

AN IN-DEPTH EXPLORATION OF ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF CANDIDATES FOR ROMAN CATHOLIC SEMINARIES

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to investigate the psychological assessment and ethical considerations in the setting of evaluating candidates for Roman Catholic seminaries. Some of the candidates who come to priesthood or religious life face myriads of psycho-social issues, such as deep-seated same-sex attraction, sadness, anger, poor body image, severe psychopathology, serious emotional instability, intellectual impairments, psychosexual disorders, addictive behaviours, severe personality disorders, pervasive developmental disorders, inclinations toward sexual activity with a minor, history of psychopathic deviance, criminality, and unethical, illegal, and unconscionable behaviour, multiple physical and medical concerns that significantly impair the ability of the candidate to function responsibly and inability to be formed, rigidity or inflexibility that precludes openness to guidance and influence. Therefore, it is time to assess candidates with a focus on balancing confidentiality, ethical principles, psychological screening tools, and ethical frameworks and culturally sensitive assessment practices. This article explores the multifaceted dimensions that impact the psychological evaluation of Roman Catholic seminary candidates. Further, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of the complexities inherent in the discernment process for individuals aspiring to serve in the priesthood.

KEYWORDS: Psychological Assessment, Ethical Considerations, Roman Catholic Seminaries, Confidentiality, Teachings of the Church.

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INTRODUCTION

The assessment process of Roman Catholic seminary candidates is sensitive. It requires careful attention to both clinical and ethical dimensions that involve a comprehensive approach to confirm the psychological well-being and suitability of individuals aspiring to serve in the sacred vocation of the priesthood. This discussion delves into the critical factors that must be considered when conducting psychological assessments for Roman Catholic seminary candidates, addressing the clinical and ethical considerations.

THE NECESSITY OF PSYCHOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF CANDIDATES

Candidates seeking admission to seminaries and religious formation houses bring with them a complex mix of assets and liabilities. Influenced by advertising, commercials, and movies that often portray sex, individualism, and consumerism, their understanding of vows, celibacy, and sexuality may be distorted. Some individuals entering the seminary may have come from dysfunctional families, been academically poor, had emotional disturbance, lack of friends circle, internet addiction, poor body image, inferiority complex, superiority complex, engaged in sexual activity, alcoholism, porn addiction, drug addiction, deep-seated homosexual, lesbian and bisexual behavior, and they face ongoing struggles with psychological issues such as sexual identity crisis, loneliness, depression, lack of interpersonal skills, poor emotional stability, Psychotic disorder, passive-aggressive personality, compulsive personality disorder, sleeping disturbance, fear, suicidal thoughts, guilt, chronic masturbation, unresolved anger, insecurity and harbored other hidden issues (Plante, T. G., & Songy, 2021; Rossetti, 2011; Hoising & Hogan, 2021, Parappully, 2011; Briere, 1996).

The recent clergy sexual abuse scandals within the Roman Catholic Church have brought increased scrutiny to the evaluation of applicants for the priesthood and religious life. It is imperative to acknowledge that individuals with significant psychiatric conditions, particularly those posing a risk of harm to children or others, are unsuitable for leadership roles within the Church (Plante, T. G., 2006). Therefore, the screening process for candidates must be comprehensive, encompassing an evaluation of their personality, cognitive abilities, behavioral tendencies, and psychosexual maturity traits (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2019; The John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2004, 2011; Plante & Lackey, 2007).

In light of these considerations, I wish and strongly recommend that this assessment process used ensure that those selected for the priesthood and religious life have the necessary qualities and maturity to fulfill their responsibilities ethically and safeguard the well-being of vulnerable individuals within their care. Screening is not merely advisable but mandatory.

TEACHINGS OF THE CHURCH

The introduction of psychological screening for candidates seeking admission to the priesthood signified a significant development stemming from the initiatives of Vatican II. The responsibility for implementing the guidelines recommended by the Vatican Congregation for Education in (1970) was entrusted to local Bishops' Conferences. The inception of psychological testing coincided with the Vatican Council Decree, *Optatum Totius* (Decree on Priestly Formation) in 1965, which did not explicitly reference psychological evaluators at that time. Recognition of the integrity of evaluators would later find a place in the American "Program for Priestly Formation."

Moreover, Pope John Paul II further contributed to this discourse through his Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, issued on the Feast of the Annunciation in 1992. This document, following the 1990 International Synod of Bishops, acknowledged the challenges posed by an atheistic postmodern world on aspiring priests. While emphasizing the need for priests of exemplary life and various qualities, including competence in psychology, the document offered only passing acknowledgment of the importance of formation personnel being competent in psychology (PDV 204).

Therefore, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* underscores the Church responsibility in establishing norms and conditions for discernment and formation of priestly candidates. The seminary, as an educational ecclesial community, is tasked with

discerning vocations and providing comprehensive human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral training. The discernment of a vocation's suitability falls upon the bishop, in consultation with the rector and formation faculty. The document highlights the ecclesial element inherent in a vocation to the priestly ministry, emphasizing the candidate's acceptance of the Church norms and conditions (PDV 35, 61).

Therefore, the importance of psychological evaluations had stressed by the Plenary Assembly of 1998, which reviewed a draft on Psychological Screening and the Use of Psychology in the Admission and Development of Candidates for the Priesthood and the Consecrated Life. St. John Paul II expressed the need for integral training, integrating behavioral sciences to discern and foster growth in human virtues, interpersonal relationships, affective-sexual development, and education in freedom and conscience. However, he highlighted the necessity of these sciences staying within the limits of their expertise and not overshadowing divine gift and spiritual inspiration of a vocation (OptatamTotius P.20, 21).

Pope Benedict XVI (2010) on homosexuality says, Sexuality has an intrinsic meaning and direction which is not homosexual. The meaning and direction of sexuality is to bring about the union of man and woman and in this way give humanity posterity, children, future. This is the determination internal to the essence of sexuality. Everything else is against sexuality's intrinsic meaning and direction. It is a point we need to hold firm, even if it is not pleasing to our age. And Roman Catholic Church as reflected in the language of this instruction: men who are sexually attracted to other men do not possess those qualities necessary to be icons of Christ and spiritual fathers. They "find themselves in a situation that gravely hinders them from relating correctly to men and women" (Congregation for Catholic Education 2005, p.3).

In summary, the evolution of guidelines for psychological assessments in the context of priestly formation reflects the Church commitment to ensuring the integrity of the priesthood and the holistic development of its candidates. The ongoing refinement of these guidelines reflects the Church adaptability in addressing contemporary challenges while remaining faithful to its principles.

APA ETHICAL PRINCIPLES AND CODE OF CONDUCT FOR PSYCHOLOGISTS

Informed Consent to Therapy

This process of safeguarding informed consent to therapy, an obligation specified in Standard 3.10 on Informed Consent, psychologists carefully apprise clients or patients at the earliest possible juncture in the therapeutic relationship about the nature and expected trajectory of therapy. Which includes transparent disclosure regarding fees, potential involvement of third parties, and delineation of the limits of confidentiality. Psychologists afford an ample opportunity for clients or patients to pose questions and ensure they receive comprehensive answers. (Refer also to Standards 4.02 on discussing the Limits of Confidentiality and 6.04 on Fees and Financial Arrangements, APA 2017).

Maintaining Confidentiality

Psychologists bear primary obligation to safeguard confidential information obtained through or stored in any medium, taking reasonable precautions to ensure its protection. It acknowledged that the extent and limitations of confidentiality may be subject to legal regulations or stipulations established by institutional rules or within the context of professional or scientific relationships (American Psychological Association (APA), 2017). (Refer also to Standard 2.05 on Delegation of Work to others.)

Unfair Discrimination

In their professional activities, psychologists refrain from participating unfair discrimination based on age, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status, or any other basis proscribed by law (APA, 2017). Therefore, based on the above-cited rules, how do I reconcile with church expectations in terms of homosexuality and gender identity crisis? The answer is given by Mark A. PsydYarhouse (1998), a Christian psychologist who has written widely on sexuality and gender issues. He suggests three important frameworks: the integrity framework, the disability framework, and the diversity framework.

The Integrity Framework views sexuality and gender as part of God's original design for creation, and therefore any kind of deviation from the normative heterosexual and cisgender expressions is seen as a result of the fall and sin. This framework highlights the need for repentance, transformation, and obedience to God's will, and believes that moral law can heal and change the person.

The Disability Framework views sexuality and gender as part of human nature that is affected by the fall and brokenness; therefore, any deviation from the normative heterosexual and cisgender expressions is seen as a sign of a disorder or impairment. This framework emphasises the need for compassion, support, and healing for those who struggle with their sexuality and gender identity. This framework is often associated with moderate or compassionate Christian views.

The Diversity Framework views sexuality and gender as part of human diversity that reflects God's creativity and grace; therefore, any deviation from the normative heterosexual and cisgender expressions is seen as a form of variation or difference. This framework emphasises the need for acceptance, affirmation, and celebration of the diversity of sexuality and gender identity. This framework is often associated with progressive or inclusive Christian views. Yarhouse does not reject any of these frameworks but rather invites Christians to engage in dialogue and understanding with each other and with those who identify as LGBTQ+. He also suggests that Christians should consider the personal, relational, and cultural factors that influence how people experience and express their sexuality and gender identity; therefore, these are the ways the church can reconcile with the church. (Yarhouse, 1998; Songy, D. O.F.M. Cap, 2012)

Maintenance, Dissemination, and Disposal of Confidential Records

Professional and Scientific Work Psychologists adhere to principles of confidentiality throughout the life cycle of records under their control, including creation, storage, access, transfer, and disposal, whether in written, automated, or any other medium (APA, 2017). (Refer also to Standards 4.01 on Maintaining Confidentiality and 6.01 on Documentation of Professional and Scientific Work and Maintenance of Records).

APPLYING A CANONICAL PERSPECTIVE TO ETHICS FOR ASSESSING SEMINARIANS

- Competence
- Informed consent
- Release of information
- Confidentiality
- Dual relationships

Competence

Individuals tasked with conducting psychological assessments, preparing assessment reports, or interpreting such reports possess a thorough understanding of and alignment with the Church's expectations concerning candidates for the priesthood. This is particularly critical in areas such as chastity, celibacy, obedience, and the permanence of commitment, as elucidated by the Congregation for Catholic Education (Guidelines for the Use of Psychology, n. 6) and the Program of Priestly Formation (PPF, nn. 51, 77-79, 100-102).

It is important to acknowledge that, as per ecclesiastical directives, the responsibility for deciding on the admission of an applicant to the priesthood should not be delegated solely to the psychological expert. The bishop, who bears the ultimate responsibility for such decisions, is cautioned against relying exclusively on the findings of the psychological assessment. This directive is consistent with the guidance provided in the Program of Priestly Formation (PPF, nn. 51, 77-79, 100-102).

It is essential to recognise the shared commitment of both the psychological expert and the bishop in evaluating candidates for the priesthood. The psychological assessment serves as a valuable tool, offering insights into the psychological well-being and suitability of candidates. However, the bishop, as the discerning authority, must consider a broader array of factors beyond the psychological assessment alone. This balanced approach ensures a comprehensive evaluation that respects the Church's expectations while recognising the multifaceted nature of discerning individuals for the sacred vocation of priesthood.

Informed Consent

In the context of psychological assessments for candidates in the Catholic Church, adherence to the principles of informed consent is paramount. Several key considerations underscore the significance of informed consent in this process:

No applicant forced into participating in psychological assessment (Con. for Catholic Education, Guidelines for the Use of Psychology, n.5) and they must give free and informed consent before the evaluation process (Con. for Catholic Education, Guidelines for the Use of Psychology, nn. 5; 12, PPF, n.57). Moreover, the applicant has the right to choose a psychological expert from approved list (Con. for Catholic Education, Guidelines for the Use of Psychology, n.12) and The Methods of psychological assessment and use of results disclosed in advance to the applicant (PPF, n.57) and the Release forms must be utilized (PPF, n.57).

Release of Information

In the ecclesiastical context of assessing candidates for the Catholic priesthood, the release of information derived from psychological assessments is subject to specific guidelines, ensuring ethical and confidential handling:

The psychological assessment report is provided to the vocation director or bishop to facilitate their determination of whether to endorse an applicant for admission to seminary, as articulated in the "Program of Priestly Formation" (PPF, n. 48). This step is crucial in the discernment process, allowing ecclesiastical authorities to make informed decisions based on the psychological evaluation. Subsequently, the bishop or vocation director conveys the assessment report to the seminary admissions committee, as specified in the "Program of Priestly Formation" (PPF, n. 48). This ensures that the admissions committee receives comprehensive insights into the psychological profile of the candidate, contributing to their decision-making regarding seminary admission. The utilisation of information by formators is constrained and strictly on a need-to-know basis, aligning with guidelines outlined by the Congregation for Catholic Education (n. 13) and the

"Program of Priestly Formation" (n. 57). This approach safeguards the confidentiality of psychological information, with access granted only to those directly involved in the formational process.

In specific circumstances where additional psychological expertise is required for counselling purposes, the "Program of Priestly Formation" permits the use of information by another qualified psychological expert (nn. 80; 105). This provision ensures that candidates receive appropriate support and guidance based on the findings of the assessment while maintaining the highest standards of confidentiality. The concept of the internal forum allows information to be disclosed to a spiritual director with the consent of the applicant, but such information is not shared by the spiritual director with other formators, according to the Congregation for Catholic Education's "Guidelines for the Use of Psychology" (n. 14).

In contrast, the external forum permits the use of information to formulate plans, particularly concerning human formation and may be shared with formators with the consent of the applicant (Congregation for Catholic Education, Guidelines for the Use of Psychology, n. 13). It is imperative that seminaries establish clear directives for the use of psychological information. The "Program of Priestly Formation" mandates that the psychological assessment process and the use of information should be thoroughly explained in seminary application materials, as well as in faculty and student handbooks (n. 57).

Based on the above-mentioned information, psychologists can do much to facilitate the evaluation procedure. First, it is helpful for the evaluator to be specific in drawing up the release of information, discussing ahead of time what kinds of information would be included in the evaluation report. In discussing the difficulty of providing adequate information to homosexual men seeking treatment, Yarhouse (1998) suggests that they should be told the teachings of the church and the ethical notion of the church openly; if the homosexual tendency is transitory, then the church offers a year of discernment period; if the candidates are willing to give advanced informed consent, then they should accept the situation and move ahead with the discernment process. If it is deep-seated, then the psychologists should help the candidates with the neuroplastic haptic method and spiritual direction. However, if the candidates fail to overcome the situation, then he/she has to discern a suitable life for themselves.

Confidentiality

- In the ecclesiastical context of assessing candidates for the Catholic priesthood, the principles of confidentiality are integral to the ethical handling of information.
- Admission to the seminary is not an inherent right for the applicant, as emphasised in the "Program of Priestly Formation" (PPF, n. 47). This underscores that admission is contingent upon a comprehensive evaluation, including psychological assessments, rather than an automatic entitlement.
- According to the Code of Canon Law (CIC, c. 220) and the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches (CCEO, c. 23), as well as the "Program of Priestly Formation" (PPF, n. 52), individuals, including seminary candidates, have the right to a presumed good reputation unless legitimately impugned. This legal and ecclesiastical protection ensures fair treatment and upholds the dignity of candidates.
- The right to safeguard one's privacy is affirmed by the Code of Canon Law (CIC, c. 220) and the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches (CCEO, c. 23), along with the "Program of Priestly Formation" (PPF, n. 52). This right underscores the importance of protecting personal information and maintaining the confidentiality of psychological assessments.

- The interconnection between conscience and confidentiality is acknowledged in the context of psychological assessments. As individuals participate in these assessments, they are, in a sense, manifesting their conscience. This linkage is especially relevant in the discernment process for priesthood candidates, emphasising the need for a conscientious and confidential evaluation.

Dual Relationships

- Those who conduct the psychological assessment, prepare the assessment report, or interpret the report cannot be part of the seminary formation team (Con. for Catholic Education, Guidelines for the Use of Psychology, nn.5,12; PPF, n.57).
- This role of the psychologist who conducts the assessment should not be confused with adjunct or staff psychologists/counselors who assist in providing counselling for individual seminarians or in advising formators on issues about the human formation of the seminarians (Con. for Catholic Education, Guidelines for the Use of Psychology, nn.8-9; PPF, nn.80; 327).

KEY COMPONENTS OF A PSYCHOLOGICAL EVALUATION PROCESS

Informed Consent

To ensure that the individual being evaluated understands the nature and purpose of the evaluation and gives voluntary consent. The evaluator explains the purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits of the evaluation methods. The individual is allowed to ask questions and provide informed consent.

Reason for Referral

This is to identify the specific concerns or reasons that prompted the referral for psychological evaluation. The evaluator gathers information from the referring party (e.g., a physician, employer, or legal authority) to understand the specific issues to be addressed in the evaluation. Mainly, they use questionnaires and interviewing techniques to collect data.

Psychosocial History

To obtain a comprehensive understanding of the individual's background, including family, education, work, relationships, and relevant life events. The evaluator uses questions and interviews to ask the client to provide information about their personal and social history, allowing the evaluator to assess contextual factors influencing their current psychological well-being.

Clinical Interview

An Exploration of the individual's current mental health, emotional state, and relevant life experiences. The evaluator conducts a structured or semi-structured interview to gather information on symptoms, cognitive functioning, emotional regulation, and other relevant factors.

Psychological Testing

Standardised assessments are used to gather objective data on cognitive abilities, personality traits, emotional functioning, and other relevant psychological factors. The individual may complete various psychological tests, such as intelligence tests, personality inventories, or projective tests, depending on the goals of the evaluation. One of the tools used in psychological testing is the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale IV (WAIS-IV): The WAIS-IV is a comprehensive measure

designed to assess a person's intellectual abilities across a range of cognitive domains, including verbal comprehension, working memory, perceptual reasoning, and processing speed. Secondly, the Brief Intelligence Screening Measures WASI: Wechsler Abbreviated Scale of Intelligence) is a brief measure derived from the WAIS designed for a quick estimate of intellectual functioning. The Shipley Institute of Living Scale Purpose is also a brief measure of cognitive abilities, including verbal and non-verbal intelligence. Subsequently, the Rorschach Inkblot Test: This is a projective test that aims to tap into an individual's unconscious thoughts and feelings by having them interpret ambiguous inkblots. Incomplete Sentence Blank (ISB) or Thematic Apperception Test (TAT): This is a projective test that involves completing sentences or interpreting ambiguous pictures to reveal underlying thoughts and emotions.

When choosing assessments, it's important to consider the specific goals of the evaluation, the time available, and the qualifications of the evaluator. Additionally, ethical considerations and the individual's comfort and willingness to participate in the assessment process should be prioritised. Always ensure that professionals administering these tests are trained and experienced in their use (Songy, O.F.M. Cap, 2012 & Plante, T. G., Rossetti, 2011; Parappully, 2017; Gould, James, 2007).

Use and Interpretation

When interpreting assessment results, including automated interpretations, the psychologist takes into account the purpose of the assessment as well as the various test factors such as situational, personal, linguistic, and cultural differences, which might affect the objectivity of test results and reduce the accuracy of interpretations. He/she indicates in the report any significant limitations of their interpretations. A psychologist must not use assessment instruments that are outdated or irrelevant for current purposes.

Discussion and Recommendation

The present findings and provides recommendations based on the assessment results. The evaluator discusses the assessment results with the individual, offering insights into their psychological profile and addressing any concerns. Recommendations for treatment, intervention, or further evaluation may be provided. These components collectively contribute to a thorough understanding of an individual's psychological well-being and can inform decisions regarding treatment, support, or other. It's essential for the evaluator to maintain ethical standards, ensuring confidentiality and respect for the individual's autonomy throughout the evaluation process.

THE SPECIFIC FOCUS AREAS FOR A PSYCHOLOGICAL REPORT ON SEMINARIANS AND PRIESTS

Overall Assessment of Level of Psychological Functioning

Psychologists need to provide an overview of the individual's cognitive, emotional, and interpersonal functioning when they evaluate the candidates. They ought to discuss the strengths or areas of concern related to psychological well-being so that the candidates grow in their lives by overcoming the setbacks.

Assessment of Psychosocial Maturity

This involves evaluating the individual's social and emotional maturity, which includes factors such as interpersonal relationships, coping skills, and the ability to navigate social situations. The candidate knows how to adapt and respond to the situation.

Assessment of Psychosexual Maturity

This involves examining the individual's understanding of comfort with their sexuality. The evaluator should explore how the individual integrates their sexuality into their overall identity. Sometimes the individual may not know the difference between positive feelings and negative feelings because, as cited in the beginning, some candidates who come to the priesthood are abused children in various life settings. Therefore, those candidates are asked to explore their feelings through questions, theories, and other psychological testing to find out their psychosexual maturity.

Assessment of Personal Autonomy and Attitude Towards Authority Figures

This involves evaluating whether the individual can make decisions in a critical situation and assessing their attitude towards authority figures, including their willingness to collaborate within a hierarchical structure.

Assessment of Flexibility and Emotional Resilience

This involves analysing the individual's adaptability to change and their ability to cope with stressors, and also exploring how they handle setbacks, disappointment, or unexpected challenges.

Assessment of Authenticity of Motivations for Priesthood and Ability of Applicant to Complete Priesthood Studies

This involves exploring the individual's motivations for pursuing priesthood, and assessing the congruence between their stated motivations and observed behaviours. Specifically, the evaluator should evaluate their commitment to completing the required studies. It is very important to assess this because some candidates come to the priesthood and religious life without thinking of their call, due to poverty or to get an educational qualification. Therefore, it is good to evaluate the candidate's genuine interest and suitability for priesthood (Songy, O.F.M. Cap, 2012 & Plante, T. G., Rossetti, 2011; Parappully, 2017).

Psychologist's Satisfaction that Applicant Responded in All Significant Areas Honestly and Thoroughly

This involves discussing the methodology used to ensure the validity of the responses and commenting on the individual's cooperation and openness during the assessment process. The evaluator should also note any concerns or inconsistencies in the information provided and address them accordingly.

Specific Recommendations for Applicant's Continued Growth and Development in Seminary Formation

This involves providing actionable recommendations for areas of improvement and suggesting strategies for enhancing psychological well-being, interpersonal skills, and coping mechanisms. The evaluator should consider how to further align their personal and spiritual development and acknowledge cultural and individual differences in the assessment process. Moreover, the evaluator should highlight the importance of ongoing support and counselling during the seminary formation period and emphasise the collaborative nature of the evaluation, promoting the individual's active involvement in their growth. It's crucial to present the information in a balanced and constructive manner, emphasising both strengths and areas for development. The recommendations should be geared towards supporting the individual's journey in seminary formation and aligning with the values and goals of the religious institution, and the report will maintain professional confidentiality.

RECOMMENDATION FOR SEMINARY RECTORS

Drawing from the insightful perspective presented by (D. Songy, 2012) in "Spiritual Direction for Priestly Celibacy," it is evident that psychological assessments play a crucial role in the comprehensive formation of our seminarians.

Identifying Fundamental Markers of Human Maturity

The use of psychological assessments aids in identifying and understanding the fundamental markers of human maturity in our seminarians. By assessing cognitive, emotional, and interpersonal dimensions, we gain valuable insights into their readiness for pastoral ministry.

Highlighting Strengths and Internal Resources

Psychological assessments provide a lens through which we can recognise and leverage the strengths and internal resources of our seminarians. Understanding these attributes enables the formation team to tailor programs that capitalise on their unique capabilities.

Identifying Vulnerabilities for Addressing in Formation

By pinpointing vulnerabilities through assessments, the formation team gains an opportunity to address specific challenges that seminarians may face during their formation. This proactive approach ensures a more targeted and supportive formation process.

Confronting Seminarians with Reliable Information

Psychological assessments offer reliable information about each seminarian, facilitating honest and constructive feedback. This confrontation with self-awareness can be a transformative aspect of their formation, aiding in personal growth and self-understanding.

Noting Factors Influencing Effective Support

Assessments help identify the factors that influence how the formation staff can best work with seminarians and provide the necessary support. Tailoring support to individual needs fosters a more responsive and personalised formation environment.

Integrating Dimensions of Seminary Formation

Psychological assessments contribute significantly to the integration of various dimensions of seminary formation, particularly in human formation. Affective maturity, as highlighted by Songy, becomes a foundational aspect influencing intellectual, spiritual, and pastoral development (D. Songy (2012), pp.43-125).

“To develop and maintain affective maturity and to live priestly and religious celibacy joyfully and fruitfully, the FABC recommend the following: persevering and regular prayer life, development of deeper self-awareness and appropriate expression of feelings; cultivation of knowledge of sexuality which is appropriate and helps counterbalance over-idealisation and idolization of sexualised behaviour. They should also be encouraged to seek spiritual guidance and individual counselling, not only when wounds from the past affect current life and ministry. Compassion and commitment to pastoral ministry to others are also a great help for transforming human passion and attraction into the love of Christ. Regular practices of confession, solitude, a meditation on and union with Christ, and filial devotion to Mary are recommended” (Federation of Asian Bishops Conference, 2013).

HANDBOOK FOR VOCATION AND SEMINARY PERSONNEL (1987)

- No candidate can be admitted to a seminary who is known to have been sexually active within three to five years before applying for admission.
- It must be proven by tests that the applicant has the capacity for impulse control; (please note well at this time there are no firm tests on impulse control. That information must be obtained via the "history" taken by the screener.)
- A person who is unusually effeminate should not be accepted (again, please be aware some are "Milquetoasts" or "Wimpy" but are not homosexuals. Also, for consideration, heterosexual milquetoasts are not common).
- Any person who has participated in a "gay" culture, especially in a militant fashion, should not be considered for admission to a seminary (Handbook III-13).

In conclusion, the incorporation of psychological assessments aligns with best practices in seminary formation. It enhances our ability to guide seminarians through a holistic and individually tailored journey toward priesthood. I recommend the continued implementation of psychological assessments as an integral component of our formation program.

REFLECTION FOR SEMINARY RECTORS AND PRIESTS

"Even before the world was made, God had already chosen us to be His through our union with Christ" (Ephesians 1:4). Every call to the priesthood and religious life is a noble one, emanating from the Supreme God, the "timeless God." Here, I affirm that it is a supernatural call; every creature that God created will urge the candidates to move forward to fulfil his or her mission. The candidate is a weak being, not one who jumped from heaven as an angel with all the normal emotions, weaknesses, and feelings. They come to the seminary, and the saints of the Church also had their own ups and downs. They overcame through the grace of God; moreover, by cooperating with the will and ordinances of God. God helped them become holy and blameless. Therefore, psychological screening should go hand in hand with spiritual direction so that candidates can easily discern the will of God.

CONCLUSIONS

Pope Francis, emphasising the importance of psychological evaluations, declared, "No man should become a priest without a psychological evaluation proving he is suited to a life of chastity" (Zauzmer, 2019). This underscores the recognition that psycho-social problems among priests and religious can be attributed to significant psychological baggage (Rossetti, 2011; Arndt, 1991). Individuals entering the priesthood with a history of dysfunctional childhoods and pre-existing mental health issues, sexual conflicts, or narcissistic traits are more susceptible to unhappiness in their vocation. To address and mitigate these psychosocial challenges, screening and formation of candidates become imperative (USCCB, 2019; The John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2004-2011; Plante & Lackey, 2007).

The screening process serves as a crucial tool for individuals to freely discern their vocation, ensuring that those ordained as priests are well-suited for the demands of a religious life. Without proper guidance and discernment, individuals enter the priesthood unhappily and face a myriad of psychological problems. The absence of screening increases the risk of priests facing psychological challenges such as gender identity crises, loneliness, rejection, chronic masturbation, anger problems, suicide, fear of setbacks in life, pornography, and acting out in heterosexual or homosexual

ways. Additionally, priests may grapple with issues like voyeurism, pedophilia, and a preoccupation with inappropriate behaviour, including dirty jokes and sexting. The accumulation of such challenges may drive individuals to reconsider their commitment to the noble vocation of priesthood (Songy, O.F.M. Cap, 2012 & Plante, T. G., Rossetti, 2011; Parappully, 2017).

In conclusion, the essentiality of screening for the priesthood and religious life is emphasised by the potential for psychological problems among candidates. Thus, the process of screening also serves as a preventive measure, helping individuals find their vocation more harmoniously and contribute positively to the religious community.

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