

## BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTICES

*Formazione affettivo-sessuale: itinerario per i seminaristi e giovani consacrati e consacrate.* Ed. Paolo Gambini, Mario Oscar Llanos and Giuseppe Mariano Roggia. Collana Problemi di Vita Religiosa. Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, 2017. ISBN 978-88-10-50746-9. Pages: 482. Price: € 38.00.

Don Bosco, the founder of the Salesians, is known for having given special attention to the virtue of purity. Though in some Salesian settings this attention became excessive, exaggerated and distorted, Don Bosco's basic intuition was correct. As various authors in the book under review say repeatedly, affectivity and sexuality are fundamental dimensions of the human being and his project of life (Llanos and Tognacci 19, etc.)

This substantial volume, fruit of some four years of work by professors from the Faculty of the Sciences of Education of the Salesian Pontifical University (UPS), Rome, offers guidelines for formation of Catholic seminarians and consecrated persons in the area of affectivity and sexuality. It is addressed primarily to formation guides, but will naturally be useful also to seminarians, priests and consecrated persons in general. (Presentazione 7)

I believe that the importance of the formation of formators to the consecrated life, and to the priesthood, cannot be underestimated. My impression is that, while we have learned how to prepare teachers, especially in the areas of philosophy and theology, we have not yet learned how to prepare formation guides, or at the very least, this kind of preparation has not yet become system. Provincials, for example, do not hesitate to set aside confreres for masters or doctoral degrees, but they still find it difficult to 'spare' someone in order to prepare him for the work of formation. The book edited by Gambini, Llanos and Roggia is, therefore, very relevant, and, along with the two volumes produced in India some years ago (*Psychosexual Integration and Celibate Maturity*, ed. J. Parapully and J. Kuttianimattathil), one more precious contribution to the formation of formation guides.

Three things in this book drew my attention: (1) the emphasis on relationship, (2) the appeal to the category of

nuptiality, and (3) the primacy of faith and of grace in the dialogue between the spiritual dimension and the human sciences.

I do not want to dwell long on the third point, the primacy of grace, except to register my appreciation for the way this permeates the contributions. It would have been unfortunate to find, especially among consecrated persons who are specialists in the human sciences, an exaggerated compartmentalization and, worse still, a lack of clarity on this question, but this is clearly not the case. In his Preface, Msgr. Patron Wong, Secretary of the Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education, rightly draws attention to the expression of St Paul: "Until Christ be formed in you!" (Gal 4, 19). Formation is the work of the Trinitarian God who in his goodness and wisdom has wanted to work not only directly in our hearts but also through mediations, among which also the human sciences and formation guides.

As for the first point, the relationship perspective, the editors are wonderfully clear: "the theoretical and methodological perspective of the process [presented in the book] is founded on relationship."<sup>(8)</sup> Among the positive points of postmodernism is the attempt to overcome the atomic individualism that has dominated the West since the modern period, and that underlies and underpins much of contemporary politics, economics, culture and society, as many of the contributors point out. Within church circles also we see a shift away from the individual and towards a rediscovery of the person (see, among others, Guardini, Ratzinger and Rupnik), a category that was forged as Richard De Smet pointed out, in the crucible of the great Christian effort to think and speak coherently and faithfully about the Trinitarian God. Human beings are created in the image of God who is Communion, and are therefore relational at their very core. Relationality is not, therefore, something that must be added on to the individual (Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau); it is part of the way human beings are constituted. The I is born from the We of the parents, family, society. In the wonderful phrase of Lonergan reported by Philip McShane, "That's what life is all about: saying hello." We come ultimately from the eternal conversation that is God. It is good to read, therefore, at p. 383: "In the ultimate analysis, we believe that the

effectiveness of formation is mediated above all by the quality of the relationship that is established between formees and educators.” As a young consecrated person coming from a difficult family background once said to me: “What really healed me was meeting a formator who loved me without expecting anything in return.” Human beings are relational, and it is by relation that we form to relationship. “In this way *goal* and *method* coincide.” (8)

In the light of this, I find it extremely interesting that Giuseppe Roggia, in “*Cammino spirituale e maturazione affettivo-sessuale*,” proposes the category of *nuptiality* for a harmonious integration of the spiritual journey and affective maturity. Nuptiality, Roggia says, is something that is profoundly rooted in the Bible though he, for some reason, fails to make the obligatory reference to John Paul II’s great Theology of the Body. The category of nuptiality has the advantage of not only being able to mesh seamlessly with the relational perspective of the book, but also of making possible an integration of the three states of Christian life in the context of a theology of relation, where the states are understood not in separation and competition but in relation and communion.

“It is only one person who can form another,” says Roggia in another article on the formation of formation guides. We need to pass, therefore, from a formation centred on knowledge and techniques to one centred on processes generative of the person, accompanying him to the attainment of autonomy and responsibility for himself, for others and for creation. Given, further, that ongoing formation is the mother-idea of formation, the person has to be helped to learn how to learn. (242)

Pope Francis insists, in fact, on the *via pulchritudinis* the dynamic of beauty that attracts and influences, the joy that is the most beautiful sign of the truth of consecrated life. Within a community that is “sufficiently healthy,” with the presence of formators who are authentic even if not perfect, all the tools supplied by the human sciences take their place. I must say that I am impressed by what I have been able to read in the second and third parts of the book (II: methodologies psycho-education and affective maturity; spiritual direction and vocational accompaniment; the helping relationship and formation; the

experiential group; self-expression; formative “training”; psychodiagnosis; counselling and psychological therapy; III: instruments the personal project of life; tools for evaluation and self-evaluation; dream therapy; the family genogram). In his article on spiritual direction, Roggia makes the interesting observation that spiritual accompaniment is not “an aristocratic optional” but something that should be the normal way of being adults in the faith, of exercising paternity and maternity in the faith. (261). Interesting also is his insistence on the accompaniment of preadolescents, though here he is talking chiefly of group accompaniment given that sexuality is now discovered, at least in a Western context, already before the age of 10. (271) Noteworthy also is Anna Rita Colasanti’s article on experiential learning a skill that, to my mind, is absolutely fundamental to formation, which is basically a process of “learning by experience” (see, for example, article 98 of the Constitutions of the Society of St Francis of Sales). Roggia’s article on the personal project of life is also well worth reading, both because his insistence on the necessity of this formative instrument for ensuring a clear direction to growth and maturity in the context of individualism, subjectivism and the worship of transient feelings, and because of the utterly refreshing practical indications for the writing of the project (discovering the divine centre of one’s existence, living in the present, in an attitude of discernment, with the help of a guide). Worth looking into is also Severino De Pieri’s article on assessment tools, which he calls not only important but even indispensable, given the importance of affective-sexual maturity in the formation journey, and the prolonged psychological and affective immaturity of candidates. (353)

One great conclusion follows from the wonderful way in which the volume under review focuses on relationship: that it would be a mistake to focus solely on formees, or at best on the skills and tools for formation. Formation is a constitutionally relational reality, and so we cannot afford to forget the “other pole” of the relationship: the person of the formator himself, and the formators as a team, or perhaps even better the community as the subject of formation. The very first attention in the formation of formation guides must be to the persons of the formators

themselves, their human and spiritual growth, as individuals and as team. I see this book as being meant for formators first of all in this sense: as an invitation to invest seriously in their own personal growth. Only within this kind of commitment is it then useful to place the learning of skills and methods, instruments, processes. And all this within a sane and integrated Christian vision of the person as relation and here this book is precious. Vision is not everything, but it is fundamental. "When there is no vision, the people is lost." (Prov 29,18)

My warm congratulations to the Faculty of the Sciences of Education of the UPS and to the many who have contributed to this volume, and especially to Paolo Gambini (former dean), Mario Llanos (dean), and Giuseppe Roggia (professor, member of the national team for vocation ministry of the Italian Bishops' Conference, consultant to the Conference of Religious Major Superiors in Italy). My impression is that the contributions flow not only from academic competence, but also from the personal engagement of many of the authors in the work of formation to consecrated life and the priesthood. It would have been wonderful to find a good index (what the Italians call 'indice analitico' at the back of the book but that could be a job for the next edition of this book, which any formation house and seminary should be happy to acquire.

*Ivo Coelho*

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