

08.02.2018

Fr. Jordan – formator of his spiritual sons and daughters

When I think about Fr. Jordan as a *"formator of his spiritual sons and daughters"*, it becomes clear to me how very deep down he was a formator, even from today's point of view. Time and again, on various occasions, in speeches, sermons, letters and many more, he reflected and meditated each time on new spiritual and theological issues, the rules, the vows and community life and presented his thoughts to his confreres and sisters to stimulate them towards further thought and inner renewal. For Fr. Jordan, it was important that the foundations laid in early formation were constantly renewed and brought to mind. This "stay in touch" with the "spirit of the Institute" was a mission for which he himself worked assiduously. We understand today that what Fr. Jordan did was an important part of "continuing vocational training".

In addition to this personal commitment, to convey close up to his spiritual sons and daughters the essence of religious life and the "spirit of the Institute" in ever new ways, the following aspects of Fr. Jordan's character in particular bring to mind his personality as formator: Once, Fr. Jordan wondered what can be done for a young confrere at the beginning of his apostolic service so that he does not suffer burn-out or take too much upon himself (see Chapter address of July 14, 1899). In this context, Fr. Jordan highlighted that you have to focus on the formation and the preparation of the individual (see *ibid.*). And Fr. Jordan saw the formator as a "kind, empathetic father" (SD IV/19) in a formation system that is based "entirely on reasonableness, piety and friendship" (SD IV/20). The personal good example of the individual is thus always of paramount importance for him and often more effective than many a word and scripture (see Chapter address of February 1, 1901).

These features in Fr. Jordan's personality as formator pose a personal challenge for me: to structure the formation of each one individually, to prepare and to train him first of all to personally shape his relationship with Christ, whom he has to proclaim (John 17:3), and thus to assume from the outset the main responsibility for his lifelong formation. This bond with Christ is the basis of all apostolic and community activity, because Christ is the principal formator. Precisely at the beginning of religious life, this responsibility for one's own formation requires the support of a formator in the person of a "kind father" (SD IV/19). For me, this is a logical continuation of the mission, as Salvatorians to proclaim and make perceptible "God's goodness and human kindness" (Titus 3:4, SD IV/37). Here, the personal example of the formator is called for to a high degree. For me one thing is clear: whoever has experienced "goodness and human kindness" in their own religious formation and experienced real personal attention can later pass this on in a genuine way in the service of God and the Salvatorians. Then, Fr. Jordan's mission, "make the Savior known", are no longer empty words. Whoever experienced kind fatherliness and healing and forgiving care from their formators can pass on these empathetically to those whom they meet.

Being responsible for formation, I must ask myself time and again, whether formation, as I organize it in programs, as I structure it in everyday life, offers room so that one can grow, so that it fosters one's strengths, and one's limitations can be examined in an atmosphere of "goodness and human kindness". This must be done in an empathically fatherly and friendly way that is supportive, without creating an atmosphere of anxiety and fear, while at the same time clearly pointing the way, sometimes in an intentionally confrontational manner.

Can I create room in which Christ the Savior can become involved with formandi? Am I ready to place myself at Christ's disposal as an apostle?

In the context of formation, Fr. Jordan's example challenges me further to always create anew an atmosphere based on "reasonableness, piety and friendship". For me, this includes encounter at eye level, which also means necessary confrontations and compromises always in an atmosphere of appreciable esteem. For me too, this means that the context of formation has to involve a shared spiritual life, so that the formandi can also experience that I too am traveling on my spiritual path and again and again shape and strengthen my relationship with Christ. A healthy, friendly-fatherly relationship in the formation context need not shy away from necessary confrontations and can be perceptible in a good balance between closeness and remoteness.

When I look at Fr. Jordan as the formator, whom I am trying to emulate, then part of my regular soul-searching must be whether the formandus by my side perceives someone really implementing these attributes that Fr. Jordan exemplifies. Can the formandus grow and mature as a person and Salvatorian in the formation environment that I create? Can he discover in me a fatherly friend by his side, who engages with him, accompanies him, teaches him, guides him, stimulates him to such a degree that the "Savior" is perceptibly proclaimed and the "goodness and love of God for humanity" can be palpably felt?

Fr. Heribert Kerschgens SDS