

VIII. PERMANENT FORMATION

Const. 104-120

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How can a man be born when he is old?

8.1. DEFINITION

189. The evangelist Luke tells us “And Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favour with God and men. (Lk 2,52)” Thus it was for Jesus and so will it be for His disciples (cf. Jn 16,12-13). He said to His disciples “There is still much that I could say to you, but the burden would be too great for you now. However, when he comes who is the Spirit of truth, he will guide you into all the truth.” (Jn 16,12-13). To grow and to learn, this is the primary vocation of a human being and a Christian. This is a permanent, ongoing task: “There is no standing still in Christian

life. Whoever is not going forward is going backwards.” (Saint Augustine) ¹ By surviving inevitable crises we gradually become what we have been called to be.

8.1.1. Nature

190. The process of formation is not confined to its initial stages. Because of human limitations no consecrated person can claim to have completed the process of bringing forth that new man who shares the very sentiments of Christ in every life-situation. Permanent formation solidifies initial formation – it creates in the subject the capacity to allow himself to be formed every day of his life ².

The vocation of a friar Servant of Mary is not realized in a single act, but continues in a constant rhythm of invitation and acceptance (*Const.* 105). Therefore permanent formation is required for all the friars of the Order ³

8.1.2. Objectives

191. The objectives of permanent formation are to help the solemn professed friar to:

- live his basic vocation with dignity and quality;
- recognize and live consciously that phase of formation appropriate for his age;
- grow at his own pace and in his own way: to accept crises and to learn how to overcome them and continue on one's journey;
- give oneself to the service of others, in conformity with the charism of the Order (cf. *Const.* 73);
- test and develop one's ability to extend fraternity to all people of today divided as they are by age, nationality, race, religion, wealth and education (cf. *Const.* 74);
- live with the values of Servite religious life as priorities.

8.1.3. Duration

192. The development of a Servant of Mary lasts throughout one's life (*Const.* 120) ⁴ This development follows the normal stages of a person's human and spiritual growth. Roughly they are:

- birth and childhood (0 to 12 years);
- adolescence (13 to 20 years);
- young adult (20 to 40/45 years) ⁵;
- middle aged (40/45 to 65 years) – this can be subdivided into the forties and the fifties ⁶;

¹ Saint Bernard (1090-1153) says the same thing in other words: “Not to go forward means to go backwards.” If life is not moving towards maturity it is on the path to regression and self-destruction. For this reason, formation is an ongoing process: every Christian, at his own pace and in his own way, must develop the grace of his baptism and vocation; he must move ceaselessly towards fullness. Cf. GOYA, Benito, *Formazione integrale alla vita consacrata, alla luce della esortazione post-sinodale* = Problemi di vita religiosa (Dehoniane, Bologna 1997) pp. 32-35.

² Cf. VC 69.

³ Cf. CG 1995. Formazione permanente. *Decreto del Capitolo*, in: Acta OSM 61 (1996) p. 244.

⁴ “Religious should attend assiduously to their spiritual, doctrinal and practical formation throughout their life; superiors should provide the means and the time needed for this.” (*Canon* 661).

⁵ For those who are 40 or 45 years old we are speaking about middle age. This usually begins with the realization that life goes forward towards its appointed end and that we have arrived at the second and definitive stage. It would probably be more appropriate to say middle age went approximately from 35 to 45; mathematically it is 37 for men and 40 for women. Cf. GOYA Benito, *Formazione integrale alla vita consacrata, alla luce della esortazione post-sinodale* = Problemi di vita religiosa (Dehoniane, Bologna 1997) p 237.

- old age (65 and more years) leading to the conclusion of life.

193. Moving from one stage to another is often marked by crisis or trauma. Life in the womb ends with birth. Childhood ends with puberty. Adolescence comes up against the real world. Adulthood makes one aware of one's own limitations. Middle age ends in the crisis of detachment and old age ends in death ⁷ - death ends in resurrection.

8.1.4. Place

194. Permanent formation takes place in the community to which one belongs.

During periods of renewal, re-training or updating, e.g. sabbatical year ⁸, with the appropriate authorization a friar may be assigned to a Servite community near to the place where a program is being offered.

8.1.5. Program ⁹

8.1.5.1. The young friar who has just finished his studies and initial formation

195. Situation. This can be a critical time: it marks the passage from a guided life to one of full operative responsibility ¹⁰. The young friar will find himself free, with greater responsibilities and in a new environment; he must find a way to remain faithful to God.

196. During the first five years after the initial formation period, when a young friar is finding his place in the community, there should be someone to direct and help him live fully his youthful love and enthusiasm for Christ ¹¹. The Prior or Vicar Provincial ¹² will name someone to be this brother "director" who will meet personally with the young friar at least three times a year. The competent authorities should organize an annual, regional meeting of young friars lasting at least a week; this meeting should dedicate itself to the dynamics of community living and sharing ¹³. The meeting can also be a time for spiritual renewal (cf. *Const.* 31bc; 119) and an occasion to share and solve problems on the personal, community or apostolate level.

8.1.5.2. The friar in early adulthood

197. Situation. It is still the springtime of life. The friar in early adulthood (25 to 40/45) is full of self-confidence - he takes on a variety of tasks and services energetically. But about ten years after solemn profession there is the risk of falling into a rut, of being disappointed by the meager results of his work; he may confront that mental and physical exhaustion that afflicts forty-year olds, he may lose his self-confidence.

⁶ Cf. *Progetto formativo dei frati minori cappuccini italiani* (Bologna 1993) pp. 28-30. This is possibly the first formation project that handles the problems of middle and old age *ex professo* (section II and III of the second part: *La formazione permanente*).

⁷ GUARDINI, R. *Le età della vita. Loro significato educativo e morale* = Sestante 2 (Vita e Pensiero, Milano 1992) p. 82.

⁸ Priors and vicars provincial, with the consent of their respective councils, must guarantee all friars a year for spiritual, theological, pastoral or cultural renewal. In fraternal dialogue, they should encourage each friar and arrange times when he can be freed from his ordinary responsibilities and take advantage of the year of renewal. The friar, for his part, will present in advance a detailed programme for the approval of the competent authority. (*Const.* 167).

⁹ Cf. VC 69-71; *Progetto formativo dei frati minori cappuccini italiani* (Bologna 1993) pp. 23-33, nn. 19-31.

¹⁰ Cf. VC 70.

¹¹ Cf. VC 70.

¹² Cf. CG 1995. Documento sulla Formazione. *Disposizioni del Capitolo*, n. 8, in: Acta OSM 61 (1996) p. 237.

¹³ CG 1995. Documento sulla Formazione. *Disposizioni del Capitolo*, n. 8, in: Acta OSM 61 (1996) p. 237.

198. It is important to help the friar in young adulthood who is looking for genuine meaning to find new impetus and motivation for his choice of life; to help him see his original choice once again in the perspective of the Gospel and the charismatic inspiration of the Seven Holy Founders. One must not confuse the value of one's dedication with the results of one's work. The young friar should

- seek specialization in some field in which he is interested and for which he has the aptitude;
- take a sabbatical year (preferably in community) at least once every ten years – at around the ages of 35 and 45.

8.1.5.3. The middle-aged friar

199. Situation. This is the summer of life. Middle age (40/45 to 65), the time of spiritual fatherhood. The friar Servant of Mary experiences satisfaction or frustration seeing his fraternal, ecclesial or professional projects succeed or fail. He is tempted by individualism, by feelings of inadequacy, by rigidity, withdrawal or apathy.

200. It is important to help the middle-aged friar regain a higher level of spiritual and apostolic life and discover what is peculiar to the phase of life through which he is passing.

If a friar lacks the courage or the patience to take an entire sabbatical year (around ages 55 and 65) he should at least:

- try to live intense periods (three months or less) of theological, educational, pastoral updating and spiritual renewal;
- become involved in re-training courses.

8.1.5.4. The friar in old age ¹⁴

201. Situation. It is the autumn of life. In old age (65 and above) more frequent ill-health and diminishing strength force the friar Servant of Mary gradually to withdraw from action. This is often a time of sorrow. There is a growing risk of loneliness, depression and feeling useless. The friar experiences what Paul describes in the context of our approach to the resurrection: "We do not lose heart. Though our outward humanity is in decay, yet day by day we are inwardly renewed." (2 Cor 4, 16; cf. also 5,1-10). St. Peter who had the immense task of shepherding the Lord's flock hears himself told: "When you are old you will stretch out your arms, and a stranger will bind you fast and carry you where you have no wish to go." (Jn 21,18).

202. It is important to offer the elderly friar an intelligent program of spiritual support and to appreciate his regular presence at common acts (prayer, chapter, meals, recreation, relaxation) and his work albeit diminished (*lectio divina*, spiritual direction, light manual work, conferences, preaching ...) all to the extent that his strength allows. His presence among young friars should be valued. While for his part their enthusiasm and creativity will provide a sense of continuity, they can benefit from his experience, words of comfort, and encouragement to persevere in their dedication and joyous faithfulness.

8.1.5.5. The friar approaching death

203. Situation. It is the winter of life. At the sunset of his life the friar Servant of Mary is aware that his encounter with the Lord is near; it will be the culmination of his total oblation of himself. As that "supreme" hour approaches he knows that the Father is bringing to a close that mysterious process of formation that He began long ago.

¹⁴ Cf. PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE LAITY, *The Dignity of the Aged and their Mission in the Church and in the World* (October 1, 1998); John Paul II, *Letter to the Aged* (October 1, 1999).

204. Religious life is *ars vivendi, ars moriendi* (the art of living, the art of dying). It is important that the friar who is on his way to his Father's house be accompanied by the anxious love of Mother Church (Sacrament of the Sick ...) and by the sincere affection of those who have been his companions on this journey; in this way the courage and fear that usually accompany this moment of transition will be turned into serenity and faith.

8.1.5.6. The friar tried by life ¹⁵

205. Situation. Apart from those difficulties connected to a particular time of life, every age can know crisis. These crises can be the result of external factors (change of community or work, difficulty with work or failure in the apostolate, misunderstanding, being shunted aside) or more personal problems (physical or mental ill-health, strong temptations, crises of faith or identity, feelings of meaninglessness, and so forth). The friar beset with these difficulties is standing at a crossroads – he must choose again what he intends to be.

206. When remaining steadfast becomes really difficult – as was the case with the prophet Elijah (cf. 1 Kings 19,1-18) ¹⁶ - the friar must be helped to continue his journey towards a new awareness of himself and a new experience of God. This will be an example for all of us. We can help and support that friar by showing greater confidence and more intense love on both the personal and the community level. Above all the prior must be sensitive and supportive (cf. *Const.* 47-48). The help of a qualified brother will be of great comfort; his eager and helpful presence can lead to rediscovering the alliance God has initiated and will not forsake. The friar who is tried learns that purification and detachment are essential elements in following Christ crucified. The trial itself is an instrument of formation in the hands of the Father (cf. Heb 13, 5-6). It is not simply a psychological struggle of the ego, but a religious struggle marked by the daily presence of God and the power of the Cross!

¹⁵ Cf. CENTRI DI ORIENTAMENTO SCOLASTICO, PROFESSIONALE E SOCIALE (= COSPES), *Difficoltà e crisi nella vita consacrata* (Elle Di Ci, Leumann-Torino 1996) 199 p.

¹⁶ Cf. MASSON, M., *Elia: l'appello del silenzio* (Dehoniane, Bologna 1993).

8.2. BASIC THEMES IN PERMANENT FORMATION

8.2.1. Human Maturity

207. *Specific Aspect*

To grow spiritually and as a human being over time; to accept periods of difficulty as necessary passages and occasions for a renewed choice or a new definition of oneself that will lead to the realization of God's plan for us.

208. *Means*

1. *Reasoned self-discipline and care for one's health* (cf. *Const.* 117): know one's own strength and needs, both physical and mental.
2. *Ability to make a personal judgement.*
3. *Sense of responsibility and the ability to be critical of oneself* – to accept one's own poverty (limitations and talents).
4. *Positive appreciation of one's loneliness and need for affection* (cf. *Const.* 109); learn how to control one's emotions, affections and above all sexuality.
5. *Internal freedom: the ability to listen, to accept patiently criticism, correction and help*¹⁷; to internalize and make sense of one's life experiences, to use the Gospel as a point of reference.
6. *A desire to be informed and to learn* (cf. *Const.* 115; 157); *reading* (cf. *Const.* 75d), *pastoral and cultural updating* (cf. *Const.* 119).
7. *Reconciliation with one's own past*, a frequent source of feelings of guilt, failure and anger.
8. *Study*, the indispensable means for complete formation (cf. *Const.* 157). *Courses of specialization* (cf. *Const.* 163)¹⁸.
9. *Sabbatical Year* – eventually every ten years.

8.2.2. Following the Lord

209. *Specific Aspect*

Center increasingly one's own life on the Master and Lord, Jesus Christ, by assuming various responsibilities.

210. *Means*

1. *Daily lectio divina* (cf. *Const.* 24b; 31a; 116; 154), practiced both with the community and with the faithful (cf. *Const.* 80).
2. *Integration of one's prayer life and work life* (cf. *Const.* 121).
3. *Contemplative prayer* as a prolonged and loving look at God, or as a personally experienced occasion of union with God.
4. *Faithfulness to community and personal prayer* (cf. *Const.* 24; 113).
5. *Active participation in the liturgy* – the most effective means for complete religious formation (cf. *Const.* 114).

¹⁷ "A Christian community becomes a community of salvation not because wounds are healed and sufferings alleviated but because both become a passage and an occasion for a new vision. After confession both become occasions for reciprocal appreciation of hope and a sharing of weaknesses, a common record of the strength that is to come." NOUWEN, Henry J.M., *The Wounded Healer*, (Image Books Doubleday, New York 1990) p. 94.

¹⁸ Cf. *CG 1995*, Studi, n. 4. *Titoli accademici e specializzazioni*, in : *Acta OSM* 61 (1996) pp. 251-252.

6. *Evangelization*: receive the Word of God, make it one's own, proclaim it publicly in concrete and current language (cf. *Const.* 86).
7. *Assistance of a spiritual or pastoral guide*.

8.2.3. Common Life

211. *Specific Aspect*

Learn to see fraternal life in community as the basic foundation of formation for a Servant of Mary (cf. *Const.* 121) as over the years he takes on a variety of tasks and responsibilities.

212. Means

1. *Integration* of community life and apostolic service (cf. *Const.* 111).
2. *Work, preferably in a group* (cf. *Const.* 81).
3. *Deep human friendships* ¹⁹ that bring one out of isolation ²⁰, enrich the personality and lead to the perfection of charity (cf. *Const.* 109; Jn 13, 35; 15, 12.15).
4. *Community review of life (révision de vie)* evaluation of one's over-all direction in apostolic service, in witness and in the use of property (cf. *Const.* 36) search for a common vision.
5. *Human relations based on trust and openness; listening to each other, sincere and friendly dialogue*, free from all selfishness (cf. *Const.* 108).
6. *Recognition and positive resolution of whatever conflicts arise* (cf. *Const.* 17).
7. *Wisdom of the heart* (Psalm 90 [89], 12); wisdom of the poor one who is loved, of the sinner who is pardoned (cf. Rm 8, 35-37).
8. *Universal Brotherhood*: unconditional acceptance of other people (cf. *Const.* 74).

8.2.4. Servite Identity

213. *Specific Aspect*

To communicate through one's own service the joy one finds in being a friar Servant of Mary.

214. Means

1. *A sense of belonging*, following day by day the life of the Order throughout the world.
2. *Charism of the Order*, shared in one's own service in mercy (cf. *Const.* 52).
3. *Dedication to Our Lady* in teaching, liturgy and devotions.
4. *Readiness* to go wherever Servite work in the world requires (cf. *Const.* 3).

¹⁹ N.B. Deep human friendship is part of the original charism of the Order. The Seven Holy Founders were so linked by a spiritual friendship "that they could not support the absence of one of their number for an hour without great displeasure" (*Legenda de Origine Ordinis*, n. 29). For Christians too friendship is evident in the concord that existed in the primitive Christian community (cf. Ac 2, 42-48; 4, 32-35; 5, 12) and in the very life of Jesus. He had intimate friends such as John the Baptist (cf. Jn 3,29), the disciples (cf. Jn 1, 35ff), Peter (cf. Jn 21, 15ff), the beloved disciple who rested his head upon His breast (cf. Jn 13, 25. 23; 19, 26; 20, 2; 21, 7. 20), Martha, Mary and Lazarus of Bethany (cf. Jn 11, 3. 36), Mary of Magdala (cf. Jn 20, 11-18) and others. Jesus loved and was loved ... He therefore does not ask us to close ourselves up in the security of an infantile affectivity prolonged in time; He challenges us to love deeply. Cf. FERRARI, Gabriele, *Religiosi e formazione permanente. La crescita umana e spirituale nell'età adulta* = Problemi di vita religiosa (Dehoniane, Bologna 1997) pp 61-82 (chapter 3. *L'amicizia delle persone consacrate: è possibile? come si esprime? Riflessioni e prospettive*); John Paul II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis* on the formation of priests in present-day circumstances (March 25, 1992) n. 44; MOONS Hubert M., Letter *Arise and Walk* (November 16, 1994) m. 34.

²⁰ Cf. MERTON Thomas, *No Man Is an Island* (Image Books, New York 1967) 197 pp.

8.2.5. Apostolate, Work, Missionary Dimension

215. *Specific Aspect*

To know the social, economic, cultural and religious realities of the world in which one is engaged.

216. *Means*

1. *Sense of work and spirit of service.*
2. *Sense of mission and the ability to adapt.*
3. *Manual work* is an integral part of formation: it gives a person balance, expresses love of the brothers, allows one to live poverty and to understand the conditions of human life (cf. *Const.* 118).
4. *The ability to encounter all people* and to work humbly with them.
5. *A less frenetic rhythm, a sense of availability, a style of spiritual service* that in practice considers persons more important than structures, that is concerned with *being* rather than *doing*.
6. *Faithfulness to one's commitments and a willingness to update oneself constantly* (cf. *Const.* 75d).
7. *The ability to make conscious choices* for the sake of the Kingdom, the ability to say no when one has reached one's personal limits (cf. Mt 16,26).
8. *Missionary leadership.*

8.2.6. Justice and Peace

217. *Specific Aspect*

To meet the real needs of the society in which one works; to answer the signs of the times; to feel oneself involved in the affairs of the Church and of the world.

218. *Means*

1. *Attention to the urgent needs* of our time and of our world.
2. *Ability to find real and practical solutions.*
3. *Generous assistance to the least* (the aged, the sick, the poor).
4. *Visits to Christians and non-Christians alike.*
5. *Ecumenical and inter-religious meetings* (cf. *Const.* 91).

How can a grown man be born? (Jn 3,4)

219. I am sure you remember the reply of Jesus to Nicodemus' question.
You must be born anew of water and the Spirit (Jn. 5,5).
You are still a Christian in the process of becoming,
still in ongoing formation.
You must reserve space within yourself to being always new,
so that your re-birth after Baptism is something continual.
The Friars' Constitutions (120) note that
the personal development of the Servant of Mary
continues throughout life.
Take care, then, to keep your door open for newness of life,
for change in your life,
for your own conversion.
Do not turn in upon yourself.
Ever.
As the years go by,
do not let your heart be coarsened
and hardened like stone (cf Ezek. 36,26).
As your poor body is slowly being transformed
and is perhaps losing some of its youthful vitality,
may your heart preserve and develop your youthfulness of spirit.
Do not consider what old-age takes away,
but notice rather what it leaves you with.
And do not lose your ideal of service.
Even in advanced years,
whatever you have the strength for,
retain your delight in giving service,
after the example of Jesus
who came not to be served, but to serve (Mt. 20,28)
and to give his life for others.
If young people can find older religious
who are alive and happy in their vocation,
the work of formators would be easy...
and you would be bearing much fruit. ²¹

²¹ MOONS, Hubert M., osm, Letter Arise and Walk (November 16, 1994) n. 17: Acta OSM 62 (1995) p. 35 in French.