



## TUGBOATS

*...an additional help to steer a willing heart and mind into the harbour of life or out into the sea of living, as did Don Bosco, with and for the thousands of young people of his times.*

# Formation, Leading to Transformation: Reality or Hypothesis?

*The blazing Sun can well be a sign of the formation process we are all called to engage in. The sun is **ever vibrant**, even when unseen by half the world; there is a **dynamic continuous inner process of combustion** which sustains the very being of the celestial body; and finally, the resulting heat and light is **not for itself but for everyone**.*



## 'PUTTING ON CHRIST'

If I am not mistaken it is Paulo Coelho who in one of his books writes, 'we are stories telling stories'. We can look at this statement from two perspectives: we are stories and we tell stories. Every human being on earth is a story and he/she has a story to tell. Credibility comes when there is a correspondence between the story that 'one is' and the story that 'one tells'. To be credible, in other words, one needs to become the story that he/she narrates.

Formation, Pope Francis in a recent talk, observed is about "protecting and nurturing vocations, and they shall bear ripe fruit." Formation, Pope continued, "is not a unilateral act by which one transmits theological or spiritual notions." Jesus did not say to those he called: Come, I shall teach you or explain some difficult concepts to you. Instead, his invitation was 'come and follow me', 'do as I do', and this

is the method that even today the Church wants to adopt for her ministers.

To follow someone could be taken literally, to walk in the footsteps of that person or else it could mean to imitate or to live the same type of life that person lives. Jesus' invitation 'come follow me,' therefore, is not only a call to accompany him, rather it's a call to imitate him. In other words, it is a call to be like him. Come follow me is an invitation, as St Paul would say, to "put on the mind of Christ" (Phil 2, 5; 1 Cor 2, 16) or as St John in his first letter would say, it is a call to "live the same kind of life that Christ lived" (1 John 2, 6).

If so, the whole purpose of formation is to become the story that one wants to narrate. For the consecrated person, there is only one story 'to be' and one story 'to narrate'; the story of God in Christ Jesus. Formation, then, both initial and ongoing, has only one goal, to become a version of the story of

Christ. As Pascual Chavez, our former Rector Major said we all need to be converted to Christ and conversion, he said, is a call to become another version of Christ.

***Formation a gradual transformation into the person of Christ.***

Formation, both initial and ongoing, is a gradual transformation into the person of Christ, a slow and patient process of being formed/transformed unto the likeness of Christ. Hopefully one will be able to repeat along with St Paul, at least at the end of one's life, 'it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me' (Gal 2, 20). I would consider it no exaggeration to state that formation to religious life and priestly life is either a transformation into the person of Christ or it is no formation at all.

Fr Alex Kalathikattil sdb (INK)

### Formation to Transformation

Does formation lead to transformation? Everyone who cares about the future of his/her congregation repeatedly asks this question, knowing well that this is our future.

The three major stake-holders in formation are the formee, the formator and the religious order or the circumstances. Though each one has his role, I feel the major role is played by the formee. It is in his answer to what, why and how can a real formation take place. However it is true of transformation too. The same formators and the circumstances can evoke different reactions. I would personally see, transformation as development of positive attitudes. Attitudes that will positively affect oneself and the other. A formation which does not prepare the formee or the attitude of the formee which does not comply

with the mission is meaningless.

The demands made by the face of the other, in every situation, challenges me to be another Christ, who seeing the needs of the other, did forget himself, and was one with them. The transformation is an attitude which makes me to be one with, to whom I am sent. Transformation becomes a hypothesis when it remains in the individual structures, most often conveniently chosen for my comforts.

Cl. Manu Michael sdb (INK)



## Formation: A Slow and Steady Transformation

Formation does lead to transformation. The proof of this is in the number of Salesians, whose lives enthuse us, because they exude a certain inner conviction of their vocation, as their lives have undergone a transformation. They have made the journey from Information to Formation, to Transformation. That is there for all of us to see. And they touch our own vocational journeys, through their lives.

In the Salesian Ratio (2000), there is a recurring theme, which is also repeated by Pascual Chavez, in his letter, Vocation and Formation. Formation is a daily response to vocation. It is not a long period of

waiting, for the full involvement in the common mission. Nor is it a time for religious and professional studies. Formation is the joyful acceptance of the gift of one's vocation and its actualization at every moment of one's life and in every situation. Formation is a matter of vocational identification, which leads to the transformation of our self, into a Salesian self. It is a life-long task, a daily Yes.

Transformation is about the quotidian, and not the bizarre and the esoteric. It is a slow-fire affair, not a microwave magic. It is something that happens *in us*, and not *to us*. It is that which makes us move from the gallery to the arena of life, from

being a spectator, to becoming a participant. Transformation is the plunge into life, a matter of heart and guts, the fire within. It is our destiny, that which destabilizes all our stances, and makes us move forward. Path is the goal, and goal is the path, as Zen wisdom, would have it.

Yes. Formation does lead to transformation, in the climate of a community, which is purpose-driven, with the mystic touch of those who are being transformed, journeying within.

Fr Jose D. Maliekal sdb (INH)

## Igniting a Transformative Process

As I pondered on this proposition, 'Formation, leading to Transformation: Reality or Hypothesis', I asked myself: Am I being asked to make a judgement on the status of formation as it has happened in the past / is happening now or should happen in the future? What empirical data does one have to make such an assessment? In the absence of any scientific data one can only surmise that certainly Formation has led to Transformation in some people's lives and therefore a reality to some extent. And it is equally or more true to say that it has been just a hypothesis in most cases, a theory to be tried out, a premise

or an assumption we base ourselves on in our attempts at formation.

Having said that – and it is not saying much – I would instead want to know when can we really say that formation leading to transformation is a reality. One is often tempted only to look at what formation does in the lives of the formees: does a conversion, transformation or a makeover happen in their lives? We need to go beyond this. Does the formation one receives/ gives help to transform the reality around the formee/ the formator for better? Does the formator also get transformed for the better in the process of imparting formation? If that happens then we can say that formation indeed leads to transformation. The challenge then is to make every formative effort into a transformative process whereby



what is premised, supposed does indeed become a reality.

Fr Thomas Pallithanam sdb (INH)





## The *Teleos* of Formation and the Face of the Other

The issue of formation is becoming a hot topic of discussion in the religious circles today. One of the reasons pointed out by different forums for the high drop outs among the clerics is the lack of wholesome formation. When the issue of paedophilia soared high, the various religious communities were invited to go back to their formation strategies and make it holistic. As it is popularly said, formation should not be confined to providing information about religious life, its history, and history of the congregation or its constitution. Formation should lead to transformation. This transformation involves a change that leads one from being fisherman to a fisher of man. Christ was the greatest fisherman of people and formation is intended to imitate Jesus, who shed his blood for others. Vita Consecrata of John Paul II says: "The consecrated persons should not only make Christ the whole meaning of their lives but also strive to reproduce the form of life that the son of God embraced." So, formation is moulding ourselves to Christ, who lived and died for others.

In this context, the basic question to be reviewed again is 'for whom is the formation oriented to?' Much emphasis is put on the personal character of formation. Formation strategies emphasise on development of convictions, talents, and religious values within a person. But sometimes the *teleos* of formation is often missed out. The aim of all these formation procedures is to become fishers of men. Let us look at the formation policy employed by Jesus. The three years that the disciples spent with Jesus was their formation time. At the end Jesus asked them to 'go and proclaim to the world' (Mk 16: 15). This mission can be contrasted to what was given to Adam and Eve: 'be fruitful and multiply' (Gen 1: 28). Thus formation is other-oriented. When we limit formation only to the personal growth of the individual without

considering the aim of it, it is an invitation 'to be fruitful and to multiply.' In this case formation will remain as only information about very many things without knowing the 'why' of the whole thing. Only when this teleological nature of formation is stressed can formation lead to trans-formation – transcending one's own boundaries for the other. Formation is not only the transformation of the person but also the transformation of the world. The face of the other should evoke a spontaneous response of responsibility from me.

This aspect of formation is also emphasised in our Constitutions when it says: "Our vocation is graced by a special gift of God: predilection for the young... for their welfare we give generously of our time, talents and health" (Constitutions 14). Don Bosco is the best example for the other-oriented formation. The early years of his life, the time when he acquired the gifts of nature (tailoring, cooking, making pastries, magic etc... along with his spiritual and academic formation) could be considered as his formation period. Years later when he saw the face of Bartholomew Garelli, the formation that he received transformed into active apostolate for the others.

So formation will become transformation only when the teleological nature of formation too is emphasised. Otherwise it could tend towards individualism. I may know so many things but those things may not evoke a response from me. In such a context, formation leading to transformation would remain a mere hypothesis and not a reality.

Cl. Jerin Palatty sdb (INK)



## Formation to 'be Christs'

Everything in nature is a command but with regard to the human nature it is an invitation." "If it is to be it is up to me." These two quotes remind us of an important aspect of any formative experience. The whole thing is a process of personalization and integration. It has something to do with a sense of responsibility and accountability. Scott Peck in his book *The Road Less Travelled* says, "Real transformation takes place when the person does not follow the beaten path." Does he mean to say that the beaten path is not correct or the person who has travelled that path has traversed through the wrong course? I feel the answer is an emphatic no. We are challenged to take the road less travelled not because the beaten path is wrong but because the journey that a person takes up in his life is not referring to a physical journey but an internal one. Secondly it is a process of growth for each individual and needs to be taken individually by himself/herself, a task involving the self. One person grows into maturity not because he takes a beaten path or he does not but because he is ready to take up the journey. Therefore we could say that the formation process that we have seen through and gone through has its own advantages and limitations and it is for the present day formees and formation guides to get into the whole process with a sense of belonging and owning up the journey that the person has to make.

As I see, the process of formation takes place in the context of a formative experience. We are trying to understand the process of formation in the context of the bicentenary of the birth of Don Bosco. What is formation about? Abraham Herschel, a Jewish intellectual seems to have said that 'there are certain nouns with a verbal connotation.' I feel formation is one such word. Therefore trying to understand the deeper significance and meaning of formation we understand that it has something to do with gathering information that helps towards formation, training, personalization, integration leading to transcendence and finally resulting in Christ-formation. So the goal of formative experience is Christ-formation and the means could be seen as a process of internalization

### Questions to Ponder

\* Does the quality of our confreres and the quantity of the work that we do reflect the long years of formation that we impart to the formees?

\* Are our confreres through our formation equipped to meet the changing scenario of today's post-modern world of the young?

\* Does our formation build up a sense of personal responsibility and authenticity in the young confreres or does it serve to be just conformity to the rules?

\* Does formation help our young Salesians strive to become Men of God or efficient managers or neither?

\* Does formation ever end? What then is my attitude towards ongoing formation?

ion and personalization of vocationally sound values built up into attitudes trying to balance one's desire and urge to fulfill one's needs only in keeping with one's vocational choice and vocational response. Taking up one's cross and following Jesus is a response that asks for vocational integration of all that one experiences in one's life. It is no more finding one's relevance or becoming just useful. It is simply being moved by the charity of Christ which becomes one's compelling motive (2 Cor 5:14).

Formative experience does not stop with gathering information rather it has something to do with building up of attitudes. Basically it is becoming aware of one's identity: sense of identity ought to become something of a priority in one's life. Basically we are followers of Christ and that is our identity. This is what we know ourselves to be and what we want to be. We try to see ourselves in terms of this basic identity and that would lead us to understand ourselves in terms of our charism and also the traditions of the congregation.

Fr Thonikuzhiyil Joyce sdb (INK)





## Formation, More a Formality than a Transformation?

The topic 'Formation leading to transformation: Reality or Hypothesis?' is provocative. For us Salesians, ongoing formation is an integral part of the very nature of formation. Here I restrict myself to the area of initial formation. I have the fortune of meeting clerics/brothers at various stages of formation in the formation houses and in the communities. Some remarks that I often hear are about the quality of confreres in the initial stages of formation. They seem to lack convictions, be less enthusiastic, touchy, fragile, and tend to easily succumb to pressures. There are also some of us who, having gone through (successfully?) this stage exclaim, "When we were Brothers..."

My experience and observation proves these remarks right in some way. Fr Pascual Chavez speaking about formation affirmed that there is a growing 'psychological fragility, vocational inconsistency and ethical relativism' among the formees. Are the formees to be blamed? Or the formators? Neither. I think time has come for us to seriously review and renew our formation settings and the process involving the accompaniment of the young Salesians. It is true that the existing formation settings have been well designed for formation and they have worked well for the most part. We notice that changes have been drastic in every sphere of life and that we have almost a new breed of young people willing to take up the challenge that we once took up. But how are they going to fit into the old wine skins?

Salesians in the formation settings are doing a commendable work. After all the effort put in, it pains us if one says that 'at the end of the two/three years of philosophy, we have a college student with a religious tag going for the practical training.'

What needs to change? We need to change from a curriculum based initial formation setting to a process based setting. Discernment does not and cannot be complete with the first profession. Formation settings at all levels need to focus more on and spend time and efforts to help formees to deepen their call and convictions about Salesian life and mission.

Eureka? Not yet. I am still thinking. All of us need to. Maybe we will come up with something Copernican.

Fr Thathireddy Vijaya Bhaskar sdb (INH)

## Know Don Bosco

1. Who was Bosco's childhood friend?
2. What magazine did Don Bosco bring out against the bad press?
3. Who was the leader of the first regular missionary band to India?
4. Where was the first academic and technical school started by Don Bosco?
5. How many Salesians attended the first General Chapter?

*(Names of those who send the right answers will be published in the next issue. Please send your answers to [manunsdb@yahoo.com](mailto:manunsdb@yahoo.com))*

## Answers for the September 2014 Issue

1. How many boys attended the first catechism class organized by Don Bosco? *One*
2. Who were the companions of Fr Thomatis? *Vingeron, Bibeck and three brothers.*
3. Who designated Rua to be the first successor of Don Bosco? *At the explicit request of Bosco, Pope Leo XIII*
4. Name the 10 diamonds present in the Dream of Don Bosco? *Faith, Hope and Charity, Work and Temperance, Obedience, Poverty, Reward, Chastity and Fasting*
5. Who was the first Salesian Co-operator? *Pope Leo XIII*





## WHITHER FORMATION?

Some ask: Who *needs* formation? The answer is so obvious that most of us miss it! It happens during group therapy that the answer is evident for all except for the one in the hot seat! In everyday life too, others see the dirt on our face, but not us – unless of course we look into a mirror! The question could be posed differently: “Who *wants* formation?” Here again the answer is obvious. So you should know the obvious answer to: *Formation, leading to transformation: reality or hypothesis?*

Once I put out five key words related to formation to a group of formators and I got the following responses. Formation as **INFORMATION**: a time to acquire knowledge. As **EDUCATION**: to turn knowledge into wisdom through thought and reflection. As **TRAINING**: to become skilled in what we have learnt. As **CORRECTION** or **HEALING**: to make mid-course changes and to integrate our emotions. Then we came to the fifth term: **FORMATION**. They were lost for words. Earlier on a trial run I had put the same question to a group of pre-novices. They had responded spontaneously: *To have the mind of Christ!*

A preacher was speaking of obedience and mentioned about a Rector and Correspondent of the school who served a memo on his confrere who was the Headmaster. Sounds odd? Yes, if we think that we are committed to perfection and to seek God’s Will, and should not require threats! Not odd anymore. Some consider that profession and ordination make us privileged, hence not responsible. Hopefully the memo shocked the confrere into reality!

By now it must be clear that we have posed the wrong questions. Who needs formation? Who wants formation? What is formation? The question could have been: Why am I here?

Fr Tharakan John sdb (INH)

## “YOUR FRANK OPINION...”

*Thanks and congratulations... I just went through what Fr Tony wrote (regarding the need of formation of lay people for a healthy Salesian mission). I could not agree more!*

Fr Ivo Coelho sdb

*Greetings from the Philippines on the way around the EAO region. Thanks for your wonderful TUGBOATS, September issue. Yes, we need something like this and it's to be congratulated... But I have one question always in my mind: Is there a future for the Salesians in India without a strong move towards the Lay element in our charism - number of brothers? number of Salesian cooperators? just 15 VDBs in the whole country? Could you contribute something in this sense to the TUGBOATS...?*

Fr Vaclav Klement sdb

*Thanks for your kind mail and for sending Tugboats. I read the current issue and I was happy to have read all of it. My hearty congratulations to you and to the brothers who are at it and all the contributors.*

*The theme of the next issue sounds good. I am sure it will bring out some serious matter for thinking and hopefully action!*

Fr Thomas Koshy sdb

*Congratulations as you brought out the second issue of the Tugboats. Do circulate it to all our provinces. It is a great initiative. Keep it up.*

Fr Thathireddy Vijaya Bhaskar sdb

*Congratulations for TUGBOATS, a wonderful initiative launched by Don Bosco, Karunapuram. Don Bosco's great vision has tugged us till today, to celebrate his bicentenary. Indeed as expressed in Tugboats, we have the historic responsibility to visualize and continue his mission for another century and more.*

Fr Noel Maddhichetty sdb

## “...OUR SINCERE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT”



## Don Bosco's Approach to Formation

Once while talking to the boys, Don Bosco gave them a riddle: What is the full form of S.S.S.S.? The boys could not decipher it and the next day during the good night he explained it himself. The five Ss mean: *sano, santo, sapiente, sacerdote salesiano*, meaning Healthy, holy, wise, Salesian, priest. The Salesian priest is to be healthy, holy and wise. This would indicate to us the idea that Don Bosco had with regard to the result of a formative experience. It is integral, whole, specific and all embracing.

Don Bosco inculcated in the minds of the young certain basic and true convictions. Don Lemoyne speaks about three mementos that Don Bosco gave to the boys: a word of advice (frequent confession), a friend (Our Lord and everything associated with Him), and a thing to remember (heaven) (Vol. VII, 307). We are to live a life in association with Jesus. This is our identity. For Don Bosco the ideal of *sequela Christi* was something basic for a formative experience.

Another important element of the formative style of Don Bosco was to help the boys to get themselves motivated. Once he told them the experience of Pope Innocent XI with an ambassador who came to him requesting him certain favours which were contrary to justice. The ambassador used all his eloquence to convince the Pope that it would be wise to oblige so mighty a prince. The Pope listened in silence and replied, "I

cannot grant your request.' The man said, "Your Holiness remember that the emperor is immensely rich and can lavishly endow the Church. He will also be generous to you personally." The Pope reiterated, "The answer is still no." "He is even prepared to defend you with his armies against your enemies," insisted the ambassador. But the Pope replied, "Regretfully I cannot grant his request." "The emperor may take offense and you may later regret it." "My answer is still no. Tell your emperor that if I had two souls I would gladly sacrifice one for him. But I have only one." After narrating this Don Bosco continued, "This is a magnificent answer worthy of a Pope. I say the same to you my dear sons. You have but one soul. If we had two we could sacrifice one to the devil by satisfying our passions. But we have only one. So what must we do? Throw it away to the devil. No, let us

give it to the Lord so that we may be eternally saved. To be able to offer to the Lord we must be able to do certain things and avoid others. Let us always strive to learn what to do and what not to do." Why do you do what you do? Finding an answer to this challenge is being properly motivated. Thus he inculcated in them a sense of purpose and many of them were able to respond to Don Bosco as he helped them to be motivated.

Thirdly Don Bosco's method was one of accompaniment. He reached his boys' hearts because the truths he taught and the grace which accompanied them were enhanced by his thoughtful anxiety to meet their needs. Their ailments, moods, melancholy and discouragements never escaped his eye.

Fr Thonikuzhiyil Joyce sdb (INK)

Regions	Salesians	Novices	Total
Africa-Madagascar	1416	97	1513
America South Cone	1419	30	1449
East Asia-Oceania	1395	72	1467
South Asia	2597	153	2750
North-Centre Europe	2292	31	2323
West Europe	210	1	211
Interamerica	1919	38	1957
Mediterranea	3281	23	3304

Number of Salesians and Novices according to the Regions -2014 ([www.sdb.org](http://www.sdb.org))