complementary or central options which each individual or group carries out bit by bit. The state of life as religious is an option which calls for the taking of a position with regard to forms of human development, but without ever repressing any other aspect including those of renunciation, but to the benefit of healthy options taken by people.

There are also desires that can arise from a certain type of frustration in the development of anthropological characteristics. Affective frustrations are well known and frequent: isolation, aggression, lack of freedom, repression, economic limitation, lack of access to culture, to faith and many other gaps in development. When we speak of possible ruptures of promises made and of the suspension of

³⁸ Good references and comprehension are offered by books on: Philosophic anthropology, theological anthropology, and in the Bible.

an assumed fidelity, we are in general referring to a conscious or unconscious frustration. This frustration creates dissatisfaction and this, in turn, awakens desires for recuperation, vengeance, aggression or it looks for other alternatives. In general, everyone is disposed towards loving to the degree to which he feels he has been loved. Insofar as he feels himself loved and satisfied with life, the person or group feel themselves stimulated towards fidelity. The continuity of the process of growth and fidelity is maintained both in time and in the quality of being. The desires born of these frustrations transform themselves into motivations and interfere in both general and particular options. Most of these frustrations begin to take shape in early infancy and at present these facts and these reactions are maintained in the unconscious. We know that something happened from the consequences still perceived today and which interfere to a certain extent in our effective freedom. By knowing one's personal history we can better understand the person, his ideals, his desires and can perhaps plan a kind of re-elaboration for liberating energy in the service of the immature dimension and putting it as motivation for the cause of the Reign.

Our desires orientate us towards our interior: to celebrate their positive aspects or to have what we have lost and which we would consider important for our self-esteem and our self-evaluation. It is, therefore, healthy to ask ourselves: 'What do I desire in the last analysis, in my depth?' 'How is it that my immediate desires reflect my most profound desires? The deepest desires are the anthropological desires and therefore the healthiest. Even if there are desires to give up on the process of fidelity, they indicate an itinerary of overtaking something. The most immediate desires are those aroused, planned or looked for. In addition, in this sense, once again, it is very useful to evaluate the deep motivations that arouse or nourish our desires.

Our desires and ideals constitute motivation for the choices and for the action. They have their origin in our history and in those aspects that we understand throughout our lives. We can talk about our desires and ideals and discover their deepest origin.

Affective, intellectual, relational, professional, religious maturity and fidelity

We can complete these reflections by taking up again other aspects that have to do with the capacity for fidelity in a direct or indirect manner. Simply wanting to be faithful and persevere is not enough. We need to have sufficient maturity and the capacity for a dynamic and creative fidelity within the framework of the variables and diversities that may present themselves.

We are listening to and seeing so many people and groups who understand immaturity as the cause of conflicts, problems, and lack of fulfilment. Pope Francis, speaking to married persons, brings up this question which, properly adapted, could be applied to religious life: "A love that is weak or infirm, incapable of accepting marriage as a challenge to be taken up and fought for, reborn, renewed and reinvented until death, cannot sustain a great commitment. It will succumb to the culture of the ephemeral that prevents a constant process of growth."³⁹ This weak love establishes itself in family experiences marked by disenchantment, that is to say rejection, aggression, violence, isolation, lack of respect, of comfort or of support. We all need to face up to this reality regardless of which state of life we have chosen. The religious life is supposedly less inclined towards the failures and weakness of others. Fidelity enjoys the acceptance and the welcome of persons as they are, in order to thus find means of growth. "Understandably, families often experience problems when one of their members is emotionally immature because he or she still bears the scars of earlier experiences. An unhappy childhood or adolescence can breed personal crises that affect one's marriage"⁴⁰ and fidelity in the religious life. If we were all more mature in the main aspects of life, crises would be less frequent and less painful. The Pope insists that there is a shout of these sufferings in the next stages of life and a search for compensation. He continues: "Some love with the selfish, capricious and self-centred love of a child: an insatiable love that screams or cries when it fails to get what it wants. Others love with an adolescent love marked by hostility, bitter criticism and the need to blame others; caught up in their own emotions and fantasies, such persons expect others to fill their emptiness and

³⁹ In: *Amoris Laetitia*, n° 124

⁴⁰ *Amoris Laetitia*, n° 239

to satisfy their every desire. Many people leave childhood without ever having felt unconditional love. This affects their ability to be trusting and open with others. A poor relationship with one's parents and siblings, if left unhealed, can re-emerge and hurt a marriage."⁴¹ We would say/add community and apostolic life. We are faced with a reality that reveals more about human weaknesses as far as they are part of the human condition⁴² and not necessarily as something morally bad. In considering life as something that has limits, a true anthropology of limits, one can then understand the importance of mercy and motivating persons towards fidelity. In a demanding world as ours, those who fail or have many difficulties can revive a feeling of culpability that unleashes passivity and an incapacity for growth and fidelity.

There is a certain connection between possibility and the capacity for dynamic and creative fidelity and the stage of maturity in some significant human motivating aspects such as affectivity, knowledge, relations, professional success and maturity of faith and of spiritual experience. One cannot wait for maximum maturity. However, there is a minimum degree expected at a determined age for adequately expressing internal life, for living with others, for defining oneself in a determined state of life. Fidelity to what we have taken on and promised ought to renew itself always in a creative form up to the end of life. Certain premature discouragements, apathy, lack of apostolic momentum, indicate a kind of infidelity that one cannot refer to as a vocational infidelity but as a vocational experience that detaches itself little by little from the central ideals and values which have motivated previous options. However, a minimum maturity facilitates options and the capacity for holding on to them. We should also keep in mind the idea that fidelity does not necessarily depend on maturity. Other aspects can favour fidelity to the options taken. The proof of this is that there are many religious, faithful throughout their lives, whose maturity could be called into question. Nevertheless, to avoid the useless using up of psychic and spiritual energy, it is desirable to have a simple and wide maturity in the fundamental domains of human life. Let us think, for example, how much interior freedom there is when there are few affective conflicts, when there is an objectivity with

⁴¹ *Amoris Laetitia*, n° 239.240

⁴² See: Hanna Arendt, *The Human Condition*.

values, a healthy spirituality, a gratuitous apostolic capacity! Immaturity can lead people to activate compensatory, egoistic desires and to close themselves off from a more adult world that signifies getting past weaknesses. Affective maturity is not enough. It should be integrated into a faith and into apostolic values, into a shared evangelical cause supported by a community or institute/institution.

Fidelity benefits from some human domains where the person or the group build satisfaction, blossoming, appeasement. One of these is human experience as a unity, synthesised for many as affective maturity (affect). In addition to these, access to the development of intelligence in significant human domains helps in organising the vision of the world (intelligence) and in giving assurance and arguments in favour of the options chosen (will).

These intellectual contents include an understanding of the world, of the religious option, of the charism, of the experience of God and similar ones. Yet another domain refers to success with people, whether they be children, young people or adults; men or women; authorities or those subject to authority; of the same culture or a different one. Satisfaction in relationships helps us to believe in the justice of the options chosen and goes beyond the insecurity that could cause these options to waver. We can also include the importance of spiritual maturity. The process of fidelity is often called into question and broadened in a world full of challenges and immature expressions of faith and experiences of God⁴³. Maturity and faith strengthens fidelity.

Something similar can be found in professional satisfaction as an apostolic expression of love. The form of the exercise of the profession expresses the quality of the stage of maturity. Silvano Burgalassi⁴⁴ claims that research indicates that there are three crises that affect fidelity in the religious life: identity crisis, role crisis, crisis of totality.

a) We will not deal here with identity crisis⁴⁵.

b) In many cases fidelity has to do with role crisis, that is to say that the consecrated person ought to humanise his profession more and more each time

⁴³ See: Carlos Domínguez Morano: Pray after Freud; Believe after Freud

⁴⁴ In: Dicionário de Pastoral Vocacional, p 511-512.

⁴⁵ We know the centrality of identity developed by Erikson. It's useful also see the importance of that topic in: Paul Ricoeur, in *Parcours de Reconnaissance; Soi même come un autre; L'io dell'altro* (Attilio Danese).

by converting it into a mission, "This new identity is not very clear because the mission and the profession are not easy to integrate"⁴⁶. There are always underlying motivations in the decision to prioritise the profession and being capable of transforming it into a mission. This translates into options, above all when there is a professional crisis, geographical relocation or other forms of deficiencies and facts. Certainly, for creative and dynamic fidelity there is the challenge of transforming the profession into a mission, even if we speak a great deal about the educational 'mission'.

c) The crisis of the totality is also a challenge for fidelity. In general, people separate the time dedicated to work from that dedicated to the family, to rest, to leisure. In the case of religious, they are full-time religious and cannot get away from this. This can cause a little fear, especially in the young, because there are compensative desires stimulated by what is provisional. We all feel ourselves drawn by immediate results without managing to have long-term results. Moreover, options for the immediate are more frequent and can compromise the capacity for long-term or definitive options. Jesus Christ lived his life in total unity.

Fidelity is not a biological, psychic, or spiritual determinism, but an option that is benefited by freedom and maturity. How am I developing and may develop important existential aspects such as predisposition to faithfulness.

THE CULTURAL, SOCIAL, RELIGIOUS CONTEXT AS A PREDISPOSITION TO DEFINITIVE OPTIONS

We are all gradually more aware of the importance of considering the cultural, social and religious contexts. Starting with this, we can better understand persons and groups and see how the question of fidelity is situated in this ensemble of variables. When we talk about this, the question of the provisional and disposable arises.⁴⁷ We cannot deny the influence of external models as a reference for our internal models for seeing and making decisions. We cannot hide ourselves behind the social reality and use it as rationalization for our lack of capacity for

⁴⁶ Burgalassi, p. 512.

⁴⁷ See different books of Zygmunt Bauman on this topic.

living conscientiously and with objectivity all that we are and all that we decide behind these affirmations. We are faced with a change from a static world to another more dynamic one. If the model of the provisional is very widespread, the options of fidelity, continuity and duration can be affected. Fidelity and "the perpetual vows today constitute a counter-cultural action."⁴⁸ We should remember that the realities of love are eternal traits and we always want to live them according to this dimension. It is also good to remember that the mentality of changing everything and being provisional is not generalised in all humanity or in all cultures. Often, we pay more attention to the facts without looking at the deep search into the profound meaning of life that is behind the more superficial and temporary vacillations and reactions.

One of the stages of life in which change is felt more is that of youth. It is not a final stage of human development. All social systems and ideologies value youth as a target for defusing new realities. The young tend to accept and experiment with what is new. If the culture favours change, which will facilitate adhesions, the reinforcement of the image of self and identity...

We speak a lot nowadays of youths/young people and not of youth, both in the means of social communication and in sociological and religious analysis. This brings to mind the cultural and existential difference and diversity of young people. Many groups of young people are characterised because they associate according to their resemblance in values, ideals and the humanising processes. Others associate to show their specificity, their dissatisfaction, their fragility, their search for meaning.⁴⁹ This diversity among young people should be seen and understood as a concern when we are dealing with the question of fidelity, of continuity in time with promises and commitments made earlier. In an epoch or stage of life the centre is found in the material and psychic dimension, the temporality, the precarious and what is passing are privileged. When you value more the spiritual dimension you enter into a dimension of eternity. We must assure ourselves today that the dimension of eternity is valued, renewed and structured. We can then consolidate the dimension of fidelity in the time of commitments and promises. Javier Melloni affirms this general question of human

⁴⁸ William Sneek, *Reasons for departure from the Novitiate*, p 5.

⁴⁹ See Rossana Reguillo Cruz: *Emergencia de Culturas Juveniles*, Bogotá, Grupo Editorial Norma, 2007.

structure. We are much more than a psychic and corporal identity. "I do not believe that my psychic identity or my body is what I am. I am much more than that".⁵⁰

Changing and the fascination of the provisional can indicate a certain dissatisfaction, which people want to flee and get beyond. There is something profound that we are always looking for and which is more stable. Pope Francis expressed this idea saying that 'time is superior to space'.⁵¹ It is not sufficient to control persons in the details of their behaviour nor to have regressive practices in order to avoid problems. As the Pope says: "The big question is not: where he is - the son/daughter - in an existential sense, not a geographical one, where he is from the point of view of his convictions, his aims, his desires, his life plan... Are we trying to understand "where" these children really are - [the religious] - on their road? Do we know where their soul really is? And above all, are we really interested in knowing?⁵² Something similar interests us with regard to fidelity: what do the religious really wish and what they do with their life when seen as a mission and a call to love, especially for the needy?

Present reality values a greater awareness of the human aspects that were not sufficiently taken into account by the culture. This has a repercussion in understanding fidelity and stability. Some of these aspects are reflected in the understanding of commitments, including those that flows from the options for a state of life. Pascual Chavez Villanueva⁵³ considers fidelity as an anthropological prophecy in postmodernity, but he recalls the specificity of our epoch characterised by historic authenticity as a-horizon and path of human realisation. This has had repercussions in education and formation considered as permanent. From a more passive vision, we pass to a more dynamic one. Even more, freedom is transformed into the supreme value of human flourishing, around which persons organise their values, knowing the practical ambiguity inherent in effective freedom. It is even helpful that present reality looks less towards the past than towards the future. The Reign of God has always been presented as the "already and not yet", a humanising project of the future.

⁵⁰ Javier Melloni , José Cobo. Dios sin Dios, Una confrontación. Barcelona, Fragmenta Editorial, 2015, p 86.

⁵¹ In: Amoris Laetitia, n° 261.

⁵² In: Amoris Laetitia, n° 261.

⁵³ Pascual Villanueva. Fidelidad, Fuente de vida plena... in: Para una Vida Consagrada Fiel, UISG, Roma 2006, p 9-19.

Greater access to the world of social communications, more knowledge of cultures, of economic reality, technology, facilities all this awakens desires whose accomplishment is significant for self-esteem. This questions religious with regard to poverty, affective experiences (chastity), freedom (obedience). The more intense the desire the greater will be the strength of the decisions taken, especially when they include the possibility of not achieving all the immediate desires. Fidelity to commitments and promises could be considered as an obstacle. It is more difficult for a person to let go of the desire to compensate for their weaknesses when they are intimately linked to self-esteem, self-respect, and self-evaluation that are considered decisive for reaching his objectives in life. Religious institutions/institutes ought to offer experiences that assure their members happiness, fulfilment, and love beyond just immediate gratifications. These experiences depend on significant and motivating apostolic projects. We will come back to this idea later.

Context influence Faithfulness. There was a time when the context was more conducive to fidelity. Today there are more stimuli in favor of non-fidelity. How can we be faithful in a world that often indicates contrary realities?

FACILITATORS OF DYNAMIC AND CREATIVE FIDELITY

We are assuming that the human capacity for the dynamic of fidelity is one of the more complex and profound desires. Constantly changing the commitments taken on can be a signal of interior dissatisfaction and a lack of an adequate response to the existential questions that people pose. This can indicate the lack of a sure identity and represent a certain 'adolescence' as a result of not having more certain and consistent options. Viewed in this way, what is more human is expressed in fidelity and not in change or infidelity. However, fidelity does not have a biological determinism such as one can find in certain species of animals. Fidelity is the result of the exercise of freedom and responsibility made by persons whose make-up is sufficiently solid to ensure a certain stability that is maintained within a world with such unforeseeable situations. Fidelity is possible and it is dynamic, always renewed starting out from the integration of new realities. It is also creative in the sense that it triggers forms of fidelity suitable for each stage

of life and in each new situation that presents itself, in particular in the new forms of mission and of the expression of the love of God and of his Reign. Up to a certain point, it is a kind of adventure from which we can emerge victorious.

Regarding fidelity, it can happen that we are already tempted to consider more infidelities. If fidelity is not determined, we must help people to be faithful. It would be disappointing to normalize giving up on a commitment. Let us remember how sad, disappointed and betrayed families and other relationships feel as a result of someone's infidelity and the resulting negative consequences. Fidelity can be facilitated by considering three significant dimensions of human life: personal, communal and institutional. The dialectical balance between them and their significant implementation can help people to wish to continue to devote their lives to an evangelical cause.

Just as there are factors that can disfavor fidelity, we need to be attentive to the aspects that facilitate fidelity and assume that fidelity is more anthropological than non-fidelity. Freedom and responsibility foster fidelity. How?

The personal dimension: discernment, integration of history, culture and life, transcendent values, unifying identity, the experience of intimacy with God, found in community for mission.

Certain aspects of one's personality facilitate fidelity. Some people opt for fidelity via the commitment to religious life, thinking that it is God's will for them. Clearly, opting for the inner truth is a way that is capable of leading towards a feeling of satisfaction and happiness in the choice one has made. Nowadays, there are good scientific methods, both spiritual and psychological, which enable us to recognize this personal truth in terms of the type of love involved and the where and with whom that love is developed and expressed. We have not yet sufficiently socialized these methods. We just know some of them.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ We are familiar with the Ignatian method of discernment. Any methods which give direct access to the unconscious are also useful. L.M. Rulla, in his *Anthropologie de la vocation chrétienne* speaks about the affinity between personal values and Christian values. Rulla reminds us that, in addition, we need affinity between what the individual wants personally and Christian values and also the deep-down residue of the unconscious in an individual.

We believe that our conscious motives are what decide things, but that is not always the case. We must accept the fact that the individual is ontologically oriented towards the good, the true, the beautiful and towards love. This orientation finds expression at the level of the unconscious as well as the conscious. In other words, conscious motives may point to a path to truth that individuals and groups should be aware of and cultivate. The question of discernment about a state of life is relevant to all significant personal situations, and it is a very important step. However, when we know what the will of God is, we are not automatically sure of our ability to carry it out. Helping individuals to exercise and develop fidelity in a permanent way is a lifelong task. Responsibility for fidelity is down to the individual person in the first place, and then to the other members of the community or Institute.

Another thing that stimulates fidelity is the act of integrating one's own history, culture and life. Certain steps in succession must follow up this act of integration. The first step consists in knowing the history, the culture, the facts and the circumstances that may be exercising a big influence on the unconscious at any particular time. Knowledge of this history makes it possible to get a higher quality of interpretation. This in turn leads us to a better understanding of the people involved, the circumstances, the consequences and the potential implications for life. Understanding opens the situation out towards wider and deeper areas. This wider understanding enables individuals to begin a process of quality growth. The process will call for an effective and an affective separation from the past, because it no longer exists and especially because it has been harmful to a proper understanding. A successful understanding of what is happening in one's life makes reconciliation and mercy possible. At the same time, accessing one's history gives a chance to celebrate the beneficial events in life. The result is that we get a memory that is happy and reconciled. It is in this way that individuals free themselves from over-compensating behavior and subjectivism, and that they are better able to know the will of God. Moreover, they become disposed to spend their energies for the sake of love and for the Reign of God. This process is of great help for the development of the capacity for dynamic and creative fidelity.

Values exercise a force of attraction and have a positive impact on motivation. Values also have their affective, cognitive and behavioral dimensions. That is why they stir up emotions and move people to make commitments. Nobody dies for

ideas, but they may be ready to die for religious principles, if these are significant enough. The attraction of values is a kind of fascination for good, transcendent values that improve the motivation of individuals and groups. Transcendent values in themselves do not ensure the sustaining of fidelity if they are not integrated into and consonant with rest of the person. However, they may provide sufficient support in difficult situations.

Many studies have been made on identity, and we all have our ideas on the subject. The sense of fulfillment people feel when they have forged a good identity is a clear indicator that fidelity is a possibility. A good identity is one that integrates the past and unifies the various experiences made throughout life, including the decision to opt for and to promise some kind of significant continuity. As we have already said, in a period of great changes the necessity of an identity that takes in new elements every day represents a challenge and becomes important for our capacity for fidelity. The more fragile a person is, the more their identity will depend on the group for a social identity. The stronger the person, the better their ability to associate and commit themselves to groups of like identity in a more mature and more meaningful way. Our self-esteem is increased through the link between a good, personal identity and our identification and association with a group that articulates and strengthens our individual identity. This makes apostolic activity in the mission more effective and so fosters fidelity. The stimulus that comes from an institution's moral quality strengthens integrated growth, produces a sense of purpose and openness and helps to keep individuals open to a wider love, to the transcendent dimension and to the acceptance of commitments.

Such an experience of identity is linked to a positive experience of intimacy. Accounts of mystical experiences stress the idea of intimacy with God as an expression of profound love and communication, total acceptance, meaning and fullness. Many of them speak about the dimension of eternity, of an experience that we would not like to leave. It is the experience of union that generates trust and a readiness to love. Walter Schubart⁵⁵ says that longing for union is the greatest longing and stems from the union with God that was there at the start of life. It is realised in and symbolised by the union with our mother when we are in

⁵⁵ Walter Schubart, *Éros et Religion*.

the womb. There is a tendency to want to perpetuate this experience because it is the complete fulfilment of what it means to be human. This experience of intimacy is very important for human communication. It is all the more authentic when it is the crowning of identity. Only those who possess themselves at a profound level can give themselves up in intimacy.⁵⁶

Good human experiences of intimacy, especially with those who share our option and creative commitment on a daily basis, foster fidelity and the desire to perpetuate one's experience. When that happens, we know that we have come to interior truth and we are ready to go ever more deeply into it. The quality of our mental prayer is crucial. The experience of identification in following and in union with Christ and living for Christ is a source of life and joy. Everybody is looking for the experience of intimacy. Where do they find it? In a particular place and situation, even if that involves sacrifice, searching, a change of location or an existential change.

Nowadays in this fluid world, the experience of intimacy may be more difficult to obtain, but that does not mean we can do without it. On the contrary, we need it because we feel the dissonance present in our lives, and the dialectical process we experience calls for a permanent stability to be established or reestablished. Fidelity to the life plan we have adopted is strengthened by repeated profound experiences of intimacy with God, especially when they are experienced and shared in a community that is committed to a common mission of salvation.

The experience of personal fulfillment, of assumed values of intimacy with others and with God, is confirmed by a quality performance in one's mission and a meaningful and competent presence in society. Unlike others, we religious in particular need to dedicate a large part of our time to the mission so as to find in it moments of inspiration which reaffirm our choice of life and strengthen the unity in our lives as a whole. The mission is the expression of a major human characteristic. "The center of man is outside of man. I believe that that is the essential experience of human existence as such. Anyone who thinks he or she is the center is simply mistaken".⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Jane Loevinger, *Ego Development Theory*. Loevinger affirms that those who do not possess themselves surrender themselves. He refers to the sequential process of identity as a path to intimacy followed by a path to generativity, as Erikson would also have said.

⁵⁷ Javier Melloni, José Cobo. *Dios sin Dios Una, confrontación*, Barcelona, Fragmenta Publishers, 2015, p 116.

Living one's profession as a mission is a way of expressing this 'going out from self' in a commitment to the Reign of God. Fidelity takes on board this apostolic center that is situated outside the individual. We know that this becomes easier when we have previously established a good inner unity and satisfaction with the option that has been made.

Sciences present and develop many aspects of human life and processes of growth. Insofar as we are content and satisfied with ourselves, we are more willing to continue. Which human aspects do we consider the most important and which ones do we neglect?

The Community Dimension: fraternity, dialogue, sharing, trust

There has been a change in the central focus of motivation in recent years. We know that everything we experience, directly or indirectly, has an influence on the whole complex of motivations which predispose us to action and leads us to action. From a more conscious viewpoint, the motivations arising from our ideals, our knowledge and the impulses of our will were considered to be decisive. Nowadays, thanks to a broader understanding of human nature and its conscious and sub-conscious dimensions, the affective and relational aspects are accorded a more central role. Emotions are short-lived, but in a world of immediacy, our feelings increase in importance among the criteria for making decisions. People tend to decide according to the way they feel and according to the acceptance they receive from others. Consequently, there is a tendency to continue a thing so long as we feel good. When we feel bad, rejected, isolated or attacked, the tendency is to cease a commitment and look elsewhere for a more satisfying response from other people. It is against this background that the importance of community emerges. Everything possible must be done to make people feel welcome, understood and supported in their life's work. They need to be stimulated by their community to identify with the shared plans.

The community dimension has become one of the most important variables involved in the capacity and the enthusiasm for fidelity. A climate of unconditional sympathy, sharing, dialogue, collaboration and trust make for an ambiance that is favorable to fidelity. This fosters the experience of intimacy between individuals

and with God and increases the readiness for apostolic activity and its efficacy. Our capacities as a community are never exhausted. Community life is always renewing itself in the face of new situations, facts and experiences that are shared with the members of the community and others associated with it as part of the apostolic experience.

All individuals have a profound desire to share their story, their fears, their long term or short-term plans, their strengths, their discoveries, their progress in growth and identity and their challenges from new situations day by day. It is very important that people show empathy for the lives of others and for things that are most dear to them. We are all aware of the bad effects that can arise from prejudice, criticism, bitterness, isolation, rejection and all the other ways to keep people at a distance by opening their deepest wounds. If these negative situations last a long time, people tend to become discouraged and closed in and look for other alternatives, even outside the community. This could eventually put their choice of vocation of life at risk.

The Community dimension has a strong impact on loyalty. People want to be welcomed and to live well. How does our community facilitate fidelity? Is there any aspect that can discourage the process of belonging and continuation?

The Institutional Dimension: an attractive apostolic action plan

We have been considering the things that facilitate fidelity. Firstly, we looked at the dimension of the individual person, then at the community dimension. We shall conclude this session devoted to clarification by looking at the institutional dimension. Of course, these three aspects are not the only facilitators of fidelity. You are invited to fulfill those aspects that contribute to fidelity based on your own direct and indirect experiences.

The more complex situations become the more they tend to destabilize individuals and groups. Individuals really need the support that comes from belonging to a big institution, religious or not. Some people feel attracted to strong institutions because they feel themselves to be weak and incapable of facing up to life. In institutions, they can meet power, prestige and economic assurance. We know that such motivations are not healthy. However, someone

can also find a connection between his personal ideal and the ideal of an institution as expressed in its charism, its spirituality and in his or her experience of its apostolate. People feel proud to take part in the realization of the institutional project, to the extent that the institution offers a life project that is stimulating and attractive in terms of its internal organization and of the life led by its members and in terms of its meaningful apostolic project. "The common project envelops and unifies individuals, communities, and Districts. It also contributes to mutual understanding, participation in meetings and in the evaluation of the personal and institutional story".⁵⁸

The story pays tribute to the individuals who have contributed to the common project. Being honoured in this way reinforces the individuals' self-esteem and corresponds to what they are looking for. They feel stimulated to carry on being faithful in working for the realization of the projects. Nowadays, good apostolic projects that are clear, challenging and engaging will facilitate fidelity because they arouse good experiences in individuals that they can cling to, renew and strengthen.

We all want to feel proud to belong to a particular institution, especially when it has clear and stimulating apostolic projects. Which institutional aspects favor fidelity? How can I see signs that make fidelity difficult?

UNDERSTANDING BETTER WHY COMMITMENTS TO SOME PROJECTS ARE WITHDRAWN: STRUCTURAL QUESTIONS, INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL; THE QUESTION OF PROPORTIONALITY

Up to now, we have looked mostly at the question of fidelity, since that is what interests us most. However, we must also be realistic when faced with the fact that so many religious abandon the religious life that they chose as their life's project. The option for gospel celibacy and its creative observance are not just a matter of a conscious decision. Wanting to is not enough. One must also be able to continue, not just at the moment of making the decision but also throughout the story of the journey that comes after that. Throughout history, there have always

⁵⁸ Cereda, Francesco. *À la recherche de signaux de vitalité dans la vie consacrée*, in: *Fidélité et abandons...* p 75.

been withdrawals. We see small-scale withdrawals all the time. Many people give up on big life-projects that call for total and full-time commitment for the duration. We have all probably felt like giving up on a chosen course of action when the road became difficult. We may continue with the intended project for a variety of reasons. We may continue the commitment for sound reasons, from fear, for convenience, or because of circumstances of over-compensating. We may also continue because the choice we made corresponds to something that lies very deep within us.

Careful discernment may lead people to conclude that a particular path is no longer for them. They make a new option for something that is more true to their inner selves. "God guides each individual in a personal way, and so their generosity and love can be expressed in many different ways".⁵⁹

The situation is the same in other states of life, *mutatis mutandis*. We should also recall that while the Church has always adopted an intransigent position regarding fidelity in marriage which is said to be 'indissoluble', it has always been tolerant when dealing with religious. The procedures for requesting a dispensation from vows have been around for centuries. In terms of fidelity, we may even call into question the system of temporary and perpetual vows.

As we have seen, many factors influence an individual's option and sustain it. Some can even be subconscious and beyond the control of psychological or spiritual will-power. We have already spoken about affective maturity as an important element, and it is one that is becoming increasingly important today. However, there are unforeseen situations which individuals are unable to deal with successfully. Their mechanisms for dealing with them may be weak, especially when the new situations are complex and beyond their real capabilities. This aspect must be kept in mind when considering the complexity of life options since we need to evaluate all the things that can influence the motivations for our actions.

While our whole past experience may influence and predetermine our ideals for the future, one single factor in the past may point to a partial truth or to a certain naivety or superficiality. It is often said that withdrawals are linked to a lack of

⁵⁹ William J. Sneek, *Reasons for Departures from Novitiates*, p 3.

prayer. That is not entirely wrong, but deficiency in prayer and in the depth of spiritual life are symptomatic of many other aspects of human nature that may not be in harmony with the particular life option. It is also true that the ability to pray is something that must be actively learned.

So far, we have stressed the importance of the process of growth and the integration of one's historical situation. We have spoken about the importance of living to the full each stage of life with its own special demands, passing with a certain assurance from one to the next. We have seen the motivating power of the conscious and sub-conscious domains. We have also mentioned the importance of the community and institutional settings. On our own, we can never totally control the internal and external factors, the big challenges that come from cultural and social surprises.

Lack of community support and Institute support, allied to a lack of a graduated proportionality in commitments, can increase anxiety and the probability of failure. There are people who are not built for leading certain projects forward. No matter what great efforts they make, there will always be a certain dissatisfaction and disquiet⁶⁰ It is always good to see that someone has found happiness and peace in their options. Faced with situations we find hard to understand adequately, we can end things by giving up on our project. We cannot accept that giving up on a life project is normal, simple and immediate. For years, these individuals have fought against difficulties, questionings and choices without showing it. They only show it when there is no going back or when other vital commitments make continuation unviable. Before making decisions of this importance, people have struggled, lived with insecurity, looked for alternatives. The decision to change one's state of life produces a lot of suffering, although in some cases it can also produce a feeling of liberation. It can be a positive thing, when these individuals have opted for something different in order to diminish anguish or tension and the anxiety arising from the demands of the situation and the weakness of their capacity to respond to them. Studies relating to the topic of withdrawals are very illuminating. We will refer to them here, indicating their varying scientific value, since they lack an organized

⁶⁰ The thoughts of William J. Sneek, SJ, are very useful: *Reasons for Departure from the Novitiate*, in *Human Development*, vol 7, N° 3, 1986, p. 3.

structure of research method. Luís Oviedo⁶¹ presents a classification of the data on withdrawals collected worldwide. He lists the reasons behind them as follows: conflicts with superiors (17,1 %), crises of faith (5,4 %), problems over affections (43,3 %), immaturity (21,3 %), psychological problems (21,0 %), dissatisfaction and fatigue (28,6 %), other (22,7 %). We can note the predominance of problems of affection, including sexual affectivity in its different manifestations. It is always important to gauge the symbolic value of affectivity and sexuality. Sexuality varies in form and is omnipresent. That means that in every human experience details appear, ways of acting and ideals that are based on gender identity. Many of them are shaped and determined by one's culture. In-depth studies in psychology insist on the plasticity of sexuality, and this can be applied to other important areas of human expression. That means that any aspect of human nature can express itself in the way we experience our sexuality including its genital forms. Immature aspects may express themselves in sexuality, and an individual may turn to genital sexuality to overcome or to compensate for their immature side.

A badly integrated or unintegrated sexuality may hide wounded affections, feelings of inferiority, loneliness, lack of identity, aggression, anxiety in the face of present or future difficulties, hostile surroundings, a lack of satisfaction in life, insecurity about the future, domination, all of which may be reinforced by a lack of understanding in inhospitable communities. As we have pointed out, an individual needs to find satisfaction in order to live. If they do not find it, they will look for it in the intimacy, acceptance and satisfaction offered by others who may not be members of the religious community and may not share the same goals and values. We must also remember that nowadays the alternatives offered by social networking open up many more possible options. This can be an incentive to diversify relationships, sometimes for gratification, but it may also stimulate a search for a healthy individuality. A more holistic support takes this complex fact into account.

In one way or another, all the reasons and motivations behind a withdrawal can be understood as a manifestation of immaturity in certain areas that did not

⁶¹ Luís Oviedo, *Approche et réalité des abandons*, in: **Fidélité et abandons**.. p 48-57. To some extent, the data was confirmed by the Brothers Visitors at their meeting in Rome June 2016.

receive enough consideration or were never fully overcome. It may well be that individual's showed good will in the process, but because of their method of operation or other factors, they were unable to reach integration or overcome aspects inconsistent with their option for the religious life. When someone wants to continue to be a religious but is passionately involved with another, it may mean that their vocation is real but that there are questions of affectivity that make fidelity difficult. That means we cannot automatically conclude *a priori* that there was a lack of vocation. Very often people enter for conscious reasons based on values, but they withdraw for unconscious reasons, which may have been present at the time of entry but remained insufficiently examined.

When people enter the religious life, besides wanting to serve God and his Reign, they may also be seeking to resolve some affective or existential problems. Having said that, it seems that the best thing to do is to help the individual to overcome the immature aspects of their lives in order to find mature ways of expressing their affectivity within the framework of their chosen way of life. As Oviedo says,⁶² this leads us to rethink the process of identification with the Institute, the evangelical project, the possibility of a more affective form of spirituality, the quality of our relationships and friendships. We must remember that the causes for withdrawal are not simple and may not be fully explained by the individual concerned.⁶³

It is better to understand things by taking each case individually and following its itinerary. The explanation for everything lies in the individual's interior life. It is not enough to try and to dissuade without getting down to the root cause. That can be reached by using more effective methods, whether spiritual or psychological, for accessing the individual's interiority. This is very challenging. Anything that helps to understand individuals and their motivations for choice is to be encouraged.

⁶² Luís Oviedo, *Approche à la réalité des abandons...* p 68.

⁶³ Good discernment can help to throw light on these questions. The first step becomes much clearer when the process of personal growth has been completed.

Withdrawals always cause some pain. In general, we have one factor explanation. However, it is something complex that needs to be better understood and looked upon with love. What could be possible causes of withdrawal of the option made? How can we help a joyful and fulfilled fidelity?

DYNAMIC AND CREATIVE FIDELITY AND ACCOMPANIMENT

All the aspects described above are part of a kind of accompaniment. Living together in a community implies a sort of commitment to one another. In the various responsibilities and the social and community roles, we can see that the course of life is easier when there is attentiveness to one another, enthusiasm and mutual acceptance. The more complex the situation, the more change will take place more people may have difficulties in managing their lives and be more vulnerable in the face of challenges. Accompaniment is one of the best ways to encourage fidelity in the adopted course of life.⁶⁴

Authentic community life facilitates fidelity. How do we consider this aspect in our community? Mutual co-responsibility is very important. "Am I responsible for my brother?"

Fidelity as a life-journey

Fidelity is the sum of the small and great acts of fidelity relating to one's life option. The dynamics of life mean that fidelity has no final point at which everything would be securely guaranteed. Since it is always possible for us to succumb to the fragilities of life, fidelity is a positive expression of a life that is accomplished. Like accompaniment, fidelity is primarily the responsibility of the individual who has made an option in life. However, it is supported by a community and by a cause expressed through a particular institution. In following their journey, individuals have a better source of help when their lives have a significance that is confirmed by a community that is attractive as an institution

⁶⁴ We will not explore this important topic here. We will limit ourselves to a few ideas that seem important to us. More and more is being written on this theme with a view to a fuller evaluation of this kind of co-responsibility. I have written more on the topic and the material is available.

and in its apostolic project. There are today many signs of dynamic and creative fidelity that can encourage us.⁶⁵ They include among other things, a stronger sense of belonging to the Church, more dialogue with culture, a certain balance in formation and renewed spirituality. Fidelity is also supported by the fact that care is taken to give real priority to God and to give a witness that is prophetic. Another positive aspect is that our ideas on formation are increasingly more holistic, integral, and continuous and personalized in its methodology.

Fidelity is built with little daily fidelity. It is, therefore, an itinerary. It is good to stimulate experiences and moments to return to the initial reasons for our options and see how we have strengthened them in the course of life.

Accompaniment as care, co-responsibility of community and institutions

Healthy individuals, along with communities that are open and apostolic and institutions that are healthy, vital and active are all indications of the positive quality of the accompaniment given to individual members, especially the most vulnerable.

Accompaniment is based on attentiveness to others in all central aspects of human nature. We accompany the process of physical, psychological and spiritual growth, the process of socialization and the fundamental option for life as a profession and a mission. We accompany the process of growth in the widest sense, especially in the option for a state of life, namely a spiritual life in community with a mission and vows. We accompany people especially in those fragile moments, interior or external, in their process of holistic growth, avoiding infantilism and indifference. We accompany them in recovering from wounds and provide them instead with reconciliation and peace. We accompany and promote creativity concern for others. We accompany them by reinforcing the life options they have made and by opening up the path of fidelity and perseverance.

Accompaniment takes place in every experience of community, in relationship with various human groupings, with superiors or their deputies, with all those entrusted to us. It takes place through interviews, meetings, studies, retreats, apostolic activities, encounters with significant people, etc.

⁶⁵ Cereda, Francesco: *À la recherche de signaux de vitalité...* p. 75-91.

A significant presence as a confrere has its importance in fidelity. Today there is a great relationship between accompaniment and fidelity. How can this happen better in our community?

Dynamic, creative fidelity as a salvific expression of apostolic love

When individuals and groups experience salvation, they tend to start showing fidelity. When they have good experiences of love, intimacy and union (with God, their community and those they serve), people are more capable of saying “Yes” and being faithful. History has been built on people saying “Yes”. Saying “No” has generally not done humanity much good. Human nature longs for dynamic and creative fidelity, especially when it means autonomy, freedom, responsibility and a happy, open life. In every withdrawal, there is a kind of pain and suffering, a feeling of failure.

Obviously, there are times when the withdrawal means freeing oneself from repressive, archaic systems. However, we are ontologically structured in favor of fidelity as an expression of love resembling God’s faithful love. Consequently, educating for love is the great secret of fidelity. In the same way, a great love has apostolic strength and enables others to participate in salvation. In its turn, this shared experience reinforces fidelity and forms the impulse for growth in love and fidelity. There are institutions and communities that stimulate fidelity, while others are an obstacle to it because of their concrete style of life and their relationships.

Fidelity is an act of love and a sign of the Reign. An apostolic dynamic offers an interior satisfaction and indicates the path of fidelity. What options can facilitate us this positive apostolic expression?

SOME INDICATIONS CONCERNING THE PROCESS

Before we conclude, it must be noted that, in principle, fidelity expresses truth more than infidelity does. Infidelity always causes a certain unease. Fidelity produces confidence, security, encouragement, support, freedom and the exercise of one’s energies in the construction of the Reign of God. Dynamic and

creative fidelity makes use of a process of accompaniment and personalized help through the healthy development of individuals. By that, we mean a fidelity to ideals that are challenging, social and spiritual, and which identify and adopt a joint salvific project that is shared with others and is objectively important and consistent. We shall now make a few more remarks relevant to this topic.

Fidelities renewed within a larger fidelity

Fidelity is a process that is the result of education. Small fidelities are learned in childhood. Sensitivity to certain options is also learned and shows a hierarchy of values. Gradually, the individual takes on more and ever greater options in line with the demands of fidelities. They also need to feel the satisfaction that comes from fidelity. Some moments in life are more suitable than others for making options of a state of life. Options do not guarantee that there will be a visible follow-up. If someone has not reflected enough before deciding to choose, life will make them think again. However, fidelity still does not guarantee that people will be aware of the consequences of their decisions at any particular stage in their lives.

New situations may arise, each more important than the others, and they may nullify the previous options. It is necessary, however, to hold to two positions. On the one hand, we need to watch ourselves and our situation carefully to ensure responsible control over the changes that come about. On the other hand, we need to review the context, the reasons and the motivations involved in the decisions taken, establishing a link between the past and the present to ensure fidelity in the future.

No matter how strong and significant an experience may have been, if it is not repeated, renewed and reinforced, it will die in time. Repetition of an experience can give new vigor to a person's apostolic aspect.

When experience is repeated, it also revives motivations and emotions that were present at the original, significant moment. When positive and meaningful experiences are not repeated, wounds can be reopened and become more painful, because of the weaknesses and compensations for them that start a new process of regression and infidelity. Breaking a promise is not something that happens in a moment. It is the endpoint in a process. As we said above, it is clear that the lack of continuity in a cause or an option does not mean - as some have

thought - that that affects the possibility of salvation. It takes away people's means for growth and an open life, and it reduces their self-esteem and self-respect.

However, it is right to accept an anthropology of limits,⁶⁶ which means that our frailty can lead us to decisions which may weaken smaller options to begin with and then the larger options. Our natural watchfulness regarding others and ourselves facilitates fidelity. We can be faithful by choosing to cultivate our affections, our intelligence and our will in accordance with the choices we have made. On the other hand, we may opt for a particular form of life and then nourish affections, intellectual ideas and other choices that do not match our fundamental option. Over time, any variable in human prejudice or omission will have its effect on our whole personality. A holistic, enlightened development through spiritual values of the Reign can be the way forward to fidelity.

Faithfulness depends on great personal, communitarian and institutional realism. Healthy choices are strengthened by the renewal of them in a structured way. How does this theme come into our daily life?

Community, mission and accompaniment

Looking back over our discussion and analysis so far, it is good to assert once again the importance of community as the locus of fidelity. Community has to be created by trust, by the possibility of dialogue, by sharing, by a deep understanding of the life of each member and acceptance of their personal projects. The community shares faith, the Eucharist, intellectual study and affective experiences. It gives affective support in the face of weaknesses and in happy moments. It ensures a wider presence that includes the families of the members of the community. Shared fidelity produces a sense of self-realization and encouragement, which strengthens the profound desire, to seek God's will.⁶⁷

Community helps us to have and to share deep experiences of faith and of God. It also shares the mission. Its support for the mission is a stimulant that reinforces the option made and gives support to efforts to make the Reign of God visible.

⁶⁶ For a clearer understanding of this anthropology of limits or thresholds, see the writings of Ricardo Peter, especially: *Accepte tes limites, l'imperfection dans les Évangiles, et d'autres.*

⁶⁷ Cf William Sneek p 3.

Community develops a culture of accompaniment that is needed to stimulate the love for fidelity. Accompaniment is a very important means for promoting fidelity. Obviously, we cannot say accompaniment and fidelity are identical. We cannot conclude that, when people discontinue their fundamental option, it is because they have not had any accompaniment. The question of fidelity is much broader and more complex, as we have seen. However, we must not downgrade the importance of accompaniment, especially when it is understood in the way described above.

The community is a sign of the Reign. It expresses itself in the mission and in the sharing of life and faith. Community dynamics, their organization and apostolic expression, can facilitate fidelity. We can talk about how it works in our community.

FORMATION ITINERARY AS DYNAMIC, CREATIVE FIDELITY

Formation, especially in its earlier stages, is generally accused of having been so deficient that it actually caused infidelity. That is partly true, but it also includes some projection and transference of present dissatisfactions onto preceding stages. The fact that one is unable to continue adequately today is projected and transferred to something outside ourselves in a previous time. However, formation is being seen more and more as an itinerary in fidelity. Throughout life and in its various stages, there are events and experiences of formation that can predispose an individual to fidelity.

Formation should help individuals and whole groups to keep following the itinerary. Individuals need to be helped to understand their personal and cultural situations. They require help to accept their own reality as it is, even if they did not consciously make the commitment based on facts and experiences. We learned from models that were a mix of love and a lack of it. We learned from affective models of compensating to which we became attached but which we must leave behind in order to overcome. Once the past has been accepted, values and ideals need to be offered which will attract people and help them feel they are important for the building of the Reign of God. Moreover, it is also important to help people so that they become joyful, motivating forces, capable

of remaining faithful to the decisions they have taken.

This whole process must be reaffirmed, in its entirety and in all its parts, in the context of a supporting community and identified in the context of a significant institution which espouses the cause to which one wishes to commit one's life. In that sense, one must accept the consequences of an inclusive model mentioned by Pope Francis when he said, "Two processes have operated throughout the history of the Church, namely excluding and reintegrating. (...) Ever since the Council of Jerusalem, the way of the Church has always been the way of Jesus, the way of mercy and inclusion. (...) It is the way of the Church not to condemn anybody forever but to extend God's mercy to all who ask for it with a sincere heart. (...) True charity is always undeserved, unconditional and freely given! Consequently, one should avoid any judgements that do not take into account the complexity of different situations. It is equally necessary to pay attention to the way in which people live and suffer because of their condition."⁶⁸

We are all attracted to a deeper and more holistic formation that facilitates life options that have greater freedom and which favors fidelity. Carbalho asserts that we must form people for a more integral and profound life in order to prevent withdrawals and strengthen fidelity.⁶⁹ Formation needs to be holistic, personalized, continued, progressive, gradual and accompanied. It should promote the deployment of one's energies in exactly the way Christ did, namely collaborating with the Father in building the Reign of God.

We can conclude by pointing out some lines for further exploration.

- a. Each person could review the itinerary of their fidelity, the difficulties, the progress, how their motives for fidelity have been strengthened, the practices which have helped them most to grow in fidelity.
- b. Each community needs to create a climate of trust, of welcoming and of understanding which facilitates the sharing of ideas about life, including questions about vocation. Communities also need to ensure that the members have support in their affective and religious life. The Brother Director has an important part to play in this respect.

⁶⁸ Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, n° 296.

⁶⁹Carbalho, José Rodriguez: *Pour une vie consacrée fidèle*, in, *Défis anthropologiques à la formation*. 67° Conventus semestralis, UISG, (2006?) p 39-56.

- c. District Councils, District Assemblies, District Chapters and other authorities must find ways and structures of accompaniment and offer an Institutional Project that is attractive and motivating and promotes fidelity. District Councils must, among other things, look to the method of preparing formators who are aware of and can develop the basic ideas presented above, especially those ideas which promote a fidelity that is dynamic and creative.

The formative process, seen each time as global, integrating, dynamic, as a lifelong journey of all ... all this envisages fidelity to the project of life and the option for the Reign. How do we realize our formative responsibility?

ACCOMPANIMENT IN RELIGIOUS LIFE

Br. Paulo Dullius, fsc

The form of God's action is accompaniment in love, transformation in the Spirit, and resurrected life⁷⁰.

Accompaniment⁷¹: What can be understood

One of the features of human life is the art of living together. Somehow, others are within us. The success of living together defines our sense of life, of self-esteem and value. Human injuries - affective or not, self-valued or not, accepted or not - are born and are developed mainly from the quality of relationships. The living experiences extend throughout life, with features that depend on age, culture, and surrounding context.

As we are aware of what happens outside of ourselves, we also see others and evaluate them. Others do the same thing with us. In addition, we are constantly evaluated. Since early age, we are educated to see, to judge, to compare. Therefore, there is a tendency to observe and be interested in the others. The underlying deep dynamic is that anthropological one, meaning a desire and a growing force in love, in truth, in goodness. We want this for ourselves and, ultimately, we desire it for the others.

In accompaniment, the person or groups are those who carry out the journey. The one who accompanies gives support and equips himself/herself with content and methods so that the person or group can accomplish what they set out. This means that no accompanying can replace the accompanied one, but has to

⁷⁰ Denis Edwards. **How God Acts**, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2010, p 51

⁷¹ In this text I take into account many contributions from *individuals and institutions*. Readers can easily recognize the inspiration that several authors present to the topic, which I value, but I will not quote directly, which can be a word limit, but certainly do better flow reading and understanding.

facilitate his/her the way. He/she cannot, either, impose on his/her vision. His presence is positive and is significant while holding and facilitating the journey of the accompanied. The one who accompanies must have already accomplished successfully his/her own journey or, at least, be well underway in it so he/she can understand the successes and difficulties, the critical moments, the strengths, weaknesses, ideals, situations and also the best means for the integral growth of the accompanied. All accompaniment requires a deep interest, love and respect for the person or group for it is assumed or be assumed project, by the reinforcement and strengthening of its being and within a growth process, while the journey being held in peace and joy. Great empathy facilitates accompaniment. When it refers to a group that accompanies, one needs a structure that follows well established rules within the context to avoid excessive projection of personal problems. These difficulties could detract from the purpose of the sharing.

By their own experience and journey already done, those - individual or group - that carry out accompaniment, do it with joy, with love and zeal. Good accompaniment is the result of a fulfilled life. People too fragile, immature, ill... have difficulty of a real accompaniment. This deep care, zeal and interest for the good of others transforms the accompaniment into a significant human experience that we all need.

All of us have experience of accompaniment in our lives, especially in early childhood. Somehow, all of us go on needing it more intensely in certain moments of life and at certain stages and, less intensely, at other times. That is why the content that involves accompaniment ought to be integrated into our daily lives: not interpreted as a result of immaturity or shortcomings, but as something characteristic of the human condition. He who accompanies needs to be powered by a heart full of love and wanting to do well, of understanding, acceptance and mercy. It is in this sense that one can speak of a *Culture of accompaniment* signifying this experience as truly communitarian and fraternal which characterizes us. In other words, accompaniment puts us in an arduous and perseverant process of humanization, in the broadest sense of the term. All collaboration in an authentic humanization involves some kind of accompaniment. People more satisfied with themselves, their choices, with their communications, with their self-esteem, with the broad values internalized... these

people tend to accompany others, especially the weakest and most vulnerable. People more frustrated in life, more bitter in their lives have more difficulty to deciding to follow. Accompaniment is a characteristic of human health for both individuals and for groups.

What are the main characteristics of the accompaniment? My accompaniment experience.

Historical Aspects of accompaniment

Accompaniment is not a new reality. It has existed as long as there has been humanity. Generally, it consisted of vigilance, of advice and of the oversight maintained by the elders over the younger. Later people with legitimate power accomplished it. This model has been mixed with control, domination, with objective care, with the right to guide decisions. In times in which they are most vulnerable, groups or people even want some kind of accompaniment in order that the path and direction of life be made easier. This form of influence and control has been transformed, in many cases, in a cultural characteristics with its consequences in the history of individuals and groups. In some cultures, the gender issue became one of the dominant characteristics with regard to responsibility and in the methodology used by those who accompany and those who are recipients of it. Thus, for example, in a strongly patriarchal culture, it was the men, the 'elders' to whom the accompaniment was entrusted. However, women have always found their discreet way of accompaniment, although not official.

Parents accompany their children. This accompaniment has the form of education, initiation and introduction into society. Through this process, they want to preserve the traditions and the values. They also want to facilitate the path of growth of the children, driven by a positive desire to overcome obstacles and succeed in life. Only physically, psychologically or spiritually sick parents give up following up their children. Educators play the same role of accompaniment. Although accent is centered on more intellectual content, the educator as a person also has his/her influence on the students. How many religious leaders and superiors of religious institutions put accompaniment as one of their great responsibilities!

Depending on the areas or on the most valued human aspects, some people assume the role of accompaniment, almost like professionals. Even though it has a diversity of expression, most of these influences have been more behavioral and less motivational. The behavior was looked at and, from it, the guidance were shown through the approval or correction. This scheme later has become dominantly moralistic. The area of the spiritual focused most studies on practices of accompaniment. The role of director and spiritual guide, the interviews on the account of behavior, has the role of the sharing that was established between the person and the one who played the spiritual mentor role. The techniques were also highly developed, and the number of people grew, who made and make the psychological area the center of accompaniment instead of being only the spiritual are. The knowledge that the human sciences have developed about the human person is admirable, which opens up the range of possible areas that are the potential of follow-up, especially in what they represent as new, as surprise and unpredictable. The diversity of methods, visions of various human sciences with their respective practices, indicates the complexity of this psychological area. Accompaniment that focus on spiritual and psychological areas have been, in general, from a superior to a subject, from someone who knows to someone who is learning. In addition, they have been essentially individual, personal. From that personalized retreats and individual therapeutic techniques were developed. These are all forms of accompaniment. This concept has been generalized from a very distant past to the present day.

Today, the social aspect due to the more collective awareness, understanding of group dynamics and the enhancement of social influence in individual behavior has been much developed. In addition, the objective capacity of the superiors being the only ones who know the truth and the will of God for very complex personal and group situations is questioned. The authority of experts is replacing largely the one of the legitimate superiors.

All of us manage our lives in a world of limits and possibilities. At the same time, objective capacities linked to good and truth can happen in anyone who can manifest them to others both in relation to oneself and in relation to groups. This does not mean a devaluation of what happened in the past, but to the forms of the past one needs to add other aspects to accompaniment so that it will always be more effective and efficient. With this new reality, one has to give up a vision

of accompaniment that comes from the superior to the subject, from indications of behavior, corrective moralistic attitudes etc., and one needs to walk more towards an understanding accompaniment in the objective sense of the word, based on charity. As we will see below, the content and the areas of accompaniment also expand, no longer just in one area, especially spiritual, but the content of accompaniment will be anthropological, reaching the physical, psychological, professional, relational, social, spiritual, cultural areas and others. Through the past and present reality, through the human constitution we cannot live without accompaniment. It can be questionable according to the method and content, but not if it should exist or not. It is impossible to avoid ways of being and acting indicating some form of accompaniment. Today there is an institutionalized desire of accompaniment manifested especially by the younger generations. What needs to be improved is the understanding of it, extending it beyond the spiritual or psychological areas and also overcoming the understanding that delegates this mission solely to superiors or specialized people only. We need, of course, people specialized in accompaniment, but accompaniment cannot be delegated solely to them. Something very positive consists in purifying the understanding of negative aspects that possibly were introduced throughout history, as well as overcoming dependence in favor of a personal and group responsibility, or even to overcome a judging vision for one of a stimulating growth. It will be of great value to go back to deep human dynamics that are healthy and which are oriented towards a positive desire in relation to others, especially when they are weak or are in situations where they could act and live, injuring themselves and moving away from their more authentic self, expressed in the community.

Today, therefore, we have better conditions to accomplish a healthier accompaniment; more compassionate, more proactive and more objective. We need an integral comprehensive of the human person and of a just consideration of the many variables in human behavior.

There has always been some kind of accompaniment in humanity. Which forms were effective? In them, we can discover a positive intentionality, of love.

The Benefices of Accompaniment

In a world quite marked by individualism, by compensating for the personal and collective past frustrations, by the increased awareness of freedom and autonomy, so has the pursuit of self-sufficiency. We cannot reduce reality to the cultural and historical changes. The change of paradigm also refers to the way by which existential aspects are constructed, reflected upon and decided. The diverse social reality today, the personal, social and cultural liberation of repressed forms in the past, come accompanied by new situations that require interdependence. Thus, the growth process is facilitated and new 'injuries' that in subsequent generations leave dissatisfactions, frustrations and countervailing trends. There are events that are inscribed in human reality, to further cultural and historical differences. One of these realities is accompaniment. The form and the personal and social motivations can vary greatly, but it is not possible to prevent different forms of accompaniment.

Personal and social balance depends largely on attention to reality, the attention to the way in which individuals and groups can live without exaggerated expenditure of energy. This caring attention is the way of accompaniment. Where this caring attention happens better, people and groups benefit more, as there are people, groups and structures that accompany all human expressions that come from their interior and exterior.

We need to recognize the wonder of so many people who fraternally accompanied others more fragile and even structures that, without the mediation of some kind of accompaniment would make their lives more difficult. How many educational processes have left their positive mark on humanity! How many good testimonies continue to indicate ways! An accompaniment well accomplished benefits all involved in it. How grateful we are to Jesus Christ for having accompanied the people who came to him, for having accompanied the Apostles in the process of moving from mere disciples to apostles, because he put his care to as many as different situations to heal people! How important the repeated presence of Saint Paul to primitive communities was, be it through his person, or someone he delegated and received an order to do so, and/or writing letters to them! How important was the accompaniment of God to his people, especially after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, by sending the Holy Spirit! How significant was the presence of the Church to the martyrs, the missionaries, the

poor, the sick and the needy! How comforting the 'communion of saints', the unity of all Christians is! How important were guidelines given by Religious Superiors, by General Chapters! How important the pastoral visits were!

Somehow, all of us want to be accompanied, especially in specific moments or delicate situations. We also note unsuccessful or distorted accompaniments of true zeal, care and help. There have been cases of lack of interest, abuse of power, dependency, or being an obstacle to personality development or a handicap in the development of mission ... But this cannot shake us nor make us ignore so much good done by the fraternal, friendly, solidarity of presence, and deeply caring and attentiveness.

Regardless of the historical style of accompaniment, we must recognize the benefits of it. This also applies to religious institutions. We know the zeal with which the founders accompanied their early followers in fidelity to the work that is God's. This accompaniment has facilitated the institutional identity and given emotional and spiritual security to all. The fidelity to the charism, the continuous stimulation of the personal and community journey are ways in which institutions discovered a healthy way of accompaniment.

A good accompaniment has always been a benefit for those involved. The importance of this has led to the development of specializations. We are invited to deepen the subject.

Anthropological characteristics as an expression of life and accompaniment

In a not too distant past, accompaniment had its well-defined areas. It was inspired by the 'wise' that each culture had privileged to ensure the initiation processes. In addition to ensuring the fidelity to taboos, these 'wise' penetrated in the secrets of the gods and reported them to the human beings. Within Christianity, also some people specialize in the understanding of the Gospel, the Christian life, and God's design for each person and for each group and community. Because of this, accompaniment became a more spiritual-shaped vigilance of people and groups. One of the results of this spiritual vigilance was spiritual discernment. Discernment is a form of accompaniment. All of us know -

some more, some less - of discernment, so this issue can be developed later. What should be safeguarded is that discernment continues being a significant form of accompaniment for all times, perhaps one of the most significant. We all know the complexity involved in a deep discernment.

If care and solicitude are general attitudes, a broad and motivating predisposition of action, will be open to other areas of human life and not only or mainly to the spiritual area and for the option for the states of life. Parents concentrate their care on the body and in the child's affection. Educators pay more attention to learning and group integration. Spiritual directors are aware of the journey of faith, the motivation and loyalty to God. Medical doctors try to care for health. Therefore, we could continue this enumeration of distinctions.

If accompaniment is a form of fraternal presence, a care, a concern ... it needs to be extended to all areas of human life, to any age or situation. Assuming that life is a journey, and in this journey a person and groups will be faced with new situations, some more familiar, some less, some more simple and others more complex and different. In this sense - individuals, groups, institutions - can benefit from accompaniment to maintain and strengthen the orientation for the good, for truth, for beauty and for love.

A good accompaniment includes a variety of human aspects. The body has its dynamics, its laws that need to be known, cultivated, respected and integrated. We also need to consider the body of others and the social values linked to it. We have the material reality that requires smooth integration into the general life project and original purpose for which they exist. The use and abuse can not be irresponsible. Our human constitution includes an area that we may call the psychological dimension. To it belongs affection, intelligence and the will. In addition, sociability belong to this dimension with all their diverse capabilities. Our affection needs to be developed, and without limit, but to the service of love. Our intelligence has immense possibilities, but it must serve the human being to understand itself, each other, God, the universe. Intelligence needs to keep in mind, above all, the dimensions connected to life, to communication, to love, to faith and to God. Our will concludes our affective and intellectual processes and turns them into decisions. The best decisions are those that favor the good of the whole person and groups, which solidify the options of the mission and fidelity to promises made responsibly. The whole process of socialization,

communication, self-esteem and self-respect is a learning that takes place with possible risks. For that, accompaniment could be so useful.

This kind of this learning through orientation, identification and imitation⁷² are forms of accompaniment, and its success depends on the quality and methodology of those who accompany and of the preconditions of the one who is accompanied. Somehow, the accompaniment has in mind these dynamics of the potentialities and their integral development in personal, group and institutional life.

The spiritual dimension is a part of human constitution. It exists as constitution, but it needs to be developed within the authenticity of its existence. As it refers to the whole of life, we achieve by cultivating life, by the transcendent values, by the existential options, by entering into groups of the same state of life, by the relationship with God, the general meaning of life. The spiritual dimension is a broader dimension and this explains why so many groups are interested in it, especially ideological and religious groups. There are those who use religion to free the person of immature consequences in any human area to be freer to serve gratuitously. Religions tend to specify the will of God for people, for groups and for the most diverse institutions. We all know the human dimension of religions and their effort to come nearer to the spiritual God, who is beyond anthropomorphizations. The spiritual journey is one of the most complex ones in life. That is why the one who pursues it, receives special attention from accompaniment. Simplification of human life can turn people and the groups away from the inherent truth in the human being and acting.

Any human area, as we have already stated, is subject to accompaniment. In any area, one can profit with the care and solicitude of those around us and help discerning healthier options. What needs to characterize this accompaniment is the chaste and respectful love for the person lived in celibacy or in marriage; chaste and respectful love lived in poverty, in one's own material realities (body and property) and those of others; chaste and respectful love lived in personal growth, community, obedience, in relationships, in fulfillment of God's will, in fidelity to the charism and mission; lived in dynamics of social realities and new

⁷² Francesco Alberoni draws attention to the learning processes related to the indication and identification of others towards us and we pass them on to others. René Girard speaks of positive and negative imitation.

signs of the times and of the changing world. This care is an attitude that can be temporary or can also be a general attitude of being a time of caring. We need both.

The accompaniment is realistic and refers to all aspects and expressions of human life. We can talk about the anthropological vision present in our accompaniment process.

Who does the accompaniment: people, community...

If at one time accompaniment has been entrusted to some specific people, today we encourage the awareness of the responsibility of consciousness that there is a co-responsibility in the process of humanization. Accompanying becomes a social reality. No one can say 'he has nothing to do with his brother' because somehow we influence others. With the knowledge we have today of the conscious and mostly unconscious, it is impossible not to enter into the lives of others. It is not possible to make an impenetrable barrier. People capture our quality of being and our intentions. There is no neutrality in these human interactions: they are either of a positive quality or they may predispose to regression and a kind of confusion.

Who would be responsible for accompaniment? The response cannot be narrow but wide, i.e., all of us are responsible in a variety of ways. There is a constant human interrelation that in some way and in some cases assumes the characteristics of accompaniment. 1) The first subject of accompaniment is the person in relation to him/herself, to his/her existential project, to the responsibility for his/her development, by developing his/her potentialities, for his/her successes, for his/her options. The Gospel reminds us that - in the case of a talent, and this buried - nobody can delegate his/her identity and responsibility to others, and still project out to others, these responsibilities. In the free part that characterizes us, we are those who choose among the best opportunities of growth, esteem, respect and self-worth. We cannot standardize immature attitudes that include delegating responsibility to others when they belong to us. No one can blame fate, with basis, or blame others for one's own current situation. We can grow to freedom or less freedom depending on choices we make. Each

person makes commitments in relation to others: life, gender option, the state of life, values and identity institutions. Faced with a plentitude of alternatives, each person lives his/her project and journey with autonomy and commitment. This charitable vigilance on oneself is a very healthy form of accompaniment.

2) As we assume that parents have greater responsibility towards their children than their neighbors or strangers. Likewise there are significant people, many of them with legitimate authority, to which are conferred a "right" and a responsibility for accompaniment. Historically, the people of authority and power are the ones who most played this role. Many of them have assumed the right to distinguish between right and wrong, presenting the image that they themselves were the most perfect. This led them to develop a great spirit of observing the others, and even referencing God as their source for their interpretation. On the other hand, aware of the responsibility entrusted to them, led many of them foster charitable observations, to do their best so that the path of the accompanied was without many obstacles but always within the designs of God. In this sense, a confessor accompanies those who turn to him; a superior - director, provincial, general - accompanies those entrusted to him; formators accompany those within the institution and those in the process of entering it; an educator accompanies the students; a doctor accompanies a patient who needs care; a therapist accompanies those who use him to get to know themselves better and accept themselves better and accept others better and awaken in themselves to a new sense of life, and accompaniment in the re-education and the structuring of a new life. Many times a confrere, a friend, accompanies another in very different situations.

3) There is a third group who does accompaniment. I refer to the groups, to the community, to the Province, to the Provincial and General Chapter, to the Church and to the peer groups ... No one can 'wash their hands'. Somehow, we are all responsible for the fidelity of individuals and groups, especially for those we are closer to. We are all responsible for the proclamation of the Gospel, for the fidelity to the charism, for the personal and community growth in different human characteristics. Provided with a caring, zeal and solicitude is more a vigilant, lovely and compassionate presence, and less a system of control and judgment. The building of an authentic community is one of the best ways of accompaniment, since all 'rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep', taking each

other's burden. So many understandings about the purpose of the community, of the Chapters let you see the great accompanying responsibility present in them.

Somehow, we are all accompanying. We are all co-responsible for each other. How does this happen in our community and District?

Who receives accompaniment: people, communities

We have already made it clear above that every person is part of a group and it is up to each person to develop him/herself in so many characteristics of the human being. There will be a time when he/she gets from others and there will be time when he/she should be a significant presence to others. The Individual - and the groups - also enters an unknown world, ever new. In more traditional societies, this inclusion is quite simple and quite predictable, tending to uniformity. Conversely, in less traditional societies or in times of change, as the current time, there is so much difference between that traditional society proposes and the current and future challenges, that the area of the unknown, of improvisation, and the surprising and amazing increases its range of horizons and may have its consequences in the personal and institutional balance. Regardless of the good intention and effort, the weaknesses can manifest themselves more, the anxieties may appear more, and the resulting regressions, evasions and compensations can appear. There may even be a difficulty to carry forward the personal or the group project with freedom and objectivity in the short, medium and long terms. The plethora of alternatives and certain in differentiation of values increases the complexity of the best personal and group and community choices. Therefore, collective resources are important to facilitate the good of all concerned and of the group itself.

Acknowledging the above said we can assume that the interdependence, the cooperation, the association, the observation, the understanding and the deepening experiences can be of great value and are even necessary for healthy growth without the loss of energy in systems of regression, of doubt and uncertainties. All we need - as already stated - some form of accompaniment because we are all in need of some compass as a general guide or at some

moments or aspects of our lives. Instead, therefore, to think that the children, the young people, the subjects are the ones who need accompaniment; we are assuming that no one is so self-sufficient, free and mature to always know God's will for oneself and for others. There are not the superiors and the structures or communities that are exempt, but we all need to consider the anthropology of the limit, i.e., in the abandonment of a Greek perfectionist vision to assume the human reality that is faced with the limit, with weakness, with evil. Jesus assumed his life and his message being among the people, and their limits are well known to us. Human limitation is not a moral evil, but a human condition. In concrete human reality all benefit from mutual responsibility, guaranteed personal and group uniqueness.

The common principle of accompaniment is adapted to each personal, cultural and institutional reality. Some people are more fragile and inexperienced in facing life, and accompaniment can be very fruitful for them. There are those who acquired a personal dynamic growth and already determine on their own accompanying processes. There are also those who consider themselves self-sufficient and 'perfect' and with the 'right' to feel dispensed from accompaniment. The seeds that the sower sows and that fall on the hard road, insensitive and impenetrable, inflexible ... is the first obstacle to the growth journey. There are also people and social and community situations that have strong characteristics of superficiality and that overly need external stimuli. We can still find those who put themselves in a social context so diverse in values and even no values and, consequently, their good qualities and good intentions cannot provide a developed identity in the service of the cause of the Reign. Even the good seed must be cultivated in a soil with difficulty to remain itself soft, available, deep and free of major obstacles, particularly, of the context and of the negative fantasy and imagination.

From an early age and somehow we always need others in our life. This means a willingness to be accompanied as an act of charity on the part of those who do it and gratitude on the part of those who receive it.

What do we have to accompany

What would be the content and matter of an accompanying method? The content, in short, is life as humanizing commitment to a fulfilled life with and for others, in just societies. A fulfilled life means to have succeeded in life as a whole and in many specific aspects. To have a fulfilling life, one must have been successful in some socially valued profession. It also helps significantly to be an institution in which he/she identifies his/her personal ideal with the ideal of the institution; where each person and group finds support to carry out their life project that includes others. A fulfilled life also means growth to adulthood and integration of all constitutive personal characteristics. In this process, there is a special place for group interaction and community engagement. We live with and for others. All this life experience has surprises, easy aspects and resistances, slow or faster progress, fears and support. Likewise, the social ambiguity offers us a challenge. The sense of justice requires going beyond the circle of close acquaintances to give space to everyone, even to those who have no rights, that is, those whose dignity must have a minimum of opportunities.

That said, and recalling aspects mentioned above, the content or the object of accompaniment is the person and the groups, and the institutions in what they are in three aspects: a) what they are as a possibility and as potentiality; b) what they are at present, that is, how they are realizing their potentials; c) what they could be within the existential possibilities. This latter aspect includes what the person and/or the group can expect specifically from them, given their history, their cultural context, their objective strengths, their values, their opportunities of today and tomorrow.

We can specify some human variables that are considered content of accompaniment. We follow the physical development, health, appreciation of one's own body and that of others, we respect and obey the rhythm of the body; we avoid exposing it to unnecessary dangers and too little exercise; we take care of a healthy diet. We are also attentive to the development of affect, to situations that could hurt the self-esteem and self-respect; we take care of healthy relationships with others, be they superiors, subordinates, equal, known or not, close or less close. The emotional issue has its process of expression balanced by age, gender, context and culture. Adequate affective experience produces growth and opens the person more and more to others.

We also follow a healthy development of intelligence to understand oneself, the others and the world. Our intelligence has virtually unlimited possibilities. Its development will depend on opportunities, social support and stimuli. It is always important to have access to good information that promotes human dignity, existential values, the good and the true. This needs discernment that is facilitated in a accompanying climate. Something similar can be said of the will: it must be exercised for personal responsibility and autonomy. The will concludes the affective and intellectual processes. If the will is well used it avoids infantilisms and dependencies or else, avoiding decisions above its capabilities that would result in feelings of failure and likely regressive or childish reactions.

Accompaniment considers the capacity of the individual to live community life and it also pays attention to psychological and spiritual issues present in the vows. In 'chastity', one accompanies a person in his ability to live an integrated affection and self-sacrifice, with healthy affective bonds. In poverty, one is attentive to freedom from goods and material realities avoiding compensation or projective transfers indicating a lack of freedom in front of these, such as autonomy. In obedience, the accompaniment is oriented towards the responsibility and freedom before God's will discerned as a person and as a community, and the consequent ability to follow it.

Another area of accompaniment we can find in the meaning of life expression. This area includes the areas of spiritual and religious expressions. Accompaniment includes issues such as faith, spiritual practice in prayer, the sensitivity of charity and mercy to the needy. It also considers how to live the ideals, the dimension of the finite, the reality of evil and one's own guilt and that of others; it considers the ability of understanding the weaknesses of others and the reconciliation and process of peace making. Accompaniment also assesses the degree of maturity of their religious experience, both in personal practices as in community expressions. Psychoanalysis has much criticized the immature processes present in the religious expressions, wishing to be mature. Criticizes narcissistic ways, maternal dependence, and parental addiction and encourages the abandonment to God's will. (Cf Carlos Dominguez Morano, in: Praying after Freud).

Fidelity to the existential project and to the state of life, positive life experiences, and the obstacles... all of this constitutes content of care, zeal, solicitude, that are

characteristics of the accompaniment.

We discuss the contents of the accompaniment, which follow the human characteristics and their expressions with the others. There are areas in which there is more accompaniment care and others less. We need to balance and meet any human aspect.

Accompaniment as a general attitude and in specific situations and moments

We are considering accompaniment as a caring attitude and solicitude for all concerned and for everyone involved. It is the attitude of zeal, of attention, of charity, of responsibility for one another. In some specific situations, this accompaniment takes on a more intense quality. This can happen at certain stages of life or specific experiences that are delicate and could cause anxieties and regressions if there is not someone 'outside' that helps clarify the present moment and opens healthier alternatives to overcome these moments.

We certainly need to structure accompanying as an attitude of our daily lives. However, as we have already said, there are difficult situations in our lives, and surprising in a person's life and it benefits from a more focused accompaniment, more oriented to very concrete issues. Let us remember again that what is said in relation to individuals is also true for the communities and groups. There are times and situations in which groups, institutions, congregations can go through similar situations.

While human development, the early times of life - prenatal and first years - are characterized by greater reliance on the external in many human senses. Moreover, the quality of accompanying is very important. The socialization outside the family circle, the local community circle, the country circle and others, of the academic environment, the entry into religious or married life, a sense of crisis and mission in middle age, the passage to retirement and the proximity of

death... are critical situations that require an accompaniment due to the complexity and novelty that arise. It also happens in the processes of the exercise of the mission in places so different or in the aging process when feelings of worthlessness and loneliness heighten. This reality includes the experience of the physical itself, the way of affective expressions and the integration of gender and sexuality.

People and groups can see themselves in front of new health situations or loss of close people and need to be helped to work through the mourning, the separation. This same mourning applies to situations and people who are no longer close, to the cultural realities that are no longer today. All renewal and adaptation in face of new social and religious situations may require a consistent journey of accompaniment. Sometimes the situations of everyday life can lead to discouragement, to doubts about the decisions made and needed objectification. Sometimes the shaken existential sense can lead to crisis of faith, trust and doubt about the ability to keep the promise and responsibility in front of what was lived and experienced. This difficulty can also come from the institutional reality that has lost the 'dreams', the prospects, the founding impetus. Many of these situations can have characteristics of surprises or may be the result of little infidelities that, over time, undermine and question the entire assumed life project. The surprises are understood within the reality and cannot shake the whole personal and group itinerary. The unsatisfactory result of a journey needs to be done to find the way, and prevent the current situation as the only intervening variable for decisions for today and tomorrow. The accompaniment - of a specialist or of the community - helps clarify the facts and experiences, equipping individuals and groups with other aspects that can contribute in overcoming the difficulties.

There are situations more favorable to our construction and expression of love. It is the dimension of everyday life. There are moments that are more delicate and situations that require specific forms of accompaniment. It is good to talk about this.

Obstacles to the accompaniment: infantile treatment (condescension), omission

Accompaniment is one of the main features and responsibilities of the community. In a family, with the necessary differences, all accompany those who live in it. Just see how someone interacts in the family: when someone is seriously ill, who is depressed, who is an alcoholic, who leaves home and does not give news about where and how he/she is, who is having trouble or dies. Many of these signs stem from the blood relationship. However, there is only one way of respect and interest. Healthy people and institutions make accompaniment one of their features. One can speak of something similar of the religious establishment, of the community. In addition to the care similar to the family, the community cares for the affective climate, for the career opportunities, for information, for the fidelity to God's project for each of its members. It watches over the quality of the spiritual life and of the apostolate, it calls for forgiveness, for the consciousness of the loving presence of God.

Accompaniment is very complex, and as such, it includes real possibilities of limitation. We cannot ask everything from the others or from ourselves. There will be imperfections, but at the same time accompaniment wants to facilitate the full growth of all involved. It needs to avoid, therefore, two extremes: infantilism (childishness) and omission.

Infantilism means a way of thinking that considers others as children and unable to manage their life, always in need of someone to help them or replaces them in their decisions. It tends to avoid healthy tensions and challenges of growth. For those who coordinate groups and institutions, it is more comfortable that the others have little opinion, little criticism, little autonomy, little responsibility and freedom. The socialist regimes have always had infantile ways in leading people. Government is the provident 'good father'. For a long time, the authorities in religious life and the structures largely supported this dependency. In some cases they defended obedience as a virtue when other motivations underlay such as power and control. When one wants to favor a type of value, usually two strategies are used: to exalt the value and excellence of what you want - obedience, in the case here -; and devalue or create guilt in those who do not enter the desired system. Many times, while exalting the positive side, presenting

arguments of tradition, history, and of the past, are used, and are shown examples of punishments of those who did not observe the required standard of conduct. We know it is hard to find a pedagogy that progressively delegates freedom and autonomy and the person or group be able to use this with responsibility, to the age and situation of the moment. Parents know that it is easier to control children, but do not know quite so well when they grow to adolescence, youth and adulthood. In religious life sometimes it is hard to develop trust and delegate adequate autonomy to the people involved. Many times, there is exaggerated control on secondary aspects rather than explicit stimuli to growth. It is not suitable to always rationalize by saying that people are not able. People grow to the degree that they have good experiences in a given age and life situation, making them look for better alternatives for the future. Exaggerated controls, judgments, little autonomy, incompetence... everything can lead to an infantilizing way. Rigid, inflexible, uncreative structures tend to give little chance of growth. Today everyone wants to participate more in decisions and want to know better the reasons for the options, be more autonomous, even if there are immature elements in the motivations of these desires. Often community life can strengthen infantilism systems. Over time, dissatisfaction, bitterness and lack of meaning in life are established.

On the opposite side of excessive control that does not allow for growth, we can see the 'omission.' Omission assumes that people are adults and know what they should be and do without guidance or accompaniment. This assumption speaking ideally is interesting, but the human reality is different. People feel 'abandoned' to themselves. New realities arising from age, circumstances, context and human and religious development make people or groups faced with something unknown and new with which they did not develop familiarity or ability to overcome these situations without a great expenditure of energy. In these cases, often people and groups develop anxieties, insecurities and guilt so that they become paralyzed or regress to earlier stages of more tranquility, or enter into compensatory systems on the physical or psychological level. To defend a pseudo-autonomy and to keep personal and community gratifications, we can develop theories and practices that enhance the omission. One can understand this also as a reaction to a time of excessive control, enabling the desire for freedom and autonomy.

Instead of opting for over-control or by omission, good accompaniment evaluates the appropriateness to be or not be more directive or rely more on people, or see the best pedagogy according to the people and the situations of the moment. The result of infantilism and the omission ends up being about the same: an immature way of being. Infantilism, or control, does not let people grow; omission allows the emergence of situations that lead to anxiety and people returning to be immature children. Our purpose is to promote growth, to integrate a person's life and offer it as a gift. We do it associated with others in a humanizing mission. In this case, great attention is paid to the content and method, adapted to the circumstances of the personal and group realities. Our purpose is to promote growth, to integrate its life and offer it as a gift. We do it associated with others in a humanizing mission. In this case, a great attention is paid to the content and method, adapted to personal and group circumstances and realities.

One cannot delegate the responsibility for accompanying. We need to discern well to avoid casting the recipient in the role of a child and omission. How does this happen to me, in the community, in the District?

Forms and accompaniment techniques - structures and responsibilities

Instead of writing many specialized techniques of accompaniment, we can indicate practices and forms that already exist and others that might help as expressions of charity, care, hospitality, solicitude, responsibility and faithfulness to the promises made to oneself, to the group and to God.

Spiritual direction and the human sciences have developed techniques of accompaniment preserving more the individuality of the person and specific individual issues. These techniques have developed useful methodologies that need to be well known by the community with regard to positive and negative social accompaniment. These methods need to be more circumstantial than permanent. If they have to be permanent, it is necessary to consider the possibility of the presence of dependency, domination and even professional incompetence of the expert.

Accompaniment needs to give importance to a deep self-knowledge from the

contributions of the human sciences - psychology, philosophy, sociology and theology, especially, the spiritual discernment. These skills include a conscious and unconscious access to the personal story in its facts and consequent strengths, weaknesses, desires, ideals, expectations, visions of the world and of God. Today we know that this access through personal and cultural narratives that help give an identity and understand the whole predispositions needed to act. Therefore, accompaniment helps to look at the past - archaeological (historical) aspect - to understand the present and plan for the future - teleological aspect. We have good examples of narrative in the Bible, and in some books of Paul Ricoeur.

Thus considered, accompaniment includes the whole life of individuals and groups. The access to the interior is supported by readings, reflections, experiences, meditation and the practice of Prayerful Reading of the Word. The community dimension of accompaniment takes place in meetings of personal and community sharing in which respect, self-esteem, the dignity of all involved is maintained, secured. There is also the accompaniment of new realities that could facilitate the growth or stagnation of the people in their process. It includes also the daily sharing of all involved. One cannot forget either the studies of the knowledge of the reality and of the people we live with. Access to other sources of knowledge and experience requires a consciousness of accompaniment.

A special mention has to be given to the meetings of groups for personal and group sharing, to the deep emotional bonds established from these ideals and of the basic Christian and religious choices. We can also cite the importance of retreats and of recollection days, times of Provincial and General Chapters as institutional forms of personal and group sharing. The community project includes ways of accompanying both the individual but also the community. Each person needs to understand his/hers first responsibility in face of oneself. Then he/she shares in the community participation of his/her options and favors, this way, that the community also makes itself co-responsible for the fidelity and growth of all and every one.

Personal growth and maturity turn accompaniment into a more cheerful and generous sharing of the successful existential experience and the one of union with God in following Jesus Christ, the result of continuous discernment.

Just as there is a creative diversity of accompaniment for each state of a person's life and groups, there are also characteristics in each stage of life, of the formation, culture and historical context. The institutionalization of these processes is up to each person, but also to the community, especially to those who have received legitimate authority - superiors, coordinators - to watch, to ensure, to care and heal within the charity and mercy. The Rule, the Guide for Formation of the Brothers, the Guide of formation for Mission are part of this institutionalization. The forms of accompaniment are expressed in them in a narrow and broad sense of what this means.

There are many ways and techniques to accompanying. Many of them are available and within reach. Which of these do we use in our community and which ones could we use?

Culture of accompaniment - vote of association

One of the understandings of the Vow of Association includes the culture of accompaniment. We are all responsible for those who are associated with us, and we to them. We all want to carry out a project entrusted to us by God, the Church, in the Institute. This zeal and care for each other in achieving this project gives special attention to the most fragile and unprotected; it sustains everyone, even those who have already made a good journey as consecrated persons for a mission to the Reign. We all are mutually responsible for each other's fidelity and growth in love. We carry out the project together, each one within his own characteristics and legitimately differentiated responsibilities. In short, each one commits himself to the others to bring to fulfillment the work of God entrusted to us. In this sense, we talk about a culture of accompaniment.

Our understanding of accompaniment is a zeal and care for us, with our confreres. How can we develop this care to become an accompaniment culture?



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