

## Christ Is the Sure Foundation: Priestly Human Formation Completed in and by Spiritual Formation\*

JAMES KEATING  
*Institute for Priestly Formation*  
*Creighton University*  
*Omaha, Nebraska*

FIFTEEN years ago, Father Louis Camelli urged seminary formators not to complicate human and spiritual priestly 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.<sup>1</sup> What might an integrated human–spiritual formation process be built upon, and how might it be understood within seminary life?<sup>2</sup>

In this article, I want to argue that deep 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.

---

\* My thanks to Edward Hogan, Kathy Kanavy, Peter Ryan, S.J., Michael C. Barber, S.J., and Christine Lynch, who read earlier drafts of this essay.

<sup>1</sup> Louis Camelli, “Origins and Promise: Perspectives on Human Formation for Priesthood” *Seminary Journal* 1, no. 2 (Fall 1995): 16.

<sup>2</sup> See John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis (PDV)* (1992), 45, wherein it is noted that *human formation finds its completion in spiritual formation*. If *PDV* 45 is to become enfolded, seminary formators need to continue to articulate a compatible anthropology and theory of human personality based upon this capacity of the human to commune with God.

### Rationale for Integration

After 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.<sup>3</sup> Further, and even more telling, the *Program of Priestly Formation* calls Christ the “foundation” of all human formation.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, knowledge of and intimacy with Christ encompasses all aspects of formation and is explicitly its foundation in human formation. Substantially, the Church envisions human formation to be a set of relationships that enable a seminarian to become a man of communion; “that he becomes someone who makes a gift of himself and is able to receive the gift of others.”<sup>5</sup> The seminarian achieves this self-donative character through “the love of God and service to others.”<sup>6</sup> 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. 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. In order that human formation be integrated with spirituality, a seminary is not to falsely reduce such formation to devotionalism. 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 (for example, the deepest of intimate prayer and its companion images); faith, ultimately, is as public a reality as a man hanging on the 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.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Program of Priestly Formation* (Washington, D.C.: USCCB, 2006), 115.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>7</sup> John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis* (1979), §10.

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 (*Redemptor Hominis* §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 (Mt 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, therefore, 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 make 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 for all dimensions of seminary formation (pastoral, human, and academic) to be integrated around spiritual formation. Spiritual formation (that is, living in intimate and unceasing union with God and the mysteries of Christ) is the heart and core of seminary 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>8</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

---

<sup>8</sup> *The Program of 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.”

reach affective maturity, we must learn how to contemplate Christ.<sup>9</sup> 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. Thus, the mind and heart 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.”<sup>10</sup> 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. Indeed, it is dangerous 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.<sup>11</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.<sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> Victoria Harrison, *The Apologetic Value of Human Holiness* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2000), 29.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 30–31.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 41; Benedict XVI, “Homily” 20 July 2008, World Youth Day: “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.”

<sup>12</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Prayer* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961), 99.

The seminarian is not only to receive the truth about himself in prayerful discernment but to 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 (that is, abiding in Christ unto self-donation) defines one as a "man of communion." Nevertheless, one of the key reasons to retain a distinction between spiritual and human formation is 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>13</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.<sup>14</sup> 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."<sup>15</sup> 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).<sup>16</sup> The capacity to speak the truth and hear the truth about oneself 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

---

<sup>13</sup> St. Louis de Montfort 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. See Thelagathoti Raja Rao, "The Mystical Experience of St. Louis-Marie De Monfort," *Studies in Spirituality* 17 (2007). "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" (174). This disproportionate attention to prayer on the part of seminarians, to the disregard of the needs of other persons, has always been the fear of some seminary formators. 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 measurable 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.

<sup>14</sup> See Harrison, *The Apologetic Value of Human Holiness*, 89.

<sup>15</sup> Documents of Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), §22.

<sup>16</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Prayer*, 38.

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 must not 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, “The good pastor must be rooted in contemplation.”<sup>17</sup> “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.”<sup>18</sup> 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>19</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.”<sup>20</sup> 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

<sup>17</sup> Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (2005), §7.

<sup>18</sup> Balthasar, *Prayer*, 63.

<sup>19</sup> The proximate object is affective maturity, or the reception of the truth about oneself and one’s capacity to give that self away in love, whereas the ultimate object is the ability to receive and accept the mystery of the Father’s love as the truth about oneself.

<sup>20</sup> St. Bonaventure, *Major Life of St. Francis of Assisi*, §6.1

maturity needed to espouse the Church in the Spirit of Christ. Until such “hiding” (Gen. 3:8–10) is shunned, he will not be capable of giving himself to the Church. Instead, he will 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>21</sup> A mature man seeks the good of his spouse and is not fixated upon what he will get out of the marriage.

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>22</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.<sup>23</sup> Human formation encompasses a development of moral virtue but cannot simply be reduced to growth in moral virtue alone.

Furthermore, contemplation deepens 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. His sharing in this mission begins to break down a seminarian’s fantasies, which lead him to daydream about what he will get out of the priesthood, materially or egocentrically (that is, the best parish assignment, praise and adulation from parishioners, bachelor freedom to travel, et cetera). As Balthasar notes, we enter God in prayer by contemplating the wounds of His Son.<sup>24</sup> 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

---

<sup>21</sup> 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.

<sup>22</sup> 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.

<sup>23</sup> Balthasar, *Prayer*, 65.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

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 not only to will the welfare of the spouse through complete self-donation but slowly to 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.<sup>25</sup>

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. And 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. Then he can pursue healing as an exclusive endeavor and not simply as part of the process of becoming a priest.

---

<sup>25</sup> Servais Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 208–9.



### 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 are healed.<sup>26</sup> A seminarian does not behold Christ in order 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, whether with anger toward celibacy or toward authority, or with 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.<sup>27</sup>

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

<sup>26</sup> See the vital essay by Fr. John Cihak, "The Blessed Virgin Mary's Role in the Celibate Priest's Spousal and Paternal Love," [insightscoop.typepad.com/2004/2009/07/the-blessed-virgin-marys-role-in-the-celibate-priests-spousal-and-paternal-love.html](http://insightscoop.typepad.com/2004/2009/07/the-blessed-virgin-marys-role-in-the-celibate-priests-spousal-and-paternal-love.html) (20 July 2009). See also Cihak's "The Priest as Man, Husband, and Father" *Sacrum Ministerium* 12, no. 2 (2006): 75–85.

<sup>27</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, First Sunday of Advent, 2005.

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 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. Joy is the fruit of freedom (*PDV* 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.”<sup>28</sup> 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.<sup>29</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. Instead, a man is invited to explore the true will of God for himself—priesthood or marriage.<sup>30</sup> In an envi-

<sup>28</sup> Balthasar, *Prayer*, 75.

<sup>29</sup> Balthasar has noted that contemplation did not lead Christ to “action,” a busy-ness, but to sacrifice, to his Passion. In other words, contemplation led Christ into his own priesthood. *Explorations in Theology: 1. The Word Made Flesh* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989), 236.

<sup>30</sup> Canon 241, §1 states the following: “A diocesan bishop is to admit to a major seminary only those who are judged qualified to dedicate themselves permanently to the sacred ministries.” Although this canon is to be observed, experienced seminary personnel know that some men undergo profound levels of conversion when

ronment where trust rules, a seminarian can receive the truth more readily. In such a community, while becoming a priest is the goal of formation, it is accomplished within a foundational search to know God's will regarding which kind of fatherhood a man is being called to: spiritual fatherhood or biological fatherhood. Barring any psycho-pathology, a seminarian will want to know this, receive this, and not impose his own will upon God.<sup>31</sup>

### Chastity

If the seminary is a set of relationships that conspire 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*.<sup>32</sup>

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.<sup>33</sup> 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.<sup>34</sup> The chaste life is to be the

---

seminary formation is of a high quality. Even in major seminary it is not uncommon for seminarians to visit the question of marriage again in spiritual direction and human formation.

<sup>31</sup> 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 receive divine love deeply. In this role, the psychologist endeavors to integrate his or her gifts with spirituality as well. *The Program of Priestly Formation* expressly notes that, "while psychology . . . can be a resource for human formation, [it] is not the same as human formation" (105). What any human formation process is looking to do is to see where a priestly spirituality penetrates with the "stable structures of a personality" (Timothy Costello, *Forming a Priestly Identity* [Rome: Gregorian University Press, 2002], 129).

<sup>32</sup> *PDV* 44.

<sup>33</sup> John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* (Boston: Pauline Press, 2006).

<sup>34</sup> See Fr. John Cihak, "The Blessed Virgin Mary's Role in the Celibate Priest's Spousal and Parental Love."

normal practice of the seminarian years before he enters major seminary, and all the practices of such a life are to be reinforced by formators by everything they give witness to in their own lives and by their instruction.

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>35</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>36</sup> Affective maturity is the interpenetration of a man's reception of divine love with the awakening of desire to give the self away to another as a result of receiving this love (that is, communion with Christ bears fruit in pastoral charity).<sup>37</sup> To fail to suffer this integration is to become a priest who may well organize priesthood around his own needs.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> Of course, maturity is progressive, developmental. See Joyce Riddick, "Preparing Priests: The Road to Transformation," in *Journey to Freedom*, ed. Franco Imoda, S.J. (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 187: "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." Consider also this passage from Fr. Servais Pinckaers: "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" (Servais Pinckaers, O.P., *Morality, The Catholic View* [South Bend, IN: St. Augustine Press, 2003], 88).

<sup>36</sup> Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, §10: ". . . 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" (11).

<sup>37</sup> 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 lies 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* 42/43 (July 2003): 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

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.<sup>39</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.<sup>40</sup>

### Mystery and Human Formation

Perhaps we can construe human formation in the context of spirituality in a way that is similar to the way in which 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”<sup>41</sup>

Human formation is integrated into the heart of seminary life, spirituality, when formators and seminarians conspire to reverence both the

---

Billy and James Keating, *Conscience and Prayer: The Spirit of Catholic Moral Theology* (Minneapolis: Liturgical Press, 2001).

<sup>38</sup> Egenolf, “Vocation and Motivation,” 88.

<sup>39</sup> See Parker Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 62, wherein he 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.

<sup>40</sup> Riddick, “Preparing Priests,” 199. 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, *Forming a Priestly Identity*, 161: “. . . 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. . . . [I]t can also be glimpsed in the man who pursues rational objectivity in an exaggerated way, and one who promotes a heavy handed authoritarianism”.

<sup>41</sup> Andrew Louth, *Discerning the Mystery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 145.

mystery of each man who is discerning priesthood and the One who is calling and questioning him. Each seminarian is necessarily 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.<sup>42</sup> 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.

### Conclusion/Summary

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.<sup>43</sup> 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 himself and the seminarian.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Olivier Clement, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1996), 90.

<sup>43</sup> “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, *Forming a Priestly Identity*, 88, 30–31).

<sup>44</sup> Although the Church does encourage spiritual directors to assist in human formation (*PPF* 80), it does not, in turn, envision a direct role for human formators to assist in spiritual formation. This latter role is still developing, as bishops discern

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, but, rather, 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 (for example, 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 openness to transcendent values and a concern for the welfare of others.”<sup>45</sup> 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 cease.

As noted previously, the *Program of Priestly Formation* calls Christ the foundation for all human formation. Thus, 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 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—without destroying the distinction between growth in human freedom and growth in intimacy with God—that both human formation

---

how to protect the internal forum of spiritual direction *without* making spirituality solely a private reality.

<sup>45</sup> *PPF*, 89.

and spiritual formation interpenetrate and inform one another. 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.<sup>46</sup> Such a man participates within these mysteries by way of his developed intellect, will, and affect. A seminarian's freedom and maturity are 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.

Directors of Human Formation 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.

Spiritual directors, on the other hand, guide 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 name the truth about himself courageously. In spiritual direction, communion with Christ is present as a direct end, which enables 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

---

<sup>46</sup> Clement, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, 80.



of the reality of Christian life: in Christ, human nature is capable of receiving the power of the Resurrection.<sup>47</sup>

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."<sup>48</sup> Ultimately, it is Christ, the Foundation, who shows a seminarian the truth and invites him to live in the light, not illusions. **N V**

---

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 89

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.