

Sculpting JESUIT

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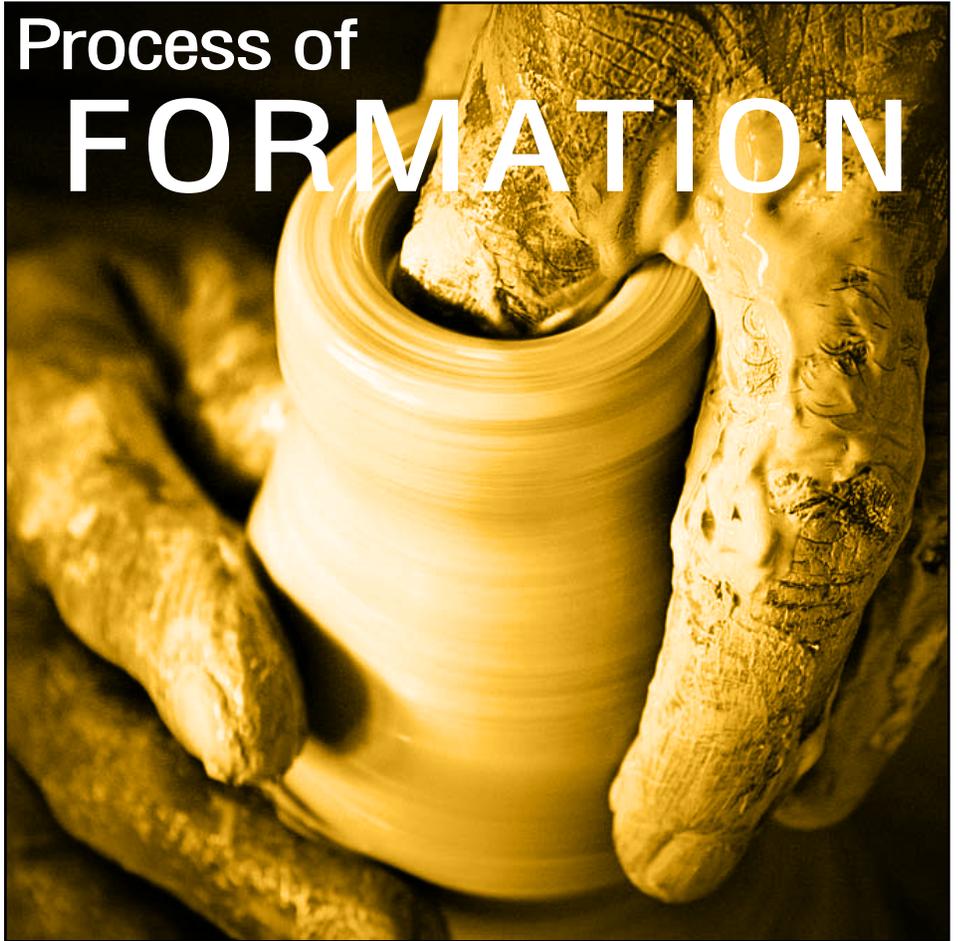


ONE OF THE FAVORITE meditations I use to guide others to see themselves is to imagine themselves as a sculpture – a masterpiece by the Master Sculptor, shaped moment by moment, a work in progress. Yes, every person is a sculpture in the hands of the Creator.

Formation is a participation in this work in progress. Each formator is God's co-sculptor in the shaping of His unique masterpiece. Family life may be likened to the kind of sculpture called "modeling." "Like clay in the hands of the potter, so are you in my hands," says Yahweh. As flexible as clay or wax is in the hands of the potter or the sculptor, so are we in the hands of God through our parents. At young adulthood, we move on to choose the particular pathway of our life commitment. But God does not cease His shaping and re-shaping of our person.

Formation work in religious life participates in a later stage in the Creator's work in progress. Such a later formation may be likened more to another kind of sculpting called "carving." Whereas modeling permits addition as well as subtraction of the material and is highly flexible, carving is strictly limited by the original block. The person who enters

Process of FORMATION



the process of Jesuit formation is still a work in progress – but has formed characteristics, taken from both nature and nurture, each with a peculiar temperament and personality – uniquely sculpted through his life story. The process of Jesuit formation will find God chiseling through each formand a masterpiece – slowly bringing out the grain, and the quality work of art. What I attempt in this article is to describe these stages of carving called "Jesuit formation."

NOVIATE: CHISELING BOLD STROKES

The two years of Jesuit novitiate may be likened to carving out the "bold chiseling strokes." In this initial stage of carving, formation adopts a psycho-spiritual approach. This aims to bring about an initial understanding of the formand's personality, his sexual orientation, and his motivation for entering Jesuit religious life. A thirty-day retreat on the Spiritual Exercises of

St. Ignatius allows the new Jesuit to enter into the basic paradigm of Jesuit life. Different month-long exposures – or "trials" – in apostolic life are undergone: e.g., mission, hospital, squatters, factory which challenge him to integrate his own religious ideals with actual life experience. At the end of this two-year period, the Jesuit novice is evaluated as to whether he is fit for a Jesuit lifestyle. If he is deemed ready and fit, he makes his first vows.

JUNIORATE AND PHILOSOPHY: INTERMEDIATE, CHISELING STROKES

Jesuit Juniorate and Philosophy years attempt to chisel the formand more finely. The stress of a year of Juniorate formation is towards greater socialization – exposing the formand more and more to the interactions of community life vis-à-vis the rigors of university studies and continuing apostolic endeavors. Interpersonal skills are stressed.

Communication subjects are taken – stressing proficiency in both English and Filipino – chiseling them to greater sensitivity through literature and the other arts.

Two years of philosophy studies follow. What is significant in these years is the development of critical thinking, or the ability to question his basic presuppositions of thinking. This equips the philosopher with a way of understanding his own choices in life. What is important is an examined, reflected life. These years aim to challenge the formand to move beyond a conformist paradigm, hopefully liberating him from his myopic ways of thinking through a process of deeper, critical self-awareness.

REGENCY: SCRUTINIZING THE WORK IN PROGRESS

At regency, the sculptor takes a back step to scrutinize His masterpiece in process. The two years of regency are usually spent teaching in particular Jesuit schools, although some regents are sent to peculiar assignments according to need. Regency is an entry into the regular rhythm of Jesuit life. Here he has to learn how to deal with everyday stresses of living – this time in peer relationship with his fellow Jesuits. He enters into this regular rhythm while attending to

his regular apostolic assignment – usually dealing with students and faculty, and being involved in outreach programs. Regency aims to help the regent learn how to integrate contemplation and action, and come as close as possible to the Ignatian ideal of *contemplativus in actione*. At the end of regency he is assessed as to whether he is ready for theological formation. For those who are judged not yet ready, another year of regency awaits them. Some may decide to leave Jesuit life.

THEOLOGY AND ORDINATION: CARVING THE FINISHING TOUCHES

Through four years immediately preceding ordination, the Master Sculptor carves through his finishing touches. Central to these four years is the academic theological formation. Aside from this, however, the theologian is evaluated in terms of stability of personality, clarity of vocation, and a rich spiritual life. What is most important in this stage of formation is the answer to the following question: will the individual be apostolically effective? Are there still unresolved personal issues that hinder apostolic effectiveness? Can the formand deeply appreciate his God-given gifts, and the way God

has slowly molded and carved his personality through all his years of formation? These questions have to be attended to – and sufficiently answered – before ordination. At the end of the four years of theology is a final evaluation. All the years of formation culminate in the Jesuit's ordination to priesthood.

In the spirit of *Contemplatio ad amorem*, the whole formation program of the Society of Jesus is a learning to love. At the end of the long stages of Jesuit formation, at ordination time, the new Jesuit priest asks himself: can he now be a work of art His Creator can hold proudly in His hands – bearing the Standard of Christ in poverty of spirit, detached from a life of honor and applause, begging to decrease as the God he proclaims with his life increases, walking ever humbly before his God? Truly, the work of formation never ceases.

Fr. Venancio S. Calpotura, SJ, who obtained his doctoral degree in Formative Spirituality from Duquesne University in Pennsylvania (USA), served as Formation Delegate of the Philippine Province of the Society of Jesus. Revered as the formator par excellence of the Philippine Jesuits, he exercised many formation responsibilities, like those of Novice Master, Vice-Superior of Theologians, among others. He was also the Director of the Center for Ignatian Spirituality (CIS) and the founding Director of EMMAUS Center, both of which continue to provide invaluable assistance to the formation of priests and religious.





Stages in Jesuit Formation