

Changing Landscape of Religious Missionary Life

Formation and Vowed Life

I wish to begin this contribution by expressing my gratitude to the Executive of SEDOS, organizers of this workshop, for inviting me to share my reflections on this topic. Vatican II called us, religious, many years ago to look at the 'signs of the times'. In numerous articles over the past number of years there have been analyses of what has been, what is now occurring and what the future of religious life might be. Of course, history gives us some bearing as we navigate our individual and collective journey as religious. Mission is at the heart of the Church. The world is changing dramatically and religious life is changing alongside it. If religious life is to be understood today, what transpired yesterday must be seen and used as a point of reference. So, these changes determine how we motivate and animate for mission in the local Churches where we live and work. The topic I have been asked to reflect on is very broad. Thankfully, aspects of the topic have been dealt with by previous presenters. This paper will discuss some aspects of this Changing Landscape, the vows and the place of formation in ensuring the ability of members to adapt to these changing times. It is my opinion that integral and holistic formation of younger members could ensure the quality of religious life and efficacy of our missionary religious life.

The Changing Landscape of Missionary Religious Life

The most fundamental issue of the changing landscape, in my opinion, is God – our relationship and concept of God. Worthy of note is that Europe was mainly Christian and lived out the Christian values. This landscape has changed and one senses a certain hostility towards the Catholic Church now in the light of this down turn of events. This has resulted to a change in the role of the Church in the society. Furthermore, there is a sense of absence of religion in the public square. Consequently, it is

difficult to share the good news in a system that is becoming increasingly secular. It is my understanding that religious life is about giving priority to God. But

where God is only minimally in the picture, what can we do? This is a question to be faced with candour and sobriety.

Another changing landscape is a passage from a spirituality that was nourished by certain devotions (novenas) to one that is grounded either exclusively on the Word of God and the liturgy or to other spiritualities. Some faculties of theology in the Global North are being shut down for lack of enrolment. The aging population of theologians also puts some pressure in the field as there appears to be very few successors among the younger generation. It is praiseworthy to note that many lay people are now studying theology and most of these are fine theologians.

An increasing problem in Western Europe, North America etc. is the decreasing number of religious. Today, for many religious, the future is insecure and uncertain, thus the survival of religious life is in doubt. They have seen their houses close, sisters leave, their congregation amalgamate, their numbers dwindle, the apostolic work to which they had dedicated their lives are being handed over to Trusts.

Religious women, in a patriarchal Church, more and more have to negotiate its relationship with the local Church. Previously, religious women tended to think almost exclusively in terms of the Church as universal. Today, Schools, Hospitals started by missionaries belong to the



Church. Funding formation of newer members has become a challenge.

Information technology has revolutionised the way we communicate.

The expanded understanding of Mission *ad gentes/ad extra* is another example. This puts into question the ‘especially for Africa’ dimension of some of our charisms. In the 1870s the focus of the Society of African Missions and the Sisters of our Lady of Apostles was very clearly ‘Africa’ and not just ‘Africa’ but a very defined part of Africa allocated by Propaganda Fide. Today, the field of mission, the landscape of that reality has changed and there is need for evangelization and re-evangelization of all continents.

Most religious congregations were founded in order to carry out a series of services for which there was a widely felt need but which the government did not provide for example, health care, education etc. The early missionaries arrived in the then called mission territories (Africa and Asia) and opened hospitals, schools etc. Today, in Africa and Asia these ministries have continued with the religious being more and more involved in administrative roles. There is an increasing number of sisters taking up new and more diversified ministries both in the Global North and Global South and community life is taking newer forms. In the West religious life has become less visible and it is commonplace for men and women to commit to ministry, not only within the Church setting but in the wider non-profit sector. In this new social and ecclesial context, the role of the religious woman becomes less clear.

Another key changing landscape is the demography of missionary Institutes which has moved from being predominantly Western (European or American) to being now, younger missionaries from other continents. Does the Global North need missionaries? At the beginning of my mission in Ireland in 2018 there were comments like, ‘what are these African priests and religious coming to do in Europe? They should stay in their own country’. And I ask: what did the early missionaries come to do in Africa? To my mind, they had a vision of what the reign of God would be like. They came to share the good news with our people and they were, in most cases, warmly

welcomed. Does the Global North need the Gospel? And my response is yes, they do. Missionaries are agents of the Gospel. Following the footsteps of the early missionaries’ recipients of the Christian message, commissioned by their own baptism, now want to take a more active part in God’s mission by sharing the faith in the countries of those who brought the good news to them.

The landscape of missionary congregations probably in the past was quite an assimilation model – where new members from other nationalities had to fit in. Now we speak more of interculturality where in dialogue we are supposed to form a new way of intercultural living with no dominant culture. For example, I am a Nigerian and I joined the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles in 1981. In the early years of my life as a religious, it was not clear what was religious life and what was European. We came from different parts of Nigeria and Ghana and we were simply African sisters. We adopted one way of living – predominantly European and we took pride in this – and very little attention was paid to the fact that we came from different cultural backgrounds. This has posed some challenges for us even today. Initial formation must form new entrants for interculturality. This might mean helping candidates/religious to identify and name some obvious differences among us and discuss criteria of acceptability within the particular community.

In 2018 I joined the team at the Religious Formation Ministry Programme, Loreto House, Dublin, a project of the Association of Missionaries and Religious of Ireland (AMRI). Permit me to use this programme which has served the Church so faithfully to explain an aspect of the changing landscape of religious missionary life in Ireland. When the programme began in 1982, the demography of the participants and team were mainly Europeans, Religious men and women dressed mostly in habits. Today, the programme has nineteen participants from eleven countries namely Angola, India, Kenya, Lebanon, Pakistan, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Nigeria, The Gambia, New Zealand. I will like to show some slides of this.

Moving from a familiar culture from the Global South to the Global North with its different

culture, brings with it joys and challenges for community living. Based on John Heron's ideas, there are four common concerns that many people have when they are in a new group for the first time. These concerns are: will I be accepted? Will I understand what people say or mean? Will I be able to participate? And will I be relevant/interesting? When a sister is missioned from the Global South to the Global North, she leaves her country but carries with her, her history, model of society and Church. She moves to a new place to learn, and learning is possible because one has a horizon, which is the totality of one's "reality". These must be integrated into the new reality.

This transition places a lot of demand on both the new comer and on the community that is receiving the individual. Therefore, it is essential that the community members prepare appropriately, not just socially but also psychologically and spiritually, to welcome her. This does not mean treating an adult like a helpless child. An orientation programme would be helpful in this regard to support both the new and old members. The orientation programme needs to take the "reality" of the new member into consideration. It ought not to be another exercise in westernisation and de-Africanisation. Both the missionary and the receiving community/Church must be ready to make adjustments. These welcoming and orientation programmes can introduce the new missionaries to the current situation of the country and best practice laying emphasis on what works and what doesn't. It took me about three years to begin to understand the Irish context or culture and still for nearly five years, I am still learning. The community is called upon to show appropriate patience and accompaniment to anyone who is relatively new or just entering the community. This requires that everyone attempts to listen, encourage and change as necessary rather than expecting incoming members to conform and change to fit into the community.

There is obvious generational gap between newer and older members in most communities. The new member, where possible, will benefit from the presence of another young person in the community or in another community in the country. It is also important that a member of the community is assigned to

mentor/accompany her – introduce her to the house showing her how things operate as well as how to get around the locality until she settles in. In time, she will find her way, get a spiritual director and form her own circle of friends. The community atmosphere must give space for people to express themselves, ask questions and leaders need to create space for this to be possible. Gittens suggests that 'given the global demographic changes that have occurred in the lifetime of today's senior members, the future of international religious communities must increasingly and intentionally become intercultural'¹. The Association of African Priests and Religious in Ireland is a testimony to the increasing number of missionaries from various parts of Africa on mission.

When I joined religious life most of the sisters of Our Lady of Apostles in Nigeria were Irish with very few Nigerians. By early 1990s the picture began to change as many of the sisters returned to Ireland either because of ill health or because of age. With the decline of vocations in Europe, some of us from the Global South have been missioned to Europe forming intercultural communities. Present day Ireland is a multicultural society. I am experiencing, increasingly here, openness to people of different cultures. As missionary religious group, our intercultural communities bear witness to the gospel. However, challenges exist and if faced and dealt with appropriately the result could be a community of persons committed to each other, to the mission and their own on-going transformation as disciples. We are missionaries because we have encountered the Lord, we have fallen in love with God and so we make the commitment to be God's witnesses by living the evangelical counsels.

The vows

Another changing landscape is the style of religious life. Over the years of renewal there have been many attempts to explain what the vows are and what they are not. In spite of the changing landscape, the vows remain attractive,

¹ Gittens A. J., (2015) *Living Mission Interculturally, Faith, culture and the Renewal of Praxis* A Michael Glazier Book, Liturgical Press Collegeville Minnesota, p.2

though vowed commitment also presents some challenges. We read from *Vita Consecrata* that ‘the present difficulties which a number of Institutes are encountering in some parts of the world must not lead to a questioning of the fact that the profession of the evangelical counsels is an integral part of the Church’s life’². For the vow to be life giving, a new approach to understanding the vows is needed, one that will go beyond redefining words. How do we prepare candidates for this new reality? Some people would suggest presenting the vows in an easier way so as to attract new members. We must remember that some people have left religious life, not because too much was asked of them but because too little was asked of them. I do not think that young people or new members desire that we water down the values of religious life in order to welcome them. Aspiring members desire to see us live the vows in an authentic, human way.

It is my opinion that if we admit adults into our formation houses and form them as adults – giving them opportunities to make use of their initiatives, make mistakes, be helped to learn from these mistakes then the values of Christ especially the vows will be lived to the best of each individual’s/community’s ability. Coming from different cultures, there are aspects of the vows that are rooted in each culture. Can we encourage new members and even older members to reflect on these?

O’Murchu ³ asserts that today revisioning the **vow of poverty** needs to begin with a recognition that all around us is gift and that we are an integral part of creation. The evangelical understanding of poverty is more about dependence on God. Presupposed in this approach is the understanding that everything is a gift from God and should be used creatively and responsibly for the good of all. Evangelical poverty is about offering to God what God has given us. One is so grateful for this gift that one offers it to God. ‘Go sell all you have [possessions], give the money to the poor [detachment], come, follow me [discipleship]’.

² Pope John Paul II, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Consecrated Life and its mission in the Church and in the World, *Vita Consecrata*, n.3

³ O’Murchu D. (2018) Religious Life in the 21st Century, The Prospect of Refounding, Orbis Books Maryknoll, New York 10545

All is gift. But not all is to be possessed. The vow of poverty invites us to open extra space in our lives and clear away the clutter so there is more space for God as well as space to facilitate the creative use of life’s resources. To live the vow of poverty is to live in a way that matches what we say we are. If we say we are called to live in solidarity with the poor and with the earth, we should be seen as people who are trying to do just that.

It means to live in a way that is countercultural, that challenges what our society says is necessary for life and happiness. It places us on the way to defy materialism and this will require of us an honest, transparent discernment of our own lifestyle, individually and communally. This will be a very uncomfortable exercise for many of us but it will lead to the desired renewal of religious life ⁴. I believe it is possible to introduce this concept to the new members even before they enter. Maybe the newer members already have a lot to teach us in this regard. Can we listen to them and hear what attracts them? Today, many who aspire to religious life have had tertiary education, are earning a living and are quite independent. From the time they decide to ‘come and see’, they must have undergone some process of discernment. Introducing them to the vow of poverty or asceticism is not just about taking their phones or credit cards from them. Could we have a dialogue with them about the process we use and what the process is about? Introduce them to the concept of living freely and simply and caring for the earth? Train them by living what we profess as individual and as community?

The understanding of the **vow of obedience** is changing from too much emphasis on rules and more to listening and discerning together. The vow is now less connected to questions of command and control. We need to shift emphasis from the love of power to the power of love. Although we still need power – the power of love, is the power that empowers. O’Murchu suggests that we need to form people for joint responsibility, engage them in mature adult consultation, empowering mutuality and discernment.

⁴ Ibid

How do we train candidates to exercise their God given creativity in conjunction with people? Forming for personal responsibility will enable the candidates to ask critical questions of themselves, of others and of the system. We must train them to be free enough to ask these questions for if we are open to these, we never know what the answer is going to be. We must train our candidates to be accountable, not just of money but of self, to themselves, to the community and the world at large. Here the formation process needs to emphasise joint responsibility for self, for goods and for creation. Also, we need to form them as leaders – to learn how to lead from below, not from above. Can we dare to begin/continue this journey in our formation houses and through younger members listen to what the Spirit is saying to us today? This requires of us all – the candidates, the professed members and those in authority – to be in a listening and a discerning stance.

Today's youths are trained with lots of opportunities to make choices. Does our vow of obedience have room for this? The youths today want to know if their freedom to choose or to have a voice will be taken away by the vow of obedience. We do not want to form individuals who only do what they are told. There is a need to form them as adults with the ability to make free and informed decisions. Choices made after reflection. We are to train them in discernment, train them to have the ability to distinguish between needs and wants. Train them to listen. In this process, the One whom one must listen to 'in vowed obedience, is God, speaking to the person through the inner authority that exists in everyone but also through the charism, vision, and decisions made within each congregation' ⁵. As we know it today, the **vow of chastity** is not just about avoiding undue closeness. We chose the path of chastity so as to love more. Charity – love of God above all things, and of neighbour because of God – makes us embrace the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Our formation programme – initial and ongoing – must train people for healthy adult relating. O'Murchu points out that through relationship we encounter the Trinity. Sexuality and

psychosexual development and integration must be addressed openly and unambiguously in the formation process. The individual must be committed to this journey by being open to the other as a person, whatever his/her sexual orientation is and learn to develop meaningful relationships with others in accordance with the choice of life. The individual must be accompanied in this process.

Dynamics of Formation

Pope St John Paul II, in his Post-Synodal Exhortation on Consecrated Life *Vita Consacrata*,⁶ notes that the primary objective of religious formation is the preparation of the candidate for total self-giving to God, following Jesus Christ. If Christ is the root and centre of religious life, a candidate needs to know from the beginning that formation implies conversion. One can argue therefore that there is no formation without conversion, that is, without internalizing the values of Jesus Christ. Conversion is always a transforming experience and the concern of the formator is to elicit and order the desire for conversion in the candidate. Since internalization involves attitudinal change, it is important to address this question by referring to Herbert Kelman's seminal study of attitudinal change ⁷.

Kelman describes three processes – compliance, identification and internalization – which help explain why people adopt attitudes and ways of acting. Although described separately here, in real life situations these dynamics could present in mixed forms. What is important is to be attentive to what prevails in each situation.

The first process, *compliance*, occurs when a person's ideas, attitudes and actions are influenced principally by the desire to gain a reward or to avoid punishment. This could be in the form of external conformity to rules with no deep personal conviction about what these rules stand for. A formator or community leader can make him/herself important by using reward or punishment in various forms. It could be the

⁵ Harmer C. M. (1995). Religious Life in the 21st Century. A contemporary journey into Canaan. Twenty-Third Publications Mystic, CT 06355

⁶ Pope John Paul II, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Consecrated Life and its mission in the Church and in the World, *Vita Consecrata* n.1

⁷ Kelman, H. C. Compliance, Identification and Internalization: Three Processes of Attitude Change, In *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 2, no. 1(1958), pp.51-60

threat of evaluation, shaming, withdrawal of love or some necessities, too strict a formator/community leader. This is only 'a subtle form of blackmail which pushes one to conformity in order to avoid unpleasant consequences'⁸. Sometimes, however, the individual develops the attitude of *playing the game* – of doing what will be seen by others as appropriate behaviour. Compliance does not necessarily mean commitment.

Candidates or religious who operate mainly at this level may keep all the rules of the house in order to avoid being asked to withdraw and/or to achieve the reward whatever the desired reward is. An adage in my culture says that when a chicken enters a strange environment, it stands on one leg as it observes how the other chickens stand. A new environment elicits some anxiety in people and sometimes compliance, for many, seems the only helpful way to cope. But for how long does the chicken need to stand on one leg? From real life experience, candidates who only comply seem to have some hidden agenda which exhibits itself after profession with consequences for religious life and for ministry. To change this outlook and the candidate's perspective, it is essential that formation be seen as a journey of self-discovery, in this process one begins to recognize his/her strengths amid limitations and work with them. Candidates need to be rooted in a commitment to growth and wholeness. This has to go beyond keeping the rules.

An individual must be gradually prepared to take personal responsibility for his/her life on an adult level. This is accomplished through regular meetings, by establishing a relationship of mutuality, in an atmosphere of confidentiality and trust whereby the individual is led to see him/herself clearly, honestly and objectively. This shedding of light on the individual's experience helps also to keep him/her accountable to self and to others. On a new mission, he/she might need help to solve the conflicts that arise as a result of change of environment but if he/she is always told what to do in the name of obedience, then it will be challenging to find an adult balance as he/she settles down on the mission.

The second process, *identification*, occurs when attitudes and actions are adopted because of the desire to be part of a group and to maintain a relationship with an important, admired, or loved person. Even if the attitude is believed, perseverance in it is subject to the existence of the relationship itself – if relationship ends, one abandons what has been learnt. The process of identification is a necessary stage in the acquisition of values. Identification is a source of growth in the measure in which it makes us learn attitudes that increase values. 'But if the person remains at the level of identification, then the process has not reached its full term'.⁹ It is said that books and talks are necessary for learning opinions. But to learn values we need reference models. Identification is a source of growth in the measure in which it makes us learn attitudes that increase values. The community is a fundamental means for presenting the values of religious life such as prayer, the vows, charism etc. Formators are not training the candidates to do later something other than what they are doing already. The more a value is mentioned, practiced and seen in all its versions and becomes the life and testimony of many, the easier it is, hopefully, for the candidates to see what the call they have responded to holds for them. It can be very confusing for candidates if the ideals taught and experienced in the formation process are not lived out by the professed members of the community. If the formation programme is experienced as quite different from the lived reality, unreal expectations can result in dysfunctional behaviours.

The third process is *internalization*. This occurs when attitudes, opinions and ways of acting are adopted and maintained because the person understands that this is the right thing to do. The person's attitudes, actions and decisions are congruent with his/her personal beliefs and value system. Such an individual, after profession continues to live out these values irrespective of where he/she is or what he/she does. Hence, I do not advocate a different formation programme for missionaries for Europe. The need for integral formation at all

⁸ Cencini A. & Manenti A. (2010). Psychology and Formation. Structure and Dynamics. India Printing Works, Mumbai p.414

⁹ Costello T, (2010) Goal and Purpose of Priestly Formation, In Vincent S. and Constello T (ed.), *Formation and Transformation*, Asian Trading Corporation: Bangalore, p. 8

levels cannot be overemphasized so that those who make this journey may be equipped with minds capable of reading the signs of the times and at the same time enabled to openly dialogue with the world as it is.

The processes of compliance, identification and internalization offer a framework for understanding the formative dynamics by which the essential goal of formation can be pursued, always in cooperation with the freely-given gift of grace which is poured into the candidate's heart through the power of the Holy Spirit. Motivation is what activates or directs one's being and acting. So, it is essential that the candidate builds up a relationship with Christ. If one's motivation is by choice Christ – putting on Christ at the beginning and at the end of everything – then a fertile ground is available for formation to take place. Therefore, the question of internalization of values should be one of the very central concerns for any programme of formation. But it is important to differentiate between real internalization, compliance, or identification. For it is difficult to act always and exclusively out of the love for God.

It is possible to observe the efforts made by a candidate to live out the values proclaimed by Christ. It is also possible to recognize the interference of personal interest, of identification and compliance. It is the responsibility of the formator to evaluate which of these processes is prevalent in the life of the candidate, to facilitate a gradual internalization of Gospel values, and to enable the candidate to recognize and understand his or her own motivations, goals and needs.

There are candidates who think they can consecrate themselves without the need for changing much in their lives, without the need for conversion. But the internalization of evangelical values, which formation is, demands death to the old self so that a new self-in-Christ may be born. This new person is neither a sample of human maturity nor a hero of perfection. According to Cencini, he/she is one 'who has felt won over by the look of Christ and conquered by his love'¹⁰. Such is the transformation that conversion is. It is, as St Paul reminds us, the work of the Holy Spirit

who transforms the believer into the image of the Father (2 Cor. 3: 17-18).

The action of divine grace is gratuitous and comes about through God's initiative. The candidate, moved by grace, makes him/herself available to God's work of transformation. This disposition on the part of the candidate is the fundamental attitude required for formation. The process of formation leading to transformation demands that first, the candidates must have relatively sufficient understanding of the ideals and values of religious life they wish to embrace. Secondly, he/she must sufficiently understand the demands these core values make of his/her life and way of being and acting. Thirdly, he/she must personalize these ideals and values that they become so deeply part of his/her life¹¹. According to Cencini, there is formation only where values and content are experienced and savoured by the candidate to the point of their constituting for him/her a new way of looking at things, a new way of life.

The process of formation that leads to the internalization of the values of Christ comes about through hard work not only of the candidate but of the formator and the formation process. This points to the need for formators whose competence, commitment and maturity to handle whatever the candidates bring could be vouched for. If the candidate is to internalize Gospel values, today's formator must be someone who has internalized the values of the Gospel and who has the skills to communicate these values to candidates. He/she must have a good knowledge of the candidates as individuals, as members of a generation, and as members of a class. In other words, attention is to be paid to each candidate's development by ensuring that none is lost in the crowd of anonymity. Personal accompaniment, therefore, is central to the process of integral human formation. What is intended by this process of accompaniment is the facilitation of the candidate's taking charge of his/her life and doing so at all levels even in later years.

At the core of our vocation and consecration there exists a tension between two poles. For

¹⁰ Cencini A, *Spiritual and Emotional Maturity*, Nairobi, Pauline Publications, 2006, p.162

¹¹ Cf. Costello T, Goal and Purpose of Priestly Formation, In Vincent S. and Constello T (ed.), *Formation and Transformation*, Asian Trading Corporation: Bangalore, 2010, p. 14

there is what the society offers the candidate, and there is what the Gospel demands and what the Institute is all about. And while, in the words of Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes*, the joys and hopes of the world of our time are the joys and hopes of the Church, there will be need to differentiate between aspirations that are incompatible and those that are compatible with the Gospel way of life, and the candidate must choose between these two. The option of making a choice raises a lot of tension and the individual needs to be accompanied as he/she negotiates this tension. How does what we offer our candidates prepare them to face the realities of life? We are challenged to 'ask ourselves if what we savour and offer to drink is actually *new wine* that is full-bodied and wholesome? Or despite all good intentions and praiseworthy efforts, is it wine that has been watered-down to make up for the acids – the consequence of a bad harvest or poorly pruned grapevines?' ¹²

As described above, since the goal of formation is to internalize the values of Christ, there is need to reflect on our approach to formation critically so as to discover, together, what model of formation will help achieve this goal. Three models of formation have been described by various authors: namely the traditional, the progressive and the integrative.

The *traditional model* was the model promoted before Vatican II. Everything from content to dressing to liturgy and even manner of eating was regimented. Little diversions were noticed and corrected. Uniformity was essential feature. Much emphasis was laid on structures and adherence to rules. Criterion for selection was based on exhibition of external piety and conformity. Too little consideration was given to individual uniqueness in the formation process. This model is still widely adopted, albeit in an updated form in the formation of younger religious in some congregations today. When this is the dominant model of life either in the formation house or in the community, the individual will give up certain aspects of their cultural identity, for example ways of prayer so as to be included. In some instances, maintaining fidelity to religious life was sometimes achieved by strong internal and external structures and this led to positive

results. However, if religious have not internalised the values of religious life, when these structures are absent, they will be unable to cope and, in their disillusionment, turn their back on a life which no longer have meaning for them and leave.

The *progressive model* was developed as a reaction to the excessive impersonal and legalistic approach of the traditional model. This model was based on the absolute freedom of the individual for self-fulfilment. Individuals in formation were left to decide what they want and how they want it. This led to a laissez-faire attitude towards rules and regulations. The formators were usually non-directive. They saw their roles as creating a climate in which those in formation can fulfil their desire for self-expression. This approach did nothing to help those who were affectively immature. Some congregations have tried this and called it adult formation.

The *integrated model* is a blend of some aspects of the traditional and progressive models that are helpful for internalization of values. In this, there are attempts to lead the individual to recognize and accept the grace and gift of religious vocation. The candidate is offered a personal in-depth help in self-knowledge so as to be able to respond to the values of Christ willingly. This model encourages individuals to take responsibility for their formation and so is considered by many as the best for the achievement of the goal of formation. However, it can only be carried out successfully by formators who deal with few individuals.

Vita Consecrata states that to say "yes" to the Lord's call by taking personal responsibility for maturing in one's vocation is the inescapable duty of all who have been called. Candidates come to us as adults and they need to be treated as adults. Yes, they have not lived religious life before but they have come with certain knowledge and we can train them to take personal responsibility for their lives building on previous experiences. Charles Serrao considers personal responsibility "one of the goals of the formation process."¹³ This is rightly so because at the end of initial formation Religious are expected to continue to take

¹² Ibid

¹³ Charles Serrao, 2014 Discernment of Religious Vocation Dhyana Publications, p.65

responsibility for their own growth and development in ongoing formation.

A sign that the candidate is taking personal responsibility for his/her life would be his/her understanding of the necessity to develop a habit of personal prayer (spiritual formation) and also the determination and self-discipline actually to carry it out even when the formators are not around. The same applies to the process of growing in relationship with others as well as responsibility with money, entertainment (human formation) and his/her attitude as regards apostolic sphere (apostolic formation). These are areas requiring high degrees of personal responsibility, that is, to respond and positively with initiative in any given situation, always under the accompaniment of the formator. Personal accompaniment is central to the process of integral human formation. It is through this personal attention on the candidate's experience which will allow the candidate to visualize his/her own journey. However, 'without a solid formation of formators, it would not be possible to provide a true and promising accompaniment of the youngest members'¹⁴ for ministry in these changing times. Formation must include knowledge of and ability to share one's own culture and a willingness to listen to or learn about the culture of the other, not just their food and mode of dressing but the whole lot that make up a people.

There is need to elaborate a type of integral human formation that can allow the candidate to truly take charge of his/her life and make his/her own God's project for him/her. The purpose of planning a programme is to unify and coordinate the many elements that make up the life. With the right aim and purpose in mind, we shall find that religious formation does not tend to repress but to develop the candidate as a woman and as a Christian and then as a religious. If the programme is integrated, it will make sense to the candidate and she will be able to respond and cooperate personally so that in the end she will be truly formed as a mature religious with a well-integrated outlook on life. This process challenges us to evaluate regularly

our structures as well as our formation programme to discern what aspects need to be transformed and what aspects need to be discarded.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to explore some key elements, though there are certainly others that could have been discussed, of the Changing Landscape of Religious Missionary life. I have argued that religious formation must be such that it fosters that human maturity which provides the necessary basis for Christian maturity. Religious formation, in the widest sense of the term, is the preparation for the actual living of religious life hence the emphasis on formation for personal responsibility. It includes everything that pertains to the life that the candidate is to live as a religious – individual and communal prayer, asceticism, vows and a life in community with others in an increasingly intercultural setting. This formation also includes preparation of the candidate to participate in a special way in the Church's mission through the Congregation's Charism and Apostolate wherever the need arises. Religious life is a call to live radically the Gospel values. In saying yes to this call the candidate continues the Christian journey of transformation. An integral and holistic formation of younger members would ensure that in the future 'we would not only have young consecrated persons who hold academic titles, but also ones who have been formed to identify with the values of life of *sequela Christi*'¹⁵.



¹⁴ Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *New Wine in New Wine Skins*, The Consecrated Life and Its Ongoing Challenges since Vatican II n.9

¹⁵ Ibid n.15