

Maturity: What the Church Seeks Through Its Consecrated Persons

When examining the Church's formation documents and those of various Institutes of consecrated men and women, the terms *maturity* and *mature* prominently appear. From a human formation perspective, human maturity produces and nurtures a fragrant, sweet ripeness. Maturity manifests a vibrant but measured self-potency that emerges through the discipline of reflective self-observation. Joy, fulfillment, and peace are the unfolding characteristics of mature persons irrespective of their life situations and the challenges that life presents.

On April 4, 2011, Most Rev. Diarmuid Martin, Archbishop of Dublin and Primate of Ireland, presented [*The Truth Will Make You Free: A Personal Journey*](#) at Marquette University International Dialogue on the Clergy Sexual Abuse Scandal. In his presentation, he noted the following: "We have to learn that the truth has a power to set free which half-truths do not have. The first condition for restorative justice is that all parties are willing to tell the truth and to take ownership of the truth, even when the truth is unpleasant. As I said at a recent liturgy of lament in Dublin: 'The truth will set us free, but not in a simplistic way. The truth hurts. The truth cleanses not like smooth designer soap but like a fire that burns and hurts and lances.'" "

In reference to our article here on maturity, Archbishop Martin reminds consecrated persons of their need and requirement to seek truth, i.e., the world's truth and one's personal truth, even though searching for the truth hurts at times. This parallels *Vita Consecrata*. Its formation exhortation notes the importance of *learn[ing] how to discover the signs of God in earthly realities* (VC 68). Maturity begins with seeking, uncovering, and disclosing truth and reality. There is a strong connection between the ability to seek one's truth and one's level of maturity. Maturity vitalizes the capacity to search for the truth. Human experience clearly identifies the correlation between the capacity to authentically see, hear, feel, and experience truth and the level of an individual's maturity. Without a significant level of maturity (which has little to do with intelligence level), truth becomes illusive and reality becomes distorted.

Maturity depends on the discipline of reflective self-observation, of being an astute, inquisitive observer of self. This discipline nurtures self-awareness. When curious self-observation focuses on the truth of how we have been shaped and formed and on the reality of how we continue to be impacted by past events and recent situations, we grow in self-awareness. We increase our self-awareness concerning how our body, thoughts, emotions, and heart are swayed and moved by various people, events, and things throughout ordinary, everyday life. The

present condition of our body, thoughts, emotions, and heart sets the parameters and directs our behavior. They motivate and animate our behavior. When reflective self-observation is lacking, immaturity lingers. Inadequate self-observation gives way to limited self-awareness, an ignorance of the truth, and a misperception of reality.

Toward the conclusion of Archbishop Martin's presentation, he adds the following: "The question has to be asked as to what was going on in the seminaries.... There is a real need of a formation regime for future priests which will more effectively foster the development of rounded human beings, not just in the area of human sexuality but in overall mature behaviour and relationships. Being a priest today requires a high level of human and spiritual maturity to be able to face the challenge of truly serving the community.... What we need are future priests who truly understand the call of Jesus as a call to total self giving...."

From FCS's perspective, Archbishop Martin is calling for potent, comprehensive human formation processes within seminary, within initial formation. When this type of human formation is integrated into initial formation, these processes make a substantive difference in a consecrated person's life. Comprehensive and systematic human formation processes develop self-observation and self-awareness that unfold in maturational fullness.

One of the basic situations for dioceses and religious institutes has been a combination of fearing human formation and not knowing how to go about integrating comprehensive and systematic human formation processes. Sound human formation processes promote reflective self-observation and self-awareness that grow into maturational fullness. Also, the academic calendar and educational requirements have interfered with human formation. This is the primary reason FCS recommends that the bulk of human formation be accomplished prior to seminary or novitiate. How can a consecrated person be about "total self giving" when the consecrated person lacks disciplined self-observation, self-awareness, and significant human maturity?

Authentic consecrated life relies on and therefore necessitates a crucial level of maturity or human maturational ripeness. The maturational process, however, does not unfold in an accidental, casual manner. Human maturity needs conscious and intentional cultivation—human formation processes designed to enhance maturity. This is especially needed during the early stages of initial formation (vocational discernment and Postulancy/pre-seminary). When human maturity relies on chance, relegated to a subtext and an afterthought, and when ignorance and fear inhibit the institution and integration of concrete, helpful human formation processes within initial formation, the outcome for the Church will continue to yield many immature consecrated persons working in the ministerial vineyard. Be advised that the same immaturity and life stressors that produced the sexual abuse scandal within the Church will continue to show their ugly face in other ways.

Immaturity promotes poor decision-making and leads to problematic behavior. Self-absorption, rigidity, dismissiveness, harshness, disrespect, secretiveness, indifference, negativity, overly judgmental and critical assessments, closed-heartedness, addictive behaviors, and lack of self-observation and self-awareness generate difficulties and troubles. Immaturity also shows

itself in behaviors such as indecisiveness, intolerance, impatience, low self-esteem, distrust, and procrastination, as well as being unappreciative, guarded, uncharitable, inhospitable, aggressive, defensive, unfocused, impulsive, unrealistic, competitive, insistent, avoidant, controlling, self-doubting, and blaming. All of these behaviors cause a level of pain and suffering for the individual consecrated person and others. The immature person disrupts and stresses community, adds immeasurable headaches and work for leadership, and leaves the people of God confused and hungry.

On one level, the origin of the problematic behavior and the situations that occurred in a person's past are irrelevant. During the first phases of initial formation (and this is FCS's experience and stance), the cultivation of human maturity needs to be emphasized and prioritized. As candidates progress through vocational discernment and Postulancy/pre-seminary, candidates need to demonstrate significant growth in self-observation and self-awareness. Candidates need to show the capacity to grow, evolve, ripen, and mature. When candidates do not, this is a flashing red light of warning for formators, communities, dioceses, institutes, and the Church.

When helpful and effective human formation processes are prioritized and integrated within the beginning stages of initial formation, candidates, directors, and communities will clearly see whether candidates have the capacity to grow and mature. When a candidate in initial formation does not have the potential for whatever reason, it is unfair to the person, to the director, to the institute/diocese, and to the Church to encourage continued movement forward. A significant level of openness, reflective self-observation, self-awareness, and maturity needs to be demonstrated prior to the stage of novitiate or seminary.

Consecrated persons can be functionally mature and competent in many skills applicable, necessary, and helpful for ministry. Functional competency, however, does not necessarily evolve into genuine human maturity and should not be mistaken for human maturity. Our achievements have little to do with human maturity. Just look around our local communities and parishes that contain "highly successful" individuals. Though professionally trained and accomplished, many lack authentic human maturity. They lack, for example, self-awareness, warmth, empathy, humility, graciousness, appreciation, gentleness, and/or self-observation.

- How might we describe human maturity and its characteristics for consecrated persons?
- How might we go about cultivating human maturity, especially within initial formation?

Describing Human Maturity

Human maturity encompasses many dimensions. From her consecrated persons, the Church calls for more than helpful functionality, more than developing gifts and talents, more than success in ministry and administration, more than the capacity to direct and accomplish, more than doing all the right things, and more than academic success. The Gospels and the Church's interest focus on the humanizing aspects of relational interaction. This is similar to Archbishop Martin's earlier remarks and *Vita Consecrata's* exhortation. The Church desires that consecrated

persons attend to matters within the ministerial vineyard in a human heart interactions way, rather than in a functional, mechanical, automatic, robotic, unreflective way. For the Church, human maturity is much more than emotional-psychological-social maturity or the capacity to be concretely helpful in a ministerial way.

Take the example of listening to someone. When we just tolerate and put in the time with a pleasant look and nod, not really wanting to be there and be present to that person, the interaction and experience lack human warmth and humanizing connection. The experience does not open the heart or touch the heart of the other. An opportunity to humanize, touch, open, appreciate, empathize, and be compassionate has been missed. In turn, a shortage of appreciativeness and graciousness limits the human potential of the interaction. The experience may be functionally helpful, but it misses the quality of a warm and open human heart.

Ultimately, from a human formation perspective, the Church desires that consecrated persons attend to their individual heart. Through text and art within the Church and the documents and images of various institutes of consecrated women and men, the use and image of the human heart remains rich and energizing. We often talk about the human heart. The open, sweet ripeness and fragrance of the human heart makes a significant difference between just being helpful and successful in a functional manner and being genuinely human in an openhearted manner. Openheartedness infuses any movement and interaction such that it results in an experience of being deeply and profoundly touched. It has the capacity to convert and transform the individual self and other(s) in the situation.

Many people care for needs within the ministerial vineyard, for the needs of community members. Motivation, perseverance, and skill may yield a successful harvest, and successful harvests are important. But what is the cost—the wear and tear on the individual laborer and on those around the laborer in the vineyard? When human maturity lacks heart, openheartedness, and cultivating dispositions of awe and appreciation, gentleness and humility, reflective self-awareness, self-observation, consciousness, and presence to the here and now, functional maturity rather than heart maturity is being observed. Being functionally mature (trained and experienced) and being emotionally mature are important and necessary. However, the Church and its people need more than functional and emotional maturity from consecrated persons who attend to the vineyard. We seek heart maturity from our consecrated persons.

Essential Characteristics of Human Heart Maturity

What are some essential characteristics of human heart maturity? These characteristics would include, but also go beyond, emotional-psychological-social maturity.

People with heart maturity possess an overall awareness of and appreciation for who they are with their strengths and gifts, limits and underdeveloped aspects, unique personality, and particular way of making sense of the world. They experience a contentment and peacefulness with who they are and who they are not.

As reflective self-observers, they learn from their mistakes. In this way, they develop and integrate new learning. They are flexible and adaptable, open to new ideas and possibilities as the world and life shift and change around them with the passage of time and evolving events.

They acknowledge their potency and have tamed their ego striving desires and behaviors.

Aware of their emotions and how their emotions activate their thoughts and behaviors, they are capable of expressing their emotions in helpful, constructive ways.

Having appreciation for their importance and place in the world, they reflect on the experiences of the day. They possess active curiosity concerning how the people, events, and things of the day have impacted them and how they are called to adapt and adjust accordingly.

Knowing that they are important to others, they reflect on how they impact others. They are responsive to changing their behaviors and intentions accordingly. They readily seek reconciliation and forgiveness. They note and appreciate their importance and helpfulness to others and have placed their self-importance into perspective, placing everything against the bigger backdrop of life and reality.

Acknowledging, accepting, and satisfied with their place in the world, they have quieted their desires and appetites. They are at peace with themselves and their life situation.

They demonstrate grace within their bodies.

With a mature heart, they delight in relationships. They desire to be involved in healthy, mutually responsible relationships. They communicate well with concreteness, saying yes when they mean yes, and saying no when the mean no. They actively listen to others with empathy, interest, care, and compassion.

They are trustworthy, dependable, and consistent. They take responsibility for their behavior and the consequences of their behavior. They do not blame others for their mistakes. Consecrated persons with heart maturity exhibit independence and value interdependence. They structure their day, delight in their creativity and productivity, and possess self-confidence that energizes and propels them forward as they assume the tasks of the day. They recognize and celebrate their contributions to community, to the ministerial vineyard, and to the overall Church.

When adversity strikes, they manage the emerging situation and create opportunities from the ashes. They are resilient. They place situations and life into their proper context and perspective.

Consecrated persons with maturity of heart are conscious, self-observant, self-aware, and live in the present moment, the here and now. They experience awe and appreciation for themselves and for others. They are truly capable of hearing the whisperings of the Spirit and discerning the signs of the times.

Cultivating Heart Maturity

With the above briefly outlining and describing the basics of heart maturity, the following summarizes from FCS's perspective some concrete, practical, and effective ways to go about cultivating heart maturity, particularly during the beginning stages of initial formation.

Maturity of heart unfolds through the increasing capacity to be **reflective** and **self-observing**. This leads to openness and receptivity to changing, growing, evolving, ripening, maturing. It unfolds in the capacity to view, interpret, and understand life and the world through a multidimensional perspective. FCS refers to this human formation process as **Reflective Living**.

(For a brief description of [Reflective Living](#), you can check our home page for an introduction. A more comprehensive description and conversation on *Reflective Living* can be found in our *Articles on Formation* section, [#023 Reflective Living](#).)

Daily **journaling** as a process of reflective self-observation is a most valuable tool that cultivates self-awareness and heart maturity. The benefits and growth potential derived from journaling's discipline is immeasurable. Numerous books and workshops have assisted many with making journaling a central focus of their daily reflection on life.

(Again, for more details about journaling, you can review material on our website, such as the article, [Reflecting on Daily Life via Journaling](#), from our January, 2011 newsletter in the *Newsletter Articles* section. Also, material can be found in our *Articles on Formation* section, [#013 Journal Writing](#). Finally, you can request from us Chapter One from our *Structured Autobiography*, which also contains a section detailing two specific options for going about journaling as a process to enhance heart maturity.)

Recognizing, naming, and articulating feelings in healthy, constructive, responsible ways are essential to cultivating human heart maturity. Developing an accessible feeling vocabulary is essential for anyone interested in and motivated to grow in this area. It requires valuing the power and influence of feelings. It involves focusing on identifying feelings throughout the day. There are many books and articles on increasing one's recognition of feelings.

FCS has a brief "Feeling List" that many participants have found helpful as an aid to increasing their feelings awareness. If you are interested in the list, just email us and request the "Feeling List." Regardless of whether we are aware of our feelings, they profoundly influence the way we think and thus behave, the way we take up situations with people, events, and things, and the way we interpret and make sense of how the world impacts us today. Immaturity, the inability to identify and articulate feelings, is a significant obstacle to heart maturity.

The **influence of our past**, i.e., the significant people, events, and things that have impacted us in helpful and unhelpful ways, has substantially molded our experience along the immaturity–maturity scale. To assist our participants with making sense of and appreciating who they are,

how they came to be who they are, and who the significant shapers of their unique selves today are, FCS has crafted and continues to hone its *Structured Autobiography*. It is a 181-page manual that methodically and comprehensively assists participants with uncovering and discovering important past experiences and their profound helpful and unhelpful impact.

Our *Structured Autobiography* is the foundation for all of FCS's human formation processes. It is the cornerstone of our *Rediscovering the Sabbath* sabbatical program. We also train formators in the use of our *Structured Autobiography*. They then use it with their persons-in-formation. This is part of our *Human Formation–Formator Formation Process*. If you are interested in receiving Chapters One and Two of our *Structured Autobiography*, just email us with your request. Chapter One provides an overview of how to take up the *Structured Autobiography*. Chapter Two, *Family's Impact on the Formation of the Symbolic Human Heart*, explores areas that require attention in order to appreciate and make sense of our unfolding heart story. The full 181-page manual is available only to FCS participants and to formators who have been trained by FCS to use the *Structured Autobiography* with their persons-in-formation.

Another way of viewing, understanding, and cultivating heart maturity is through the **phenomenon of addictions**. We all have addictions. Under the larger umbrella, addictions could be, in part, defined as behaviors that alter one's mood. The more common addictions are alcohol and drugs, cigarettes and nicotine, gambling, overeating and under-eating, and sexual addictions (having sex with self or others to compensate for feeling bored, worn out, overworked, disconnected from others, lonely, inadequate, unfulfilled). There are also work-oriented addictions (working to make one's self feel better, working to cover undesirable feelings).

In addition, there are more subtle addictions. For example, excessive exercising or excessiveness in just about anything, such as cleaning, ordering, and reorganizing, is addictive, mood altering behavior. There are addictions to power, control, influence, and being held in high esteem. There is also an addiction to being abusive and violent in order to feel in control and powerful. Using soft drinks with large amounts of sugar or caffeine or caffeine addiction through coffee alters a person. Behaviors such as voyeurism, living in one's head, excessive preoccupation with Internet viewing and use, and overuse of television to numb the self are addictive behaviors. Overachieving, perfectionism, unhelpful codependent relationships, risky behaviors, and self-mutilation can be addictive and mood altering as well.

The field of addiction talks about the momentary high a person experiences when participating in the addictive behavior. Mood altering experiences are fleeting respites from unpleasant feelings and experiences. The reflective question to ask ourselves is, **“What are my unique addictions and how do they alter my mood?”** When we want to understand and appreciate who we are and why we engage in certain behaviors, investigating our addictions will lead to increased self-awareness and heart maturity.

Conclusion

Heart maturity unfolds from cultivating a reflective lifestyle that results in a keen capacity to self-observe. People with heart maturity possess a curiosity concerning how people, events, and

things of the past (distant past and recent past) have impacted and continue to impact their heart. Furthermore, by cultivating a wide-eyed, open consciousness that sees through the fog, hears the subtle resonance, and feels deeply, this quality of heart maturity unfolds the capacity to experience the whisperings of the Spirit and to discern the signs of the times. With these qualities of human heart maturity, a consecrated person lives out daily life in a peace-filled manner. Joy, fulfillment, and peace are the unfolding characteristics of the mature person.

Links

Archbishop Martin's presentation:

http://www.dublindiocese.ie/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2367&Itemid=1166

Reflective Living:

<http://www.fcs-bilotta.com/pages/cfHome.cfm>

<http://www.fcs-bilotta.com/pages/cfArticles.cfm> in the article: #023 *Reflective Living*

Journaling

[http://www.fcs-](http://www.fcs-bilotta.com/documents/03_2011_Jan,%20Reflecting%20on%20Daily%20Life%20via%20Journaling.pdf)

[bilotta.com/documents/03_2011_Jan,%20Reflecting%20on%20Daily%20Life%20via%20Journaling.pdf](http://www.fcs-bilotta.com/documents/03_2011_Jan,%20Reflecting%20on%20Daily%20Life%20via%20Journaling.pdf)