

AFFECTIVE MATURITY: FUNDAMENTAL REQUIREMENT FOR RESPONDING AND LIVING THE RELIGIOUS VOCATION

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Abstract:

In the Catholic Church, there are three ways or states of life: (1) married life, (2) celibate life as priest or religious, and (3) celibate life as lay person. Ideally, each individual can only choose one of these three states of life for the rest of his or her life. Therefore, in order to be able to choose and to live their life choices responsibly, an individual is required to have maturity in physiological, emotional, intellectual, and interpersonal aspects. This article attempts to describe one of the aspects of human maturity, namely the “affective (emotional) maturity”, in relation to the choice of celibacy as a religious person. The significance of human affectivity lies in its correlation with other aspects of maturity. Affectivity is a ‘machine’ for an individual that is more than intelligence or spiritual facts. It is connected with human biological reality as a force or a drive that enables individuals to act or behave. As is well known, vocation to the religious life (to become a priest, monk, or nun) in the Catholic Church is marked by the commitment of the person to live the three evangelical values: obedience, poverty, and chastity. Those called to religious life are obliged to behave and to be oriented in accordance to their vows. In this context, affective maturity becomes a measuring tool as well as a fundamental requirement to be able to respond to and to live this demanding religious vocation.

Keywords:

affective maturity • religious vocation • self integration • internalization • transcendence • transformation

Introduction: Affective Area in the Constellation of Human Maturity

In general, “human maturity” is defined as the goal of the development of each individual that covers all aspects of human life. The term “comprehensive maturity” used by Franco Imoda can explain this definition clearly:

“Comprehensive maturity refers to the person as a whole: physiological, emotional, cognitive, interpersonal. It denotes the capacity to carry out the operations demanded by the ends proposed, or the lack of that capacity. Maturity is impeded when the individual lacks the essential or effective capacity to act as a spiritual and intelligent being, free to transcend himself in a love both anthropocentric and theocentric. Psychologically, maturity depends on the degree of inner harmony and the capacity of managing the inevitable conflict inherent in the mystery of the person.”¹

Here, the term “comprehensive” refers to all aspects of humanity: physiological, emotional (affective), intellectual (cognitive), and interpersonal (social). In other words, when we talk about “human maturity,” we are not really talking about only one aspect. The focus of this article is on “affective maturity,” for this type of maturity is a reflection of one’s actions and is generally used to be a measure or a reinterpretation of human maturity. Affectivity is very important because it is considered as a fundamental dimension of the person. In other words, “affective maturity” can be considered as an indispensable requirement for the optimal functioning of the personality. The pleasant or unpleasant nature of the various relational experiences is the reflection of the affective maturity achieved by an individual.

To be able to understand more about human affectivity, this aspect is often compared to other aspect that works in a conflicting way, namely the cognitive aspect. The *cognitive area* in human personality tends to objectivize, in fact to externalize and somehow to divide, meanwhile the *affective area* unites and connects. We might say it makes the object encountered as other cohere with the self. Here, nature and person meet. It is only in the affective area that the moment of passivity expressed in the very ‘e-movere’ (to move out) is unified with the active structuring of object and experience. The mediation between finite and infinite, between bodily

experience and the spirit, between the objectivizing function of rational consciousness and subjective appropriation of truth happens here. This is an arena of human heart's restlessness: torn as it is between the illusory rest of pleasure and the rest of a happiness not yet possessed. In this area of 'heart' which we call affective, what emerges as original and unique in the mediation expressing the basic dilemma, is the character of interiorization of the conflict itself. This is the place where affectivity, as passion, touches and unites subjectivity itself (the concrete self) with the actual personality, interiorizing the bodylines into the person's very being.² This mediation cannot be achieved apart from the area of human affectivity. Therefore, to be a "positive person" and to prevent uncomfortable conditions, people need to be aware of their affectivity. If they are aware of what they live, they can regulate their feelings or emotions, so that they are attuned to the motivations and aspirations rooted in the most intimate sphere of their being.³

The affective area is a very dynamic part of the personality, and therefore very sensitive to the evolutionary transformations of the individual.⁴ This is the point where one can deeply communicate or deeply wound and be wounded as well. In affective area there is an affective memory which plays an important role in the evaluation and interpretation of all that surrounds the individual. One product of reflective evaluation is an "emotion." Emotion itself is a tendency of action, of a rational nature this time.⁵ The return of past emotion is not experienced as memory but as a feeling of the here and now emerging from the present situation. When we experience a situation that is analogous to a past one, there is a spontaneous vivid recall of the past emotional reaction, and hence a tendency to experience the same emotional reaction once again.⁶ Therefore, we can say that affective memory operates in the subconscious. The affective memory is also generalizes: an affection inspired by a particular object becomes unconsciously generalized to all classes of objects. For example, a child bitten by a dog will tend to be afraid of all dogs.⁷ This case remembers us that from the beginning of its existence, the child learns to respond emotionally to the affective stimuli that he or she receives, especially in relationship with the attached figures. Because all of these complexities, Imoda says that the affective area of a fully human is not just a simple

emotion, but it is the locus for manifestation of the mystery of a human being.⁸ In this affective area, the authenticity of a human being: the identity and character or nature can be revealed, so that he or she can be better known or correctly identified by the people around him or her.

Affective Maturity and the Religious Vocation

God's vocation is fundamentally a dialogue between two freedoms, the freedom of God who calls and the freedom of human. God creates human as a free being to make human responds to God, making human "capable of responding." God does not force human to love God or to show God gratitude or to follow God.⁹ God touches our affection (personally) and invites us liberally to choose one of the states of life: marriage, celibate as religious, or celibate as laity. Affective maturity has an important function in helping someone choose his or her future life path. Specifically in the context of religious vocation, where a person decides deliberately not to be married, affective maturity has important roles for the spiritual and human growth of the person. This section will describe only *three affective maturity criteria* or indications and their implications or correlations with religious vocation, in order to present a holistic understanding of "affective maturity".

a. Affective Maturity: a Sign of Self-Integration and Internalization

There are two types of self-integration that indicate "affective maturity" in a person, namely integration *between all aspects of oneself* (spirit-soul-body;¹⁰ with its strengths and weaknesses), and integration (in the sense of 'internalization') *between values and his own ideals with evangelical values (Christ's values)*. The second type of integration assumes that the first integration has been achieved. Self-integration is an important topic to discuss here because it plays a central role in forming one's "true identity." As defined by Cencini and Manenti, *identity* is "the sense of interior unity and continuity lasting in time and various circumstances, together (*integral*) with an ability to maintain solidarity with a realistic system of values."¹¹ Without self-integration, there is no real identity and it means the lack of self-esteem which is manifested in shyness, lack of trust, lack of stability,

and lack of value reference. In other words, “there is no maturity without self-integration.” Integration does not signify superimposition (placed on or over something else). Identity is not something we arrive at only when the two structures tally, giving place to a full actualization of values. If only so, it would then be an absurd pretence or a source of perfectionistic tension toward an unattainable ideal.¹² To find our “true identity,” what must be integrated first are weaknesses and strengths in each of us that appear physically or emotionally. To be able to accept our strengths is quite easy, but it takes a process and an open heart to be able to accept our weaknesses.

According to Cencini and Manenti, there are three aspects of these human weaknesses: “physiological, psychological, and moral” negatives.¹³ All of these constituted of those weaknesses, traumas, or affective immaturities, that nearly everyone carries within.¹⁴ Naturally, “non-perfection” may have left a mark or a weakness in us. There are wounds that never heal and we have to learn to live with them. Cencini said that to be mature means to be strong, in a position to be able to avoid former inconsistencies and immature traits. One acknowledges one’s own immaturity or weaknesses and know where its roots lie. For him or her, it is important above all to turn weaknesses into an integral part of life. Before struggling against them, one should be helped to make sense of them.¹⁵ Briefly, affective maturity means the success of integrating these weaknesses as part of ourselves or our lives. An “integration” of these weaknesses means: engaging oneself in discovering one’s weak points, accepting them without undue anxiety or fatalism, acknowledging oneself to be a person in ongoing formation and in need of help, doing one’s best to limit their behavioral effects so as not to let them weigh on others, not pretending to resolve everything radically and in a hurry, but taking due precautions, living the immaturity as a part of one’s own self and as a sign of a limitation that one does not subject oneself to, but rather tends to overcome.¹⁶ From this explanation, we can understand that maturity *does not mean perfection*, but a perfectibility in the progressive fulfillment of an ideal-self-in-the-given-circumstance.¹⁷ Maturity includes the ability to accept oneself as a whole (integrally), including one’s strengths and weaknesses. We can be mature in our personal weaknesses, paradoxically, by finding our strengths in it. Recognizing personal weaknesses is very

important because one of the biggest obstacles to self-integration and internalization is when individuals, especially those who are in the early stages of formation, are firm in the belief that they are mature or good enough so that they close themselves for growth or change, and feel that they do not need any teaching further. For individuals like this, internalization of values is not possible.¹⁸

Immaturity or human weaknesses also could appear in the physical aspect, which is often discussed in the context of religious life in one's understanding and appreciation of sexuality. Although this aspect is very physical, the emotional (affective) dimension must not be excluded, because emotion can modify, civilize, and humanize physical desire. On the other hand, the physical dimension cannot be excluded either. We cannot leave our bodies outside of our relationships and so, one way or another, our bodies speak. In other words, there is always an integral relationship between the affective and the physical aspects of us, and "affective maturity" in this context means the ability to integrate both properly. "Integration" between the two can be called successful as far as affection or emotion can control our bodies, so those who show greater maturity on the index of psychosexual development will not have sexual weaknesses such as masturbation and homosexual or (negative) heterosexual relations.¹⁹ In fact, because "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt. 26:41), it is quite difficult to achieve this integration, but nevertheless the religious—as celibate—must find ways of integrating this bodily or physical aspect (with all of its desires) into her or his consecrated life. Many people say that positive activities such as sports or art can be a damper or diversion (*constitutive function*) of this sexual or physical desire. The implication of this integration is "internalization" which makes various disordered desires or wills can be controlled according to moral values and celibacy rules that we understand and live. Psychologically speaking, celibacy in religious life can be justified as a viable human attitude only if it expresses the living commitment of a personality sufficiently fulfilled with regard to its affective growth. Celibacy is not simply a matter of logic, and its meaning is more than simply rational. Those who are called to live this life need to be sufficiently free to accept to do so without being able completely to explain their choice. In this context, persons with affective maturity have

achieved integration between the spiritual aspects (the values they live) with the physical aspects (sexuality, which they control in the commitment to follow Christ radically).

In the context of religious vocation, the second thing that must be integrated is one's self—with all its values and ideals—with Christ's values. In this context, affective maturity means the internalization of Christ values in our self.²⁰ Nobody receives a call from God and can answer the call of God except in the person of Jesus Christ. A "personal vocation" can only be in Christ Jesus.²¹ Often, the difficulties experienced by priests and religious in trying to internalize Christ's values appear to be heightened by this tendency: the person is limited in the interior freedom. It becomes evident then that merely proclaiming the values by word alone without the matching action could constitute a way of evading the actual internalization of the proclaimed value.²² In other words, "there is no integration between knowledge and action." In fact, "integration" is a condition or requirement of religious life. Religious vocation, in its very essential positive values of "offering," requires self-denial, sacrifice, and painful self-correction, which are formulated and expressed in the three vows: chastity, poverty, and obedience. The three vows are impossible without an integration of the personality with the supernatural values of concrete dedication to God and to our fellow human beings for the sake of the Kingdom.²³ In a particular sense, sometimes "integration" can also be understood as "balancing" two or more different things. In priestly and religious vocation, it is very important to balance (integrate) our personal needs and concerns and that of the larger community, congregation, or diocese. The reason is that religious life cannot exist without an individual dying to self, in such a way that collectively all can witness to the central sacrifice of Christ who died that we might have life abundantly (John 10:10).²⁴ However, before being able to achieve this balance, a person must first reach the affective balance. According to Crea, each age is particularly important for the affective growth, since in each age the individual is called to balance emotional experiences, to live one's own affectivity and feelings in line with the chosen lifestyle. It is in the affective dimension that the levels of integration of the constitutive aspects of the person are reflected, just as it is in them that the distortions of character and

mood are revealed.²⁵ We can conclude that, affective maturity is indicated by the self-integration (and also internalization), which helps strengthen one's identity as consecrated person or minister of pastoral service. It allows to rediscover how life is a sequence of opportunities to respond to the vocation project of God.²⁶ Integration and internalization are unifying factors of personality. The seat of one's own identity becomes the conviction and as a consequence the involvement becomes really personal.²⁷

b. Affective Maturity: the Capability of Self-Transcendence

Living the religious vocation involves a capability of self-transcendence. If God calls someone to live a religious life, that means God also calls the person to transcend his or her life ("going out from the self"). This call to self-transcendence, which constitutes real challenge and real struggle, can be expressed in various ways, depending on the motives at the root of one's actions or choices. Based on those motives or objectives, there are three kinds of human self-transcendence:²⁸

- 1) *Egocentric*. The principal aim in egocentric self-transcendence is one's own perfection or goodness. The goal of the human person is seen as self-actualization. One may give up some personal interest or pleasure for something that is self fulfilling or satisfying. A seminarian, for example, is concerned about his success in academics and in fulfilling his ambitions: to earn more comfort, honor, regard, or other benefits to enhance his life. In this case, the motive is for the individual himself, although someone else might indirectly benefit from his actions. When there is an indication of severe *self-centeredness* like this in a person, it constitutes a serious block to the next levels of self-transcendence, or the lack of ability to go beyond the mere pursuit of self-interest. This person instead could be prone to using others for the personal gain.²⁹
- 2) *Social-philanthropic*. The main motivation for social-philanthropic self transcendence goes beyond personal gains to seeking the improvement or perfection of the human community. A seminarian, for example, is concerned about his success in academics to improve the life of the people, his congregation, and to do something good for the society. These are humanitarian motives. There is nothing wrong with these,

except that the chief objective which is love of God, for its own sake, needs to be at the centre. In this stage, a person experiences real self-realization, even though it is not yet perfect. Self-realization is to be reached only through altruistic self-transcendence, as Vatican Council II puts it: "Man can fully discover his true self only in sincere giving of himself."³⁰ These two forms of self-transcendence must be added in order to bring them to fullness of love in Christ.

- 3) *Theocentric*. This ultimate level of self-transcendence means that one is becoming detached from oneself in order to reach God. This is the ultimate objective to which the human person aspires, since God is the ground of every meaning and every value in one's life. A seminarian, for example, is concerned about his success in academics for the sake of the reign of God and the intrinsic good in doing his studies well. The difference between this and egocentric self-transcendence is that the person is not inordinately preoccupied with the reward or affirmation he would receive as a result of his action. If self-transcendence is basically theocentric, the person stands firm doing good with or without reward or recognition as a total gift for God and others.

In addition, a research by Rulla and friends shows that a person who has reached the final stage of self-transcendence also has psychosexual maturity that enables him or her to control various physical desires and even bring him or her to be an ideal religious day by day.³¹ Besides being a gift, theocentric self-transcendence is also the final result of a self-conquest which can be reached only gradually. The gradual conquest involves a long personal journey of active cooperation with the divine grace.³² If the capability of (theocentric) self-transcendence is one indicator of "affective maturity," we can say that maturity always requires also a long process or can only be reached gradually. Crea said that affective maturation is not a matter of "all or nothing", of something that is there because the person always smiles and is lovable by everyone, or is not there because one is grumpy and intractable. Rather, it is a lifelong process that aims to modulate and reconstruct the different emotional experiences, against the background of common motives and objectives (as explained before, since various grades of self-transcendence depend on one's motives and objectives).³³

Another important thing we need to consider is that theocentric self-transcendence can be reached and celibacy can be lived only in “adult faith,” because over and above psychological considerations, the centre of our life is the person of Jesus Christ. Only a mature person is able to comprehend how joy and suffering come together in the Paschal mystery, and that to die is to create life. Only a mature person can choose, like Christ, to be vulnerable. Also, it is in meditating upon the person of Jesus Christ—the Word made flesh in order to be completely in communion with humans—that we can freely accept the demands of a celibate life (cf. Phil. 2:6-7). An adult faith on the mystery of a free gift of God which transcends our power of expression also needs our capability of self-transcendence. For, only the matures—who do not feel ‘threatened’ and who are able to transcend themselves—are capable of accepting this mystery in their lives. Their inner security enables them to accept the unknown in their lives and to accept that others will question a way of life which can never be explained in a completely satisfactory manner on the level of human logic. The most frequently asked question is: “Why are you celibate?” To reach certain depth and to be expressive of the values, one has to be rooted and grounded in Christ, which means being rooted in love. Love involves a degree of self-transcendence. To transcend oneself as a priest or religious means to overcome oneself for the love of God. However, as Rulla explains, religious vocation does not start from the human side, but starts from divine transcendence and stresses the divine call by the eternal and gratuitous love of God.³⁴ This concretely means making choices and decisions based on what pleases God rather than on what one generally likes or prefers. To be like this, we need to transcend ourselves. Some theorists, like Erikson, believe that a stage of maturity *beyond self-actualization* exists, that is, a kind of “self-transcendence” which essentially the same as the Gospel vision “*to love* others in the same spirit of generosity that God loves us.”³⁵

These values of Christ must be incorporated and will perfect all of the human good values that a person gets from the past and throughout his or her life. According to Szentmártoni, this is also an indication of affective maturity that can only be achieved with the principle of self-transcendence. To reach affective or emotional maturity, it is necessary that one is able to connect one’s past with one’s present in a global vision of one’s life (“self-

transcendence,” beyond the now and here), which is protesting toward the future. The inclination and orientation of an individual toward the future are revealed in the fact that one has the values and ideals that one wishes to achieve and for which one lives. The historical development of an individual is influenced not only by the events of the past, but also by one’s look at the future. Although it is true that one’s past life largely influences the present situation, it is also true that, up to a certain point, one can overcome this influence thanks to the ideals that one hopes to achieve in the future. In this context, “affective maturity” means knowing and accepting one’s objective, values, and free ideals in situations and a legitimate consequence of the effort to live it.³⁶ About this principle of self-transcendence, Cencini also describes that to be mature means to welcome the natural aspiration that pushes one onward and forward, preventing one from being satisfied with mediocrity, thus attaining a premature old-age. One accepts the ups and downs of life in order to discover by oneself one’s own surprising and often hidden resources. And one decides to project one’s life and one’s future. One chooses “to throw away himself, forward” beyond petty calculations and even beyond gifts and talents, to make oneself available to receive that mysterious appeal that transcends the ego by projecting it into another dimension.³⁷

Up to this point, we can conclude that a religious person who has an “affective maturity” has the capability for self-transcends, which at its highest level means being able to change (purify) his or her motivation or objectives in serving God: not for the sake of oneself or one’s group only, but for something far greater: “for the greater glory of God.” Individuals with affective maturity are also able to process various experiences and emotions that arise from the past and the present, so that they can achieve a bright future. The ability of self-transcendence makes one not to be trapped in a certain time or place, but always to be oriented toward a better future. It is also important to note that a show of piety and knowledge of prayers do not mean that one has a vocation to the religious life. People need first to be grounded in the Christian faith and vocation before they can make a meaningful commitment to the religious or priestly vocation.³⁸ It means that one is able to integrate all aspects of one’s humanity and to internalize the divine values proclaimed by Jesus into the attitude and orientation of everyday life.

c. Affective Maturity: Transformation from Self-Love to Universal and Unconditional Love

This point shows a process of development that is almost similar to the three stages of self-transcendence in the previous point. However, the last stage of love at this point does not only mean doing something with the motivation “for God” (as in *theocentric self-transcendence*), but furthermore, making someone “remain with God,”³⁹ and even “to be like God”, who loves everyone, universally and unconditionally. It is obvious that the love for Christ and for humanity is a goal of religious formation, but it is also must be a starting point and a fundamental motivation.⁴⁰ This kind of love allows us to experience God affectively, as St. Bernard says, “to be affected is to be divinized.”⁴¹ Divinization, for St. Bernard, means that God descends into the flesh and transforms the whole individual, so that one may participate in God’s divine love. The love of God incarnates itself in the cupidity of the flesh, for thus God has created us in God’s image. The movement of our capacity to love first of all follows the laws of this vulnerable existence, which is in search of security and clings tightly to life.⁴² The discussion of love on this point is very important because ordinarily, the experience of total and exclusive love becomes the best catalyst for affective maturity. Affectivity matures under the warming rays of true personal love. The affectivity of a person called to live only for God will mature if it grows in the light of a total and exclusive love for God. And this is the fruitful source of one’s universal self-giving to others.⁴³ By this reason, affective maturity is also often referred to as mature love.

As is well known, there are three stages of love.⁴⁴ The lowest stage of love is “self-love” or egocentrism (*eros*) which focuses on self-satisfaction. As social beings, humans realize their inability to live without the help of others. This awareness leads them to the next stage of love, which is “interpersonal” or “exchange love” (*philia*). Cencini describes a person at this stage of love as one who is “not self sufficient”; one acknowledges one’s need for others, and trusts those at one’s side to the point of being ready to hand over one’s life into the hands of another and of allowing oneself to be limited by other people’s weaknesses.⁴⁵ However, this stage of love is still not perfect because usually it is still based on mutual need

motivation, for example, the love between friends which is only based on motivation that they do not feel lonely to each other. Someone who is called reaching an “affective maturity” is one who has succeeded in reaching the stage of ultimate love (*agape*), that is, a universal and unconditional love as exemplified by Jesus himself.⁴⁶ God’s love is universal and gratuitous. The awareness of being called to live love in this ultimate level (*agapeic*), motivates to regulate one’s emotional world, and is part of the process of growth and psycho-spiritual maturation of each person. One’s true affective maturity consists in the harmonious integration of one’s capacity to love and one’s need to be loved with one’s own state in life. It encompasses one’s entire capacity for interpersonal relationships. One can be trusted, but also is able to trust others. It implies the orientation of all one’s affections and, as far as possible, all one’s sentiments, toward the ideal one has chosen for oneself. This is one of the keys for developing a firm identity. Identity as religious becomes clear with the capacity for total gifts to the world, which may be concretized in the following of Christ represented by a heart that is poor, chaste, and obedient, as is Christ’s.⁴⁷ About this, Cencini says that “to have a clear idea of self must not exclude experiencing God’s mercy.”⁴⁸ The real experience of God’s *agapeic* love (mercy) is very significant for making us aware of who our true identity is: “fragile and sinful creatures who are always forgiven and still loved by God.”

Along the path of vocational growth, affective maturity has a very special place because it concerns the ability to love according to the teachings of Jesus. Gospel love belongs to the true nature of a person, who is called to rediscover one’s existential vocation in self-transcendence, dialogue, and openness to the other.⁴⁹ Self-revelation, openness to others, the willingness to be vulnerable, and even to be betrayed, rejected or exploited by those we love: these are the prerequisites of authentic communion. The terms “communion” and “community” used in this context symbolize a universal aspect of love. Universal love always forms or creates a communion with everyone, while self-love is isolated to oneself and even has a great potential to destruct the communion or relationship with others. Before taking his leave of his own, Jesus gives his testament of love which is the fulfillment of the path of conversion and maturation. John 13:34, for example, shows the process of growth as the

maturation of a communion that generates love for others. Meanwhile, John 15:13 clearly shows the unconditional dimension of divine love that we must strive for its manifestation in our lives. These are all genuine love, which is not just an ‘affect’ in the sense of being affected by somebody, but an active striving for the growth, ultimate good, and happiness of the loved person (despite having to sacrifice oneself), rooted in one’s own capacity to love.⁵⁰ If religious vocation is a particular way of loving, the chief characteristic of this love is to be found in the purpose of Christ’s own mission: “I have come in order that the sheep might have life and have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

This is the meaning of our celibate consecration and corresponds at the same time to the deepest needs of our human nature. As Jesus taught and did, every man and woman—in marriage as in celibacy—is called upon to give life, and the quality of our love can be judged only by the quality of life which our encounter with others brings forth. A religious affective maturity is evident from one’s strong desire to increase further union with Christ who offered himself in sacrifice love for the fulfillment of the Father’s universal salvific will. Just as God has given us his Word Jesus Christ to bring about community founded upon communion with himself, so should our own celibate love be creative and liberating, so that our relationships with the men and women whom the Lord puts in our way may build up true community. Affective maturity is measured by *the capacity of intimacy* with others. When relationships oscillate between subjection and domination, it is likely that the objective in each case is of a personal security rather than as a gift of life.⁵¹ Up to this point, it becomes clear that “affective maturity” means the transformation from the self-love or group-love to the ultimate level of love (*agapeic*) indicated by “universality” as the capacity to accept all people in one communion and in an “unconditional” way. All religious need this kind of love—it means they need to have an affective maturity—because they must always be ready to be sent everywhere and to serve everyone, as taught and exemplified by Christ himself throughout his life. As Rulla says, “A vocation to the life of the Evangelical Counsels must be understood within the mystery of Christ’s own life and love.”⁵² In a person with affective maturity, love becomes a virtue, and not just an emotion; it is an action or activity and less of a mere excitement of the senses.

Conclusion: Affective Maturity as Fundamental Requirement for Religious Vocation

As explained above, God calls humans personally and affectively, so we must also respond affectively first to his vocation, and then with all of ourselves: “with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind” (Luke 10:27). The response to God’s vocation thus requires our affective maturity, which in this article is indicated in three criteria: *the capability of self transcendence, self-integration and internalization, and to love universally*. Based on this understanding, we can conclude that affective maturity is a fundamental requirement for responding and living the religious vocation. As a “fundamental requirement,” it means that people will not be able to respond to God’s vocation correctly and live their vocation properly, without first achieving this affective maturity. Affective maturity is needed at the beginning of responding to God’s vocation to enter the religious life, so that we can choose the right way of life that is in accordance with God’s will. Furthermore, affective maturity is also needed for living the religious vocation, so that our lives and services are truly meaningful to ourselves and can be fruitful to many people, and so that we can form a good community with others. This is something that we must strive for in our life.

The Church emphasizes the importance of affective maturity as a condition for responding and living the religious vocation. Pope Paul VI indicates the need for religious education to be supplemented by sound psychology and pedagogy. Formation must help the candidates to achieve a proper degree of human maturity manifested in stability of character, ability to make carefully considered decisions, sound judgement of events and people, etc.⁵³ He also emphasizes the need to achieve maturity and especially the affective maturity before one is admitted to the profession of the vows: “... candidates ought not to go forward, nor should they be admitted, to the profession of chastity except after really adequate testing, and unless they are sufficiently mature, psychologically and affectively.”⁵⁴ Pope John Paul II also pays special attention to the centrality of affective maturity in relation to religious vocation. For him, the discussion on affective maturity is based on the presupposition that love is central to human life. The human foundation of priestly celibacy is the priest’s

capacity for mature relationships which, in turn, depends largely upon his degree of affective maturity: “In view of the commitment to celibacy, affective maturity should bring to human relationships of serene friendship and deep brotherliness a strong, lively and personal love for Jesus Christ. ...”⁵⁵ He also teaches that a sufficient and progressive freedom and affective maturity convert one into a relational human, capable of true pastoral paternity, and makes one conform to the emotions of Son, servant and lamb.⁵⁶ Based on the Church’s teachings, we can say that affective maturity is a condition for living religious vocation, because the heart of a religious life consists in relationship with God, prayer, authenticity, charisma, witness-faithfulness and community, value of life, justice and trust, dialogue and creativity, and self giving.⁵⁷ All of these values and virtues require creativity, courage, effort to overcome conventional limitations, a great heart, an open mind, an acute intuition in the unpredictability, radical commitment, and generosity for something imposed absolutely, precisely because a religious life is intrinsically beautiful, true, and good.⁵⁸ Above all, a person who is called needs an adequate affective maturity, so that all the good values can be truly realized and will bear abundant fruits for oneself and for others who are served.

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Endnotes:

- 1 Franco Imoda, *Human Development: Psychology and Mystery* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998) 372.
- 2 Cf. *ibid.*, 57-58.
- 3 Giuseppe Crea, *Psicologia, Spiritualità, e Benessere Vocazionale: Percorsi Educativi per Una Formazione Permanente* (Padova: Edizioni Messaggero Padova, 2014) 117.

- 4 *Ibid.*, 125.
- 5 A. Cencini and A. Manenti, *Psychology and Formation: Structures and Dynamics* (Mumbai: Pauline Sisters Bombay Society, 2010) 74-75.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 77.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 79.
- 8 Imoda, *op. cit.*, 57.
- 9 Amedeo Cencini, "The Four Talks" in International Congress of Young Women and Men Religious, *Looking to the Future with the Young Religious: Accepting the Challenges Proposals and Hopes* (Rome: Unione Superiori Generali, 1997) 19.
- 10 Cf. 1Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 4:12, etc.
- 11 Cencini and Manenti, *op. cit.*, 177.
- 12 Cf. *ibid.*, 177-178.
- 13 Cf. *ibid.*, 218-224.
- 14 For Szentmártoni there are five Indicators of "affective immaturity": a) The immature is not emotionally capable of adaptation, but approaches his peers in two extreme ways: either as protector or by isolating himself. b) The affectionately immature person has extreme reactions to sexual reality: he reacts with aggression or dissociation. c) The affectionately immature person is not capable of a relationship with authority but reacts in an extreme way or with aggression or submission. d) Immaturity is reflected in an inability to accept oneself in the form of false humility, or in the opposite, as an overestimation of one's abilities. e) As signs of immaturity we can list the following: lack of consistency and perseverance, loss of interest in the project, use of work as an escape, fear of accepting responsibility. See Mihaly Szentmártoni, *Psicologia della Vocazione (Appunti per gli Studenti)* (Roma: Pontificia Università Gregoriana-Istituto di Spiritualità, 1989) 47-48.
- 15 Amedeo Cencini, *Spiritual and Emotional Maturity: Guiding Young People in Religious and Priestly Formation* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1999) 80.
- 16 Cencini and Manenti, *op. cit.*, 220-221.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 178.
- 18 Cf. Chinyeaka C. Ezeani, *Rooted in Christ: Insights into Contemporary Religious and Priestly Formation* (Iperu-Remo: Ambassador Press, 2007) 37.
- 19 L. M. Rulla, J. Riddick, and F. Imoda, *Anthropology of the Christian Vocation: Volume II -Existential Confirmation* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1989) 283. Addition mine.
- 20 Further, Rulla defines this condition as "vocational maturity," in which religious persons can accept and integrate their needs with vocational values and attitudes, and to be realistic in its fulfillment. Cf. Szentmártoni, *op. cit.*, 50-51.
- 21 Herbert Alphonso, *La Vocazione Personale: Trasformazione in Profondità per Mezzo degli Esercizi Spirituali* (Roma: Gregorian Biblical Press, 2014) 19.
- 22 Ezeani, *op. cit.*, 35.
- 23 L. M. Rulla, *Depth Psychology and Vocation: A Psycho-Social Perspective* (Roma: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2003) 180.
- 24 Ezeani, *op. cit.*, 89-90.
- 25 Crea, *op. cit.*, 125.
- 26 Cf. *ibid.*, 139.
- 27 Cencini and Manenti, *op. cit.*, 427.

- 28 These three points are summarized from Ezeani, *op. cit.*, 22-25; cf. Rulla, Riddick, and Imoda, *op. cit.*, 121.
- 29 Ezeani, *op. cit.*, 43.
- 30 *Gaudium et Spes*, n.24, as quoted in Tim Healey, “The Challenge of Self Transcendence” in Franco Imoda (Ed.), *A Journey to Freedom* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000) 81.
- 31 See Rulla, Riddick, and Imoda, *op. cit.*, 294-295.
- 32 As Rulla says that “... this self transcendence ‘for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven’ ... is possible only through God’s supernatural grace: it is such a sublime, self-transcending ideal that is achievable only with God’s assistance and assurance ...” Rulla, *op. cit.*, 50.
- 33 Giuseppe Crea, *Patologia e Speranza nella Vita Consacrata: Formazione Affettiva nelle Comunità Religiose* (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna, 2007) 31; Szentmártoni also emphasized that “those who voluntarily strive to achieve perfection (maturity) once and for all, sometimes reach an artificial perfection or an alleged sanction which implies the disappointment of seeing every possible feeling, need, fundamental inclination lack. It can not be done directly, but only indirectly.” Szentmártoni, *op. cit.*, 48. For both of them, “affective maturity” (including the ability to self-transcendence) can only be achieved through a long and gradual process.
- 34 Rulla, *op. cit.*, 183.
- 35 Cf. Ezeani, *op. cit.*, 21-22.
- 36 Szentmártoni, *op. cit.*, 49; cf. Rulla, *op. cit.*, 182.
- 37 Cencini, *op. cit.*, 82.
- 38 Ezeani, *op. cit.*, 33-34.
- 39 “He has chosen us to be with Him” (cf. *Mk. 3:14*); “to remain in His love” (*Jn. 15:9*).
- 40 Cf. Marcial Maciel, *Integral Formation of Catholic Priests* (New York: Alba House, 1992) 35.
- 41 Hein Blommestijn, “Self Transcendence in Bernard of Clairvaux,” in Imoda (Ed.), *op. cit.*, 241.
- 42 Cf. *ibid.*, 256-257.
- 43 Maciel, *op. cit.*, 81.
- 44 To deepen these three kinds of love, read Bruce Brander, *Love that Works: The Art and Science of Giving* (Philadelphia and London: Template Foundation Press, 2004), especially *Chapter 13* about “the Highest Love.” See Crea, *op. cit.*, 121.
- 45 Cf. Cencini, *op. cit.*, 83.
- 46 Brander also calls this level of love as “the loftiest love of all.” Brander, *op. cit.*, 111.
- 47 Cf. L. M. Rulla, *Anthropology of the Christian Vocation: Volume I -Interdisciplinary Bases* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 2018) 283-284.
- 48 Cencini, *op. cit.*, 80.
- 49 Cf. Crea, *op. cit.*, 115-116, 119.
- 50 Brander, *op. cit.*, 112.
- 51 This universal love that forms a “communion” with others, according to Szentmártoni is inspired by communion with Christ Himself with the Father and the Holy Spirit. In this sense, someone with affective maturity can be understood as those who are able to see everything, judge, and act in the communion of God’s

Trinity and also discover the Church as communion and as sacrament of love and salvation. This awareness becomes the initial capital to develop towards a more universal love, which is also able to reach all people with different backgrounds of religion, ethnicity, culture, etc. Cf. Szentmártoni, *op. cit.*, 49-50.

- 52 Rulla, *Depth Psychology and Vocation*, *op. cit.*, 23.
- 53 Paul VI, *Optatam Totius: Decree on Priestly Training* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1965) n.11.
- 54 Paul VI, *Perfectae caritatis: Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1965) n.12.
- 55 John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1992) n.44.
- 56 Cf. John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Consecrated Life and Its Mission in the Church and in the world* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996) n.65-69.
- 57 Frank Santucci, "The Life of the Constellations," in International Congress of Young Women and Men Religious, *op. cit.*, 154.
- 58 Cencini, "The Four Talks," *op. cit.*, 16-17.