

THE FOUR DIMENSIONS OF EDUCATION AND THE FOUR ELEMENTS OF CATHOLIC PRIESTLY FORMATION: ANY NEXUS?

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Abstract

A holistic education of the human person takes into consideration four important dimensions, namely, the cognitive, the affective, the operative and the social dimensions. These aspects are so intermingled that a defect in one leads to a defect in the integral development of the individual. These dimensions are also evident in the formation program of candidates to the Catholic priesthood where human formation, spiritual formation, intellectual formation and pastoral formation are seen as the essential pillars of priestly formation. This paper seeks points of contact between secular education and the Catholic priestly formation and identifies that reference to traditional Nigerian education could help form authentic priests who are intellectually mature and possessing strength of character and respect for the cultural values of the Nigerian people.

Keywords: Education, Formation, Integral, Catholic Priesthood

Introduction

The basic principles underlying the concept and scope of education are the various attempts towards the acquisition and utilization of knowledge for the improvement of humanity. In other words, the ultimate goals of education are the acquisition and correct application of the knowledge thus acquired. This acquisition and use of knowledge help in the overall development of the human person and of the human race. According to the World Bank report of 1999, “successful development entails more than investing in physical capital, or closing the gap in capital. It also entails acquiring and using knowledge as well as closing the gaps in knowledge” (Odia/Omofonmwa, 81). Surely, before one could speak of the correct use of knowledge, one must first speak of avenues of acquiring this knowledge. This involves the appreciation of the various dimensions of the learning process that yield the requisite knowledge.

In a similar way, the Decree on the Training of Priests of the second Vatican Council, *Optatam Totius* (OT), begins with the auspicious statement that “the council is fully aware that the desired renewal of the whole Church depends in great part upon a priestly ministry animated by the spirit of Christ and it solemnly affirms the critical importance of priestly training” (OT, 1). The Council goes on to express that the major seminaries should be a place of training the future priests to be like the Lord Jesus Christ, priest and shepherd. The elements of this training, spiritual, intellectual and discipline should be coordinated with a pastoral aim in view (OT, 3). This importance laid on priestly formation is a continuation of the desire of the Lord Jesus who chose his disciples so that they may be with him and that they may be sent out (Mk 3:14). It is in staying with the master that the disciples will learn how to be and how to do like the master. From the Church's understanding, this is important both for the renewal of the Church and the whole

world. Even though Formation to the Catholic priesthood is not equivalent to a secular sense of education or, even less, job training but rather cooperation with the grace of God (PPF 68), one could still relate the four dimensions of learning to the four pillars of integral priestly formation.

In this paper, therefore, I will attempt to analyze the four principal dimensions of education as enunciated by psychologists of education and the UNESCO and how these dimensions help in an integral learning process. Since these four dimensions were also evident in traditional Nigerian education before the advent of Western and Arabic education, it is important to relate the Catholic priestly formation in Nigeria to the various aspects of traditional Nigerian education. Relating it to traditional education in Nigeria is important because “the success of a learning process also depends upon how it succeeds in understanding the *environmental* requirements or the pre-conditioning of the pupils” (Ziebertz, 2003: 12). The environmental requirements could be seen as the socio-cultural, as well as the religio-political and scientific backgrounds of the agents of the learning process. In this paper, I shall be employing the terms, “learning” and “education” interchangeably, since both involve the same process of change in the person undergoing the learning process.

Understanding the Meaning of Education or Learning

As indicated above, the education of a person refers to their upbringing in relation to their environment. It could be said to be a continuous interaction between the self and the environment (Humboldt, 1997: 239). It encapsulates the sum total of the processes that lead to a mature formation of the human person right from the onset of sensibility. Its root (*educare*) means breeding, bringing up, and rearing. Although this rearing or bringing up involves a mentor, the main subject of education remains the one undergoing the educational process (Ziebertz et al, 2001: 107). Since education is concerned with bringing up or leading forward, it implies that the focus of education is in the not-yet dimension (Ziebertz, 2003: 84).

The close connection between education and learning is shown in the definition of education by James Lee as “the broad process whereby a person learns something” (Lee, 1987: 144). This learning of something leads to a change of behaviour on the part of the learning agent. In the words of the psychologist, Merlin C. Wittrock, “learning is the term we use to describe the processes involved in changing through experience. It is the process of acquiring relatively permanent change in understanding, attitude, knowledge, information, ability, and skill through experience” (see Gruber, et al, 2001: 126). It is a process of acquiring knowledge in a holistic way in the sense that it affects a person’s cognitive, physical emotional and interpersonal experiences. It could also be seen as “the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or young adult develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour which are of positive value to the society in which he lives; that is to say, it is a process of disseminating knowledge either to ensure

social control or to guarantee rational direction of the society or both” (Fafunwa, 1974: 17).

As already indicated, education involves a mutual exchange between a subject and the environment. It is in this sense that the contributions of the psychologist, Jean Piaget becomes relevant. The Piagetian position sees learning as the interaction between the subject and the world. The interaction with the world means that the learning subjects affect the human environment in the same way as they are affected by the environment. In other words, it is the interface between subject and object (Piaget, 1976). This reciprocity is achieved through the processes of assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation helps the learning subject to interpret the world to fit into their subjective experiences, while accommodation helps the learners to appreciate their inability to explain all the realities of their environment according to their subjective modes and structures. This recognition forces the subjects to adjust their ways of thinking, feeling, action and values (see Mietzel, 1986: 64). This mutual influence can be represented with the following figure:

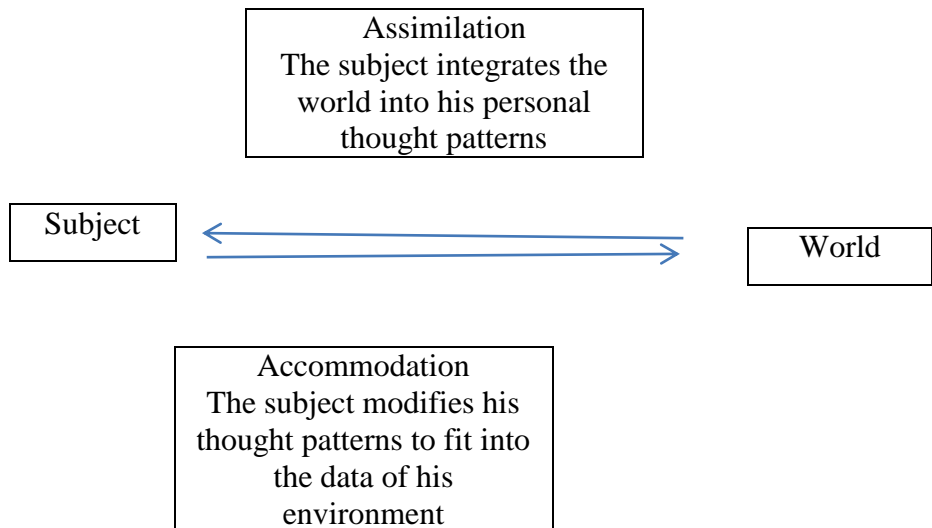


Fig. 1. Assimilation and Accommodation according to Jean Piaget

Since these are the two fundamental movements of the education process, we then see that education is not complete unless it involves a mutual influence between the learning subject and the society. Therefore, an educational process that only leads to adaptation to the environment can only be called half-education.

These definitions and illustrations already show that education or the learning process is multi-dimensional. Through it, the young people are imparted the knowledge, skills and aptitudes necessary for a positive impact in the world. It has four principal dimensions.

Approaching the Four Dimensions of Education

Our exposition above has shown that education or the learning process is a complex exercise involving different aspects. One could speak of understanding, attitude, knowledge or information, ability and skill. However, to make these dimensions more understandable, scholars have identified four fundamental dimensions of learning. They are the cognitive or intellectual dimension, the operative or motor dimension, the emotional or affective dimension and the social or interpersonal dimension.

The Cognitive Dimension

The cognitive or intellectual dimension has to do with the ability to easily understand the subject matter that is presented to the learning subject. An instance is when a student is able to understand the teacher's presentations or is able to read a book and easily grasp the subject matter. This cognitive ability is also at work when a learner can argue logically without self-contradiction (Porzelt, 2009: 34f). Such a student normally does well in his/her examinations. Perhaps, this is what people refer to when they speak of a person having a high or low IQ. Because of the fact that people who excel in cognitive ability are regarded as having a high IQ, much stress is placed on this aspect of education to the neglect of other areas.

The Emotional Dimension

The emotional dimension of learning is more difficult to explain since it involves the most sensitive and sensible aspects of the learning subject. Nonetheless, this refers to every aspect of the person that has to do with sensation and feelings. The emotional education leads to change in personal interests and attitudes. There is also a positive change in a person's assessment and judgement of things. A good emotional education leads to a better appreciation of the self and of others.

With regard to religious education or formation, this aspect seems to be very relevant because emotional experience is very important to the understanding of religious phenomena. Mark Wynn (2005: ix) has been able to argue that any serious examination of the psychology of the formation of religious beliefs will lead to the conclusion that various kinds of emotional commitment lead to their shaping. In the same way, arguments about the cognitive status of religious beliefs always lead to agreement concerning the importance of emotions. If we understand our theological endeavour as faith seeking understanding, then it becomes easy to see the importance of emotions to cognition.

The Operative Dimension

This dimension deals with the development of practical skills. "It is limited to the level of bodily movement or the use of the body in the handling of concrete actions. It begins from the rehearsal and learning of particular handiworks or gestures and extends to complicated action sequences and extensive practical projects" (Onyenali, 2013: 76). It incorporates the training of students in handicraft and other skills necessary for future life. One could see it as the practical

application of the competences already learned. It has to be stated that since most of our schools pay more attention to the cognitive dimension of learning, this operative dimension hardly receives the required attention.

The Social Dimension

As a social being, the social dimension helps the learning subject to acquire the abilities necessary for life in the community of humans. This stems from the fact that the human person is a *zoon politikon*, a social being. His/her learning, then, involves listening to others, arguing with them, understanding them and criticizing them constructively (Onyenali, 2013: 77).

In summary, learning affects the understanding, attitude, knowledge, ability and skills of the individual. These varied aspects are realized through the four principal dimensions of education. However, these four dimensions should not be seen as segmented aspects of learning. Rather, they should be seen as complementary aspects of the complicated learning process. The graphic below helps to give these dimensions an easy grasp.

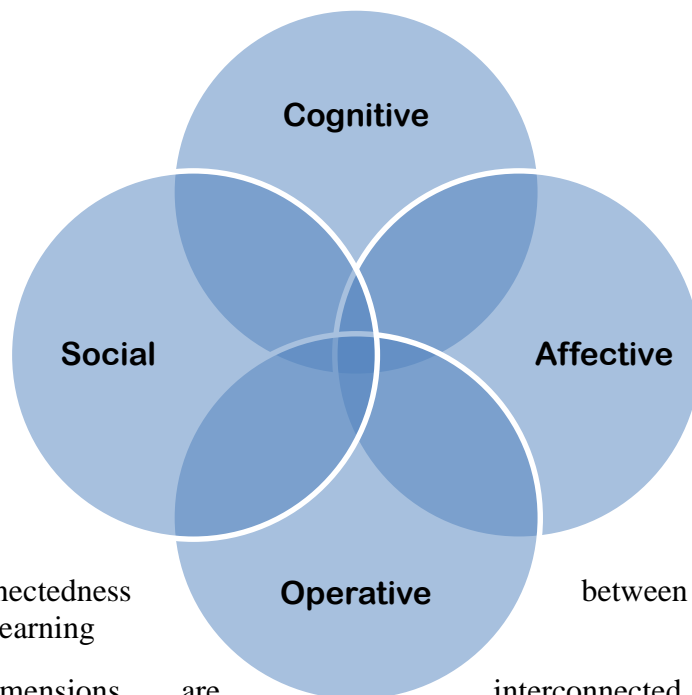


Fig 2. The Interconnectedness between the Four Dimensions of Learning

Since these dimensions are interconnected, they should be treated as of equal importance. For instance, for humans to live harmoniously as social beings, they must have to understand others, have a positive judgment of them and apply this judgment in interpersonal relationship. Perhaps, the UNESCO concept of education brings out his point more clearly.

The UNESCO Report on Learning

A similar schema is evident in the 2014 UNESCO report titled *Learning: The Treasure Within*. It is also referred to as the *Delors Report, the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century* (henceforth, UNESCO). This

report, which is the outcome of a three-year work by a commission chaired by Jacques Delors, considers the requirements for an education for the twenty-first century capable of tapping and nurturing the rich potential for learning inherent in every individual. The committee conceived of education as an edifice, with the following four pillars its cornerstones: Learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together.

Learning to Know

Just like the cognitive dimension of learning, the aim of this pillar of education is to provide the cognitive tools required to better comprehend the world and its complexities, and to provide an appropriate and adequate foundation for future learning. This first pillar has to do with a solid academic base, for instance, reading, numeracy, comprehension, ability to research and analyze. The goal is “to provide the cognitive tools required to better comprehend the world and its complexities, and to provide an appropriate and adequate foundation for future learning.” It also involves “combining a sufficiently broad general education with the possibility of in-depth work on a selected number of subjects” (UNESCO, 23).

Learning to Do

This dimension deals with the provision of the skills that would enable individuals to effectively participate in the global economy and society. Brunton (2012, 14) sees it as “the acquisition of the practical skills needed in the workplace along with the ability to contribute as part of a team and to demonstrate initiative.” This is easily relatable to the operative dimension of education. Through it, learners are taught handicrafts and other essential skills necessary for both self-sustenance and greater relevance in the labour market.

Learning to Be

This is the emotional or affective dimension of education. Its aim is to provide self-analytical and social skills to enable individuals to develop to their fullest potential psycho-socially, affectively as well as physically, for an all-round ‘complete person’. This is with the realization that each individual has lots of hidden talents that need to be tapped. These hidden talents include “memory, reasoning power, imagination, physical ability, aesthetic sense, the aptitude to communicate with others and the natural charisma of the group leader, which again goes to prove the need for greater self-knowledge” (UNESCO, 23). This pillar of education “is the conviction that education should contribute to every person’s complete development – mind and body, intelligence, sensitivity, aesthetic appreciation and spirituality. All people should receive in their childhood and youth an education that equips them to develop their own independent, critical way of thinking and judgment so that they can make up their own minds on the best courses of action in the different circumstances in their lives. Education should enable people to live fulfilling lives” (Brunton, 2012: 14).

Learning to Live Together:

The UNESCO report has presented this pillar of education as the crown of every learning endeavour. Its aim is to help individuals to develop “an understanding of others and their history, traditions and spiritual values and, on this basis, creating a new spirit which, guided by recognition of our growing interdependence and a common analysis of the risks and challenges of the future, would induce people to implement common projects or to manage the inevitable conflicts in an intelligent and peaceful way” (UNESCO, 22). Put differently, this pillar of education aims at exposing individuals to the values implicit within human rights, democratic principles, intercultural understanding and respect and peace at all levels of society and human relationships to enable individuals and societies to live in peace and harmony. The other pillars of education are seen as the foundation for the realization of learning to live together. It could be said that the aim of education thus is to understand the differences in other cultures or peoples and how to handle them. In this case “education becomes the acknowledgement of differences and the ability to work with these differences” (Onyenali, 2013: 73). Anyone who has not mastered this ability cannot be said to be educated. UNESCO’s model of education can be depicted with the graphic below:

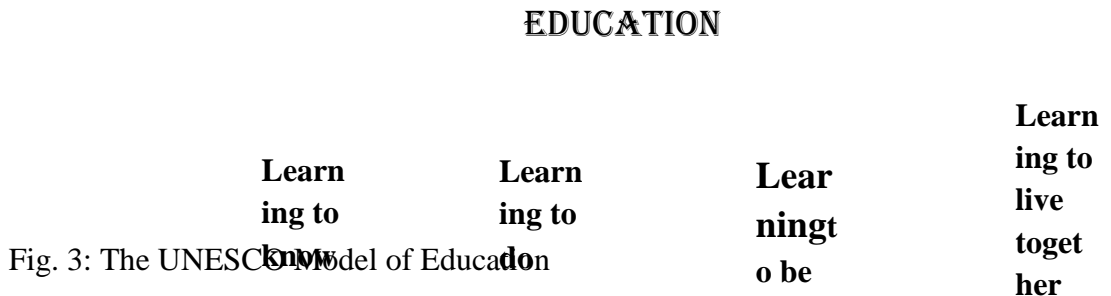


Fig. 3: The UNESCO model of Education

Traditional Education in Nigeria

Before the incursion of Western/Christian and Arabic/Islamic education into the Nigerian educational landscape, the mode of education was informal education, based on the dissemination of information from the parents, guardians or elders of the clan to the children. Elizabeth Isichei(1995: 255) puts it thus: “all traditional societies had their own systems of education, which were primarily vocational and moral. Children learnt farming techniques, and a variety of other skills, which might include fishing, blacksmithing, spinning and weaving, or pottery making, depending on the area, and the sex of the child.” It was through this means that children became socialized. On his part, Fafunwa (1974: 20-49) has named seven areas of focus of the traditional Nigerian education. They included (1) physical training (2) development of character (3) respect for elders and peers (4) intellectual training (5) vocational training (6) community participation and (7) promotion of cultural heritage. This inclusive educational endeavour ensured a non-compartmentalization of the educational process and could account for the

fact that before the introduction of Western and Arabic education in Nigeria the issue of unemployment was either minimal or non-existent.

It is easy to compress Fafunwa's seven elements of traditional Nigerian education into four important aspects. These are (1) intellectual training, (2) physical training, (3) character development and (4) promotion of cultural heritage. This compression into four elements is because of my view that respect for elders could easily fall within the purview of development of character. This is so because in traditional Nigerian society, anyone lacking respect for elders is lacking in character formation. In the same way, physical training can incorporate vocational training while community participation could be part of the promotion of cultural heritage (see Onyenali, 2019: 452). If we are correct in this compression, we arrive at an indigenous educational system that stresses intellectual formation (learning to know), physical or operative formation (learning to do), character formation (learning to be), and socio-cultural formation (learning to live with others). This was the type of training that produced men and women of character in traditional Nigerian society and it is also the form of education that could lead to integral formation of the future Nigerian priests.

The Four Pillars of Education and the Catholic Priestly Formation

In the formation of candidates to the Catholic priesthood, various aspects are taken into consideration. Some church documents are explicit on the areas of focus of Catholic priestly formation. They include: *Optatam Totius*(OT) of the Second Vatican Council, *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*(Rat Fund) of the Congregation for Catholic Education, and the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis*(PDV) of Pope Saint John Paul II. In these documents, the following areas are enunciated for special consideration: human formation, spiritual formation, intellectual formation and pastoral formation.

Human Formation

Since the priest is a human being, chosen from among humans and also bound by human limitations (cf. Heb 5:1), a program for human formation takes into account what it means to be fully human. This dimension forms the foundation of all priestly formation (PDV 43; Rat Fund 94). It involves the maturity of the self which is made manifest in a mature interpersonal relationship and leads to an authentic exercise of priestly ministry. Pope Saint John Paul II puts it beautifully: "Of special importance is the capacity to relate to others. This is truly fundamental for a person who is called to be responsible for a community and to be a 'man of communion'" (PDV 43). In the light of our world saturated with permissiveness and perversion of various kinds, human formation helps in the fostering of affective maturity "which is the result of an education in true and responsible love" (PDV 43). This means that there should be an intensification of stress on psychosexual maturity, cultivation of humility, courage, common sense, magnanimity, right judgement and discretion, tolerance and transparency, love of truth and honesty (Rat Fund, 93). Its opposite is the inability to understand the integrity of the human person and to be in touch with oneself (see Umoren, 2012:

80). Some of the elements of human formation include formation conferences, counseling sections, sexuality and celibacy workshops, etc. These programs help in forming the person to learn how to live with others in a mutually enriching interpersonal communion. It helps candidates to the priesthood to learn how to handle their emotions (Akabogu, 2018: 99). The human dimension of formation is shown as the foundation of every other dimension of formation since grace builds on nature. Again, the evangelization of people takes place through a human person and is mediated by his personality. Hence, it incorporates all the four dimensions of learning. Any candidate to the Catholic priesthood that is deficient in this aspect of formation could be a misfit in the ministerial priesthood.

Spiritual Formation

The importance of spiritual formation in the life of the candidates for the priesthood cannot be overemphasized. Although spiritual formation is relevant for every Christian, it is more so for the priest since spiritual formation “is the core which unifies and gives life to his being a priest and his acting as a priest” (PDV 45). The heart of spiritual formation is spiritual union with Christ, nourished by prolonged prayer, listening to the word of God and participating in all the sacraments of the Church (Rat Fund 102) and a faithful service of charity to the less privileged ones. In this sense it is obvious that spiritual formation involves the priestly life in union with God and with fellow humans. In other words, an authentic spiritual formation recognizes the needs of the less privileged around us. The daily life of formation in the formation centres revolves around daily celebration of the Holy Eucharist, office of the hours, regular confessions, etc. These are some important elements of spiritual formation. Through them the life of Christ permeates the seminarian. He is helped to develop “faithfulness, integrity, consistency, wisdom, a welcoming spirit, friendliness, goodness of heart... freedom from overly subjective viewpoints, personal disinterestedness, patience, an enthusiasm for daily tasks, confidence in the value of the hidden workings of grace as manifested in the simple and the poor (PDV 26). This means that spiritual formation leads the candidate to the recognition that his sanctity is determined not just by his faithfulness to God but more so by his attention to the needs of people around him. This is the social dimension of education or learning to live with others.

Intellectual Formation

Intellectual formation recognizes that academic discipline is an essential component of priestly formation. Although the intellectual aspect of formation is easily subsumable in cognitive learning or learning to know, from the point of view of *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, intellectual formation is not just about study in sacred theology or in philosophy. Rather, this is related to spiritual formation. It notes that “intellectual formation in theology and formation in the spiritual life, in particular the life of prayer, meet and strengthen each other, without detracting in any way from the soundness of research or from the spiritual tenor of prayer” (PDV 53). Intellectual formation understands that theology is a matter of faith seeking understanding and as such it must flow from a deep prayer life and also

lead to a deepened life of prayer. This is nothing short of reason opening up to divine revelation. Hence, stressing this aspect of formation will lead the candidates to develop the required competence in preaching and handing on the word of God and the teachings of the Church in accordance with the signs of the times.

Pastoral Formation

This aspect of formation is the practical or operational dimension of the formation process. “Since pastoral action is destined by its very nature to enliven the Church, which is essentially ‘mystery,’ ‘communion’ and ‘mission,’ pastoral formation should be aware of and should live these ecclesial aspects in the exercise of the ministry” (PDV 69). The Second Vatican Council when speaking of the pastoral formation of future priests states that “the whole training of the students should have as its object to make them true shepherds of souls after the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, teacher, priest and shepherd. Hence, they should be trained for the ministry of the word... They should be trained for the ministry of worship and sanctification... They should be trained to undertake the ministry of the shepherd, that they may know how to represent Christ to humanity...” (OT, 4). As is evident, this formation takes into consideration the various ministries the priest will carry out in the course of his pasturing the flock of God. It enables the students to acquire the necessary tools to practicalize what they learned in formation and avoid the danger of liturgical aberrations and unnecessary negative influences from the new age spiritualities.

At the end, priestly formation should be seen through a unifying lens which considers the four dimensions as important for integral formation of the clergy: “Together, these dimensions give shape and structure to the identity of the seminarian and the priest, and make him capable of that ‘gift of self to the church’, which is the essence of pastoral charity (Rat Fund, III). To show that any lack in any of these dimensions will result to a lack in integral formation, the *Ratio Fundamentalis* makes the following statement: the human dimension represents the necessary and dynamic foundation of all priestly life; the spiritual dimension helps to shape the quality of priestly ministry; the intellectual dimension provides the rational tools needed in order to understand the values that belong to being a pastor, to make them incarnate in daily life, and to transmit the of faith appropriately; the pastoral dimension makes possible a responsible and fruitful ecclesial service (Rat Fund, 89).

Conclusion

From the above exposition, it is clear that there are huge points of contact between secular education and the formation to the Catholic priesthood. Both are geared towards the integral formation of the persons involved. Both also agree to the existence of four different dimensions that are intermingled. A correct development of all the various aspects of both will ensure that the learning agent reaches the required maturity humanly, spiritually, intellectually and in the development of skills.

However, we have also seen that the formation to the Catholic priesthood is not exactly the same as secular education in the strict sense. This explains why, despite the obvious points of contact, the two cannot be related exactly to one another. For instance, the pastoral formation of priests is not easily reducible to the operative dimension of learning. It seems to incorporate both the emotional, operative and social dimensions of education. This is so because it equips the candidate in formation with the necessary tools to be a man of communion and to put into practice what he had been taught in the seminary. We have also seen that these four dimensions were evident in traditional Nigerian education before the advent of Western and Arabic school system that ended up producing disaffected clerks with little regard for knowledge of the vernacular, agriculture, handicrafts, domestic skills and African religions.

Unfortunately, however, it seems that some of these important dimensions have been neglected. For instance, the operational dimension is seriously lacking. A typical Nigerian graduate finds it difficult, if not impossible to fix the tires of his car, paint the four walls of his room or even maintain a simple garden. This is also reflected in most of our formation apparatuses where the best students are always seen as the ones that do very well in their semester examinations, which mostly focus on the intellectual dimension. If more attention could be paid to the four formative dimensions thus explored, perhaps the formation of candidates to the priesthood and the education of our youth would be more integral.

We could also go on to say the same concerning other dimensions of learning or formation. An integral learning process should help the subjects of learning to develop in character formation and the ability to live with others. From the point of view of both the formal educational process and the formation of candidates to the Catholic priesthood, this leads to respect for the self and for others. It helps in the development of the affective side of the person which helps them to relate to the other in the spirit of mutual love and responsibility. This is what we need in our society of humans.

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