

MOTIVATION, PERSONALITY AND TEMPERAMENT

Introduction

Having motivations is the best antidote against growing old. We could paraphrase the old proverb and say: tell me how motivated you are and I will tell you how old you are! People with a high level of motivation feel young regardless of their age. In fact, there are some young people who look old: they are not thrilled or excited about anything in life. On the other hand, I have known people in their eighties whose enthusiasm is really amazing.

The current social background has a lot to do with motivation. We live in a hedonist society where our actions are very much influenced by the “I do not feel like it” philosophy. Feelings become the main driving force in the actions and decisions of many people.

1 THE “ENGINES” OF HUMAN MOTIVATION

The etymological origin of the word *motivation* helps us understand its meaning. Coming from the Latin words “*moveo / motivus*”, it conveys the idea of movement: to motivate is to move something or someone with a purpose.

Now, in order to move something you need a driving force, an “engine”. In human motivation there are two main driving forces:

- A “*something*”: **Goals**. In the same way that athletes are refreshed in their effort by the thought or the vision of the goal, we need clearly defined aims in life which motivate us.

The vision of the goal is refreshing and reaffirming because it generates excitement-enthusiasm- thrill.

Take the example of Paul in 1 Corinthians 9: 24-26:

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize....Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly..”

- A “*someone*”: **Role models**. Following the illustration of the athlete, children who want to become good sportsmen have models whom they want to emulate. The example and influence of these role models greatly shapes the behavior of the young athlete. “*I want to be like him or her*” is a powerful motivation.

We find role models in all categories in life. In Medicine, great doctors who have preceded us have been a strong motivation in our vocation. I can witness of my own example with Dr. Paul Tournier whose personality, ideas and writings were one of the main reasons why I decided to study Medicine and eventually become *a doctor of the whole person*.

The same need for models occurs in our Christian faith, the great race of life. Hebrews 11, the anthological chapter of faith, displays a magnificent list of the “heroes of faith”. We find all kinds of men and women with different experiences, but all of them share something in common: faith in God was their driving force. Each piece of biography starts with this little phrase “*by faith....*” they did so and so.

It is meaningful to notice how this text of Hebrews closes: “*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses (role models), ...let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith...*”

(Hebrews 12: 2). Christ is at the same time our goal and our supreme model. For this reason He is the central motivation of our lives as Christians (we will go back to this idea at the end).

2 THE “BREAKDOWNS” OF THE ENGINES. MOTIVATION AND PERSONALITY

There are some specific situations when the motivation fails. We will consider first the ones that are directly related to our personality (having to do with feelings, thoughts and will, the three great ingredients of human personality). Then, in our next section, we shall see motivation in relationship to temperament, the other column of our character.

Amongst others, I would like to mention five main pathways leading to the loss of motivation:

- **Frustration:** this is usually the result of a repeated situation that generates disappointment and emotional dryness. We can see it specially in works where there is no proper reward or recognition, no professional incentives or when there is a lot of emotional output (self-giving) without being replaced by the input. This frustration leads ultimately to the “burn out” syndrome which has the lack of motivation as one of its cardinal symptoms. Medical doctors are specially prone to this form of loss of motivation.

Similar situations can happen in family life or community life (vg. church). Emotional tiredness and a sense of being “unable to cope anymore” are the common feature.

- **Everything is meaningless: “The Ecclesiastes syndrome”.** The symptoms may be similar to the previous situation, but the problem here is deeper and lasts longer. Its roots have to do with the loss of the meaning in life: *“So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind...”* (Ecc. 2:17).

This attitude of emptiness and bitterness is not only limited to a few intellectual persons with a nihilist approach towards life. Sadly enough is the hallmark of many people today who live in a situation of apathy and demotivation. Existential boredom and despair seem to be their way of life. No wonder the high rate of suicide in our so called developed countries.

Specially exposed to this emotional condition are the retired people who are unable to face their new stage in life with a minimum degree of excitement and stimulation. Hence the high rate of demotivated (depressed people) among the pensioners.

- **Depression: unable to “move”.** “I want to, but I can’t”. Sometimes the loss of motivation is clearly due to a disease, a pathological condition. The main one is clinical depression where the person feels totally unable to “move” because they lack the minimum amount of energy. They are willing to, but feel unable. It is like having all the energy drained by a mysterious paralyzing force. A diminished motivation occurs also in other psychiatric conditions (personality disorders, depressive personalities, etc.).
- **Dispersion: too many goals.** Having too many things to do can decrease your motivation instead of being a driving force. Actually it blocks the motivation because it generates a situation that Jesus himself described with precise words: *“Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is necessary”* (Lk. 10:41-42). When there are too many roads –goals- in the map, the route may look confusing. Goals are a driving force when there are just a few and they are clearly defined.

- **The atrophy of the will: I can, but I do not want**” Sometimes a disturbance in the motivation comes from a weakened will. This is specially true today with **adolescents**. Too often in our developed countries (not so in the “third world”) many teenagers show an attitude of tedium and lack of personal enthusiasm. Very few things –if anything- seem to motivate them. A worrying triad of apathy, chronic tiredness and lack of will power seem to be the hallmark of their lifestyle.

What are the reasons for this atrophy? We cannot simplify a complex subject, but very often this problem with younger people has to do with the lack of training the will. We can compare our human will to a muscle. Unless you use it, the muscle is progressively debilitated causing, eventually, its atrophy. According to some experts, getting too many things and too easily, without hardly any effort, is the main reason. The generation of our parents had to work very hard to get a certain amount of well-being. Such an effort is the best way to train the will. Many children and young people today are lacking this training. They never had to struggle to get something. They got most things in an *automatic and instant* way, two magic words in our society. No wonder, then, that they feel tired before making any effort.

We need to rediscover ourselves and teach our younger generations the great value of difficulties and problems as a motivating force. We should try to understand the deeper reasons for boredom –demotivation- in an entertaining society whose hedonism is trivializing every area of our lives.

3 ACCEPTING OUR DIFFERENCES: MOTIVATION AND TEMPERAMENT

So far we have considered how certain personality characteristics influence our motivation. Now let us see how the inborn dimension of our character, the temperament, affects it. Temperament is the most constitutional part of our emotional make up; it is mainly determined by biological and genetic factors. If we refer to the personality as *nurture* (the result of childhood influences and environment), temperament would be *nature*, the part that is built in or hard- wired.

Following Karl G. Jung’s typology, we will divide people in two axis:

A) **Extroversion - Introversion**

An extrovert is someone whose general attitudes, interests and energy are directed outwards and whose motivations come mainly from external stimuli. An introvert, on the other hand, have their interests and energy directed inwards and they are motivated basically from internal stimuli.

In fact, every human being potentially possesses both possibilities. We all go through periods of our lives when we have a tendency towards introversion - adolescence for example. Consequently, there can be fluctuations in these basic attitudes. In spite of that, however, one of the two attitudes will always be predominant; one will react in a more spontaneous, automatic way than the other. For example, an introvert is a person who wishes they could be more talkative in the company of others, while an extrovert will repent of how much they have spoken. An introvert's brain works much quicker than their tongue: an extrovert is the opposite!

Since **introverts** direct their vital energy inwards, they will be shy, lacking in fluency and adaptability in their relationships. Introverts need a lot of privacy. They are comfortable alone: people - especially crowds - tire them. For this reason they prefer activities that involve few or no other people. They come to 'recharge their batteries' (energy) through quietness. An introvert is likely to return home exhausted after a party!

Their motivation, thus, comes from their inner life: **meditation** and introspection come naturally to them. Far more interested in ideas than in things, they enjoy reading books and meditating on the word of God. Given their rich inner life, they inhabit their dreams, their speculations, their own private universe. Although they do not like showing their emotions, they do have fire in their hearts. In summary, their spirituality is a rich treasure in a society that is increasingly attracted by superficiality and sensationalism.

The extrovert, on the other hand, is a sociable person, adapting easily to their environment and relating effortlessly to the outside world. Their motivations are not centered on their own private universe but around people and things. They are, by nature, open to others, and one of their worst enemies is loneliness. Their need for sociability is striking: an extrovert becomes more and more alive as a party continues! Being with people greatly motivate them. They 'recharge their batteries' from their interaction with others. Unlike the introvert, they experience quietness or solitude almost as a punishment. Having to stay at home alone for a long time is uncomfortable; they need to go out and it doesn't matter where! They like outdoor activities, preferably with others, rather than indoor. They need as much contact with others as they can get. Their natural motivation is **action** rather than meditation. They are the ones doing things because they need to be active all the time. The introverts plan and prepare the ideas that the extroverts implement.

Extroverts are people with attractive personalities at first sight, while the attractions of an introvert become apparent as one gets to know them. Extroverts and introverts are naturally attracted to each other, motivated by each other!. You will find more couples who complement each other than those that bring similar temperaments.

Research has shown a consistent correlation between extroversion and the tendency to boredom, a difficulty to be motivated. Why? Extroverts more than introverts find that monotony, repetition and under-stimulation produce discomfort and lack of perseverance.

B) The psychological functions.

The second axis of Jung's typology has to do with our way to adapt to the outside world and to ourselves. Every individual is endowed with four main functions that, just like introversion and extroversion, are inborn. We all possess all four of them, but in different degrees of development. Very briefly let us consider how they are related to motivation:

- **The thinking type.** In these people, logic prevails over feeling, the objective over the subjective. Reason is their motivation and guide in every situation. Their first question is: What does it mean? Principles are more important than emotions. For them things are not pleasant or unpleasant, attractive or ugly, but true or false, logical or illogical. They are motivated by classifying and analyzing things, they are very methodical.

Their life, including their spiritual life, is marked by stability, without many ups or downs. Their firmness in their faith makes them a bulwark in the church as they can lead and encourage others in times of difficulty. The apostle Paul. and Martin Luther would be good examples of this type.

- **The feeling type.** They approach reality with the question: Do I like this or not? Is it attractive or unattractive? Their concern is not so much about truth or falsehood. Their decisions are motivated by personal impact. Relationships are much more important than principles. Self-giving is a powerful and spontaneous motivating force. They have a remarkable capacity for giving warmth and affection. They have greatly developed the "*sense of the person*" (Paul Tournier).

Whereas the head predominates in the thinking type, the heart is in the forefront of the feeling type. Their philosophy of life could be summed up with Paul's statement "*knowledge puffs up, but love builds up*". We find good examples of this type in the Bible: Jeremiah, the sensitive prophet, Barnabas, whose name means *son of encouragement*, Mary, the sister of Lazarus, who chose the "good part", that is the personal relationship with her Master among others.

- **The intuitive type.** These people see the possibilities of a person, thing or situation beyond what is apparent on the surface. They are able to discern what lies hidden, anticipating possibilities. Their main motivation is to initiate projects, actions, because their natural gift for foreseeing things makes them innovators, pioneers, though not followers. Actually the follow up is their weak point. They are the spark that lights the fire, but not the fuel that keeps it burning (as the thinking types are). What motivates them is the future, what lies beyond. The present, the here and now, does not "move" them because it seems too prosaic. Their minds are full of visions and projects. They are idealists, but not realists. Prototype of this people would be inventors and explorers.

An interesting feature of this type is that they are greatly motivated by **contemplation** (*intueri* in latin means to contemplate). They are visionaries in the best sense of the word. They have an innate sensitivity to spiritual matters, a kind of natural mysticism. Their interest lies much more in the abstract rather than the concrete. The apostle John is a good example.

- **The sensation type.** These people are motivated mainly by all that can be perceived. They incessantly see, hear, touch. They are constantly registering everything around them. The forefront of their motivation is not the head (thinking type), nor the heart (feeling type), nor contemplation (intuitive type), but **the senses**. They are pure perception. Their feelings, and therefore their motivation, is easily aroused by colors, flavors, shapes, all practical details that would probably remain unseen to the other types. They have skilled eyes for contemplating not the abstract, but the concrete. They usually have a strong sense of responsibility and can be trusted as excellent administrators. They are also motivated by the organization of things –they are excellent organisers- because they can take care of the smallest detail with great efficiency.

Given their reliance on external circumstances, they may suffer from frequent ups and downs, but these are usually very short and they quickly recover their innate joy of living (*joie de vivre*). The apostle Peter is a good example of this type.

Therefore, because we are all very different from one another, we need to accept one another. One of the main purposes of this lecture is to promote the acceptance of our diversity as far as motivation, personality and temperament is concerned. The coming together of genetic, biographical and circumstantial factors makes each one of us a little universe that is very different from all the others. We need to learn to respect one another not in spite of such differences, but precisely through them. One of the most beautiful facts of God's creation is variety. For our Creator, beauty and unity do not depend on uniformity.

Conclusion:

LOVE, THE GREAT MOTIVATION OF THE CHRISTIAN

As we close, we go back to our supreme model, Jesus Christ: **our ultimate motivation is Christ's love for us and our love for Christ**. We can express it in two dimensions:

- **Gratitude to God.** This is the vertical dimension: “*For Christ’s love compels us*” (2 Cor. 5:14). The natural, spontaneous response of a Christian is to love God because He loved us first.
- **Compassion to our neighbor.** It is striking to notice that in the two main parables of Jesus (The Prodigal Son and The Good Samaritan) we find the same expression: “*He was **moved** (motivated) to mercy and compassion*” (Lk. 10: 25-37; 15:11-12). The backbone of love lies in this two fold attitude of mercy and compassion. This is love in practice. And this is the force that motivated Jesus to be the great healer and the great Savior. In our daily practice as doctors we are called to this high motivation as we want to be imitators of Christ.

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