

# SEMINARY JOURNAL

VOLUME FIFTEEN

NUMBER THREE

WINTER 2009

SPECIAL THEME: Psychological Assessment – Part I

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*Msgr. Jeremiah McCarthy*

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An Overview of the Alma Conference  
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Conversing at the Core: Spiritual Direction and the Formation of  
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Canonical Description and History of the Use of the Terms "Internal  
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## BOOK REVIEW

*Resting on the Heart of Christ: The Vocation and Spirituality of the Seminary  
Theologian* by Deacon James Keating, Ph.D.  
Reviewed by Gregory J. Schlesselmann



# SEMINARY JOURNAL

VOLUME 15

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*Note: Due to leadership changes in the Seminary Department, this volume was actually published in June 2011.*

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.

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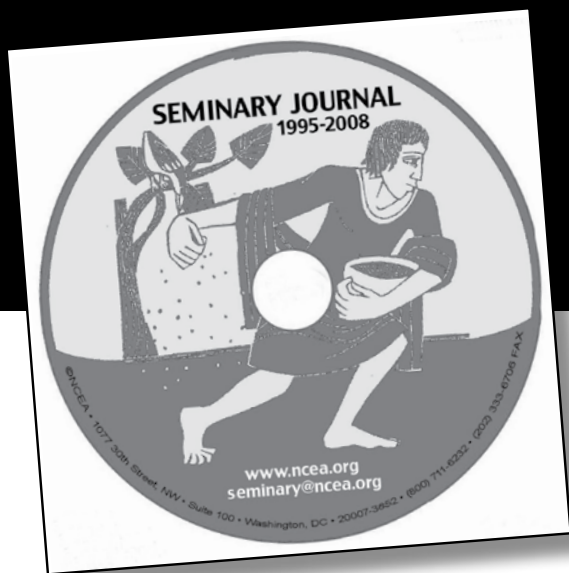
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# From the Desk of the Executive Director

**A**s a moral theologian, I am particularly attracted to the notion of discernment as a spiritual discipline for responding to the ethical challenges and quandaries we face as human beings. Discernment is an educated sensibility, essential to the notion of conscience, which grasps not only the intellectual contours of the moral notions or principles that guide action, but also the affective and emotional aspects that contextualize our judgments. Experts in the Christian moral and spiritual tradition ranging from St. Thomas Aquinas to theologian Stanley Hauerwas to philosopher Edmund Pincoffs have wisely observed that it is not enough to ask, “what must I do?” in the face of a moral crisis requiring judgment, but also, and, perhaps more importantly, “what kind of person do I become by the choices that I make?”

These thoughts come to mind as I reflect on the excellent articles that comprise this Winter 2009 issue of the journal, the first of a two-part series with the special theme of Psychological Assessment. In this issue, there are a number of articles that emerged from a symposium offered by the Sisters of Mercy at their facility in Alma, Michigan. The contribution of psychology to our self-understanding is valuable because it supports healthy, spiritually strong priests. In large measure, careful psychological assessment of candidates for priestly ministry complements the discerning intelligence that is necessary, not only for acting morally, but also for living a balanced, holy life. Karl Barth registers a magnificent encomium to all things Catholic when he states that “the great Catholic word is *and*.” The Catholic sensibility holds together in dynamic tension theological and spiritual realities such as nature and grace, faith and reason, scripture and tradition. The list can be extended, of course, but an essential optic of these articles is the organic, integral connection between psychological assessment and spiritual well-being, the cultivation, if you will, of the discerning, Christ-like heart of a good priest.

Bishop Earl Boyea of Lansing, Michigan, provides a brief overview of each presentation at the conference, including the next four articles that are published here.

Note that Sister Marysia Weber gave two talks at the Alma Conference; the first talk, “Significant Markers of Human Maturation Applied to the Selection and Formation of Seminarians,” was published in the Spring 2009 *Seminary Journal*. Bishop Boyea also posed some questions for the panelists who commented on the presentations. These reflections provide helpful, additional context for appreciating the contributions of the Alma Conference.

Msgr. Thomas Caserta’s article, “Conversing at the Core: Spiritual Direction and the Formation of Conscience” is a fine example of the conjunctive Catholic spirit so aptly celebrated by Karl Barth. This presentation highlights the essential role of spiritual direction in cultivating the interior stillness and receptivity to truth that is constitutive of a well-formed conscience. Seminary educators will find here an important resource for the linkage between human and spiritual formation.

Sister Joseph Marie Ruessmann, R.S.M., and Sister Mary Pierre Jean Wilson, R.S.M., trace the historical background of the terms “internal” and “external” forum. Having a clear understanding of the meaning and distinctions between these terms is critically important for establishing policies that protect the privacy of the individual and balance the public good of the church. I think that our readers will find this article particularly valuable for conversations with psychologists, spiritual directors, and seminary evaluation committees.

Sister Marysia Weber R.S.M., offers a set of reflections on the roles of psychology and psychiatry in the discernment of a priestly vocation. These reflections should be beneficial to vocation directors and seminary staff members.

Mercy Sister Mary Kathleen Ronan’s article, “Grace and Priestly Identity” is an insightful reflection on the theological notion of grace and its importance for the formation of seminarians. She notes that priestly identity is anchored in ecclesial relationships and that a proper understanding of the unique character of priesthood requires a commensurate appreciation of the unique dignity of the lay faithful. The hallmarks of pas-

toral charity provide criteria for assessing the capability of a good seminarian to assume the role of an ordained presbyter.

Doctor Len Sperry offers a comprehensive model for assessment of the capacities and competencies expected by the four pillars of the *Program for Priestly Formation*. He provides a rich set of insights that should be carefully reviewed.

Father Mel Blanchette, S.S., who has recently completed a distinguished term of service as rector of Theological College, Washington, DC, and who is a professional, licensed psychologist, delivered an address at the National Conference of Diocesan Vocation Directors in 2009 on the topic of priestly formation and the psychological sciences. We have also appended his guidelines for vocation directors that he developed to assist vocation directors with the discernment and screening process of prospective candidates for the priesthood. Father Mel brings to these reflections a lifetime of seminary experience and clinical background.

I am pleased that Msgr. Stephen Rosetti, now serving as clinical associate professor at the Catholic University of America, has chosen the journal to present his research on the psychological health of today's priests. Msgr. Rosetti served with distinction as director of St. Luke's Institute in Silver Spring, Maryland, prior to taking up his new post at CUA. Amidst the shadows and sorrows of the clergy abuse crisis in the country, it is reassuring to have solid research that supports the

happiness and strong morale of our good priests. This valuable information establishes a constructive context for addressing the needs and concerns of priests as well as seminarians in formation programs.

Deacon James Keating's article, "Christ is the Sure Foundation: Human Formation Completed in and by Spiritual Formation," integrates the perspectives of these two disciplines, and provides an appraisal of the dynamic interrelationships within priestly formation.

Deacon Keating's book, "Resting on the Heart of Jesus: The Vocation and Spirituality of the Seminary Theologian," is ably reviewed by Msgr. Gregory Schlesselman and will be, I think, well-received by seminary faculty members. It is a book that could be a vehicle for a good faculty development seminar.

It is my hope that you will find nourishment as well as encouragement for the work of priestly formation. As always, may I conclude with an invitation for you to consider submitting an article to *Seminary Journal*. I am grateful for colleagues who have agreed to serve as an Editorial Advisory Committee and I look forward to working with them to make sure that the journal provides an effective forum for conversation about important issues in priestly formation.



Msgr. Jeremiah J. McCarthy  
Editor



## Calendar of Events • NCEA Seminary Department

### 2011

- ◆ **May 31 - June 3**  
**National Association of College Seminaries**  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- ◆ **June 7-14**  
**10<sup>th</sup> Institute for the Preparation of Seminary Formation Staff & Advisors**  
St. Patrick's Seminary, Menlo Park, California
- ◆ **August 29-31**  
**J.S. Paluch Vocation Seminar**  
Chicago, Illinois
- ◆ **September 19-23**  
**NCDVD Convention**  
Marriott Renaissance Center, Detroit, Michigan
- ◆ **September 29 - October 1**  
**MATS**  
Chicago, Illinois

### 2012

- ◆ **April 11-13**  
**NCEA Convention & Expo**  
Boston, Massachusetts
- ◆ **June 10-13**  
**A Necessary Conversation: A Gathering of Experts, Part II.** Cultural Competency— A focused conference for vocation directors, formation directors and psychologists
- ◆ **June 14-15**  
**A Necessary Conversation: A Gathering of Experts, Part I.** Psychological Assessment Conference — An Introduction for vocation directors, formation directors and psychologists

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A post conference workshop will be offered for those not able to attend in 2010. Save the dates June 13-15, 2012 for *A Necessary Conversation: A Gathering of Experts, Part I*. Vocation Directors, Formation Directors and Assessing & Treating Psychologists are strongly encouraged to attend.

Our 2012 conference will again be co-hosted by Saint Charles Borromeo Seminary and Saint John Vianney Center. We hope you will join us!

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For details please contact Reverend Gerard J. McGlone, S.J., Ph.D. at [gmcglone@sjvcenter.org](mailto:gmcglone@sjvcenter.org)

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# An Overview of the Alma Conference

**Bishop Earl Boyea**



**B**ishop Robert Carlson, bishop of Saginaw, and Mother Mary Quentin Sheridan, R.S.M., superior general of the Alma Mercy Sisters, both our hosts, welcomed the participants to this convocation in the diocese of Saginaw. The bishop spoke of the duty of his brother bishops to be both father and brother to his priests, especially by their attentiveness to the spiritual well-being of himself and his priests. He should monitor their participation in the annual retreat and in the regular use of the sacrament of penance. He should offer several times a year days of prayer so that his contact with his priests is not just social. In the face of the evils of our day, relativism and a lack of respect for authority, he should urge his priests to be as generous as the church, not less. And he should urge himself and his priests to imitate Philippians 4:8 (Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things). Mother Quentin spoke of the need to face the truth in our lives and to promote open discussion, especially since truth-telling is difficult in our culture, where deceit is a way of life. We all need to disclose honestly, especially that which is needed for and precluded by the priesthood. All need a renewed desire for chastity, especially with a renewal of our theology of the body and of the mystical body. The central figure in trying to build this kind of communion is the bishop.

Sr. Marysia Weber, R.S.M., D.O., psychiatrist, gave two presentations. The first was to outline markers for human maturation in the handling of life tasks such as management of dependency, control and authority, productivity, sense of self, intimacy and generativity. Her listing of signals of maturation and signals of immaturity in each of these tasks were reviewed and applied to

**We all need to disclose honestly, especially that which is needed for and precluded by the priesthood.**

two case studies. These could be helpful in articulating areas of evaluation of seminarians or even applicants to the seminary. Her second presentation discussed five personality disorders found in some problem priests. First, she distinguished these from mental illness which is usually genetic or chemical and is somewhat treatable by medication. Personality disorders are instead psychosocial and while not “curable” can be addressed in terms of behavioral change. She noted a number of traits for each of these disorders: narcissistic personality disorder; histrionic personality disorder; anti-social personality disorder (which she said was the most problematic for a priest as it challenges the very setting of his ministry, the church); obsessive/compulsive personality disorder (not to be confused with obsessive/compulsive disorder which has to do with repeated behaviors); and passive/aggressive personality disorder.

Dr. Malcolm Spica, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist and neuropsychologist, spoke on the elements of a psychological assessment, particularly for problem priests. After reviewing the types of assessment that can be made, he spoke for the use, in these cases, not of projective tests (which he finds too dependent on the skills of the tester, often exaggerated) but rather of psychometric tests (measurable and comparative) which he has found even more revealing than clinical interviews. He

warned that testing cannot predict the future nor determine what exactly happened in a past event, but it can do a risk assessment of potential behavior (not probable behavior). He also reviewed the kind of assessor that a bishop should employ, one who is a clinical psychologist not a counselor, and preferably one who is a forensic psychologist. He then suggested the parameters and questions to pose to the assessor to guide his report back to the bishop after the assessment is completed.

A panel composed of Sr. Mary Raphael Paradis, R.S.M., a psychiatric nurse practitioner, Sr. Jane Firestone, R.S.M., M.D., a spiritual mentor, and Fr. Ignatius Cetoute, L.L.P.C., director of the house for resident priests and seminarians, described the holistic program run by the Mercy Sisters for priests and seminarians in residential therapy. The components of this program, called the therapeutic milieu program, are containment (rule of life with strict limits or boundaries); support (system of respect to build self-esteem); structure (deepen activities that enhance and rid oneself of activities which debase oneself); and validation (affirmation of priestly life).

Sr. Marysia then gave a presentation on the indicators of sexual deviancy after indicating that no test indicates conclusively who has engaged or will engage in sexually deviant behavior. Basically, she called for a thorough sexual history, conducted by a professional assessor and a slightly lesser history elicited by the rector or some formation person so as to engage the seminarian in true growth. Her keynote was how often she has heard from clients that they were never asked such and such before. One of the key windows she focused on was masturbation. When I asked how the Alma sisters reconciled what they were asking for with some in the church who decry these kinds of interviews as manifestations of conscience, she replied that this is the only way for us to help these candidates heal their human nature so that grace can build on it. She viewed this kind of an interview as a natural, not a supernatural activity. Real growth can only come through honesty and openness. Another sister also noted that this is only a problem when it is coerced, which usually happens when information is gained incorrectly in a canonical penal process. Seminarians can always refuse to participate and leave the seminary. This presentation contained a great deal of detail in the kinds of questions to ask.

Sr. Mary Judith O'Brien, R.S.M., J.C.D., J.D., then spoke of the issues of confidentiality and privacy, the latter having to do with a right of the person and the former with how information is handled. She spoke

**Real growth can only  
come through honesty and  
openness.**

about all this in three contexts, the relationship between the bishop and his priest, the relationships among the bishop's team which handles any intervention, and the relationship between the bishop and the health care provider. In all these she emphasized the need for truth-telling, having complete information, and to preserve the good name of the priest. She also emphasized how the real canonical concern is how any particular charge of bad behavior has affected the ministry of the priest, especially his sacramental ministry.

The final presentation was given by Sr. Marysia on pornography on the internet: both viewing material and engaging in cyber-sex. She presented remarkable statistics of pornographic usage of the internet in 2006. Next she presented a recent recognition by psychiatrists that internet pornographic usage is addictive in the same way that cocaine is, by creating a chemical response in the brain which develops a tolerance for the usage, withdrawal symptoms when it is reduced or ceased, affective disturbances, and reductions in the quantity and quality of relationships. This internet addiction disorder is quite serious and easily acquired. She then offered some holistic suggestions to fight this.

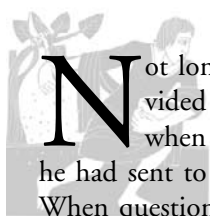
Perhaps one thing that could have helped the whole conference would have been a clearer focus of whether we were dealing with admissions/formation issues or problem management issues, for not all that was said applies to both.



**Bishop Earl Boyea, S.T.L., Ph.D.**, served as professor and academic dean at Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit and as rector/president at the Pontifical College Josephinum in Columbus, Ohio. He is bishop of Lansing, Michigan.

# Conversing at the Core: Spiritual Direction and the Formation of Conscience

Msgr. Thomas Caserta



Not long ago a bishop from the Midwest provided a perfect introduction to these reflections when he told a story of a young seminarian he had sent to a popular spiritual formation program. When questioned about the insights he gained from the program, the young man replied, “God the Father loves me.” The response might sound rudimentary, but for that seminarian the interior life had begun. It would be a mistake to think that initially the candidates who come to us are aware of exactly what the interior life is. In many instances, our post-modern and increasingly secular culture has done its work far too well. Self-preoccupation has been substituted for self-knowledge, the essential pre-condition for the interior life. The formation of a right Christian conscience is a powerful antidote to such cultural ills and one of the significant helps to a vibrant interior life.

## Reviewing the Basics

Church teaching provides ample reflection on the meaning of conscience and the rigors of its formation. In one of its most often quoted passages *Gaudium et Spes* tells us, “His conscience is man’s most secret core and his sanctuary. There he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths.” (no. 16) As such, conscience is an experience of a law not laid upon ourselves – a law written on the heart by God. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* further elaborates that conscience “[a]lso judges particular choices approving those that are good and denouncing those that evil” (no. 1777). Obeying this interior law is the very dignity of man (GS, no. 16).

Perhaps nowhere is the relationship of conscience to man’s dignity and the interior life better seen than in the three functions of conscience. Those functions correspond to the three parts of the soul, which are, accord-

**Self-preoccupation has been substituted for self-knowledge, the essential pre-condition for the interior life. The formation of a right Christian conscience is a powerful antidote to such cultural ills and one of the significant helps to a vibrant interior life.**

ing to Peter Kreeft: intellect or reason (the rational function), will (the volitional function) and emotion (the intuitive function) (2001, p. 187). Conscience’s rational function yields an awareness of good and evil. The volitional creates a desire for good and an aversion to evil, while the intuitive gives a sense of joy at having done the good and unease at having done wrong. These three faculties are key players in the drama of the interior life. Competent spiritual direction will consistently attempt to engage and, where necessary, convert these faculties of our candidates.

## Conscience Formation

Such engagement of these three faculties involves conscience formation. *The Catechism* suggests that in this formation the word of God is our light, the cross is our standard, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are our assistance, the witness or advice of others is an additional

***The Catechism suggests that in this formation the word of God is our light, the cross is our standard, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are our assistance, the witness or advice of others is an additional help and the authoritative teaching of the Church is our guide (no. 1785).***

help and the authoritative teaching of the Church is our guide (no. 1785). It is worth briefly noting how the spiritual director can assist the candidate in each.

Spiritual directors must help candidates for the priesthood genuinely to love the word of God. A bit of Jeremiah's fire must be ignited in all those committed to our care. "When I found your words, I devoured them; they became my joy and the happiness of my heart" (Jer 15:16). Teaching the ancient discipline of *lectio divina*, the Ignatian composition of place, or the more contemporary living the word of life popular among the Focolare are all opportunities for helping our candidates be enlightened by God's holy word.

In light of God's word, the cross becomes the standard of a well-formed conscience. Through a deepening appreciation of the sacrament of Reconciliation, the understanding of the importance of a penitential way of life, the redemptive value of human suffering, and a commitment to sacrifice and works of charity, the reality of the cross is more deeply incised on a seminarian's heart. Frequent confession helps to recover a sense of sin all but lost in the secular culture from which so many of even our strongest candidates come. John Paul II reminded us that from the sacrament of reconciliation flow "[t]he sense of asceticism and interior discipline, a spirit of sacrifice and self-denial, the acceptance of hard work and the cross" (1984, no. 48). This sense of asceticism reminds us of the importance of penance in the life of a seminarian and a priest. Without it, no matter the keenness of our skills, we remain just another "nice guy" or well trained functionary. The heart of a priest is a penitential heart. Within such a penitential heart,

suffering is seen as a share in the passion of Christ. Sacrifice and acts of charity, sometimes performed at grave personal inconvenience, are viewed as the language of love. The standard of the cross does indeed conform a human heart more closely to the heart of Christ.

If the sacrament of penance helps us claim the standard of the cross, then retrieving a deeper sense of our Baptism and Confirmation help us enlist the gifts of the spirit as a special assistance in the formation of conscience. Claiming the grace of our full initiation into the people of God, cherishing ourselves as temples of the Holy Spirit, and recognizing our unique place in the Mystical Body of Christ powerfully shape the inner core of every Christian, but especially of a man called to the priesthood. Within the reality of the Church, the witness of others, the cloud of faithful witnesses who so graciously surround us both on this earth and from their places in the kingdom, are also dramatic encouragements in our effort to do good and avoid evil.

When we consider the authoritative teaching of the Church as our guide in conscience formation, the spiritual director has the opportunity to assist a candidate in developing a healthy sense of docility. If there is a misunderstood word in the Christian lexicon today, it is docility. Caricatures of little pets blithely following their masters often come to mind. The word, as we all recognize in our better moments, simply means a willingness to be taught. Docility does not indicate an inability or an unwillingness to think critically or question sincerely. Such faculties enhance the docility to accept the combined wisdom of two thousand years of Christian living and praying. This is particularly evidenced in a candidate's willingness to trust the formation program in which he is studying.

As the document "Guidelines for the Use of Psychology in the Admission and Formation of Candidates for the Priesthood" (2008) of the Congregation for Catholic Education reminds us, "The spiritual director's task is not easy, neither in discerning the vocation nor in the area of conscience" (p. 14). It is made no less complex by the circumstances of the times.

### **Circumstances of the Times**

The bishops of the United States have advised us in the *Program of Priestly Formation* (5<sup>th</sup> edition, 2006) that "[w]eakness of ethical standards and a moral relativism have a corrosive effect on American public life. . . . This ethical environment has affected the Church herself" (no. 12). As a former and most valued colleague in the work of priestly formation often phrased it, "If it's



out there, it's in here." We live in what philosopher and social scientist Christopher Lasch has called "a culture of Narcissism." Personal feelings and points of view have become the grand arbiter of meaning and truth. A new worldview has been created that psychologist, Paul Vitz has termed "selfist culture." In more ancient days, Bernard of Clairvaux reminded us, "It is much more easy to find many men of the world who have been converted from evil to good than it is to find one religious who has progressed from good to better. Anyone who has risen even a little above the state he has once attained in religion is a very rare bird indeed" (1953, p. X). Harsh? Yes, but deliberately so to make a clear point. We have wandered far afield of a deliberate commitment to objective truth in the formation of conscience. We have lost sight of the fact that conscience must be subordinate to truth.

John Paul II offers an alternative to this weakness of ethical standards and moral relativism in his monumental *Veritatis Splendor*. It is worth quoting at length.

*As is immediately evident the crisis of truth is not unconnected to this development [relativism]. Once the idea of a universal truth about the good, knowable by human reason, is lost, it is inevitable that the notion of conscience also changes. Conscience is no longer considered in its primordial reality as an act of a person's intelligence, the function of which is to apply the universal knowledge of the good in a specific situation and thus to express a judgment about the right conduct to be chosen here and now. Instead, there is a tendency to grant to the individual conscience the prerogative of independently determining the criteria of good and evil and then acting accordingly. Such an outlook is quite congenial to an individualistic ethic, wherein each individual is faced with his own truth, different from the truth of others. Taken to its extreme consequences, this individualism leads to a denial of the very idea of human nature. (no. 32)*

In this selfist individualism, candidates are apt to construct a church and priestly ministry of their own choosing, "Piling up," as Paul said to Timothy, "teachings that suit their pleasure" (2 Timothy 4:3). This tendency often shows itself in an unhealthy preoccupation with "time off" or dedicating themselves exclusively or predominantly to favorite projects neglecting more pressing, but personally less fulfilling, needs. If left unchallenged, especially by the wise counsel of a spiritual director, these tendencies can lead ultimately to living

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the priestly life simply on one's own terms. In such a context the seminary becomes, for some candidates, a time of invention rather than formation.

In the "Report on American Seminaries" (December 15, 2008), there is a quote from a 1962 address to seminary spiritual directors by Blessed John XXIII that is as instructional as it is inspiring. "The young seminarian will never know how to exercise self-control, if he has not learned to observe and love a strict rule, which trains him for mortification and for mastering his own will. Otherwise, in the full exercise of the ministry he will not be ready to obey his bishop fully and joyfully."

### Addressing the Circumstances

The spiritual director can be a significant help to candidates as they address these circumstances of ethical weakness and moral relativism. Once again the American bishops in the *Program of Priestly Formation* remind us,

*The spiritual director should foster an integration of spiritual formation, human formation and character development consistent with priestly formation. The spiritual director assists the seminarian in acquiring the skills of spiritual discernment and plays a key role in helping the seminarian discern whether he is called to the priesthood or to another vocation in the Church. (2006, no. 129)*

In other words, a key component in seminary spiritual formation is helping the candidate develop the

conscience of a priest, a truly priestly way of life and, ultimately, a priestly heart. During this long and at times arduous process, a candidate might object, "But you want me to be something I am not." While each director will respond to objections like these in his own way, the ultimate answer is a firm but clear, "Yes, I do – that is why this process is called formation. You are being formed into something you not yet are."

While fellow seminarians, parish priests, family members, and friends all have a part to play in this formation, a primary influence is exercised by spiritual directors and other members of the seminary faculty. It is, therefore, worth reviewing briefly the mind of the church concerning seminary faculty.

The teaching of Vatican II in *Optatam totius*, its decree on priestly formation, is quite clear on the character and obligations of seminary faculty. Faculty members should be chosen from among the best of the diocesan presbyterate, painstakingly prepared by solid doctrine, appropriate pastoral experience, and special pedagogical and spiritual training. The faculty should be acutely aware of how their own thinking and acting impacts the outcome of seminarians' formation. The old proverb, "One delivers a better sermon with one's life than with one's lips," is a useful point of examination of conscience for all formational personnel.

**The faculty member who assiduously teaches his classes but then disappears from the seminary community may be a great asset to the seminary's intellectual life, but is clearly neglecting other serious aspects of priestly formation.**

The Council's decree further instructs that under the leadership of the rector, the faculty should create the strictest harmony in spirit and behavior. A united vision of formation according to the mind of the Church is essential if candidates are to be presented with a clear and certain program of priestly formation.

The last element of faculty responsibility is perhaps

the most overlooked especially in diocesan seminarians. Along with the students, the faculty should create a family that answers the Lord's call, "That all may be one," and intensifies the joy of the vocation in each student (*Optatam totius*, 1965, no. 5). The days of formation en masse are clearly over, not simply because there are few seminaries with mass numbers, but because formation in the circumstances of today requires far more one on one and personal interaction than ever before. The faculty member who assiduously teaches his classes but then disappears from the seminary community may be a great asset to the seminary's intellectual life, but is clearly neglecting other serious aspects of priestly formation. If these principles are true for the entire faculty, they have a special and significant urgency for spiritual directors.

### Specific Strategies

These responsibilities of the seminary faculty are certainly an immense challenge, but they need not be overwhelming. Three specific strategies can assist a spiritual director in fulfilling the responsibility to form a priestly conscience in candidates. First, greater exterior and interior silence must be created. Simply put, our seminaries, formation houses, and novitiates are far too noisy. The program of spiritual formation must assist candidates in not only valuing but loving silence in which they can hear the voice of the Lord and respond without distraction, "Here I am, Lord, I come to do your will." Secondly, the spiritual director by instruction and example must foster a genuine desire for the interior life in candidates. *The Catechism* defines such interiority as the capacity for reflection, self-examination, and introspection (no. 1779). This love of the interior life helps candidates avoid episodic living in which the soul jumps from one experience (many of which are of deep benefit) to another without sufficient time and silence for any meaningful reflection on those experiences.

The final strategy available to directors is to foster in each candidate a love of the Church that is greater than any determination to carry out individual plans. Years ago, a diocesan seminarian trying to be serious and devout about his formation was discerning entrance into a strictly contemplative religious order. On the verge of entrance, one of the monks, a much older and truly holy man, helped the seminarian to recognize this was the candidate's plan for his life, but not God's will for him. While difficult and sad to accept, the young man was led to love the will of God and the needs of his local church more than his plans. A competent

spiritual director can be a tremendous help in assisting a candidate to see that his own good and the good of the Church should never be in opposition.

### A Final Context

Throughout this article, the responsibilities of spiritual directors in helping in the formation of candidates' consciences have been examined from the point of view unique to formation faculties. One element has been the presumed factor, but in conclusion must form the over-all context of our discussion. It stems from the opening insight of *Gaudium et Spes*. In his conscience man is alone with God. The final context of this discussion must be the reliance of the director on the presence of the Spirit of God in all direction sessions. Through his own prayer and discernment for each candidate he sees, the director must trust the movement of the Holy Spirit in the candidate's heart and in the director's guidance.

Once again, John Paul II is quite helpful in this regard, as he writes in *Veritatis splendor* (1993):

*In the heart of every Christian, in the utmost depths of each person, there is always an echo of the question which the young man in the gospel once asked Jesus, "Teacher, what good must I do to have eternal life?" And when Christians ask him the question which rises from their conscience, the Lord replies in the words of the New Covenant which have been entrusted to his Church . . . The Church's answer to man's question contains the wisdom and power of Christ crucified . . . the Truth which gives of itself. (no. 117)*

It is that truth alone which sets formation personnel free to give ourselves to priestly service and to form others for a similar self-donation.



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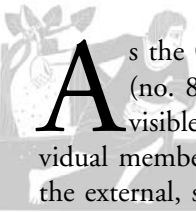
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# Canonical Description and History of the Use of the Terms “Internal Forum” and “External Forum”

Sister Joseph Marie Ruessmann, R.S.M.

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As the Council Fathers stated in *Lumen Gentium* (no. 8), the Church is both a visible and an invisible reality. So too the condition of the individual members of the Church, and it is important that the external, social perception not be in conflict with the internal reality of grace. Yet some realities are hidden from public knowledge, for the benefit of the good name of the individuals involved or to avoid scandal. The truth, however, is one, and, as the authors hope to demonstrate, so too is the power of jurisdiction one, whether exercised in the external or the internal forum.

The role of the internal forum has a significant place in the process of forming young men for the priesthood, but the understanding of it has not always been clear. In part this is due to the development of the term in history and in part because of misuse of the term by some people in recent years.

This article will present a brief history of the evolution of the terms, the nature of the internal forum and its distinction from the external forum, how internal forum relates to the right to privacy, and its role in seminary formation and the selection of suitable candidates for the priesthood.

## Internal Forum

### History of the Concept of Internal Forum

Before attempting to distinguish between internal and external forum, it will be helpful to explain the concept of “forum” as used in canon law. The concept of canonical forum came from the Roman forum, which

**The concept of canonical forum came from the Roman forum, which was a place where people gathered and where, among other things, judicial and other acts of the government took place.**

was a place where people gathered and where, among other things, judicial and other acts of the government took place. It is used today to mean, figuratively, not a place or a certain type of acts, but the “way” in which juridical acts are presented to ecclesiastical authority. Thus in the 1983 Code there is reference, for example, to the *forum competens* (c. 221 §1), the *forum legitimum* (c. 1409 §2), the *forum iudiciale* (cc. 1047 §1; 1049 §1); and the *forum partis conventae* (c. 1407 §3).<sup>1</sup>

The concept of an internal and an external forum first appeared at the end of the twelfth century as a way to distinguish the forum of “hidden judgment” or “penitential judgment,” from a public ecclesiastical judgment based on concrete evidence and proofs.<sup>2</sup> The 17<sup>th</sup> century theologian Francisco Suarez, while not using the term “internal forum”, did use the term “external forum”, distinguishing it by saying that “the forum of conscience deals with matters between man and God, whereas the

exterior forum deals with matters of man to man.”<sup>3</sup>

The actual term “internal forum” was being specifically used by scholars in the sixteenth century but did not appear in official Church documents for two hundred more years. The Council of Trent made a distinction within the “penitential forum,” noting that it could be either “sacramental” or “extra-sacramental,” depending on whether it referred to actions within the Sacrament of Penance or to non-sacramental actions which were not public such as dispensations from irregularities or impediments or remission of penal sanctions.<sup>4</sup>

Post-tridentine canonists used the expressions “forum of conscience,” “penitential forum” or “internal forum” in a moral sense, to designate a subjective judgment concerning the morality of an act or the conscience itself, and, in a juridical sense, to designate both the exercise of jurisdiction of the confessor or of the ecclesiastical superior in regard to taking away sins, penalties, or other juridical bonds, or bestowing favors, and the sphere where such jurisdiction is exercised.<sup>5</sup>

In the consolidation of canon law in the 1917 Code of Canon Law, the two forums were described as being a twofold means of exercising the power of jurisdiction or government. The internal forum, subdivided into sacramental and extra-sacramental, was referred to as the “forum of conscience” (can. 196). This definition of the internal forum as the forum of conscience led some to distinguish it from the external forum as being primarily for the good of individuals, that is, of their conscience, versus the common good, and seemed to place it outside of the juridical forum, suggesting that acts within the internal forum were not properly juridical acts.<sup>6</sup>

At the beginning of the process of revising the 1917 Code, Pope Paul VI approved ten principles to guide the work of the revision. The second of these principles states that “There is to be a coordination between the external and the internal forum, which is proper to the Church and which has been operative for centuries, so as to preclude any conflict between the two.”<sup>7</sup> This opened up the way for the clarification of these issues in the 1983 Code.

### ***Nature of Internal Forum and Distinction from External Forum***

Canon 130 is the fundamental norm in the 1983 Code describing internal and external forums. It reads: “Of itself, the power of governance is exercised for the external forum; sometimes, however, it is exercised for the internal forum alone, so that the effects which its

**In other words, the internal forum is a place for the exercise of the power of governance that is not recognized or not known in the external forum, and this distinguishes it from the external forum.**

exercise is meant to have for the external forum are not recognized there, except insofar as the law establishes it in determined cases.” In other words, the internal forum is a place for the exercise of the power of governance that is not recognized or not known in the external forum, and this distinguishes it from the external forum. “Ecclesiastical jurisdiction can be exercised in one forum or the other, not in both, since a jurisdictional act cannot be both public and hidden at the same time. The power of governance is exercised in the internal forum if it is done in a hidden way.”<sup>8</sup>

This departs significantly from the understanding of internal forum as being something between God and man, and external forum as between man and man; or the understanding that internal forum is for the private good of individuals, and external forum for the common good. The problem with these definitions is that acts in the external forum should also be for the good of the individual, and in particular, for his or her salvation, although perhaps less directly than many things in the internal forum; and actions between man and man also affect each individual’s relationship with God. In the Church, in fact, the greatest public interest is the salvation of souls.<sup>9</sup>

The 1983 Code clarified that the difference between the external forum and internal forum is based on how the matter is handled: whether in a hidden manner, called “occult” in canonical terminology, or in a manner that is based on a public record or public testimony and that can be recognized by the community. The term “public” is not necessarily the same as “external,” because external activity or exercise of jurisdiction can remain occult. Public exercise is always external, but the reverse is not true.<sup>10</sup>

Acts of governance realized in the internal forum are efficacious, that is, they are juridically valid. For ex-

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

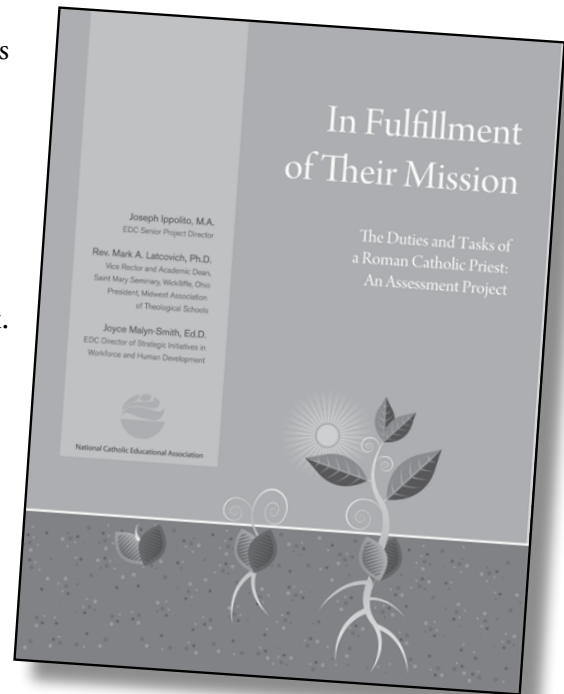
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ample, a priest with the proper faculty can remove sanctions and dispense impediments and irregularities in the internal forum. There is no need to repeat a juridical act so as to reach juridical efficacy in the external forum as well. The fact that a juridical act done in the internal forum is not recognized in the external forum is not due to its invalidity, but rather to the lack of the necessary formal publicity.

When there is an exercise of power for the internal forum, done in an occult manner, its effects are not recognized in the external forum, except as provided by canon law (c. 130), unless and until the juridical proof is made public (observable, recognizable, and recognized by the community). When the facts become public, they belong then to the external forum.<sup>11</sup> For example, if two people, with the permission of the local Ordinary and for a serious and urgent reason, contract marriage secretly (c. 1130), observing canonical form (c. 1131 §2),

the marriage is valid also for the external forum. The marriage is recorded in the register in the secret archive (c. 1133). If necessary in the future to avoid scandal, the Ordinary is to produce proof of the celebration (c. 1132). When the occult facts become public, the solution that was given occultly must also become public through the production of proofs, so that the apparent contradiction between the public facts and a manner of behaving that is founded on unknown facts will be eliminated.<sup>12</sup>

Another example would be if a bishop granted a favor orally but privately, which would be an exercise of power that remained occult. For the beneficiary to use the favor publicly in the life of the community, he must provide proof of the favor to anyone who lawfully demands it, either by the testimony of witnesses or by a later document recording the favor (see c. 74).

If an impediment is dispensed from, or a censure

remitted, in the sacramental internal forum, there is no possibility of proof of the juridical act. Consequently, unless it would harm the individuals involved or cause scandal, the remission is to be granted in the external forum.

At times, there is an apparent divergence between the internal forum and the external forum because the objective reality is known only in the internal forum, and there is a lack of knowledge in the external forum.<sup>13</sup> For example, if someone went through the marriage ceremony but feigned consent, the marriage would be invalid, but the only person to know would be the one who did not give consent. The objective truth is that the marriage is invalid, but the perceptible reality, based on the presumption that the parties meant what they said, is that the marriage is valid (can. 1101 §1).

### “Contents” of the Internal Forum

As mentioned previously, the internal forum concerns acts of governance such as the removal or dispensation of obligations that are hidden. For example, hidden impediments or canonical irregularities for marriage or Holy Orders may be dispensed, or canonical penalties remitted, within the internal forum. Although the Code itself uses the term “internal forum” only in regard to the exercise of jurisdiction in the Church, other magisterial documents regarding seminaries state that the spiritual director, who must be a priest, acts in the internal forum, even though spiritual direction *per se* is not an exercise of jurisdiction. These Church documents include the general report on the visitation of U.S. seminaries by the Congregation for Catholic Education (henceforth called *Visitation Report*, to distinguish it from reports sent to individual bishops and rectors concerning each seminary in particular), and the *Program of Priestly Formation* (“PPF”) (nos. 80, 134, 333).<sup>14</sup>

The Code does not say that the seminary spiritual director operates in the internal forum, but states in canon 240 §2 that the vote or opinion of the spiritual director and of the confessors may not be sought in discussion concerning the admission of candidates to Orders or their dismissal from the seminary. The placement of the spiritual director of seminarians, whom the PPF specifies must be a priest, in the internal forum, even if he is not necessarily engaging in an act of jurisdiction as the seminarian’s confessor, encourages the seminarian to freely and voluntarily discuss matters of conscience with his spiritual director. It is consistent with canon 246 §4, which recommends that each seminarian have “a director of his spiritual life whom he has freely chosen and

to whom he can confidently open his conscience.”

The PPF states three times that the spiritual director functions in the internal forum and thus the relationship of seminarians to their spiritual director is a privileged and confidential one (no. 333, see also no. 80 and 134). Consequently, the spiritual director is held to the strictest confidentiality concerning information received in spiritual direction. He may neither reveal it nor use it, nor may participate in the evaluation of those they currently direct or whom they directed in the past. The PPF does make one exception to this confidentiality, which

*would be the case of grave, immediate, or mortal danger involving the directee or another person. If what is revealed in spiritual direction coincides with the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance (in other words, what is revealed is revealed ad ordinem absolutionis), that is, the exchange not only takes place in the internal forum but also the sacramental forum, then the absolute strictures of the seal of confession hold, and no information may be revealed or used (no. 134).*

**The Code places parallel restrictions on those in the external forum in the seminary, namely, the priests in authority, including the rector and formators.**

The Code places parallel restrictions on those in the external forum in the seminary, namely, the priests in authority, including the rector and formators. The Code prohibits them from using, for purposes of external governance, the knowledge of sins that has come to them from the hearing of confession (can. 984 §2) and prohibits them from hearing the confessions of the seminarians unless the seminarian approaches freely (see can. 985). Similarly, canon 630 §5 encourages religious to approach their superiors with trust and to be able to open their minds freely and spontaneously to them, but forbids superiors from inducing the members in any way to make a manifestation of conscience to them.

An important fact relevant to seminary formation is that while the content of spiritual direction is in the internal forum, the fact that someone is going to a spiritual director is in the external forum. The distinction is necessary because spiritual formation, one of the four pillars of the seminary formation program, while including spiritual direction in the internal forum, also includes other means of developing the spiritual life which are in the external forum such as participation in liturgies and devotional practices. Those making decisions concerning seminarians must be able to demonstrate that a seminarian is growing in his spiritual life; knowing that he is receiving spiritual direction regularly is one means to verify this.

### **Erroneous Conceptions of Internal Forum**

In recent years, some erroneous conceptions of what the internal forum is have arisen, particularly in matrimonial law and in seminary formation. Some of this is due to the historical developments of the distinctions between the forums. It seems that some of the lack of clarity is also due to recent developments in the use of spiritual direction and of various professional fields, especially psychology. These developments, on the whole, are tremendous gifts to the faithful as they seek to follow the Second Vatican Council's exhortation to respond to the universal call to holiness, but have also been occasions for misunderstanding of the internal forum.

**Internal Forum as Limited to Issues of Morals or Conscience** – Among the misunderstandings about the internal forum to clarify is that it is thought to be the sphere of personal relations with God, of personal conscience, or of moral issues. All norms and ecclesiastical juridical activity could be called matters of conscience, because all Church law is binding and all law concerns the individual's spiritual good. In both internal and external forums, juridical acts should assist the personal sanctification of those concerned. The difference between the external forum and the internal forum is not based on the nature of the matter or on the nature of the act itself, but on the way in which the power is exercised.<sup>15</sup>

**Internal Forum as Private Matter** – A second common misunderstanding about internal forum is that it is a private area, the field of personal autonomy, and thus not subject to external laws or to disclosure.<sup>16</sup> Sometimes it is equated with certain client-professional relationships in which disclosures are protected by law. This confuses the ecclesial and the civil forums. Internal

forum is a forum for hidden acts of ecclesiastical jurisdiction and for priests who act as spiritual directors in seminaries.

Some persons claim that a seminarian's sessions with a psychologist are in the internal forum; this claim has been used in some instances to prevent psychological reports from being given to formators, hiding information that might affect a decision on whether a candidate is accepted or can proceed in formation. In its *Visitation Report*, the Congregation for Catholic Education has stated clearly that psychology is not in the internal forum.<sup>17</sup> Professional confidentiality must be maintained, but is not the same as the protection given to the internal forum by canon law.

### **Internal Forum not Valid in External Forum –**

Although perhaps more present in penal law or matrimonial law than in law governing Holy Orders, another misunderstanding about the internal forum is that it is not juridical in character or that it is not valid in the external forum. Acts of governance realized in the internal forum are efficacious, that is, they are juridically valid. There is no need to repeat a juridical act so as to reach juridical efficacy in the external forum as well. The fact that a juridical act done in the internal forum is not recognized by the external forum is not due to its invalidity, but to its hidden character.<sup>18</sup>

**While respecting the secrecy of the internal forum, bishops, rectors, spiritual directors, and seminary formators have a serious responsibility to promote only suitable candidates for ordination.**

### **Role in Internal Forum of Promotion of Suitable Candidates**

While respecting the secrecy of the internal forum, bishops, rectors, spiritual directors, and seminary formators have a serious responsibility to promote only suitable candidates for ordination. The dignity of the priesthood of Jesus Christ demands that the Church conduct evaluations of all candidates and varied aspects of their lives. As St. Paul told St. Timothy, "Do not lay hands



too readily on anyone”, that is, do not ordain anyone too quickly.

Pope Pius XI, in his 1935 encyclical *On the Catholic Priesthood*, gave spiritual directors and confessors significant responsibility in the process of ensuring the suitability of candidates. He exhorted confessors and spiritual directors to

*reflect how weighty a responsibility they assume before God, before the Church, and before the youths themselves, if they do not take all means at their disposal to avoid a false step; not indeed because they can take any outward action, since that is severely forbidden them by their most delicate office itself, and often also by the inviolable sacramental seal; but because they can have a great influence on the souls of the individual students.... Should the superiors, for whatever reason, not take steps or show themselves weak, then especially should confessors and spiritual directors admonish the unsuited and unworthy ... of their obligation to retire while yet there is time.<sup>19</sup>*

In 1961, the Sacred Congregation for Religious issued an instruction titled “Careful Selection and Training of Candidates for the States of Perfection and Sacred Orders.” It seems to be the first magisterial document that states that spiritual direction of seminarians is in the internal forum. Because it contains such a clear presentation of the topic of promotion of suitable candidates with respect to the internal forum, a somewhat lengthy section of it is cited here. Although it is referring to religious candidates to Orders,<sup>20</sup> the principles apply equally to candidates for the diocesan priesthood.

*[M]ajor superiors [and similarly, Diocesan Bishops] need the helpful cooperation of all who are in charge of selecting and training candidates, whether they be superiors and directors [and similarly, formators for diocesan seminaries] in the external forum or confessors and spiritual prefects, each within the limits of his office. For some of the signs of a divine vocation or lack of it, by their very nature, come to the knowledge of superiors in the external forum, while others, since they belong rather to the intimate realm of mind and conscience, can oftentimes be known only by confessors and spiritual directors. All these individuals accept a burden in conscience in the choice of priests and religious and in their admission to profession and to ordination, and through their ignorance or negligence they may have a share in the sins of others.*

**Thus, seminary spiritual directors are bound to secrecy, that is, act in the internal forum, by virtue of the religious office they have accepted.**

*Nevertheless, they must use different methods in discharging their duties. Directors in the external forum must do their duty exteriorly according to the norms of common and particular law. The case is different with confessors who are bound by “the inviolable sacramental seal,” and with spiritual directors in the stricter sense, who are likewise bound to secrecy “by virtue of the religious office they have accepted.” Confessors and spiritual directors should strive, but only in the internal forum, to see that those who either are not called by God or who have become unworthy should not go farther.*

*But although the procedure in the internal and the external forum is different, it is of the utmost importance that “all should use the same principles in testing vocations and taking appropriate precautions to the end that young men may be prudently admitted to profession and to Orders.”<sup>21</sup>*

Thus, seminary spiritual directors are bound to secrecy, that is, act in the internal forum, by virtue of the religious office they have accepted. The document goes on to say they nonetheless have a significant role in determining the suitability of candidates. “[S]piritual directors are under obligation in the non-sacramental internal forum, to judge of the divine vocation of those entrusted to them and are also under the obligation to warn and privately urge those who are unfit, to withdraw voluntarily from the life they have embraced.”<sup>22</sup>

Because of the recent scandals in the priesthood and the numbers of sometimes openly homosexual priests and seminarians, the Congregation for Catholic Education produced a document specifically on candidates with homosexual tendencies. In it, the Congregation gives the spiritual director the obligation “to evaluate all the qualities of the candidate’s personality and to make sure that he does not present disturbances of a sexual nature, which are incompatible with the priest-

hood. If a candidate practices homosexuality or presents deep-seated homosexual tendencies, his spiritual director as well as his confessor have the duty to dissuade him in conscience from proceeding toward ordination.”<sup>23</sup>

Although the spiritual director functions in the internal forum, one way that the spiritual director could exercise his responsibility in regard to a questionable candidate would be to insist, as a condition for continued spiritual direction, that the candidate tell the rector or his formation advisor about the particular information that he has revealed to the spiritual director. If the seminarian refuses, or the spiritual director discovers that he has not done so, the director has the option of refusing to direct the seminarian, a fact that then is in the external forum. The refusal of a director to direct a seminarian is a fact which must be made known to the rector, who then, without knowing the details, knows that a serious issue is involved.

### Right to Privacy in the External Forum

A major issue related to the external forum is the right to privacy. Most seminary faculty, staff, and formators are clear about the requirement of secrecy in the internal forum, however, there are many mistaken ideas about privacy in the external forum, including calling things “internal forum” in order to make things secret, not to be revealed to others.

The right to privacy is found in canon 220 of the Code of Canon Law: “No one is permitted to harm illegitimately the good reputation which a person possesses nor to injure the right of any person to protect his or her own privacy.” This flows from the teaching of *Gaudium et Spes* (no. 26), which includes the rights “to a good reputation ... [and] to protection of privacy” in a list of basic human rights. The Congregation for Catholic Education notes the tension in its 2008 Instruction *Guidelines for the use of Psychology in the Admission and Formation of Candidates for the Priesthood* (*Guidelines*, for future reference), which state that “The formational institution has the right and the duty to acquire the knowledge necessary for a prudentially certain judgment regarding the candidate’s suitability. But this must not harm the candidate’s right to a good reputation, which any person enjoys, nor the right to defend his own privacy, as prescribed in canon 220 of the Code of Canon Law.”<sup>24</sup> Similarly, in regard to religious, the Code allows superiors to verify the health, character, and maturity of candidates “by using experts, if necessary, [but] without prejudice to the prescript of can. 220.”<sup>25</sup> Thus seminary formators must find the balance between find-

ing sufficient evidence of a true vocation while respecting the right to privacy of the candidate.

To assist in finding this balance, the seminary should have and put into practice policies that protect the right to privacy to the greatest degree possible. In the case of psychological evaluations for admissions, candidates should be told in advance the extent to which his interior life will be examined and what he may be asked to disclose. In addition, he should know who will receive copies of the report and how it will be used. Often the abuses occur not in the testing itself but in the access to the information in the seminary files.<sup>26</sup>

### Internal – External Forum in Human Formation

As described in the Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, seminary formation is based on the four pillars of intellectual, pastoral, spiritual, and human formation.<sup>27</sup> The distinctions between internal and external forums are usually not issues in intellectual or pastoral formation, and the role of spiritual direction has already been discussed. This section will offer a discussion of the distinction of forums in the area it is most controversial, human formation.

The Congregation for Catholic Education stated in its *Guidelines* and the *Visitation Report*, that formators and psychologists are not in the internal forum. The *Visitation Report*, in fact, found a need to better safeguard the internal forum:

*in places, seminarians are being asked to reveal (in formation advising, in psychological counseling, in public confessions of faults, etc.) matters of sin, which belong to the internal forum. Other seminaries dilute the confidential nature of the internal forum: the spiritual directors and students are presented with a list of “exceptions” to the confidentiality of spiritual direction.*<sup>28</sup>

Each seminary is expected to clarify with spiritual directors, formators, psychologists, and others involved in formation what is matter of the internal forum, and what is matter of the external forum, protected by the right to privacy except to the extent freely and voluntarily revealed by the candidate.

### Formators

The *Visitation Report* praised the figure of the formation advisor or formator, which developed in American seminaries in the 1980’s and 1990’s to assist

seminarians in interiorizing their formation and to hold them accountable for actions in the external forum. The *PPF* describes formators in paragraph 80, stating that

*“on every seminary faculty, certain members function as formators in the external forum. These formation advisors/mentors and directors should be priests. They observe seminarians and assist them to grow humanly by offering them feedback.... These formators function exclusively in the external forum and are not to engage in matters that are reserved for the internal forum and the spiritual directors.”*

The difficulty arises from the requirement that formators assist candidates in “interiorizing their formation”, yet without probing into their interior life. The *Visitation Report* noted that

*aspects of the system invite ambiguity. At times, students need more direction in learning how to distinguish between formation advising and spiritual direction. There have been occasions when, during their formation advising sessions, students have felt obliged to divulge matter that belongs to the internal forum. There have also been cases of formation advisors invading the internal forum, asking about matters of sin.<sup>29</sup>*

While the seminary way of life and other policies can assist in making the distinctions, much is left to the prudential judgment of formators.

### **Psychologists**

A major participant in human formation at some seminaries is the psychologist. The presence of psychologists in seminaries is a new development in the last several decades, due in part to the growth of the field itself. Psychologists and other experts offer much-needed services to individual students and to the seminary as an institution, through courses and workshops. How they fit into seminary formation has not always been clear, with some claiming that they operate in the internal forum. In its *Guidelines*, the Congregation for Catholic Education states clearly that they do not operate in the internal forum and, in fact, may not be part of the formation team (no. 6).

The 1983 *Code* made only brief mention of the use of psychological experts in evaluating religious candidates, and no reference to evaluating candidates for the diocesan priesthood. The use of psychologists in

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formation work has increased significantly in the last 25 years, not only for evaluation of readiness for orders, but also for human maturation and formation. With its *Guidelines*, the Congregation for Catholic Education presented the first major document of the Holy See on the topic, pointing out that in undertaking these evaluations, there needs to be a balance between the good of the candidate and the Church’s need to safeguard her mission and to choose suitable ministers.<sup>30</sup> The good of the candidate includes his canonical right to protect his privacy and good reputation.

**Role of Psychologists in the Seminary** – The primary role of the psychologist in the seminary is that of an expert offering professional advice to formators, the rector or the bishop for the assessment of candidates. The bishop and rector rely on experts so that they can better assess the candidates’ psychological health in order to ensure suitability of candidates and to have capable sacred ministers for the Christian faithful.

The role of the psychologist should always be examined in the context of how it assists the process of human formation. While maintaining professional confidentiality, it should not be forgotten that the psychologist is hired by the seminary and responsible to the rector. The *Guidelines* state that “it is useful for the rector and other formators to be able to count on the co-operation of experts in the psychological sciences. Such experts, who cannot be part of the formation team, will have to have specific competence in the field of vocations, and unite the wisdom of the Spirit to their professional expertise.”<sup>31</sup> Seminarians should be asked to give consent to permitting the psychologist to give reports to their formators in order to integrate the work



of the psychologist with the human formation process of the seminary formation.

**Conditions for the Use of Psychologists** – In its *Guidelines*, the Congregation for Education limits the use of experts in psychology to “in some cases” and gives criteria for what these cases would be: a) to allow a more sure evaluation of the candidate’s psychological state, to help to evaluate his human dispositions for responding to the divine call, or to provide some extra assistance for the candidate’s human growth; b) in particular cases; and c) on a temporary basis.<sup>32</sup>

**Evaluation of Candidate’s Psychological State** – The *Guidelines* provide for the use of experts in psychology to conduct an evaluation, to make a diagnosis, to offer a professional opinion, and to suggest appropriate therapy if needed (no. 5). Examples of situations in which this would be appropriate include if there is a suspicion that psychological disturbances may be present (no. 8) or if there is a doubt about the suitability of a candidate for admission (no. 11).

According to the Congregation for Catholic Education,

*“...the spiritual director can find that, in order to clear up any doubts that are otherwise irresolvable and to proceed with greater certainty in the discernment and in spiritual accompaniment, he needs to suggest to the candidate that he undergo a psychological consultation – without, however, ever demanding it.”<sup>33</sup> The Guidelines adds that, in such a case, it is desirable that the candidate inform both the spiritual director and his formator about the results of the consultation. (no. 14)*

**Evaluation of the Human Dispositions of the Candidate** – The second possible use for experts in psychology that the *Guidelines* envisions is to help the candidate to become aware of the difficulties that he is experiencing and their possible consequences for his life and future priestly ministry (no. 15). This possible use of psychologists applies both before admission to the seminary and during formation (see no. 5). The *Guidelines* present this possibility for “exceptional cases” – “*si casus ferat*” (no. 5).

**Assistance for the Candidate’s Human Growth** – The *Guidelines* indicate that a third possible use of psychological experts is to assist the candidate’s human growth during formation:

Moreover, by suggesting ways for favouring a vocational response that is more free, they can help support

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the development of the human (especially relational) qualities, which are required for the exercise of the ministry... help[ing] the candidate overcome those psychological wounds, and interiorize, in an ever more stable and profound way, the type of life shown by Jesus the Good Shepherd, Head and Bridegroom of the Church. ...[I]t can also be useful in supporting the candidate on his journey towards a more sure possession of the moral virtues...can contribute to overcoming, or rendering less rigid, his psychological resistances to what his formation is proposing.<sup>34</sup>

The *PPF* also mentions this purpose of fostering the candidate’s human growth, noting that family histories may impede relational abilities.<sup>35</sup>

**In Particular Cases** – In the last fifty years, there has been consistent magisterial teaching that the “investigation of the intimate psychological and moral status of the interior life of any member of the Christian faithful cannot be carried on except with the consent of the one to undergo such evaluation.”<sup>36</sup> Thus, the question arises whether a candidate can be required to undergo psychological evaluation. On the one hand, no one can be forced to undergo psychological testing, while, on the other hand, no one has a right to be ordained or to be accepted into a seminary formation program.

The *Program for Priestly Formation*, which was approved by the Congregation for Catholic Education only two years prior to the release of *Guidelines*, requires seminary applicants to “undergo a thorough screening process,” including psychological evaluations, and states that a psychological assessment is an integral part of the admission procedure.<sup>37</sup> The *Guidelines* however, state that psychological testing and assistance is to be used only in “some cases”.<sup>38</sup>

**On a Temporary Basis for Minor Issues** – Along with the restriction of psychologists to necessary cases and specified purposes, the use of psychologists for can-

didates to Orders is limited to a temporary basis and for issues that do not require extensive therapy. Both the *Guidelines* and the *PPF* state that if a candidate needs extensive or long-term therapy, this therapy should be carried out before he is admitted to the seminary or house of formation. If it arises during formation, he should leave the seminary and apply for re-admission later.<sup>39</sup>

**There is the continued need to balance the Church's interest of admitting only suitable candidates to the priesthood and the right of the candidates to protect their privacy and good reputation.**

## Conclusion

The distinction between the internal forum and the external forum is essential in the work of spiritual directors, seminary formators, and experts in the area of psychology, in order to uphold the dignity and the privacy of candidates for Holy Orders during their time of seminary formation. The forum refers primarily to the way of exercising the power of jurisdiction, with the distinction being that internal forum matters are hidden while those in the external forum are publicly known and can be verified by concrete proofs. Recent magisterial documents have clarified the question about spiritual directors and formators, stating that spiritual directors in seminaries operate in the internal forum while formators work in the external forum. In addition, the *Guidelines for the Use of Psychology in the Admission and Formation of Candidates for the Priesthoods* state that psychologists, although they have an important role to play in seminary formation, may not be part of the formation team. Since they do not possess the power of jurisdiction, their work cannot be protected through the internal forum, but rather is held in the confidentiality proper to a professional-client relationship.

There is the continued need to balance the Church's interest of admitting only suitable candidates to the priesthood and the right of the candidates to pro-

tect their privacy and good reputation. To protect these rights of the candidates, persons in the external forum need to obtain the prior, written informed consent of the candidates before asking them to reveal information about themselves.



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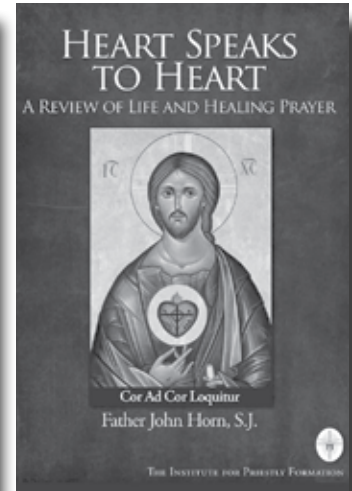
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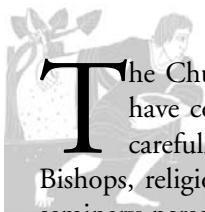
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# The Discernment of a Priestly Vocation and the Expertise of Psychiatry and Psychology

Sister Marysia Weber, R.S.M., D.O.



The Church documents on priestly formation have consistently addressed the importance of carefully fostering vocations to the priesthood. Bishops, religious superiors, vocation directors and seminary personnel in the Catholic Church retain the responsibility to discern the vocation and suitability of candidates for priestly ministry. The Second Vatican Council called for a prudent integration of the human sciences into the formation process of priestly candidates. The *Decree on Priestly Formation* (1965) took up the challenge by recommending the use of the behavioral sciences to enhance the effectiveness of the formative process for ordained ministry.<sup>1</sup> Subsequent documents addressed practical implications arising from utilizing sound insights of psychiatry and psychology in the work of priestly formation.<sup>2</sup>

In 2008, Documents from the Congregation for Catholic Education (hereafter “Congregation”) clarified two points for seminary formation faculty and experts in psychiatry and psychology. First, the Congregation in *Guidelines for the Use of Psychology in the Admission and Formation of Seminarians for the Priesthood* (June 29, 2008) stipulated that “[a]s a result of a particular gift of God, the vocation to the priesthood and its discernment lie outside the narrow competence of psychology” (*Guidelines*, no. 1). Second, the Congregation maintained that while the work of the psychological experts remains confidential, their observations belong to the external forum.<sup>3</sup>

The purpose of this article is to offer formators practical means to enhance the effectiveness of the formative process through collaboration with psychiatrists and psychologists. One of the goals of formation is certainly to screen out men who should not be admitted to

**One of the goals of formation is certainly to screen out men who should not be admitted to orders. A more significant goal of priestly formation, however, is to enhance the effectiveness of the formative process and to promote the formator’s responsibility to identify authentic vocations to the priesthood.**

orders. A more significant goal of priestly formation, however, is to enhance the effectiveness of the formative process and to promote the formator’s responsibility to identify authentic vocations to the priesthood. This goal does not focus on screening out but rather on vocational growth and development.

To provide guidelines for these processes, I wish to offer information and insights. First, I will identify aspects of formators’ responsibilities cited by the Congregation in its Guidelines. Second, I will describe the process of maturation that seminarians experience during priestly formation. Third, I want to provide criteria to engage the expertise of psychiatrists and psychologists in the selection and formation of seminarians. Fourth, I



will describe how the goals of psychotherapy differ from those of spiritual direction and formation. Fifth, I will propose what consultation with psychiatric and psychological experts can offer seminary formators. Sixth, I will offer suggestions that augment the benefit of psychiatric and psychological evaluations for vocation directors, seminary formators, and bishops. Finally, I will make recommendations for processes and structures that will help to clarify expectations and to eliminate ambiguity in the formation process and establish appropriate lines of responsibility for bishops, religious superiors, vocation directors, seminary formation faculty, psychiatrists, psychologists, and seminarians.

**Since they lack basic requisite markers of human maturity, affectively impaired seminarians detract from the formation of men who do have the capacity for vocational growth. The seminary is not the environment to try to resolve the developmental tasks of childhood.**

### **Vocational discernment of seminarians for priestly ministry**

For more than twenty-five years, I have worked with priests and bishops who are responsible for the formation of seminarians. They face many challenges in their ministry, and they struggle for ways to improve screening. In particular, they frequently express their interest in developing skills necessary to identify men who do not have the capacity to profit from seminary formation because of a lack of human and spiritual maturity. Post-conciliar documents on priestly and religious formation emphasize the importance of making a thorough assessment of seminary applicants before they are accepted into the seminary.

Accepting seminary applicants who do not have the capacity for vocational growth or ability to make a life commitment to ordained priestly ministry contra-

dicts charity and good stewardship of resources. While men who are affectively impaired may be good persons, they require a disproportionate amount of time and energy from the formation team. Since they lack basic requisite markers of human maturity, affectively impaired seminarians detract from the formation of men who do have the capacity for vocational growth. The seminary is not the environment to try to resolve the developmental tasks of childhood.

The *Guidelines* (2008) states:

*Formators need to be adequately prepared to carry out a discernment that, fully respecting the Church's doctrine on the priestly vocation, allows for a reasonably sure decision as to whether the candidate should be admitted to the seminary or house of formation of the religious clergy, or whether he should be dismissed from the seminary or house of formation for reasons of unsuitability. (no. 3)*

This document from the Congregation renews a call to seminary formators for a prudent integration of the psychological sciences into the Church's theology and life so that seminarians' personalities may become more richly human and increasingly configured to the image of Jesus Christ, the priest. Seminarians must interiorize and strengthen their commitment to the priestly call, which includes Gospel values. Following the spirit of this Congregation's message, I submit that a key to maximizing the effectiveness of seminary formation lies in the formation of the formators themselves.

The *Guidelines* (2008) states

*Hence, the need for every formator to possess, in due measure, the sensitivity and psychological preparation that will allow him, insofar as possible, to perceive the candidate's true motivations, to discern the barriers that stop him from integrating human and Christian maturity, and to pick up on any psychopathic disturbances present in the candidate. . . . The formator must know how to evaluate the person in his totality, not forgetting the gradual nature of development. He must see the candidate's strong and weak points, as well as the level of awareness that the candidate has of his own problems. Lastly, the formator must discern the candidate's capacity for controlling his own behavior in responsibility and freedom. (no. 4)*

## Aspects of Formation of Seminarians for Priestly Ministry

The human and spiritual growth of a seminarian does not occur automatically or inherently upon acceptance to the seminary. The process of maturation is the work of human formation in coordination with the spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral dimensions of formation. Adequate formation is achieved only through the seminarian's continued cooperation with the work of divine grace (*Guidelines*, no. 2), during which unfolds the uniqueness of each seminarian in his developing priestly identity.

In the major seminary, the process of fostering a priestly vocation takes place in a variety of settings and through multiple shared experiences of formation within the community life of the seminary. These are hopefully integrated through relationships with vocation directors, faculty formators, peers, and bishops. The community life of the seminary provides many good opportunities for formation, offering an environment in which the formation team may assess seminarians and verify, in the context of daily living, a seminarian's capacity for healthy "give-and-take" in relationships. For example, formators are able to identify a seminarian's ability to develop healthy interpersonal boundaries, transcend his personal points of view and personal preferences, achieve a deepening self-awareness and knowledge in his faith life, analyze and communicate difficulties, demonstrate self-sacrifice, and relate comfortably with all types of people. The community life of the seminary also offers the opportunity for the formation team to observe the quality of the seminarians' relationships with persons in roles of authority. Obedience and respect are necessary, as are honesty, integrity and candor. These qualities all reflect a seminarian's overall level of maturity.

Pastoral assignments and internships provide added opportunities in which to assess the suitability of a seminarian. Some dioceses or seminaries offer a spirituality year. Does the seminarian bear witness to the compassionate presence of Christ Jesus in his life? Does he contribute to drawing parishioners closer to God by his presence? Is he responsible in his pastoral assignment? Does he exhibit the potential for pastoral charity? What is the caliber of his relationships with his own family and others?

Seminarians must exercise appropriate self-disclosure in formation meetings and spiritual direction. The *Program of Priestly Formation (PPF, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2006)* states that "[c]are should be taken to ensure that issues of human formation that properly belong to the external

**One of the goals of seminary formation is to help the seminarian articulate an honest understanding of himself, with his complex make-up, weaknesses and potentialities toward a priestly identity.**

forum are not limited to the spiritual direction relationship for their resolution" (no. 131). One of the goals of seminary formation is to help the seminarian articulate an honest understanding of himself, with his complex make-up, weaknesses and potentialities toward a priestly identity. "Just as the seminary recognizes that the positive qualities of a seminarian's prior formation can both indicate a vocation and provide a solid foundation for further growth, it should also address possible deficiencies in the candidate's earlier formation and find means to address them" (*PPF*, no. 88).

I would like to add that injustice is done to a seminarian, and ultimately to the diocese or religious institute, if human faults and failings are not properly addressed in the external forum and are improperly compartmentalized in the internal forum. Excluding human formation issues from its proper forum builds unhealthy layers of secrecy. Priests and seminarians are entitled to private lives but not secret lives. A seminary formation team that "protects" human frailties in the internal forum risks mentoring priestly candidates in the practice of duplicity.

Respecting a seminarian's right of privacy is, conversely, necessary and careful management of confidential materials must be observed. "This is especially true in the case of sharing confidential information with a team of formators, while at the same time ensuring that those charged with the candidate's growth and integration have clear and specific information they need so that they can help the candidate achieve the growth necessary to become a 'man of communion.'"<sup>4</sup> Appropriate self-disclosure and a cultivated capacity for self-reflection and accountability are among the requisite habits and skills of a man in seminary formation (*PPF*, no. 93).

Opportunities for self-evaluation are also important. How does the seminarian's self-image compare with

the image depicted by his formators (e.g. seminary formator, instructors and spiritual director), non-formation staff members, auxiliary personnel (e.g. secretarial staff, maintenance personnel) and persons to whom he ministers? Peer evaluations also provide additional information.

Self-knowledge is an essential prerequisite for the personal maturing process at all levels. For a seminarian, this includes human and Christian maturity, but at the same time goes beyond to what the Congregation refers to in its *Guide for Formation* as “sacerdotal maturity”:

*During his time of formation, a seminarian must pass from pre-adolescent immaturity to adult maturity, from an ordinary Christian life to a mature Christian life. In other words, he must learn to live, in a profoundly intense way, a life of faith, hope and charity in Christ. Finally, he must advance to the level of priestly maturity, a more intimate sharing in the teaching, sanctifying and ruling mission of Christ the priest. Sacerdotal maturity includes and strengthens human and Christian maturity, but at the same time, it goes beyond these, permeating all the human and Christian elements in him, including, therefore, his emotional, sexual and active life. (no. 30)*

What are factors that contribute to struggles in living out one's vocation? Conscious and unconscious dynamics can leave a person in a state of ambivalence and inner conflict in which he experiences himself literally being pulled in two opposing directions. Psychologically, the term “ambivalence” refers to an underlying emotional attitude in which co-existing contradictory feelings, beliefs or behaviors exist toward the same person, object or circumstance. Men who are immature or suffer with significant personality deficits can sometimes present a facade of religious appearances by external conformity which covers up an underlying impoverishment of human development. Instead of the development of a genuine priestly identity, this becomes a hollow substitute, something exterior, which has been “put on” like a garment rather than an identity that is gradually built on the solid foundations of values that have been personally embraced and integrated.

While some seminarians flourish and grow in their vocation, other seminarians exhibit a variety of struggles. For example, seminarians may demonstrate a reduction of energy and enthusiasm for the spiritual life and ministry, a limited ability to witness to the person of Jesus Christ, psychosexual struggles, and a diminished capacity

to remain faithful in a lifelong commitment. To guide him along the path of priestly formation, formators must understand, as best as is possible, a seminarian's level of human functioning. Is the seminarian's psychological woundedness hindering his capacity to engage in and benefit from priestly formation? Is he aware of his areas of emotional underdevelopment? Is he willing to address areas of emotional immaturity contributing to relational deficiencies? Can these weaknesses be addressed through dialogue with formators? Would psychotherapy be helpful? What kinds of deficiencies reduce the viability of a vocation?

**The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops continues to require psychological assessment of *all* seminary candidates (PPF, no. 52).**

### **Criteria to engage the expertise of psychiatrists and psychologists in the selection and formation of seminarians**

The *Guidelines* (2008) cites two main reasons to consult the experts: a) for a “more sure evaluation of the candidate's psychic state” and potential for human growth; and b) for therapy to help a seminarian overcome psychological wounds that limit his capacity for making progress on the path of formation towards the priesthood (nos. 5, 8, 9, 11, and 15).

Not all countries or seminaries consult psychological experts. The Congregation's *Guidelines* directs “different countries...to regulate the recourse to experts in the psychological sciences in their respective *Rationes institutionis sacerdotalis* (no. 7). The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops continues to require psychological assessment of *all* seminary candidates (PPF, no. 52). The assessments are to be incorporated by the dioceses and seminary formators as part of the overall vocational discernment process (*Guidelines*, no. 6).

Use of the experts is at the service of the seminarian for “greater self-knowledge...of his potentialities, and vulnerabilities” in the context of possible future priestly ministry (*Guidelines*, no. 15). The seminarian's willingness to offer consent to share the progress and results of

the psychiatric and psychological consultation with his formators is necessary to ensure the bishop's confidence in the seminarian's suitability for ordained priestly ministry.

At the same time, the psychiatric and psychological consultation can only proceed with the seminarian's previous explicit, informed and free consent (*Guidelines*, no. 12). If the seminarian refuses to give consent for a psychiatric and psychological evaluation, the Congregation maintains that formators are not to force the seminarian's will in any way. "Instead, they will prudently proceed in the work of discernment with the knowledge they already have, bearing in mind canon 1052.1" (*Guidelines*, no. 12).

The seminary rector or his delegate is obliged to establish guidelines for psychiatrists and psychologists, describing objectively those traits and attitudes that indicate satisfactory progress toward the priesthood and those that indicate a lack of the necessary qualities needed for growth in human formation (*PPF*, nos. 103 and 105).

The *PPF* states that a seminary applicant "should understand that the testing results will be shared with select seminary personnel in a way that permits a thorough review" (no. 52). At the same time, the Congregation requires that "particular care be taken so that the professional opinions expressed by the expert are exclusively accessible to those responsible for formation, with the precise and binding proscription against using it in any way other than for the discernment of a vocation and for the candidate's formation" (*Guidelines*, no. 13). Protocols for the access and use of psychiatric and psychological evaluations and courses of therapy; place and period of retention of records; and destruction of these records need to be established by the dioceses and seminaries.<sup>5</sup>

### **What are means of gaining the greatest benefit from a psychiatric and psychological evaluation?**

Consider the six following suggestions for gaining the greatest benefit from a psychiatric and psychological evaluation:

1. Ask your evaluator to look for elements that suggest good or poor prognoses regarding affective levels of functioning including expressed feelings, beliefs and behaviors.

The *Program of Priestly Formation* states:

*The basic principle of human formation is to be found in Pastores dabo vobis, no. 43: the human personality of the priest is to be a bridge and not an obstacle for others in their meeting with Jesus Christ the Redeemer of the human race. As the humanity of the Word made flesh was the Instrumentum salutis, so the humanity of the priest is instrumental in mediating the redemptive gifts of Christ to the people today. (Guidelines, no. 41)*

Characteristics of affective maturity, for example, mature expressions of feelings, beliefs and behaviors, suggest good prognosis. These qualities include the following:

- A sufficient and enduring ego strength
- The ability to act autonomously and interpersonally
- The capacity for pastoral charity and self-sacrifice
- The capacity to establish and maintain healthy and personally satisfying relationships versus clinging, manipulative, superficial, aloof or conflicted relationships<sup>6</sup>

Characteristics of affective immaturity suggestive of probable obstacles regarding personality functioning include the following:

- Self-preoccupation
- Entitlement
- Overly defensive/critical/contentious/isolative behaviors
- History of repeated impaired judgment, work/relationship "failures," conflicts with persons in roles of authority or previous psychiatric treatment
- Attracted/motivated to engage in priestly ministry to be taken care of (due to pervasive insecurities), to escape family/life situations, or to ambitiously affiliate with a role of authority for vicarious respect, for "saintliness," for opportunity (education, travel, work) or for power
- Multiple physical concerns

Professionals doing your evaluations need to be thorough in order to avoid missing important components of human maturity in the candidate being assessed.



2. Provide the evaluator with pertinent personal and collateral information. Be sure to send information that may contribute to a thorough assessment without predetermining what is essential or not necessary. Consider the following:

- Are you or others on the formation team offering pertinent information to the evaluator so that the assessment can be accurate and comprehensive?
- Are you or others on the formation team withholding material because you have a positive or negative bias about a candidate and do not think that a thorough assessment is necessary?
- Are formators uncomfortable asking specific questions about problematic behaviors, and therefore, have not gathered pertinent information for the evaluator?

3. The evaluator might not be asking the most pertinent questions. Consider the following:

- Is your evaluator assessing for troublesome behaviors and signs of immaturity?
- Have you put in writing specific questions that you want answered regarding your referral (e.g. sexual behavior, Internet pornography use, alcohol use, gambling, problems with anger or frequent physical concerns)? It is essential to appreciate that most psychological testing does *not* detect sexual deviances. Sexual development and behavior is most thoroughly explored through direct questioning.
- Are your evaluator's assessments and recommendations understandable to you? Are they useful to you?

Interview questions vary from evaluator to evaluator. Present to your evaluator the questions for which you require answers. Also, request reports that are thorough and clear for lay readers, spelling out ways that test findings are likely to translate into behavior patterns.

4. Review the evaluator's data as well as his or her conclusions about the individual. This data is but one component that will guide the vocation director's, seminary formator's, and ultimately the bishop's discernment regarding the pastoral suitability of a man.

- Have you spoken directly with the individual assessed to ask about specific concerns noted in the assessment?

- Does the individual assessed voice any concerns or insights about the results of his assessment?
- Are the results of the assessment in keeping with an individual seeking priestly formation?

5. Use the assessment results throughout the formation process. Formators might file away assessments and not look at them again unless problems arise. Alternatively, formators could use the assessment as a tool for educating the seminarian in areas of affective weakness and strength, if behavioral or interpersonal difficulties arise, or to gain some understanding of underpinning dynamics of impaired anger management, fear patterns, or self-esteem deficits, for example. A seminarian or priest needs to receive the evaluation results as a challenge and invitation to grow and heal. They should be presented to him as such.

6. Formators need to ask specific pertinent questions of each individual seminarian (e.g. sexual behavior, Internet pornography use or other pertinent questions for a particular seminarian) throughout formation.

**To fulfill the basic requirements of psychological therapy as outlined by the Congregation and the *PPF*, an open and honest dialogue is essential in the collaborative process.**

### **How can a formator assess the progress made by a seminarian who has had psychotherapy?**

To fulfill the basic requirements of psychological therapy as outlined by the Congregation and the *PPF*, an open and honest dialogue is essential in the collaborative process. Necessarily, a seminarian who has been referred for psychological therapy must give written permission for the psychiatrist or psychologist to appropriately share information with his formators. Specifically, the therapist is to provide pertinent information of a seminarian's psychological assessment, goals of therapy, periodic evaluations, and prognosis regarding the attain-

ment of traits and attitudes that indicate satisfactory progress toward the priesthood.

If a seminarian has participated in psychotherapy and the appropriate consent forms have been completed, how can the formator assess the progress made in areas of emotional weakness or relational deficiencies? Is this progress sufficient to allow a seminarian to continue in priestly formation? The formator can consider the following questions:

1. What did the therapist tell you? Did he/she outline specific goals and some practical ways to assess for progress? Did you meet with the therapist and seminarian during the course of psychotherapy to offer and receive feedback regarding progress toward therapy goals? Was a time frame for therapy established?

2. Are you satisfied with the results of therapy? Is the seminarian open to feedback/correction? Is his therapy helping him to grow in his areas of emotional weakness and relational deficiencies? For example, does he address his faults and failings as opportunities to grow in a life of virtue and make realistic plans to do so?

3. Is the seminary formation team relying solely on the therapist's report to make a determination about how the seminarian has progressed in formation?

4. Are the formators working harder than the seminarian? Each seminarian is responsible for his own formation; how is this reflected in the seminarian? Look for evidence of integration of the insights gained in psychotherapy in his interactions within the seminary environment, not just exterior conformity.

5. If the goals established to endorse a seminarian for ongoing formation are not met, are the outcomes and consequences clearly delineated? The *PPF*, no.105, makes the following two statements: "Seminarians in need of long-term therapy should avail themselves of such assistance before entering the seminary, or should leave the program until the therapy has been completed." And, "If such a departure be indicated, there should be no expectation of automatic readmission. A candidate should not be considered for advancement to Holy Orders if he is engaged in long-term psychological therapy. Issues being addressed in counseling should be satisfactorily settled before the call to Holy Orders."

### **How do the goals of psychotherapy differ from those of spiritual direction and human formation?**

Psychotherapy entails the work of developing an evolving process of awareness and interpretation of unconscious and conscious conflicted feelings, beliefs, and

behaviors to produce insight in the patient. Such insight can then be placed at the service of self-actualization. Self-actualization can lead to self-aggrandizement or self-transcendence depending on the direction the person takes.

Gaining self-awareness is a major goal of psychotherapy and by definition, this goal "has a multiplicity of destinations."<sup>7</sup> That is, psychotherapeutic actions vary depending on the goals toward which growth in self-knowledge is applied. This fact is more keenly noted by looking at the stated goals for several common modalities of therapy. For example, brief focal psychotherapy defines its goal as "clarifying the nature of defense mechanisms, anxiety and impulses;" short-term dynamic psychotherapy defines its goal as "resolving oedipal conflicts;" interpersonal psychotherapy has as its goal "improving current interpersonal skills"<sup>8</sup> and cognitive psychotherapy has as its goal "identifying and altering cognitive distortions that maintain symptoms."<sup>9</sup>

From these descriptions, it is clear that the goals of any modality or school of psychotherapy are highly variable or *relativistic*. With relativistic goals, psychotherapy risks promoting individualism, private perfectionism or narcissism. Also, behaviors that in the past were considered inappropriate or immoral are not necessarily treated as such in our present culture. This societal shift has altered the goals of some psychotherapies, especially in the area of sexuality and what constitutes the anthropology of the human person.

Since the goals of psychotherapy vary depending on the modality, there is no *inherent* moral direction in psychotherapy. The direction of psychotherapy is determined by how the person receiving therapy makes application of the insights gained. The relativistic goals of psychotherapy underscore the necessity that experts in the psychological sciences consulted by dioceses and seminaries "must be inspired by an anthropology that openly shares the Christian vision about the human person, sexuality, as well as vocation to the priesthood and to celibacy" (*Guidelines*, no. 6).

Note again the specific purpose of therapy for seminarians. Experts in the psychological sciences sharing a Catholic view of a vocation to the priesthood thereby remove the *relativistic* quality of psychotherapy. The Catholic view of vocation specifies that the aim of therapy is to develop affective qualities consonant with priesthood. Seminaries should develop guidelines for psychiatrists and psychologists that describe these requisite vocational qualities (*PPF*, no. 105).

Psychological services assist individuals in overcoming

ing emotional weaknesses and human relational deficiencies. Spiritual direction, by distinction, guides a seminarian to develop his interior life and relationship with God. Spiritual formation is about the supernatural life. The *Guidelines* (2008) state, “It is a firm principle that spiritual direction cannot, in any way, be interchanged with or substituted by forms of analysis or of psychological assistance” (no. 14). Spiritual direction has as its aim the seminarian’s relations with God as a man aspiring to priesthood and the life of grace. The focus of psychotherapy is feelings, attitudes, and behaviors as related to human functioning. The spiritual director and psychological expert both assess a seminarian’s capacity to commit himself to priestly celibacy and the quality of his motives but from a very different perspective.

Formators assist seminarians in their formation toward priesthood. Ultimately, it is the seminarian himself who bears the primary responsibility for his formation in response to God’s transforming grace (*PPF*, no. 87). The *PPF* also describes the formation of seminarians as

*first and foremost cooperation with the grace of God... ‘Although this formation [in seminaries] has many aspects in common with the human and Christian formation of all the members of the Church, it has, nevertheless, contents, modalities, and characteristics which relate specifically to the aim of preparation for the priesthood’ (Pastores Dabo Vobis, no. 61). . . . [H]uman, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation are to be read in [a] unified and integrated sense. These are neither discrete nor layered dimensions of priestly existence, but they are . . . interrelated aspects of a human response to God’s transforming grace. (PPF, nos. 68 and 72)*

## Recommendations

A renewed sense of accountability, compassion and fraternity will assist in bringing the hope and support necessary for healthy celibate priestly living. To promote this level of healthy relationship, I offer the following recommendations which provide specific structures and procedures for seminarians, bishops, religious superiors, vocation directors, and seminary personnel and helps to eliminate layers of secrecy and ambiguity.

- Develop a consent form to obtain written permission from each seminary candidate for a psychiatric/psychological assessment. Also, specify the persons who may have access to the evaluation and indicate that use of the evaluation be for the explicit purpose of the semi-

narian’s vocational growth, development and discernment

- Develop a consent form for each diocese, religious community, and seminary to obtain permission from each seminarian for formators (who are specifically named; e.g. seminary formation faculty, vocation director, bishop) to address formation issues of vocational growth, development and capacity for celibate priesthood
- Clarify what it means to reveal one’s conscience, for example, spiritual director/confessor may address sexual thoughts, feelings, behaviors as sin. Formators in the external forum, however, would address as vocational growth and development issues and considerations for capacity to live Gospel values as a priest. Psychiatrist/psychologist would address sexual behaviors as psychosocial dynamics to assess if a seminarian is emotionally healthy enough to espouse values of the Catholic faith . . . behaviors would not be addressed as sin, per se
- Specify the expectations of spiritual directors within the seminary; for example, identify practical means to guide seminarians in developing a spiritual life and interior life of prayer, educate seminarians regarding what conscience is and help seminarians form their conscience (which is often deformed or under formed).
- Establish protocols for the access and use of psychiatric and psychological evaluations and courses of therapy; determine a period of retention of records; and establish a process of destruction of these records by the dioceses, religious communities and seminaries
- Establish similar protocols for records kept by formators

## Conclusion

When I attend an ordination to the priesthood, my attention becomes very focused when the ordaining bishop asks the vocation director, “Do you find these men worthy?” With confidence, the vocation director asserts, “After inquiry among the people of Christ and upon the recommendation of those concerned with their training, I testify that they have been found worthy.”<sup>10</sup>

In addition to encouraging collaboration between the psychological scientists, formators and spiritual directors, the Church seeks to foster the common good

of everyone involved in formation. We see this attitude articulated in the *Guidelines* (2008).

*[T]hroughout the entire process of formation for ministry, the church is moved by two concerns: to safeguard the good of her own mission and, at the same time, the good of the candidates....Therefore, the good of the Church and that of the candidate are not in opposition, but rather converge. Those responsible for formation work at harmonizing these two goods, by always considering both simultaneously in their interdependent dynamic. This is an essential aspect of the great responsibility they bear in their service to the Church and to individuals. (no. 1)*

In their ministry, formators are given an immense responsibility that will impact the Church for many years. Formators who have taken time and made the effort to screen candidates with care and concern and who have continued their own ministerial formation possess the confidence they need to recommend a seminarian as a candidate for Holy Orders. Even more, thousands of Catholics will experience Christ's reconciling and redemptive work through the ordained priestly ministry of these men who have been found worthy to carry out this office.<sup>11</sup>



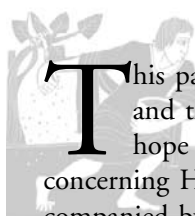
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## Endnotes

1. Vatican Council II, Decree on Priestly Training, *Optatam totius*, (October 28, 1965), n. 11.
2. Paul VI, Encyclical Letter, *Sacerdotalis caelibatus* (June 24, 1967), Congregation for Catholic Education, *Ratio Fundamentalis* (January 6, 1970), Congregation for Catholic Education, *A Guide to Formation in Priestly Celibacy* (April 11, 1974), John Paul II, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (March 25, 1992), Committee on Priestly Formation of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Program of Priestly Formation*, fifth edition. (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, September, 2006), and Congregation for Catholic Education, *Guidelines for the use of Psychology in the Admission and Formation of Candidates for the Priesthood*, (June 29, 2008).
3. Congregation for Catholic Education, *Apostolic Visitation of the American Seminaries and Houses of Priestly Formation*, (December 15, 2008), n. 16.
4. Rev. Mark L. Bartchak, "Canonical Issues Concerning Confidentiality, Privacy Rights, Access to Data, and Record Keeping", *Seminary Journal*, vol. 14, n.1, (Spring 2008), p. 7.
5. Rev. Daniel J. Ward, OSB, J.C.L., J.D. "Psychological Testing for Applicants to Seminaries", *Seminary Journal*, vol. 14, n. 1, (Spring 2008), p. 21.
6. For a more detailed description of affective levels of functioning, see Sister Marysia Weber, "Significant Markers of Human Maturation Applied to the Selection and Formation of Seminarians", *Seminary Journal*, vol. 15, n. 1, (Spring, 2009), pp. 35-41.
7. Benjamin James Sadock, M.D. and Virginia Alcott Sadock, M.D., *Kaplan and Sadock's Synopsis of Psychiatry*, ninth edition (Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams and Wilkins, 2003), p. 923.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 931-933.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 957.
10. *The Rites of the Catholic Church*, vol. 2, trans. International Commission on English in the Liturgy (New York: Pueblo Publishing Co., 1980), p. 71.
11. Sacred Heart Mercy Health Care Center sponsored a seminar entitled, *Guarding the Truth and Dignity of the Priesthood* for seminary formators and diocesan vocation directors in 2009, at which an earlier draft of this paper was presented. I am grateful for suggested revisions to this article from the following persons: Sister Mary Prudence Allen, RSM, PhD; Rev. Kevin Huber, DMin; Rev. Brain Van Hove, SJ, STL, PhD; Sister Joseph Marie Ruessmann, RSM, JCD and Sister Mary Judith O'Brien, RSM, JCD.

# Grace and Priestly Identity

Sister Mary Kathleen Ronan, R.S.M., S.T.D.



This paper is an examination of priestly identity and the working of grace. It is given in the hope that the intense theological instruction concerning Holy Orders prior to ordination will be accompanied by a program of comprehensive formation that will prepare the seminarian to live in harmony with the ontological change that awaits him. While an understanding of theological principles is indispensable, the entire seminary experience should be designed to promote a personal love for Christ and the Church that is marked by appreciation for the Liturgy (particularly the Holy Eucharist), Sacred Scripture, the regular use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and Penance, the exercise of virtue, and fidelity to prayer including the Liturgy of the Hours and visits to the reserved Sacrament. A seminarian who lives the faith with love for Christ and the Church prior to ordination will gain awareness of the breadth of God's love and approach Holy Orders equipped by God's grace for a life of service in the image of Christ.

The identity of the priest is to be found within the dynamic of the Divine call to communion that has been placed in every human heart. It was Christ who gave us the means of attaining this communion when, ascending to the Father, He sent the Holy Spirit and formed His Body the Church. The life and ministry of the priest exists within the mystery of the Church to promote this communion. From his sacramental identification with Christ the Bridegroom and His Body the Church, the priest is a sign and a means of communion for the whole Church, i.e. of grace, of participation in the Divine life. Throughout the years of formation, the seminarian should be encouraged to ponder personally this unique call of the Father to communion with Christ. The seminary might be considered rightly the ante-chamber to participation in a mystery of inexpressible magnitude, the mystery of the union of Christ and His Spouse the Church.

**The identity of the priest is to be found within the dynamic of the Divine call to communion that has been placed in every human heart.**

## Methodology

Four questions have directed this study: "What is the nature of priesthood?" "What is the origin and purpose of the ordained priesthood?" "How is grace operative in the being and ministry of the priest?" "What can be done before ordination to prepare seminarians to live consciously and fruitfully their priestly identity?"

The first three questions are theological and form the basis for the structure of the paper. The fourth question is pertinent to all involved in formation, i.e. bishop, rector, academic faculty, spiritual directors, vocation director, and others in the seminary and parish community. Observations and suggestions for formation will be made within the context of the theological considerations.

The principal sources utilized were the documents promulgated by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and subsequent Magisterial documents, including the writings of recent Holy Fathers, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and studies of the priesthood. An International Symposium on the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Promulgation of the Conciliar Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis* sponsored by the Congregation for the Clergy in October of 1995, entitled "Priesthood a greater love," has been a valuable resource.

## Introduction

We begin our considerations of the nature of priesthood with the words of St. Paul in 2 Timothy

1:6 in which he writes, “Stir into flame the gift of God bestowed when my hands were laid on you.” The sacramental action of ordination establishes a man as priest in a new relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit by virtue of *the gift of God* given when the bishop lays hands upon him and with the Church. The words “when my hands were laid on you” draw attention to the sacramental action of ordination whereby the divine gift is bestowed within the Church through the hands of the bishop.

The invitation to Timothy to “[s]tir into flame the gift” is an acknowledgement of the divine gift that calls for a response and an intimation of the freedom inherent in the gift of grace. Timothy is given a gift along with the potential for its growth in relationship with Christ and his bishop, St. Paul. It is here where freedom determines that the human response aided by grace is called to a deeper love and formators strive to guide seminarians to new depths of desire and readiness for reception of the “gift of God.”

In the letter to the Romans, St. Paul considers his own identity as minister and its origin and purpose, expressed as “the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in performing the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering up of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 15:15). He speaks of himself as “a minister of Christ Jesus.” His priestly identity and his ministry to the Gentiles are the result of grace. His unity with Christ and the action of the Holy Spirit define his priestly action and direct its purpose.

### **Divine Salvific Will**

The identity and *raison d'être* of the priest must be understood from the perspective of accomplishing the divine work of salvation. According to the *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests*, Congregation for the Clergy (January 31, 1994), “The grace and the indelible character conferred with the sacramental unction of the Holy Spirit, place the priest in personal relation with the Trinity since it is the fountain of the priestly being and work” (no. 2). By ordination, a unique and particular communion with the Trinity is established that impresses upon the essence of the priest an identification with the Divine will.

A sentence from the Instruction of the Congregation for the Clergy entitled *The Priest, Pastor and Leader of the Parish Community* (August 4, 2002) situates priestly identity totally within the salvific work of Christ in the Church: “Priestly identity has to be seen

in the context of the divine salvific will since it [priestly identity] is a fruit of the sacramental action of the Holy Spirit, a sharing in the saving work of Christ and completely oriented to that work in the Church” (no. 4).

**The priest who sees his priestly life and ministry within the context of his identification with the fulfillment of the Divine will in the saving work of Christ in the Church will recognize that he is a bridge to communion with God.**

The indispensable nature of the saving work of Christ is described by Father Robert W. Gleason, S.J., in his book entitled *Grace* (1962) as “[t]he universal human longing for union with God will be satisfied, not by man’s ascent to God, but by God’s descent to man to incorporate man in Himself” (p. 10). Salvation alone is able to repair the rupture in our relationship with God and establish the communion that is the desire of the Father, the work of the Son, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. The priest who sees his priestly life and ministry within the context of his identification with the fulfillment of the Divine will in the saving work of Christ in the Church will recognize that he is a bridge to communion with God.

To intellectually grasp and subsequently integrate this mystery at every level of his life, the period of formation will require an intense foundation in dogmatic theology including Soteriology, Pneumatology, Christology, and Ecclesiology. From the first day in the seminary, it should be understood that preparation for Holy Orders and criteria for advancing to ordination does not consist in scholastic excellence alone. Consideration of the mysteries of faith must be integrated personally through the arduous and relentless interior labor, assisted by grace, which will promote spiritual growth and lead to ongoing conversion, growth in virtue, and continued openness to the working of grace.

The seminary community as a whole can work together to promote new depths of awareness of our sinfulness and need for Divine mercy. This could be

done during the penitential liturgical seasons, at times of retreat, within spiritual direction, and in times of prayer and spiritual reading. Extensive instruction should be offered to foster the regular and fruitful use of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation by encouraging faith in the power of Christ in the Sacrament, hope in the everlasting mercy of the Father, and gratitude and love for Christ, the Redeemer. To the degree that a seminarian recognizes in himself the fallen but redeemed condition of the human race, he will grow in compassion for others and gratitude for the grace and merciful love of the Father in the sacramental life of the Church.

### **The Church, Universal Sacrament of Salvation**

As it was the love of the Father, made manifest and fulfilled in Christ that achieved our salvation, that same love is present in the union of Christ with the Church for the salvation of all men. Now, that love is manifest and effective through the sacramental ministry of the priest in union with Christ and the Church. The priest is assumed into the mystery of the union of Christ with His Spouse, the Church, a union described in *The Catechism*, paragraph 771:

*We know that in the Church, Christ “fulfills and reveals His own mystery as the purpose of God’s plan: ‘to unite all things in Him’ (Eph. 1:10). St. Paul calls the nuptial union of Christ and the Church ‘a great mystery.’ Because she is united to Christ as to her bridegroom, she becomes a mystery in her turn” (Eph. 5:32; 3:9-11; 5:25-27).*

Through his union with Christ, the priest is minister of the Church who draws all into union described in the words of *Lumen Gentium* as follows:

*The Church, in Christ, is like a sacrament – a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men.’ The Church’s first purpose is to be the sacrament of the inner union of men with God. Because men’s communion with one another is rooted in that union with God, the Church is also the sacrament of the unity of the human race. (no. 1)*

Through the ministry of her priests, we are given the hope of attaining that communion with God and one another for which we were created.

*The priest is transformed by the gift of the Holy Spirit and configured to Christ, the High Priest, so that*

*he might lead others to that communion for which we have been created. In his first letter to Priests in 1979, Pope John Paul II described the priestly ministry citing Hebrews 5:1 that “chosen from among men, He is constituted in favor of men.” The pinnacle of priestly activity “in favor of men” is the summit toward which all the action of the Church is directed.*

The words of *Presbyterorum ordinis* describe in greater detail the service the priest renders to the laity:

*All belonging to this people, since they have been sanctified by the Holy Spirit, can offer themselves as “a sacrifice, living, holy, pleasing to God” (Rom 12:1). Through the ministry of the priests, the spiritual sacrifice of the faithful is made perfect in union with the sacrifice of Christ. (no. 2)*

In the address to the Plenary of the Congregation for the Clergy (November 23, 2001), Pope John Paul II comments on the indispensable nature of the priest’s service for the whole Church:

*Thanks to the ministerial priesthood, the faithful are made aware of their common priesthood and they live it (cf. Eph 4:11-12); the priest reminds them that they are the People of God and makes them able to “offer spiritual sacrifices” (cf. 1 Pt 2:5), through which Christ himself makes us an eternal gift to the Father (cf. 1 Pt 3:18). Without the presence of Christ represented by the priest, the sacramental guide of the community, this would not be an ecclesial community in its fullness.*

We find in this an expression of the communion between priests and lay faithful that pertains to the very nature of the Church Herself. Through the priest, the spousal love that unites Christ to the Church is manifest and expressed.

In his configuration to Christ, the priest embodies the spousal love of Christ “in favor of men.” As stated in *Pastores dabo vobis*:

*Hence Christ stands “before” the Church and “nourishes and cherishes her” (Eph. 5 :29), giving his life for her. The priest is called to be the living image of Jesus Christ, the spouse of the Church. Of course, he will always remain a member of the community as a believer alongside his other brothers and sisters who have been called by the Spirit, but in virtue of his*



*configuration to Christ, the head and shepherd, the priest stands in this spousal relationship with regard to the community. (no. 22)*

The bond with the Bishop who rules, governs, and sanctifies in the line of Apostolic Succession is the link whereby the priest shares in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly mission of Christ. In the first paragraph of his Holy Thursday letter to priests April 8, 1979, Pope John Paul II wrote, "I want to express my faith in the vocation that unites you to your Bishop, in a particular communion of sacrament and ministry, by means of which the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, is built up" (no. 1).

Pope John Paul II examined the centrality of the priesthood for the life of the Church. In his Address to the Plenary Session of the Congregation for the Clergy (November 23, 2001), he noted that it is the relation of the priest with Christ that qualifies his relation to the Church:

*What determines this singular ecclesial centrality of the priest is the fundamental relation he has with Christ, Head and Pastor, as his sacramental re-presentation. ...The ecclesial dimension belongs to the substance of the ordained priesthood. It is totally at the service of the Church, so that the ecclesial community has an absolute need for the ministerial priesthood to have Christ the Head and Shepherd present in her.*

An essential preparation for ordination will include the development of strong ecclesial relationships through opportunities to know and love the Holy Father, encounters that strengthen the relationship with the bishop who will ordain him, mentoring by members of the presbyterate, and friendships with classmates. Periodically, it will be useful to evaluate the measure in which the physical, intellectual, social, and spiritual environments of the seminary are conducive to fostering the development of these relationships. Needless to say, the primary source of this communion is the sacramental life of the Church where the seminarian will encounter Christ Himself and, once ordained, serve as bridge *in persona Christi* for the faithful. Seminary years can achieve much to prepare the man to be an effective agent for fostering communion within a parish and as member of the diocesan presbyterate. A comprehensive study of Ecclesiology will require a corresponding application in ministerial practicum and integration within the various disciplines of the curriculum.

**Periodically, it will be useful to evaluate the measure in which the physical, intellectual, social, and spiritual environments of the seminary are conducive to fostering the development of these relationships.**

The source of all communion, the Paschal Mystery of Christ the Priest, i.e., His Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension to the Father is the font of salvation and reconciliation with God. The identity of the priest is intimately linked to that source. The Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests (January 31, 1994) describes this as participation in the one Priesthood of Christ.

*[T]he identity of the priest comes from the specific participation in the Priesthood of Christ, in which the one ordained becomes, in the Church and for the Church, a real, living and faithful image of Christ the Priest, "a sacramental representation of Christ, Head and Shepherd." (no. 2)*

The Directory uses the terms "real, living and faithful" to describe the words "image of Christ the Priest." Lest any doubt remain, priestly identity is described as "a sacramental representation of Christ, Head and Shepherd." Whether "real image" or "sacramental representation," priestly identity must be understood in the light of the doctrine of the Church on sacraments stated in *Sacrosanctum concilium*: "When a man baptizes, it is Christ Who baptizes" (No. 7). As a sacramental representation, the priest both manifests and achieves what he signifies. In this light it can be said that the priest makes Christ, Priest, Head and Shepherd, present and active in and for the Church. It is possible because he "receives a spiritual power as a gift." The gift is "a participation in the authority with which Jesus Christ, through his Spirit, guides the Church" (*Pastores dabo vobis*, no. 21, *Presbyterorum ordinis*, nos. 2, 12).

The term "specific participation" is used to set apart and compare priestly participation with that of the faithful who have their own way of participating. Pope John Paul II emphasized the need to recognize



and attend to this essential distinction. For, while all are called in Baptism to bear witness to Christ, to render an offering of self to God and to praise God, the organic structure of the Body requires the unique interaction between two forms of participation in the one priesthood of Christ.

A priest always retains his identity as a child of God who is called to praise the Father and to bring his own life as an offering to the Father in the Liturgy. After ordination, however, his ontological identification with Christ distinguishes him among the Baptized. Citing *Lumen Gentium* (no. 10), the Holy Father noted in *Novo incipiente*:

*Though they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless interrelated: each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ. (no. 3)*

**To effectively exercise his priestly ministry in service of the holiness of the laity, the seminarian will need a deep conviction of the distinction between priest and laity and of the unique dignity of the lay faithful as members of the Body of Christ.**

To effectively exercise his priestly ministry in service of the holiness of the laity, the seminarian will need a deep conviction of the distinction between priest and laity and of the unique dignity of the lay faithful as members of the Body of Christ. The Liturgy celebrated in the seminary will serve as a model of appropriate participation in the Liturgy by the laity and the ordained. A seminarian who prior to ordination is dedicated to promoting an understanding of the universal call to holiness among the laity will be aided in his pastoral ministry as priest as he teaches the lay faithful of their proper vocation and dignity as *Lumen Gentium* has described it:

*Taking part in the Eucharistic sacrifice, which is the fount and apex of the whole Christian life, they offer the Divine Victim to God, and offer themselves along with it. Thus both by reason of the offering and through Holy Communion all take part in this liturgical service, not indeed, all in the same way but each in that way which is proper to himself. (no. 11)*

*Sacrosanctum Concilium* offers the rationale for the claim that the principal action of the priest is the celebration of the Liturgy: “every liturgical celebration, because it is an action of Christ the priest and of His Body which is the Church, is a sacred action surpassing all others; no other action of the Church can equal its efficacy by the same title and to the same degree” (no. 7). It is here, to the highest degree, that priestly ministry is exercised “in favor of” the Body of Christ.

From the liturgy, therefore, and especially from the Eucharist, as from a font, grace is poured forth upon us; and the sanctification of men in Christ and the glorification of God, to which all other activities of the Church are directed as toward their end, is achieved in the most efficacious possible way. (No. 10)

*Sacrosanctum Concilium* points to the Liturgy as the source of all communion in the Church, communion with God and with men. “Christ indeed always associates the Church with Himself in this great work wherein God is perfectly glorified and men are sanctified” (No. 7). Supported by the *Directory*, the conclusion can be drawn that there is no activity in the life of the priest that surpasses in importance his participation in the Liturgy. During the period of formation in the seminary, the centrality of the Liturgy for the life of the entire Body of Christ, the Church, must be emphasized and understood.

### **Mission of the Church is Configured**

In his first Holy Thursday letter to priests, Pope John Paul II situated the understanding of the priesthood within the ecclesiological vision of the Second Vatican Council drawing it into depths heretofore uncharted:

*The Second Vatican Council has deepened the conception of priesthood, presenting it within the context of its entire magisterium as the expression of inner powers, of those dynamisms/energies by means of which the mission of the whole of the People of God in the Church is configured. What is essential is to re-examine the Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*.*

*(Novo incipiente, no. 3)*

The identity and ministry of the priest is intimately joined to the life and mission of the Church and derived from her inner powers and energies in order to “configure” the mission of the whole People of God. In and through the priest, the People of God are capable of fulfilling their Christian vocation. They are drawn into participation in the mystery of Christ and His Body. To the degree that the seminarian has understood the ecclesiological teachings of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, he will begin to grasp the extent to which he is about to be drawn into the heart of the life and mission of the Church.

### Pastoral Charity

The extent to which the exercise of priestly ministry meets with hearts disposed to receive the grace of the sacraments is due in part to unmerited grace and in part to the cooperation of the recipient. While the efficacy of the sacramental ministry does not depend upon the holiness of the minister, the priest remains obliged to strive for holiness and grow in love, in the image of Christ to whom he is bound by ordination.

The beginnings of a priestly vocation are attributed by Pope John Paul II to being overtaken by love, divine love (*Novo incipiente*, no. 2). Do not the years that follow flourish in that same love? The guarantee that love will deepen in the heart of the priest is the gift of the Holy Spirit. *Pastores dabō vobis* calls for fidelity to the impulses of the Holy Spirit throughout life:

*Beloved, through ordination, you have received the same Spirit of Christ, who makes you like him, so that you can act in his name and so that his very mind and heart might live in you. This intimate communion with the Spirit of Christ - while guaranteeing the efficacy of the sacramental actions which you perform in persona Christi - seeks to be expressed in fervent prayer, in integrity of life, in the pastoral charity of a ministry tirelessly spending itself for the salvation of the brethren. In a word, it calls for your personal sanctification. (no. 33)*

The priestly character, sign of the irrevocable bond with Christ, marks the relationship of the priest with Christ and the Church as one of loving generous service in the image of Christ. In an Address given during a Symposium on Priesthood in Rome in 1995, Pope Benedict XVI described the all-encompassing transfor-

mation achieved through the sacramental action whereby the man belongs to the Lord forever. What remains for the priest is a response that lies in the realm of human choice assisted by grace.

*The concept of “servant” is connected with the image of the “indelible character” ... One could say: “character” means ownership impressed upon the essence. . . . We deal with a kind of belonging that cannot be tampered with; the initiative comes from the owner: from Christ.” . . . I cannot declare myself to belong to the Lord. He should above all take me as his own; only then can I enter into the state of being assumed, in order to accept on my part and try to live it.*

This work of grace may be compared with what R. Gleason in his book entitled *Grace* wrote:

*God’s love is efficacious. If even human love is capable of altering the one to whom it is directed, all the more does divine love transform its object. When God looks on man with love, He alters the very structure of man’s being, producing in it, through the objective gift we call grace, a reflection of His own inner attitude of generosity, mercy and loving kindness. (p. 39)*

Lest we lose heart at the immensity of the task, a focus upon the centrality of the work of God through grace during and after the time of formation offers reassurance in the face of human frailty. We read the remarks of Pope Benedict XVI in his *Life and Ministry of Priests*.

*Belonging to the Lord who became a servant is to belong to those who are his own. This means that now the servant can, under the sacred sign, give what he can never give by his own power: in fact, he can give the Holy Spirit, absolve from sins, make present both the sacrifice of Christ in his body and blood; all rights reserved to God, that no man can procure of himself, nor can they be delegated to him by any community.*

If we consider the words of St. Paul, “I live now no longer I but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:19-20), we are reminded that the identification of the priest with Christ is entire. The basis of the identification is the love that binds Christ to the Father and the Holy Spirit. Within the nuptial union of Christ with His Church, all fruitfulness is a direct result of the grace of the Holy Spirit, a font of divine love. *Pastores dabō vobis*

**The time of seminary formation offers many opportunities to foster in oneself a loving heart displayed by a compassionate and merciful disposition.**

describes the free participation of priests in the charity of Christ:

*Pastoral charity is the virtue by which we imitate Christ in his self - giving and service. It is not just what we do, but our gift of self, which manifests Christ's love for his flock. Pastoral charity determines our way of thinking and acting, our way of relating to people. It makes special demands on us. . . . The gift of self, which is the source and synthesis of pastoral charity, is directed toward the Church. (No. 23)*

The time of seminary formation offers many opportunities to foster in oneself a loving heart displayed by a compassionate and merciful disposition. *Pastores dabо vobis* does not underestimate the aspect of human formation:

*In order that his ministry may be humanly as credible and acceptable as possible, it is important that the priest should mold his human personality in such a way that it becomes a bridge and not an obstacle for others in their meeting with Jesus Christ the Redeemer of humanity. (no. 43)*

In anticipation of the day when by Holy Orders the man is totally identified with Christ and His Body the Church, every means should be sought to heighten the awareness of the seminarian that "the Church is born primarily of Christ's total self-giving for our salvation" (CCC, no. 766).

Convincing evidence should be sought that the seminarian too is willing, with God's grace, to give of himself to Christ and to His Bride, the Church, without counting the cost. By a particular configuration to Christ through Holy Orders, he will be taken to new depths of participation in the mystery of the Passion

and Death of Christ, the heart of the life and mission of the Church.



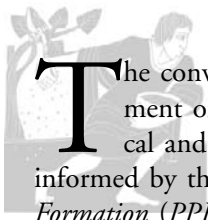
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# Psychological Assessment for Seminary Admission: Are We Failing to Assess Key Factors?

Len Sperry, M.D., Ph.D.



The conventional model of psychological assessment of seminary candidates has both theoretical and technical shortcomings. In this article, informed by the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Program for Priestly Formation (PPF, 2006)* and the NCEA survey on the psychological assessment of seminary candidates, a comprehensive model of psychological assessment is proposed that remedies the shortcomings of the conventional model.

For some time I have been concerned about the adequacy of the psychological assessment of candidates for the priesthood. This concern follows from my experience evaluating seminary candidates as well as priests accused of various forms of misconduct, including sexual misconduct. Usually, there was a report of psychological assessment in the files of nearly all the priests that I evaluated. Typically, these reports included results on a MMPI, Rorschach, and a WAIS. It was somewhat disappointing that the reports contained few, if any, clues suggesting that misconduct might occur. It could be argued that candidates with such clues in their assessments were, in fact, screened out of priestly formation. The reality, though, is that a large percentage (28%) was admitted despite a negative psychological assessment report (Batsis, 1993). It could also be argued that the assessment protocols of those who went on to become priests and then engaged in misconduct were incomplete and so could not be sufficiently predictive.

Assuming that the typical assessment protocol is incomplete, what additional components or factors would increase predictability? To begin to answer this

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question requires that a typical assessment protocol be specified. Unfortunately, this is problematic since consensus on what constitutes a standard assessment protocol has yet to be achieved. This problem is longstanding beginning in the late 1930s when the psychological screening of candidates began in response to Moore's famous study involving "pre-psychotic" priests (Moore, 1936). Surprisingly, not even the sexual misconduct crisis of the past two decades has led to a standardized protocol or a national applicant database (Plante & Boccaccini, 1998). It was not until the 5th edition of the *PPF* that psychological testing became norma-

tive in the seminary admission process. Fortunately, an important step forward was the recent report on the national survey of testing and screening practices of seminary candidates. The report, *Psychological Assessment: The Testing and Screening of Candidates for Admission to the Priesthood in the U.S. Catholic Church: A Survey Study Conducted by the NCEA Seminary Department in Collaboration with the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate* – hereafter referred to as the report or NCEA survey – provides the first documentation of the current practices of psychological assessment in the U.S.<sup>1</sup> The report identified what appears to be “a standard, core set of measures [Wechsler scales of intelligence, Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2, and the Rorschach Inkblot Test using the Exner system]” (NCEA, 2010, p. 52) and the clinical interview. The report indicates that the psychologists assessing seminary candidates also utilized other measures to assess additional considerations. But what are these additional considerations and what is the basis for conducting such additional assessments?

This article attempts to address these questions. First, it briefly reviews the USCCB document making psychological testing normative (that is, the aforementioned 5<sup>th</sup> edition of the *PPF*). It then compares national survey data on current assessment practices with that document and concludes that the conventional model of psychological assessment of seminary candidates has both theoretical and technical shortcomings. Finally, it proposes additional assessment factors that presumably provide a fuller, more comprehensive psychological assessment model.

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### Rationale for Psychological Assessment

To date, what constitutes the psychological assessment of seminary candidates has been largely the decision of vocation directors, individual seminaries and psychologists. In other words there is no consensus on

a systemic and theological basis or rationale on which specific factors are to be assessed. As noted previously, the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of the *PPF* (2006) made psychological testing for seminary candidates normative, but specified no directives about the factors to be assessed, nor was a specific test battery designated. Seminaries were instead charged with specifying what constituted “sufficient growth” necessary for seminary admission.

The *PPF*, nevertheless, did outline several markers or attributes of maturity that it expected viable candidates would have achieved prior to seminary admission. “Candidates for admission...should have attained, at least in some measure, growth in those areas represented by the four pillars or in the integrated dimensions of formation identified in *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (PDV, 1992): human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral” (no. 37). The document then specifies what it considers to be “sufficiency” – presumably an indicator of minimal competency – for each of the four pillars. It indicates that sufficient **human formation** involves the absence of serious pathology and the proven capacity to function competently in ordinary situations without requiring extensive psychotherapy or remedial work. It also involves psychosexual maturity, empathy, the capacity for personal and relational growth and for conversion. Finally, it involves a “deep desire to be a man for others in the likeness of Christ” which presumably reflects the candidate’s capacity to live celibate chastity. Sufficient **spiritual formation** requires that a candidate prays daily, belongs to a parish, regularly participates in the sacraments of Eucharist and Penance, is drawn to deepen his spiritual life and to share it with others. Sufficient **pastoral formation** involves the candidate’s understanding of the Church’s mission and his willingness to contribute to it. It also involves sensitivity to the needs of others and the desire to respond to them in addition to a willingness to initiate actions and assume leadership of individuals and communities. Sufficient **intellectual formation** involves a proven capacity for critical thinking, a demonstrable ability to understand abstract and practical questions, and a sufficient understanding to communicate effectively orally and in writing (no. 37). In other words, the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Program for Priestly Formation* does provide a systematic and theological rationale for the assessment of seminary applicants.

### Conventional Assessment Model

This rationale is not only reasonable, but because the stated markers of sufficiency are specific enough to serve as behavioral markers, these markers can be



assessed. In fact, the NCEA survey appears to have adapted these markers, generated a list of “assessment components” (e.g., psychosexual development, capacity for empathy, capacity for critical thinking, capacity for leadership, etc.), and incorporated them as survey items.

The results of this survey are enlightening. Psychologists report that they are very likely (ratings of “very likely” with percentages of 70% or more on components) to assess 8 of the 18 assessment components. These include “psychosocial development,” “affective maturity,” “history of substance abuse,” “interpersonal skills,” “sexual orientation or inclination,” “sexual experience,” “capacity for empathy,” and “capacity to live celibate chastity.” Less emphasized are “dealing with authority,” “capacity for growth and conversion,” “capacity for critical thinking,” and “cross-cultural adaptability.” Although the report indicates that “pastoral leadership formation, decision-making skills, and the manner of dealing with authority are areas that seminaries typically address during the formation process” (p. 11), it appears that these assessment components related to pastoral formation were, in fact, assessed by some psychologists. Table 1 lists all 18 assessment components categorized in terms of the four pillars of formation. What is noteworthy about these survey results is that most of the assessment components identified as human formation were assessed in contrast to the other three areas of formation, wherein only “capacity to live celibate chastity” was very likely to be assessed. The results of this national study operationalize what will be called the Conventional Assessment Model in this paper.

In the psychological literature the term “sufficiency” denotes a “minimal level of competency” (Sperry,

2010). The *PPF* implies that the process of priestly formation should result in higher levels of sufficiency and increased maturity which have been called “proficiency.”<sup>2</sup> Because the primary concern of this article is on the assessment of seminary applicants, nevertheless, it focuses on the assessment of sufficiencies. A logical question concerns whether the typical or conventional psychological assessment of seminary candidates actually measures or assesses these sufficiencies. Assuming that the NCEA survey represents conventional assessment practice, the answer to this question is found by comparing conventional practice against the sufficiencies specified in the *PPF*. Table 2 provides a visual depiction of this comparison.

What should be obvious from Table 2 is that conventional psychological assessment only assesses some of these markers. Obvious omissions of the human formation dimension are the capacity for personal and relational growth, a critical element of “affective maturity.” It also appears that markers of the pastoral formation dimension are less likely to be formally a part of the conventional psychological assessment, although, as indicated, such information is likely to be elicited by the vocation director or seminary personnel.

### Comprehensive Assessment Model

Attention now turns to the question: are there other key factors that may be useful indicators of effectiveness and satisfaction in priestly ministry besides those already being assessed? A basic premise of this article is that the conventional approach to psychological assessment of seminary candidates has some value but also has some shortcomings. A second premise is

**Table 1: NCEA Survey Assessment – Components Related to the Four Pillars of Formation**

<p><b><u>Human Formation</u></b>          psychosocial development*          affective maturity*          history of substance abuse*          interpersonal skills*          sexual orientation or inclination*          sexual experience*          capacity for empathy*          ability to communicate effectively</p>	<p><b><u>Spiritual Formation</u></b>          capacity to live celibate chastity* +          capacity for growth and conversion</p> <p><b><u>Intellectual Formation</u></b>          capacity for critical thinking          ability to grasp practical questions          ability to grasp abstract questions          cross-cultural adaptability</p> <p><b><u>Pastoral Formation</u></b>          capacity for leadership          manner of dealing with authority          decision-making skills</p>
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\* denotes components that were very likely to be assessed by surveyed psychologists

+ some may also consider this to be a component of human formation



**Table 2: Comparison of the PPF Markers to Conventional Assessment Focus and Methods**

PPF Pillars	PPF Markers of Sufficiency	Assessment Factors	Assessment Methods
Human	a. absence of serious pathology b. function competently without extensive therapy or remediation c. psychosexual maturity d. capacity for empathy e. capacity for personal & relational growth f. capacity for conversion g. capacity to live celibate chastity	1. Psychopathology (a) 2. Coping Capacity (b)  3. Sexuality (c) 4. Relational Capacity (d & e)	1. MMPI-2; Rorschach, others 2. Interview & tests 3. Interview & tests 4. Interview & tests  (See p.58, this issue, for definition of assessment method.)
Spiritual	a. daily prayer b. active parish membership c. regular Eucharist and penance d. desire to deepen spiritual life & share it		**
Intellectual	a. critical thinking b. understand abstract and practical questions c. effective oral & written communication	5. Intelligence (a & b)	5. WAIS, WASI or others  (See p.58, this issue, for definitions of assessment methods.)
Pastoral	a. understand & promote church's mission b. sensitivity and responsiveness to others' needs (including culture) c. willing to initiate actions & assume individual & communal leadership		**

\* very limited view of this construct (see text) \*\*Information from interview by formator or vocation director or document review such as transcripts and the pastor's recommendation letter

that psychologically-based information on factors such as the spiritual and pastoral pillars is an essential and necessary additional component to the assessment data collected by vocation directors and seminary personnel. What is proposed here is a "comprehensive assessment" which bolsters the conventional psychological assessment foci or areas of Psychopathology, Coping Capacity, Intelligence, Sexuality, and Relational Capacity with six additional foci. These are Affective Maturity, Acculturation and Cultural Adaptability, God Image, Anthropology and Theology of Ministry, Leadership and Work Orientation, and "Fit" with Seminary Culture. Each is described in this section and identified in Table 3.

### **Affective Maturity**

In the NCEA survey, 89% of psychologists reported that they were very likely to assess affective maturity.

Since no consensus exists among psychologists about the definition of affective maturity or its assessment, however, it is unclear what psychologists were assessing. Additionally, no obvious consensus in the definition of affective maturity exists in Vatican documents addressing seminaries (McGlone, Ortiz, Vigilone, 2009). For example, in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, affective maturity is defined as the capacity to "relate correctly to both men and women." It involves "a responsible love that touches the person in his physical, psychic and spiritual dimensions." Affective maturity assumes that a seminarian can bring to all human relationships a serene friendship and a deep brotherliness, with the capacity to renounce anything that is a threat to it. It requires self-mastery and the capacity to be a "sincere gift of self" to all (nos. 43-44). The PPF defines a person of affective maturity as "someone whose life of feelings is in balance and in-

**Table 3: The Four Pillars and Conventional and Comprehensive Psychological Assessment**

Four Pillars	Conventional Psychological Assessment Factors	Comprehensive Psychological Assessment Factors
Human	Psychopathology Sexuality Coping Capacity Relational Capacity	Psychopathology Sexuality Coping Capacity <u>Affective Maturity*</u>
Spiritual		<u>God Image</u> <u>Anthropology (Implicit)</u>
Intellectual	Intelligence	Intelligence
Pastoral		Leadership and Work Orientation Acculturation & Cultural Adaptability “Fit” with Seminary Culture Theology of Ministry (Implicit)

\* underlined items are the proposed added factors or components of a comprehensive assessment

tegrated into thought and values; in other words, a man of feelings who is not driven by them but freely lives his life enriched by them.” It then specifies four ways in which affective maturity is manifested: the ability to live well with authority; the ability to take direction from another; the capacity to effectively exercise authority among peers; and the ability to deal productively with conflict and stress (no. 76). Even though the *PPF* specifies affective maturity as part of human formation, only the capacity to deal with stress and conflict is clearly related to the human formation dimension while the other three seem to relate more closely with the pastoral formation dimension as described in *PPF* no. 37.

In contrast to these theological definitions, the psychological literature emphasizes the link between affective maturity and intimacy. For example, McClone (2009) suggests that the effective priest is expected to “relate in more honest and conscious ways with oneself, with others and with God. These various relational dimensions are interconnected and influence each other’s growth” (p. 6). Intimacy and affective maturity are central to such relationality and include relating to God. Intimacy is described as being in touch with one’s real self, and it presumes the capacities for self-awareness, self-intimacy, and self-disclosure. More specifically, affective maturity is the capacity to “effectively identify, understand and express my real feelings with the diversity of persons that make up the contemporary church while having a growing capacity to listen, understand, and empathize with their experiences” (p. 6). In short, affective maturity is an indicator of an individual’s capacity

for intimacy, and it seems to be central to both human formation as well as pastoral and spiritual formation.

Some view affective maturity and sexual maturity as overlapping realities. Both involve the capacity for intimacy, specifically to develop and maintain friendships and relationships of significance. For celibates – seminarians and priests – it involves at least three dimensions: the capacity for self knowledge and awareness, the willingness to risk being loved and loving as celibates, and an integrated sexuality and comfort with this identity (G. M. McGlone, personal communication, October 26, 2010).

Although there may be some conceptual confusion about affective maturity, depending on how it is defined, it may actually overlap some of the formation areas. Accordingly, it could be concluded that affective maturity is actually a central component of at least three pillars of formation: human, spiritual, and pastoral. But what about the remaining pillar? Is there any relationship between affective maturity and the intellectual pillar? Are not a priest’s affective life and his intellectual development closely interrelated?

Should seminarians have a passion for learning and ongoing formation that keeps their minds and hearts continually challenged and open to growth? Theological and psychological literature supports this link. For example, affective maturity and the intellectual pillar appear to be closely related in *PDV* (nos. 71-72) wherein John Paul II implies such a link and provides a model for it.

The psychological literature also suggests a strong link between the two, particularly in the literature on

cognitive and emotional development. For instance, seminarians are expected, at a minimum, to utilize formal-operational thinking (FOT). FOT is the capacity to think abstractly and use inductive and deductive reasoning to make decisions and solve problems based on logic. A higher level of intellectual development is called post-formal thinking (PFT). PFT is more complex than FOT and involves making decisions based on situational constraints and circumstances and while *integrating emotion* with logic. It relies on subjective experience and intuition as well as logic, and it is useful in dealing with ambiguity, contradiction, and compromise. Four stages of PFT have been identified (Commons & Richards, 2003).

The distinction between FOT and PFT is important and can be observed in seminary candidates. It is not uncommon for candidates with a limited capacity for PFT to experience more difficulty with emotionally charged situations than candidates with a greater capacity for it. Discussions involving emotional issues often reveal differing responses which reflect the capacity for PFT: those with little PFT tend to believe that there are clear right and wrong ways in dealing with complex situations while those with much more PFT are likely to be open to nuance. Accordingly, it would seem essential to assess a candidate's capacity for FOT and PFT.

Related to general intelligence, emotional intelligence (EI) overlaps with both PFT and affective maturity. As such, it is a necessary component of effective, compassionate, and intelligent behavior. EI is the ability to understand and regulate emotions. It involves four competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management in which a person can develop others, exert influence, communicate effectively, and function effectively as a leader (Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2008).<sup>3</sup> In short, PFT and EI overlap with affective maturity. Accordingly, a case can be made that affective maturity is a necessary factor in all four pillars: human, spiritual, pastoral, and intellectual.

## God Image

Research on God image, also called God representations, suggests these representations have considerable potential for both candidate assessment and for formation. God image refers to ways in which an individual views or represents God. The image can vary from positive (e.g., loving and caring) to negative (e.g., stern and wrathful). Explanations vary for how God images develop. The most common explanation or theory is that a child's image of God is linked to the child's perception

**God image refers to ways in which an individual views or represents God. The image can vary from positive (e.g., loving and caring) to negative (e.g., stern and wrathful).**

of his parents. Convincing evidence exists that individuals project characteristics of their father onto their image of God which suggests a link between God image and one's biological father (Hood, Spilka, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 1996). Other research suggests that a child's attachment style influences his experience of God later in life (Tisdale et al., 1997). It also appears that God image reflects an individual's theological anthropology (Sperry, 2009).

Other factors such as transformational experiences and psychotherapy have been shown to modify God image. For example, researchers report that an adult client's God image changes as a result of successful psychotherapy even when the therapy did not address spiritual matters. God images changed from a harsh, negative view of God at the outset to images of God as loving and caring at the completion of treatment (Cheston, Piedmont, Eanes, and Lavin (2003).

Assessing the candidate's God image adds value to the psychological assessment process. Because God image reflects an individual's relationship with his father, his attachment style with his mother or caretaker, and his theological anthropology, furthermore, assessing the God image provides indirect verification of the candidate's attachment style, relationship with his father, and his theological anthropology. If a candidate reports having a "good and happy childhood" but later in the interview portrays a negative image of God, further inquiry is indicated to clarify this apparent discrepancy.

God image can be assessed in the clinical interview or by formal measures. The interviewer can simply ask the candidate how he imagines God when he prays, when he is sick, or when he feels he has failed. The most common psychological measure is the God Image Scale, or its shorter version, the God Image Inventory (Lawrence, 1997). Beyond identifying God image as part of assessment of seminary candidates, knowledge of a seminarian's God image can be quite useful in semi-

nary formation, including spiritual direction.

### **Acculturation and Cultural Adaptability**

The number of international applicants to U.S. seminaries continues to rise. The diversity of American society means that an increasing number of candidates were born here of recent immigrants. Acculturation is the process by which individuals adapt to a new culture and reflects the level or degree to which they integrate new cultural patterns into their original cultural patterns. Individuals with lower levels of acculturation can find seminary extraordinarily challenging.

At the same time, highly acculturated candidates, often of European ancestry, will inevitably find themselves – assuming they are accepted and complete seminary training – assigned to culturally diverse parishes. They will be expected to be culturally adaptive. The same expectation will be held for international priests since they may be assigned to parishes with cultures that are different than their own. In short, future priests will be increasingly expected to demonstrate cultural sensitivity and competence. For that reason, formal assessment of acculturation and cultural adaptability should become a necessary component of the psychological assessment of seminary candidates.

There are several ways of assessing acculturation. A short and clinically useful method is the Brief Acculturation Scale. This scale measures three levels of acculturation (low, medium, high) based on the client's language (native vs. English), generation (first to fifth), and social activities (preference for friends–native vs. dominant culture). The scale and its scoring system for three levels of acculturation is available in Paniagua (2005, pp. 11-12). In addition, the Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory (Kelley, 1995) is a device useful in assessing an individual's cross-cultural adaptability. It measures psychological factors critical to success in cross-cultural situations.

### **Leadership and Work Orientation**

Capacity for leadership is one of the indicators of sufficiency for pastoral formation expected of seminary candidates (*PPF*, no. 37) as is the capacity to understand and promote the Church's mission and his work orientation. Both leadership and work orientation are discussed in this section.

#### **Leadership**

Leadership refers to a process of influence whereby an individual in the role of leader influences others to

**Highly effective priest-pastors are masters of directing and are able to create a vision that tells parishioners where the parish is going and how it will get there and then galvanize their commitment to the vision by being ethical, open, empowering, and inspiring.**

pursue and achieve the intended goals of an organization such as a parish. Today, while leadership is being distinguished from management, both deal with five functions of influence: planning, organizing, staffing, directing, and controlling which can be ascribed to those in leadership or management roles. While those in management are expected to operationalize the planning, organizing, staffing, and controlling functions, those in leadership roles are primarily involved with the directing function (Sperry, 2004). In a parish setting, a priest, particularly the pastor, is expected to be proficient at all five functions. Highly effective priest-pastors are masters of directing and are able to create a vision that tells parishioners where the parish is going and how it will get there and then galvanize their commitment to the vision by being ethical, open, empowering, and inspiring. Less effective priest-pastors have less mastery of this function. Fortunately, it is possible to become a better leader-manager. Unfortunately, assessing a candidate's capacity for leadership is not often a part of the psychological assessment except for organizational psychologists. But, it can be. Inventories exist such as the *Leadership Practices Inventory* (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). It is an assessment tool for measuring leadership competencies. It was developed by two luminaries in leadership research, Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner, and has demonstrated its value as a useful measure of leadership potential.

#### **Work Orientation**

Four work orientations have been described: job, career, vocation, or calling (Wrzesniewski, et al., 1997, Dik, Duffy & Eldgridge, 2009). In the job orienta-

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

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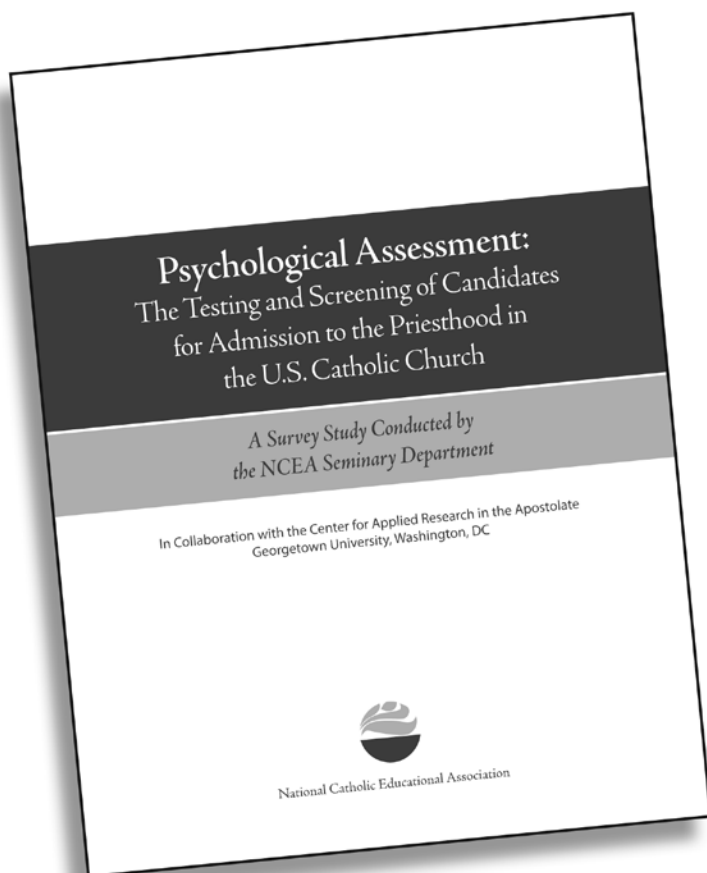
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tion, the focus is on making money and benefits so that workers can engage in activities consistent with core values of hobbies and entertainment. In priestly ministry, this orientation is not uncommon in those who are psychopaths and sexual predators (Sperry, 2005). In the career orientation the focus is on fostering career advancement. This orientation is not uncommon among those whose lives and ministry are characterized by clericalism (Conference of Major Superiors of Men, 1983). In the vocation orientation, the focus is on finding meaning in life and/or making a difference in the world. The core value is fulfillment in terms of wholeness and increased well-being. Recently, a distinction has been made in the research between a vocation orientation and a calling orientation. The core values operative in the calling orientation have been identified as having a “transcended summons” or “self-transcending reasons” for working whereas the operative value in the vocation orientation is finding personal meaning in one’s work (Dik, Duffy & Eldgridge, 2009). The operative values of the calling orientation are most compatible with priestly ministry. Accordingly, the assessment of the candidate’s core values in the clinical interview, particularly as candidates express themselves in work orientations, could be valuable in screening candidates. Since the calling orientation and its core values can be enhanced and reinforced, they could also be valuable considerations in seminary formation.

### **“Fit” with Seminary Culture**

Every seminary is an organization with its own unique mission, structures, policies, system of rewards and sanctions, and culture. It is a truism in organizational psychology that culture always reflects the actual core values – in contrast to the stated values – of an organization. A seminary’s culture can range from healthy to disability-prone (Sperry, 2003). Healthier seminary cultures are less likely to reflect values associated with “clerical culture” and “clericalism” than less healthy and disability-prone seminaries. Clerical culture reflects values associated with privilege, entitlement, separateness, and status. Clericalism is the extreme, and some would say pathological, version of the clerical culture, and is considered inconsistent with priestly ministry (Conference of Major Superiors of Men, 1983).

A seminary’s identity as well as its actions, including the attitudes and behaviors of faculty administration, and seminarians, is subtly and not so subtly influenced by clerical culture values. A candidate’s individual dynamics interact with the organizational dynamics of a seminary. That interaction – called “fit” – can either

**A seminary’s identity as well as its actions, including the attitudes and behaviors of faculty administration, and seminarians, is subtly and not so subtly influenced by clerical culture values.**

foster growth or regression and psychopathology in the candidate. In other words, seminary candidates with a “good fit” between their healthy core values and the seminary’s healthy core values are more likely to experience health, well-being, and increased sufficiency in terms of the four pillars than if there is a “poor fit.”

Because the emotional and financial stakes are so high, assessing “fit” is a necessary and vital component for psychologists evaluating managers and executives who are applicants for corporate positions. Similarly, assessing “fit” should also be a necessary component in the psychological evaluation of seminary candidates. Assessing such fit requires that psychologists assess a candidate’s core values and become sufficiently familiar with the cultural values of the seminaries and religious orders in a geographical area. Occasionally, it happens that the psychologist finds that a particular candidate is judged not to be a “good fit” with the seminary to which he is seeking admission but is assessed to be a better “fit” with another one.

### **Anthropology and Theology of Ministry (Implicit)**

Implicit theory refers to the commonsense but unarticulated explanations individuals use to make sense of their world (Bruner & Taguiri, 1954). In contrast, explicit theories tend to be technically informed and articulated explanations. While implicit theories may be life giving and useful, they can also be harmful and ineffective particularly when they are shortsighted, injurious, or biased. A reality of life is that the lives of many individuals are based on implicit theories. More specifically, seminary candidates hold many implicit theories including their anthropology and theology of ministry. Arguably, these implicit theories can and should be assessed. Presumably, effective priestly formation assists seminarians in examining and articulating their various



theories and explanations. Both anthropology and theology of ministry are described in this section.

### *Anthropology*

Everyone has a theory or explanation of what it means to be human, and this includes a notion of the meaning of life and a view of human nature. While this theory may be implicit or explicit, it is technically an anthropology, and it profoundly influences one's attitudes, decisions, and actions (Brugger, 2009). While psychologists may associate the term "anthropology" with the study of human persons from sociological, cultural, or even natural science perspectives, vocation directors and seminary formators are likely to think of anthropology from the philosophical and theological perspectives. A Catholic's anthropology may or may not be compatible with the Catholic vision. The Catholic Church teaches that all individuals are made in the image of God, that human nature is good but influenced by original sin, that human beings are redeemed and restored by Jesus Christ, and that people can respond to grace and achieve fullness of life.

An individual's anthropology *always* reflects one's basic personality dynamics and core values, that is, basic convictions or views about self and the world which are significantly influenced by early life experiences and confirmed and reinforced by one's ongoing experiences. An individual's anthropology may not be consistent, therefore, with the individual's formal learning and Catholic beliefs. Our understanding a candidate's anthropology is vitally important because that anthropology significantly influences his thinking and actions. Accordingly, a candidate's view of human nature can and does influence how he conducts his personal and professional life. For example, a candidate who operates from a Calvinistic view that human nature is corrupted and that change is nearly impossible, may have very limited expectations about personal and spiritual growth. Needless to say, such spiritual futility is inconsistent with a Catholic anthropology.

Since a candidate's operative anthropology can be identified, presumably this information can be useful in making admission decisions and guiding priestly formation. Because an individual's view of human nature is a reasonably accurate marker of his anthropology, it can be assessed in a number of ways. Our carefully listening to the candidate's narrative may enable us to understand his basic convictions or views about self and the world. In addition, the individual's view of human nature will be reflected in his attachment styles and God images.

**Just as anthropology reflects one's core convictions about self, the world, and human nature, so does theology of ministry reflect these core convictions.**

### *Theology of Ministry*

A candidate's theology of ministry is typically implicit. Because it can greatly influence how one ministers, it is important that it be made explicit. Just as anthropology reflects one's core convictions about self, the world, and human nature, so does theology of ministry reflect these core convictions. Basically, theologies of ministry can be thought of as a continuum with two very distinct theologies of ministry at each end of the continuum.

At one end of the continuum is the more effort-oriented view. Here, ministry is understood as a personal responsibility in which the minister focuses talent and energy on serving others. Often, but not always, his upholding established policy and authority, maintaining control, and preserving the status quo are involved. In this view, the health and welling of the minister is a secondary consideration to accomplishing the mission. The focus is on action and results, the "doing" pole of existence. A sense of compulsiveness is present within this theology of ministry, and often the candidate (or minister) has perfectionistic tendencies. Accordingly, he may believe that he should have full knowledge about the ministry, be highly competent, and be available to those served at all times. He may also find delegation difficult believing that if it is to be done right then he have to do it himself (Sperry, 2003). Not surprisingly, loneliness is not uncommon among these individuals. Furthermore, those who operate from this theology of ministry are at risk of experiencing burnout and compassion fatigue.

At the other end of the continuum is the more presence-oriented view. Here, ministers assume that their ministry is in God's hands and that things will work out. "Being" with others is favored over planning and focused efforts at implementing the mission or plan.

Shared leadership is valued and this is not problematic as long as parishioners are ready for mutual collaboration and the minister exerts appropriate leadership. Those who operate from this theology of ministry are not likely to experience burnout and compassion fatigue. Instead, they may be viewed by others as lazy, not sufficiently involved, failing to provide necessary leadership,

**The implicit theology of ministry of a suitable candidate is likely midway between these two extremes: an individual that is focused and effective and who can practice a ministry of presence. In this view, a balanced lifestyle and mutual concern become the framework through which the kingdom comes about.**

or emphasizing faith over works.

The implicit theology of ministry of a suitable candidate is likely midway between these two extremes: an individual that is focused and effective and who can practice a ministry of presence. In this view, a balanced lifestyle and mutual concern become the framework through which the kingdom comes about. Doing springs from the “being” pole of existence, as action is more likely to flow from contemplation than compulsiveness. Achieving such balance may require considerable experience, so it is not often seen in candidates.

In his classic book entitled *Theology of Ministry*, O’Meara (1999) indicates that a variant of the effort-oriented theology of ministry and its resulting model of priest-parishioner relationships was normative throughout Christian history. It was commonplace in America with its emphasis on “doing” rather than “being.” The laity’s expected role in this theology of ministry translated to the “pray, pay, and obey” model which characterized most priests’ expectations for the subordinate role of parishioners in priest-parishioner relations (O’Meara,

1999, p. 8). This theology of ministry was widespread in America. Fortunately, *Lumen Gentium* has somewhat modified this theology of ministry and the model of priest-parishioner that results from it.

Unfortunately, like anthropology, theology of ministry is influenced by an individual’s early life experiences and personality dynamics. As such, it does not change simply because the individual decides to change it. Individuals with compulsive and perfectionistic dynamics are thus likely to operate out of the effort-oriented theology of ministry and unless a transformational experience occurs may be on a pathway to model hard work but not necessarily the love of God. They may also be predisposed to some degree of burnout or compassion fatigue. Since priests’ theology of ministry can significantly impact both themselves and others, assessment of the implicit theology of ministry of seminary candidates seems advisable. Since formal measures of theology of ministry are not extant, a review of the candidate’s life history and personality dynamics and the clinical interview may be helpful in making this assessment.

### The Next Steps

This proposed comprehensive assessment model is the beginning of a process. Feedback, input, and an empirical evaluation of it are indicated and necessary. Feedback and input from psychologists, seminary personnel, and vocation directors are essential so that these factors can be refined or replaced by factors or components that are more accurate and powerful indicators of sufficiency of the four pillars. So also are efforts at empirical evaluation. It would also be useful to review how similar efforts could increase the viability of the assessment process. One notable example is a recently published assessment tool for evaluating seminarians. The tool evaluates seminarian performance with regard to four pillars of formation, nine basic ministerial duties and related tasks (e.g., provides pastoral care, leads parish administration, practices a ministry of presence with parish groups) and four performance levels (Ippolito, Latcovich & Malyn-Smith, 2008). Another is an assessment model for formation which incorporates the four pillars (Ortiz & McGlone, in press). Finally, it is not inconceivable that proficiency in performing such a comprehensive psychological assessment may necessitate specialized training and experience for psychologists and perhaps even certification.

### Conclusion

The answer to the question posed in the sub-

title of this article is ‘yes’ there is a failure to address a number of key factors in the assessment of candidates for admission to the seminary. This failure reflects both theoretical and technical shortcomings to the conventional model of psychological assessment of seminary candidates. The main theoretical shortcoming of the conventional model is the absence of a sufficient systematic and theological rationale informing the conventional model. Fortunately, the *PPF* provides such a rationale for establishing a comprehensive model of psychological assessment that remedies the theoretical shortcoming. The conventional model represents the typical practice of most psychologists, and the NCEA survey has been useful in specifying this model. Mapping the survey results against the “sufficiencies” of the *PPF* depicts the shortcomings of this model.

The main technical shortcoming of the conventional model is that psychological assessment primarily assesses components of the human and intellectual pillars of formation while virtually ignoring the spiritual and pastoral pillars. The NCEA survey seems to support this observation. Survey results demonstrate that the actual practice of psychological assessment is largely limited to the human and intellectual pillars of formation. It also appears that aspects of affective maturity, specifically intimacy and relatedness with self, with others, and with God are not adequately assessed. My conclusion was that while affective maturity is largely within the domain of the human pillar, it is also key factor in both

**My presumption is that a comprehensive model of psychological assessment should provide psychologically-informed input on all four pillars, not just the human and intellectual pillars.**

the spiritual and pastoral pillars.

The proposed comprehensive model of psychological assessment is, furthermore, consistent with the *PPF* – which provides it a systematic and theological rationale – and adds six factors to the conventional model. As such, it remedies a major technical shortcoming of

the conventional model. My presumption is that a comprehensive model of psychological assessment should provide psychologically-informed input on all four pillars, not just the human and intellectual pillars. This input supplements—but does not replace—information from vocation directors, seminary personnel, and others on the spiritual and pastoral pillars. The next steps in this process are to refine and empirically validate the factors and components. The end result of the process will hopefully be a comprehensive model that provides more valuable, psychologically-based information to better inform decisions about a candidate’s suitability for priestly ministry.



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### Endnotes

1. Survey data on seminary rectors and vocation directors is not reported in this article.
2. Three levels of proficiency: “approaching proficiency,” “proficiency,” and “above proficiency” are used to rate seminarian performance (Ippolito, et al, 2008).
3. It would appear that EI overlaps with at least three pillars: human, pastoral, and intellectual.

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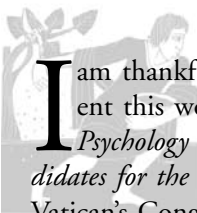
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# Priestly Formation and the Psychological Sciences

Rev. Melvin C. Blanchette, S.S., Ph.D.

*This address was given at a workshop in September 2009 during the convention of the National Conference of Diocesan Vocation Directors (NCDVD).*



I am thankful to NCDVD for the invitation to present this workshop on the *Guidelines for the Use of Psychology in the Admission and Formation of Candidates for the Priesthood*, issued in June of 2008 by the Vatican's Congregation for Catholic Education under the signature of Cardinal Zenon Grocholewski, prefect of the Congregation. My perspective on this document is threefold.

1. As a priest, seminary formator, and spiritual director over many years, I share an awareness of the intricate dynamics of the spiritual and human formation that comprises the discernment of vocations and the admission to ordination. I am happy to see in the document, for the most part, a great respect for the overall process, an awareness of its intricacies, and an affirmation of the process as a reflection of a person's response to a divine calling.
2. As a licensed clinical psychologist, who over many years has worked with a diverse number of priests and seminarians (both diocesan and religious) in a professional psychological capacity, I have experienced the many ways in which the psychological sciences can be of benefit to the discernment process for seminarians as well as to the healthy and holy growth of priests. I daresay that it was but twenty years ago, perhaps fewer, that numerous Church officials seemed wary about the contribution of psychology in religious and seminary settings. These new guidelines make it very clear that psychology does have a valued contribution to make, even within the limits that are rightfully circumscribed by the congregation.

**I have experienced the many ways in which the psychological sciences can be of benefit to the discernment process for seminarians as well as to the healthy and holy growth of priests.**

3. Finally, as a seminary rector (perhaps the only psychologist who is rector of a graduate theology formation house in the U.S.), I can understand keenly the care which the congregation has taken to ensure that any contribution of the psychological sciences is integrated properly to contribute not only to the life of individual candidates, but also to the formators, spiritual directors, and teachers, who play such a large role in the discernment and development of vocations to ministry.

My goal is to review the main components of the document, focusing on the first three sections, with a few words on the final three brief sections:

1. The Church and the Discernment of Vocations
2. Preparation of Formators
3. Contributions of Psychology to Discernment and Formation
4. Specialist Evaluations and Candidate Privacy
5. Relationship of Formators and Psychological Experts
6. Persons Dismissed or Who Have Freely Left

As I review them, I will also make some evaluative observations, not in order to sway your opinion, but more to leave you with some ongoing questions that I myself am considering. Perhaps a collaborative effort to address these questions will provide helpful in the near future. I also want to mention that I am thankful to Drs. Gerald McGlone, Fernando Ortiz, and Donald Viglione, for the thoughts they shared in an article from the Summer 2009 issue of *Human Development Magazine*, entitled “Cause for Hope and Concern” (available online at [http://www.fernando-a-ortiz.net/files/hd\\_summer09causeforhope.pdf](http://www.fernando-a-ortiz.net/files/hd_summer09causeforhope.pdf)).

### I. The Church and the Discernment of Vocations

The congregation begins its document by rightfully describing the admission and discernment process as a spiritual and ecclesial process, which, however, cannot be separated from its context. This context, in general, is the fullness of human life and, in particular, is the specific human personalities who present themselves for seminary formation and, subsequently, ordination.

The spiritual character of the process always takes priority because “[e]ach Christian vocation comes from God and is God’s gift” (no. 1). At the same time, the ecclesial character holds a high place because the Christian vocation “is never bestowed outside of or independently of the Church” (no. 1). The primary persons responsible for discernment and formation are the bishops, as shepherds of the Church. The bishops, in turn, charge seminary personnel with the task of assisting them in this process. We are all well aware of the responsibilities enjoined upon us in this task.

Nothing in the document contradicts what we have heard many times about the process of formation being a wholly human process that is enlightened by the promptings of the Spirit in the life of an individual. The document recognizes and affirms that the development of human personality can be a manifestation of one’s willingness to respond to God’s call. On the other hand, the document recognizes that obstacles (often called wounds) to mature human development can become barriers to seminary admission or ordination if these human obstacles are not properly addressed.

Throughout the process, the Church holds two primary concerns: “to safeguard the good of her own mission and, at the same time, the good of the candidates” (no. 1). These two concerns are not seen as opposing forces but rather converging ones, to the extent that formators are encouraged to keep both concerns

in mind as they assist candidates in the process. The congregation calls this dynamic an interdependent one. I think all of us are very much aware of this interdependent dynamic, both through our experience and the many other documents we have that assist us in our work.

At the same time, I think we must acknowledge that, as seminary personnel, that we sometimes struggle with the interdependent nature of this dynamic when we face some of the tensions seminarians experience when they are unable to see the compatibility of these two ends, the good of the Church and the good of the seminarian. Perhaps this very awareness, among others, of course, is one of the reasons for issuing a document in the first place.

As I mentioned earlier, the congregation situates this process in the human arena. The document underscores the observation from *Pastores Dabo Vobis* that, while formation is human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral, the foundation for all formation is the human one.

With this note, the congregation attempts to describe the kind of personality that is required of a priest. In my mind, its first definition seems to fall flat and to be rather limiting. The document notes: “The specific understanding of personality in this document refers to affective maturity and absence of mental disorder” (no. 2). Fortunately, the sole focus on affective maturity and the defining of personality in terms of a negative (absence of mental disorder) becomes overshadowed when the congregation provides a list of traits to explain what is meant by this definition. I think these traits are worth noting verbatim:

- The positive and stable sense of one’s masculine identity, and the capacity to form relations in a mature way with individuals and groups of people. (Author’s note: This, for example, demands not only affective maturity, but also spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral [or relational] maturity.)
- A solid sense of belonging, which is the basis for future communion with the presbyterate and of a responsible collaboration in the ministry of the bishop.
- The freedom to be enthused by great ideals and a coherence in realizing them in everyday action.
- The courage to make decisions and to stay with them.
- A knowledge of oneself and one’s talents and



limitations so as to integrate them within a self-esteem before God. (Author's note: This needs some work to understand what is meant.)

- The capacity to correct oneself.
- The appreciation of beauty in the sense of "splendor of the truth" as well as the art of recognizing it.
- The trust that is born from an esteem of the other person and that leads to acceptance. (Author's note: Of the trusting person or the trusted person?)
- The capacity of the candidate to integrate his sexuality in accordance with the Christian vision, including in consideration of the obligation of celibacy. (no. 2)

The congregation names these as *some* of the interior dispositions that need to be developed in the years of formation. They caution that formators always need to leave room for growth. They also note how the development of these traits involves an integration of Christian virtue, human development traits, and God's grace. They call this "an extraordinary and demanding synergy of human and spiritual dynamics" (no. 2).

They go on to note how this integrated view of the human personality informs both seminary formators and the way psychologists contribute to the formation process.

## II. Preparation of Formators

I am pleased that the guidelines urge formators to be fully versed in human development issues and that they encourage bishops to ensure that formators have opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills in these areas of human formation. My pleasure is increased, as you probably know, by the role the Sulpicians have played in this by conducting our bi-annual institute for seminary formators, the Institute for the Preparation of Seminary Formation Staff & Advisors, which is co-sponsored by the NCEA Seminary Department. We have just completed our ninth institute, and I suspect that some of you have had the opportunity to benefit from those sessions.

While urging this awareness of human pedagogy, as they call it, the guidelines also insist, rightfully so, that formators be fully immersed in the overall vision that was spelled out in part one of the document. While the discernment process for ordination is founded on human development, it remains a spiritual and ecclesial process. For this reason formators are asked to carry out

discernment in light of the doctrine of the Church and with a respect for the ways that God's grace acts uniquely in each individual.

The discernment of candidates must also include opportunities for development in theological and moral virtue. While this theological and moral development is tied closely to human development, the congregation insists that the psychological sciences by themselves could not adequately assist candidates in this growth. (In the next section I will address how the congregation asks psychological experts to be in tune with this moral, spiritual, and ecclesial development).

At the same time, the congregation stresses how important it is for formators to have this awareness of the character of human development. This following sentence is a bit ambiguous—Are mistakes in discernment rare? If so, how? How does one interpret the conclusion that such knowledge of defects contributes to the screening process? For one, they note that even though mistakes in discernment are rare, such knowledge could be helpful in ascertaining human defects that are not consonant with ordination to priesthood. They say, "Detecting defects earlier would help avoid many tragic experiences" (no. 4).

I think it is appropriate, again, to quote those traits which the guidelines ask of formators:

*Hence, the need for every formator to possess in due measure the sensitivity and psychological preparation that will allow him, insofar as possible, to perceive the candidate's true motivations, to discern the barriers that stop him integrating human and Christian maturity, and to pick up any psychopathic disturbances in the candidate. The formator must accurately and very prudently evaluate the candidate's history. (no. 4)*

That being said, the congregation continues to insist that these psychological traits cannot alone suffice for either admission to orders or dismissal from the seminary. They must be integrated with the range of spiritual and ecclesial understanding that are the underpinning for being a priest in the Catholic Church. They must also be integrated with a deep respect for the freedom of each candidate to engage in the discernment process.

The guidelines conclude by noting the great demands placed on formators. "To that end, much advantage can be derived from meeting experts in the psychological sciences, to compare notes and obtain clarification on specific issues" (no. 4).

### III. Contributions of Psychology to Discernment and Formation

If section one of the guidelines can be called the foundation, section three with its 29 paragraphs forms the heart of the message. The congregation begins by noting that vocational discernment lies outside of the scope and competence of psychology. The guidelines admit at times, however, when it is necessary to consult with psychologists for evaluation and when it is necessary for them to play a role in helping candidates in the discernment process.

Not only should seminary formators seek psychologists who are competent in their profession, but these “experts” should be versed in a general knowledge of the ways of vocational discernment and be supportive of what the Church teaches and professes about the call to priestly ministry. Recourse to psychologists “can allow a more sure evaluation of the candidate’s psychic state; it can help evaluate his human dispositions for responding to the divine call and it can provide some extra assistance for the candidate’s human growth” (no. 5). Such experts can offer suggestions for both diagnosis and therapy.

Choosing experts in psychology relies on professionals who can be coherent with a candidate’s moral and spiritual formation. They should be persons of a “sound human and spiritual maturity” who “must be inspired by an anthropology that openly shares the Christian vision about the human person, sexuality, as well as vocation to the priesthood and celibacy” (no. 6). This reliance on such experts stems from an awareness of the human condition, with its fragility, with the tensions people face in life, and with the woundedness that many face in life. “Even formation for the priesthood must face up to the manifold symptoms of the imbalance rooted in the heart of man” (no. 5).

Though spiritual directors serve to assist candidates in many of the struggles they face, the guidelines admit that certain conditions of psychological woundedness require the assistance of professional experts. Though these conditions are not specifically named, the guidelines point to the experience of seminarians and the ways in which they may be unduly influenced by some aspects of culture, e.g., consumerism, family instability, relativism, “erroneous” visions of sexuality, etc.

At times, candidates are unaware themselves that these wounds lie at the heart of some of their behaviors and attitudes. The process of formation seeks for candidates to grow in a healthy awareness of their hurts so that they may find healing through God’s grace work-

ing in tandem with the overall process of formation on every level.

The document calls those moments when recourse to psychological professionals is necessary “exceptional cases” (no. 5). This is one of those statements in the document that I believe needs continued exploration. It seems that up to this point, the guidelines express openness to such consultation, especially considering the range of behaviors and character traits that are discussed. Perhaps use of the word “exceptional” serves as a reminder that the primary character for the entire process remains spiritual and ecclesial.

Psychological experts may be called upon both during the process for admission to the seminary and during the process of formation for priesthood. In every case, and no matter what kind of consultation is offered, it “must always be carried out with the previous, explicit, informed and free consent of the candidate.” This stipulation is noted frequently throughout the document as a way of showing respect for the freedom of the candidate. It pertains also to any kind of evaluations or assessments that a psychological expert provides.

Seminary formators themselves are asked to avoid using “specialist psychological or psychotherapeutic techniques” (no. 5). Although formators should be able to count on the cooperation of psychological experts, these experts likewise “cannot be part of the formation team” (no. 6).

#### Initial Discernment

Seminary formators are asked to have ways of determining a candidate’s potential for joining in the seminary formation process. This may at times require the use of psychological experts to assist in the assessment, especially with seminarians who are not aware of difficulties they face, who tend to deny those difficulties, or who tend to over-emphasize them. Some examples offered include the following:

- Excessive affective dependency
- Disproportionate aggression
- Insufficient capacity to be faithful to obligations
- Insufficient capacity for establishing serene relationships of openness, trust, and fraternal collaboration as well as collaboration with authority. (Author’s note: what does “serene” mean?)
- A sexual identity that is confused or not yet well-defined (no. 8)

The guidelines note that experts can be especially helpful in the diagnosis of psychological disturbances. Sometimes, for those seeking admission, it may also be necessary for candidates to undergo some therapy before they are admitted.

### Subsequent Formation

Once a candidate has been admitted to a seminary or house of formation, the use of psychological experts can also be helpful, especially when seminary personnel perceive suspicious symptoms that may signal some kind of psychological imbalance. These experts can be helpful in charting out a course of formation that is tailored to a candidate's specific needs and circumstances. They may also be "useful in supporting the candidate on his journey towards a more sure possession of the moral virtues" (no. 9). By helping candidates to have a better awareness of their own personalities, experts enable candidates to be attentive to God with greater awareness and freedom.

Although experts may be helpful to candidates in attaining greater "Christian and vocational maturity" (no. 9), the guidelines also recognize that such maturity cannot ever be totally free of tensions and struggles, which require "interior discipline, a spirit of sacrifice, acceptance of struggle and of the cross, and the entrusting of oneself to the irreplaceable assistance of grace" (no. 9).

The guidelines admit that, in some cases, even psychological experts will not be able to help in the development of maturity and suggest that formation may need to be interrupted when signs of grave immaturity are evident, such as these:

- Strong affective dependencies
- Notable lack of freedom in relations
- Excessive rigidity of character
- Lack of loyalty
- Uncertain sexual identity
- Deep-seated homosexual tendencies, etc. (no. 10)

The interruption of formation is also suggested when candidates have difficulty embracing chastity as part of the celibate life.

### IV - VI. The Final Three Sections

The final three sections include "The Request for Specialist Evaluations and Respect for Candidate Privacy," "Relationship of Formators and Psychological Experts," and "Persons Dismissed from, or Who Have

**Once a candidate has been admitted to a seminary or house of formation, the use of psychological experts can also be helpful, especially when seminary personnel perceive suspicious symptoms that may signal some kind of psychological imbalance.**

Freely Left, Seminaries or Houses of Formation."

A major focus, repeated throughout the document, is respect for a candidate's privacy. All psychological consultations and evaluations may only be carried out with a candidate's "previous, explicit, informed and free consent" (no. 12). In cases where such consent is not given, formators are responsible for helping candidates in some other way (though the guidelines do not suggest the alternatives to which formators might have recourse).

It is up to the formators, however, to create an atmosphere of trust and openness so that candidates will be open and willing to participate in the discernment and formation process with the methods that will best suit their needs and help them grow in Christian and vocational maturity. The guidelines suggest that formators should also have good motivation and ways for suggesting psychological consultation to candidates. The motivation and ways of suggesting assistance, coupled with an atmosphere of openness and transparency, can help to overcome misunderstanding between a candidate and the formators.

Formators are asked to respect a candidate's privacy with respect to any reports they may receive as a result of psychological consultation. This respect is evidenced by the prudence that formators show by ensuring that access to any kind of documentation is limited to those who are responsible for formation. Because psychologists are bound by confidentiality (which the document recognizes), candidates must also give their consent for such reports prior to their being handed over. "The formators will make use of any information thus acquired to sketch out a general picture of the candidate's personality and to make appropriate indication for the candi-

date's further path for formation or for his admission to ordination" (no. 13).

The difficult role of spiritual directors is also noted. When a spiritual director believes that some kind of psychological evaluation or help is needed, it is most helpful when the candidate shares this request with those in the external forum. Even if the candidate does not do this and the information will be conveyed only to the spiritual director, the guidelines for respecting the candidate's privacy and freedom must always be followed, as with those in the external forum. It is an important principle that "spiritual direction cannot, in any way, be interchanged with or substituted by forms of analysis or psychological assistance" (no. 14).

With regard to formators, experts may provide, always with the candidate's consent, suggestions for pathways of formation, continued psychological support, and/or foreseeable possibilities for a candidate's growth. The final, sixth, section of the document addresses persons who are dismissed or who freely leave seminaries or houses of formation. Church guidelines already prohibit seminaries or houses of formation from admitting candidates who have been dismissed without being aware of the circumstances that led to the dismissal. Formators have the responsibility of providing a new seminary or house of formation into which a candidate seeks admission with exact information regarding the dismissal. Formators are also asked to be alert to candidates who choose to leave a seminary when they suspect or know that a request for psychological assistance is forthcoming.

## Conclusion

As I noted at the beginning, the very good news about this document is how supportive the Congregation for Education has been in drawing on the experience and expertise of psychologists in the context of the admission and formation of candidates for the priesthood. In the way they have integrated Christian anthropology, vocational spirituality, ecclesiology, and psychological sciences, they have dispelled the fear or wariness that exists in some Church leaders about the use of psychology in formation.

By being open to assistance from professionals in the psychological sciences, they free formators from trying to interact with candidates in ways that are beyond their competence. In fact, formators are asked to refrain from the practice of psychology with students so that they may more appropriately focus on the discernment issues that stem from spirituality and ecclesiology. For-

mators need an awareness of psychology, but they must have recourse to the experts.

Admittedly, the document raises some concerns and issues that will need to be addressed. McGlone, Ortiz, and Viglione (2009) point out some of these:

- To what degree can the "measures" employed by psychologists be used to measure such things as being Christ-like or being in a Christian and ecclesial relationship?
- Do psychologists have to take on a new role in order to "investigate" a candidate's readiness for priesthood?
- Can professional arrangements be made with psychologists so that, with a candidate's consent, psychological information can be shared without asking psychologists to step beyond ethical or professional standards?
- Is there any conflict or blurriness between the way these guidelines describe personality and personality disorders and the way they are described in the professional psychological society (e.g., "affective" dependency vs. "interpersonal" dependency; the meaning of "serene" relationships, etc.)?

In spite of questions like these, both my experience and now this document suggest that the psychological sciences can provide a unique benefit to the process of admission and formation. For this I give thanks as we continue to move ahead in helping to prepare candidates to share in the ministry of the Church as ordained priests.



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## Psychological Report Requirements: A Sample Guideline for Vocation Directors

As part of the application process, Theological College asks that the vocation director of arch/dioceses sponsoring a candidate for admission direct a licensed psychologist to administer a battery of psychological tests. The *Program for Priestly Formation* (5<sup>th</sup> edition, 2006) states that psychological assessment should be considered an integral part of the admission procedures (p. 23, § 52). Psychological Testing should be done by a licensed psychologist competent to conduct psychological testing and assessment. The psychological assessment should be completed no more than one year prior to making application.

The following ethical procedures should be carefully observed: "The place of psychological testing in the overall screening process should be clearly explained to the candidate. Test results are to be treated in a confidential manner. The persons to whom the results will be released are to be clearly indicated and the candidate must sign a release form specifically authorizing those persons to have access to the test results." (See *Psychology, Counseling and the Seminarian*, Washington, DC: NCEA, 1994 and "On Screening Seminarians Through Behavioral and Psychological Testing" *Seminary Journal*, Spring 1997).

The vocation office determines which psychologists are used and what tests are administered as part of the assessment. This battery of tests should be periodically reviewed with the assistance of professionals in the field. The diagnostic clinical interview should include the following: family of origin history; relational history; psychological and psychosexual development history and present level of health/integration; history of traumatic events and mental illnesses such as experiences of loss, violence, abuse, addictions, mental illness, depression, anxiety and panic attacks, etc.

Among the tests used in psychological evaluation of candidates are the following:

- Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory – III. This is a self-administered objective test, format equals true/false, test of 566 items, takes one to two hours, identifies clinical symptoms and/or psychopathology. This test measures levels of depression in an individual but does not explain the causes for that depression.
- Thematic Apperception Test (TAT). This is a self-administered projective test, candidate tells stories in conjunction with pictures displayed, takes one hour. TAT will yield life themes and attitudes and help identify an individual's thoughts and feelings.
- Rorschach Test. This is administered by examiner; takes one hour, projective and very unstructured. Particularly useful with intelligent, sophisticated people because there are no obvious right/wrong answers; it helps to identify how an individual handles overly obsessive issues.
- Edwards Personal Preference Schedule (EPPS). This is a multiple-choice objective test, takes a half-hour. Tells personal preferences (motivations); for example, is an individual motivated by need to help others, etc.
- Incomplete Sentences Blank – Adult Form. This is a self-administered test of 40 incomplete sentences, is a projective test, takes a half-hour. Its limitation is that an individual may manipulate it by giving socially desirable answers.
- Human Figure Drawing. This is a projective test that takes 15 minutes. Gives information regarding self-perception as well as perceptions of males versus females.
- Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale – Revised (WAIS-R or the Wechsler Abbreviated Scale of Intelligence (WASI). These are administered by examiner, and take one to one and a half hours. Gives both verbal and non-verbal IQ scores. Usually not necessary unless there is some

question about an individual's academic ability. It is good, however, to have some sort of cognitive functioning test, perhaps an abbreviated WAIS or a Shipley.

- Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory – III (McMI-III) This is a self-administered objective test of 175 items, is forced choice, true/false, computer scored, a self report instrument, takes 20—30 minutes to complete. This is a valuable instrument to provide information in making an assessment and decisions about persons with emotional and interpersonal difficulties.
- Bender Gestalt Test. This is administered by examiner and consists of drawing some geometric figures. What is perhaps most noteworthy with this instrument is that it forces the candidate to think in a way that is different from the verbal style of most people.

Regarding the written report, psychological reports are the property of the sponsoring arch/diocese and are not normally given to the candidate, nor is the institution or psychologist required to provide to the candidate more than an interpretative summary of the contents of the test that might have led to the decision to accept or to reject an applicant.

The Vocation Office should receive in a timely fashion a thorough and professionally written report analyzing and interpreting the data from interviews and tests. The report should be written with specific consideration of the individual's capacity for priestly formation and life along with specific recommendations regarding the possible issues to be addressed in formation. The report may include a recommendation regarding admittance to seminary formation. Reports should specifically indicate any area of concern in which the candidate needs further growth and/or discernment and what approaches might be taken to address these issues. This report will be treated in a confidential manner by the seminary's admission committee. Only the rector and one other member of the admissions committee read this report. It is used as only one piece of data in the acceptance process along with the applicant's autobiography and other application materials. These reports are stored in a secured area of the seminary, and the reports are not readily available to faculty members without the permission of the rector.

A typical report should include paragraphs on the following: reason for referral, background information and social history, clinical interview and behavioral observations, and tests administered.

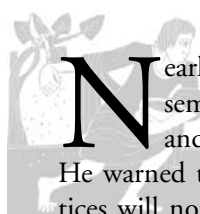
The seminary presumes that the licensed psychologist will share the results of the testing with the applicant before submitting the report to the Theological College. This is in keeping with Principle 8a of the American Psychological Association's "On the Ethical Principles of Psychologists" which we reproduce in full:

In using assessment techniques, psychologists respect the right of clients to have full explanations of the nature and purpose of the techniques in language the clients can understand, unless an explicit exception to this right has been agreed upon in advance. When the explanations are to be provided by others, psychologists establish procedures for ensuring the adequacy of these explanations. In closing, I would ask you to forward this document to the licensed psychologist you will be consulting in the completion of this requirement. If you or the psychologist have any questions about this battery of tests, please feel free to contact me directly.

The Psychological Report should be sent to:  
Reverend Melvin C. Blanchette, S.S.  
Rector, Theological College  
401 Michigan Avenue, NE, Washington, DC 20017

# Christ is the Sure Foundation: Human Formation Completed in and by Spiritual Formation<sup>1</sup>

Deacon James Keating, Ph.D.



Nearly fifteen years ago, Fr. Louis Camelli urged seminary formators not to complicate human and spiritual formation by trying to fuse them. He warned that intense commitment to spiritual practices will not, of itself, lead to affective or psychological maturity. He also noted, however, that human and spiritual formation ought to be integrated in a mutual relationship (Camelli, 1995, p. 16). What might an integrated human-spiritual formation process be built upon, and how might it be understood within seminary life?<sup>2</sup>

## Rationale for Integration

Since Camelli wrote his essay calling for a mutual relationship between human and spiritual formation, something dramatic happened in the minds of the U.S. Bishops: spiritual formation became the “heart and core” of priestly formation around which *all other aspects of formation are integrated* (PPF, no. 115). Even more telling, the *Program of Priestly Formation* calls Christ the “foundation” of all human formation (PPF, no. 74). Knowledge of and intimacy with Christ, therefore, encompasses all aspects of formation and is its foundation in human formation explicitly. Substantially, the Church envisions human formation to be a set of relationships that enable a seminarian to become a man of communion: “that he become someone who makes a gift of himself and is able to receive the gift of others” (PPF, no. 83). The seminarian achieves this self-donative character through “the love of God and service to others” (PPF, no. 84).

We see here that both spiritual and human formation hinge on the openness of the seminarian to receive love and to receive the truth about himself as a sign of being loved. In this article, I want to argue that deep

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within the heart of priestly formation is a *perichoresis* of human formation and spirituality. In human formation, the seminarian listens to the truth about himself so that, within spiritual formation, he can relate all that he knows about himself to the mystery of Christ.

## The Catholic Man

Such a complex reality as human formation is held together by the structures of faith even though, for reasons articulated by Philosophy and the Human Sciences, it is held distinct from spiritual intimacy. For human formation to be integrated with spirituality, a seminary is not to falsely reduce such formation to devotionism. A seminarian becomes a man of communion from within the depths of his own intimacy with Christ, and not simply by entering into pious practices. Such intimacy sustains and orders a man’s personality and virtue, directing them toward full healing where necessary. To separate human formation from spiritual progress would create an untenable bifurcated world of inner life and supernatural life, of private faith and public ethic. Albeit, not all aspects of a man’s faith life ought to be made public (e.g., the deepest of intimate prayer and its



companion images), but faith, ultimately, is as public as a man hanging on a cross.

As Pope John Paul II noted, “the man who wishes to understand himself thoroughly . . . his unrest, uncertainty, his weakness and sinfulness . . . [must] draw near to Christ. He must . . . enter into [Christ] with all his own self, he must appropriate . . . the incarnation and redemption in order to find himself (*Redemptor hominis*, no. 10).”

**Mature humans adore God and are grateful to Him for their own being. Human formation is the work of becoming a *vir catholicus*.**

John Paul II further alludes to the fact that this type of formation will lead a man to adore God and experience wonder at his own being. Such formation is called Christianity (*RH*, no.10). Here we see how human formation is affiliated with catechesis and mystagogy. Mature humans adore God and are grateful to Him for their own being. Human formation is the work of becoming a *vir catholicus*. We can say, then, that the seminarian who receives the truth about himself in the process of human formation has “put on Christ,” has been established upon the firm foundation (1 Cor. 3:11). He has suffered the coming of truth about his own character and the truth has set him free (Jn 8:32). Such freedom, received by one who is open to the truth, is the authentic hallmark of a man who has fully entered into the formative relationships that facilitate maturation.

Formators can assist a seminarian to appropriate this freedom by ushering him into the mystery of Christ’s own Baptism (Matt. 3:17). The mystery of sharing in the beloved Sonship of Christ is a foundational element in a man’s capacity to receive the Love of the Father and his own personal mission. If he does not receive this identity and come to savor and contemplate it, the man will make decisions that reflect a *search for* the Father’s love rather than decisions *in the light of* such love.

## Prayer as a Way of Integration

If we are created in the image and likeness of God, it stands to reason that to reach human fulfillment, we have to listen to God. In this way, we can say that the integrating dynamism between human and spiritual formation is prayer. This concept becomes even more apparent when we remember that the Church is asking that the three other dimensions of seminarian formation (pastoral, human, and academic) be integrated into spiritual formation. *Spiritual formation (i.e. living in intimate and unceasing union with God and the mysteries of Christ)* is the heart and core of seminarian formation; *the other dimensions are to be informed by spirituality*. These other dimensions await their completion *in intimacy with the indwelling Trinity, as communicated within the sacraments of the Church*.<sup>3</sup>

Among other meanings prayer is a way of listening to God and discerning His call to truth. In meetings with his human formation director, and in events throughout the day, a seminarian can prayerfully listen to the truth about himself and receive this truth in a discerning manner in the context of faith. This prayerful listening is a way for the seminarian *to relate all of what he knows about himself* to the mystery of Christ. For any of us to reach affective maturity, we must learn how to contemplate Christ (Harrison, 2000, p. 29). Such contemplation is not esoteric in its execution, but it does require an openness to a “sacred exchange” at the level of the heart, the conscience. Prayer is a matter of wanting to be *affected by God in the very depths of one’s openness to His truth and love*. The mind and heart, thus, know the delight of thinking about such gratuitous love.

*In the Course of human maturation there comes a point . . . when every individual . . . realizes that the purpose and meaning [he] is looking for . . . cannot be found simply by searching within himself. . . . Truth does not lie within the self. It is distinct from the self and can only be found in God. (Harrison, 2000, pp. 30-31)*

The very nature of truth requires the seminarian to be available to what it encompasses in both the spiritual and the natural realms. Without this full availability to truth, a seminarian cannot be a man of integrity. It is dangerous, indeed, for a seminarian to think that he can separate the truth about his need for affective maturity from the healing reality of who Christ is for him. It is equally dangerous to think that spirituality alone, separated from the processes of receiving the full truth about

one's personality, conscience formation, and patterns of living can bring about growth in human formation.

In prayer, a seminarian receives God, who reveals, unfolds, evokes, and gently raises the truth about his life. In God, the seminarian comes to live in the truth (Harrison, 2000, p. 41).<sup>4</sup> God alone defines us. Other people can indicate only how we affect them, but they cannot give us our identity. Our true identity is given only by Him who also gives us our true *mission* in life (Von Balthasar, 1986, p. 122). If a person's mission is given with his identity, then the seminarian finds his affective maturity and virtue *only along the path of fidelity to the priestly identities*: chaste spouse, spiritual father, pastoral physician, good shepherd, and beloved son. As noted above, the foundational identity is beloved son. In the absence of this identity which constructs a secured interiority, a man mistakes lies about his identity, rooted in human wounds and satanic whispers, for truth. The formators must explore these wounds and whispers if the seminarian is ever to live the priestly identities and the missions that issue from them.

The seminarian is not only *to receive* the truth about himself in prayerful discernment but *suffer these truths, endure them*. If human formation entails receiving the truth about oneself, then spiritual formation sublates these received truths into a freedom to be loved by Christ. Living out one's mission in *spiritual and affective* maturity (i.e., abiding in Christ unto self-donation) defines one as a "man of communion." One of the key reasons to retain a distinction between spiritual and human formation is, nevertheless, to serve the healing of emotional wounds. Not all wounds are immediately healed through prayer. Such wounds need to be taken up into a "prayerful therapeutic," which may include some assistance by psychotherapists. Becoming a man of communion is a lifelong commitment.<sup>5</sup>

In order to become a man of communion, a seminarian needs to "see" – to behold the beauty of Christ's self-donation, to see the lives of the saints as real, to recognize the truth delivered by his formator as something to be joyfully accepted (Harrison, 2000, p. 89). Even if this truth costs and causes affective pain, a seminarian endures it because "Christ . . . fully reveals man to himself and makes his supreme calling clear" (*Gaudium et spes*, no. 22). Formators want the seminarian to be open to truth, to possess a gifted capacity to stand before God *as a son and speak his mind (parrhesia)*, to look God in the face without fear because God is a Loving Father (JN 16:26) (Von Balthasar, 1961, p. 38). The capacity to speak the truth and hear the truth about one-

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self is the result of an intimacy that comes from love. Does the seminarian who avoids the truth about himself do so because *he has yet to receive the love of the Father*? When the seminarian trusts the Father enough to receive His love in Christ and through the Spirit, then he becomes open to all truth, including painful truth about his own flaws.

We cannot mistake the necessity of a seminarian receiving the love of the Father for the error about which Louis Camelli rightly warned formators. Saying that the love of God must be received by a seminarian is not equivalent to saying that "intense commitment to spiritual practices" leads to affective maturity. It is to say that spiritual formation is endemic to any and all progress toward becoming a mature priest. The seminarian must *learn to dwell in the spiritual realm of a mutually interpenetrating love* between himself as a member of the body of Christ and the Father's own love for that body. The human formation of the seminarian, then, is enfolded within the mystery of spirituality. As Pope Benedict XVI teaches in *Deus Caritas Est*, "The good pastor must be rooted in contemplation" (no. 7). "The contemplative man does not merely come into the presence of truth and think about it as an object, *he lives in truth, stands in truth, comes from truth*" (Von Balthasar, 1961, p. 63). To have the seminarian live in truth, stand in truth, and come from truth is the goal of all human formation. Such a goal, however, is reached only when seminarians are rooted in contemplation, and stand freely before God receiving His love.

## Spousal Love

What truth does human formation have as its object?<sup>6</sup> Human formation assists the seminarian to reach full stature, full maturity in and through his acceptance of the mystery of the Father's love in Christ. In accepting this love, the seminarian awakens to his sonship and then begins to listen to the Father *in the Son*. The anthropological truth of sonship is summed up well by the aphorism of Francis of Assisi, "What a man is *before God* that he is and no more" (Bonaventure, 2009, Section 6.1). It is the "before God" perspective that orders all conversation toward truth in the external forum.

Gentle persistent effort must be placed upon the seminarian to stop hiding from God. To continue to hide is to ruin his chances at ever becoming a man of communion--in other words, a mature man. To continue to hide in sin, fear, entitlements, and academic success thwarts the possibility of a seminarian coming to possess the full stature and maturity needed to *espouse the Church in the Spirit of Christ*. Until such "hiding" (Gen. 3:8-10) is shunned, the seminarian will not be capable of giving himself to the Church. He will, instead, simply lust after her, taking *from* the Church in order to serve his own immature purposes. Such "lusting" by a man toward his future bride should stop or delay the "marriage preparation" process immediately.<sup>7</sup> A mature man seeks the good of his spouse and is not fixated upon what he will get out of the marriage.

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To live in the light of truth, to accept his spousal call, the seminarian must confront the naked vulnerability of the Son of God upon the Cross. He must contemplate such self-donation as the antidote to his own self-involvement. Contemplation is not simply meditating upon a narrative and marveling at its drama. Contemplation *that heals* a man lets the living mystery of divine love affect the intellect and move the will to new life commitments.<sup>8</sup> Human formation places the

mystery of prayer without ceasing (1 Thess 5:25) within its purview since one ought not to consider spiritual and moral progress in human formation apart from truths perceived in prayer (Von Balthasar, 1961, p. 65). Human formation encompasses a development of moral virtue but cannot simply be reduced to growth in moral virtue *alone*.

Contemplation deepens, furthermore, the seminarian's connection to the Church since he never receives anything in legitimate contemplation other than what the Church has already received in the Paschal Mystery. This connection to the Church and the gift that is Christ's own mission enters the seminarian and begins to order his thinking. Sharing in this mission begins to break down a seminarian's fantasies that lead him to daydream about what *he will get out of the priesthood*, materially or egocentrically (e.g., the best parish assignment, praise and adulation from parishioners, bachelor freedom to travel, etc.). As Balthasar notes, we enter God in prayer by contemplating the wounds of His Son (Von Balthasar, 1961, p. 56). The seminarian is to be invited to press his own wounds (affective, psychological, and physical) into the mystery of Christ's open wounds upon the cross. In this activity, the seminarian's wounds, some of which are brought about by his own sins, meet the pierced heart of Christ. This heart, open and vulnerable as well, becomes the corrective, the balm for the seminarian's wounds.

Whereas the seminarian has opened himself to suffering through ignorance or a lack of trust in God's love, Christ has opened himself to suffering out of love for the seminarian. Christ's wound of love meets the seminarian's ego wound and transfigures the site into a place of intimacy and new life (*felix culpa*). This activity of a man pressing his fears, doubts, lusts, and sorrows into Christ's generosity, as imagined in contemplation, becomes the place where the future priest is formed by mature Spousal love. Here, near the cross, the seminarian becomes aware of a spousal love becoming fatherly love. Christ's own sons are *born at the cross*. This cross embodies spousal love and awakens the heart of the seminarian to want to give even more. The seminarian wants to will not only the welfare of the spouse through complete self-donation but to slowly welcome an emerging spiritual fatherhood under the tutelage of the Bride herself (the Church, Mary). Affective maturity demands a commitment on the seminarian's part to press his *deepest wounds* into the mystery of Christ's torn body upon the cross. The seminarian needs to name his wounds, and any concomitant grief, so that Christ can

heal him.

While this spousal love is daunting, the seminarian will come to see this self-donative mystery as the only way to secure happiness. It is a happiness born of contemplating and entering priestly identity (sacrificial self-giving by way of a vulnerability to Divine love). This Spousal identity, which Christ shares with His priests, is Christ's own answer to affective and moral immaturity (Pinckaers, 1995, p. 208-209).

*Healing the fear* of this spousal self-giving, along with the fears of paternal commitment and receiving love from God and others as son, may well be the heart of seminary human formation. The recent clerical sexual scandals involved emotionally ill men, but they also involved vicious men. These vicious men were simply *takers*, not *spouses*. Not all the sexual activity of errant priests can be reduced to pathology. A refusal to receive and stay in the love of God no doubt plays a weighty role in many priestly scandals, from misuse of finances, to broken promises of chastity. Here we recognize that a man who cannot enter *such a contemplative reception of truth* about himself before God may best belong outside of formation. He can then pursue healing as *an exclusive endeavor* and not simply *as part of a goal to become a priest*.

### Healing the Sorrows and Fear

Beholding the truth of oneself before the self-giving love of Christ is the place where both the fear of receiving love and the fear of self-donation is healed (Chihak, Blessed Virgin, 2009).<sup>9</sup> A seminarian does not behold Christ to measure himself against such divine love; that would lead only to despair. He beholds the Christ so that he might allow his vulnerability (his own wounds) to be healed by Christ's own wounds. The greatest wound that Christ wants to heal is fear of self-giving. Such a fear, born of lack of trust, is a shadow of a deeper fear of death and love ("What will happen to ME if I give? Who will care for ME?"). This fear is the reverberation of Adam's lack of trust that God is providential. In fear, one is always led to take, rather than to give and to receive. Also, grief and sorrow lie dormant in some men, affecting them unconsciously with bouts of displaced anger and depression. These emotions lead to temptations to enter false consolation such as pornography, alcohol, and arrogant behavior. This sorrow and grief is born in many *past experiences* of the seminarian's youth and may fuel *his present* struggle with anger toward celibacy, authority, or self-hate.

*Before Christ . . . men and women are defined in the whole of their being . . . spirit, soul and body, thereby indicating the whole of the human person as a unit with somatic, psychic, and spiritual dimensions. Sanctification is God's gift and His project, but human beings are called to respond with their entire being, without excluding any part of themselves. It is the Holy Spirit himself . . . who brings God's marvelous plan to completion in the human person, first of all by transforming the heart and from this center, all the rest. (Benedict XVI, 2005)*

These wounds of fear, impure eros, egocentric taking, sorrows, and more are to be prudently articulated by the seminarian before his human formation director as well as held in the seminarian's consciousness during Rector's conferences or days of reflection sponsored by the seminary. In spiritual direction, he brings the fullness of these burdens to light. Since the seminarian is striving to become a contemplative pastor, as Benedict XVI counseled, he is willing and eager to receive all truth about himself in light of the desire of Christ to heal him and his *need to be healed for the sake of his priestly mission to the Church*. If the seminarian is allowing his spiritual director to guide him deeply in prayer, then he will experience the Spirit as healer. If the seminarian does not relate his sorrow, grief, anger, impure erotic movements, and temptations to such movements to the mystery of Christ upon the cross, he will jeopardize his reception of one of the deepest spiritual gifts and consolations – gratitude. If this gift is alien to the seminarian as a man, then joy will be alien to him as a priest. Human formation should be seeking the release of this joy. It is joy that helps evangelize people and keeps the priest steady in his commitment to say "yes" to chaste celibacy and pastoral self-giving. As *Pastores dabo vobis* teaches, joy is the fruit of freedom (no. 44).

### Suffering One's Own Freedom

Ultimately, the seminary exists to assist grace in cultivating the spiritual freedom of the seminarian. The formators desire to invite men to a new kind of listening within the human formation process, a listening that allows for the suffering of conversion, a conversion that orders the seminarian toward action, change, and new choices. This action is not a busy-ness but rather *the choice of a man to be available for sacrifice*. Such action is the filial, spousal, and paternal mystery of the priest as he longs to care for the Church in her pain, confusion, sorrow, and wounds.

*When Mary sat at Christ's feet listening, she was not . . . intent on acquiring ideas . . . that she thought herself capable of evaluating . . . ideas she might expect to pass off later as her own . . . she was WHOLLY ALERT . . . prepared to GIVE HERSELF . . . following Christ in His greatest designs.*  
(Von Balthasar, 1961, p. 75).

Formation does not simply provide new ideas or information but facilitates the conversion of seminarians by which they come to offer their lives as gifts to the Church (Von Balthasar, 1989, p. 236).<sup>10</sup> The seminarian is to embrace a new kind of freedom, one tasted in the effects of becoming *wholly alert*, of allowing what he knows about himself from the formation process to be the impetus for making his life a gift to the Bride. This freedom is best accomplished in an environment where fear does not rule. A man, instead, *is invited to explore the true will of God for himself . . . priesthood or marriage*. In an environment where trust rules, a seminarian can receive the truth more readily. In such a community, becoming a priest is not the goal. The goal for each seminarian is *to know God's will about which kind of fatherhood he is being personally called to*: spiritual fatherhood or biological fatherhood. Barring any psychopathology, a seminarian will want to know this, receive this, and not impose his own will upon God.<sup>11</sup>

## Chastity

If the seminary is a set of relationships that conspires to form a spiritual husband and father in a manner after Christ's own spousal self-gift, then the virtue of chastity plays a key role in human formation.

*Affective maturity, which is the result of an education in true and responsible love, is a significant and decisive factor in the formation of candidates for the priesthood . . . [sexual education] should present chastity in a manner that shows appreciation and love for it as a virtue that develops a person's authentic maturity and makes him capable of respecting and fostering the nuptial meaning of the body.* (PDV, no. 44)

This nuptial meaning of the body is articulated in John Paul II's *Theology of the Body* and is a great gift to both married couples and the chaste celibate (2006, p. 224). *Doctrinal orthodoxy alone* does not keep a man chaste in his celibacy; *academic education alone* does not keep a man chaste, but along with these an affective and prayerful reception of the nuptial meaning of his body

in the context of contemplating the Paschal Mystery will. A man's body indicates that his whole life is to be a gift to another. In the case of the priest, this gift is given to the Church (Cihak, 2009).

Until the seminarian begins to see that he is one called to give himself in a spiritual spousal-paternal love, he may simply imagine he is attending a *college or graduate school*. In this error, if the seminary structures cooperate, he can safely calculate *progress toward his own goal of priesthood* by way of attaining academic success and becoming competent at community service.<sup>12</sup> In such a case, he need never be cognizant of God's desire for him to give himself *to God* by way of a nuptial commitment *to the Church*. In such a sad case, the erotic becomes pathologically directed toward self-fulfillment. Here we have a man whose *eros* never becomes *agape*.<sup>13</sup> Affective maturity is the interpenetration of both a *man's* reception of divine love and the *awakening of desire to give the self away to another as a result of receiving this love* (i.e., Communion with Christ bears fruit in pastoral charity).<sup>14</sup> To fail to suffer this integration is to become a priest who may well organize priesthood around *his own* needs (Egenoff, 2003, p. 88).

In integrating human formation with spiritual formation, we see the *foundation* of seminary life, human formation, being summoned by *the heart* of seminary life, spiritual formation, to ascend to healing and integration. Such integration leaves it difficult for a seminarian to "act" his way through formation (Palmer, 2000, p. 62).<sup>15</sup> The goal of seminary is to get the seminarian to the point where he enters formation for its intrinsic worth; it is for and of Christ. A seminarian moves from fear, self-concern, need-love to gift-love and an interior freedom of the heart. He can then more clearly hear the call to priestly celibacy, if there is one (Ridick, p. 189).<sup>16</sup>

## Mystery and Human Formation

Perhaps we can construe human formation in the context of spirituality in a similar way that Andrew Louth understands mystery.

*The mystery of the Ultimate is met in the particular. [The Ultimate is] present actively, seeking us out, making itself known to us. Here more than anywhere else, we realize the true character of mystery: mystery not just as the focus for our questioning and investigating, but mystery as that which questions us, which calls us to account.* (Louth, 1983, p. 145)

Human formation is integrated into the heart of



seminary life, spirituality, when formators and seminarians conspire to reverence both the mystery of each man who is discerning priesthood and the One who is calling and *questioning him*. Each seminarian is vulnerable to such Divine questioning if he is to discover what needs healing in the depths of his humanity. This questioning, as an inquiry to uncover truth, is accomplished in the spirit of St. John of the Cross when he noted that ultimately, God will examine us in love. Such examination lowers the fear level in seminary culture. When fear subsides, the seminarian can become hospitable to truth about himself. It is fear that keeps the seminarian externally comported to the “program” but internally disturbed or duplicitous. *Human formation informed by the spiritual life is to assist the seminarian in attaching his freedom to God* (Clement, 1993, p. 90). This goal is achieved in many seminarians, but it stands as a deepening aspiration for those men who continue in ongoing formation and spiritual direction once ordination has occurred.

**As mysteries, seminarians are drawn into moral and spiritual development by their capacity to host the truth about themselves and their vocations in the context of both the desires of the self and the needs of the Church.**

### Conclusion/ Summary<sup>17</sup>

As mysteries, seminarians are drawn into moral and spiritual development by their *capacity to host the truth about themselves* and their vocations in the context of both the desires of the self and the needs of the Church. This capacity should be developed in formation and should be clearly stated at the outset of seminary formation. There is no guarantee of, or right to, ordination – but if one enters formation fully, there is *a hope* that he will meet Christ, and Christ will communicate to him a sense of self that is healthy and spiritually mature *since it was born in the interchange between his own receptivity to host the truth and Christ’s own desire to be*

*that truth for him.*

It will take some work to see how both the human formation director and the spiritual director can cooperate. It will be a struggle, perhaps, to bring spirituality out of the realm of *the secret*, but the director of human formation will not lead a man to fuller freedom unless spiritual consciousness guides many of the conversations between him and the seminarian.<sup>18</sup>

In the human formation process, I would urge seminarians to imbue their prayers with cries for freedom. Such cries are longings for interior peace, integrity, and emotional stability. Seminarians do not want to be driven or tossed about each day by emotions that rule them. They want to be peacefully directed by a desire for holiness. In human formation, this cry is heard; and the seminarian is directed to the sources that will heal his pain. The seminarian is invited to become adept at hearing this cry for freedom and trust his director to *lead him to truths that will liberate*. If this trust is lacking, the human formation process collapses. If trust is secured, the seminarian comes to see his weaknesses and own them. The spiritual life does not wait artificially in the wings until this process is complete: rather, it assists, elevates, and heals in its own right, *directly within the human formation relationship*.

In summary, then, how does the spiritual life both assist and crown the processes of human formation? The *PPF* makes clear that the diocese and seminary should do all they can in the screening process to omit candidates who will resist formation (e.g., those exhibiting extreme narcissism, serious pathologies, deep anger, materialistic lifestyle, and compulsive behaviors, and those suffering from deep-seated same-sex attraction). Excluding these, we can assume that the candidate is capable of appropriating the truth and living by it. Human formation endeavors to promote men who “have the potential to move from self-preoccupation to an openness to transcendent values and a concern for the welfare of others” (*PPF*, no. 89). If a man does not choose to live in truth or is incapable of doing so, then progress in all the other formation pillars will be threatened.

As noted previously, the *PPF* calls *Christ the foundation* for all human formation. *Human formation finds progress in other areas of priestly formation, but it is faith in Christ that founds human formation*. Here we see the *perichoresis* of priestly formation. Deep within the heart of priestly formation is the interpenetration of spiritual formation (“I receive the offer of sharing in Christ’s identity and mission”) with human formation (“I know, love and give myself in and through a surrender to



Christ"). Within this mutual indwelling of the spiritual and the personal, contextualized in the Church, rests all progress in priestly formation. By invoking the term *perichoresis*, I want to emphasize that both human formation and spiritual formation interpenetrate and inform one another, without destroying the distinction between growth in human freedom and growth in intimacy with God. They are distinct but not separate. In other words, it is legitimate to retain a distinction between spiritual formation and human formation, but only within a context that acknowledges that *the free man is drawn toward the Paschal Mystery from within and seeks his completion by the power of that same Christic Mystery* (Clement, 1993, p. 80). Such a man participates within these mysteries by way of his developed intellect, will, and affect. A seminarian's freedom and maturity is expedited when he allows Christ to live His mysteries over again in his heart. This is so because Christ is the healer, the reconciler, the One who integrates.

Formators welcome a seminarian where they find him, assess his areas of growth, affirm his gifts, and articulate how his human gifts and weaknesses can be deepened or healed by surrender and abandonment to Christ. As a man walks the way of self-knowledge and opens himself to receive his authentic identity as gift, he places himself within a trusting relationship to his formator and spiritual director. In this trust, he can more easily love the truth and progress in both freedom and holiness. Even though direction in human formation is fundamentally a reality of the *external* forum, it is not fundamentally a *secular* endeavor. Formators see the spiritual life of the seminarian as enabling an encounter between the seminarian and his own personality so that he can develop into a man of communion. This process is public to the extent allowed by prudence and formational norms and canons.

The spiritual director, on the other hand, is guiding the seminarian to name the places of intimacy between himself and Christ so that in prayer and through sacramental living nothing can separate that man from Christ. Spiritual direction creates a space where the indwelling Spirit can speak freely the word of love and salvation received at Baptism and appropriated over the length of adult living. In human formation, priestly spirituality is present as a power *enabling the seminarian to courageously name the truth about himself*. In spiritual direction, communion with Christ is present as a direct end, enabling the seminarian to listen intently to the Spirit *as the Spirit speaks the truth about the seminarian (traditional area of human formation) and Christ in*

*relationship*. Ultimately, these are different dimensions of the same reality, but they are handled distinctly so that each facet can be more solidly fixed in place, thus assuring both affective maturity and self-gift *in and through the power of accepting the love of God in Christ*. At its depths, the interpenetration of human formation with the spiritual is simply a description of the reality of Christian life: in Christ, human nature is capable of receiving the power of the Resurrection (Clement, 1993, p. 89).

The key to the human formation process lies in *a seminarian's ability to name the truth about himself and for the formator to love the truth about priestly identity*. Only in an environment that calls a man to self-examination, in the context of formators who love the priesthood in its self-sacrificing mystery, can a seminarian ever reach his full potential as someone who becomes Christ's man of communion. In the end, human formation attempts to instill within a seminarian "a boundless gratitude to those who rudely destroy [his own] illusions concerning [his] person" (Clement, 1993, p. 49). Ultimately, it is Christ, the Foundation, who shows a seminarian the truth and invites him to live in the light, not illusions.



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- the human to commune with God.
3. *The Program for Priestly Formation* specifies what it means by priestly spirituality in paragraph 109: "their spirituality draws them into the priestly, self sacrificial path of Jesus...the Good Shepherd, the Head ,and the Bridegroom."
  4. Benedict XVI (2008) in his "Eucharistic celebration" writes, "Prayer is pure receptivity to God's grace, love in action, communion with the Spirit who dwells within us, leading us, through Jesus, in the Church, to our heavenly Father. In the power of his Spirit, Jesus is always present in our hearts, quietly waiting for us to be still with him, to hear his voice, to abide in his love, and to receive 'power from on high', enabling us to be salt and light for our world."
  5. St. Louis DeMonfort struggled with becoming a man of communion his whole priestly life. Such a struggle was relaxed by way of his prayer life but also through simple human experience, the wisdom of his superiors, and other contingencies that played a role in his becoming more charitable in his relations with certain ecclesial and civil authorities. Thelagathoti Raja Rao (2007) writes, "For most of his life, Louis Marie had been scrupulously attentive to his relationship with God. His relationships with other people, on the other hand, left much to be desired, since he was often totally unaware of the effect his behavior had on others" (p. 174). This attention to prayer to the disregard of human need has always been the fear of some leaders in priestly formation. If this fear runs formation, however, it can hollow out the soul, making intimacy with God in prayer impossible. In such a fearful formator, all the emphasis on seminarian maturation is placed upon "good works," skills, and meeting objectives. Letting spirituality inform all the facets of priestly formation, however, bodes well for seminarian integration and maturation, since grace is not to be restricted to spiritual direction, the "traditional" confine for spirituality.
  6. The proximate object is affective maturity, or the reception of the truth about oneself, whereas the ultimate object is the ability to receive and accept the mystery of the Father's love for the truth about oneself.
  7. Such lusting can be partially uncovered by noting the way a seminarian speaks about future ministry and priestly life. He may be fixated upon the trappings of priestly life, a perceived privilege, a sense of entitlement, a covetousness about wanting "the best" parish or only chancery work, etc.
  8. We can see this in the lives of saints, such as Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross contemplating St. Teresa of Avila's life ("This is Truth") or St. Francis of Assisi receiving Matthew's Gospel (19:21) in its full force, leading to his new life commitment of possessing nothing of his own.
  9. See also Cihak's "The Priest as Man, Husband, and Father" *Sacrum Ministerium* 12:2 (2006): 75-85.
  10. Balthasar has noted that contemplation did not lead

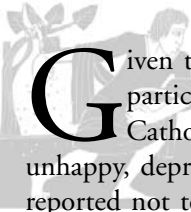
## Endnotes

1. My thanks to Edward Hogan, Ph.D; Kathy Kanavy, M.A.; Peter Ryan, SJ; Michael C. Barber, SJ and Christine Lynch, Psy.D.; who read earlier drafts of this essay.
2. See, *Pastores dabo vobis* 45, wherein it notes that *human formation finds its completion in spiritual formation*. If PDV 45 is to become enfleshed, seminary formators need to continue to articulate a compatible anthropology and theory of human personality based upon this capacity of

- Christ to "action," a busyness, but to sacrifice, to his passion. In other words, contemplation led Christ into *his own priesthood*.
11. What psychology can do is to function as a tool to help *the man receive his identity from God more freely*, liberating him from false identities received from others, sources that blocked his capacity to deeply receive divine love. In this role, the psychologist endeavors to integrate his or her gifts with spirituality as well. The *Program for Priestly Formation* expressly notes that, "while psychology . . . can be a resource for human formation, [it] is not the same as human formation" (no. 105). What any human formation process is looking to do is to see where a priestly spirituality compenetrates with the "stable structures of a personality" (Costello, 2002, p. 129).
  12. Of course, maturity is progressive, developmental. Riddick (2000) writes, "Maturity, achieved by passage through consecutive human developmental stages is basic to and integrated in growth in all areas, particularly in one's capacity to love. . . . The human capacity for *theocentric, self-transcendent love* is certainly a gift of grace; but it is also a conquest of the developmental stages in the process of human growth." Pinckaers (2003) writes, "The involvement of the Holy Spirit in our growth in virtue shows us that the Spirit acts in us through the normal paths of daily effort, rather than through extraordinary revelations, sudden motions, or exceptional charisms. He moves us like sap, whose movement we neither see nor sense, so discrete is he before the activities and projects that engross us." (*Morality*, p. 88).
  13. Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, no.11, reads, "*eros* directs man towards marriage, to a bond which is unique and definitive; thus, and only thus, does it fulfill its deepest purpose. Corresponding to the image of a monotheistic God is monogamous marriage. Marriage based on exclusive and definitive love becomes the icon of the relationship between God and his people and vice versa. God's way of loving becomes the measure of human love."
  14. What is essential to this human maturation, influenced by vulnerability to divine intimacy, is the role that a prayerful conscience plays. Truly, no human formation can progress in a man who is leading a double life in the seminary--one life public for those who measure observable behavior and one secret that lays in wait for ordination day so he can "finally be himself." For an overview of human formation and psychology, see Peter Egenolf, "Vocation and Motivation: The Theories of Luigi Rulla" *The Way* 42/3 July 2003, pp 81-93. This essay contains a critique of the thought of Rulla and his method. The author says that Rulla separated human formation too much from spiritual formation. See also Dennis Billy and James Keating, *Conscience and prayer: The spirit of Catholic moral theology* (Collegeville: Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2001).
  15. Palmer notes that *integration* is the opposite of *depression*. The externally identified, needy seminarian is depressed because he cannot bear the weight that is crushing him (neediness, seeking to please, trying to derive a sense of self without developing interiority). He cannot see a healthy way out of his pain.
  16. The formator consistently explores with the seminarian any fears of delving into his conscience, his motivations and intentions for wanting to be formed in the first place. "Why," a formator asks, "are you here in the seminary if not to receive the intrinsic worth of what the truth can give to you?" Also, see Costello, ". . . we need to look for a seminarian's respect for "other," other persons and God. . . . This is a distinctive criterion for evaluating affective maturity." Here we are looking for men who "emphasize the self at the expense of the other" through mild forms of selfishness to an aggravated form of subjectivism. We look for those who tolerate no limit to their personal freedom, those looking for constant attention, aiming conversation and actions toward constant self-reference, to the narcissist who sees relationships only in light of utilitarian motives. Affective immaturity can also be expressed through the opposite phenomenon of self-abasement, succorance. . . . it can also be glimpsed in the man who pursues rational objectivity in an exaggerated way, and one who promotes a heavy handed authoritarianism." 161.
  17. "The rationale for human formation is not the humanistic desire to develop full personal potential but, rather, the desire to enhance the candidate's effectiveness for the Church's mission. . . . The human personality of the priest is his essential instrument for this mission. The aim of formation . . . is to transform the personality of the candidate . . . into the likeness of Christ the priest. . . . Such human maturity comes by way of developing interior freedom, fostering strong conscience, enhancing affective maturity" (Costello, 2002, pp. 88; 30-1).
  18. While the church encourages spiritual directors to assist in human formation (*PPF*, no. 80), it does not, in turn, envision a direct role for human formators to assist in spiritual formation. This role is still developing as bishops discern how to protect the internal forum of spiritual direction *without* making spirituality solely a private reality.

# The Psychological Health of Priests Today: Myths and Facts<sup>1</sup>

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Given the barrage of negative media accounts, particularly since 2002, it is often assumed that Catholic priests are psychologically deficient, unhappy, depressed, and burned out. As one newspaper reported not too long ago, “In the wake of one scandal after another, the image of the genial, saintly cleric has given way to that of a lonely, dispirited figure living an unhealthy life that breeds sexual deviation.”<sup>2</sup>

So much of our understanding of the state of priesthood today is based upon anecdotal information or personal experience. We know of a case of this or that, and we generalize and say, “All priests must be like that.” For example, we might know a priest who is burned out and thus we think, “Most priests are suffering from burnout.” This is called *Inductive Reasoning*. One can readily see its methodological flaw.

It is not difficult to ascertain the negative effect such public perceptions can have on vocational recruitment. Why would anyone want to join such a group of unhappy, dysfunctional men? And repeating such negative perceptions often enough could ultimately have a dampening effect on our seminaries and presbyterates. Negative self-talk can eventually become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

It is time for us to base our judgments on facts, not presumptions. What is the state of priesthood today? To investigate the state of priesthood, it is important that we gather information from the priests themselves. Instead of looking at what the media say about priests, we ought to go directly to the source.

In 2003-2004 and again in 2008-2009, I surveyed a large number of priests: 1,242 priests from 16 dioceses around the country in the first survey and 2,482 priests from 23 dioceses spread across the United States. The

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surveys were anonymous and confidential. The response rates were a relatively good 64.9% in 2004 and 57% in 2009. Given the broad range of priests sampled from around the country with these relatively good response rates, the results should be largely representative of priests in this country. As we shall see, moreover, the findings in these studies were supported by other studies measuring similar variables, further confirming the results herein.

Let us look at some popular assumptions about priests' mental health and happiness.

## Myth #1: Priests are psychologically unhealthy.

### Previous Studies on Priestly Mental Health

When trying to answer the question, “Are priests psychologically deficient?” people often rely on the 1972 Kennedy and Heckler study - *The Catholic Priest in the United States: Psychological Investigations*. The clinical researchers extensively interviewed 271 priests and made clinical judgments about their level of psychological maturity. They judged that approximately 8% (23) are maldeveloped; 66% (179) are underdeveloped; 18% (50) are developing; and 7% (19) are developed. These numbers have been often repeated in recent media reports to support the notion that priests are psychologically dysfunctional.

Such interpretations are, however, not faithful to the report itself. Kennedy and Heckler themselves summarized their results with the sentence: “The priests of the United States are ordinary men.”<sup>3</sup> Also, they did not compare their priest sample with any statistical norms of the general population, so their reflections are their own clinical judgments. They found, nonetheless, that “American priests are bright and good men who do not as a group suffer from major psychological problems.”<sup>4</sup> And, although there were no general statistical norms used, the study concluded, “Priests probably stand up psychologically, according to any overall judgment, as well as any other professional group.”<sup>5</sup>

Rev. Thomas Nestor, in his 1993 clinical study of priestly wellness, compared 104 Chicago priests to 101 laymen also from Chicago. Nestor was critical of Kennedy and Heckler’s study for not using a control group and standardized testing, thus relying on their own clinical observations and assessments. Nestor wrote, “The likelihood of bias, inconsistency, and expectancy effects increases substantially when such an assessment modality is utilized.”<sup>6</sup>

Nestor gave his sample of priests the SCL-90R, a test by Derogatis that screens for psychopathology. *In his study, the priests scored less distressed than the general population.* His mean score for the priests on the SCL-90R Global Severity Index (GSI) was 34.187. His control group of adult males’ mean score on the GSI was considerably higher at 48.602.<sup>7</sup> Finally, it should be noted that the SCL-90R uses T scores, thus the norms are set at 50 with 10 points being one standard deviation. The priest’s scores were, therefore, markedly better than the general population in Nestor’s study, over one standard deviation below.

Comparing priests to the laymen in his study on such tests as the SCL-90R and the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS), he concluded, “Priests in this study were more intimate, more satisfied with their vocations, and better adjusted than their male peers.”<sup>8</sup>

Similarly the National Opinion Research Center study of 1971, as reported in a NFPC review, also found similar results. “The researchers report there is no evidence to suggest Catholic priests are any more or less deficient in emotional maturity when compared to both married and unmarried men of similar ages and education.” They based their findings on their study of 5,155 priests using the norms of the Personal Orientation Inventory.<sup>9</sup>

### Current Study of Priests’ Psychological Health

The 2,482 priests in my 2009 study were given another standardized test called the *Brief Symptom Inventory 18* (BSI-18). With 18 individual items, it was developed as a “highly sensitive screen for psychiatric disorders and psychological integration.”<sup>10</sup> Our population of Catholic priests was compared to the BSI-18 community norm sample of 605 adult males.

The BSI-18 has four scales. One scale is *Somatization* (SOM) which measures the presence of distress caused by bodily dysfunction. A second and third scales are *Depression* (DEP) and *Anxiety* (ANX). The *Global Severity Index* (GSI) is a summary of the previous three scales which the author of the instrument describes as “the single best indicator of the respondent’s overall emotional adjustment or psychopathologic status.”<sup>11</sup>

The results for the BSI-18 are noted in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
**BSI-18 Pathology Results<sup>12</sup>**

	Priests’ mean	General Male Population
BSI Somatization Scale	48.89	50
BSI Depression Scale	48.95	50
BSI Anxiety Scale	47.48	50
BSI Global Severity Index	49.11	50

As the chart demonstrates, on all four measures of psychological health, the mean scores of the sample of priests are modestly lower than the norm sample of males. *The results thus suggest that priests, as a group, are slightly healthier and a bit less psychologically distressed than the general population of males.*<sup>13</sup>

**Fact #1: Priests as a group are not psychologically more deficient than their lay counterparts. In reality, they are likely slightly healthier.**

**Myth #2: Priests are isolated, lonely people.**

#### ***Priesthood and Intimacy***

Kennedy and Heckler said that priests have difficulty with human intimacy, that is, close personal relationships. This was their clinical judgment based upon their subjective personal interviews. When given objective psychological tests in Nestor's study, however, this judgment was not borne out. Nestor also gave his sample of priests and the lay control group the Miller Social Intimacy Scale. His research results showed that "priests were more likely to enter into close relationships than their male peers. The priests experienced significantly higher levels of intimacy in their relationships than other men."<sup>14</sup>

Nestor thus found that the priests actually did "well in interpersonal relationships," and he suggested that "Kennedy and Heckler may have been subject to experimenter bias."<sup>15</sup> Nestor recognized, "There is a general presumption that priests...are deficient in interpersonal relationships. The results of the present study contradict that notion."<sup>16</sup>

This finding is supported by my 2009 study. A large percentage of the priests sampled reported having close personal relationships in which they share their problems and feelings. For example, 90.9% of the 2,482 priests agreed or strongly agreed that they "get emotional support from others;" 93.0% said they have "good lay friends who are an emotional support;" 87.6% said they have close priest friends, and 83.2% said they share "problems and feelings with close friends." A high per-

centage of priests thus report having solid, close personal relationships both with other priests and with laity.

**Fact #2: Priests tested as more likely to enter into close relationships than their male peers. Moreover, a very high percentage of priests report having solid personal relationships with other priests and with the laity.**

**Myth #3: Priests are burned out.**

#### ***Priesthood and Burnout***

It is often presumed that priests, as a group, are burned out. This, too, is based upon anecdotal information and personal speculation. To test out this assumption, the 2,482 priest respondents in the 2009 survey were given a leading measure of burnout: the Maslach Burnout Inventory.<sup>17</sup> The inventory is divided into three subscales: *emotional exhaustion (EE)*, *depersonalization (DP)*, and *personal accomplishment (PA)*. Burnout is defined and measured in the Maslach Inventory by these three factors using a total of 22 items. When people are burned out, they typically are emotionally exhausted and depleted; they can become emotionally hardened and impersonal, especially to those whom they minister; and they feel like their work is accomplishing little and that they are not fully competent or effective.

As a clinician, I am personally aware of priests who fit into the category of being "burned out." The question however remains: how is the priesthood as a whole doing with burnout? Given the fewer numbers of priests, their increasing workload, and the very real stresses in their lives, it is only reasonable to wonder if priests are burning out.

To answer this question, I compared the mean scores of the entire sample of priests with the norm

**Table 2**  
**Maslach Burnout Inventory Scores<sup>18</sup>**

	Emotional Exhaustion	<i>Depersonalization</i>	Personal Accomplishment
Priests (n= 2,460)	13.57	4.07	37.62
Priests under age 70 (n=1747)	15.53	4.67	37.89
Total Maslach sample (n=11,067)	20.99	8.73	34.58
Social Services (n=1,538)	21.35	7.46	32.75
Medicine (n=1,104)	22.19	7.12	36.53
Males (n=2,247)	19.86	7.43	36.29



samples of laity provided by the Maslach Burnout Inventory manual. I also compared the mean scores of priests below the age of 70 to ensure that retired priests did not skew the results in favor of the priests. The results are in Table 2.

The findings are clear and remarkable. Contrary to speculation, regardless of which Maslach sample is used (the entire sample or subsamples of those working in medicine or social service occupations or males in general), priests score much lower on *emotional exhaustion*, much lower on *depersonalization*, and higher on *personal accomplishment*. These are all positive findings. Higher scores on personal accomplishment are desirable and it means that priests are more likely to see their ministries as fruitful and themselves as being efficacious. The lower scores for priests on *emotional exhaustion* and *depersonalization* are also positive because it means that priests are less likely to feel emotionally depleted, emotionally hardened, and distant from the people whom they serve. The differences were all statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ).

Priests, as a group, thus score much better on the Maslach Burnout Inventory than the general population or compared to those in medicine, social services or males in general. This is true even when possibly retired priests, those over age 70, were taken out of the sample.

### **FACT #3: Priests as a group test as markedly less burned out than the general population.**

#### **Priesthood and Workloads**

This does not, however, mean that priests are not overburdened with work. In the 2004 survey, the sample of 1,242 priests were given the statement: "I feel overwhelmed with the amount of work I have to do." The results are in Table 3.

*It is striking that fully 42.3% of priests would describe themselves as being overwhelmed with their workloads (either agreeing or strongly agreeing). This is a very large percentage.*

These findings were echoed in the CARA Priest Poll 2001. They said, "72 percent of non-retired diocesan priests and 62 percent of non-retired religious priests (68 percent overall) report that they experience the problem of 'too much work' either 'a great deal' or 'some.'"<sup>19</sup> It is also interesting that, in this CARA study, the recently ordained reported working slightly more hours per week than the entire sample of priests, a mean of 65 hours/week versus 63 hours/week for the general sample of priests. They concluded, "Still, the findings suggest that most priests are working an excep-

**Table 3**  
**2004 survey results for: "I feel overwhelmed with work"**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	67	5.4	5.5
	Disagree	508	40.9	41.7
	Unsure	129	10.4	10.6
	Agree	374	30.1	30.7
	Strongly Agree	141	11.4	11.6
	Total	1219	98.1	100.0
Missing		23	1.9	
Total		1242	100.0	

tionally large number of hours."<sup>20</sup>

A number of priests commented on their workloads on my 2004 survey.

*"My biggest problem as a priest today is: feeling overwhelmed (timewise) in pastoring a large parish of 4,000+ families."*

*"Priests are overworked and expectations are too high."*

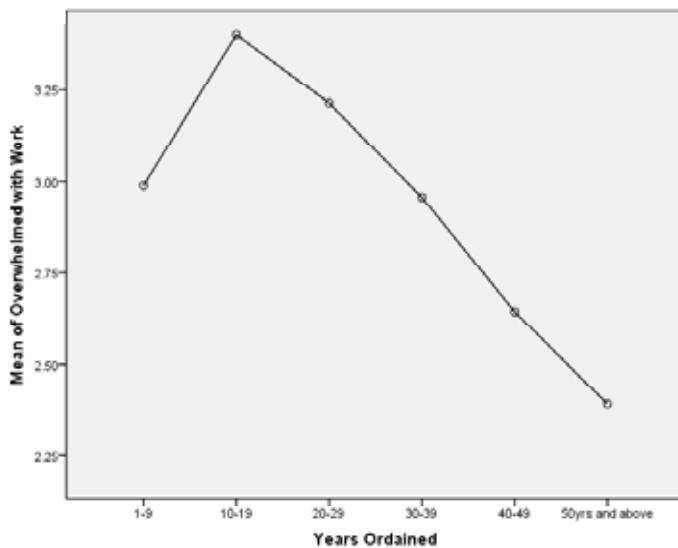
*"My biggest problem as a priest today is: more demands than I can satisfy."*

There is no question that a large number of priests are putting in long hours in their demanding pastoral ministries.

There was a statistically different response among ordination cohorts (ANOVA  $F=14.838$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Those who reported the highest levels of feeling overwhelmed were priests ordained 11-20 years. Figure 1 depicts the results.<sup>21</sup>

Excessive workloads was a very common theme in the comments section of the 2004 survey for all priests, especially the younger priests. *For example, 42.3% of the entire sample of priests agreed or strongly agreed that they feel overwhelmed with their workloads. For those ordained 10-19 years, however, this number jumps up to 54.9%.*

Given the stress of adjusting to priesthood (including living a celibate life surrounded by a less-than-supportive if not critical culture) and often becoming pastors so soon in priesthood, it is not difficult to see why the younger priests are especially feeling overwhelmed. They are still adjusting to pastoral ministry and leadership. Comparing ordination cohorts, moreover, the overall highest scores on the Maslach Burnout Inventory

**Figure 1****Years Ordained and Overwhelmed with Work**

were registered by the younger priests.

These are important findings. Dioceses are instinctively becoming more concerned about the adjustment and mentoring of its newly ordained and new pastors. This study gives statistical support to their concern and perhaps increased incentive to reach out more strongly to priests ordained fewer than 20 years.

As I travel around the dioceses, I find that priests in general are concerned about their workloads and related stress. There are fewer priests and increasing numbers of Catholics. Instead of several priests living together in a single parish, they are now scattered around the dioceses and often cover more than one parish by themselves. These are significant changes to the lives of priests, and they are no doubt having an impact on their lives. It is clear to me that priests are concerned about the rising workloads and their ability to keep up with them.

Priests as a group, nevertheless, do not test as being burned out. Why is that? To begin to answer this question, we might look at rates of priestly happiness.

**Myth #4: Priests are unhappy.****Happiness and Priesthood**

It is commonly assumed that priests, as a lot, are unhappy. Given the blistering scandals that have boiled in the Church for the last nine years, plus the increasing workloads and declining vocations, not to mention the increasing secularization of the culture, this would be a reasonable assumption. One might expect priests to be increasingly unhappy.

The opposite, however, is true. They report becoming increasingly happier and the overall level of priestly happiness is amazingly high. In Table 4, we find the results from both the 2004 and 2009 surveys.

The results are relatively stable over these five years with a modest increase of 3.3% in “Strongly Agree” and a slight decrease in “Disagree.”

*The message is clear: when asked directly, a large majority say they are happy as priests.* It is even more remarkable when one compares it to the job satisfaction rates of Americans, as reported in The Conference Board’s 2009 report. In this comprehensive study of 5,000 households, only 45% of Americans surveyed said they were satisfied with their jobs.<sup>22</sup>

Because these overall numbers regarding priestly happiness are so positive, some have questioned their veracity. Consistent research findings, however, support them. First, this study was performed twice using two almost completely different samples. Second, other studies, both informal and formal, have found similar results. When similar findings occur in different surveys, accomplished by different organizations, and using differing samples, this argues strongly in favor of the accuracy of the findings.

In a survey of 1,854 priests by the L.A. Times published October 20 and 21, 2002, 91% of the priests expressed satisfaction with the “way your life as a priest is going these days” and 90% said they would do it again.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, in the National Federation of Priests’ Council’s 2001 survey of 1,279 priests, 45% described themselves as “Very happy” and 49% described themselves as “Pretty happy” with only 6% saying they were

**Table 4**  
**“Overall, I am happy as a priest.”**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure/Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2004 Survey	39.2%	50.8%	5.2%	4.5%	0.3%
2009 Survey	42.5%	49.9%	5.0%	2.1%	0.5%

**Table 5**  
**Percentage Reporting Happiness:**  
**Comparing Priests to Laity of All Adult Age Cohorts**

	Priests	Laity 18-27	Laity 28-37	Laity 38-47	Laity 48-57	Laity 58-67	Laity 68-77	Laity 78-89
Very happy (%)	45	28.3	30.9	31.7	33.3	36.0	37.9	34.1
Pretty happy (%)	49	58.9	58.6	56.6	53.4	51.2	49.9	52.4
Not too happy (%)	6	12.8	10.5	11.7	13.3	12.8	12.2	13.5

“Not too happy.”<sup>24</sup>

Again, the CARA priest poll of 1,234 priests in March 2001 found 88% of priests “strongly agree” and 11% “somewhat agree” with the statement, “Overall, I am satisfied with my life as a priest.” Similarly, 87% “strongly agree” and 12% “somewhat agree” with the statement, “I am happy in my ministry.”<sup>25</sup> CARA concluded, “Nearly all priests say they are happy in their ministry and that they are satisfied with their lives as priests.”<sup>26</sup>

The National Opinion Research Center collected data on 32,029 adult Americans from the age of 18-89 years from 1972-1994.<sup>27</sup> They, too, were asked if they were “very happy,” “pretty happy,” or “Not too happy.” All age groups reported being consistently less happy than the priests, as noted in Table 5.

In the 2001 NFPC study, moreover, Dean Hoge found that the levels of overall happiness of priests, i.e., the percentage describing themselves as “very happy,” has been steadily increasing from 28% in 1970 to 39% in 1985 to 39% again in 1993 and, finally, to 45% in 2001.<sup>28</sup>

**Fact #4: Priests not only report a much higher level of satisfaction than their lay counterparts, their reported rate of happiness is increasing.**

### Why Are Our Overworked Priests Not Burned Out?

Priests reported high rates of being overwhelmed with their workloads (42.3%) and CARA reported that, on average, priests typically work 63 hours/week. Their burnout scores, however, were low. It is likely that one of the major reasons that priests are not more burned out is that they very much like their ministries and derive much personal satisfaction from them, as noted in the previous section.

In Table 6 using the 2009 survey data, we see that priestly happiness and the three burnout scales correlate highly. Those who are happy in ministry are much more likely to feel a sense of personal accomplishment, and they are much less likely to be emotionally exhausted or feel a sense of depersonalization. This only makes sense. When one does not like one’s work and is unhappy, that person is much more susceptible to burnout.

Recall previously that priests, as a group, have, moreover, a strong network of friends among their fellow priests and among the laity. Nestor reported that they had higher levels of social intimacy. These, too, are important personal supports and safeguards against burnout.

One final factor may also tell us something very important about the high levels of happiness of our priests and their low levels of burnout. This factor is their relationship to God.

**Table 6**

		Burnout-Personal Accomplishment	Burnout-Emotional Exhaustion	Burnout- Depersonalization
Happiness As Priest	Pearson Correlation	.279	-.456	-.352
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
	N	2469	2471	2469

**Table 7**  
**Relationship to God correlated with Happiness and Burnout**

		Happiness As Priest	Burnout-Personal Accomplishment	Burnout-Emotional Exhaustion	Burnout-Depersonalization
Relationship To God	Pearson Correlation	.491	.341	-.205	-.216
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	2476	2465	2467	2465

### Relationship to God

In the 2009 survey, priests were given six pages of questions which were then subjected to two factor analyses. These analyses were done so that individual survey items could be combined to form stronger composite variables. Not surprising, the following five questions loaded strongly onto a single factor which I labeled as "Relationship to God." The five questions are: "I feel that God loves me personally and directly"; "I feel a sense of closeness to God"; "I feel thankful for my blessings"; "From time to time, I feel a joy that is a grace from God"; "I have a relationship to God (or Jesus) that is nourishing for me." As we see from visually inspecting these questions, they measure a priest's perception of his relationship to God.

The correlations of this variable, "Relationship to God," with priestly happiness and burnout are strong. The results are found in Table 7.

As one's relationship to God increases, therefore, one's level of happiness increases markedly. As one's relationship to God increases, moreover, one's level of burnout decreases. It seems clear that another factor helping to increase priestly happiness and to reduce their levels of burnout is the spiritual lives of our priests.

Fortunately, in the 2009 survey, 97% of priests reported believing that God personally loves them; 93% feel a sense of closeness to God; 98% feel thankful for their blessings; 95% feel a joy that is a grace from God; and 96% priests reported a nourishing relationship to God. A solid source of support and strength for a priestly vocation and life comes from the priest's personal relationship to God. They also professed, in very high percentages, to having such a relationship.

### Implications for Priestly Life and Formation

The results of these surveys suggest some important recommendations for those involved in priestly screening, formation and on-going formation.

Get the word out: *priesthood is a very fulfilling and happy vocation*. The sometimes negative image of priest wellness and happiness is largely a myth.

*During the formative years, work intensely with seminarians on their spiritual formation, fostering a direct, personal relationship with God.* The survey results suggest that spiritual formation is central and crucial to the well-being and happiness of a priest.

*Assist seminarians in their development of good friendships, and screen out seriously isolated men.*

The presence of good friendships is a key marker in the suitability of a man for the priesthood and a strong support for living a healthy, well-adjusted priestly life. An isolated priest is unlikely to do well personally, spiritually, and pastorally.

*Assist priests with their increasingly heavy workloads.* While priests currently do not score as being burned out, their workloads are increasing. Priests are concerned about this. They ought to be assisted in dealing directly with the increasing demands on their time and energies.

*Younger priests today need solid mentoring and support.* This includes priests up to 20 years ordained. It is difficult to adjust to a celibate, demanding priesthood today surrounded by a secular, sex-crazed culture. This is especially true for young priests with only a few years of experience becoming pastors, an occurrence that places them in demanding and complex leadership positions. They need our special attention and support.

### Concluding Remarks

We owe it to our priests, who have committed their lives to the Church and God's people, to provide them with the care and support that they need. This presupposes that we understand the real state of priesthood today and its true needs. The subject is too important to be left to innuendo and supposition. Given the modern research tools and methods now

**One can never truly understand a priest without understanding that he is only a man, like everyone else . . . yet there is something more, a spiritual presence, which is just as real and, at times, reveals its sacred face.**

available to us, it is time to begin a more systematic and fact-based study of the priesthood. Hopefully, this research study is a small step toward that goal.

Having sifted through the findings about our priests, I confess that the facts have been a source of encouragement and edification. While certainly recognizing the real humanity of our priests, everywhere evident, their underlying strength and spirit have also emerged during the course of this research. Ultimately, they point to the Gospel and confirm the truth of its message. One can never truly understand a priest without understanding that he is only a man, like everyone else . . . yet there is something more, a spiritual presence, which is just as real and, at times, reveals its sacred face.



**Msgr. Stephen J. Rosetti, Ph.D.**, served many years as president and CEO of Saint Luke Institute in Silver Spring, Maryland. He lectures widely on priest spirituality and wellness issues. He is a clinical associate professor of pastoral studies at The Catholic University of America.

## Endnotes

1. The full results of these studies will be published by *Ave Maria Press* Fall 2011 in *Why Priests Are Happy: A Study of the Psychological and Spiritual Health of Priests*.
2. Garret Condon, "Priests (mostly) Happy, Survey Says," *Hartford Courant* in *courant.com*, January 19, 2003; [http://articles.courant.com/2003-01-19/news/0301190010\\_1\\_catholic-priests-sociology-at-catholic-university-survey](http://articles.courant.com/2003-01-19/news/0301190010_1_catholic-priests-sociology-at-catholic-university-survey)
3. Eugene C. Kennedy and Victor J. Heckler, *The Catholic Priest in the United States: Psychological Investigations* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1972), 3.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., 4.
6. Thomas F. Nestor, *Intimacy and Adjustment Among Catholic Priests* (Chicago, IL.: Loyola University dissertation, 1993), 140.
7. Thomas F. Nestor, telephone conversation and email, June 2010. These numbers are not in his dissertation.
8. Nestor, 141.
9. Melvin C. Blanchette, "Review of Research on Psychological Factors in Priestly Morale," in *Consultation on Priests' Morale: a review of research*, National Federation of Priests' Councils, Volume II, Number 5 (Chicago, IL.: NFPC, 1992), 14-15.
10. Leonard R. Derogatis, *BSI 18: Administration, Scoring, and Procedures Manual* (Minneapolis, MN.: NCS Pearson, Inc., 2000), 1.
11. Ibid., 6.
12. BSI scales are calibrated as T scores. Thus the mean for the sample group of males is 50 with a standard deviation of 10. The priest sample mean responses were calculated by determining the T-score for each respondent and then adding up all the T-scores and dividing by the number of valid cases.
13. The mean scores between the priests and the norm sample were statistically compared using a one-sample t-test and the differences were all statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ). T Scores of 45, 47, 48 and 49 are in the 31<sup>st</sup>, 38<sup>th</sup>, 42<sup>nd</sup>, and 46<sup>th</sup> percentile, respectively, with a score of 50 putting the person in the mean or 50<sup>th</sup> percentile.
14. Nestor, 124.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., 136.
17. Christina Maslach, et al., *Maslach Burnout Inventory Manual*, third edition (Mountain View, California: CPP Inc.: 1996), 19. Recipients were given the MBI-HSS version, that is, the version that "was developed to measure burnout as an occupational issue for people providing human services." This is most appropriate for priests who clearly are providing human services. There is precedent for words being modified for the specific group surveyed. Thus, for example, "recipient" is changed to "student" when the inventory is given to teachers. In this case,

“recipient” was changed to “parishioner,” and “job” was changed to “ministry” or “priesthood” for the priests. Indeed, the manual instructs the respondent, “Because persons in a wide variety of occupations will answer this survey, it uses the term *recipients* to refer to the people for whom you provide your service, treatment, or instruction. When answering this survey please think of these people as recipients of the service you provide, even though you may use another term in your work.”

Nevertheless, in order to confirm the results of this survey, another four dioceses were given the Maslach Burnout Inventory. There was a total of 217 priests given this second round of surveys, and the words were left unmodified, i.e., *recipient* and *job* were left in. The results were similar to the original survey. For this second survey, given in 2010, the means for the three scales were: Emotional Exhaustion = 16.11; Depersonalization = 5.67; Personal Accomplishment = 37.21. These follow-on, smaller sample means are roughly similar to the original findings thus confirming the original results.

18. Christina Maslach, et al., *Maslach Burnout Inventory Manual*, 8.
19. Paul Perl and Bryan T. Froehle, “Priests in the United States: Satisfaction, Work Load, and Support Structures,” CARA Working Paper Series Number 5 (Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, September 2002), 24.
20. Ibid., 26.
21. For ease of viewing the chart, the values were coded as follows: Strongly Agree=5, Agree=4, Unsure=3, Disagree=2 and Strongly Disagree=1. The highest levels of feeling overwhelmed showed up as the highest point on the chart. Scheffe post hoc tests showed those ordained 10-19 years were significantly different than all of the other groups except those ordained 20-29 years.
22. The Conference Board, “U.S. Job Satisfaction at Lowest Level in Two Decades,” January 5, 2010. <http://www.conference-board.org/press/pressdetail.cfm?pressid=3820>
23. Jill Darling Richardson, “Poll Analysis: Priests Say Catholic Church Faces Biggest Crisis of the Century,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 20 and 21, 2002.
24. Dean R. Hoge and Jacqueline E. Wenger, *Evolving Visions of the Priesthood* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2003), 29.
25. CARA working Paper Series Number 5, p. 21.
26. Ibid., 1.
27. Daniel K. Mroczek and Christian M. Kolarz, “The Effect of Age on Positive and Negative Affect: A Developmental Perspective on Happiness,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 75 (5), 1998, 1335.
28. Dean R. Hoge and Jacqueline E. Wenger, *Evolving Visions of the Priesthood*, 29.



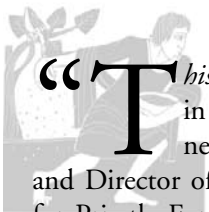
## BOOK REVIEW

# Resting on the Heart of Christ: The Vocation and Spirituality of the Seminary Theologian

Deacon James Keating, Ph.D.

Institute For Priestly Formation, Publications, 2009

*Reviewed by Msgr. Gregory J. Schlesselmann, S.T.L., rector, Cardinal Muench Seminary, North Dakota*



**“T***his is a book of spiritual reading”* (emphasis in original). Dr. James Keating, a permanent deacon of the Archdiocese of Omaha and Director of Theological Formation for The Institute for Priestly Formation, opens his most recent work with these humble yet revealing words. By inviting the reader to prayer, he immediately goes to the core of his fundamental message: seminary theologians are called to rest on the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the very act of carrying out their mission of forming future priests. His book is a timely and urgently needed contribution to the effort to overcome the false dichotomy between the interiority of the life of faith and the exterior teaching of theology in seminary formation. By highlighting the need for “mystical-pastoral” priests, Dr. Keating redirects our attention to what is truly important in the priestly mission of the Church.

Dr. Keating treats the subject matter in six chapters, considering his basic thesis from different angles. He begins by outlining the nature of the theology taught in seminary formation as distinct from that commonly found in university settings. Instead of following the “prophetic-critical model” of theology currently prevalent in academia, the author identifies the greater freedom found in teaching theology as a service to the pastoral desire that burns in the hearts of seminarians. By being open to the dynamic of ecclesial faith and the impact of divine Love, seminary theologians are enabled to communicate most effectively the Word of God. They are forming the “saintly intellect” (John Henry

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Newman’s phrase, quoted by the author) in future priests. This corresponds precisely to what the Magisterium has been calling for in priestly formation and what the people of God need most – priests rooted in faith and deeply in love with Christ and the Church.

The author then addresses the identity of the seminary theologian which follows from this vision of theology. The theologian is one who is personally and intimately familiar with God, having undergone and continuing to undergo the purifying reception of divine Truth and Love. He invites teachers to be schooled in mysticism so as to be able to invite seminarians into that personal intimacy with Christ. He beautifully situates seminary teaching by seeing the “classroom as an extension of the Liturgy of the Word . . . where revelation is encountered and integrated into pastoral-spiritual realities.” By an interior participation in the Paschal

Mystery of Christ, the seminary theologian is enabled to “satisfy the seminarian’s desire for prayer *in and through* (emphasis in original) theological teaching.” The seminary theologian, Dr. Keating urges, must be a contemplative first and foremost, personally seeking intimate communion with the Holy Spirit, so as to fulfill the mission of forming seminarians.

In his longest chapter, Dr. Keating discusses the practice of study by the seminary theologian. While lamenting the absence of a specific spiritual formation for seminary theologians, the author points out the importance of the pastoral intentionality of seminary theology, namely the formation of the laity. Studying with a view to forming spiritual fathers, the theologian becomes attentive to deeper dimensions of the Word and personally derives delight and peace in the exercise of this mission. This purpose strengthens a contemplative approach to theological study, seeking to learn theology “not simply as divine *data* but divine *encounter*” (emphasis in original). He outlines two approaches to study that embody this contemplative approach: an “iconic” method that entails the asceticism of receptivity and humility before the mystery of the Divine, and a method patterned after “Ignatian meditation” which stresses an active personal engagement with the mystery being studied. By seeking theological wisdom in these ways, the seminary theologian abides in contemplation that truly serves the developing priestly identity of seminarians and purifies the motivations of the professor for greater service to the Church. The author calls for a serious review of seminary structures with regard to supporting and encouraging such a vision.

The author then turns his attention more concretely to the actual teaching of theology in the seminary classroom. He invites the reader to see the integration of spirituality with academic theology as “a surrendered searching, a discerning abandonment.” He encourages the theologian to be attentive to the living character of doctrine in the heart of the seminarian so that he learns affectively as well as intellectually. Understanding the mission of teaching theology as essentially “welcoming a Presence,” Dr. Keating invites the theologian to welcome prayer and silence in appropriate ways in the context of the classroom setting, and he offers practical steps to achieve this. (An appendix lists practical suggestions in this regard.)

In a beautiful and key chapter, the reader is reminded of how ecclesial worship is the deep, living source of authentic theology. Dr. Keating embraces the Second Vatican Council’s teaching that the liturgy is the

source and summit of Church life and applies it to this particular vocation. The seminary theologian needs to be nourished and inspired at the Eucharistic banquet. By welcoming the Heart of Christ as one’s own, the theologian offers to the Trinity a “love-imbued heart” for the mystery of God to inhabit. True rest is thus found in the worship of the Trinity where the work of God Himself accomplishes far more than we can ask or imagine (cf. Eph 3:20).

Finally, the author highlights the pastoral charity of Christ as the proper finality of seminary theology. He draws the reader’s attention to the spousal and paternal gift to which the future priest is called: a sharing in the celibately chaste self-gift of Christ to his bride the Church and the outpouring of his spiritual fatherhood for his flock. Preparing young men to be true spouses and fathers means leading them into ever greater intimacy and communion with the pastoral charity of Christ so that they are enabled to give what they have received. As the seminarian grows in communion with God, he will deepen his love for the laity and their specific call to holiness.

This book is a breath of fresh air and a breath of the Holy Spirit for our times. How important it is for those forming the hearts and minds of our future priests to be steeped in the gift of Trinitarian communion and love. Dr. Keating offers to those with this vocation an inspiring and thought-provoking gift. With solid theological foundation and ample references to theological literature, the author invites the reader to meditatively receive the deeper dimensions of the vocation to form seminarians. By interspersing the text with meditation questions, he beckons the reader into the mystery of that ever-necessary personal dialogue with the Lord. One can only imagine in great hope how much fruit can be borne by the prayerful reception of this beautiful and respectful invitation to his colleagues. May they find that rest in the Heart of Jesus!



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## 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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