

FORMING JESUS
in the Life of the Eudists Today

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“Forming Jesus” in us and others, is our charism. The previous Eudist General Assembly in Mexico, 2007, gave us an opportunity to grasp the meaning of the expression that Saint John Eudes adapted from St. Paul’s letter to the Galatians: *“I am in the pains of birth until Christ is formed in you.”* John Eudes used this formula of the apostle to say what is happening in the process of faith. It is our personal adherence to faith which is an interior welcome of the risen Christ. For St Paul, Jesus forms himself in us, transforms us, and conforms us to him. John Eudes emphasizes the essence of Christian existence: a call to let ourselves be transformed by the grace of God who forms us in the image of his beloved Son.

If this is the heart of the Christian experience, then the priests are serving the life of the faith through the work of formation of Christ in others. Formation is a vocation. It is the call of God to welcome His Son Jesus in oneself. This formation begins with the *Grace of Baptism* and the continuous formation of Christ in the hearts of the faithful, by all the tasks of the priestly ministry. In this line, the main work of Eudists: incorporated and associated is “to form Jesus!”

I would like to briefly present three ways of living this formation by the Eudists today.

The Eudists form Jesus when they announce the Gospel. It can be a first announcement or a new evangelization: through preaching, media, or apostolates. I think about an organization in the Congregation dedicated to new evangelization, named CEFNEC. It is working in Colombia. It is the Formation Center for the new evangelization and catechesis. The purpose of this center is to reflect and propose new ways to announce the Good News today. That is not only new means but almost new awareness of a deep and constant personal relation with Jesus. This means that forming Jesus in us, or remains in Christ according to the words of Saint John.

Evangelization as formation of Jesus is realized by our presence in the social networks – website or other means of social communication. It is one aspect of the mission that is developing and expected to take more place in the coming years. The young generation is sensitive to this mission. In many countries seminarians or young priests are involved in this pastoral work. The challenge is great because there are so many propositions, therefore we must find the best way, and I am sure that this way is what we can propose to build a strong inner life. I believe that the service to the poor or suffering people is also an evangelization by the witness in act of the power of the Gospel. Therefore the formation of Christ is an act of receiving and giving care to others. We form Jesus

when we announce Jesus because we cannot announce the Lord without living with Him, who lives and reigns in us.

Secondly, the Eudists form Jesus when they implement their charism of formators which means the formation of the good workers of the Gospel, according to the expression of St. John Eudes. The good workers can be lay faithful, sisters, seminarians or priests. By vocation, all baptized participate to the mission of evangelization, and they announce what they have received. One aspect of our charism is to train those who form Christ in others: they can be missionary-disciples in the parishes, seminaries, schools and universities. Although the approach of the mission is diverse but the goal of the Congregation is same: to form Jesus in us and others. We encourage all the efforts and initiatives to promote formation schools for lay faithful in the parishes; I dream that in all our parishes in different part of the world, we organize such formation schools. Parishes are very adapted to build up formations and training, in core subjects and in leadership training.

About the formation of the future diocesan priests, it is in our DNA because we were founded in the same act of foundation that the seminary of Caen, in France. We are twin with a seminary! It is not providential; it is the will of our founder, John Eudes. According to him, we take care of the people of God when we are able to offer well-trained priests, pastors according the Heart of God. We are in charge of several seminaries in France, Colombia, Ecuador, Honduras, Ivory Coast, or involved in team of animators in Venezuela, France, and Brazil. I hope we shall be able to develop this central aspect of our vocation for the service of the Church. Actually, it is a priority, and we must form more Eudists to fulfill this very specific mission. Myself I worked as a professor of systematic theology in a seminary for sixteen years and eight years as Rector; it was a great mission!

Finally, I believe that the Eudists continue to form Jesus by forming themselves, through the solid prayer life. This way of formation allows Jesus to live and reign in us, an expression repeated more than a thousand times by our founder. This is a requirement that must be remembered in season and out of season! This inner formation of Christ also necessarily passes through charity among us. This fraternal and communal life is a school where we are formed with each other and by others. This process calls us in the image of the apostles gathered by Jesus to form the College of Twelve. What most surely forms us to have Christ dwell in us by faith that concrete charity to live with each other. Be careful of those who preach beautifully and successfully but are unable to live with others, to live a common mission, or simply to hear the words of their leaders.

An important mission in the Congregation is the formation of our own members, whether candidates in probation or incorporated and ordained. With regard to initial formation, we are in the process of writing a new Eudist *Ratio* in

line with the Universal Church. Later, each province will have to write its training directory. This is one of my main tasks to follow because our history and charism provides an exemplary formation. If somehow we are unable to provide the formation then we cannot claim to be at the service of the formation and the accompaniment of the priests! According to the decision of the recent General Assembly, the ongoing formation is a responsibility of the each Eudist Province. The ongoing formation proposes two main tasks beside studies: first, to provide tools to form one according to what the Church or the dioceses demands, and second, formation according to the richness of our inheritance. We are the heirs of a great spiritual teacher worthy of being a Doctor of the Church. We have the grace of several centuries of works and publications in different countries and cultures. How to take advantage of our heritage? The goal is to form our identity and to form Christ in our hearts by faith!

So I hope that we will continue to move forward in this fundamental formation of Christ in us through the various means I have just presented. I would like to share with you one of my favorite St. John Eudes quote:

The mystery of all mysteries and the greatest of all works is the formation of Jesus within us. This is indicated by these words of St. Paul: "My children, I am going through the pain of giving birth to you continually until Christ is formed in you" (Gal. 4:19). It is the greatest mystery and the greatest work that is ever accomplished, either in heaven or on earth by the most excellent Beings in existence, namely, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the Blessed Virgin, and Holy Mother Church.
(St. John Eudes, *The Kingdom of Jesus*, p.78, or OC I, 271)