

# SEMINARY JOURNAL

VOLUME SEVENTEEN

NUMBER TWO

THEME: Priestly Formation

From the Desk of the Executive Director  
*Msgr. Jeremiah McCarthy*

Cultivating a Priestly Vocation: It's Not About Me  
*Very Reverend James A. Wehner, S.T.D.*

The Vocation of Jeremiah  
*Rev. Julian Anthony*

Forming Shepherds in Priestly Formation  
*Msgr. Gregory J. Schlesselmann, S.T.L.*

The Role of the Spiritual Exercises in Priestly Formation  
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Pastoral Formation in Light of Jesus' Intimate Bond with the Father  
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The Indispensability of Divine Mercy in Spiritual and Pastoral Formation  
*Most Rev. Felipe Estevez*

Teaching Seminary Theology: To Know the Love of Christ that Surpasses Knowledge  
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A Thirst for Holiness: Reflections on Seminary Formation A Response to James Keating  
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Making Interreligious Education a Seminary Priority  
*Rev. John T. Pawlikowski, OSM, Ph.D.*

Teaching About Death: Forming Students in the Complete Culture of Life  
*Cynthia Toolin, Ph.D.*

Spiritual Formation and the Study of the Old Testament in Priestly Formation  
*Rev. Gregory Vall*



## BOOK REVIEW

Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity by Dietrich Werner, et al. editors  
*Reviewed by Brother Jeffrey Gros, FSC*

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VOLUME 17

NUMBER TWO

FALL 2011

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The *Seminary Journal* is a journal of opinion, research and praxis in the field of seminary education and formation for priesthood within the Roman Catholic tradition. Articles are selected, edited and published by the Executive Director of the Seminary Department of the National Catholic Educational Association.

Msgr. Jeremiah McCarthy, *Executive Editor*

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# From the Desk of the Executive Director



**T**he theme of this issue of the journal is “Priestly Formation.” We have gathered a number of perspectives on the nature of the priestly vocation and the implications for seminary training.

Fr. James Wehner, STD, former rector of the Pontifical College Josephinum and newly appointed rector of Notre Dame Seminary, New Orleans, reflects on his experience as a former vocation director and his current work as a rector and seminary formator. He begins his essay with observations about social, economic, and ecclesial obstacles to creating a positive climate or culture of vocations. Among the strategies he suggests for strengthening support for ordination candidates is a genuine spirit of trust between vocation directors and the seminary formation staff. Such a climate of trust helps to “keep things real” and provides opportunities for constructive collaboration among all those involved in the ministry of priestly formation. Fr. Wehner’s experience of collegial, supportive relationships facilitates a climate of honest assessment that can only redound to the benefit of the candidate and the church he will serve.

Fr. Julian Anthony offers a biblical reflection on the vocation of the prophet Jeremiah. The prophet’s life story of fidelity in the midst of much suffering provides a crucial insight into the task of the seminary educator. It is not sufficient for professors to be masters of their respective intellectual disciplines; they are called to be faithful witnesses by living lives of integrity. In so doing, they provide courage and example to the seminarians they teach.

Msgr. Gregory Schlesselmann, former rector of Cardinal Muench Seminary, Fargo, North Dakota (now closed), provides an essay about spiritual transformation to configure a seminarian’s heart to the example and teaching of Jesus, the Good Shepherd. His exegetical assessment of the call of Mary leads him to develop crucial skills and “habits of the heart” that facilitate this process of conversion to a priestly spirituality. Attentive, contemplative listening is indispensable for fulfilling the vision of Pope John Paul II, “I will give you shepherds,” (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*).

Edward McCormack, a specialist in the spirituality of St. Ignatius Loyola, notes that the spiritual exercises of the Jesuit founder provide a model for the seminary spiritual formation program. By cultivating key dispositions of attentive listening and imaginative engagement with the scriptures, students are led to a spirit of discernment whereby they can “find Christ in all things.” A well formed spiritual life is indispensable for the happiness and effectiveness of future priests.

As a coda to these reflections on the spiritual formation of seminarians, Bishop Felipe Estevez of St. Augustine discusses the critical importance of an encounter with the mercy of God during the seminarian’s sojourn in the seminary. Unless he has interiorized and integrated this mercy into his heart, the ministry of the newly ordained priests to others will be ineffective and superficial, at best.

Perhaps a question that readers may wish to pursue in light of the foregoing essays is: Given the importance of spiritual formation, how does this pillar of the *Program of Priestly Formation* assist in the integration of the equally important pillars of pastoral, human and intellectual formation? James Rafferty’s essay, “Pastoral Formation in Light of Jesus’ Intimate Bond with the Father,” specifically addresses the interconnection of solid spiritual formation with pastoral training and the future pastoral ministry of the ordained priest. The essay makes a compelling case for avoiding a compartmentalization of spiritual practices and the demands of pastoral care, but it also raises some interesting questions for the holistic vision of the PPF.

This issue of whether spiritual formation, exclusively, should bear the full weight of integrating the four pillars of the PPF, or whether it should be seen as contributing to the process of integration is part of an important debate in this issue between Dr. James Keating from the Institute of Pastoral Formation, Creighton University, Omaha, and Fr. Kurt Belsole, OSB, former rector of St. Vincent’s Seminary, Latrobe, Pennsylvania. Dr. Keating graciously granted permission for *Seminary*

*Journal* to re-publish his essay, "Teaching Seminary Theology: To Know the Love of Christ that Surpasses Knowledge." Fr. Belsole's essay, "A Thirst for Holiness: Reflections on Seminary Formation A Response to James Keating," addresses several points of concern. I hope that readers will find in these two essays rich fare for faculty conversation.

I am very pleased that Fr. John Pawlikowski, professor of social ethics and director of the Catholic-Jewish Studies Program at Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, has written his essay on the importance of providing both intellectual and experiential education on interreligious dialogue. Given the reality of religious diversity in the United States, and the expanding numbers of international seminarians and priests, it is crucial that future priests acquire the knowledge and skills to exercise effective pastoral leadership in our truly global "catholic" church.

Cynthia Toolin, a professor of dogmatic theology at Holy Apostles College and Seminary, Cromwell, Connecticut, writes persuasively in her article about educating seminarians in the whole culture of life, including euthanasia, when teaching Catholic Social Teaching.

Gregory Vall, associate professor of theology at Ave Maria University, Ave Maria, Florida, astutely notes the importance of careful integration of Old Testament studies into the biblical curriculum. Not only is a solid grounding in the Old Testament essential for New Testament studies, but this grounding strengthens a comprehensive grasp of the whole of scripture for the spiritual formation of the seminarian.

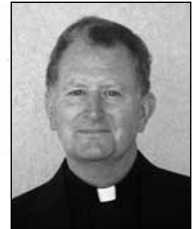
Brother Jeffrey Gros authors a fine review of *Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity* to close this issue, and I am grateful to him and to all of our contributors to this issue of the journal.

The journal is a forum for ideas and I welcome your feedback. Let me know your thoughts for future issues. Better yet, I welcome your own essays and articles.

Cordially,



Msgr. Jeremiah McCarthy  
Editor



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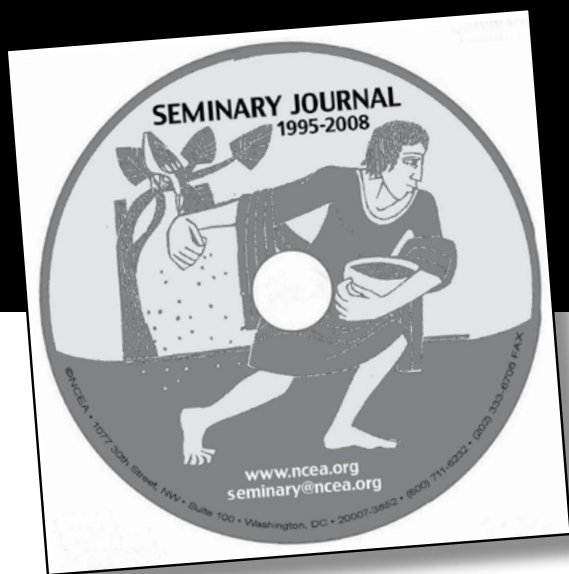
- ◆ **August 20**  
**Seminary Department**  
**Executive Committee Meeting**  
Chicago, IL
- ◆ **August 27 – December 7**  
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- ◆ **October 5-6**  
**Midwest Association of**  
**Theological Schools Annual**  
**Meeting**  
Hilton Garden Inn  
Schaumburg, IL
- ◆ **October 7-28**  
**Synod of Bishops on the New**  
**Evangelization**  
The Vatican, Rome

### 2013

- ◆ **January 28-29 (tentative)**  
**New Rectors Seminar**  
St. Louis, MO
- ◆ **January 29-31**  
**Rectors Convocation**  
St. Louis, MO

- ◆ **April 2-4**  
**NCEA Convention & Exposition**  
**(Priest Day, TBD)**  
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- ◆ **May 31 – June 7**  
**11th Institute for the**  
**Preparation of Seminary**  
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- ◆ **June 2-5**  
**International Symposium on**  
**Priestly Formation**  
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(651) 962-5066 (office)  
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(847) 970-4800 (office)  
dlyle@usml.edu

**Rev. Justin Matro, OSB (East Coast Rectors)**

Rector, St. Vincent Seminary  
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(724) 532-6600 (office)  
justin.matro@email.stvincent.edu

**Rev. Leon Hutton**

Director of Human Formation  
St. John's Seminary School of Theology  
5012 Seminary Road  
Camarillo, CA 93012-0637  
(805) 482-2755 (office)  
lhutton@stjohnsem.edu

**Rev. Tom Knoebel**

Vice Rector, Sacred Heart School of Theology  
P.O. Box 429  
Hales Corners, WI 53130-0429  
(414) 529-6984 (office)  
tknoebel@shst.edu

**EX-OFFICIO**

**Dan Aleshire (ATS)**

Executive Director  
Association of Theological Schools  
10 Summit Park Drive  
Pittsburgh, PA 15275  
(412) 788-6505 (office)  
aleshire@ats.edu

**Rev. Shawn McKnight (CCLV)**

Executive Director, USCCB Committee on Clergy,  
Consecrated Life and Vocations  
3211 Fourth Street, NE  
Washington, DC 20017  
(202) 541-3033 (office)  
smcknight@usccb.org

**STAFF MEMBERS**

**Msgr. Jeremiah McCarthy**

Executive Director, NCEA Seminary Department  
1005 N. Glebe Road, Suite 525  
Arlington, VA 22201  
(800) 711-6232 (office)  
jmccarthy@ncea.org

**Kathy Schmitt, M.Div.**

Administrative Assistant, NCEA Seminary Department  
1005 N. Glebe Road, Suite 525  
Arlington, VA 22201  
(571) 451-2881 (direct to desk)  
(800) 711-6232 (office – receptionist)  
kschmitt@ncea.org

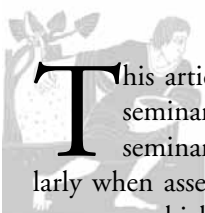
**Dr. Karen Ristau, Ph.D.**

President, National Catholic Educational Association  
1005 N. Glebe Road, Suite 525  
Arlington, VA 22201  
(800) 711-6232 (office)  
kristau@ncea.org

# Cultivating a Priestly Vocation: It's Not About Me

Very Reverend James A. Wehner, S.T.D.

*"There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit. To one is given through the Spirit the expression of wisdom; to another the expression of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit; to another mighty deeds; to another prophecy; to another discernment of spirits; to another varieties of tongues; to another interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing them individually to each person as he wishes" (1 Cor. 12:4-11).*



This article considers how everyone responsible for seminary formation can work together to assist seminarians in the discernment process, particularly when assessing vocations. The data, pedagogies and resources which assess the development and formation of seminarians may be of interest to many: bishops, vocation directors, pastors, parents and the seminarians themselves. For those entrusted with the preparation of seminarians for future ministry and priestly life, it is especially useful for us to consider the varying responsibilities we all have in cultivating a priestly vocation.

Seminary formation is a great and noble responsibility. The People of God trust that their future priests are being prepared to undertake the joys and burdens of pastoral ministry in a loving, competent and effective way. Bishops expect the formators to cultivate a priestly vocation with an attitude of patience, a character of good example and a fidelity which nurtures in the future priest a love for the Church. The seminarian invokes the Holy Spirit in the joyful hope that his seminary formation will always have his best interests at heart.

A great deal of energy is expended by everyone entrusted with the task of promoting vocations. Parents, pastors, vocation directors, bishops, the formation team and friends of the seminarians all have an interest in what kind of priest the seminarian will be after ordination. What must be avoided in the self-interest of all involved is a false sense of "competition" among those supporting the seminarian.

**This article considers how everyone responsible for seminary formation can work together to assist seminarians in the discernment process, particularly when assessing vocations.**

## The Competitive Nature of Promoting/ Sustaining Priestly Vocations

Many voices and initiatives are directed at young people, all trying to influence their lives and careers. Today, more than ever, young people have an array of options before them. High school students are actively recruited by the military, corporations and universities.

Too often, dissident voices in society drown out not only the message of the Gospel but also the voice of the Church, indeed, even the importance of a priestly vocation. All too often, the strategic efforts promoted by Catholic schools and religious education programs to encourage vocations to religious life and ordained ministry are hardly even considered by students.

Sadly, and perhaps shockingly, my experience as a

vocation director and a rector has confirmed a particular obstacle to priestly vocations – parents. Many married couples that choose to have few children do not actively encourage a religious or priestly vocation. They want grandchildren! I have met many seminarians in the past ten years who had to fight their way into the seminary. The good news is that most parents, once they understand seminary life, become great supporters of their sons.

Other factors include finances. Given the economic pressures on diocesan budgets, college seminarians often have to pay for their own education. Like any other collegian, seminarians take out loans and pursue grants. Unlike their college counterparts, however, college seminarians are not able to work during the school year because of the rightful demands of seminary formation. Young men often choose, therefore, to pursue a secular undergraduate degree before entering the seminary. There is currently a trend of more collegians entering the seminary, but these are often from dioceses where financial assistance is provided, illustrating the positive effects financial assistance could have. It is possible in that case that we are losing vocations because of this economic situation.

Financial pressures often remain, even after a seminarian begins his formation. Grateful as we are for the support of the local Knights of Columbus councils and parish organizations, sometimes this is not enough. Most seminaries have special fundraising efforts to assist seminarians when diocesan funds are insufficient. Seminary life should not be plush, but seminarians should not feel additional stress because of financial pressures.

A most discouraging factor is the perceived lack of support from some priests. I cannot tell you how many times seminarians come back from Christmas break discouraged because the pastor did not invite the seminarian to assist at Mass or gave him but a token responsibility. Perhaps the pastor did not want to offend the lay faithful who were scheduled to proclaim the Word or assist with the distribution of Holy Communion. Or perhaps the seminarian was not involved in the parish over the summer because the pastor thought that the seminarian might appreciate the time off. In the last ten years that I have been involved with seminary formation, I have spent more time at the end of summer or after a break consoling seminarians who simply were not acknowledged as seminarians or who were seen as suspiciously too traditionalist by priests.

The list can go on, but I believe we (bishops, vocation directors, priests, parents and formators) need to

**The Church is not well served by an “open enrollment” view of the seminary. A vocation director must know the candidate, know the expectations of the Church and encourage what is best for this young man.**

find better ways to remove unnecessary obstacles in the lives of seminarians. The temptor is already doing this – we do not need to create more stress in the lives of seminarians.

### **Pressures on Vocation Directors**

Consider for a moment the immense responsibilities of a vocation director who is trying to encourage men (young and old) who are discerning their vocation, consoling worried parents curious about their son’s motives and trying to be patient with brother priests who offer unsolicited advice about how he should do his job!

In an environment like this, vocation directors are placed under a spotlight. What creative program can they invent? Can their personality attract young men to religious life? What can the vocation director do to make priesthood look *cool*? Bishops want to see successful vocation programs, as well they should. Parents have a right to know that their sons are not being misled. Brother priests want to be sure their vocation director is keeping it real. The vocation director himself certainly does not want to see his priestly ministry reduced to a personality contest.

Because of these pressures, vocation directors must not surrender their primary responsibility – assisting men in their initial discernment. The Church is not well served by an “open enrollment” view of the seminary. A vocation director must know the candidate, know the expectations of the Church and encourage what is best for this young man.

Vocation directors are entrusted with the initial responsibility of assessing a candidate’s readiness and willingness to embrace formation. The candidate trusts

that the vocation director has the experience, wisdom and care as advice is being given. Trust is a significant aspect of the candidate's relationship to the discernment process.

The humbling reality for a vocation director is that it is the Holy Spirit, not he, who calls and confirms the priestly vocation. The People of God are, however, expecting that their financial contributions will be used prudently when assisting men in their discernment. The vocation director is, therefore, charged with grave and serious questions of judgment.

To attempt to measure the success of a vocation director's ministry solely on how many seminarians he has recruited is invidious. If a vocation director is being faithful to his responsibilities, gaining accurate information in the application process and promoting authentic means to encourage priestly vocations that are Christologically and ecclesially sound, then he is doing his job. If he is counting numbers, not asking the tough questions in the interview process, pushing men into the seminary who clearly are not ready or, worst, cultivating vocations around his personality rather than that of Jesus Christ and the Church, then the formation team, the institution, the Church – and, most certainly, the applicant – are not being served well in this process.

### **Vocation Directors Need to Trust the Seminary**

While the bishop and the candidate have expectations of the vocation director and the vocation director has expectations of how a seminary is to receive the candidate, the Church has expectations, too, concerning suitability and readiness. Underlining all of these expectations is trust. Trust has two elements: We must be trusting, and we must be trustworthy. Without trust, the whole formation system will fail. Without trust, seminarians will be poorly trained, will not practice a healthy sense of obedience and will become a thorn in the side of their bishop after ordination.

Once a seminarian enters priestly formation, the vocation director rightly has expectations that the formators will do their job and act responsibly. The formators trust that they are free to carry out their responsibilities without interference. Trust becomes manifest.

If vocation directors do not trust the formators, then priestly formation becomes political, it becomes personalized in the wrong way. As a result, the Church is not free to form the seminarian with a universal sense of formation in mind. Seminarians hear their vocation director saying one thing and their formators saying

something else. Vocation directors entrust to the seminary a candidate who is to love the Church in his status as a seminarian. This means that the seminary becomes the immediate experience of the Church for the seminarian. The seminarian learns how to trust and be loyal to the Church in his experience of seminary formation.

This is critically important because seminarians bring into the seminary their own perception of the Church, what the Church ought to be, where the Church should be going in the future. This passion is an excellent source of encouragement for seminary formators. The Church indeed envisions that seminaries will provide an apostolic, universal vision of the Church that brings the seminarian beyond his own limited experience of the modern Church.

Vocation directors therefore are asked to trust this apostolic, universal approach to priestly formation. We certainly appreciate that a vocation director might feel uneasy were he to see certain liturgical, pastoral or communal practices at the seminary that might not mirror the practices of the local Church. The proper forum in which to express that disquiet, I feel, should be with the priests responsible for the seminary in question. In his frustration, it could be harmful to have seminarians hearing one thing from the vocation director and something else from the seminary.

As stated, however, the formation team needs to be aware of various diocesan histories or problems of a presbyterate concerning certain ecclesial or liturgical practices so that seminarians are not blind-sided by their own actions that could be inconsistent with the traditions and practices of the presbyterate.

### **Seminary Life Needs to Keep it Real**

Rectors and formators need to trust in the counsel of vocation directors and bishops who know so readily the landscape of pastoral ministry in their own diocese. This means that formators need to listen carefully to what vocation directors and bishops are asking of a seminary program. Without this counsel, formation could be reduced to a cookie-cutter approach disconnected from the realities to which the future priest must minister.

While the seminary is intentionally isolated from many of the day-to-day concerns of society so that it might serve as a refuge that creates solitude for the seminarian, it is not intended to divorce the seminarian from life itself. This is why the seminary should encourage seminarians to be in regular contact with the vocation director, to read the diocesan paper and to

keep abreast of developments in the home diocese. The seminarian is, nevertheless, exposed to the beneficial influence of the institution for only about 28 weeks of the year. This means that the seminarian must embrace with total commitment, focus, energy and loyalty the demands and expectations of priestly formation at the seminary. The seminarian embraces self-denial, willingly moderating his exposure to social media, cell phones and other enticements. He is asked to learn how to be a man of prayer, study and fraternity within his community. The seminarian begins to cultivate the virtue of solitude which requires a certain amount of sacrifice.

Visits by bishops and vocation directors remind the seminary formation team and the seminarians of the object of priestly formation. The universal qualities of priestly formation have a particular pastoral aim that is directed to the local Church. The listening heart of the formation team and the obedience being cultivated by the seminarian prepares everyone to discern and appreciate the needs of diocesan Churches. A spirit of humility exists among formators as they listen carefully to the wisdom of bishops and vocation directors.

### **Doing Their Job: The Seminary Formation Team**

Any rector knows that one of his most demanding yet critical tasks is to recruit priests to the seminary faculty. The United States has many seminaries of great distinction, but this abundance makes the recruitment of priests even more difficult. How grateful I was to hear Pope Benedict XVI plead with the American bishops during his visit to the United States when he asked them to release their best priests for seminary formation work.

Once the formation team is assembled, our mission is collaborative – to prepare priests for the particular dioceses of our country. We must keep in the forefront of our consciousness the pastoral landscape that awaits the newly ordained priest, as reported to us by the bishop and vocation director, while also considering the universal, timeless principles of priestly formation.

Bishops and vocation directors rightly ask questions about the qualities of priests and professors at the seminary. Are we giving our men the best? Rectors have to be certain that we are not just “filling slots” with priests who have no business being involved with priestly formation. Making tough decisions to release a priest from the faculty is a part of accountability. Seminarians will know that we care for them in how we assemble a good team.

**Formation can be equated with conversion: the more that the seminarian is being converted to Christ and His Church, the more he is embracing priestly formation; likewise, the more that the seminarian commits himself wholeheartedly to the formation experience, the more intimate his relationship with Jesus Christ will be.**

How helpful it is when bishops and religious superiors can also make the sacrifice. The product of good, holy, prayerful priests is often the result of the mentoring received in the seminary. I plead to the bishops and religious superiors of our country to consider releasing priests when such requests are made by rectors.

With a formation team in place, the Church provides to the seminarian a very clear and precise experience that creates an environment of discernment and formation. Formation can be equated with conversion: the more that the seminarian is being converted to Christ and His Church, the more he is embracing priestly formation; likewise, the more that the seminarian commits himself wholeheartedly to the formation experience, the more intimate his relationship with Jesus Christ will be.

If formation is to be successful, the seminarian is going to be challenged. Bishops, vocation directors and parents must be patient and trust in the formation team. Interference, no matter how well-intentioned, can undermine the formation experience. Seminarians will not fully enter into the formation process if they know that support is not being given by those back home. This causes distraction for all involved.

## Let's Trust One Another

Seminarians are sons of the Church. They inspire all of the faithful, the non-ordained and ordained alike. They place themselves in the hands of Mother Church to be formed. How exciting for those of us to be involved in priestly formation – to witness first-hand the work of the Holy Spirit.

It can be difficult when the interests of so many parties *compete* – each trying to influence the seminarian. I think of a childhood disciplinary moment when I was reprimanded by a religious sister in school only then to be reprimanded again by my mother for getting sister upset. Notwithstanding the facts, my mother implicitly trusted sister.

Living in seminary community means seeing the human condition up front. Our normal social defenses are sometimes reduced. The seminarians may not always see the best in the priests, and we priests understand that we do not always see the best of the seminarians while living as a community. This is the way the Church envisions seminary life. It is frustrating that when a seminarian disagrees with a policy or decision, he contacts the vocation director who then often questions the formation team. Unlike my mother who implicitly trusted sister, formators are not asking for a blank check. The level of trust must first be established between the rector, bishop, vocation director and formator. The seminarian begins to learn that he can maneuver his way through seminary formation, otherwise. This scenario does not serve anybody well.

When I was a pastor, I recall how a teacher reprimanded a student. The parents of the student then called me and asked me to reprimand the teacher for reprimanding the student! One wonders what is going through the mind of the student who knows that the parents take the defense of the child outright. Will the teacher ever reprimand the student again or simply let that student slide by thus avoiding future situations? Sadly, in the end, the student is not being served well.

The seminary does not own the seminarian nor does his diocese. God is calling this man to discernment and the Church is entrusted to nurture the vocation. Everyone has a part to play, each according to the responsibility entrusted to him. The human condition with its imperfections will indeed surface matters that need to be addressed. The system is not perfect, but the experience is real. Like the apostles who bristled with each other, and dare I say with Our Lord, so too our seminarians are coming to learn what it means to embrace the communitarian dimension of priestly life.

**In an environment created by trust, the expectations of the Church articulated in the governing documents of priestly formation and presumed by our bishops are achieved.**

## Fair, Honest Assessment

In an environment created by trust, the expectations of the Church articulated in the governing documents of priestly formation and presumed by our bishops are achieved. The People of God should always want to support their priests. They manifest their joy when the bishop assigns a newly ordained priest to their parish. The faithful want to see this newly ordained priest grow in his vocation and be a successful, effective, holy priest of God.

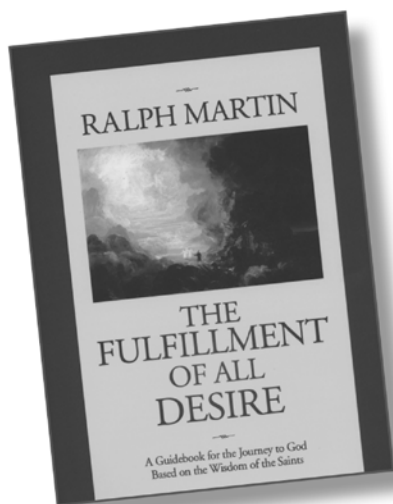
Assessing the seminarian from the moment when he meets with his vocation director, when he begins the application process to the seminary and when he receives evaluations from the formation team and recommendations about needed growth -- all these things presume trust by those involved. No one vocation director, no one bishop, no one rector or seminary has the complete responsibility of forming future priests. It requires the entire Church!

“God has so constructed the body as to give greater honor to a part that is without it, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the parts may have the same concern for one another. If (one) part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy!” (1 Cor. 12:24-26).



**Very Reverend James A. Wehner** was ordained a priest in 1995 for the Diocese of Pittsburgh. After completing doctoral studies at the Pontifical Gregorian University, Father Wehner served as rector of Saint Paul Seminary for six years. He also served as diocesan director for vocations, the permanent diaconate, evangelization, and ministerial formation. The Holy See appointed Father

Wehner as rector of the Pontifical College Josephinum in 2009. In Spring 2012, Archbishop Gregory Aymond appointed Father Wehner as rector of Notre Dame Seminary, New Orleans.



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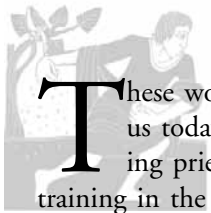
Ralph Martin, S.T.L., is the Director of Graduate Theology Programs in Evangelization at Sacred Heart Major Seminary in the Archdiocese of Detroit and President of Renewal Ministries.

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# Vocation of Jeremiah

Rev. Julian Anthony

*The work of the priesthood is done on earth, but it is ranked among heavenly ordinances. And this is only right, for no man, no angel, no archangel, no other created power, but the Paraclete himself ordained this succession; and persuaded men, while still remaining in the flesh to represent the ministry of angels. The priest, therefore, must be as pure as if he were standing in heaven itself, in the midst of those powers.<sup>1</sup>*



These words of St. John Chrysostom challenge us today when we hear about scandals involving priests. We ask, what went wrong with their training in the seminary? Naturally the question arises of how can we prepare them better to serve the people of God. In other words, how do we evaluate the candidates for the priesthood in the four key areas of human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation?

A careful study of the call and vocation of Jeremiah (Jer 1:4-10) and his life as a prophet who suffered much may help us to understand the nature of vocation in the Bible. This paper does not presume to solve the problems of the formation of the seminarians but attempts to understand the nature and dignity of the vocation in the light of biblical revelation. It is divided into two parts. First the vocation narrative of Jeremiah will enable us to understand God's call and the response of the one who is called. Second, the interior life of Jeremiah will give us insight into the problems and sufferings that Jeremiah endured in order to be faithful to his vocation. This aspect of his life will encourage us to carry on the mission given to us by Jesus in spite of the obstacles we face in our society. The vocation of Jeremiah will be studied in comparison with the callings of Moses, Isaiah, Mary and Paul.

**The Vocation of Jeremiah:** Jer 1:4-10. (cf. Ex 3:1-12; Is 6:1-9; Lk 1:26-36; Acts 9:1-9.)

*The Call of God* (Jer 1:4-5). A vocation to the priesthood comes from God, for it is God who takes the initiative to call. Manifestations of God in the following vocation narratives may be in different forms, but it is always God who calls. In the case of Moses (Ex 3:1-12), God appeared in the form of fire. God appeared to Isaiah (Is 6:1-9) in the temple as the king, Yahweh

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Sabaoth. To Jeremiah (Jer 1:4-10), God appeared as the word of Yahweh. In the Gospel of Luke (Lk 1:26-36), the Angel Gabriel announced the message of Yahweh to Mary. After the resurrection (Acts 9:1-9), the risen Lord spoke to Saul. In the New Testament, Jesus said: "You did not choose me but I chose you" (Jn 15:16).

*The Reaction of Jeremiah* (Jer 1:6). When God called Jeremiah, the prophet excused himself saying that he was only a child and did not know how to speak. Similarly, Moses gave several reasons not to accept his call (Ex 3:11-4:17). Isaiah said when he was called: "I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips" (Is 6:5). Mary said: "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" (Lk 1:34).

*God Reassures Jeremiah* (Jer 1:7-8). God reassured Jeremiah and persuaded him to accept his call, promising "I will be with you" (Jer 1:8). Similarly God promised to Moses, "I will be with you" (Ex 3:11).

*A Sign is Given* (Jer 1:8-9). God clearly indicated that Jeremiah was speaking in His name: "I have put my words in your mouth" (Jer 1:9). In the same way, a sign was given to Moses: "This shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you; when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain" (Ex 3:12). A sign was likewise given to Mary: "Your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also

conceived a son” (Lk 1:39).

As we think about vocations in our day, there are four important points for our consideration.

- Seminarians must understand from the beginning of their formation that they are called by God. Therefore they have to prepare themselves for priestly ministry, which is a vocation not a profession.
- The role model for seminarians is Jesus Christ, the High Priest who said, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mt 20:28).
- Accepting freely the call of God, seminarians must submit themselves to the will of God, imitating Mary who humbly accepted the call of God by saying, “Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word” (Lk 1:38). By surrendering to the will of God, a virgin from Nazareth became the *Theotokos*, the God-bearer. Moses became the liberator of the people of Israel. Saul, a persecutor of Christians, became the apostle to the gentiles. Similarly, seminarians by their humble submission to the will of God can become prophets in the twenty-first century.
- The seminary is a testing place where the students must honestly examine their suitability for becoming celibate priests.

During their period of formation, seminarians may have doubts about their vocations. Some may be tempted to abandon the celibate life. Some may have health or psychological problems and others may have serious problems with interpersonal relationships. In such cases, they must have recourse to two important resources: a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and openness to their spiritual directors.

First, Jesus Christ is the source and center of the seminarians’ spiritual lives. The Sacred Heart of Jesus, who is “more loving than a mother” (Is 49:15),<sup>2</sup> is always ready with open arms to embrace those whom He has called. Let them remember the promise of the Lord, who said: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations” (Jer 1:5).

This implies that seminarians must cultivate personal intimacy with Jesus Christ. St. Paul, because of his close personal relationship with Jesus, was able to say in times of difficulty: “Who will separate us from the

**Seminarians must realize that the training they receive in the seminary is only the beginning and that they must continue to grow after ordination, in the four key areas of human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation.**

love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or peril or sword?” (Rom 8:35). Furthermore the vocation narratives of Moses and Jeremiah remind us that God promised them in their need: “I shall be with you” (Ex 3:12; Jer 1:8).

Second, seminarians should be open and honest with their spiritual directors. In this, they should follow the example of St. Therese of Lisieux, who wrote in her autobiography: “I tried always to be an open book to my Director.”<sup>3</sup>

### **The Responsibility of the Superior in the Seminary**

As we know, the formation of the seminarians does not end in the seminary. The word “seminary” comes from the Latin word *seminarium*, which means “nursery.” This implies that the seminary is a place where the seed of vocation germinates and grows within seminarians in a protected environment, to bear fruits during their ministry. Seminarians must realize that the training they receive in the seminary is only the beginning and that they must continue to grow after ordination, in the four key areas of human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation.

The superior of the seminary must have a vision for the fruitful ministry of the seminarians after their ordination. He has to arrange the seminary training in such a way that the students have not only academic knowledge, but also practical experience in parishes. This arrangement is good for both the students and the superior. It is good for the students because they gain personal experience by interacting with the people in a mature way, and they can learn from the wisdom and experience of good pastors. It is good for the superiors because this arrangement gives them an opportunity to evaluate the

students' suitability for priestly ministry. This program is implemented in most seminaries, but how efficiently the supervision of the seminarians is done and how much personal attention is given to guiding the students must be reviewed.

In conscience, the superior has to be responsible not to promote the student for ordination who has not proven himself worthy of his calling. Bishops sometimes are tempted to ordain candidates who are not worthy because they want priests to fill the vacancies in their dioceses. At times, there is pressure from those above the superior of the seminary to promote students who are of a doubtful character. The superior must not yield to this kind of temptation.

### The Interior Life of Jeremiah

*Message of doom* During the years 609 to 598 B.C., Jeremiah suffered much. Skinner has summarized in a single word this stage of his life, calling it, "Gethsemane."<sup>4</sup> Bossuet in his admirable book entitled, *Meditation on the Gospel*, has compared it with the passion of Christ: "As God wanted to give Jeremiah a great part of holiness, he gave him also a great part of his persecution and cross."<sup>5</sup> The sufferings of the prophet were connected with his mission. Jeremiah wrote: "Every time I have to say the 'WORD', I must shout and proclaim violence and ruin" (Jer 20:8). After a short period of time, he could deliver a few prophecies of happiness; however, his ministry brought him continuously dark prospects, which continued until the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC. National sin loomed large in his vision, for he knew that the end of Judah was unavoidable because a general conversion of the people was not possible (Jer 13:23). Here is the tragedy: less sensitive prophets like Isaiah and Ezekiel would also have suffered to announce such a message, but there was much more suffering for Jeremiah because of his sensitive nature. It became like cancer in his life; consequently, he was easily discouraged (Jer 15:19).

*Persecutions* In 608 B.C.E., his own people in Anathoth attacked him, plotting against the prophet and his family. Like Jesus of Nazareth, he must have realized that "no prophet is welcome in his own land" (Lk 4:24). But it was only a beginning, for persecutions continued from higher circles.

*When Jeremiah had finished speaking all that the Lord had commanded him to speak to all the people, then the priests and the prophets and all the people laid hold of him, saying, "You shall die! Why have you prophesied in the name of the Lord, saying, 'This*

*house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate, without inhabitant?" And all the people gathered about Jeremiah in the house of the Lord. (Jer 26:8-9)*

The priest Pashhur, who was chief officer in the house of the Lord, beat Jeremiah the prophet and put him in the stocks (Jer 20:2). He was banned from the sanctuary for several years (Jer 36:5). In 604 B.C.E., King Jehoiakim decided to arrest Jeremiah and he had to hide himself (Jer 36:26).

*Sadness* When Jeremiah spoke, he was always sad because he was mocked and ill-treated by his enemies. Even his friends criticized him for his tone of severity, which insisted on the forthcoming punishments for their sins (Jer 20:10). Podechard wrote:

*If we consider the social condition prevailing at the time of Jeremiah, when there was no privacy of personal life, and there was no choice of food or lodging; everything was in common and one has to depend upon others for anything. Jeremiah, sensitive as he was, imagined his problem much more and this aggravated his suffering. If we can visualize this condition and read the sorrowful confession of Jeremiah, we may understand him to a certain extent. Cf. Jer. 20:10-12; 17:14-18; 18:18-23.<sup>6</sup>*

*Problem of Retribution* It may be shocking to read some of the passages in Jeremiah calling for vengeance. We have to remember that Jeremiah was not living in a Christian atmosphere. The question of retribution was not developed and understood as we understand it today. The prospect of eternal rewards was not yet known. It was thought that retribution had to be found in the present world. When evil triumphed and justice was not rewarded, people thought that it was a kind of divine failure but one that could not last. At a later time, Job and Qoheleth would deal with this problem. It was Jeremiah who, for the first time, articulated this problem in all its dimensions (Jer 12:1-5). In this passage, we have to notice that the divine voice did not approve the vindictive words of the prophet. Yahweh posed another question and renewed his call. Jeremiah also faced other difficulties in life; one might say that he had to pass through the forest where wild animals lay in wait.

*Moral solitude* Another aspect of his sufferings was his moral solitude. "I never sat in the company of scoffers amusing myself; with your hands on me I held myself aloof (Jer 15:17). Isaiah, though completely dedi-





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cated to his mission, shared everything with his wife, a prophet (Is 8:3-4). Ezekiel, stern as he was, has given us a beautiful insight into the joys of his family life: "His wife is the joy of his eyes" (Ez 24:16, 21). Jeremiah, however, was refused this consolation. At the age when a man thinks of marriage, he was burdened with overwork and there was no time for his social life. When he was in his forties, the life of celibacy became heavier to bear. However, he held that his life was a symbolic act and he recalled Hosea's marriage, writing:

*The word of Yahweh was addressed to me as follows: You are not to marry or have sons and daughters to be born in this place, about the mothers who give birth to them, and about the fathers who beget them in this land. They will die of deadly diseases, unlamented and unburied; they will be like dung spread on the ground; they will meet their end by sword and famine, and their corpses will be food for the birds of the sky and the beasts of earth" (Jer 16:1-4).*

*Discouragement and comfort* The prophetic mission was a burden for Jeremiah; it was against his personal

liking. He felt that God's hand was heavy upon him (Jer 15:17). He expressed this using an analogy of strife and love. He was "allured" by God (Jer 20:7), and there was pressure in his heart: "For me, Yahweh's word has been the cause of insult and derision all day long. I would say to myself 'I will not think about him, I will not speak in his name any more,' but then there seemed to be a fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones. The effort to restrain it wearied me, I could not do it" (Jer 20:9).

Jeremiah has given us a description of his spiritual crisis. It is an examination of conscience, done with absolute sincerity before God. Jeremiah had dedicated himself with enthusiasm to his vocation, but he reaped only universal hostility. He lived in isolation, rejected by society. Yahweh assured him with His promise and encouraged him to renew his commitment to his first call.

Jeremiah had to come around and give up his doubts, discouragement and bitterness. He had to assume again with serenity the hard work of a prophet of justice. At a time when he may have been about to give up and betray his calling, God's hand held him on the edge of the abyss and his night opened on a new dawn.

“Woe is me, my mother that you ever bore me, a man of strife and contention to the whole land! I have not lent, nor have I borrowed, yet all of them curse me. The Lord said: Surely I have intervened in your life for good, surely I have imposed enemies on you in a time of trouble and in a time of distress” (Jer 15:10-11). Similarly, “I will deliver you out of the grasp of the ruthless” (Jer 15:21).

In these texts, God’s answer repeats almost word for word the terms of the text of his vocation. Compare Jeremiah 15:20 and Jeremiah 1:8, 18: “I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you, but they shall not prevail over you, for I am with you to save you and deliver you” says the Lord (Jer 15:20). And again the Lord says, “Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you” (Jer 1:8, 18). God calls the workers not once but again and again to encourage them in their vocation, which gives meaning to their lives.

### The Goal of Teaching in the Seminary

Pope Leo XIII, who paved the way for the revival of biblical studies, emphasized the value and importance of Holy Scripture in the seminary.<sup>7</sup> The Second Vatican Council would later state: “Students should receive a most careful training in holy Scripture which should be the soul, as it were, of all theology.”<sup>8</sup>

Theological studies in the seminary, as conceived by the Second Vatican Council, are not merely an academic matter but also something related to the personal life of the students and to the ministry for which they prepare themselves: “Theology should be taught in such a way that students will accurately draw Catholic doctrine from divine revelation, understand that doctrine profoundly, nourish their own spiritual lives with it and be able to proclaim it, unfold it and defend it in their priestly ministry.”<sup>9</sup>

Finally, the Second Vatican Council clearly stated that the spiritual nourishment of the Bible is important for seminarians: “After a suitable introductory course, the seminarians should receive an accurate initiation in exegetical method. They should study closely the principle themes of divine revelation and should find inspiration and nourishment in daily reading and meditation upon the sacred books.”<sup>10</sup>

### How to teach?

The professor in the seminary must be conversant with modern problems. He must know not merely the speculative implications of the Bible and theology, with all of their historical difficulties, but also the problems they pose to the modern scientific mind with its reluc-

tance to admit anything beyond the realm of experience and rational inference. This leads to the personal qualities of the professor; it is not enough that the teacher is a man of faith, but he also has to understand the working of the modern mind and the particular situation of the students. The professor above all ought to convey something of the clarity, peace and earnestness that flows from faith in Jesus Christ.

### Conclusion

The problems found in the priesthood are some of the most serious ones confronting the Church today. Jesus was truly a priest and he intended to bestow upon his apostles and their successors a priesthood that is quite distinct from the priesthood common to all the baptized, as indicated by the priestly prayer of Jesus in John 17. The Church ought to call seminarians to rediscover the magnificent meaning of the consecrated priestly life. They should be invited to contemplate the person and work of Jesus Christ, who is the sole Priest of the New Covenant. The sacrificial and priestly dimensions of the life of Christ, when clearly seen, help seminarians grasp the unique greatness of priesthood, for that dimension is where Christ’s love for us is found. The vocation of Jeremiah provides rich grounds for reflecting on these dimensions of priestly ministry and the preparation of men to undertake that task.

**Father Julian Anthony, STD**, is a native of the state of Madras, India. He received his doctorate in Biblical Studies in 1977 from the Pontifical Biblical Institute and the Gregorian University in Rome. He was professor of scripture at Sts. Cyril & Methodius Seminary in Pittsburgh until 2011, and now resides in India.

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# Forming Shepherds in Priestly Formation

**Msgr. Gregory J. Schlesselmann, S.T.L.**

*This article is drawn from a talk given at the Institute for Priestly Formation Symposium at St. Charles Borromeo Seminary, Wynnewood, Pennsylvania.*



Many centuries ago, the Lord God prophesied through his prophet Jeremiah saying, “I will give you shepherds after my own heart” (Jer 3:15). Our heavenly Father has fulfilled his promise generously and abundantly over the centuries of the Church’s life. One can easily recall the names of some of his holy shepherds: St. Peter, St. Augustine, St. Patrick, St. Boniface, St. Charles Borromeo, St. Jean Vianney, Philadelphia’s own St. John Neumann, and soon-to-be Blessed Pope John Paul the Great. Like so many others, they were truly apostles of the Lord, their hearts imprinted with the image of the Heart of Christ. With deep gratitude, we recall the gift of their priestly service to the Bride of Christ, the Church. Yet our response should go beyond that. Our hearts should be filled with praise and thanksgiving to the Trinity for those who formed them, those who were instruments in the hand of the Lord leading them to his service. It is in that same spirit of awe and gratitude for all those who continue that same mission today, contributing in so many ways to the building up of the Body of Christ (Eph 4:12), that these reflections on forming shepherds are offered today.

It is beyond question that the mission of priestly formation has fundamental importance for the life of the Church. In his post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis*, Pope John Paul II identified the formation of future priests as “one of the most demanding and important tasks for the future of the evangelization of humanity.”<sup>1</sup> In fact, in each age, the Church is faced with the question of how to cooperate with her Spouse in raising up new apostles of his saving Gospel. That is why it is valuable for us to pause as we do today to ponder this “continuation in time of Christ’s own work.”<sup>2</sup> Reflecting on this question can be an occasion for inspiration toward deeper fruitfulness, encourage-

ment in the face of challenges and greater confidence in building upon solid foundations already laid down. With Pope John Paul II, we can embrace “complete trust in the unbroken fulfillment of God’s promise”<sup>3</sup> as we join the Lord in the formation of future priests.

## **“The power of the Most High will overshadow you” (Lk 1:35)**

In light of the prophetic words of Jeremiah “I will give you shepherds after my own heart” (Jer 3:15), one can readily be led to a key text in the Pope John Paul II’s exhortation:

*...the future priest also, and in the first place, must grow in his awareness that the agent par excellence of his formation is the Holy Spirit, who by the gift of a new heart configures and conforms him to Jesus Christ the good shepherd. In this way the candidate to the priesthood will affirm in the most radical way possible his freedom to welcome the molding action of the Spirit.<sup>4</sup>*

Here Pope John Paul II is making a number of fundamental assertions. First of all, he is teaching that priestly formation is primarily and essentially the work of the Holy Spirit. The Third Person of the Holy Trinity transforms the seminarian into the priest that He intends him to become. This does not only occur in the grace of Holy Orders itself, but also throughout all the preparatory work which readies the candidate for the gift of that sacramental transformation.

Secondly, John Paul II affirms that the Holy Spirit forms the seminarian “by the gift of a new heart.” This is not some pious sentimentalism but an assertion of the radicalism of priestly formation. With great seriousness, God intends to transform the seminarian in the most

radical, profound and permanent way. The word “heart” means not just the dimension of affectivity but also the hidden center of the human person, the place within which the seminarian dwells and from which he lives his life.<sup>5</sup> By the power of the Holy Spirit, the heart becomes a sanctified place for the new and eternal covenant,<sup>6</sup> for grace makes all things new.

Thirdly, the Holy Spirit’s gift of a new heart to the seminarian constitutes an essential dimension of his being configured and conformed to Jesus Christ the Good Shepherd.<sup>7</sup> Surely that means that this new heart is none other than a living image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Himself. The loving plan of the Father is to breathe forth his Holy Spirit upon the seminarian so that by his infinite power, He transforms his heart into that of the Son of God, full of wisdom, grace and light – the heart of the “Good Shepherd” (John 10:14-18). The Father’s plan of priestly formation is to transform the priestly candidate in such a profound way that Christ is able to truly live his life in and through the future priest. Should not every seminarian and priest be able to say with St. Paul, it is “no longer I but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20)?

Pope John Paul II’s insightful teaching leads us to a refinement of the question before us. The question now is: how does the Holy Spirit so radically transform the seminarian so as to give him a new heart, a living image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus? Where can we learn more about how the Holy Spirit accomplishes this great work?

In order to answer this question, it is helpful at this point to remember two truths. First of all, the priesthood for which seminarians are being prepared is the same priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ. By the grace of Holy Orders, the ordained candidate will henceforth share in that one eternal priesthood.<sup>8</sup> The second truth is that the priesthood of Jesus Christ resides in his sacred humanity,<sup>9</sup> which as such needed to be formed. In order to discern elements of an answer to our question, we can contemplate how the Holy Spirit formed the priestly Heart of Jesus in Nazareth, how the Spirit of the Father lovingly formed the human heart of the Incarnate Word,<sup>10</sup> and how Mary and Joseph cooperated with divine grace in this, the most pivotal of all priestly formations. For Mary<sup>11</sup> and Joseph<sup>12</sup> were the most formative human influences upon Jesus. Led by the Holy Spirit, they established the grace-filled human atmosphere and personal context of his foundational years so that we can truly say that the home at Nazareth was the first seminary.<sup>13</sup> Thus by pondering these

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mysteries, we can gain insights into how the Holy Spirit wills to form the Heart of Jesus in the heart of the seminarian, transforming the seminarian into the true likeness of the Good Shepherd.

Since a thorough treatment of this question would take us too far beyond the scope of this talk, we will limit our discussion to the very first moment of that formation, namely the historic event of the Annunciation and the Incarnation of the Son of God in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary. By pondering what the Word of God reveals to us in St. Luke’s passage of the Annunciation (Lk 1:26-38), we are also pondering the necessary conditions and graces offered to the Church in her mission to form priests. By drawing from the inexhaustible well of Sacred Scripture, we can invite the Wisdom of God to envelop us by his light and teach us the pathway before us.

This text offers us four distinct moments to ponder: verses 26-27 set the stage, while in the following verses, St. Luke offers us a triptych of dialogues within the encounter between the angel Gabriel and the Blessed Virgin Mary (vv. 28-29, vv. 30-34, vv. 35-38). In each of the three dialogues, Gabriel announces a message and Mary responds. Let us now turn to each one of these moments in succession and see what the Word of God wills to convey to us.

#### **“To a virgin betrothed to Joseph named Mary” (Lk 1:26-27)**

St. Luke begins his account by telling us that the angel Gabriel is sent to “Nazareth to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David” (Lk 1:27), and in so doing the evangelist identifies the personal context of the gift of the Holy Spirit. God’s messenger is sent to a “virgin” not only to fulfill the prophecy of the Old Testament (Is 7:14), but also to re-

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veal in Mary's virginity that she belongs totally to the Holy Spirit. He requires full freedom to accomplish his work of the Incarnation. This virginal quality of Mary is safeguarded and protected by her being "betrothed" to Joseph, who is "of the house of David" (Lk 1:27) and a "just" man (Mt 1:19).<sup>14</sup> Being of the house of David, the royal and priestly line of Israel, Joseph stands as the image of that tradition and its continuation.

What might this mean for priestly formation?

There seem to be three motifs arising from these Gospel verses, namely that the seminary should be: a) virginal, b) entrusted to Joseph and c) Marian. Let us consider each one in its turn.

In the first place, every seminary needs to be and to see itself as "virginal." The very word *seminarium* means "nursery" or "plantation," and the Church has long considered the seminary to be a spiritual womb, the heart of a diocese,<sup>15</sup> where the seeds of a priestly vocation can grow to maturity. But not just any womb, for a seminary needs to be a place reserved for God alone, a place apart dedicated to the reception of the Divine Word<sup>16</sup> and the life in his Spirit. It needs to be capable of nurturing the organic development of spiritual growth in the seminarian by an ever-deeper participation in the mystery of life-giving communion with the Trinity. In other words, the seminary needs to be a place where the seminarian is encouraged and assisted in living exclusively for God, in living out his baptismal consecration to the Holy Trinity that is already present. He needs to be assisted in letting the Holy Spirit accomplish the radical reorientation of his life toward life in God.

This living exclusively for God, this being virginal within the covenant of love with the Trinity, calls for concrete conditions in the rhythm of life within the seminary, and notably, for silence and solitude.<sup>17</sup> First,

the seminary must be a place that fosters exterior and interior silence for the seminarian so that he hears the loving voice of the Lord within his heart. An horarium of a seminary should create space for that silence to begin and mature in the life of each seminarian. Concretely, this means a daily "atmosphere of quiet"<sup>18</sup> throughout the community, monthly days of recollection which are totally silent, and yearly retreats of extended silence over a number of days. Even though they are being prepared for active ministry, real spiritual intimacy with the Trinity is simply not possible in a life without the sustained experience and practice of silence. Given the cultural obstacles to this practice, it becomes all the more necessary that from the very first days of seminary life, he learns not only to accept the practice of silence, but also to embrace it wholeheartedly and make it his own. The Church considers this so important that in 1980 the Congregation for Catholic Education identified the main task of those responsible for the running of a seminary as "formation of the students in interior silence."<sup>19</sup> Secondly, this silence needs to be safeguarded by a certain solitude, a being alone with God. A holy and peaceful solitude is a necessary condition for the deepening of his relationship of intimacy with each Person of the Trinity. Only in and from that intimacy can the future priest truly mature in his capacity to be a "man of communion"<sup>20</sup> for and with others.

All of this will require a certain detoxification from the negative influences of today's self-centered and materialistic culture. It is rare that a new seminarian will have had significant experience with silence and solitude. A going into the desert is called for, with real privations of sense and spirit, with a healthy and balanced asceticism motivated by the love of God. In concrete terms, questions about how much of and by what means this culture should be let into the life of the seminary are questions that need to be asked and answered with spiritual clarity and real discernment.<sup>21</sup> Thus, these qualities of silence and solitude, of belonging exclusively to God, should characterize the life of a seminary.

The second motif to which the Lucan text draws us is the seminary as entrusted to Joseph. In the Father's Providence, the great mystery of the Incarnation of the High Priest and Unique Mediator was entrusted to St. Joseph, to whom the Mother of God was betrothed. Does it not stand to reason therefore that every seminary needs to be entrusted to Joseph's protection and guardianship? The "Guardian of the Redeemer"<sup>22</sup> continues his mission in safeguarding those who share in the Redeemer's priestly identity and mission. His virile

example as revealed by Sacred Scripture should be reverently contemplated and held up as the model to follow. Seeking his powerful intercession with gratitude and confidence, every seminarian should be assisted in developing a deep, truly personal relationship with St. Joseph, learning especially from him how to be a father, how to pray in work and to rest in prayer. Future priests need to learn from St. Joseph his humility, poverty of spirit, contemplative silence and disciplined industriousness for the sake of others. Joseph's fidelity to the house of David and the faith of Israel invites the seminarian to likewise be faithful to the Church in her life and teaching.<sup>23</sup>

The third motif is that the seminary should be Marian. Does it need to be said that every seminary should foster a realistic and sustained devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary?<sup>24</sup> Indeed, every seminarian needs to be initiated into an ever-deeper relationship of authentic intimacy with the Mother of our Savior so that his future priesthood is lived in communion with her. This Marian devotion is not some superficial sentimentality but is rather lived out in "an inner climate of simplicity and abandonment."<sup>25</sup> In addition, the necessity of this relational devotion to Mary invites the seminary as a community and an ecclesial institution to explicitly consecrate all its efforts in the mission of priestly formation to her maternal care. For the greatest benefit, this consecration should be renewed regularly and recalled to mind frequently. Mary is the model of holiness and integrity, of radical receptivity to the Word of God. She who was so instrumental in forming the human Heart of Jesus as he grew into the fullness of his manhood, must also be an integral part of the formation of his priests.

### **"Hail, full of grace" (Lk 1:28-29)**

Returning now to the Lucan narrative, we come to the first of the three dialogues between Gabriel and Mary. Gabriel's greeting, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you," occasions in Mary an initial response of interior alarm, confusion and wonderment. This response of Mary to the word of Gabriel implies that she is interiorly attentive and watchful as the angel arrives to make his announcement. Her heart is awake to her own interior experience and aware of the encounter with God within that experience, even though it be only a whispered word of his messenger (cf. 1 Kings 19:12-13). Her response also reveals that her initial disquiet is the profound reaction of a humble person when addressed with such exalted language.<sup>26</sup> She is troubled and perplexed by the greeting, that is to say, by what is

said rather than by an angel speaking to her. She does not doubt whether this is from God but ponders what it means. Her humility is the constant attitude of her heart with respect to the Most High – she is his hand-maiden, in lowliness and poverty, and she wonders how she can be addressed with such a greeting when she is so lowly.<sup>27</sup>

What might Mary's spiritual stance reveal to us regarding the formation of priestly shepherds? First of all, it implies that, like Mary, formators and seminarians are called to have awakened hearts, interiorly attentive to every messenger from God. Consciously and explicitly cultivating the habit of spiritual awareness, the habit of interior noticing and relating, should be one of the foremost goals of seminary formation. Of greatest significance is the interior noticing of the Indwelling of the Trinity of Divine Persons and the personal relating to each One of them. The gift of Baptism calls each one of us to live in conscious awareness and gratitude for this mystery of the divine life within us at the heart of our real personal experience. The practice of spiritual awareness is essentially the spiritual realism of a human person endowed with grace. What would the history of salvation have been like if Mary had not been interiorly aware of the presence of the Lord in her heart?

Secondly, Mary's stance implies that she had been already accustomed to praying contemplatively, to resting with the Lord in prayer. The evangelist tells us twice elsewhere (Lk 2:19, 51) that she pondered the events of the Incarnation in her heart. Like Mary, and given the capital importance of their unique relationship with the Trinity, seminarians are called to seek actively this loving encounter with the Lord in a regular practice of contemplative prayer.<sup>28</sup> This practice, ever ancient and ever new, is the privileged way of experiencing this relationship in a living and personally intimate way. That is why it is so important that contemplative prayer be taught and cultivated at every level of seminary formation. Concretely, all seminarians need to be taught both in the external forum (to ensure organic unity and comprehensive completeness of presentation) and in the

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privacy of the internal forum (where the general principles are applied to the individual) how to be spiritually aware, how to listen contemplatively and how to dialogue<sup>29</sup> in an honest and authentic way with the Persons of the Trinity. Essential to such a spiritual curriculum would be detailed instruction on the various approaches of contemplative prayer such as *lectio divina*,<sup>30</sup> a contemplatively “active participation” in the sacred Liturgy,<sup>31</sup> the discernment of spirits, contemplative action and the Examen prayer. These contemplative methods become the “orthopraxis” by which the seminarian can experience daily his vital relationship with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. These methods provide him with a means of savoring the “breadth and length and height and depth of Christ’s love” so that he might attain “to the fullness of God himself” (Eph 3:18-19). This interior intimacy with God – identical to holiness<sup>32</sup> – is vital

for any real fruitfulness in the mission of proclaiming the Gospel to which seminarians are called. For “what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we looked upon and touched with our hands ... we proclaim now to you” (1 Jn 1:1, 3). Just as Mary’s contemplative listening and dialogue with the Lord is a essential part of the mystery of her personal vocation from God, so too are these spiritual practices for seminarians discerning and growing into their own unique priestly vocation. Pope Benedict XVI said it well to seminarians in Cologne in 2005:

*It is Mary who shows him Jesus her Son; she introduces him and in a sense enables him to see and touch Jesus, and to take him into his arms. Mary teaches the seminarian to contemplate Jesus with the eyes of the heart and to make Jesus his very life.<sup>33</sup>*

## In Fulfillment of Their Mission: *The Duties and Tasks of a Roman Catholic Priest*

By Joseph Ippolito, M.A., Rev. Mark A. Latcovich, Ph.D. and Joyce Malyn-Smith, Ed.D.

*In Fulfillment of Their Mission* offers a profile of what a successful priest needs to know and be able to do. It outlines nine major areas of ministerial concern – the duties – and enumerates several tasks within each performance area. Four levels of competency are described for each task, with accompanying descriptions, laid out in a chart format.

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Thirdly, the practice of contemplative prayer leads the seminarian, indeed leads each one of us, to taste our radical spiritual poverty, which is a real gift of God. The more the seminarian prays, the more he experiences his inability to pray, to find Him whom his heart seeks (Sg 3:1-2; 5:6). This has been confirmed many times in my experience as rector. During one evening when we were teaching this topic, I explained that the seminarians should not be disturbed when they come to tell me that, after real effort, they can't pray, discern or persevere. My typical response is "Perfect!" I explained that this was because it would show the Holy Spirit was leading them into experiencing their poverty. One of the older seminarians, who had earned advanced degrees in science before entering the seminary, gazed at me with pained and utter disbelief and then burst out, unable to contain himself any longer, "This is the craziest school I have ever been to!" While I would have nuanced it a bit differently, I did not deny it!

But why should this be? This experience of poverty is the spiritual realism of humility before the ineffable mystery of the Triune God. "What is man that you should care for him?" cries the psalmist (Ps 8:5). Typically, though, the contemplating seminarian is disturbed and distressed at this experience of his poverty and seeks ways to be freed from it. It is vital to his formation that he have this experience not just once or occasionally but in an ongoing and permanent way. For in reality, it is the sure sign of the purifying fire of the Holy Spirit liberating the seminarian from the Pelagian slavery of self-reliance and giving him the freedom of loving dependence upon our heavenly Father, the freedom of the children of God. This poverty is related to the theological virtue of hope by which we place our trust in Christ's promises and rely not on our own strength but on the help of the Holy Spirit.<sup>34</sup> In a culture that promotes the idolatry of human autonomy,<sup>35</sup> the witness is urgently needed of a priest who can freely, lovingly and even joyfully proclaim his radical spiritual poverty and absolute dependence upon the Father's love in a genuine simplicity of life. Might this not be one of the deep reasons why the Church echoes Mary's grateful and hopeful proclamation of her poverty each evening in the Magnificat canticle? Truly, all in the seminary community are called to be "empty" like the womb of the Virgin Mary, ready to receive the Word of our heavenly Father by the power of his Spirit. We are called to welcome Jesus to live in and for us his own *kenosis* (Phil 2:5-11), through which He saved the world.

### **"You shall conceive and bear a Son and give him the name Jesus" (Lk 1:30-34)**

In the second of the three dialogues, the angel's words "Be not afraid" reassure Mary, echoing countless similar reassurances by the Lord in the Old Testament,<sup>36</sup> and he proceeds to reveal the Lord's intent. The Son she shall conceive and give birth to shall be called "Jesus," "Son of the Most High," and He will reign over an everlasting kingdom. Always eager to embrace wholeheartedly the loving will of the Father, Mary poses her faith-inspired question seeking to discern clearly what is being asked of her. In contrast with Zechariah's doubting refusal to trust (Lk 1:18-20), Mary wants to know how to receive his love ever more radically so as to surrender her whole being more completely to his loving plan. Her attentiveness and readiness to relate the deep question of her heart to the Lord opens the way for the revelation of who she is in the Father's heart and how the Holy Spirit intends to accomplish this great miracle. She actively receives the truth of her deepest identity from the Lord, who reveals to her that she will be the virginal Mother of God. Her vocational quest is resolved by the reception of this gift of the Father's love.

This moment of the Annunciation helps us to see how the pathway of priestly formation must assist the seminarian to discover his true identity in God. The grace of the Father's light shines upon the unique truth of the seminarian who zealously pursues the personal encounter with the Lord. He discovers ever more deeply in what particular ways he is the Father's beloved son, a son in the Son,<sup>37</sup> and he upon whom his favor rests (Lk 3:22). This grace is vital as a curative and corrective to the false and distorted identities so frequently assumed as true and binding. It liberates his heart from clinging to any lies about who he is, such as the lie that he is defined by past failures or wounds or by what he does.<sup>38</sup> Personal identity is rather the truth of the person as it is revealed in the relationship of interpersonal Trinitarian communion and love.

That is why it is so important for every seminarian to learn by practical experience how to truly discern spirits. It is vital for each one to be able to recognize interiorly the peaceful voice of the Lord as distinct from other voices and to possess the humble confidence of asking for the revelation of this truth. In short, an active faith-inspired seeking of God's vision and will is crucial. One day, a seminarian came to my office to inform me that he had discerned that God was not calling him to the priesthood. I simply asked him if he was at peace. He responded "no" and admitted to being quite trou-

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bled. I instructed him to go back to prayer and spiritual direction and stay there until he was at peace, then ask Jesus what he wanted, and then to come and talk with me. About ten days later, he showed up at my door, wearing a sheepish grin and wondering if he could stay in formation after all. To this request I readily consented, since he confirmed that he was now in peace and that God wanted him to be a priest. How important it is for the seminarian to know whose voice is whispering in his heart! The practice of discernment of spirits is intimately bound up with the attitude of expectant faith which is nothing less than the deepest foundation for the promise of obedience which every priest makes on the day of his ordination. His obedience is essentially an act of surrender to the Father's loving revelation of who he really is in God. It is a profoundly free human act, inspired and elevated by the grace of the Holy Spirit, to expect the best in trusting love.<sup>39</sup> Seminarians need to be encouraged along this way and "fathered" into this obediential faith as they discern their true identity in God and thus their vocation.

This spiritual dynamic reveals to what extent the seminarian is called to be actively receptive in the pursuit of his vocation. Active receptivity is at the heart of the identity of the Eternal Son of God who eternally receives all from his Father. Like Christ, like Mary and Joseph, the seminarian is to be assisted in living this attitude of heart in a permanent way. The seminarian is most emphatically not called to "figure out" his vocation but to receive the Word of God by the action of the Holy Spirit and to hear in the depth of his heart the loving invitation of the Father to be his priest. By the Holy Spirit's illuminating fire, the seminarian is gifted

with the treasure of his "name"<sup>40</sup> in God (Is 62:2) and in peace and tranquility comes to the joyful and certain discovery of the pathway before him. This infilling grace transforms him ever more into the living image of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who seeks to live his filial identity in him.

**"The power of the Most High will overshadow you" (Lk 1:35-38)**

In the final exchange between St. Gabriel and the Blessed Virgin Mary, the angel promises her that "the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (Lk 1:35). The evangelist uses the word ἐπισκιάσει or "overshadow," which can mean both to protect by the manifestation of transcendent power (for example, to shade from harmful rays of the sun) and to overwhelm by that same power (as in to obscure or to darken).<sup>41</sup> It can be understood as an action both "to" as well as "for" (on behalf of)<sup>42</sup> the recipient of the action – in this context, the Blessed Virgin Mary. Thus the immediate sense is that the action of the Holy Spirit in "overshadowing" Mary is one of an intervention of his divine power to shade her protectively and to overcome and transcend any other power at work in or around her while simultaneously obscuring and darkening any created power from grasping his mysterious work. The angel bears witness to the Holy Spirit's invisible mission within the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary and reassures her of his unlimited power to accomplish the Father's purpose, "for nothing is impossible for God" (Lk 1:37). Living deeply her relationship with God and having received her vocational call from Him, she now consents whole-heartedly and utterly to the mystery of the Father's plan. In deep love, she gives herself completely to the Lord. Mary's total gift of self in complete abandonment and trusting surrender to the Father's love is the prototype of any vocational "yes."<sup>43</sup>

It is precisely this overshadowing by the Holy Spirit which appears as a type of culmination of his work in the formation of future priests. The Holy Spirit takes absolute initiative, choosing according to the Father's plan the precise moment to intervene supremely and authoritatively in Mary's life and thereby in the life of human history. He will come upon her as He will come upon the Church at Pentecost (Acts 1:8). In a similar way, in the mystery of a priestly vocation, the divine initiative is always first and is "the free and gracious intervention of God who calls."<sup>44</sup> This initiative of the Holy Spirit is an act of transcendent Divine Power,

against which no other power can stand (Is 55:10-11). The intervention of the Holy Spirit renders the lesser powers of nature moot, accomplishing his purpose sovereignly (Jdt 16:14). For both the individual seminarian and the very structure of the seminary as an institution, divine authority and initiative become the profound source of encouragement and strength. When the discernment process has deeply respected God's absolute freedom of action and will and has led to a positive vocational conviction, the seminarian is enabled and empowered to continue in the face of obstacles and challenges with great freedom. For "if God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom 8:31). The seminarian can be greatly assisted to persevere in his formation when he bears the conviction in his heart that this is the Holy Spirit's work. Like St. Paul who was apostle "by the will of God" (1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; Eph 1:1; Col 1:1; 2 Tm 1:1), every seminarian's priestly vocation is an *opus Dei*. He can confidently embark upon his mission to bear faithful and credible witness to Christ the Good Shepherd.

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The overshadowing of the Holy Spirit also implies that his sanctifying presence, his holiness and charity, should constitute the atmosphere of a seminary and the very air the seminarian breathes. In light of Pope Benedict XVI's call for a "new Pentecost" in the Church,<sup>45</sup> the seminary is especially that place where that new outpouring of the Holy Spirit should be a perpetual hallmark, palpable to all who enter or visit. Indeed it should permeate the entire life of the seminarian wherever he may find himself: in the classroom, among friends, in pastoral work or in any other context. By welcoming this transforming presence of the Holy Spirit, the seminarian learns how to be a contemplative in

action, where all his activities and especially his pastoral initiatives are animated by a continual awareness of the Spirit's indwelling presence and action.<sup>46</sup> I will be always grateful for the gift God gave to a seminarian in his pastoral assignment when he struggled to know what to do for a hospice patient for whom he was unable to do anything of an obvious practical value (such as give him food or drink, or even really converse). His distress at not being able to give was completely changed when he embraced his poverty in the relationship and began to simply be aware of the presence and activity of the Spirit of Jesus within him and within his patient. He was able to taste real communion both with God and with the dying man by simply being an instrument of the Father's love for him, all the while seeming to do nothing for him. Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta would have said that it was simply "something beautiful for God."

At the same time we know that this powerful overshadowing of the Most High will only occur with the free and loving consent of the seminarian, thereby respecting his integrity as a person and ensuring that this act remains fully an act of mutual love. This same freedom of love is the attitude of heart that a seminary is called to inculcate in each seminarian so that he may make authentically the total gift of self to God in an unconditional way. He is called to the radicality of preferring above all else the will of God as revealed by the Holy Spirit. He is called to make of himself a "free oblation"<sup>47</sup> on the altar of his life to Christ and to his Bride the Church. Like both Mary and Joseph, he is called to freely allow himself to be poured out in a loving echo of the Father's eternal outpouring of divine charity. This is the pastoral charity by which the future priest becomes a living icon of Christ, he who is to become *in persona Christi capitis* truly the spouse of the Church in celibate chastity and the father to her children as the good shepherd of the flock.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, let us turn our attention once again to the words of Pope John Paul II. The Holy Spirit desires to form shepherds by giving every seminarian a new heart, the Heart of Jesus. He longs to bring into full reality what St. Jean Marie Vianney described of the priesthood, namely that it "is the love of the Heart of Jesus."<sup>48</sup> By an ever-deepening communion with the Persons of the Trinity, the seminarian is transformed into a living flame of pastoral charity, a credible witness for the Church and for the world of today. This holiness of relational intimacy with God is true spiritual integra-

tion, explicitly called for by the Church.<sup>49</sup> It will attract others to the Good News of Jesus Christ and open the door to a life of authentic pastoral fruitfulness and joy.

This is the work of the Holy Spirit, the formator par excellence,<sup>50</sup> and he beckons each one of us, formators and seminarians alike, to cooperate with Him just as Mary and Joseph did as they formed the heart of our great High Priest and Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

Therefore let us heed the words of our beloved John Paul II as he exhorted all in the Church to “a total act of faith in the Holy Spirit.”<sup>51</sup> Since we long for priestly formation to truly bear fruit in the gift of shepherds after the Heart of Christ, let us give ourselves to an explicit and whole-hearted trusting abandonment to the Holy Spirit’s inspiration and action in our lives and in the life of the Church. Trusting that He will bring about a new Pentecost, we will be able to say with St. Paul, “Now to him who is able to accomplish far more than all we ask or imagine, by the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen” (Eph 3:20-21).



**Msgr. Gregory J. Schlesselmann, S.T.L.**, was rector of Cardinal Muench Seminary in Fargo, North Dakota until it closed in May 2011. He is now in residence at St. Anthony of Padua Church in Fargo and engaged in Permanent Diaconate formation.

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## Endnotes

1. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation On the Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day *Pastores dabo vobis* (25 March 1992)
2. This amazing statement merits deeper attention and prayerful theological reflection. If such an assertion does not give us pause, nothing will!
3. John Paul II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, 2.
4. John Paul II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, 1.
5. John Paul II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, 69.
6. See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2000), 2563.
7. Much fruit could be received in contemplating how the “epiclesis” of the Holy Spirit upon the human heart transforms it into the living Body of Christ analogously to His sacramental action in the Eucharist. In a certain sense, with the Fathers of the Church we can say that we become “eucharisted” by His action.
8. John Paul II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, 22.
9. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1545.
10. 1 Tm 2:5; St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 26, a. 2; q. 22, a.1.
11. John Paul II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, 19.
12. John Paul II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, 82.
13. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation On the Person and Mission of Saint Joseph in the Life of Christ and of the Church *Redemptoris custos* (15 August 1989), 16.
14. See James Keating, “The Seminary as Nazareth: Formation in a School of Prayer,” *Ignatius Insight* (11 February 2010), at [www.ignatiusinsight.com](http://www.ignatiusinsight.com), for an important and urgently needed development of this theme.
15. The action of the Holy Spirit takes place within the context of a sacred covenant, namely the covenant of marital love (here in its initial stage). It is evocative of the nuptial imagery so dear to the prophets of Israel when describing the Lord’s love for his people. It is that same covenant, announced by the prophets, which the Father plans to bring to fulfillment in a “new and everlasting covenant” in the Person of His Beloved Son (See Eucharistic Canons, Prayer of Consecration). This covenantal aspect of priestly formation merits wider reflection.
16. Second Vatican Council, Decree on Priestly Training *Optatam totius* (28 October 1965), 5.
17. Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation On the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church *Verbum Domini* (30 September 2010), 82.
18. See Second Vatican Council, *Optatam totius*, 10; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Program of Priestly*

- Formation*, 5th ed., §110 (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006), 43-47.
18. USCCB, *Program of Priestly Formation*, 121.
  19. Congregation for Catholic Education, Circular Letter Concerning Some of the More Urgent Aspects of Spiritual Formation in Seminaries, *Origins* 9.38 (6 March 1980), Part II, 1. Christ the Word of God, pp. 615-616.
  20. See John Paul II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, 43; USCCB, *Program of Priestly Formation*, 76.
  21. For example, the question of how much use of mass media is appropriate is not only a question concerning morals, but it is also a question of how that use contributes to or hinders interior silence.
  22. See John Paul II, *Redemptoris custos*, especially 22-27.
  23. St. Joseph's example also needs to inform the Petrine dimension of the seminary, namely the seminary's relationship with the hierarchy of the Church. Bishops and their collaborators are called to provide for the seminary as Joseph provided for the Holy Family, to watch over it with paternal solicitude and concern. They are called to make the necessary sacrifices which enable the seminary to truly thrive, doing all to give it the best gifts of the diocesan family. Cf. Vatican II, *Optatam totius*, 5.
  24. See Second Vatican Council, *Optatam totius*, 8; Congregation for Catholic Education, *Circular Letter Concerning Spiritual Formation in Seminaries, Part II, Guidelines*, 4, *The Word made Flesh in the Womb of the Virgin Mary*; USCCB, *Program of Priestly Formation*, 125.
  25. Congregation for Catholic Education, Circular Letter Concerning Spiritual Formation in Seminaries, Part II Guidelines, 4, *The Word made Flesh in the Womb of the Virgin Mary*.
  26. The Greek term *καταρτιωμένη* is used by the angel as a title for Mary. This is the only instance in the Bible where an angel uses a title to address a person. See Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, *The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible, The Gospel of Luke* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2001), 19, note on Lk 1:28.
  27. Yet her humility is so deep that in her Magnificat (Lk 1:46-55) she can proclaim her lowliness in her praise of the Almighty God without the slightest hint of self-glorification.
  28. The long-standing spiritual tradition of the Church attests to the spiritual fruitfulness of this practice and urges us to seek the Lord while he may be found (Is 55:6).
  29. The Greek word in Lk1:29 is *διελογίζετο*, from which we derive the English word "dialogue."
  30. USCCB, *Program of Priestly Formation*, 110.
  31. Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum concilium* (4 December 1963)14,17.
  32. John Paul II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, 33.
  33. Benedict XVI, Meeting with Seminarians, Church of Saint Pantaleon (19 August 2005), at The Holy See, [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).
  34. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1817.
  35. John Paul II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, 7.
  36. The same Greek phrase *μή φοβοῦ* occurs 36 times in the Septuagint form of the Old Testament, from Abraham (Gen 15:1), through the times of the judges, of the kings, and of the prophets (Is 41:10). It is repeated in the wisdom literature and the prophets.
  37. John Paul II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, 45.
  38. See Cardinal Mauro Piacenza, Prefect of the Congregation for Clergy, Letter to Priests "It Is In the Eucharist That the Priest Rediscovered His True Identity?" (9 March 2011): "Particularly urgent is the conversion from noise to silence, from the anxious need 'to do' to the desire to 'remain' with Jesus participating ever more consciously with His being."
  39. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 153-154, 160.
  40. See Herbert Alphonso, *Discovering Your Personal Vocation* (New York: Paulist Press, 2001), 9-29.
  41. Mary's overshadowing is prefigured beautifully by the overshadowing of the Tent of Meeting by the luminous cloud of the Most High in Exodus 40:35 (which contains one of the rare Scriptural occurrences of the same Greek term in the LXX) filling the Tabernacle with the glory of the Lord. While visible, the cloud prevents Moses from entering the Tent; it is the exclusive domain of the Spirit of the Lord. It is linked to the revelation of the glory of Christ at the Transfiguration. Luke 9:34 uses the same Greek term of the overshadowing cloud at the Transfiguration, and the apostles are awestruck at the sight.
  42. Here the term is being used in conjunction with the dative (*σοι*).
  43. Her "Yes" being a real and perfect sharing in Her Son's eternal Yes to His Father. Cf. 2 Cor 1:19.
  44. John Paul II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, 36.
  45. Benedict XVI, Homily at St. Patrick's (19 April 2008), *Origins* 37, no. 46 (2008).
  46. USCCB, *Program of Priestly Formation*, 110, calls this a "contemplative attitude" of finding God in all things.
  47. John Paul II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, 36.
  48. As quoted in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1589.
  49. USCCB, *Program of Priestly Formation*, 115.
  50. John Paul II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, 69.
  51. John Paul II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, 1.

# PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT: THE TESTING AND SCREENING OF CANDIDATES FOR ADMISSION TO THE PRIESTHOOD IN THE U.S. CATHOLIC CHURCH

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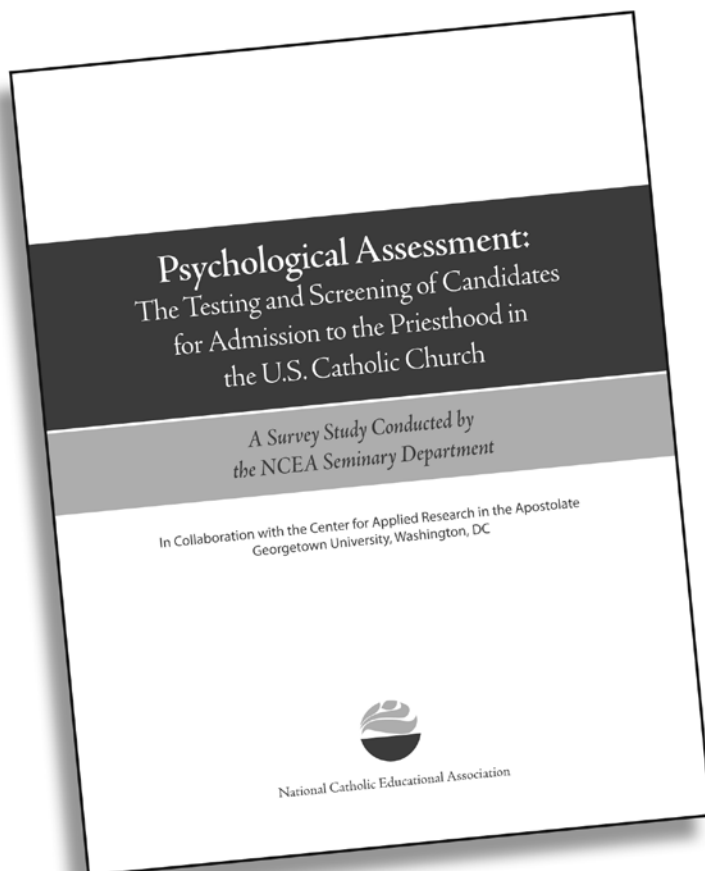
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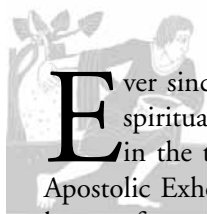
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# The Role of the Spiritual Exercises in Priestly Formation

Edward McCormack, Ph.D.



Ever since the publication of *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, spiritual formation has played an important role in the training of seminarians. According to this Apostolic Exhortation, spiritual formation completes human formation, provides the foundation for pastoral formation and gives meaning to intellectual formation.<sup>1</sup>

The essential dimensions of spiritual formation are set out in *Optatam Totius*, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, and the most recent edition of the *Program of Priestly Formation* (PPF). According to these documents, the goal of spiritual formation is an unceasing union with God through an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Such intimacy is built on a friendship with Christ that comes from seeking, finding and following him as well as imitating him and sharing in his life. Seminarians must learn to seek Christ by meditating on the word, participating in the Eucharist and engaging in works of charity. It is by experiencing the meaning and mystery of a life united to Christ that a priest will be able to excite others to seek the life Jesus offers all. Prayerful meditation on the word of God is an essential element in the spiritual formation of the priest. He must become familiar with the word of God, learning to listen to it, to develop a loving knowledge of it and to respond to it. This practice requires an education in the value of silence and the ability to pray with Scripture. Priestly spiritual formation must, furthermore, put the seminarian in touch with his own sinfulness so he knows the mercy and forgiveness of Christ. It should train him to identify with Christ crucified in order to adopt the radical self-giving proper to priestly ministry. Finally, spiritual formation should manifest itself in charity and pastoral practice, with a special love for the poor.<sup>2</sup>

Every formator knows this is a tall order. The fifth edition of the PPF acknowledges that “the development of sound and lasting habits and attitudes in the spiritual

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life is a challenging process.”<sup>3</sup> According to Katarina Schuth’s research, part of what makes this challenging is the changing cultural climate and the shallower religious backgrounds and experiences men bring to the seminary. Another factor is a lack of attention to Scripture in spiritual formation programs coupled with a disconnection between prayer and scripture. A further concern is the trend among seminarians to multiply devotions with little ability to quietly listen to God’s voice within.<sup>4</sup>

The PPF recommends that formators consider intensive spiritual formation programs as a way of meeting these challenges.<sup>5</sup> Schuth’s study confirms the value of these programs as long as they are integrated into the rest of the seminary program. One such program is the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556). The Jesuits have made the Spiritual Exercises a fundamental feature of their formation process for over 450 years. Today, some religious orders use the Exercises as a key component in their formation process. Lay people around the world are turning to the Exercises for their own spiritual formation. In recent years, diocesan semi-

narians who attend the summer spirituality program at Creighton University also make the Exercises and report how much it transforms their spiritual life.

In this article, I am proposing that formators consider adopting the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius as part of their spiritual formation program. In particular, I am suggesting they use the nine month version of the Exercises known as the 19<sup>th</sup> annotation. I make this suggestion for three reasons. First, the Exercises, as I will show, meet many of the requirements for spiritual formation called for by the documents on formation. Second, I have been training men for the priesthood for eleven years and have witnessed how seminarians are transformed by their experience of the Exercises. The reason for this is that the Exercises can lead a seminarian into the mystery and love of Christ which in turn becomes the source of his spiritual life, feeds his preaching and guides his pastoral practice. Third, my own experience of the Exercises and my practice of directing others in the Exercises confirms their power to transform lives.

### **The Spiritual Exercises as a Process of Spiritual Formation**

A person can make the full Exercises in one of two formats. It can be made over a period of thirty days in silence and relative solitude with the exception of three break days. Each day the retreatant prays four times a day for an hour each, journals after each prayer period and attends daily liturgy. He meets a spiritual guide once a day to discuss the previous day's prayer experiences and to receive material for the next day's prayer periods. The guide is an indispensable element in the process as he or she helps facilitate the relationship between the retreatant and Christ. The other format, known as the 19<sup>th</sup> annotation, allows the person to make the Exercises in the midst of everyday life over a period of nine months usually beginning in September and concluding at the end of April. In this format, the retreatant prays an hour a day and meets the guide once a week. The value of this format for seminarian formation is that, unlike many other intensive spiritual programs, it can be integrated into the rest of the seminary program so the seminarian can continue his studies while making the Exercises.

Ignatius organizes the Exercises into four "weeks." These weeks represent Ignatius' appropriation of the overarching narrative of the Bible with an emphasis on the life of Christ. They also correspond to the various stages of the formation found in the Exercises. The

**It is important to stress that the Exercises are initiated and sustained by the power and presence of the risen Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Exercises are fundamentally an experience of mutual communication between God and the one who receives the Exercises.**

Exercises begin with a period of preparation in which the retreatant reflects on the boundless generosity of the Creator God. After the preparatory period, the First Week consists of meditations on the sin of the world and our participation in it. The retreatant experiences sadness and confusion over how the world misuses God's gifts. He also comes to the painful realization that he cooperates with the sin of the world. In the midst of these hard realities, he discovers the mercy, forgiveness and freedom of Christ. During the Second Week, the retreatant contemplates the life of Christ beginning with the Incarnation and ending with Palm Sunday. He comes to know Christ and the life he offers the world in a new and personal way that moves him to want to share in Christ's mission. The Third Week leads him into the passion and crucifixion of Jesus. Finally, in the Fourth Week, he shares in the joy, company and mission of the risen Jesus.

It is important to stress that the Exercises are initiated and sustained by the power and presence of the risen Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Exercises are fundamentally an experience of mutual communication between God and the one who receives the Exercises. The retreatant and the guide must learn to cooperate with God who is the real director of the experience. Ignatius knew God would be present to the retreatant, so he emphasized the importance of giving ourselves wholeheartedly to God during the retreat. Ignatius tells us "the persons who receive the Exercises will benefit greatly by entering upon them with great Spirit and generosity toward their Creator and Lord, and by

offering all their desires and freedom to him.”<sup>6</sup> Those who give themselves to this process will find their hearts set on fire with a love for Christ who is available for mission.

### Training in Spiritual Practices

The Exercises offer a person intensive training in the spiritual practices necessary for priesthood. He will learn to practice a variety of prayer forms with a strong emphasis on praying with Scripture. These include Ignatian meditation, contemplation, the examen, conversing with the Lord and the practice of reviewing one’s prayer. He learns to value silence and solitude as a context for listening to God. In addition, he will experience God speaking to him through Scripture, the liturgy, his spiritual guide and his life experiences. His ability to hear God speak will be enhanced by his discussions with his spiritual guide who will introduce him to discernment of spirits. He will learn to reflect on his life and his prayer through journaling and the examen prayer. These practices will foster in him a profound self-knowledge, insight into the distorted ways of the world and a deeply personal knowledge of Christ.

The Exercises also cultivate dispositions that are crucial to living the Christian spiritual life. The most fundamental of these is a deep trust in God born of an experience of God’s love. This growing trust in God fosters openness to the Holy Spirit’s direction and a deep desire to know and do God’s will. Another fundamental disposition is a desire to know, follow and serve Christ in all things. Other important dispositions one develops by making the Exercises are humility, spiritual poverty, generosity and compassion. Every person comes to the Exercises with a set of spiritual practices and Christian dispositions he has been developing over the years. The Holy Spirit uses the Exercises to deepen those dispositions a person already has, nurture and intensify those that are emerging and plant the seeds for future practices and attitudes necessary for serving Christ.

### Fostering Communion with Christ through Contemplation of the Gospel Narrative

As mentioned earlier, the goal of priestly spiritual formation is to live in unceasing union with God the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit.<sup>7</sup> This goal is achieved, according to John Paul II, when priests form the habit of drawing close to Christ by seeking him in the Eucharist, through meditation on God’s word and in works of charity.<sup>8</sup> The Exercises, which involve imagining oneself as a participant in the events

**Prior to the Exercises, the retreatant may have related to Jesus as a distant acquaintance. The Exercises help him hear and respond to Christ’s call at each moment in his life.**

of Christ’s life, are a journey into the life of Christ that fosters such an intimate relationship with him.

The many hours of contemplation called for by the Exercises transform a person in ways that correspond to the central features of priestly spiritual formation. He can develop a growing awareness of God’s love for him which is manifest in a feeling of gratitude toward God for all the good he has been given in his life. The experience of imagining oneself with Jesus in prayer can be a healing and freeing experience. Ignatian contemplation fosters a deeply personal relationship with Jesus. Prior to the Exercises, the retreatant may have related to Jesus as a distant acquaintance. The Exercises help him hear and respond to Christ’s call at each moment in his life. They lead him to become a friend of Jesus who has begun to internalize Christ’s desires, his vision, his values and his way of being. As he comes to know Jesus, he discovers how attractive Christ is and the life he offers the world. As he progresses through the four weeks of the Exercises, he discovers Christ creating him into a new person whose identity is based on Jesus’ love for him. Another benefit from practicing Ignatian meditation and contemplation is a growing familiarity with Scripture. He discovers Scripture is a living word through which Christ speaks to him in new and powerful ways. All these experiences can transform him into a passionate disciple of Christ who is ready to serve God’s people.

One can see how important these experiences are for priestly ministry. His knowledge and love of Scripture will make him a powerful preacher of the word. His personal relationship with Jesus will enable him to lead others into the mystery of Christ. He will become a powerful leader of liturgy because he is a man of prayer who can listen to and respond to the presence of Christ in the people of God. His personal experience of Christ will allow him to recognize Christ at work in the life of his parishioners and his parish as a whole. He

will be able to respond to the pastoral needs of his people because he has the inner freedom to put aside his needs and focus on theirs.

The ascetical life and interior discipline are needed for priestly ministry to take on new meaning in the light of the Exercises. The Exercises frame asceticism and mortification in terms of one's relationship to Jesus and his mission giving them a new meaning and purpose. As a person contemplates the life of Christ, he grows closer to Jesus and realizes how attractive the life he offers the world is and how destructive are those forces opposed to Christ. Ignatius developed specific exercises that connect asceticism to our relationship with Christ because saying yes to Christ and God's new creation requires we say no to that which is opposed to Christ. At these moments in the Exercises, the retreatant discovers that the invitation to be a companion of Christ involves renunciation of all that is opposed to Christ and his kingdom. As Ignatius said, "Everyone must keep in mind that in all that concerns the spiritual life progress will be made in proportion to his surrender of self-love and of his own will and interests."<sup>9</sup>

### Finding Christ in All Things

The ability to find Christ in all things is a crucial dimension of the spiritual formation of priests according to *Pastores Dabo Vobis*.<sup>10</sup> As we have seen, the Exercises train a person to find Christ in Scripture, in prayer, in silence and in the liturgy. The Exercises also train a person to find Christ in other dimensions of life. For instance, by praying over one's life story in a spirit of gratitude, a person can find Christ in his call to the priesthood and in his relationships past and present. The First Week of the Exercises trains him to find Christ where he hurts and where he has hurt others. In those painful situations, he will discover Christ healing him, freeing him from distorted behavior and offering him forgiveness. After such an experience, he will be able to find Christ at work in the lives of sinful humanity. As he contemplates the life of Jesus and grows increasingly close to him, he learns to find Christ in his everyday experiences. He grows sensitive to Jesus' presence and influence especially as he makes decisions. He will also be able to find Christ and be Christ in times of suffering, loss and injustice as he compassionately accompanies others who are suffering. Throughout the Exercises, Christ labors to rescue us and make us into a new creation. Such an experience trains a person to recognize when and where Christ is working to free people and bring to birth God's new world in the lives of the people of God.

**Throughout the Exercises, Christ labors to rescue us and make us into a new creation. Such an experience trains a person to recognize when and where Christ is working to free people and bring to birth God's new world in the lives of the people of God.**

The priest who develops the ability to find and cooperate with Christ in all things will become a powerful minister of the gospel. He will be able to recognize the generosity and presence of God in his life and in the lives of others. He will be able to lead people into the mystery of Christ's presence and love in the liturgy, in pastoral counseling situations and in his everyday interaction with others. He will, moreover, be able to recognize the many ways Christ is at work in the lives of God's people freeing them, forgiving them, moving them to desire a deeper relationship with God and inspiring them to do good for others. He will also be able to recognize the many gifts Christ has given to the people of God so they can serve Christ.

### Discovering I am a Loved Sinner

Another important dimension of priestly formation occurs when a seminarian recognizes that he participates in the sin of the world and yet knows the mercy and forgiveness of Christ.<sup>11</sup> Such an experience is crucial if a priest is to mediate Christ's mercy and forgiveness to God's people. Sin, however, by its very nature blinds us to its effects. Sinful habits and attitudes are impossible to see without the revelation of God. A privatized and legalistic view of sin as well as a tendency to avoid looking at difficult things also blinds us to sin.

Various experiences throughout the Exercises can awaken a person to their cooperation with the sin of the world and Christ's mercy. For instance, the experience of God's love during the preparatory period of the Exercises enables a person to face up to the sin of the world and his own participation in it. The meditations of the First Week reveal to him that he is born into a disorder

larger than himself whose history has contaminated all creation, all human history and our very lives. This disorder is made up of many destructive forces that are opposed to the work of God the Creator. He will see and abhor the ways he misuses God's gifts, hurts others and acts against the God he serves. The contemplations of the Third Week intensify these insights as the retreatant accompanies Jesus through his passion knowing Christ experienced the way of the world in his passion while suffering to free him. This week reveals to the retreatant how the forces of sin work in political and religious institutions, in crowds, powerful leaders and even in friends.

In the midst of these difficult meditations, the retreatant discovers that God's fundamental desire is to rescue all creation from this condition through the mercy and forgiveness of Christ crucified. As the retreatant peers down into the darkness of his own sinfulness, he experiences the mercy and freedom of Christ that makes it possible for him to follow Christ out of the destructive ways that plague our world. He discovers he is a loved sinner. He will also notice a new freedom growing inside him – freedom to reject the sin of the world and to serve Christ by forgiving others.

### Learning to Love as Christ Loves

John Paul II believed the priest is an image of the Good Shepherd, which means he must be trained in the self-giving charity of Christ.<sup>12</sup> The Exercises can play an important role in this training. They retell the story of God's love in Christ while offering the retreatant an intense experience of the many dimensions of that love. It recalls the story of God's love in the beauty and goodness of creation and in the kind people in one's life. It recounts the story of God's mercy and forgiveness in Christ. The Exercises present the ministry of Jesus as the personal embodiment of God's love in the world. The climax of this story of love takes place during the Third and Fourth Weeks of the Exercises. The graces of the Exercises identify some of the ways a person experiences God's love. They are signs that a person is being trained to love as Christ loves. The first sign is an experience of joy and gratitude to God for God's generous love. Another is a sense of disgust at one's own sinfulness and gratitude to Christ for his mercy and forgiveness. A third sign is a growing desire to be with Christ and to serve him. The desire to accompany him through his passion is another sign. The love of Christ frees a person from himself and drives him out to love others as God has loved him. The desire to serve and be attentive to

the needs of the other, especially the vulnerable and marginalized, is, thus, another important sign of God's love.

The priest's encounter with the love of God in Christ through the Exercises compels him to live in generous service to others. He is compelled by the Holy Spirit to be generous as Christ is, to be merciful and forgiving as Christ is, to offer others the true life of God as Christ does, to compassionately accompany people in their suffering and loss and to rejoice in the in-breaking of God's new creation as the risen Christ does.

### Conclusion

I have been training men for the priesthood for the past 11 years. I am convinced that spiritual formation is essential for their sustained commitment, success and happiness in ministry. When done well, spiritual formation becomes the motivating and integrating force for personal, intellectual and pastoral formation. The Exercises are Ignatius' gift to the Church, a gift that should be opened and used by all men training for ordination.



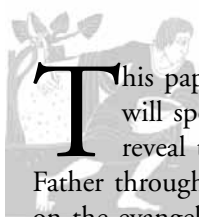
**Edward McCormack, Ph.D.**, was an associate professor of Christian spirituality and chair of the Christian spirituality department at Washington Theological Union in Washington, D.C., which is now closed. He specializes in Ignatian spirituality.

### Endnotes

1. John Paul II, *I Will Give You Shepherds: On the Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day* (Washington, D.C. Office of Publishing and Promotion Services, USCCB, 1992) 123-124.
2. *Ibid.*, 122-139.
3. *Program of Priestly Formation: Fifth Edition* (Washington, D.C. Office of Publishing and Promotion Services, USCCB, 2006), 47.
4. Katarina Schuth, *Seminaries, Theologates, and the Future of Church Ministry* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 152.
5. *PPF*, 47.
6. The English translation of the *Spiritual Exercises* I am using is found in *Ignatius of Loyola: The Spiritual Exercises and Selected Writings*, edited by George Ganss. New York: Paulist Press, 1991, 122. (Hereafter, I will follow the numbering in the *Spiritual Exercises* using the abbreviation SpEx.)
7. *Ibid.*, 42.
8. *I Will Give You Shepherds*, 124-125.
9. *Spiritual Exercises*, 189.
10. *I Will Give You Shepherds*, 126-127.
11. *Ibid.*, 133.
12. *Ibid.*, 135.

# Pastoral Formation in Light of Jesus' Intimate Bond with the Father

Rev. James Rafferty



This paper consists of two sections. The first part will spotlight certain texts of John's Gospel that reveal the intimate bond between Jesus and his Father throughout Jesus' public ministry. This reflection on the evangelist's privileged awareness of Jesus' communion with his Father, felt on a deeply personal and affective level, serves as a meditation and an invitation for the reader to savor the union that Jesus enjoys with the Father. John permits us to enter the praying heart of Christ before the Father, so that we, too, as believers may be affected by the loving presence of divine compassion. The reader will receive most richly by pausing with the particular passages of Scripture that draw the heart into contemplative wonder in personally appropriating the truth radiating from the Gospel. Jesus' way of being with and in the Father is the relationship into which every baptized person is initiated. Being with and in the Father as Jesus, the Father's Beloved is, is the center of the Christian life.

The second section of this paper will suggest how the felt experience of communion in the Trinity can shape seminary formation, with a specific focus on the interconnection between the spiritual life and pastoral formation. The integration of spiritual formation and pastoral formation in the seminary system presupposes that the spiritual life contributes specifically to the pastoral activity of the future priest. One can easily imagine the seminarian's interest in praying for those whom he serves and engaging in fruitful intercession on their behalf. One could also foresee the seminarian asking God to fill him with particular gifts or virtues that dispose him to accomplish pastoral responsibilities. These forms of prayer, however, do not engender integration of the spiritual life and pastoral activity at the very core of the

**More fundamentally than praying *about* the apostolate, the candidate for priesthood strives for the grace of *contemplative union* with the Trinity, the very source of the Church's mission. That is, the seminarian ought to seek to possess in himself the mind and heart of Christ as the interior font for all ministry in Christ's name.**

seminarian's identity. More fundamentally than praying *about* the apostolate, the candidate for priesthood strives for the grace of *contemplative union* with the Trinity, the very source of the Church's mission. That is, the seminarian ought to seek to possess in himself the mind and heart of Christ as the interior font for all ministry in Christ's name.

## Jesus' Communion with the Father in John's Gospel

A review of the Gospel of John shows that Jesus lived his public ministry in intimate communion with the Father. In Jesus' life according to the fourth evan-

gelist, Jesus' experience of ministerial service is first and foremost an experience of the Father working in him. Jesus knows himself to be sent by the Father in order to reveal the Father and incorporate others into his own relationship with the Father. The relationship between Jesus and the Father can be viewed on two levels: first, as Jesus is aware of being *sent from the Father*, and second, as Jesus declares that he is a *source of eternal life because of the Father*.

### **Jesus is sent from the Father**

John the Evangelist's awareness of Jesus as one who is sent from the Father appears in various aspects of Jesus' life. First, it points to Jesus' origin in God. Second, it grounds Jesus' activity in the work of the Father. Third, it finds expression in the mutual witness of Jesus and the Father as they testify to one another. Fourth, Jesus' awareness of being sent from the Father indicates how both Father and Son are glorified on earth. Finally, the fourth gospel depicts an ongoing bond of communion between Jesus and the Father throughout the whole of Jesus' life.

John emphatically situates Jesus' origin in God the Father on multiple occasions. John's gospel points to the pre-existent Word eternally with the Father and sharing in the work of creation (1:2-3). The Johannine Christ has descended from heaven (3:13) and bears witness to what he has seen and heard through first-hand experience (3:11). Jesus declares that he has been sent from the Father (6:57; 7:28-29; 11:42). In addition, the works that Jesus performs further validate his claim to have come from God (9:33). John's gospel portrays the paschal mystery as the Son's return to the Father (13:3-4; 16: 5). "I came from the Father and have come into the world; again, I am leaving the world and going to the Father" (16:15).

John the Evangelist grounds Jesus' public activity in the work of his Father in heaven. In other words, Jesus does not simply carry out divine commands; rather, he co-labors with the Father, who is also actively engaged in a work on behalf of humanity. Jesus does not imagine any activity of his own apart from the Father. Jesus dedicates his entire life, his whole person, to the fulfillment of the Father's work. Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work" (4:34). Jesus does not undertake his public activity as his own personal project. Jesus attributes all that he does to his obedience to his Father. "I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me..." (6:38). Jesus is not

**The relationship between Jesus and the Father can be viewed on two levels: first, as Jesus is aware of being *sent from the Father*, and second, as Jesus declares that he is a *source of eternal life because of the Father*.**

the source of his own teaching. He communicates only what he has seen and heard from the Father (7:16-18; 12:49-50). So profoundly united is Jesus to the Father, that Jesus announces that he has no authority on his own, nor does he simply follow an external command; rather, Jesus relates that "the Father who dwells in me does his works" (14:10). The Father's work and Jesus' activity are intricately conjoined in a single shared operation. By doing the Father's will, Jesus shows that he loves the Father (14:31).

John's gospel emphasizes the importance of witness. Jesus and the Father testify to each other, as though neither can be known without the other. Their whole identity rests in the mutuality of relationship. Jesus bears witness to the Father. "No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known" (1:18). Later Jesus says again, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me" (14:6). At the same time, the Father bears witness to the identity of Jesus. "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (6:44, plus 6:65). In addition, the works that Jesus performs give testimony that he has been sent from the Father (5:36-38; 10:25) and point beyond Jesus to the Father in whom they find their source. Lastly, the gift of the Counselor sent by Jesus from the Father will also testify to Jesus' identity as the Son of God (15:26). This interrelationship between Jesus and the Father is not unique to John's gospel. Matthew's gospel places a similar declaration on Jesus lips, "All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Mt 11:27).

In addition, for John there is singular attention to God's glory. Jesus does not seek his own glory, rather

the Father bestows glory upon him (1:14). Jesus answers the accusations of the Jews, “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing; it is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say that he is your God” (8:54). While the Son’s glory rests in the Father, the Son in turn glorifies the Father by embracing the self-emptying sacrifice of the Cross. This same event glorifies the Son as Jesus proclaims after Judas departs to arrange his betrayal, “Now is the Son of man glorified, and in him God is glorified; if God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and glorify him at once” (13:31-32). The Father is also glorified in the fact that the disciples’ lives bear fruit (15:8).

Finally, John’s gospel characterizes Jesus’ whole life as communion in the Father, a felt experience of enjoying a bond of intimate love. Jesus consciously embraces the identity of being Son of the Father, and all of his public activity flows from this foundational awareness. At least three times in John’s gospel the stated reason for opposition to Jesus is that he calls God his Father and makes himself the equal to God (5:18; 10:32-22; 19:7). Jesus’ claim to divine sonship is not limited to an explanation of his birth. More broadly, Jesus points to an ongoing communion of life between him and the Father, a personal and intimate mutual presence. Jesus declares that the Father has not left him alone but is always with him (16:32). Elsewhere, Jesus responds to Philip, “Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me?” (14:10). In the same passage, Jesus states that to see him is to behold the Father. Finally, Jesus captures the mystery of this intimate bond in the line, “I and the Father are one” (10:30).

### ***Jesus, Source of Eternal Life in the Father***

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him” (3:16-18). Jesus is savior of the world. This salvation, however, occurs within a relational context that specifies the movements the disciple makes into receiving redemption. Through belief in the only Son, the disciple discovers the Father and is able to ask in the name of Jesus for all that he needs. Jesus sends the disciple into the world as one who has entered into the same bond of communion that Jesus enjoys with the Father.

### ***Belief in the only Son***

The accepting response to the presence of the

Word incarnate takes the form of belief. “For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up on the last day” (6:40). Participation in eternal life begins with believing that Jesus from Nazareth is the Son of the Father, the one promised and sent by God. The direct purpose of the evangelist’s writing is that “you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.” (20:31)

### ***Knowledge of the Father***

Through belief in Jesus as Son of God, the disciple comes to know the Father. “To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” (1:12-13) Because the Father has sent his Son into the world, one’s response to Jesus constitutes one’s response to the Father. Jesus cries out, “He who believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. And he who sees me sees him who sent me” (12:44-45; also, 13:20). Rejection of Jesus means rejection of the Father. “He who hates me hates my Father also” (15:23). Through Jesus, the disciple is brought into authentic worship of the Father, that is, in spirit and in truth (4:23). Further, Jesus, who fulfills the Father’s commands out of love for the Father (14:31), promises to return to take his disciples that they might be where he is—“in my Father’s house are many rooms” (14:2).

### ***Ask in Jesus’ Name***

In the fourth gospel, Jesus assures his disciples, “Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son; if you ask anything in my name, I will do it” (14:13-14). Other texts speak of the Father responding to the disciples’ petition offered in the name of Jesus (15:16; 16:23; 11:22). The mediation of Jesus recedes in one significant passage in which Jesus proclaims the love of the Father for his disciples: “In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from the Father” (16:26-27).

### ***Jesus sends his disciples***

Jesus commissions his disciples and sends them forth, as he himself was sent by another. “As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world”

(17:18). Jesus sends forth his disciples after the resurrection and in the power of the Spirit, whom he breaths on his disciples. "Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you'" (20:21).

**The consequence of believing in the Son of God and recognizing the Father through him is the disciple's participation in the communion of the Trinity.**

### **Communion**

The consequence of believing in the Son of God and recognizing the Father through him is the disciple's participation in the communion of the Trinity. Jesus declares, "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (14:23). In his high priestly prayer, Jesus asks, "that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us...The glory which you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me in your love for me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory which you have given me in your love for me from before the foundation of the world....I made known to them your name, and I will make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them" (17:20-26). Further indication of this sharing of communion in the Trinity appears in Jesus' promise of the Spirit. "And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth...you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you" (14:16-17).

### **Application for Pastoral Formation**

I shift now to the second part of this paper, that is, to the way in which Jesus' relationship with

his Father, as revealed in John's Gospel, suggests how seminaries can order priestly formation such that communion with the Trinity and pastoral activity are seen as essentially joined. In fact, the seminary provides the environment in which the priestly candidate grows in so deep a communion with Jesus as to know the Father personally through the Heart of Jesus. This experience of being overcome by the love of the Trinity motivates and fuels the apostolic service that constitutes not so much effective social outreach as kerygmatic announcement. Ministry is the locus of bearing witness to the truth of the gospel, and it is the overflow of the intimate bond forged in contemplative prayer, where the Holy Spirit has set the man's heart aflame with the sentiments of the Risen Christ. Formed in a seminary culture that unites contemplative communion with pastoral training, the priest experiences a personal intimacy with God not only in his holy hour but also in the varied activity that constitutes his day-to-day ministry. So initiated through his seminary experience, the ordained man can overcome a disintegrating tension between personal spiritual encounter and priestly activity. He will have learned how to abide in God in both the stillness of silent prayer and in the active engagement indicative of a loving pastor.

By drawing from the insights gained from John's gospel about Jesus' public ministry as rooted in his personal relationship with the Father, I propose several considerations for those dedicated to seminary formation. First, in regard to spiritual formation, the portrait of Jesus that John shares offers specific goals for the priestly candidate to seek in his ongoing maturing faith. Second, pastoral formation can find a significant orientation by looking beyond particular skill sets—although pastoral skills remain crucial for ordained ministry—to a cultivation of an interior awareness of abiding in God amid the circumstances of priestly service. Third, I recommend a series of dispositions that the seminary ought to encourage and that the seminarian ought to acquire in preparation for ordination.

### **Spiritual Formation**

First and foremost the seminary serves as a school of prayer which allows the student to fall more deeply in love with God because the seminarian is growing ever more aware of God's personal love for him. The seminarian's dedication to prayer, his pursuit of virtue, his academic labors and his apostolic service all flow from a personal awareness of *receiving* love from God first. A man offers himself to the priestly formation process

because his heart has been awakened to the intense, passionate love of God for him personally. His discernment into seminary reflects his conviction that God has elected priesthood as the path for him to share the graces he has received, and he enters into the necessary sacrifices that seminary formation entails while being borne up by the love of God that comes to him as gratuitous gift. The foundation for any vocation in the Church is the baptismal identity of being the beloved son of the Father in and with Jesus Christ through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Seminary forms a man into a stable posture of receptivity. A man who has not interiorly tasted communion with Jesus as the Father's dearly Beloved Son will enter priesthood stunted. Spiritual formation in seminaries ought to stand against the corrosive spirit of prideful self-reliance and instead invite men into lifelong total dependence upon the Father, not in imitation of Jesus but in living communion *with* Jesus in every moment. The seminary structures in the internal and the external forum contribute in the specific ways appropriate to them to the verification and deepening of this baptismal identity. A man to be ordained a priest ought to be able to speak about his own experience of being a beloved son of the Father, and his articulation of this relationship in his spiritual life ought to be manifested in the external forum as well as the privileged relationship of spiritual direction. Formation conferences by rectors, spiritual directors and other seminary personnel ought to highlight the indispensable appropriation of this baptismal identity as a core of priestly training. How can a man love and serve others if he does not know who he is? A man who has not encountered the Father's personal affection for him and claimed that relationship as central to his life and action ought not to be advanced for sacred orders.

Seminary spiritual formation includes, then, instruction in contemplative prayer, the kind of silent beholding that contemporary culture does not readily foster. Such training also necessarily incorporates a prayerful encounter with the Lord through Scripture. This encounter presupposes solid exegetical education, of course, but it extends far beyond literary analysis at the level of academic inquiry. Seminaries must assist men in meeting the living Christ through the gospels in such a way that they are drawn into intimate communion with him. As men pray with the Scriptures, they allow the Holy Spirit to stir their hearts until they become supple to the Heart of Christ. The seminary environment and the efforts of formators should lead a man to enter the life of Jesus through the gospel texts by the

use of Spirit-guided imagination and colloquy. When the seminary provides this initiation into contemplative communion, the seminarian can grasp theological truth in the classroom while allowing the Truth whom he encounters in person to shape and unify his intellect and his affections. All the components of spiritual formation promote the seminarian's falling deeper in love with the Trinity, because he opens himself in daily prayer to receive the infinite love of God for him uniquely.

### **Pastoral Formation**

Central to the apostolic work of the Church is Christ's own pastoral charity. Clearly, the ordained man offers his abilities for the fruitfulness of his ministry; however, he is equally aware that what priesthood asks of him and what comes forth as the fruit of his ministry are beyond his human capacities. Pastoral charity is not a technique to be learned in a supervised apostolic placement. Pastoral charity flows from the individual heart's surrender to host Christ's own love for another. It is an indwelling of divine compassion—being overcome by God's love for another person and beholding that person as God does.

From this perspective, the seminary formation system approaches pastoral formation within a vision of who the priestly minister is based on the evangelic witness of Jesus' own ministerial activity. With Jesus, the priest leads others to the Father because he knows himself to be sent by the Father. In this context, the seminary helps a man to engage in pastoral labor with reflection and discernment. In an intensely frenetic society, men need to be formed into a habit of reflecting on their ordinary experiences to locate the presence and action of God. In seminary, a man learns this important skill so that as a priest he can remain attentive to the movements of grace both in quiet prayer and in the demands of priestly activity. In a culture that exalts self-reliance and independence, seminary formation has to instruct the seminarian's heart to embrace the poverty of spirit that leaves him free to depend upon the Father as Jesus does and to set aside his own will in favor of the Father's desires. The seminarian enters through the door of humility into Jesus' own intimacy with the Father. In the seminary the future priest learns how to recognize the particular way in which God desires to bless him in the apostolate. Through written or oral reflection, the seminarian increases his understanding of how he encounters the Father in the midst of pastoral activity. He develops a keener awareness of what God is doing in ministerial situations, and he gradually defeats the

insinuations of pride that would oppress him with a distorted sense of responsibility. The priestly candidate welcomes the Father into occasions of structured ministry.

Pastoral formation in seminary should be intertwined with spiritual formation. A seminarian ought to relate his service experiences to the Lord in prayer and bring pastoral situations to spiritual direction. At the same time, seminary bears the responsibility of ensuring that a man can give appropriate witness to his faith in the pastoral setting. Field education does not ask a man to violate the boundaries of the internal forum; however, pastoral placement involves an authentic witness to one's personal experience of being loved by God and loving God in return. One thinks here of the way in which a seminarian shares his vocation story with many different groups. As he narrates his experience of responding to God's invitation, the seminarian decides which details are suitable for a grade school classroom and which details are reserved for his spiritual director, yet God remains at the center of this narrative regardless of the audience.

### ***Dispositions of Pastoral Ministry***

The exquisite theological truth of the priest's configuration to Christ becomes sacramentally incarnate through the grace of ordination. This sacramental configuration, though, is prepared by the personal commitment and desire to have the mind and heart of Christ. The priestly candidate genuinely possesses theological truth when he sees himself in the full light of that truth and when he is capable of living out of it, not as a conceptual understanding but as a relationship of profound communion. Obviously, it is not enough for the seminarian to study God's love; he must fall in love himself. What attributes mark the man who dedicates himself to living Christ's pastoral charity as a priest?

The candidate for holy orders ought to know that he is a beloved son of the Father. This grounds his identity in the fundamental truth of his baptism. He does not take the place of the pre-existent Word and claim the same divine status in God as the eternal Son; however, he can identify himself with Jesus inasmuch as he receives everything from the Father. The seminarian is utterly dependent on the Father and ought to have a foundational sense of gratitude for his life as originating in the Father's desire to share himself. The seminary student knows that he is loved. He must have tasted the Father's personal affection for him in order to authentically respond to the priestly call.

Having a felt awareness of divine love at the

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core of his identity, the seminarian recognizes that he is sent by the Father. He responds to a call that he believes originates in God. This grounds the seminarian's humility as he engages in pastoral activity. He is ever conscious of responding to a vocation that renders him a gift of the Father to those whom he serves. The Father loves the priestly candidate by giving him persons to whom the seminarian can witness divine love. Therefore, the pastoral activity and those who receive it are a form of blessing by the Father on the candidate for holy orders as he knows himself sent by a loving Father so that others might know the Trinity for themselves. Within his pastoral life, the ordained priest discovers God loving him and inviting him into deeper communion. While the priest is tending to the pastoral needs of his people, the Father is loving both the priest and his people, but in a particular way, the Father unites the priest to his own love for his children. While in seminary, the student becomes comfortable with allowing his heart to be vulnerable to this love of the Father for others, and he consents to remaining in that love as Jesus does. For the seminarian, the pastoral placement is not merely the setting where he shares himself, it is also the place where the Father blesses the seminarian by giving him others with whom to share himself. The seminarian overcomes any impression that his pastoral life will be a drudgery in which he finds himself repeatedly drained and from which he must constantly withdraw; instead, he is freed to receive people who seek his time and energy as a sign of the Father's love for him and as a cause for joy.

The future priest engages in pastoral ministry to manifest the love of the Father, who is hidden. Such activity has its origin in the Father and revelation of the Father as its goal. Ministry serves as an invitation into communion with the Father for the other. It is a proclamation of the truth of God's saving presence refracted

through the personal experience of the one who practices ministry. Here, the seminarian exercises humility in that he desires his words and actions to be transparent to the one who has so profoundly affected his life. The seminarian does not reduce the tradition of the Church to his own subjective experience, but his revelation of the Father bears the mark of one who speaks from a real experience, not merely intellectual reflection or third person testimony. His ministerial activity bears the mark of praise of God and does not focus on himself as minister of the Church but on the Father whom he loves.

The seminarian approaches his apostolic work as an exercise of obedience. With Christ, the future priest must learn how to seek only the will of the Father. This discernment of the directing hand of the Father penetrates even to the most mundane labors—which phone call to return immediately, what parish meeting to attend, what words to share in a homily—all arise from a docility to and receptivity of the Father's laboring love. While exercising practical wisdom, the seminarian also has to live an openness to the promptings of the Spirit and a continuous turning toward the Father to ask the Father to accomplish his works in the seminarian's pastoral action. The academic courses of study and the various forms of pastoral preparation in seminary equip the priestly candidate with important resources to offer in the service of the laity, but they do not take the place of a conscious relationship with the Trinity. Because the priest, sacramentally configured to Christ, does not speak on his own authority, he must be constantly attentive to what he sees the Father doing and what he hears the Father speaking. With Jesus, the seminarian can confess, "I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father" (14:31).

The Father bears witness to his presence in the life of the priest. A man enters seminary on the audacious presupposition that God has called him personally to diocesan priesthood. A priest serves in the confidence that the Father is accomplishing his works in the priest's ministry. The Father draws persons to the priest so that they, in their poverty or need, might encounter Christ and receive the Father's compassion. The man in formation, meanwhile, bears witness to the action of God in his life.

The priestly servant cannot avoid the cruciform contours of divine love. Seminary formation ought to dispose a man to enter into and to remain in the "hour" of Jesus. Here, the man learns to unite himself to Christ in moments of self-sacrificing love and to receive the Father's faithful love in such occasions. More substantially, the seminarian grows in a disposition of kenosis as the way

in which he desires to love. The ordained man glorifies the Father in and with Christ by pouring himself out as an offering that mirrors in an incarnate way the divine love shared in the Trinity. The seminary system ought to set the student on a trajectory of self-renunciation over and against cultural influences that propose comfort or self-satisfaction. In addition, the years in seminary aid the man in welcoming the discomfort of having certain of his desires unfulfilled for the sake of service in the Father's name.

The seminarian ought to become acclimated to turning to the Father in the name of Jesus in every circumstance and for everything. As we learn from the epiclesis of the sacred liturgy, the most powerful activity of the Church in the world is to call out to the Father to send the Spirit to transform our offerings into Christ. The seminarian acquires a heart of love willing to unite itself to the burdens of many others through intercessory prayer. By the prayer of petition, the man asks God into every aspect of his life and the lives of others. This ready cry to the Father permits the Father to manifest his steadfast love in the concrete situations of life, and it also steeps the praying Church in gratitude for the ongoing deeds of grace. Seminarians today need encouragement to cry out to the Father. Too often they carry the tendency to resent any indication of inadequacy or insufficiency. Influenced by contemporary culture, they do not spontaneously see their poverty as the space of openness for further blessings, and they run the risk of being overwhelmed by others' needs if they do not exercise the faith underlying the epicletic prayer—abandonment to the providential love of the Father who answers the cry of his children.


The seminarian is led to communion with the Trinity. He is drawn by the Spirit into such intimacy with Jesus as to experience the Father as Jesus does. He consciously lives Jesus' identity as Son before the Father. This experience of being the beloved of the Father achieves deep inner healing and provides the relational encounter within which to grasp theological truth. This communion effects a font of joy through which others may become captivated with God. Trinitarian communion is the font of pastoral charity, and it is the goal of all pastoral action, for the priest and for those whom he serves.



**Fr. Jim Rafferty** currently serves as Vocation Director of the Diocese of Scranton. He holds a doctorate in moral theology from the Alphonsian Academy in Rome. He has been engaged in teaching and spiritual direction with the Institute for Priestly Formation.

# The Indispensability of Divine Mercy in Spiritual and Pastoral Formation

Bishop Felipe Estevez



**“M**erciful love is supremely indispensable between those who are closest to one another: between husbands and wives, between parents and children, between friends; and it is indispensable in education and in pastoral work.”<sup>1</sup>

The nexus of spiritual and pastoral formation is the “supremely indispensable” mystery of divine mercy, a profound mystery where the limits of our humanity meet the limitlessness of God. This reality, revealed forever in the Cross of Christ, is the depths out of which all pastoral charity flows and the summit up to which every authentic moment of apostolic contemplation ascends. The merciful love of God unlocks beautiful connections and practical applications in spiritual and pastoral formation because mercy is where the vision of God, the truth about oneself and the truth about one’s neighbor, implicate each other.<sup>2</sup> By applying Pope John Paul II’s message of mercy to formation, we also discover that brilliant splendor and human warmth without which a seminary risks degenerating into a cold corporate institution unable to cast light into the darkness of our times.

In order to connect the Pilgrim Pope’s message of mercy with his teaching on priestly formation, we must start with his conviction that the seminary is primarily a “spiritual place, a way of life” in which the Church accompanies men in their formation into “a living image of Jesus Christ, head and shepherd of the Church.”<sup>3</sup> The astonishing presence of Christ in the life of a seminary is precisely what makes it “a spiritual place.” For him, Christ constantly “reveals man to himself” so that by gazing on Christ men not only discover how much they are loved by the Father, but also their most high calling.<sup>4</sup> The seminary ought to be spiritually alive, filled

**In this way, the seminary is an instrument of mercy: a place of profound interiority where Christ reveals and heals all that is good, holy and true about each seminarian, a spiritual place where men discover before the mystery of the Cross those yet-to-be-explored horizons of God’s love enveloping their personal existence.**

with the marvel of encountering Christ. This presumes a community filled with deep love and respect for each seminarian, his cultural context and his personal life history.<sup>5</sup> In this way, the seminary is an instrument of mercy: a place of profound interiority where Christ reveals and heals all that is good, holy and true about each seminarian, a spiritual place where men discover before the mystery of the Cross those yet-to-be-explored horizons of God’s love enveloping their personal existence.

The two dynamic values characterizing this “spiritual place” are living in intimate “*communio*” with the Holy Trinity and the search for God “*quaerere Deum*.”<sup>6</sup> Contrary to those who regard our tradition through

the narrow lens of their own chronological snobbery, this search in its authentic form was never escapism or a pursuit limited to those embracing monastic life. In this view, all formation efforts must be dominated by the search for the One who is present but hidden; who is ever sought but, through the wonder of faith, found; the Risen Lord with whom we have communion yet still feel the need for deeper reconciliation. To share, to experience, to know the miracle of God's presence moves men to deep and ongoing acts of adoration, contrition, thanksgiving and contemplation. In such moments of wonder, men have the opportunity to learn a real friendship with the Lord marked by confidence, determination, humility, generosity of heart and joy, all of which come from Him alone. Study of the Word of God, participation in the Holy Mysteries, and the service of charity encapsulate the way in which seminary life responds to these values. These practices include silence, asceticism and formation for lifelong celibacy.<sup>7</sup>

In John Paul II's vision of priestly formation, spiritual formation provides pastoral formation with its interior and transforming dynamism because seminarians must "experience" Christ:<sup>8</sup> "Spiritual direction is essential."<sup>9</sup> This is consistent with his message to young people, in which he invited them to discover the "loving gaze" of Jesus,<sup>10</sup> with the goal that priests become teachers in the "school of Jesus at prayer."<sup>11</sup> For John Paul II, action proceeds from being, pastoral activity from contemplation.<sup>12</sup> This suggests a contemplative way of life in community, in study, in prayer, in liturgy and in the apostolate. By helping seminarians recognize the diverse ways Christ discloses his "loving gaze," spiritual formation disposes men to a kind of apostolic contemplation which gives birth to pastoral charity: "this meeting with God and his fatherly love for everyone brings us face to face with the need to meet our neighbor."<sup>13</sup> Only with this foundation is any real pastoral formation possible. To help us envision the seminary as a spiritual place, John Paul II focuses on "the experience" of the Twelve with Jesus:

*It is essential for the formation of candidates for the priesthood and pastoral ministry, which by its very nature is ecclesial, that the seminary should be experienced not as something external and superficial, or simply a place in which to live and study, but in an interior and profound way. It should be experienced as a community, a specifically ecclesial community, a community that relives the experience of the Twelve who were united to Jesus.<sup>14</sup>*

To *re-live* the experience of the Twelve suggests a profound way of life marked by a radical fraternity, brotherhood rooted in intimacy with Lord. It is to feel with one's own heart what it means to be called, chosen and sent. It means opening one's own soul to the movements of Christ's soul as he taught, admonished and encouraged those He had entrusted with a great purpose. It means taking the initiative to search the deeper meanings of his parables and miracles, to attend to the dynamism of Christ's prayer, to see the glory of Tabor, to partake of his messianic Banquet, to enter into vigilant solidarity in his agony, to follow the pathway to Golgotha, to behold the empty tomb and to pray with His Mother. This reliving of such luminous mysteries goes much deeper than anything that can be assessed by observable data. It far exceeds the mere passing on of pastoral "know-how." To live again in one's own life the original experience of discipleship, of communion and of mission with the Word made flesh, such an experience transcends the external and superficial mastery of behaviors by which one copes with the stress of public service. Reliving such an experience is possible by faith alone.

**The Risen One is present but can only be found by faith, a faith open to the wonder, to the contemplation of this presence. Faith reaches into inner recesses of the human person far deeper than is otherwise naturally accessible.**

Instead of a clever method for acquiring personal mental hygiene (so that one feels good about oneself) or, even worse, management techniques for the manipulation of others (so that they feel good about being led), Jesus promised the power of his presence. The Risen One is present but can only be found by faith, a faith open to the wonder, to the contemplation of this presence. Faith reaches into inner recesses of the human person far deeper than is otherwise naturally accessible. The Pope is concerned about the maturity of the inner man, his wisdom of heart, his openness to the wonder

of the Lord and his capacity to share this wonder with others.<sup>15</sup> True interiority is developed through formative experiences that reach into the very heart of the seminarian, ecclesial experiences which carry a man past his own subjectivism. The importance of a spiritual formation, which takes a man beyond the limits of his own psychological activity, is a grave concern among those who have dedicated their lives to this contemplation:

*The dominant spiritual climate manifests ... an extreme individualism. It is not so much God who is of interest to us, to speak with Him and to belong to Him, but rather we look for personal experience, we shut ourselves up in our own spiritual search.... Let us admit that, at present, a spiritual self-centeredness reigns, which arises from the current opinion that the world is only an appearance and that, basically, the self and God coincide. If the supreme criterion of life in Christ is no longer adherence in faith to the Triune God, but personal experience, the change to a religious syncretism will be quickly made.<sup>16</sup>*

How do we teach Christ so that He might be sought and found, felt and yearned for, so that a man might learn to break free of his own bloated ego? We must distinguish what this Camadolese author means by “experience” from that with which the Holy Father is concerned. There is a kind of concern with personal experience which is consumerist, driven by curiosity about spiritual things. The many marketed fads have done little more than indulge such curiosity even to the point of spiritual insobriety. The only experience attainable to one driven by the desire to gratify such curiosity is that which satisfies the narrow confines of his ego.

Very aware of the doctrine of faith which lives in the teachings of St. John of the Cross, the Holy Father is concerned that seminarians have an experience that goes beyond and deeper than what can be achieved by techniques and methods of meditation, an experience that completely transcends all desire for spiritual gratification and comfort.<sup>17</sup> Beyond the natural operations of our psychological powers, the Holy Spirit can drive a soul into the desert, into an experience of the otherness of God. This experience is often not gratifying or comfortable but purifying and humbling. St. John of the Cross describes this as “sheer grace” to be yearned for and prepared for with great personal effort. It is “the Dark Night.” This “Night” has the form of an interpersonal encounter in which God gives Himself as

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gift to the seminarian in incomprehensible ways so that the seminarian can learn to give the gift of himself to God in ways that go beyond his capacity to calculate. Fullness of life is found in just such a gift of self. The dogma of our faith protects this experience and, because it is Truth-bearing, makes it possible.

A certain polemic promoting contemplative intellectuality must be mentioned in relation to the efforts of spiritual and pastoral formation. John Paul II quotes St. Bonaventure to illustrate the kind of study appropriate to a seminary as a spiritual place:

*Let no one think that it is enough for him to read if he lacks devotion, or to engage in speculation without spiritual joy, or to be active if he has no piety, or to have knowledge without charity, or intelligence without humility, or study without God's grace, or to expect to know himself if he is lacking the infused wisdom of God.<sup>18</sup>*

Spiritual formation to prepare men for the priestly ministry requires a certain approach to academic study. Study in the seminary needs to be infused with wonder at Christ's presence. More than scientific research divorced from the whole of life, this passage suggests seminarians must embrace a contemplative intellectuality where academic study, prayer, meditation, contemplation and all other spiritual exercises interpenetrate each other, influence each other and enrich each other. It is a matter of questioning the subject matter and oneself in whatever is being studied so that the time spent in

study and in prayer is constantly directed to those values which characterize the seminary as a spiritual place: *communio* and *quaerere Deum*.<sup>19</sup> Such study opens up and anticipates the *admirabile commercium*, the Divine Economy, the ultimate end of which is union with God and it progresses by way of the Cross.

*The cross of Christ on Calvary stands beside the path of that admirabile commercium, of that wonderful self-communication of God to man, which also includes the call to man to share in the divine life by giving himself, and with himself the whole visible world, to God, and like an adopted son to become a sharer in the truth and love which is in God and proceeds from God.*<sup>20</sup>

Such a search for God motivated by theological wonder journeys the pathway of our crucified God. This is not rigorist or pietistic as is often assumed. The pathway is real. It is the passage from living an existence subject to futility and death to living life to the full.<sup>21</sup> This new life flows from personal knowledge of God's mercy reflected in the teachings of our faith:

*Authentic knowledge of the God of mercy, the God of tender love, is a constant and inexhaustible source of conversion, not only as a momentary interior act but also as a permanent attitude, as a state of mind. Those who come to know God in this way, who "see" Him in this way, can live only in a state of being continually converted to Him. They live, therefore, in statu conversionis; and it is this state of conversion which marks out the most profound element of the pilgrimage of every man and woman on earth in statu viatoris.*<sup>22</sup>

The renunciation, spiritual trials, struggle against temptation, self-examination, discernment of spirits, mortification, self-control, sacrifices and perseverance in discipline this entails are possible because the presence of the risen Lord places this mystery before the seminary community at every moment as the very source and summit of its life. In the context of *quaerere Deum*, the ancient ascetics of the West identified this as *conversatio morum* – an ongoing conversation with the Lord about one's whole manner of life. This is mercy filling our misery. This is the effective love of God filling the absence of his love in the human heart. When conversion results, this mercy is manifest, "Conversion is the most concrete expression of the working of love and of

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the presence of mercy in the human world ... mercy is manifested in its true and proper aspect when it restores to value, promotes and draws good from all the forms of evil existing in the world and in man."<sup>23</sup>

*Above all, love is greater than sin, than weakness ... it is stronger than death; it is a love always ready to raise up and forgive ... always looking for "the revealing of the sons of God," who are called to "the glory that is to be revealed." This revelation of love is also described as mercy; and in man's history this revelation of love and mercy has taken a form and a name: that of Jesus Christ.*<sup>24</sup>

Far more than minor adjustments to moral behavior, this conversion is ordered to *theosis*, deification, participation in the divine nature, identification with Christ, union with the mystery of Christ through his holy mysteries unto unity with the Holy Trinity: God became man so that men might become God. Present in the life of the community, the Author of Mercy constantly invites great efforts in persevering in goodness, humility, forgiveness and going beyond one's own comfort zone. In the midst of the personal suffering and hardship inevitably part of seminary life, Christ waits to reveal the power of his love.

A certain trust in the Lord lives in the words of

Blessed John Paul II, a trust that must have been forged during his own priestly formation, which occurred in secret under the oppressive and dehumanizing environment of occupied Krakow. In the shadow of the Cross, we know at once that we are infected with horrific misery and at the same time that this misery has its limit, just as the diabolic regimes of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century had their limit. Effective love in the face of suffering is mercy, and the pope learned from personal experience that if a man does not learn to believe in this love's power in his own life, he lacks the capacity to help others believe in it as well. This is why, when it comes to the seminary, in helping men face the misery haunting the depths of their own lives, he is convinced that spiritual direction and pastoral formation must be ordered to aid in a discovery of a love stronger than death, the love in fact which must animate priestly ministry and spirituality. Such love is only discovered by faith:

*Love is more powerful than any kind of evil in which individuals, humanity, or the world are involved. Believing in this love means believing in mercy. For mercy is an indispensable dimension of love; it is as it were love's second name and, at the same time, the specific manner in which love is revealed and effected vis-a-vis the reality of the evil that is in the world, affecting and besieging man, insinuating itself even into his heart and capable of causing him to "perish in Gehenna."*<sup>25</sup>

One of the most awesome tasks ever entrusted to a human person is entrusted to the spiritual director and in an extended way those who direct pastoral formation. To be afforded the opportunity to contemplate first-hand how the Lord has entered into one's own personal plight, to glimpse the gravity of evil which lives in one's own heart and from which Christ alone can save, this is the only way a man begins to realize the reality of the mercy of God. Weaknesses and broken habit patterns pop up in apostolic experiences and especially in personal failures, and this brokenness needs to be pondered and surrendered to God. A seminarian needs time and encouragement to consider the secret sorrows, false judgments and "many-sided evil" that haunt the depths of his heart. He needs the guidance of not only his spiritual director but also those involved in his pastoral formation to see these in relation to the Lord. In the shadow of the Cross, with the help of spiritual directors and formation advisors, he can experience for himself that misery cannot exceed the inexhaustible horizons of

God's merciful love: "In the paschal mystery the limits of the many-sided evil are surpassed."<sup>26</sup>

For those with enough courage, the right opportunity and the right direction, an astonishing discovery of the Lord is waiting to be made. By taking on our spiritual misery on the Cross, Christ gained access to our hearts so that when a seminarian embraces the Cross, prayerfully exploring the absence of love in his life with compunction of heart, the Lord discloses Himself to that man in a way that speaks to the reality of his life. The faith moves beyond a nice idea to which one assents in the midst of feeling pious. Discovering the astonishing and risen presence of the One crucified for our sake in the depths of our misery is the pathway to interiority, and out of this interiority a seminarian can discover the deep dug wellspring from which flows the fountain of all priestly ministry. Through this discovery a man can begin to experience for himself the heart-break and the love that moved Christ to embrace the Cross. For such a man mercy becomes a real experience, one that leads to conversion and can animate his future ministry. Spiritual exercises and pastoral life in a seminary are meant to converge in this vision love which is stronger than death, this love revealed in the mystery of the One who conquered death. The Pilgrim Pope continued to develop the nature of this divine love in relation to suffering in his encyclical on divine mercy:

*Jesus revealed ... an effective love, a love that addresses itself to man and embraces everything that makes up his humanity. This love makes itself particularly noticed in contact with suffering, injustice and poverty – in contact with the whole historical "human condition," which in various ways manifests man's limitation and frailty, both physical and moral. It is precisely the mode and sphere in which love manifests itself that in biblical language is called "mercy."*<sup>27</sup>

Here we see again that mercy is love effective in the face of suffering, and this definition implies that only those who have the capacity to suffer "notice" this kind of love. Beyond physical, mental and material forms of misery afflicting the human person, moral suffering is embraced by the mercy of God. Since priestly ministry is about extending the effective love revealed by Christ especially to this kind of suffering, special attention to formative moments in seminary life is required. This is particularly true with the struggle against sin.

In the work of ongoing conversion, sinful habits,

personal failures and shortcomings must not be ignored as inconsequential, or even deferred as chiefly psychological problems. We must face the truth: has not a lot of very serious sin been allowed to destroy the lives of the faithful because no one learned to take sin seriously?<sup>28</sup> It is not a matter of fostering a rigoristic overbearing environment. Quite the contrary, there is no environment more overbearing than one in which sin rules. If mercy is noticed in relation to suffering, then all kinds of weakness and proclivity to sin need to be sought out in each one's life individually and in the life of the community as if they were rare treasures, new ways in which divine mercy will be revealed when effort is made in faith to do penance, to make reparation and to overcome the evil. This attitude toward the mystery of sin allows the *mysterium pietatis* to disclose its magnitude.<sup>29</sup> The discovery of sin should never be a surprise, let alone an occasion of harsh judgment. Mercy forbids this. This is because every instance of falling short of the glory of God is an occasion to manifest the mercy of God anew through a renewed devotion to personal conversion. Contrition and joy, not fear and suspicion, reign when a community is animated with this filial piety.<sup>30</sup> Spiritual direction and pastoral formation have a mutual interest in fostering such a life in the seminary. When men acquire the expertise to confront the reality of sin in their own lives through the mercy of God, they will be prepared to help the faithful lift up their hearts in the ministry. Such personal struggle when wisely guided allows the Lord to increase a man's capacity for grace so that he can become a source of life for others.

Blessed John Paul II's doctrine on the Holy Spirit sheds light on this particular aspect of mercy when it confronts the moral and spiritual misery of man. Spiritual formation must instill in men an awareness that human existence plays out in the midst of a battle between good and evil. As the pope exhorted, "look to the *mysterium crucis* as the loftiest drama."<sup>31</sup> Although the victory has been won once and for all on the Cross, each person, each seminarian, must realize this victory in his own conscience, in his own life. This requires a laborious effort of conscience, a struggle, a battle for the truth.<sup>32</sup>


Why is this effort of conscience laborious? Sin is not easily recognized or acknowledged because spiritual wounds haunt the recesses of our mind and distort our ability to make right judgments. This inclines us not to recognize the alienating and dehumanizing consequences of sin. Yet the burden of guilt weighs us down: even if


we are not aware of it, we suffer our consciences, which cannot rest in false judgment and evil action. One's conscience judges one's actions and causes remorse, a remorse that echoes the anthropomorphic biblical language attributed to God of regret "at having created man."<sup>33</sup>

In the life of the seminarian, preparing him for his ministry of reconciliation, this effort is not unaided. God allowed the absence of love which afflicts human existence and the suffering this causes in the world to pierce his heart. In a certain sense, the Trinity interiorizes reprobation, or regret over having made us. In other words, God "aches" over man's alienation, and so He "aches" over the sins in seminary life. The Holy Spirit who searches the deep things of God knows the pain God bears for humanity, for each seminarian, for everyone in the seminary together. Alienated from God, from oneself, from one's neighbor, from all that is noble, good and true, the penitent begins to drink from the mercy of God when he begins to rethink his sin and to feel sorrow over what he has lost, what he has done to himself and what he has done to God.

The mission of the Holy Spirit is to communicate this heartache in the depths of God regarding sin in a salvific manner. The open wounds of Christ allow this gift to be given. The gift of tears constitutes a kind of second baptism, and in the sacrament of penance they allow a return to baptismal innocence. Tears of compunction are a vital concern of spiritual formation because they confer pastoral wisdom for the ministry of mercy. A man who has felt this sorrow inspired by the Holy Spirit recognizes this divine movement in the lives of those entrusted to his pastoral care. This is remote preparation for his ministry of reconciliation, in which the wounds of ignorance are filled with the truth of God, alienation is overcome by communion and the abyss of human misery is enveloped in the deeper abyss of God's mercy.

*In the eschatological fulfillment mercy will be revealed as love, while in the temporal phase, in human history, which is at the same time the history of sin and death, love must be revealed above all as mercy and must also be actualized as mercy. Christ's messianic program, the program of mercy, becomes the program of His people, the program of the Church. At its very center there is always the cross, for it is in the cross that the revelation of merciful love attains its culmination.*<sup>34</sup>





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If mercy is the program of the Church, in the seminary mercy is essential in both spiritual direction and pastoral formation. The wisdom of heart learned by surrendering to the Holy Spirit is key to embracing the full reality of pastoral charity, which lies at the heart of priestly ministry. Until such wisdom of heart is attained, the seminarian remains privy to mistaking functionalism for true pastoral effectiveness. Pastoral effectiveness can only be discerned in the order of mercy, which is the order of persons, the order of love – never in the order of material justice, the order of mere visible results.

Only the Lord has the power and authority to enter the heart of another. This is what He won the right to do when He who is Pure Love vanquished the powers of death and hell by completely entering into the heart of humanity and suffering our misery and meaninglessness on the Cross. With this power, He is always seeking the lost sheep, always running off to meet his lost son no matter how far away, always trying to bandage the neighbor He finds beat up on the side of the road. And we who are joined to Him by faith as members of his mystical body are the instruments through whom He works.

When the Lord brings to the Church a neighbor who is suffering, He also sends the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit constantly prompts a priest with divine power and authority so that in this moment he might act beyond the limits of his own humanity and flash forth as a fiery icon of Christ in the cold darkness of the world. In order to be able to do this, the priest must already know what it means to extend, however imperfectly, the mystery of Christ, having had this mystery extended to him as well somewhere in formation. Such a priest has the capacity, the spiritual space, the wisdom, to be present to the particular suffering heart in front of him. When the priest has surrendered such capacity, space and wisdom to the Lord, the Lord works to deliver this particular loved one, neighbor, stranger or even enemy from the hell in which they are engulfed.

In reflecting on mercy in the face of human suffering, the Pilgrim Pope notes that the plight of the man left to die on the side of the road *pierces the heart* (*misericordia*) of the Samaritan. This piercing of the heart, this compassion distinguishes the Samaritan from the others – despite their service to God.<sup>35</sup> This experience of pain over the plight of another is what makes him

neighbor to the man on the side of the road – even if he is by race and nationality also his enemy! The spiritual formation of a man whose heart is pierced by the merciful love of God and capable of being pierced by the plight of his neighbor converges with the goals of pastoral formation. For a man to be pastorally prepared for the priesthood, he must engage the ministry in such wise that he permits his heart to be implicated time and again in the plight of those entrusted him – or he risks missing the opportunity to become neighbor, just like the scribe and Pharisee in the parable. Indeed, the most dangerous of all pastoral responses is to stand before the suffering of another and to be paralyzed by our own indifference. It is a danger to our own humanity, a temptation to become inhumane.

### Conclusion

In the prophetic dialogue at the threshold of the Eucharist prayer, how can the priest dare to command “*sursum corda*” unless he has experienced the *miser cordia* of God and ached with this *miser cordia* for those entrusted to him? Providing this experience is precisely the purpose of the seminary as an educational ecclesial community. The ideal of the modern seminary introduced at Trent ties restoration of the priesthood to the close fraternal bonds found in an ecclesial community dedicated to that which reveals God’s mercy to the world: the joy of ongoing personal conversion.

In this community, conversion is based in a serious study of sacred doctrine infused with mental prayer, as well as in a form of mental prayer safeguarded and deepened by contemplation of the truth and informed by an apostolic attitude. The ultimate end of this study is the inexhaustible riches of Christ, the unfathomable depths of his mercy, revealed in the Sacred Page and accessible by living faith alone. Such contemplative intellectuality, if authentic, is an intense engagement with one’s own humanity. This is nothing less than a mastery of genuine spiritual theology in the ancient sense, a theology carried out on one’s knees where study, prayer, meditation and contemplation continually interpenetrate each other.

This pursuit is arduous because the deeper and ongoing encounters with Christ discovered in such prayerful study engender a constant and oftentimes painful re-examination of every aspect of one’s whole life. As it was originally conceived, the close fraternal bonds of seminary life are not secondary to this purpose; rather, these bonds are what principally allow the joy of such a life to be expressed and shared. If this ideal is ever to be realized, such a community and its pursuit must be

**A seminary dedicated to conversion rooted in contemplation sees its mission as something that goes far beyond the mere mastery of pastoral how-to. Instead, spiritual and pastoral formation in such an institution are really about learning to love those undergoing all kinds of suffering with an effective love.**

rooted in mercy. For Blessed John Paul II, only with *miser cordia*, that effective love in the face of suffering, can such bonds be established and maintained.

Here we have considered spiritual and pastoral formation from the standpoint of mercy. Opposed to this, there is a pragmatic and corporate attitude which sees the seminary as a kind of trade school where theology and philosophy are hoops through which to jump, spirituality a kind of escape from the difficult vicissitudes of life, administrative and corporate management skills the real subject matter to master and psychology the only true answer to all that ails the modern man. On the other hand, a seminary dedicated to conversion rooted in contemplation sees its mission as something that goes far beyond the mere mastery of pastoral how-to. Instead, spiritual and pastoral formation in such an institution are really about learning to love those undergoing all kinds of suffering with an effective love. The prayerful study of doctrine and contemplative engagement in the apostolate, which constitute essential moments in its life, converge on the effort to gain intelligence of heart, a true wisdom known only to the merciful.

The seminary as an ecclesial educational community for the formation of priests must facilitate the encounter of each seminarian with the mercy of God. The apostolic and spiritual life flowing from such an ongoing encounter with Christ is not possible if mercy is absent from the life of a seminary. Mercy alone promotes and safeguards these genuine elements of formation in the

life of a seminary. While all manifestation of conscience and everything related to such manifestations in spiritual direction for individual seminarians must be protected with careful discretion and utmost respect, fostering devotion to mercy requires the collaboration of spiritual directors, all formation advisors – in particular those overseeing pastoral formation -- seminary professors and, most of all, the seminarians themselves. The director of pastoral formation should work closely with the spiritual director or spiritual father of the seminary to evaluate and address challenges posed to the building of such a culture. Bishops and rectors would be remiss if they were not solicitous about cultivating an atmosphere of mercy in the life of the seminary.

*Stat crux dum volvitur orbis.* Formation leads to the Cross or the seminary fails its mission. Real priestly formation, of whatever kind, helps men discover, accept and embrace this turning point. This turning point, this crossroads, precisely because it is a moment of mercy, indicates the ongoing conversion at which all pastoral and spiritual formation for the priesthood should be aimed. Spiritual formation and pastoral formation converge on divine mercy because God's mercy is the remarkable cause of our conversion. Blessed are the directors and formation advisors invited to minister to our young men in this hour, in this twinkling of an eye which transforms them into living icons of Christ, the Good Shepherd! To be placed in contact with the source of their conversion, to find those vast frontiers where the limits of our humanity touch the limitless of God, to stand before the mystery around which the world turns with our seminarians in their darkest hours and finest moments: this is a sheer grace where the glory of God is revealed to the whole cosmos, a "eucatastrophe" of divine fire lighting up the cold darkness of our times to warm the hearts of men anew.



**Most Rev. Felipe Estevez** is bishop of St. Augustine, Florida.

## Endnotes

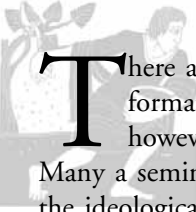
1. Pope John Paul II, Encyclical on the Mercy of God *Dives in misericordia* (30 November 1980), §14.
2. See Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter on the Meaning of Human Suffering *Salvifici doloris* (11 February 1984), §§28-29; Encyclical on the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and of the World *Dominum et Vivificantem* (18 May 1986), §39; and *Dives in misericordia*, §7.
3. Pope John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation On the Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day *Pastores dabo vobis* (25 March 1992), §42 [henceforth PDV]
4. Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes* (7 December 1965), §22.
5. PDV, §61.
6. PDV, §46.
7. PDV, §§ 46-50.
8. See PDV, §49.
9. Congregation for the Clergy, The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy: An Aid for Confessors and Spiritual Directors (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2011), §68, cf. PDV, §40.
10. "This 'loving look' of Christ contains, as it were, a summary and synthesis of the entire Good News," Apostolic Letter to the Youth of the World on the Occasion of International Youth Year *Dilecti amici* (31 March 1985), §7.
11. PDV, §47.
12. PDV, §45.
13. PDV, §48.
14. PDV, §60.
15. *Dominum et Vivificantem*, §§58-59.
16. *In Praise of Hiddenness: The Spirituality of the Camaldolese Hermits of Monte Corona*, ed. Father Louis-Albert Lassus (Bloomington, OH: Ercam Editions, 2007), 53.
17. See his dissertation *Questio de fide apud S. Joannem a Cruce* (Warsaw: Collectanea Theologica, 1950). Pope John Paul II's dissertation accomplished at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas (Angelicum) in Rome is also published as *Faith according to St. John of the Cross*, Trans. Jordan Aumann (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981).
18. PDV, §54.
19. PDV, §46.
20. *Dives in misericordia*, §7.
21. The theme for World Youth Day, 1993, in Denver, Colorado was, "I have come that they might have life, life to the full."
22. *Dives in misericordia*, §13.
23. *Dives in misericordia*, §6.
24. Pope John Paul II, Encyclical On the Redemption and Dignity of the Human Race *Redemptor hominis* (4 March 1979), §9.
25. *Dives in misericordia*, §7.
26. *Dives in misericordia*, §8.
27. *Dives in misericordia*, §3.
28. Pope John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation On Reconciliation and Penance in the Mission of the Church Today *Reconciliatio et paenitentia* (2 December 1984), §18.
29. *Reconciliatio et paenitentia*, §19ff.
30. *Reconciliatio et paenitentia*, §21.
31. *Reconciliatio et paenitentia*, §7.
32. *Dominum et Vivificantem*, §§43-45.
33. *Dominum et Vivificantem*, §45.
34. *Dives in misericordia*, §8.
35. *Salvifici doloris* §28.

# Teaching Seminary Theology: To Know the Love of Christ that Surpasses Knowledge

James Keating

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*"Those aspiring to the ministerial priesthood are called to a profound personal relationship with God's word; particularly in lectio divina.... Such attention to the prayerful reading of Scripture must not in any way lead to a dichotomy with regard to the exegetical studies which are part of formation. The Synod recommended that seminarians be concretely helped to see the relationship between biblical studies and prayer.... Great care should be taken to ensure that seminarians always cultivate this reciprocity between study and prayer."<sup>1</sup>*



There are few more basic elements to priestly formation than prayer and study. Such basics, however, do not always exist together in peace. Many a seminary faculty has itself been torn apart by the ideological sundering of these two elements. We are so close to our own biases that we normally cannot see them and therefore we cannot recognize the harm they do when concretized into a seminary's policy or vision. In recent history there have been seminaries whose reputations are reduced to these half-truths, "Oh, *Holy Prayer* seminary – that is a pious place," or, "Oh *Holy Logos* seminary – that is tough academic place." These popular descriptions of seminaries carry with them the very illness that befalls generation after generation: the separation of prayer and study. This separation seems to be a value<sup>2</sup> on the pragmatic level even to the point of having discrete seminary buildings and staff where the spiritual side of formation is "taken care of" and other buildings and staff where the academic side of things occurs. With such physical separation comes a message promoting the idea that a seminarian's real "work" takes place at the academic building and what happens at "home" (the "spiritual/formation house") is less vital, rigorous, important. In self-sustaining seminaries, this dichotomy would reflect the opinion that the "classroom" is most vital but spiritual direction is a useful addendum. This separation reflects the perennial tension

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within priestly formation, mirroring the secular academic world that exalts academics as "real" and "objective," while regarding spiritual affections and intimacy with God as "soft" and "subjective."<sup>3</sup>

This separation between intimacy with God and academics has real effects upon the church in analogous ways to a person who exalts intellect over his own bodily identity ("he lives in his head") or a person who refuses to undergo the pain of self examination and settles instead to define himself by his passing moods ("he is

an enthusiast"). Persons who live such severed lives carry about a vast amount of psychic and affective pain until such pain either leads them to integration (a conversion, a healing) or to a complete breakdown (a closing of self in upon a portion of the self alone).

To use a domestic analogy about the separation of prayer and theology, one could say that prayer should be "at home" and separate from "work (study)." A man is to be affectively intimate with God "on his own time." "After you are done thinking, and suffering the work of discovering truth in a discursive manner, *then* you can talk to God and receive His love. But right now get to work!" No one would accuse David Tracy of being an affective enthusiast in his contribution to theology, so it is instructive to listen to what he says about the institutional rift between spirituality and theology in the academy in this interview from *Commonweal*.

Like Pope Benedict XVI, Tracy has always considered mystery indispensable to religion.... He's convinced that theologians must reestablish the connection between spirituality and theology that was severed by medieval Scholasticism. "It was a great disaster in the history of Christian theology," he says ruefully. "Spirituality became something *you do after you do your theology*. It's terrible."<sup>4</sup>

If someone of the academic stature of David Tracy thinks the separation of spirituality from theology is a "disaster" and "terrible," what is keeping seminary theologians from bridging this divide right within their own study and teaching?

## The Faculty

Certainly some of the problem that we have in keeping intimacy with Christ connected to our study about Him is simply the fact that we exist in time. Time demands that we take the goods of this world successively. Time prevents me from thinking about Gabriel Marcel's philosophy while playing a football game, or playing football at the same time that I am having dinner. No matter how valuable one may think the integration of prayer and study is for the proper formation of seminarians, the reality of time and finitude plays a role in diminishing such an achievement. Of course, there are other reasons why some find it difficult to imagine a seminary that promotes the study of theology flowing from prayer and into prayer: sin, fear of intimacy with God, fear that other professors will reject such a method

as not being scientifically rigorous, ideology, fatigue, laziness, the pull of habit, the lethargy and weight one feels around imagining both a new way of teaching and a new *horarium* to support such change. But we need to note here what Benedict XVI says about study and prayer, clearly promoting their interpenetration as good for *the science* of theology.

*These words lead us to reconsider the proper place of research in theology. Its need for a scientific approach is not sacrificed when it listens religiously to the Word of God.... Spirituality does not attenuate the scientific charge, but impresses upon theological study the right method for achieving a coherent interpretation.... theology can only develop in prayer that accepts God's presence and entrusts itself to him in obedience. This is a road that deserves to be followed to the very end.*<sup>5</sup>

If spirituality provides theology with the correct method, then any approach to priestly formation has to begin at the gate of the seminary and not within its halls. To begin an age of contemplative seminaries that bear fruit for the new evangelization, we need to first look at how *future seminary theologians are trained*.<sup>6</sup> Do these future doctors learn how to receive the love of God right within their study and within any mentored teaching *practica* that they might undergo? The sooner we explore the possibilities of new ways to form seminary professors, the sooner seminarians will benefit from intellects that have been purified by an active faith.<sup>7</sup> The seminary is a community that utilizes scholars to form shepherds of souls,<sup>8</sup> not simply form other scholars. To pray unceasingly, even in the midst of research, is not to evade reality; it is to enter it with a clear mind and strengthened will.<sup>9</sup> Noting what I said above about "time," I would argue that discursive reasoning itself can be a prayer, especially as it flows from the specific vocation of a theologian. The theologian is called by God to find his or her holiness within the discipline and ascetical ways *of thinking* about faith. In being faithful to this call, the theologian is, in a broad sense, praying. To be intimate with Christ, both affectively and intellectually, and to think about some foundational point of theology may not be simultaneously possible because of the limitations of time and the finitude of our minds, but certainly thinking and praying *can be open to one another*. Pope Benedict wants to invite the theologian to consider spirituality as a method of doing theology in this way: let the truth you are pondering bring you to intimacy

with the Logos, and let the intimacy of your prayer with the Trinity clarify your discursive thought. Such interpenetration is possible because what the theologian is pondering, the truth apprehended by faith, *is already ordered* toward communion with Christ.

Pope Benedict has been meditating deeply upon the meaning of theology since his pontificate began and, of course, long before.<sup>10</sup> How he understands theology is deeply amenable to healing the rift between spirituality and theology. Note what he has to say about St. Bonaventure.

*To respond to the question if theology is a practical or theoretical science, St. Bonaventure makes a threefold distinction – hence he lengthens the alternative between theoretical (primacy of knowledge) and practical (primacy of practice), adding a third attitude, which he calls “sapiential” and affirming that wisdom embraces both aspects. And then he continues: Wisdom seeks contemplation (as the highest form of knowledge) and has as its intention that we become good (cf. Breviloquium, Prologus, 5). Then he adds: “Faith is in the intellect, in such a way that it causes affection. For example: to know that Christ died for us’ does not remain knowledge, but becomes necessarily affection, love” (Proemium in I Sent., q. 3). Love ... sees what remains inaccessible to reason. Love goes beyond reason, sees more, and enters more profoundly into the mystery of God.... All this is not anti-intellectual: it implies the way of reason but transcends it in the love of the crucified Christ.*<sup>11</sup>

One goal of seminary theology should be to assist seminarians to consider how the truth of faith tutors their affections, to assist them to recognize the affective movements of the heart as theology is studied. Wouldn't such recognition, combined with the content of the lecture and reading material, promote a deeper more sustained reception of truth? Pedagogical studies report that learning is internalized more securely when the whole person is involved in study. Since most diocesan priests have not been tutored in an integrated learning process, might this be the reason why so few continue a committed study of theology after ordination? What if their love for Christ was engaged *as they studied*, encouraged by professors to receive Christ as He emerges from the text or the lecture? The intellect is more generous in its receptivity to the fullness of truth than we have been made aware by the reductionist vision of the

Enlightenment. If professors can welcome prayer as it emerges from the truth grasped by the affectively imbued intellect, then they can pass this “method” on to seminarians. This more generous intellect does not host the cramped view of learning methods that scientism does. Within a more generous definition of reason the habit of study inheres within a mind *concentrated in the heart*. As the *Program for Priestly Formation* directs, “the seminary study of theology ... must flow from prayer and lead to prayer.”<sup>12</sup>

### The Correct Method for Studying Theology: Spirituality

The academic content of what professors are to teach seminarians has been specifically outlined by the church.<sup>13</sup> But notice what *more* Benedict XVI is unveiling in the quote above: a call to integrate mind and heart as the result of the professor and student *suffering the beauty of the Crucified Christ*. This suffering results in wisdom. Seminaries ought to hold the *birth of desire for wisdom* as a key academic goal, an intellectual formation process aimed at ordering the entire person anew. To have such a goal is not to undermine the urgency of formation in effective pastoral ministry. In fact, to secure for the Church a contemplative priest seeking wisdom is to secure effective ministry since *all contemplation of the Paschal Mystery leads to pastoral charity*. To contemplate means to behold the beauty, the radiating truth of the life death and resurrection of Christ within the affectively imbued intellect. If a man allows such beauty to affect his identity, then he will become free to serve the other as shepherd. Any unhealed affective pain that might turn him in on himself inordinately will be healed in the light of such contemplation and the ascetical features that surround and facilitate it (such as study, spiritual direction, human formation, sacramental participation, fraternal correction). To encounter Christ's beauty in the mystery of crucifixion and resurrection is to become both awakened spiritually and sent by Him into ministry. *Interiority is no threat to ministry, but its absence is*. Absent such interiority the seminary formation produces men who only serve out of their own natural gifts and strengths, or worse, men who only serve themselves.

Contemporary graduate education in universities is aimed not at wisdom or contemplation, but the commerce of effectively passing on to students discrete information in a chosen field of study. In contrast, contemplative formation will involve the ongoing reception of the gifts of the Holy Spirit,<sup>14</sup> the love of

**Critique and argument will have its place, of course, but the success of a seminary professor of the new evangelization will be known in his or her oversight of each seminarian's capacity to suffer the integration of study with the love of the Crucified.**

doctrine as a result of such habitual receptivity, and *the flowering of the contemplative mind*<sup>15</sup> wounded by the Paschal Mystery and summoned by the same to execute the charity of Christ. It is this same Paschal Mystery, consistently beheld in the mind of the theologian, that will order the way formation is established in any seminary community. In this age of the new evangelization, it will not do to simply have academics concerned with critique and elegantly argued debate, still less the reduction of theology to liberal or conservative political ideology. Critique and argument will have its place, of course, but the success of a seminary professor of the new evangelization will be known in his or her oversight of each seminarian's capacity *to suffer the integration of study with the love of the Crucified*.

This integration of its very nature will not come easy because it is a taste of eternity in time and needs to be received within and through the grace of intentional prayer. It is crucial that faculty modeling be vigorous and continual, since it is inevitable that some will become weary of such "integration" and simply cry out for the seminary to be a "graduate school" or alternately a "retreat house." The new evangelization demands that these contrasting models born of psychic and affective exhaustion ought not to define priestly formation.

### The Seminarian

A seminarian sustained in the Holy Spirit, in love with the truths of orthodoxy while all the time welcoming contemplation of the Crucified, will become the man that the Church needs for the new evangelization. Such a formation is what Bonaventure meant when he

said that theology is ordered to form a good man, one able to suffer in his mind and body who Christ is in truth. To take on this suffering is to take on the ascetical features of human, spiritual and academic formation. A man who welcomes such suffering does so with the generous heart of a spouse, making himself a selfless gift to the Bride of Christ. If such contemplative formation becomes normative in seminaries, then priests can lead the laity to a similar kind of formation to prepare them to withstand the suffering needed to evangelize culture.

Some may say that contemplative formation for seminarians is "idealistic." Charging one with idealism near guarantees that his ideas will be dismissed. No one wants to be idealistic since it is a contemporary synonym for "unworkable, irrelevant." In fact, to be idealistic is not to be in league with "unworkable" ideas but to be *with and for the Church*. It is the Church herself that carries ideals in her heart. The Church promotes exemplarism in its very core when it canonizes saints and bids its members to rise up and live in holiness as well. The idealistic church does not trade in impracticalities but in *what is most fitting for those who would receive the wound*,<sup>16</sup> the character of sharing in the priesthood of Christ. To be idealistic in the ecclesial imagination is to search for that formation which is fitting for each vocation. In promoting the new evangelization, we cannot simply *speak of it*, perhaps by studying its grammar; we are called, instead, to generate men to bear its coming *in their own bodies*. What is the oxygen the church breathes when it dreams of a fitting formation for such a man, a formation of spiritual and theological integration?

### The Oxygen for Priestly Formation: Contemplation, Orthodoxy and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit

In the formation of priests, there lies a hope that time spent in seminary will gift the Church with a new man; a man who receives his identity from his own deep participation in the love Christ has for his Bride, the Church. Such a hope is not without foundation as the Church does not so much trust in methods, ideologies, and skilled competencies producing efficient managers of people, but, rather it trusts in the power of the Holy Spirit to bring about a surrender to truth, to beauty and to holiness within each seminarian.

To speak of such things raises cynicism in some, a painful reminder of their own lost optimism not in the Spirit, but in perfectionism or some self-willed vision of utopia. To those who dwell in the Church, however,



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such a vision fires the imagination leading one to desire a strong participation in reality. Such a vision flows from the knowledge we have in faith that all things of this earth are summoned to be sublated<sup>17</sup> into the coming of the Kingdom. More specifically, the grace of the Resurrection and its perennial hope carries a call and a capacity for reforming the structures of priestly formation.<sup>18</sup>

To order the seminary toward the making of a new man is to take seriously *the kernels of truth* that lay at the heart of what Joseph Ratzinger discovered in his study of St. Bonaventure. Some Franciscans, liv-

ing in the wake of St. Francis of Assisi, looked for a new age to come, one in which the Spirit would guide all things interiorly. St. Bonaventure saw the danger of this being a subjectivist vision, one disconnected from the sacramental and visible Church, and so he put his mind to work at correcting these ideas. There is indeed a new age coming in the eschaton, but it will not arrive through any rejection of the Church, its teachings, offices and sacraments. Such an age is the fulfillment of all the Church has been about IN CHRIST. It will, when complete, be the very end the Church is seeking and tasting even now. Hints of this new age are seen in

the lives of the saints. In fact, to be a saint is to share in the holiness of Christ, a holiness that inaugurates the hope of a future full of truth, beauty and holiness. The perennial content of this present and coming age encompasses three elemental characteristics according to Joseph Ratzinger in his commentary upon the thought of St. Bonaventure: “When this age arrives, it will be a time of contemplation, a time of the full understanding of Scripture and, in this respect, a time of the Holy Spirit who leads us into the fullness of the truth of Jesus Christ.”<sup>19</sup>

Here we have the three elements that secure a context in the seminary for the spiritual formation of the new man: contemplation, orthodoxy and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Such elements have been with the Church since its beginning and as such stand as perennial points of orientation and renewal when formation processes lose their way or decline into stagnancy. All of our desires for perfection, once purified of the neurotic and sinful, lay bare a stunning continuity among Catholics, and all men: we are made to receive what is God’s deepest desire to give – participation in perfect, divine love.

This current epoch is not heaven; this time is far from perfect. What God wants to give to us in the eschaton *must already* be filtering into our minds, hearts, and wills; otherwise, the new heavens and earth would have no continuity with the human order and one’s hope for heaven would be vain. The seminarian needs to be tutored in this hope and formed within parameters that are hospitable to his receiving the fullness of divine love. The seminary is a community of hospitality toward God enabling it to receive his healing (the gifts of the Holy Spirit), his formative love (contemplation) and his truth (orthodoxy). The three realities mentioned by Joseph Ratzinger – contemplation, orthodoxy and the gifts of the Holy Spirit – have the gravity to secure and order a formation in theology that has spirituality as its method.<sup>20</sup> To see that these realities are the oxygen of seminary life is to envision a way of assuring that seminarians become contemplative-pastoral priests leading the laity in their call to evangelically transform culture. Without this foundation of deep interiority neither priest nor people could suffer the public resistance to the Gospel and remain faithful to its call.

### Holding the Foundation Together

No doubt the last forty-five years of ecclesial life have been divisive ones, so deeply divided in fact, that theological language and imagery were superseded by political language and imagery (left, right, conservative,

**What God wants to give to us in the eschaton *must already* be filtering into our minds, hearts, and wills.**

liberal, progressive). The foundational realities of contemplation, orthodoxy and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, were severed from one another and politicized as well. When these are torn apart and made to stand alone or made to relate to ideologies and not the sacramental Church, a certain beauty, unity and spiritual power vacates the Church. Only if contemplation, orthodoxy and the gifts stay unified can they truly order priestly formation effectively and in turn enable priestly ministry to assist the Church to reach its potency in publicly witnessing to the Gospel.

The aberrations that occur when the three are torn apart from one another are easy to see. During the last forty-five years, many in Catholic universities shunned orthodoxy and shied away from the “spiritual.” Hence there developed a sterile academic atmosphere of “scientific objectivity” and reduction of the mission of Catholic universities to bland platitudes about politically correct “service to society.” Orthodoxy was shunned and contemplation was emptied of its Christological core and related to politically acceptable studies of eastern religions. The gifts of the Holy Spirit were not sought because there are few spiritual connections made to academic study on Catholic campuses beyond the “availability” of Mass and service trips to poverty stricken Caribbean nations.

Catholic retreat houses as well began to turn from “western” style contemplation (Church Fathers, monastic and mendicants) toward the eastern non-Christian religions. Contemplation, in isolation from the other foundational realities, can descend into ersatz self-help methods, subjectivist meditation, syncretistic tolerance of world consciousness movements, impotent naming of emotions, and more.<sup>21</sup> With the rise of the “charismatic movement” in the Catholic Church in the 1970’s the gifts of the Holy Spirit were welcomed as well as, for the most part, doctrinal orthodoxy. Not so in the parishes where perhaps the charismatic gifts were given a “place” in parish prayer groups but orthodoxy was anemically embraced from the pulpits and in the con-

professionals. Formation in contemplation and orthodoxy likewise in both parishes and lay movements were not richly integrated. Usually, contemplation stood alone and orthodoxy was anemically understood as being sufficient if parishioners held Catholic “sensibilities.” With the pontificate of John Paul II, orthodoxy<sup>22</sup> came roaring back, but since it had been in short supply for a decade or so in the pastoral and priestly formation settings it was seized upon as ‘the’ answer to all the Church’s woes. It was held up *on its own* without the tempering that it needs from contemplation and the active reception of the Gifts.

Orthodoxy disconnected from the other foundational elements can cause seminarians to rigidly impose doctrine without any sense of a person’s capacity to receive it as truth (contemplation) under the movement of the Holy Spirit’s love. The gifts can spin off into introspection, subjectivism and fantasy without a person grounded in the truth of orthodoxy and a love that beholds the mystery of the cross and resurrection in contemplation. Contemplation can simply become escapism and syncretism without its being guided within truth and enlivened with the real and active presence of the Indwelling Spirit of Christ. *Held together*, these three foundational realities keep the human mind and heart tethered to the heart and mind of Christ.

The seminary is not interested in forming men who simply become experts in academic content; rather it promotes a *charismatic* theology that is *orthodox* and *contemplative*. The seminary, thus, forms men who can courageously preach the living Gospel.<sup>23</sup>

### Priestly Formation Settings

We have entered a time of relative peace in diocesan seminaries regarding the faithful teaching of doctrine. Priestly formation in some religious orders still promotes a more progressive theology in contrast to their diocesan counterparts.<sup>24</sup> The promotion of the love of theology as flowing from orthodoxy in its life-giving truth is the first commitment of any diocesan seminary faculty. The mysteries of Christ’s life and message do not need the idiosyncratic innovation drawn from political, feminist, gay and other sociological and ideological sources. Doctrine has *a depth of its own*, making it capable of drawing seminarians into something radically new: the transfiguration of their own lives and of those whom they will serve as shepherds. The grasping of theological truths will be better secured within the mind and heart of each seminarian the more he allows himself to be grasped by the beauty of doctrine, contemplation

and the living movement of the Spirit that “broods” over and within the sacramental life. Seminarian formators are the custodians and facilitators of a radical integration process that needs to be suffered within each seminarian before his ordination day: welcoming the habitual reciprocity between study and prayer.<sup>25</sup> Rendering the isolation of these two realities moot is a seminary that breathes in as its atmosphere the gifts, contemplation and orthodoxy. This atmosphere is sustained only by the formators themselves and their own love of living within such.

**Our breathing the air of contemplation, orthodoxy and the gifts can be better achieved if we understand that theology *has an order within itself toward spirituality* or communion with Christ, and spirituality has an order within it toward theology.**

Once a formation faculty wearies of the discipline of becoming holy, they reduce the seminary to a “manageable” endeavor, and it becomes primarily an academic center, a counseling center, a workshop for worship, a pastoral skills institute, and so on. Strong resistance to forming men in the habitual reciprocity between prayer and study might be present in some faculty because it calls them to moral and intellectual conversion, an interior life disposed to receive Christ’s own self offering upon the cross as *the matter to be received*. Here the sacrifice that is the priesthood defines the service given by the faculty of thus ordering minds and hearts to a truth that transcends scientific method. Such truth can only be glimpsed in the beauty seen within those lives affected by the mystery contemplated. In witnessing such beauty, a desire is born to tell others of its source, and one wants to evangelize. Our breathing the air of contemplation, orthodoxy and the gifts can be better achieved if we understand that theology *has an order within itself toward spirituality* or communion with

Christ, and spirituality has an order within it toward theology. This, in part, may be what Benedict XVI meant when he said that spirituality provides theology with the correct method.

## Conclusion

Clearly, then, the “mind of Christ” is not some kind of alien rationality that displaces native human reason, but is rather a pattern of rationality that is constantly held open by faith.... participation in the mind of Christ is fundamentally a relational activity, a noetic event that transpires in the communion of love.<sup>26</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI has made the point that “Christ is not trapped in a past culture of ancient Palestine.”<sup>27</sup> While the Pope is speaking from within a different context, an application of his point can be made in the development of a correct method for spiritual theology: that it allows the Church’s communion with the mystery of Christ to affect the mind’s search for truth.” Having one’s reason tutored by the Logos, the mind of Christ, will ultimately show us a new way of thinking, studying and teaching. When seminary professors live their lives as a sacred exchange between their freedom and God’s own self-offering in Christ, then they will begin to move from the mind they have now to a new mind. Such professors will allow the mind of Christ to possess them, *to welcome Christ thinking in them*, as Jean Pierre de Caussade so radically phrased it.<sup>28</sup> If such is our vision then the theme with which I began this essay can be joyfully jettisoned: we will no longer separate intimacy with Christ from study. In fact, in the near future the interior structures of such intimacy will “unceasingly”<sup>29</sup> guide the external structuring of seminary academics.



**Deacon James Keating, Ph.D.**, is director of theological formation for the Institute for Priestly Formation at Creighton University, Omaha, Nebraska. He is a permanent deacon of the Archdiocese of Omaha.

## Endnotes

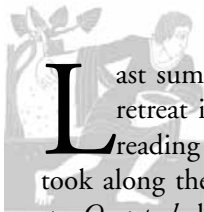
1. Pope Benedict XVI, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation On the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church *Verbum Domini* (30 September 2010), 82. My thanks to Father Peter Ryan, SJ, for his comments on earlier drafts of this essay.
2. Of course there is a great value in distinguishing between those formation activities that involve internal forum and those that exist in the external forum. Even preserving this value, though, has an unintended effect: spiritual intimacy with the Trinity can appear to be an exclusively “private” reality, whereas academic discourse holds sway in public fora.
3. See one source for the rise of the scientific method in universities, Walter Rüegg (ed.), *A History of the University in Europe*, vol. 3, *Universities in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (1800-1945) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
4. David Gibson, “God-Obsessed: David Tracy’s Theological Quest,” *Commonweal* (29 January 2010), 17. Numerous theologians have bemoaned this separation, including Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Word and Redemption* (NY: Herder, 1965), 33-34: “Faith is the intellect’s love for God.... The ‘natural’ man directs his thought by the light of reason into the darkness of mystery; the Christian *thinks in the light of mystery of faith*, by which he illuminates the darkness of the world.”
5. Pope Benedict XVI, Message For the Centenary of the Birth of Fr Hans Urs von Balthasar (6 October 2005); see also Gregory La Nave, “Is Holiness Necessary for Theology?” *The Thomist* 74 (2010), 437-59, for some excellent meditations on the relationship between being a theologian and the call to holiness. This essay is especially helpful in raising questions about the nature of affect and intellect in the study of theology. Do my affections prompt knowledge and will to attend to God, or do my affections arise from a cognitive act directed toward God? We have to distinguish between love as part of the intellectual appetite and love as an affection arising from our perception of God as our good.
6. See the following for more meditations upon the theme of forming seminary theologians: James Keating, *Resting on the Heart of Christ: The Vocation and Spirituality of the Seminary Theologian* (Omaha: IPF Publications, 2009); James Keating (ed.), *Seminary Theology: Teaching in a Contemplative Way* (Omaha: IPF Publications, 2010). On the new evangelization see Pope John Paul II, Encyclical On the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 3,33. See also Ralph Martin and Peter Williamson, *John Paul II and the New Evangelization* (Ohio: Servant, 2006).
7. See Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter On Christian Love *Deus caritas est* (25 December 2005)28.
8. See, Maximillian Heinrich Heim, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church and Living Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2007), 164
9. Pope Benedict XVI, Angelus (4 March 2007).
10. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995).
11. Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience, (17 March 2010).
12. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Program of Priestly Formation*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006), 163.
13. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation On the Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day *Pastores*

- dabo vobis* (25 March 1992); and USCCB, *Program of Priestly Formation*, 199ff.
14. See pages 105-110 in Gilles Emery, *Trinity, Church, and The Human Person: Thomistic Essays* (Naples, FL: Sapientia, 2007) for an excellent description on the role of the Holy Spirit in facilitating one's reception of truth, including the following: "As for the Holy Spirit, his action in teaching the truth is especially connected to love.... It is through the ardor of love that knowledge of the truth is given, for love moves the mind to grasp the truth and give it assent."
  15. For the purposes of this essay, "to contemplate" means to behold the beauty, the radiating truth of the life, death and resurrection of Christ within the affectively imbued intellect. The contemplative mind is one that seeks the face of Christ in discursive study. It is a mind that studies truth *because* it is fully embodied only in the person of Christ. To have a contemplative mind, in the Christian sense, is to have a mind that holds intimacy with Christ as the foremost goal of theology and engages all rational power as a vocation of surrender to Him as Truth. The contemplative mind "beholds" as its first love and analyzes and critiques only out of a desire to behold Him even more *securely*.
  16. The character received at ordination has been likened to a brand or wound that signifies "ownership." Then-Cardinal Ratzinger noted that this wound or brand "calls out to its owner." In this way, the cleric stands in relationship to the one who has placed his brand mark upon him. "From now on let no one disturb me as I bear on my body *the brand marks* of Jesus" (Gal 6:17). A further scriptural understanding of character might be summed up in this Pauline teaching: "I no longer live, not I, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20). Here Scripture underscores the interior self-surrender of the cleric. He is the one who eagerly hosts the mystery of Christ's public service of charity *as his own*, as his new life. See, David Toups, *Reclaiming our Priestly Character* (Omaha: IPF Publications, 2008), 82.
  17. Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 241: "What sublates goes beyond what is sublated, introduces something new and distinct, yet so far from interfering with the sublated or destroying it, on the contrary needs it, includes it, preserves all its proper features and properties, and carries them forward to a fuller realization within a richer context."
  18. Benedict XVI reminds us of what is possible in the new dimension we all live in his interview with Peter Seewald, *Light of the World* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2010), 168: "Why shouldn't Christ be able to rise from the dead? When I myself determine what is allowed to exist and what isn't I define the boundaries of possibility.... It is an act of intellectual arrogance for us to declare that [resurrection] is absurd.... *It is not our business to declare how many possibilities are latent in the cosmos....* God wanted to enter this world. God didn't want us to have only a distant inkling of him through physics and mathematics. He wanted to show Himself.... so *He created a new dimension of existence* in the resurrection."
  19. As quoted in Aidan Nichols, *The Thought of Benedict XVI* (London: Burns and Oates, 2007), 59.
  20. See page 55, note 5, above.
  21. For excellent insights on these tendencies see: Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of Christian Meditation (15 October 1989).
  22. I would also say that Popes John XXIII and Paul VI unleashed and promoted the spread of a "new Pentecost" with Vatican II, and now Benedict XVI is giving us the needed catechesis on authentic contemplation. So, within the ministry of Peter over the last 45 years, the three strands of charismata, contemplation, and orthodoxy were protected and deepened for appropriation in our current age.
  23. Joseph Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995), 46. See, Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, 87.
  24. "The Congregation was pleased to note that the faculties of most diocesan seminaries show a remarkable amount of unity and harmony. This unity of vision is almost always due to the sound leadership from the rector and senior management, who are the fulcra of seminary life. A lack of harmony, on the other hand, is almost always due to one or more educators being less than faithful to the Magisterium of the Church. These people, therefore, are out of kilter with the rest of the faculty and with the seminarians themselves. In centers of priestly formation with an atmosphere of more widespread dissent — which is the case particularly in centers run by religious — there can be no possibility of a unity of direction. Quite often, the Visitation discovered one or more faculty members who, although not speaking openly against Church teaching, let the students understand — through hints, off-the-cuff remarks, etc. — their disapproval of some articles of Magisterial teaching. In a few institutes, one even found the occasional non-Catholic teaching the seminarians." Congregation for Education, *Report on Seminaries*, 2008, n II,2
  25. See, Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini* (2010), 82.
  26. Mark McIntosh, "Faith, Reason and the Mind of Christ" in Paul J. Griffiths and Reinhard Hutter, eds.; *Reason and the Reasons of Faith* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 136.
  27. See, Pope Benedict XVI, *On the Way to Jesus Christ* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2005), 61-62.
  28. Jean Pierre de Caussaude, *Treatise on Prayer from the Heart* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1998), 145, n. 38.
  29. John Paul II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, 45: "Spiritual formation ... should be conducted in such a way that the students may learn to *live in intimate and unceasing union with God the Father through his Son Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit*. Those who are to take on the likeness of Christ the priest by sacred ordination should form the habit of drawing close to him as friends *in every detail of their lives*."

# A Thirst for Holiness—Reflections on Seminary Formation: A Response to James Keating<sup>1</sup>

Rev. Kurt Belsole, OSB

*Editor's Note: This article is in response to "Teaching Seminary Theology" by Deacon James Keating, Ph.D., which was originally published in the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars Quarterly, Volume 34, Spring 2011, pp. 50-56. It is reprinted in this issue of Seminary Journal.*



Last summer when I was leaving for my annual retreat in June, I was looking for some interesting reading for the train from Rome to Florence, so I took along the article in the *Fellowship of Catholic Scholars Quarterly* by James Keating "Teaching Seminary Theology," since I know both the author and the subject. The article proved to be interesting, but as the miles passed on the way to Florence, the more and more disappointed I became. The author seemed to base his argument on at least one false premise, and it seemed to be radically incomplete.

My own experience in the priestly formation of diocesan candidates began in 1983. For more than 25 years, I have served as a faculty member, spiritual director, academic dean, acting director of spiritual formation, director of liturgical formation and rector of a major seminary. From the outset, I should be clear that I do not have an argument with a good deal of James Keating's article.

I absolutely agree with him that:

- *Lectio divina* is important for those aspiring to the ministerial priesthood;
- Seminarians should cultivate a reciprocity between study and prayer and avoid a dichotomy between the two;
- Thinking and praying can be open to one another;
- One may not be affectively intimate with God only "on his own time";
- As Pope Benedict XVI states, the interpenetration of study and prayer are important for the

**The article proved to be interesting, but as the miles passed on the way to Florence, the more and more disappointed I became.**

study of theology;

- New ways might be helpful to form seminary professors;
- Seminarians and professors need to pray unceasingly, even in the midst of research;
- The truth being pondered should bring one into intimacy with the Logos;
- The intimacy of one's prayer with the Trinity should clarify one's discursive thought;
- Goals of seminary theology should be to assist seminarians to consider how the truth of faith tutors their affections and to assist them to recognize the affective movements of the heart as theology is studied;
- That love of Christ should be engaged as one studies;
- The birth of a desire for wisdom is a key academic goal;

- Interiority is no threat to ministry, but its absence is;
- Priests need to ground their identity in their own deep participation in the love Christ has for his Bride, the Church;
- Only if contemplation, orthodoxy and the gifts of the Holy Spirit stay unified can they truly order priestly formation effectively;
- Contemplation cannot stand alone and orthodoxy should not be anemically embraced;
- People need to be grounded in the truth of orthodoxy and a love that beholds the mystery of the cross and resurrection in contemplation;
- Seminary formators are the custodians and facilitators of a radical integration process that needs to be suffered within each seminarian before his ordination day.

Keating's reasoning on seminary formation, however, seems to neglect three important elements: first of all, the four pillars of priestly formation, the theology of Pope XVI and the sacred liturgy, as outlined in *Pastores dabo vobis* by Pope John Paul II<sup>2</sup> and the *Program of Priestly Formation*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops<sup>3</sup>; secondly, the theology of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI; and finally, the sacred liturgy. Although one cannot deal with all realities in a single article, I think that Keating would have done better had he addressed key themes of priestly formation and more clearly represented the theology of Cardinal Ratzinger/Pope Benedict when he dealt with teaching seminary theology.

### The Four Pillars of Formation

When it comes to dealing with the four pillars of priestly formation, I presume that Keating meant something other than the pillar of "spiritual formation" when he wrote of "spirituality" as the correct method for studying theology. That is an important distinction to make since priestly formation cannot be defined solely by the pillar of spiritual formation. When I was rector of a major seminary in the United States, I told the seminarians that if they did not want to be saints, they should pack up their bags and leave; and I was surprised to hear that, years later, one of my former students was still quite approvingly quoting me regarding the same. Today, I still maintain that if seminarians, and faculty members as well, do not want to be saints, they should not be in the seminary.

That does not, however, imply that seminary

formation is or should be determined by the pillar of spiritual formation. Seminary formators know well that the seminary cannot be run on the internal forum and that those working as spiritual directors and confessors of seminarians do not vote on the seminarians' advancement in the seminary or for Holy Orders. The conflict is obvious. Voting to recommend a man for advancement in priestly formation or voting on him for Holy Orders is the purview of the priest members of the seminary faculty who are working in the external forum: the human, intellectual and pastoral pillars. By nature of their function, the spiritual directors of the seminarians are excluded from this. How then does spirituality as the correct method for studying theology fit into the schema of the four pillars? After all, Pope John Paul II states in *Pastores dabo vobis* 43 that, "The whole work of priestly formation would be deprived of its necessary foundation if it lacked a suitable human formation,"<sup>4</sup> and the *Program of Priestly Formation* describes human formation as the foundation for the other three pillars.<sup>5</sup>

While reading his article, I also asked myself, how does Keating understand the relationship between the external forum and the internal forum, or to put it in the context of the pillars, the relationship between the pillar of spiritual formation and the other three pillars: human, intellectual and pastoral? Keating speaks of *Holy Prayer Seminary* as a pious place and *Holy Logos Seminary* as a tough academic place. He considers them to be popular descriptions of seminaries and writes that when spiritual and academic activities take place in discreet seminary buildings, a mistaken message is given that the seminarian's real work occurs at the academic building, and what happens at home, the "spiritual/formation house," is less vital, rigorous and important.

I question that for two reasons. First of all, I find it to be a facile, but not very helpful distinction. Keating cites no studies to support his theory that there are two types of seminaries and he notes that these descriptions are based on reputation and half-truths. My experience of working in seminary formation has taught me that there are not two types of seminaries, but two types of seminarians — maybe three for the purposes here. The group that by far is in the majority is comprised of those seminarians who give themselves to their studies and are also the ones who will be found in the chapel regularly at Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours as well as at adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and in private prayer. They will also be found at their apostolates working with the poor and homeless, visiting the sick, caring for AIDS patients, visiting the homebound and

engaging in pro-life work. In addition, they give themselves to the various demands of community life. They are, in fact, a remarkable group of men. The other two groups, again based perhaps on half-truths, I find by far to be in the minority. They might delve into academics to the neglect of their spiritual lives or they may decide “to be spiritual” rather than to really study and work as hard as they should. Formators and seminary formation can address the reasons for these choices over time.

It seems to me that formation is supportive of and not opposed to spirituality. Human formation deals with the seminarian showing the ability to seek help when needed, to exhibit sound prudential judgment, to set priorities and budget time wisely, to accept constructive criticism and affirmation, to show accountability to designated authorities, to demonstrate the ability to manage stress, to exhibit gentlemanly behavior and manners, and to work to interiorize formation values — among other necessary qualities. In this sense, human formation and spirituality go hand in hand.

It would have been much more helpful if Keating had situated spirituality as the correct method for studying theology within the four pillars of seminary formation as described by Pope John Paul II and the American bishops. It might also have been better if he had not set academic formation and spirituality against one another.

### **The Theology of Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI**

Although Keating quotes Pope Benedict XVI/Cardinal Ratzinger more than ten times as if he were following his thought, I would maintain that he actually does not. The sacred liturgy is a central and not a side issue for Pope Benedict XVI. As Pope Benedict wrote in 2010 in the general introduction to his collected writings in the first volume of his *opera omnia* to be published, *The Theology of the Liturgy: The Sacramental Foundation of Christian Existence*:

*The liturgy of the Church was for me, already from my childhood, the central reality of my life; and in the theological school of teachers such as Schmaus, Söhngen, Pascher and Guardini, it has also become the center of my theological endeavors.*<sup>6</sup>

Ratzinger’s concern for the centrality of the liturgy is evident as well in the preface to his book *Feast of Faith*. There he writes:

*Faced with the political and social crises of the present time and the moral challenge they offer to Christians, the problems of liturgy and prayer could easily seem to be of second [sic] importance. But the question of the moral standards and spiritual resources that we need if we are to acquit ourselves in this situation cannot be separated from the question of worship. Only if man, every man, stands before the face of God and is answerable to him, can man be secure in his dignity as a human being. Concern for the proper form of worship, therefore, is not peripheral but central to our concern for man himself.*<sup>7</sup>

Pope Benedict furthermore states in *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*:

*In his Rule, Saint Benedict coined the formula Mens nostra concordet voci nostrae — our mind must be in accord with our voice (Rule, 19, 7). Normally, thought precedes word; it seeks and formulates the word. But praying the Psalms and liturgical prayer in general is exactly the other way round: The word, the voice, goes ahead of us, and our mind must adapt to it. For on our own we human beings do not “know how to pray as we ought” (Rom 8:26) — we are too far removed from God, he is too mysterious and too great for us. And so God has come to our aid: He himself provides the words of our prayer and teaches us to pray. Through the prayers that come from him, he enables us to set out toward him; by praying together with the brothers and sisters he has given us, we gradually come to know him and draw closer to him.*<sup>8</sup>

In other words, Saint Benedict writes in his Rule that when the monks pray the Psalms, their minds must be in harmony with their voice. This does not mean that their minds and voices must be in harmony or that they should say what they mean. Rather it is the other way around. What they say should inform how they think. Saint Benedict applies this to the Psalms of the Divine Office, but Pope Benedict goes further and states that even in liturgical prayer the voice, the words of the sacred liturgy, go ahead of us and our minds must adapt themselves to the liturgy. That is a significant insight: the words of the liturgy of the Church must inform how we think of God.

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Regarding *Verbum Domini*, Pope Benedict's Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the word of God, Keating quotes Pope Benedict XVI at the very beginning of his article. Rather than beginning with *Verbum Domini* 82 and *lectio divina*, and stating that those aspiring to the ministerial priesthood are called to a profound personal relationship with God's word and that great care should be taken to ensure that seminarians always cultivate the reciprocity between study and prayer, I maintain that Keating should have begun earlier. To be true to Pope Benedict, Keating should have begun with the preceding section of *Verbum Domini*, where Pope Benedict XVI entitled the entire section: "The Liturgy, Privileged Setting for the Word of God." The Holy Father begins that section by writing: "In considering the Church as '*the home of the word*,' attention must first be given to the sacred liturgy, for the liturgy is the privileged setting in which God speaks to us in the midst of our lives; he speaks today to his people, who hear and respond."<sup>9</sup> Attention must first be given to the sacred liturgy, not to *lectio divina*; and I believe that this includes seminarians as much as anyone else. As Pope Benedict stated in *Verbum Domini*: "*A faith-filled understanding of sacred Scripture must always refer back to the liturgy, in which the word of God is celebrated as a*

timely and living word."<sup>10</sup>

Finally, Keating uses the following quotation from the Pope on p. 51 of his article in the *Fellowship of Catholic Scholars Quarterly*:

*The demand for a scientific method is not sacrificed when theological research is carried on in a religious spirit of listening to the Word of God.... Spirituality does not attenuate the work of scholarship, but rather supplies theological study with the correct method so that it can arrive at a coherent interpretation. Theology can develop only with prayer . . . This is a road that is worth travelling to the very end.*<sup>11</sup>

In note #5 of his article in the *Fellowship of Catholic Scholars Quarterly*, Keating gives only "Pope Benedict XVI, October 6, 2005" as his reference. An Internet search indicates that this was a message that the Pope sent to the participants at the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome during the International Convention on the Occasion of the Centenary of the Birth of the Swiss Theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar. Since Hans Urs von Balthasar, theologian, former Jesuit, priest, founder of the *Johannesgemeinschaft* and one of the original

members of the International Theological Commission, was well known by the Pope, these congratulatory words were well deserved.

It would be good to keep those reflections in context, however, since Pope Benedict stated, on the preceding day at his weekly general audience reflecting on Psalm 135 (134):

*The liturgy is the privileged place in which to hear the divine Word which makes present the Lord's saving acts; but it is also the context in which the community raises its prayer celebrating divine love. God and man meet each other in an embrace of salvation that finds fulfillment precisely in the liturgical celebration. We might say that this is almost a definition of the liturgy: it brings about an embrace of salvation between God and man.*<sup>12</sup>

In looking at the very beginning of this quote of Pope Benedict towards the start of his pontificate, one can hardly not be struck by the fact that *Verbum Domini* 52 calls the liturgy the *privileged setting* in which God speaks to us in the midst of our lives and that the section which begins with number 52 is entitled, “The Liturgy, Privileged Setting for the Word of God.”<sup>13</sup>

### The Role of the Sacred Liturgy

Keating begins his article on teaching seminary theology with a quote from Pope Benedict's Post Synodal Exhortation, *Verbum Domini* 82, regarding seminarians doing *lectio divina*. Keating concludes that quote by noting that Pope Benedict writes that great care should be taken to ensure that seminarians always cultivate the reciprocity between study and prayer.<sup>14</sup>

What is troubling about these references to Pope Benedict is that Keating does not devote a single sentence of his article to the sacred liturgy of the Church. The sacred liturgy is too important in the theological method of Pope Benedict, and in theological method in general, to be merely implied, even if this is possibly done by Keating in his occasional use of expressions or terms such as Paschal Mystery, priesthood, sacramental and sacraments. Not once does he speak explicitly of the sacred liturgy. Keating's neglect of the public liturgy of the Church is even more striking since the only times that he mentions ritual public liturgical worship are both dismissive. On p. 54, when writing about Catholic campuses in the last forty-five years, Keating says that few spiritual connections were made to academic study and that among other things there was simply the

**The sacred liturgy is too important in the theological method of Pope Benedict, and in theological method in general, to be merely implied, even if this is possibly done by Keating in his occasional use of expressions or terms such as Paschal Mystery, priesthood, sacramental and sacraments.**

“availability” of Mass.<sup>15</sup> On p. 55, he writes that when the seminary is reduced to being a “manageable” endeavor it becomes, among other things, a “workshop for worship.”<sup>16</sup>

While I agree that it may be true that few spiritual connections were made with theology on some Catholic campuses in the last forty-five years, and that it is disastrous when seminaries become, among other things, “workshops for worship,” Keating does not treat of the liturgy of the Church, nor do I think that it may it be dealt with dismissively in seminary formation. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum concilium*, calls the liturgy the *culmen et fons* of the life of the Church: “... the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the font from which all her power flows.”<sup>17</sup> In addition, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, states:

*The sacred nature and organic structure of the priestly community is brought into operation through the sacraments and the exercise of virtues. Incorporated into the Church by Baptism, the faithful are appointed by their baptismal character to Christian religious worship; reborn as sons of God, they must profess before men the faith they have received from God through the Church. By the sacrament of Confirmation they are more perfectly bound to the Church and are endowed with the special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence*

*they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread the faith by word and deed. Taking part in the eucharistic sacrifice, the source and summit of the Christian life (totius vitae christianae fontem et culmen), they offer the divine victim to God and themselves along with it.*<sup>18</sup>

Problematic is the fact that Keating's proposed seminarians, who would consider spirituality as the correct method for studying theology, seem never to celebrate the liturgy. They obviously must, but the sacred liturgy of the Church is not formative enough in Keating's vision for him even to mention it. In Keating's article, the texts, the rites, and the self-offering which take place in the public worship of the Church, whether in the Mass or in the Liturgy of the Hours, are never mentioned or explored. The sacred liturgy seems to make no significant contribution to either the spirituality or the theology, and consequently to the priestly formation, of Keating's proposed seminarians.

This is all the more significant as the great Dominican theologian who served on the Doctrinal Commission at Vatican II, Yves Congar, in his masterful work, *Tradition and Traditions*, considers the Church's liturgy as a *locus theologicus* and treats it first among the principal monuments or witnesses to the tradition, even before the Fathers of the Church, and certainly before the ordinary expressions of the Christian life.<sup>19</sup> There Congar notes:

*We are not here concerned with the liturgy as a dialectic arsenal ... but as the expression of a Church actively living, praising God and bringing about a holy communion with him: the covenant as fulfilled in Christ Jesus, its Lord, Head and Spouse.... The voice of the loving, praying Church, doing more than merely expressing its faith: hymning it, practising it, in a living celebration, wherein too, it makes a complete self-giving.*<sup>20</sup>

The importance of the sacred liturgy is once again emphasized when Congar, in considering *Legem credendi statuit lex orandi*, writes: "Thus the liturgy is the privileged *locus* of Tradition, not only from the point of view of conservation and preservation, but also from that of progress and development."<sup>21</sup> Again, Congar approvingly cites Dom Prosper Guéranger's *Institutions liturgiques* in the text below where he writes:

*Because of all this, the liturgy is "the principal*

*instrument of the Church's Tradition."* "It is in the liturgy that the Spirit who inspired the Scriptures still speaks to us; the liturgy is tradition itself at its highest degree of power and solemnity." The liturgy acts according to the general manner of Tradition, and since it is endowed with the genius of Tradition, it fills Tradition's role in a superlative way.<sup>22</sup>

An important consideration as one reflects on the place of the sacred liturgy in seminary formation, of course, will be to make a distinction between liturgy and ceremonies. Ceremonies or external ritual action and words are important, but they are not the liturgy. As Pope Pius XII wrote in *Mediator Dei*: "universal worship which the Church renders to God, while external must also be internal.... The principal element of divine worship is the internal element.... The sacred liturgy requires that these two elements be intimately conjoined."<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, the internal dimension of liturgical life is evident as well in *Sacrosanctum concilium* 48, which states:

*The Church, therefore, earnestly desires that Christ's faithful, when present at this mystery of faith, should not be there as strangers or silent spectators. On the contrary, through a good understanding of the rites and prayers, they should take part in the sacred action, conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full collaboration. They should be instructed by God's word, and be nourished at the table of the Lord's Body. They should give thanks to God. Offering the immaculate victim, not only through the hands of the priest but also together with him, they should learn to offer themselves. Through Christ, the Mediator, they should be drawn day by day into ever more perfect union with God and each other, so that finally God may be all in all.*<sup>24</sup>

Finally, as regards priestly formation and the sacred liturgy, a word should be said regarding the liturgy and popular piety. On 17 December 2001, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments issued the *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy*. Speaking of Principles and Guidelines, the *Directory* states:

*The faithful should be made conscious of the preeminence of the Liturgy over any other pos-*

sible form of legitimate Christian prayer. While sacramental actions are necessary to life in Christ, the various forms of popular piety are properly optional. Such is clearly proven by the Church's precept which obliges attendance at Sunday Mass. No such obligation, however, has obtained with regard to pious exercises, notwithstanding their worthiness or their widespread diffusion. Such, however, may be assumed as obligations by a community or by individual members of the faithful.<sup>25</sup>

In addressing the question of priestly formation, the same document immediately follows the above by stating: "The foregoing requires that the formation of priests and of the faithful give preeminence to liturgical prayer and to the liturgical year over any other form of devotion."<sup>26</sup>

The teaching of the Holy See is clear on the preeminence of the sacred liturgy over any other form of devotion, and in the mind of the Church that involves both the formation of priests and the formation of the faithful. In priestly formation in the United States, an example of this is that spiritual formation in the seminary will necessarily include devotional prayer centered on Eucharistic Adoration, the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints.<sup>27</sup> Nonetheless, the pre-eminence of the liturgy is maintained. The Church obliges her transitional deacons and priests to pray the Liturgy of the Hours daily, yet despite how important Eucharistic Adoration is, she does not require them to make a daily Holy Hour, something which one does not find even mentioned in the *Program of Priestly Formation*.

In summary, liturgy in both Christian life and priestly formation is important, not because liturgy is about itself, but because liturgy is about the great truths of Trinity, Incarnation and Church.

## Conclusion

Keating is correct in that priestly formation, study and prayer go together, *lectio divina* is an important part of formation, and interiority is no threat to ministry but its absence is. Nonetheless, I think that the thirst for holiness needs to be incorporated into all four of the pillars of priestly formation. Moreover, the four pillars of priestly formation are not opposed to one another but need to be integrated and should support one another. Pope Benedict XVI himself recognizes that the liturgy of the Church is central to his theological thought, and consequently his considerable theological writing both before and during his pontificate must be read in

that context. Finally, the sacred liturgy is considered by Vatican II, in both the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* as well as the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, as being the *culmen et fons*, the summit and source, of the life of the Church. For that reason, it is important for the individual Christian, and even more so for the priest who is charged by the Church to celebrate her liturgy, to know that the liturgy is the summit and source of one's life and vocation more than anything else — even various forms of devotion. To speak theologically, the liturgy is a classic *locus theologicus* and the principal instrument of the Church's tradition. The Church's life, and consequently priestly formation, cannot neglect that.



**Rev. Kurt Belsole, O.S.B., S.T.D.**, studied liturgy at the Pontifical Liturgical Institute, worked in priestly formation at Saint Vincent Seminary from 1983 to 2006, and was Rector there from 2001 to 2006. Since August 2007, he has served as Director of Liturgical Formation at the Pontifical North American College, Vatican City State.

## Endnotes

1. This article is in response to "Teaching Seminary Theology" by Deacon James Keating, Ph.D. which was published in the *Fellowship of Catholic Scholars Quarterly*, Volume 34, Spring 2011, pp. 50-56, and which is published again before this article in this volume of *Seminary Journal*.
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4. John Paul II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, 43.
5. USCCB, *Program of Priestly Formation*, 73.
6. Joseph Ratzinger, *Theologie der Liturgie: Die sakramentale Begründung christlicher Existenz*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Band 11, ed. Gerhard Ludwig Müller, 3rd ed. (Freiburg: Herder, 2010), 6: "Die Liturgie der Kirche war für mich seit meiner Kindheit zentrale Wirklichkeit meines Lebens und ist in der theologischen Schule von Lehrern wie Schmaus, Söhngen, Pascher, Guardini auch Zentrum meines theologischen Mühens geworden"; my translation.
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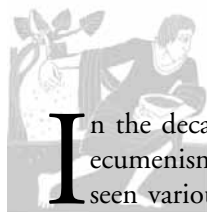
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# Making Interreligious Education A Seminary Priority

Rev. John T. Pawlikowski, OSM, Ph.D.



In the decades since Vatican II and its decrees on ecumenism and on interreligious relations, we have seen various popes give powerful, public witness to these two areas. Whether at the three Assisi gatherings of world religious leaders, Pope John Paul II's visit to Israel, Paul VI's dramatic meeting with the Ecumenical Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church and Benedict XVI's prayer in the Istanbul Mosque along with his visit to the main synagogue in Rome, the fundamental message has been the same: the Catholic Church now regards ecumenical and interreligious outreach as integral to its overall mission. This certainly represents a significant shift from previous periods where relations between Catholicism and other religious traditions, whether Christian or non-Christian, were quietly met with profound hostility. It is no accident that Benedict XVI has emphasized the importance of developing a deep-seated ecumenical and interreligious commitment during the time of seminary training.<sup>1</sup> The seminary student needs to regard this commitment as integral to his future priesthood, not merely something on the periphery of his future ministry.

Making training in ecumenical and interreligious relations a seminary priority flows not merely from the documents and witness of Church leadership since Vatican II, as important as they remain, but also from a realistic analysis of the growing diversity here in the United States. When I was involved with the planning and organization of the 1993 Parliament of the World Religions, our team was fond of repeating the phrase "the religious world is not merely coming to Chicago; it already exists in Chicago." Chicago, as like so many other American metropolitan areas, has seen an influx of new residents from all of the major world religions. Even in many rural regions, too, religious diversity is on the rise. Newly ordained priests may well find them-

**It is no accident that Benedict XVI has emphasized the importance of developing a deep-seated ecumenical and interreligious commitment during the time of seminary training.**

selves in pastoral assignments in parishes, schools and hospitals where relating to the "religious other" can become a daily necessity. In addition, recognition of how important the support of the American hierarchy was for documents such as *Nostra Aetate* (on interreligious relations, in particular Judaism) and *Dignitatis Humanae* (on religious liberty) in their complex path to final conciliar approval gives training in interreligious relations a continuing urgency. These documents are truly a legacy of American Catholicism that the upcoming generation of Catholic clergy ought to treasure. Seminarians in the United States ought to be made aware of the significant contributions of American priests such as John Courtney Murray, S. J., Msgr. George Higgins of the Archdiocese of Chicago and the Bishops' Conference in Washington and Thomas Stransky, CSP, to the compilation and passage of Vatican II's interreligious declarations.

It is important at this point to clarify what interreligious training involves. Certainly becoming familiar with the basic texts on interreligious dialogue from Vatican II as well as from the post-conciliar popes and

**If at all possible, students should also have opportunities to engage personally with members of other faith communities and visit their places of worship.**

the key Vatican congregations provides an indispensable starting point. Seminary students need to know what the Church is currently teaching on interreligious relations. Texts by themselves, though, are insufficient educational models in terms of interreligious relations. If at all possible, students should also have opportunities to engage personally with members of other faith communities and visit their places of worship. The 1975 Vatican Guidelines on Catholic-Jewish relations issued to commemorate the tenth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* is famous for its warning to Catholics not to create “straw Jews,” i.e., caricatures of what Jews really believe. This principle deserves application to all religious relations, and the best way to do this is through actual exchange with members of other faiths.

There are several ways of creating a means for personal encounters with people of other faiths in the seminary curriculum. One is to invite religious leaders from these faiths to teach a course(s) in the seminary program. Ideally, such a professor should be present at the seminary beyond the usual role of an adjunct. Some of the most important learning can, in fact, take place in more informal moments at the seminary when the students have the opportunity for conversation with the non-Catholic professor. At the Catholic Theological Union, we have seen over the years how valuable such conversation can be as non-Catholic faculty engage the students over lunch or in their seminary offices. It can also prove very valuable for such professors to be invited to faculty meetings on a regular basis. While having adjunct professors from other faith communities whose presence at the school is restricted to their actual classes is better than nothing at all in the curriculum, the goal should definitely be to provide occasions for more personal interchange between the professors and the seminary student body.

Another form of more informal education is to

visit a place of worship or the home of a member of another faith community. In Chicago, for example, Emily Soloff, who works nationally for the American Jewish Committee in interreligious relations, has invited students from Mundelein Seminary and Catholic Theological Union to her home to experience the beauty of the Shabbat meal. She provides background information on Jewish liturgy prior to their participation. Catholic seminary administrators should seek out opportunities to replicate such experiences in their own local areas. Meals provide a common setting for prayers of thanksgiving within a number of world religions.

A more extended participation in an experience of another faith community's worship practice has also occurred on occasion here at Catholic Theological Union. Our late Professor of Jewish Studies Rabbi Hayim G. Perelmutter launched what he named the Shabbat Experience seminar. The seminar began with a small-scale Shabbat dinner led by Rabbi Perelmutter and his wife. After the meal, the students would join the congregation for the evening worship service and the social that follows. The next day the students would have a lecture on Jewish liturgical music, engage Rabbi Perelmutter in a give-and-take conversation on whatever might be on their mind regarding Judaism and Catholic-Jewish relations, participate religiously through a reading of the Torah in the daytime worship of the congregation, which often included a bar mitzvah or a bat mitzvah celebrating the coming of age of a Jewish young person, have lunch with members of the congregation and, finally, observe the closing ceremony of the Shabbat entitled “Kissing the Shabbat Goodbye.” Sometimes, this experience has been included in the curriculum for the introductory course on Catholic liturgy, given the Jewish roots of our liturgy. Students have frequently spoken of how transforming the Shabbat experience was in their understanding of Judaism. Parallel programs might be developed with respect to religious traditions other than Judaism based on the model Rabbi Perelmutter created.

Another advantage to having faculty members from other faith traditions as more than adjuncts who depart fairly quickly from the school following their classes is their availability for roles beyond their particular courses. When the Catholic professor is covering the Christian-Jewish relationship in the first several centuries, when courses in medical ethics turn their attention to hospital visitation and when historical topics such as the Crusades come up for discussion, it can prove very valuable for students to hear the perspectives of someone who represents the faith tradition(s) that are involved in

such topics. Familiar faces who daily engage the student body with their presence provide just such voices.

Any authentic seminary program on ecumenical and interreligious relations must include student exposure to the principal documents of the Church regarding dialogue. Obviously, the documents from Vatican II are a necessary starting point, but subsequent documents such as the 1974 and 1985 statements on Catholic-Jewish relations as well as the 1998 statement on the Holocaust also have importance. Statements by Pope John Paul II who spoke more about the Catholic-Jewish relationship than any previous Pope,<sup>2</sup> along with those by Benedict XVI on a variety of interreligious encounters between Catholics and people of other faith traditions need to be added to any list of required readings.

Especially important are three Vatican documents dealing with interreligious relations in general and how the Catholic effort at dialogue relates to the Church's commitment to evangelization. This has been a deeply contentious issue in global Catholicism over the past several years as the intense discussions about Assisi III clearly illustrate. A student for the priesthood must be prepared to address the continuing controversy when he enters priestly ministry. He must be prepared to explain to members of his congregation why the Church since Vatican II has regarded dialogue as integral to its overall preaching of the gospel and how this priority can stand side-by-side with an ongoing effort at evangelization.

The first of the three Vatican documents was *Redemptoris Missio* (1990) from Pope John Paul II which underlined the need for Catholics to take up the responsibility to proclaim the gospel to those not in communion with the Catholic Church. This document did not discuss, however, the question that it was intended to reaffirm, which was the continued validity of the more classical approach to mission which the Pope saw as somewhat flagging after Vatican II along with its emphasis on dialogue and the proclamation of justice.<sup>3</sup>

The second document entitled *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991) was one written far more in line with the dialogue-mission discussion. A joint effort by the Vatican Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation* went through numerous drafts, its final version being somewhat less satisfactory than the initial drafts. As the late Jacques Dupuis, SJ, noted in his exhaustive analysis of the text,<sup>4</sup> some important elements are in it in terms of maintaining dialogue as a central feature of contemporary Catholic faith identity and of keeping dialogue free of explicit efforts

at proselytizing. Because the document was very much a compromise intended to incorporate the concerns of both Vatican offices, however, serious ambiguities remain within it. For Dupuis, as well as for John Borelli of Georgetown University who held the interreligious portfolio at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops for many years, *Dialogue and Proclamation* hardly resolves the continuing tension between dialogue and mission. Dupuis even observes that perhaps it is a tension that can never be fully resolved.

*Dialogue and Proclamation* at least created an in-depth discussion which many hoped would be followed up with a further constructive probing of the issue. Unfortunately, the hoped-for follow-up has never materialized with a few exceptions. Cardinal Walter Kasper, in his capacity as President of the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews (a section of the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity), has argued against any missionizing efforts aimed at Jews on the grounds that they remain in the covenant and have authentic revelation from the Christian theological perspective.<sup>5</sup> Pope Benedict XVI's second book on Christology appears, furthermore, to move along the same lines.<sup>6</sup> These statements, however, are restricted to Catholic-Jewish relations that have occupied a *sui generis* status from the Catholic perspective.

The third important document is *Dominus Iesus* released by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 2000 by then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger.<sup>7</sup> The statement takes a highly intellectual approach to the issue of the Catholic Church's perception of all other faith communities, Christian and non-Christian. Its appearance caused considerable controversy among these faith communities, and there was a concerted effort by Cardinal William Keeler, then head of the American Bishops' outreach to Jews, as well as by Cardinal Edward Idris Cassidy and Archbishop Walter Kasper of the Holy See's Commission on Religious Relations with the Jews to separate this document from the ongoing Catholic-Jewish dialogue. It is vital for seminarians to understand WHY *Dominus Iesus* produced the reaction it did among non-Catholics. Even if the reaction may have been overstated at times, authentic dialogue necessitates an understanding on the part of Catholics concerning how our dialogue partners think. Clearly a problem was the overarching tone of the statement. It lacked any personal dimension in its perspective on interfaith and interreligious dialogue. Yet dialogue, while it must be pursued on a theological plane for genuine authenticity, is first and foremost a personal encounter. Subtract

the personal element, and the dialogue is in trouble. Fr. Hanspeter Heinz, a German priest/theologian from Augsburg who has been a central figure in the Committee of Christians and Jews in Germany, has strongly emphasized the importance of personal encounter in the dialogue.<sup>8</sup>

The ecumenical and interreligious dialogue should not be presented to seminarians in a way that avoids the various controversies that have developed over several statements and actions by Catholic leadership. Seminarians need to be able to sift through such controversies to see what might be valid criticisms on the part of dialogue partners and what positive dimensions can be seen in controversial documents such as *Dominus Iesus*. The noted scholar on interreligious studies, Daniel Madigan, SJ, of Georgetown University, has provided an excellent analysis of *Dominus Iesus*, one that can serve as a framework for discussion of ecumenical and interreligious controversies in a seminary course.<sup>9</sup>

Another example of interreligious controversy has been the Hindu-Catholic relationship. It surfaced in a strong way at the 2000 Interreligious Millennium Peace Summit at the United Nations. A Hindu speaker in one of the sessions strongly critiqued Pope John Paul II and other Catholic leaders for mounting evangelistic efforts in various parts of Asia. Cardinal Francis Arinze, then President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, was in the room. He stood up and offered a strong rebuke to the speaker, arguing that missionary activity is protected under the notion of religious liberty. This exchange led to immediate tensions between Catholic leaders and the Hindu leaders in attendance. Thanks to a dedicated effort by other interreligious leaders at the summit, Cardinal Arinze and the Hindu leader began a process of working through the tensions, an effort that eventually culminated in a constructive document on the issue signed by leaders from both communities in India. This is a fine example of how interreligious controversy can be transformed into a productive encounter. Seminarians need to be prepared to deal with such controversy in a constructive way.

An interreligious educational program in a seminary should also introduce future pastoral leaders to the new understanding of the origins of Christianity and its continued relationship with Judaism for several centuries after Jesus as well as Jesus' profound positive engagement with Jewish perspectives of his day. While such knowledge is crucial for the Catholic-Jewish dialogue, it is also important for all the dialogues in which Catholicism is involved because it involves the Church's basic

self-perception. I have argued that because the Catholic-Jewish dialogue stands so close to basic Christian identity it affects not merely our attitude towards Jews but in fact our attitudes towards interreligious relations generally. If we can alter our sense of the Church's relationship with the Jewish People, which had a major impact on how we expressed Christology for centuries, then the door opens for a basic rethinking of our relationship with other faith communities even though, as Pope John Paul II often emphasized, the Catholic-Jewish relationship is indeed *sui generis*.

Over the last decade or so, biblical and historical research, some it associated with what has been termed "The Parting of the Ways" research, has shown us how much Jesus himself and the "followers of the Way" remained integrated within the Jewish community of their time and how gradual and protracted eventual separation really was.

Two of the scholars who first directed our attention to a significantly new understanding of Jesus' involvement with the Judaism of his day and the gradual separation of church and synagogue over the first several centuries were Robin Scroggs and the late Anthony Saldarini of Boston College.<sup>10</sup> Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, who wrote and spoke extensively on Christian-Jewish relations, picked up on this research in several of his essays.<sup>11</sup> Cardinal Carlo Martini, S. J., a biblical scholar in his own right as well as the author of the 1985 Vatican *Notes* commemorating the twentieth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, also contributed to this re-rooting of Jesus and early Christians within the Jewish tradition.<sup>12</sup> A new effort from the Jewish side, an annotated edition of the New Testament, adds further to this process.<sup>13</sup>

In the mid-1980s, Scroggs published his distillation of where the new research on early Christian-Jewish relations was moving. He summarized developments under four headings:

- The movement begun by Jesus and continued after his death in Palestine can best be described as a reform movement with Judaism. There is little extant evidence during this period that Christians had an identity totally separate from Jews;
- The Pauline missionary movement, as Paul understood it, was a Jewish mission that focused on the Gentiles as the proper object of God's call to his people;
- Prior to the end of the Jewish war with the Romans that ended in 70 C.E., there was no such reality as Christianity. Followers of Jesus

did not have a self-understanding of themselves as a religion over against Judaism. A distinctive Christian identity only began to emerge after the Jewish-Roman war; and

- The later sections of the New Testament all show some signs of a movement toward separation, but they also generally retain some contact with their Jewish matrix.

Anthony Saldarini added to the emerging picture painted by Scroggs. In various essays, he underlined the continuing presence of the “followers of the Way,” as Christians were originally described within the wide tent that Judaism represented at the time. Saldarini especially underscored the ongoing nexus between Christian communities and their Jewish neighbors in Eastern Christianity whose theological outlook is often ignored in presentations about the early Church within Western Christian theology.

The growing number of biblical scholars who have become engaged in this “Parting of the Ways” discussion all stress the great difficulty in locating Jesus and his mission with precision within an ever-changing Jewish context in the first several centuries. Some speak of “Judaisms” and “Christianities” in this period, almost all involving some mixture of continued Jewish practice with new insights drawn from the ministry and preaching of Jesus. For scholars such as Paula Fredriksen, even speaking of the “parting of the ways” is unhelpful because it implies two solid blocks of believers.<sup>14</sup> The various groups in fact were entangled for at least a couple of centuries. As Daniel Boyarin has rightly insisted, then, we cannot speak of Judaism as the “mother” or the “elder brother” of Christianity.<sup>15</sup> What eventually became known as Judaism and Christianity resulted rather from a complicated “co-emergence” over an extended period of time during which various views of Jesus became predominantly associated with one or two focal points.

Many factors contributed to this eventual differentiation, including Roman retaliation against “the Jews” for the late first century revolt against the occupation of Palestine and the development of a strong “against the Jews” (*adversus Judaeos*) teaching during the patristic era. The “conversion” of Emperor Constantine also proved decisive for the eventual split into two very distinctive religious communities.

The understanding of the slow forging of a distinctive Christian identity is vital for understanding that identity today, not merely with respect to relations between the Church and the Jewish People, but for in-

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terreligious dialogue in general. Judaism is the “other” religious tradition against which Christianity has historically defined its self-understanding. If that identity has been modified relative to Judaism, as indicated by *Nostra Aetate*, then the door is opened for some adjustments relative to other religious traditions beyond Judaism, especially Islam which claims some linkage to both Christianity and Judaism. While no exact parallel exists today with the process of the first two centuries, certainly the teachings of Vatican II on ecumenism and interreligious relations have led the Church to a major reconsideration that is unprecedented in the history of its self-identity in terms of relations with other faith communities.

Future priests in the Church, even in the United States, will find themselves ministering in an interreligious context. The insular Catholic ghetto is no longer the primary reality. If priests are to become genuine leaders in local communities, therefore, they need to be comfortable with relating to people from diverse faith communities and be able to integrate such pastoral collaboration within their sense of Catholic identity.

The final aspect I would like to discuss briefly is the social justice aspect of interreligious collaboration. This is once more assuming special prominence in several areas such as ecological sustainability, human rights and world peace. Such collaboration was especially emphasized at the third Assisi meeting in late October 2011 by both Pope Benedict XVI and representatives of the other religious traditions who spoke at the gathering. Future priests will need to realize that if the Catholic Church is to become a major player in global efforts at justice, as it needs to do in light of Vatican II’s *Gaudium et Spes* and the recent papal encyclicals, it will

have to join hands with people from a variety of faith traditions. Actually, this would in a sense be returning us to the period of the thirties and forties when the late Msgr. John A. Ryan, the first director of the National Catholic Welfare conference, forged a prominent interreligious coalition to support the fundamental economic changes then underway as part of the New Deal, changes which greatly benefited the economic status of American Catholics.

Interreligious education presents a new challenge for the seminary curriculum, but it is one to which Catholic theological schools must respond in a prominent way. Catholic Church leaders have made enhanced interreligious relations a prominent part of Catholic identity and ministry. It is the responsibility of the Catholic seminar curriculum to make teaching in this area a central priority.



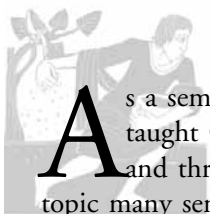
**Rev. John Pawlikowski, OSM, Ph.D.**, a Servite priest, is Professor of Social Ethics and Director of the Catholic-Jewish Studies Program at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. He served for many years on the U.S. Catholic Bishops Advisory Committee on Catholic-Jewish Relations and currently is a member of the Faiths in the World Committee of Diocesan Ecumenical and Interreligious Officers.

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# Teaching about Death: Forming Students in the Complete Culture of Life

Cynthia Toolin, Ph.D.



As a seminary professor of fifteen years, I have taught Catholic Social Teaching on campus and through distance learning many times. The topic many seminarians and lay students seem to enjoy exploring most is the right to life. As Catholics, we embrace the right to life, but it is the violation of that right that we most often speak about, particularly in terms of abortion. I believe that we need to make our students aware that there are many violations of the right to life in addition to that of the threats to the unborn. To this end, I engage my students on the cultural and societal pressures that influence our perceptions of life and death, and I begin by addressing death. Only in forming students with a comprehensive understanding of what it actually means to be pro-life can we hold out for them the possibility of their being able to apply themselves meaningfully in the various pastoral situations they will encounter in their ministries.

## Our Culture

Culture influences how each of us answers the questions common to all humans: Is there a purpose to life? Where do we come from? What happens to us after death? Why do we suffer? While all generations, regardless of when and where they live, ask these questions, how they phrase them, and which questions they emphasize, varies.

This has never been more apparent than in our time and our place – the twenty-first century Western world that has cultivated a culture of death. We ask this culture what it means to be human and find that its answers range from being higher primates who have evolved beyond the level of chimpanzees and gorillas to our being gods with a divine spark inside of us. We rarely offer the correct answer, beings created in the im-

**Many argue the optimal time to die is when life is no longer enjoyable or is burdensome, either to ourselves or to those responsible for our care.**

age and likeness of God with intellect, will and the call to community. Society seldom offers the answer that we are persons, composed of spirit and matter, distinct from all other visible creation, because society sees our existence as sub-personal and material only.

We ask Western culture about death, specifically how and when a person should die. Answers usually focus on the dying person's being in control of the dying process, made comfortable and ready for death. Many argue the optimal time to die is when life is no longer enjoyable or is burdensome, either to ourselves or to those responsible for our care. We seldom offer the correct answer, which is that the optimal time to die is when God calls us to the end of our natural lives and we have already prepared ourselves to face God's judgment and rely on His mercy. After a person dies, we often say "the person is with God now, happy and out of pain." For those who are in heaven this is true, but devout Catholics know there is an erroneous assumption in these statements, namely that everyone goes to heaven. We know not everyone receives the Beatific Vision at the end of life, but we do pray that all souls go to

heaven, especially those who rely most on God's mercy.

### The Ways of Dying

Humans die in only a handful of ways: 1) by accident, injury, or murder; 2) by disease or age; or 3) by suicide or euthanasia. In this culture we dread death by accident, injury or murder, often saying the person died too young, too suddenly or too unexpectedly. We make ourselves feel better by adding the comments, "at least it was quick" or "at least it is over now." When we say the words too young, too suddenly or too unexpectedly, we are usually thinking of our own loss. We could have enjoyed the person for many more years, perhaps decades, and we did not have time to prepare for this loss. We did not realize this person was going to die now. We do not like to think about the fact that death comes not only to the elderly: death comes, like a thief in the night, to people of all ages. When I hear a person died too young, too suddenly or too unexpectedly, I pray the person was prepared for death. We add, "at least it was quick" or "at least it is over now." These are telling statements. In our culture, we do not see any value to suffering, physically or psychologically. We want life over quickly; or, more accurately, not life, but dying. We want a quick and painless death. We want to go from being alive to being dead, just as quickly as we go from being in light to being in darkness when we turn the light switch off in a room. As devout Catholics, we know there are erroneous assumptions in these statements: that suffering only occurs in this world and that there is no value in suffering.

Augustine pointed out the first error in his *Exposition on Psalm 34*,<sup>1</sup> speaking on the death of sinners. Worse torments exist in the afterlife than those that occur here. Second, most people do not know, nor if they do know, understand, the concept of redemptive suffering. We do not want to endure suffering, and for most, joining our sufferings to those of Christ never crosses our minds. Nor do we want the time to prepare to meet God.

U.S. culture dreads death by disease or old age. Every morning when my dying mother woke up, a disease-ridden, sick, old woman, she would say, with disappointment and disgust in her voice, "I woke up again; I didn't die in the night." We say things like that because in our culture we value youth and health, enjoyment and usefulness. We cannot see the value of a life fraught with misery or weak with age. When we cannot enjoy the same things we enjoyed when we were young and healthy, we feel cheated. When we cannot be self-suffi-

**In our culture, we do not see any value to suffering, physically or psychologically. We want life over quickly; or, more accurately, not life, but dying.**

cient, independent and useful, we feel inadequate, burdensome and useless. Again, in this culture we cannot see the value of suffering, physically or psychologically. This is the same kind of suffering the person who died due to an accident, injury or murder was spared. The devout Catholic knows those who are dying of disease or old age have opportunities the others were denied: to join their suffering to the sufferings of Christ, to participate in redemptive suffering, to pray for the gift of final perseverance, to prepare for death and for meeting God and undergoing His judgment.

Many people in Western culture do not dread death by suicide or euthanasia. We like the idea of exercising control over the time, place and manner of our death. We see the existence and extent of the culture of death more clearly when we look at this phenomenon.

### Euthanasia

William C. Brennan defined the culture of death as "a far-reaching lethal mentality, which espouses and facilitates the implementation of deadly assaults directed against the most vulnerable and defenseless human lives."<sup>2</sup> He added, "Among the most prominent elements fueling the culture of death are ideology, language and technology. Its ideological foundations flow from an elitist, reductionist ethic, which places relative value on human lives."<sup>3</sup> In addition, he wrote, "John Paul II, in *Evangelium Vitae*, described a culture of death as including ...euthanasia, suicide... John Paul II singled out another casualty – the death of conscience itself. Through the manipulation of euphemisms and other verbal distortions, the forces of death have proven extraordinarily successful in numbing the moral sensitivities of many to the horrors actually taking place."<sup>4</sup>

John Paul II said, "in the strict sense [euthanasia] is understood to be an action or omission which of itself and by intention causes death, with the purpose of

eliminating all suffering.”<sup>5</sup> In this culture, everyone is a potential candidate for euthanasia: the elderly, the injured, the diseased, the developmentally challenged. We justify this perspective by arguing the person is suffering (or unhappy, or useless); is ready to go and cannot, would not, want to live like this, and would be better off dead. The combination of this perspective and its justification is a lethal mentality, which has widespread popular support.

In every culture, people are concerned with the dying process:<sup>6</sup> dying well is important, meaning to die with honor and bravery, with resignation. We see this as a virtue. In our culture, stories abound about these occurrences. The war hero, a soldier who sacrificed his life to save others by diving onto a live hand grenade in combat; the firefighter who runs into a burning building to save others and perishes in the attempt; the medical professional, a doctor who tends to those with a contagious and fatal disease, who succumbs to it herself; the ordinary person, a mother, whose gravestone is inscribed with the message, “She showed us how to live and how to die.”

We value dying well. It is still seen as involving honor, bravery and resignation, but we have changed the meaning of the words. Today, dying well is tied to issues of control and power. A hedonistic society, we see no value in suffering. A utilitarian society, we see no value in uselessness. A materialistic society, we see no value in not consuming. If life cannot be enjoyed, or be productive, or allow us to have and consume, we believe we should have the right to die – the right to determine how and when we die.

Honor, bravery, resignation. In other times and places, people accepted death as inevitable. They knew death would eventually overtake them. A person with Stage Four cancer realized the cancer was going to kill him, but he tried to make the best of his remaining time on earth. He would do what he could to prolong his life, be comfortable and fulfill his obligations. We also accept death as inevitable. In our time, a person with Stage Four cancer realizes the cancer will kill him, but only *if he lets it*. He may plan to do something to himself (or have something done), or his caretaker may decide to do something to him, so that he does not have to suffer a long and miserable death. He desires to die on his own terms. In our culture, we want to overtake death rather than let it overtake us. We want to beat death at its own game. We say, “Death, you will not win, because I will kill myself or someone else will do it for me! You will not control the time, place or

manner of how I meet you!”

### Conception to Natural Death

We talk about life from conception to natural death. The phrase has almost become a slogan for the pro-life movement. And although slogans can be catchy, they can also trivialize the truth expressed. Seminarians, as well as other Catholic leaders, should be able to articulate what this phrase means. In my Catholic Social Teachings class, we talk about many basic life issues, as students need to know about death. They need to know the distinction between the dying process (which we try to control in Western culture), the occurrence of death (the result of the dying process) and the state of being dead.<sup>7</sup> In this culture we talk about being dead as if it is an accomplishment, a goal. If we manage the dying process, we will be dead. This is the pro-death perspective! It is an all-encompassing perspective; this is what it means to be caught in the culture of death.

**They need to know the distinction between the dying process (which we try to control in Western culture), the occurrence of death (the result of the dying process) and the state of being dead.**

Most Catholic seminaries and colleges have pro-life activities: praying outside abortion clinics, participating in the March for Life, offering a Holy Hour or a rosary to end abortion, praying for the healing of the women who have undergone abortion. This is all good and necessary. These activities, though, by the narrowness of their focus, reveal that many people do not see the complete nature of the culture of death. This, I believe, is the result of an infiltration of cultural views into the pro-life movement. Students in seminaries, colleges and universities and parishioners in the pews, homes and workplaces bring with them, probably unintentionally, these anti-life cultural beliefs and ways of thinking.<sup>8</sup> We are justifiably concerned about the brutal murder of the unborn, but we are not as concerned about the deliberate demise of the old and the sick, the useless and the bored.

**I teach my students we have to fight for every life. If we stop at fighting for the unborn, we are fighting only one symptom of the culture of death.**

To explain this, I emphasize the relationship between abortion and euthanasia to my students. Yes, the beginning of life is a very dangerous time for humans: abortion, the destruction of frozen embryos and the selection of embryos for elimination from the womb all occur in a routine manner and at a devastating rate. Euthanasia is committed to alleviate another person's suffering, or to alleviate the suffering of those who must witness that suffering. How different is this from abortion? Are not abortion and euthanasia two sides of the same pro-death coin? Parents kill their babies because they may have a disease or deformity, or because they cannot afford to send another child to college or add a bedroom so the child will have his own room. They argue that if the babies were born, they would suffer; they would not lead a happy, fulfilling or useful life. Parents kill their babies because the father or mother wants to achieve self-fulfillment, go back to school, work harder for a promotion at work, or go on vacation. They argue that if the babies were born, they (the parents) would not lead a happy, fulfilling or useful life. The relationship between euthanasia and abortion is a close one; it is based on the reality that if we believe some people are disposable, we believe all people are. Both are symptoms of the culture of death.

I teach my students we have to fight for every life. If we stop at fighting for the unborn, we are fighting only one symptom of the culture of death. By word and example, by testimony and action, we have to fight for an entirely different culture, and we have to form our students in such a way that they grasp the totality of that reality.



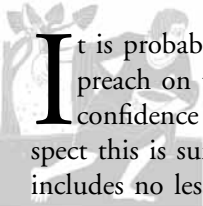
**Dr. Cynthia Toolin**, a Professor of Dogmatic and Moral Theology, is starting her sixteenth year working at Holy Apostles College and Seminary in Cromwell, CT. She has been involved in the academic formation of more than 150 priests and hundreds of religious and lay students, both in the classroom and through distance learning. She has two married daughters and six grandchildren.

#### Endnotes

1. Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm 34*, located at [www.newadvent.org/fathers](http://www.newadvent.org/fathers), accessed 7/27/2010.
2. William C. Brennan, "Culture of Death," *Encyclopedia of Catholic Social, Social Science, and Social Policy*, Vol. 1 Michael L. Coulter et al (eds.) (New York: Scarecrow Press, 2007), 268.
3. Brennan, "Culture of Death," 268.
4. Brennan itemized other aspects of the culture of death that John Paul II identified: murder, genocide, abortion, experimental and commercial exploitation of human beings deemed expendable, slavery, pornography, war, torture, mutilation rituals, arbitrary imprisonment, and numerous other infamies.
5. John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, #65.
6. For an interesting article on dying well, see Anton J. L. Van Hoof, "Ancient euthanasia: 'good death' and the doctor in the graeco-Roman World," *Social Science and Medicine* 58 (2004), p. 975-985.
7. This distinction is explained by Robert Kastenbaum in "The Good Death," *Encyclopedia of Death and Dying* at <http://www.deathreference.com/Gi-Ho/Good-Death-the.html> accessed 7/27/2010.
8. A good example is the circumstances surrounding an abortion. I have had many conversations with people who are anti-abortion until mention is made of the pregnancy of a rape or incest victim. Under those circumstances, many will say "that is different." They are in favor of killing a baby because of the crime of the father and/or the victimhood of the pregnant mother. This is a perspective often heard in the secular world.

# Spiritual Formation and the Study of the Old Testament in Priestly Formation

Gregory Vall, Ph.D.

t is probably safe to say that relatively few priests preach on the Old Testament readings with much confidence or depth of spiritual insight. In one respect this is surprising, since the typical M.Div. program includes no less than three required courses in the Old Testament. In other respects, however, it is not at all surprising. To begin with, the Old Testament is vast, dense, and not infrequently obscure. Simply to become familiar with it is a daunting task.

Furthermore, while modern biblical scholarship has shed a great deal of light on the Old Testament—light which no serious student of the Bible could afford to neglect—its method involves separation and analysis. In order to place the Old Testament within its ancient Near Eastern context, the historical-critical method first separates the Old Testament from the New Testament, the Bible from dogma and tradition, exegesis from systematic theology, and theology from the spiritual life. Then it divides each book of the Old Testament into sources and redactional layers. Many interesting discoveries have been made in this way, but biblical scholarship, at least until recently, has been relatively unconcerned with the task of putting the Bible back together into a meaningful whole. The modern biblical scholar is a bit like the inquisitive teenager who takes apart the engine of his father's car, spreading out the parts on the garage floor in order to examine them. He no doubt learns much in the process but is perhaps not too successful when he tries to reassemble the engine.

When a seminary professor who has been trained in this analytic method attempts to impart the riches of modern biblical scholarship to his or her students, the diligent seminarian may come away from his three courses on the Old Testament with dozens of handouts and three large notebooks crammed with interesting

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items of information, but this does not easily translate into good preaching. Even if the professor is able to convey some sense of the Old Testament as a whole and of its relationship to the New Testament, neither the professor nor the seminarian may know how to integrate all of this biblical knowledge with the other components of academic formation, not to mention with the other three pillars of priestly formation.

If the Old Testament professor is to serve the seminary's mission of priestly formation, he must have several elements of integration already in place in his own life and in his pedagogy. First, he cannot simply be a biblical specialist, who leaves theology to the systematists and moralists. He must understand theology as a whole and be conversant with the Church's dogma and tradition. In particular he must know and appreciate the luminous principles that guided patristic exegesis (at least as these have been distilled in *Dei Verbum*) and must have made a serious attempt to synthesize these principles with the best tools and methods of modern biblical scholarship. This crucial element of integration

was called for by Pius XII in *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (§§ 28-30) and by the future Benedict XVI in his Erasmus Lecture of 1988.

Second, to make a fruitful contribution to priestly formation, the professor of Sacred Scripture must be a person of prayer who has deeply integrated the study of Scripture into his or her own spiritual life, and vice versa. John Paul II placed great emphasis on this point in his 1993 address to the Pontifical Biblical Commission.

Indeed, to arrive at a completely valid interpretation of words inspired by the Holy Spirit, one must first be guided by the Holy Spirit, and it is necessary to pray for that, to pray much, to ask in prayer for the interior light of the Spirit and docilely accept that light, to ask for the love that alone enables one to understand the language of God, who “is love.” While engaged in the very work of interpretation, one must remain in the presence of God as much as possible (§ 9).

Seminarians need to see in their Scripture professor a living model of the integration of spiritual formation and biblical scholarship.

Third, the Scripture professor’s very pedagogy must be designed to lead the seminarian into the spiritual depths of the Old Testament. In some respects this is the most difficult element of integration to achieve. It is unrealistic to think that the seminarian can gain a comprehensive knowledge of the Old Testament, even in three or four semesters. In designing courses, therefore, the professor must think long and hard about which elements of biblical scholarship are truly pertinent to priestly formation, and which are not. He must resist the temptation to try to fashion the seminarians into biblical scholars after his or her own image. That is not their vocation. Such an attempt will result in frustration for all parties involved and will not serve the people of God.

In this regard, it is helpful to recognize that Israel’s history, as recounted in the Old Testament, amounts to what might well be described as a centuries-long process of spiritual and theological “formation.” The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains that “the books of the Old Testament bear witness to the whole divine pedagogy of saving love,” by which “God communicates himself to man gradually” and “prepares him to welcome by stages the supernatural revelation that is to culminate in the person and mission of the incarnate

**Seminarians need to see in their Scripture professor a living model of the integration of spiritual formation and biblical scholarship.**

Word, Jesus Christ” (§§ 122 and 53). A superficial reading of the Old Testament may suggest that the LORD’s labors over the children of Israel were ultimately in vain, since time and again they proved to be “a stiff-necked people.” But a more spiritually sensitive reading discloses a deep undercurrent running through the entirety of the Old Testament. At each stage in Israel’s history one finds the “faithful remnant,” the *anawim* or “poor of Yahweh,” who cooperate with the graces of repentance, purification and renewal. Following this undercurrent through the major sections of the Old Testament not only gives focus and unity to the Old Testament portion of the seminary curriculum; it also brings to the surface important dimensions of the organic unity between Old Testament and New Testament. The faithful remnant of Israel emerges finally as “the people prepared” for the Lord’s coming in the fullness of time (Luke 1:17).

Old Testament courses that draw the seminarian into the dynamics of ancient Israel’s spiritual formation will facilitate the integration of the pillars of priestly formation around their proper “center,” which is spiritual formation (*PPF* § 106). Such an approach to the study of the Old Testament correlates with the way the Old Testament reading and the Responsorial Psalm function within the Sunday liturgy. In the liturgy of the Word we relive, as it were, salvation history: encountering the LORD anew with our ancient Israelite brothers and sisters, praying in anticipation of Christ’s advent in the responsorial psalm, hearing the apostolic proclamation in the epistle, and meeting the Lord Jesus himself in the Gospel.

Among “those characteristics and practices that foster” the growth of priestly spirituality, the *PPF* includes the reading of Scripture, and specifically “the quiet and personal assimilation of that holy Word in *lectio divina*.” The “seminarian ought to develop the habit of daily reflection on the Sacred Scriptures” (§ 110). Thought-

fully prepared and well-delivered Scripture courses can contribute to the inculcation of this habit. The professor must not be content merely to transmit to the student the findings of his or her own career of study. The professor must rather teach the seminarian to read the Bible for himself. To use a somewhat hackneyed but apt image: instead of giving the student a basket of fish, the professor must teach the student to fish for himself. If the seminarian learns during the years of formation to make Scripture his daily spiritual nourishment, he will be a priest whose passionate lifelong study of Scripture wells up like a living spring for the refreshment of those to whom he ministers.

Finally, it is incumbent upon the Old Testament professor, and of crucial importance, to present the Church's traditional doctrine of the "four senses" of Scripture (CCC §§ 115-18) in an authentic manner. Too often, especially in recent publications of a quasi-scholarly nature, an inadequate understanding of this exegetical tradition is combined with an excessive enthusiasm for "typology." In some cases, what passes for biblical interpretation is in fact little more than a superficial game of connect-the-dots. A well informed understanding of the four senses, on the other hand, will respect the principle that the spiritual sense must be firmly founded upon the literal sense. When this principle is joined to an approach that focuses on the LORD's historical "formation" of Israel in the Old Testament, the spiritual

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reading of Scripture will be grounded in a proper appreciation for the true organic connection between the two testaments and will thus bear abundant fruit.



**Gregory Vall, Ph.D.**, is associate professor of theology at Ave Maria University in Ave Maria, Florida. He previously taught at Franciscan University of Steubenville and Notre Dame Seminary in New Orleans. His areas of expertise are the Old Testament and the letters of Ignatius of Antioch.



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# Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity

Dietrich Werner, et al. editors

Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2010

Reviewed by Bro. Jeffrey Gros, FSC

One of the most challenging tasks facing the seminary in this era of global Christianity and the ecumenical movement involves providing resources to enable students to be in touch with the variety of cultures, Christian histories and strains of Christianity to which the minister must relate in his career of service. The ecumenical and multiethnic environment is a present fact of daily life not only in the overseas missions but also in the large urban dioceses of the United States. Because Catholic ecumenical and universal commitments make sensitivity to the diversity of Christian life worldwide an integral part of ministerial spirituality, the *Handbook* will make a significant contribution to theological formation.

The *Handbook* was occasioned by the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1910 Edinburg Conference on World Mission, which is credited with initiating the modern ecumenical movement. It includes three parts with eighty entries grouped into thirty-five sections. It concludes with an extensive list of resources and useful websites. A very helpful set of introductions, including one by Father Robert Schreiter, outline how far the churches have come in their global expanse, in ecumenical collaboration and in inculturation since 1910 when Catholics were barely part of ecumenical dialogue.

Part one brings together essays on a variety of theological issues and themes in education: post-colonial development, mission, gender, race, power, immigration, ecumenism, contextuality, accreditation, communications, interreligious dialogue, spiritual formation, curriculum, pedagogical method, funding partnerships, disabilities and library resources. This part is introduced by three insightful essays on the move from a Western-centered Christianity to a Global Christianity, on the enumeration of issues for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and on the Catholic development of the Catholic Church into a world Church.

The second part covers the various geographical regions, with important sections on various areas in Africa, Asia and Europe. Although there are several ecumenical selections that synthesize Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant developments, the historical and contemporary surveys are particularly strong on Protestant history and practice. In fact, the lack of a Catholic entry among the three for Latin America is particularly glaring.

The final part surveys the history and current programs of the various churches: Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed, Methodist and Baptist. Roman Catholic developments in theological education are summarized in one helpful essay. Four essays are devoted to evangelical theological education, organized by regions. Three are devoted to Pentecostal education in Latin America, Africa and Asia, neglecting the US and Europe, a lacuna the editors note in their introduction.

The magnitude and diversity of Catholic work in theological education and the important debates about the Eurocentric character of some Roman initiatives will mean that this *Handbook* will need to be supplemented by Catholic libraries and courses, but the resources for this are ample. This initiative, however, does begin to bring together significant resources that will be important references for all the churches as they work to broaden the global perspective and deepen the ecumenical understanding of ministry students to deal with a dynamic Christian world.



**Brother Jeffrey Gros, FSC**, has served Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs in the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, as Director of the Faith and Order Commission of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, and as Distinguished Professor of Historical and Ecumenical Theology at Memphis Theological Seminary. He is currently president of the Society for Pentecostal

Studies and Academic Dean of the Institute for Catholic Ecumenical Leadership at Lewis University, Romeoville, Illinois, and Catholic Scholar in residence.



## THE CORE ELEMENTS OF PRIESTLY FORMATION PROGRAMS

In recognition of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Seminary Journal*, the Seminary Department has introduced a new publication series: *The Core Elements of Priestly Formation Programs*. These collections of articles celebrate the “best practices” and wisdom and insight of a wide variety of seminary professionals and church leaders. With only a few exceptions the articles were selected from the archives of *Seminary Journal* (1995-2005). Articles included from other sources are printed with permission.

The Core Elements series will be an ongoing publishing effort of the Seminary Department. The framework for the first three volumes reflects the four pillars as identified in the Bishops’ Program of Priestly Formation: *Intellectual, Spiritual, Human* and *Pastoral*. The fourth addresses the topic of “addictions” and their implications for ministry formation.

These four volumes are produced as an in-service resource for faculty and staff development and personal study and as a potential source book of readings for those in the formation program. New collections of readings will be added annually.

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