

Forming free people

(Short version)

Notes on questions of Moral Theology applied to formation

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I- FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS

- 1. Formation and freedom
- 2. Fidelity: love over time
 - a) Fidelity and freedom
 - b) Fidelity, stability and growth
- 3. The risk of voluntarism and casuistry

I-1. Formation and freedom

- Formation is a process that depends on our correspondence to the grace as its instruments.
- The reception and intellectual assimilation of concepts, **information**, is part of formation, but is not identified with it.
- A person is well formed if he does good because he recognizes it as good and freely wants it, **he feels like doing it (“le da la gana”)**.
- To be truly free, the wanting of our will must come from a correct judgment on reality, a correct criterion that only good formation provides.

I-2. Fidelity: love over time

- What provides us with a lasting **happiness** is not the professional or other kind of success but loving and feeling loved.
- The dynamic of love demands the **stability of commitment***: who declares their love without pretense of eternity?
- **Fidelity** is more than just keeping a commitment over time; it is not mere **perseverance**.
- He is not faithful who perseveres only because it is **his duty, or for fear of the consequences** of not maintaining it, instead of doing it **out of love**.

I-2a. Fidelity and freedom

- **Fidelity** is frequently understood as **denial of other options**, as the loss of choosing possibilities and, thus, as a limitation of one's freedom.
- Moreover, the essence of **freedom** is not the possibility of choosing between various alternatives, but the **autonomous affirmation of the good**, which is nothing other than love.
- **Love is necessarily free**: it is the essential act of freedom.
- Fidelity requires the **constant renewal of a free decision** that is expressed at each moment in the history of the person

I-2b. Fidelity, stability and growth

- Fidelity is **stability**, which is by no means passivity or monotony.
- Fidelity is a **growth task**: we need to form in ourselves, with time and effort, the qualities and habits that allow us to stably face the changing reality.
- Fidelity is never a simple maintenance; it is growth in the lifestyle that we love; fidelity is **formation**.

I-3. The risk of voluntarism and casuistry

- In the voluntarist and casuistic morals, some things are good because they are commanded, and others are bad because they are prohibited; whereas it is the other way around.
- In **voluntarism**, the will relies more on an external evaluation of the good than on the judgement of the intellect: the solution to problems is always to put more effort into adjusting to an obligation.
- It occurs often among good people: people who are perhaps intelligent, but who are afraid to make wrong judgment about the good and prefer to be told by someone else what to do.
- The remedy for this attitude is to realize that all moral judgment involves a risk that must be assumed, without fear of having to rectify.

II-VIRTUES: THE STRENGTH OF FREEDOM

1. Will, reason and virtue
2. The cognitive and affective dimensions of virtue
3. The intentional and elective dimensions of moral virtue
4. Prudence

II-Virtues: the strength of freedom

- Virtue is a good operative habit that enables you to usually choose and do what is good.
- It is the virtues that shape, *give form*, to the person; therefore formation implies the acquisition and development of virtues.
- Each person forms himself, though he can be guided in that task by another person, like a spiritual director, a parent, a teacher...
- Since the virtues are a perfection of freedom, to form is to form in and for freedom: there is no other formation.

II-1. Will, reason and virtue

- Our **free decisions** are voluntary, they are made by the will, which always follows a judgment of reason about the goodness of the object.
- In any situation our reason make in fact two kinds of judgement, a **theoretical judgment** based on moral principles (this is/isn't good) and a **practical judgment** (this is/isn't good for me)
- This 2nd judgment, **judgment of choice**, is the one that moves the will, and it is highly influenced by our feelings, our passions and our virtues.
- The **virtues help the reason to make righteous practical judgments** that lead the will to choose virtuous acts.

II-2. The cognitive and affective dimensions of virtue.

- The voice of feelings and inclinations (passions) is the first we hear when evaluating possible behavior, and that voice can hinder or help to make a correct judgment and decide well.
- **Virtue** has a ***cognitive dimension***: it helps us to see clearly, to recognize the true value of things; and an ***affective dimension***: it guides the affections and inclinations towards the objective good.
- Virtue not only gives the will the strength to counteract the possible negative impulses of the passions, but it also positively shapes our inclinations, our desires and our affections, orienting them towards good. (Formation of the affectivity)

II-3. The intentional and elective dimensions of moral virtue

- Moral virtue has two dimensions: **intentional dimension** (the firm and stable desire to act according to that virtue) and **elective dimension** (the ability to put into practice the act that that virtue should perform here and now).
- A **practical judgment** is needed that from the **principles** (ends, intentions) reaches the **decision** (choice) to perform an act here and now: a bridge between the two dimensions of the moral virtue.
- That bridge, that **practical judgment**, is the virtue of **prudence**.
- **prudence**: the straight *ratio agibilium*, the right reason in acting.
- **There can be no virtue if there is no prudence.**

II-4. Prudence

- **Prudence** as a virtue presupposes the habitual rectitude of the **principles** provided by the corresponding virtue, and the habitual execution of the **virtuous act** requires in turn the **good reasoning** provided by prudence.
- Therefore, any virtue in its elective dimension presupposes prudence, and prudence presupposes that virtue in its intentional dimension.
- Chicken & egg problem: to acquire prudence we need the principles provided by virtues, but we can not acquire virtues if we don't have prudence.
- Solution: The moral principles are provided at the beginning of moral formation by educators or the social environment in the form of firm rules or criteria, that latter on will become interiorized and appropriated.

III- FOUR KEYS FOR FORMATION

1. Initiative
2. Convictions
 - a) To form is to illuminate
 - b) Intelligent obedience
 - c) Teaching to think
 - d) Take advantage of mistakes
 - e) Be positive
3. Perspective
 - a) Aims and means
4. Affection

III-1. Initiative

- Since what forms are the own decisions, the initiative of the person being formed is necessary.
- Respecting and stimulating the initiative of others requires also a lot of personal initiative in the formator: he must pray and think, in order to later be able to propose, open horizons, help to discover, suggest, etc.
- It is not good to insist too much that in the spiritual direction the Will of God is transmitted; it is better to say that it helps to discern it.
- Sometimes people needs help to face the responsibility of making their own decisions.

III-2. Convictions

- «*The spiritual direction must tend to form people of judgment. And the criterion supposes maturity, firmness of convictions* » (St Josemaria).
- Formation is more a transmission of principles than conclusions; rather than encouraging to do, it consists in helping to understand.
- Saint Josemaría encouraged us to form by transmitting “*ideas madres*” that sustain our whole life and be a support in moments of more difficulty: **God has called us, we have a mission in this life**, the response to that call will fill our existence with happiness, God is our Father and is always by our side ...

III-2a. To form is to illuminate

- If the decisions correspond to the person being formed, the formator must fundamentally speak to the intelligence with reasons and not decisions.
- The intelligence, enlightened for those reasons, will move the will in a process that requires time, which can be long if the question is not easy to understand or accept.
- The formator should see himself not as someone pulling with a rope from the other person, but rather as someone walking beside him, lighting the path with a flashlight.

III-2b. Intelligent obedience

- If we want our life to be governed by convictions, we must promote intelligent obedience.
- Blind obedience is pure voluntarism and is not a virtue, because it does not include judgment on the goodness of the act.
- Obedience is not submission, but openness; it is not giving up seeing, but being able to see with the eyes of another.
- It is not blind obedience when the person realizes that renouncing his point of view helps him to form a healthy detachment from his own opinion necessary to sincerely seek the truth and the Will of God.

III-2c. Teaching to think

- At the level of prudence (right practical reason) teaching to think means teaching how to pose problems and find morally good solutions.
- One of the acts of prudence is asking for advice, however that advice is not a rule of action that replaces personal reflection, but rather a help to that reflection.
- Consulting is not transferring responsibility for deciding to someone else.
- Teaching to think in the means of formation implies speaking to the intelligence: giving reasons, transmitting ideas, making people reflect.

III-2d. Take advantage of mistakes

- The objective is not to avoid mistakes at all costs, but to take advantage of them to form well.
- Of course, we must anticipate error whenever possible, by providing good advice to the person who could commit it.
- In the task of formation we must care more about the person who is wrong than about the possible error.
- If, for fear of mistakes, the conclusions are usually given, perhaps we prevent the person from making mistakes, but we also prevent that person from thinking right: we do not form his prudence.

III-2e. Be positive

- It is necessary to know how to transmit the wonders of the Christian life as the wonders that they are and not as obligations, although they are also.
- If something is an obligation, it is precisely because it is good; and we must know how to show why it is good.
- It is about presenting the points of struggle as something that deeply suits the person being formed.
- People in their formation, rather than feeling demanded, should feel helped.

III-3. Perspective

- «*You have to count on time, and with the action of grace in each soul. It is not good to push souls, nor to pretend that they run, when they can barely sustain themselves*” (St. Josemaria).
- In the task of formation, it is necessary to have **perspective**, to **aim for long-term goals, the development of virtues.**
- Formation is not a series of specific acts, but a line, a continuous process in time.
- Forming with perspective supposes explaining the whys, in this way the initiative of the person is stimulated, because he sees the direction and the purpose of what is proposed to him.

III-3a. Aims and means

- One consequence of having perspective, long vision, of knowing where we are going, is to focus attention on the ends, rather than on the means; on the causes, rather than on its effects.
- The prudent aims for ends and puts the appropriate means to achieve them; the voluntarist treats the means as if they were ends.
- If the person understand the reasons for doing things in a certain way, he will be able to live the virtues even in circumstances that are not covered by any criteria.

III-4. Affection

- The **affection** plays a decisive role in the formation; without affection nothing is achieved.
- Affection has a lot to do with "**making the soul want**"
- The formation is better assimilated - with joy and happiness - when one feels loved.
- Manifestation of that affection is believing in others, in their ability to improve, to acquire that virtue

IV Recapitulation: two bottom lines

1. People who think
2. Trust

IV-1. Recapitulation: People who think

- It is not enough to form people who know; it is necessary to form people who think.
- Rather than teaching how to abide by rules, you must teach how to grasp and share the reasons behind each advise.
- Being a person who thinks requires developing **human sensitivity**: being able to listen, to notice nuances in life, to look at events and people from different points of view.
- Human sensitive can be acquired by reading **good literature** and watching **good cinema**.
- We must keep our attention on the virtues, because they, more than the acts, will indicate the progress of the person.

IV-2. Recapitulation: Trust

- To foster responsibility and initiative, **trust** is needed.
- Trust cannot be imposed; it must be deserved.
- The following ways of acting are sources of trust: open and moderate way of expressing one's opinions; know how to listen; always value the point of view of others; speak respectfully of everyone; always speak well of friends and acquaintances.
- But above all, **affection** is the greatest source of trust.