

REFLECTIONS ON SOME RECENT NORMS ON PRIESTLY FORMATION

Although the ecclesiastical norms on the formation of clerics represent a significant collection of canonical legislation and comment from sources both official and popular, it is an area of canonical science that occupies relatively modest attention among ecclesiastical jurists whose interests and activity are dedicated more to the law of marriage and the sacraments, procedure, education, and, in more recent years, ecclesiastical sanctions.

Yet priestly formation provides a fertile field for scholars and legislators alike for, among others, two important reasons. First, it is an area of the law that is notably open to variety and adaptation to historical and cultural circumstances. While its universal provisions are ample, its possible application to national and local situations is very broad indeed. Second, priestly formation, if it is carried out with care and attention, can be one of the richest sources for the health and vitality of the Church's future. Failings among the clergy, especially in their moral conduct, have seriously wounded the Church in recent times, and better formation programs are identified as a crucial means of healing persons and institutions. A clergy that is chosen from apt candidates, formed in the spirit of the gospel, and well educated in the Church's best theological, moral, and spiritual tradition is among the best means to ensure that the People of God will receive,

nurture, and live the faith entrusted to them by the Lord.

It is the scope of this paper, therefore, to offer some observations on norms for priestly formation, especially with respect to their adaptability and their provisions for ensuring the human maturity and moral integrity of the Church's ministers¹.

1. Universal Norms

Norms in current canon law governing priestly formation in the Latin Church are found in a number of sources. In the *Code of Canon Law* they are located in Book II and Book IV in their respective treatment of the formation of clerics and the sacrament of holy orders. On 1 March 1985, the Congregation for Catholic Education issued the second edition of the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, sometimes rendered in English as *Basic Norms for Priestly Formation*². The first edition of this text was published in 1970 when the Holy See updated its general regulation of priestly formation so that it would be consistent with the work of the Second Vatican Council, especially its decrees *Presbyterorum ordinis* [= *PO*] on the life and ministry of priests and *Optatam totius* [= *OT*] on the formation of priests.

¹ The substance of the article were first presented at a meeting of the Canon Law Society of Great Britain and Ireland in May 2007.

² An English version of this text can be found in National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Norms for Priestly Formation*, Vol. I, Washington 1993, 15-60.

It is important to recall from the outset the necessary connection between the Church's teaching and discipline on the life of priests and its norms on the formation of clergy. What the Church teaches about the nature and identity of the ministerial priesthood and their ideal exemplification in a mature, educated, faithful, devout, and zealous priest should be reflected as well in the Church's norms governing priestly formation. The elements of seminary formation should be specifically designed to evoke, promote, and teach the qualities and skills to be expected of effective priestly ministers in the Church.

The Council had appropriately acknowledged how universal norms could have only a general character and it called for each episcopal conference to devise its own Program of Priestly Formation (cf. *OT* 1). Some such documents were developed at early stages of the postconciliar period³. The Code called for them in can. 242 where in very general terms it provides:

§1. Each nation is to have a program of priestly formation which is to be established by the conference of bishops, attentive to the norms issued by the supreme authority of the Church, and which is to be approved by the Holy See. This program is to be adapted to new circumstances, also with the approval of the Holy Sec, and is to define the main principles of the instruction to be given in the seminary and general norms adapted to the pastoral needs of each region or province.

³ The first edition of the *Program of Priestly Formation*, for example, was published by the Episcopal Conference of the USA in 1971.

§2. All seminaries both diocesan and interdiocesan, are to observe the norms of the program mentioned in §1⁴.

This norm of the Code may seem to place primary emphasis of the academic curriculum or program of studies when it refers to «the main principles of the instruction to be given in the seminary», but the Latin term “*institutio*” can have a broader meaning, as it does in the *Ratio Fundamentalis*, including the many and varied objectives and activities of the daily regimen of seminaries and seminarians (since in many cases a major period of time is spent outside the seminary house).

A second central feature of can. 242 is its provision that the norms governing formation be «adapted to the pastoral needs of each region or province». This principle of the Council and the Code is one that can be found applied to other areas of ecclesial life, such as liturgy, finance, and the use of organs of consultation, but its relevance to seminary formation and the priestly ministry it serves is self-evident. Seminarians are being formed for service in the Church in a concrete historical, regional, social, and cultural setting. Moreover, their academic formation is carried on within the context of a particular educational system and tradition. The norms for priestly formation, therefore, will necessarily reflect these national particularities. The continual updating of the national programs is also envisioned in the canon.

A final important provision of the canon is the one contained in its second paragraph, namely, that the

⁴ Translations are taken from *Code of Canon Law, Latin-English Edition, New English Translation*, Washington 1999.

various national programs of priestly formation, once endowed with the *recognitio* of the Holy See, will have the binding force of particular law on all institutions within the jurisdiction.

Perhaps the most significant influence on the current discipline governing priestly formation is a document which is not itself juridical in nature, namely, Pope John Paul II's Postsynodal Apostolic Exhortation of 25 March 1992, *Pastores dabo vobis* [= *PDV*] on the Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day⁵. Synthesizing and confirming the work of the 1990 World Synod of Bishops on the same topic, *PDV* carefully observes the principle noted above, namely (and obviously), that priestly formation will be determined by the Church's understanding of priestly ministry. Its first three chapters, therefore, are devoted first to the cultural, religious, and historical context that provides priestly formation with its challenges at the dawn of the third millennium; second, to the Church's teaching on the nature and mission of the ministerial priesthood; and third, to the spiritual life of priests. Central in this doctrinal section of the document is a theme often repeated in the magisterium of John Paul II, namely, the distinction between the universal priesthood of all the baptized and the ministerial priesthood of the ordained who act *in persona Christi capitis*.

Other sources where this theme received strong emphasis were *Christifideles laici* [= *ChL*], the 1988

⁵ *AAS* 84 (1992) 657-804. An English version of this text can be found in National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Norms for Priestly Formation*, Vol. II, Washington 1993, 263-351.

Postsynodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and the World⁶, the 1997 interdicasterial Instruction *Ecclesiae de mysterio* on the Collaboration of the Non-ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priests⁷ and the 2003 Encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* and related documents on the Eucharist⁸. The consequences of this teaching for priestly formation are wide ranging. Responses of the Congregation for Catholic Education to various apostolic visitations of seminaries emphasized how seminaries should as a rule be exclusively devoted to the formation of candidates for orders and consequent provisions of particular law reflect the same objective when, for example, they insist that certain – and increasingly more – functions in seminary leadership, formation, and teaching be reserved to priests⁹.

Following *PDV*'s brief fourth chapter on the promotion and discernment of priestly vocations within the broader context of the Church's pastoral work comes the exhortation's long fifth chapter specifically dedicated to the formation of candidates for the priesthood and divided into three subsections: the areas, the setting, and the agents of formation. Perhaps the most innovative dimension of the first of these topics is its identification of the "four pillars" of priestly forma-

⁶ *AAS* 81 (1989) 393-521.

⁷ *AAS* 89 (1997) 852-877.

⁸ *AAS* 93 (2003) 433-475.

⁹ Cf. Card. W.W. BAUM, «Letter to the Bishops of the United States Concerning Free-Standing Seminaries», in NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS, *Norms for Priestly Formation*, Vol. II, Washington 1993, 221-240.

tion: human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral. While the *Ratio Fundamentalis* similarly identified spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral training and even called for the national plans to include human formation in its contents, only *PDV* specifically discusses what is meant by "human" formation, giving it that name and listing it before the other areas. Recalling the insistence of the Synod Fathers that «[t]he whole work of priestly formation would be deprived of its necessary foundation if it lacked a suitable human formation» John Paul goes on to explain how the priest is to model his personality on that of Jesus Christ, the perfect man, so that «it becomes a bridge and not an obstacle for others in their meeting with Jesus Christ the Redeemer of humanity». This goal creates objectives for the formation program:

Future priests should therefore cultivate a series of human qualities, not only out of proper and due growth and realization of self, but also with a view to the ministry. These qualities are needed for them to be balanced people, strong and free, capable of bearing the weight of pastoral responsibilities. They need to be educated to love the truth, to be loyal, to respect every person, to have a sense of justice, to be true to their word, to be genuinely compassionate, to be men of integrity and, especially, to be balanced in judgment and behavior (*PDV* 43).

Human formation, while hardly new, may have been formerly taken for granted and not given sufficiently specific emphasis. The criteria for promotion to orders contained in Book IV of the Code reflects this tendency:

Can. 1029. Only those are to be promoted to orders who, in the prudent judgment of their own bishop or of

the competent major superior, all things considered, have integral faith, are moved by the right intention, have the requisite knowledge, possess a good reputation, and are endowed with integral morals and proven virtues and the other physical and psychic qualities in keeping with the order to be received.

The "good reputation" referred to here, together with the "integral morals and proven virtues" and finally the other "psychic qualities" can all be understood as fruits, at least in part, of the human formation offered to the candidate for orders during his seminary training.

In its treatment of the formation of clerics, Book II makes specific mention of human qualities among its criteria for admission to formation programs. It provides:

Can. 241 §1. A diocesan bishop is to admit to a major seminary only those who are judged qualified to dedicate themselves permanently to the sacred ministries; he is to consider their human, moral, spiritual, and intellectual qualities, their physical and psychic health, and their correct intention.

It is noteworthy the *OT* 6 which is cited as a source of this canon, refers to the candidate's "spiritual, moral and intellectual fitness" without reference to his "human [...] qualities" as included in the canon. The conciliar text makes reference only very generally to the man's "age and development" and, as does the canon, to his "adequate physical and mental health". Some of the same natural virtues listed in *PDV* and cited above can be found in no. 39 of the first (6 January 1970) *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*¹⁰, which

¹⁰ *AAS* 62 (1970) 321-384.

is cited as another source of this canon. The list is repeated *verbatim* in the 1985 post-PDV *Ratio*, in its own no. 39. The examples given of these "human and moral qualities" include «sincerity, emotional maturity, good manners, keeping their word, steady concern for justice; feeling for friendship, for just freedom and responsibility; industry, the will to work with others, and so on». Psychosexual or affective maturity is not listed among these human qualities. Rather, "well-trying chastity" is listed among the "spiritual qualities".

A final postconciliar source cited for can. 241 §1 is one entitled "*Normae*" issued by the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education on 11 April 1974¹¹. This document develops the notion of sexual maturity in the priest in terms of virtues traditionally associated with fatherhood: «an altruistic spirit, the assumption of heavy responsibilities, a capacity for love and a dedication enough to make any sacrifice, daily bearing of life's burdens and difficulties, prudent care for the future, etc.». These same virtues are applied to the spiritual paternity of the priest. To develop these virtues and live a chaste life, the document views self-control as essential¹². The focus of the citation of this document in the Code, however, is not the virtues or the means of fostering them, but the agents of discernment of vocations, including those capable of identifying psychological defects incom-

¹¹ This document is available in English under the title «A Guide to Formation in Priestly Celibacy», in NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS, *Norms for Priestly Formation*, Vol. I, Washington 1993, 153-205.

¹² *Ibid.*, nos. 32-33.

patible with the priesthood. The final paragraph of the cited source is worth including here:

Educators, who themselves are well-prepared for their work, should be able to verify the authenticity of vocations in normal individuals by using the usual criteria for vocational discernment. However, when in doubt or when seminary superiors feel that a student needs particular help to decide his vocation, special remedies may be employed, such as a psychological testing before the candidate begins his theological course. Maybe even a specialized psychotherapeutic examination will be found advisable or he may be advised to interrupt his ecclesiastical studies in order to work for a time in some other profession¹³.

It seems clear from this text that psychological testing and pre-admission screening are not foreseen in this document. Such means are viewed as extraordinary and restricted to individual cases where "the usual criteria for vocational discernment" are insufficient. This document has relevance for the various national norms to be considered below, some of which contain as a matter of policy provisions for pre-admission psychological screening of seminary candidates.

It is opportune here to mention a more recent Vatican document concerning priestly formation, namely, the 4 November 2005 Instruction *In continuity* of the Congregation for Catholic Education concerning the criteria for the discernment of vocations with regard to persons with homosexual tendencies in view of their

¹³ *Ibid.*, no. 38.

admission to the Seminary and to Holy Orders¹⁴. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the document in great detail. It is sufficient simply to cite its assertion that the Church «cannot admit to the seminary or to holy orders those who practice homosexuality, present deep-seated homosexual tendencies or support the so-called “gay culture”»¹⁵. In this context the document highlights human formation «as the necessary foundation of all formation» and calls upon the Church to verify that a candidate for orders «has reached affective maturity». Various agents of discernment in this regard are identified: the bishop or major superior, the seminary rector and other formators, the spiritual director and confessor, and especially the candidate himself on whom the instruction imposes a major burden of honest self-revelation¹⁶.

The tension between the Church's legitimate right to know of the aptitude of candidates for the priesthood on the one hand and, on the other, the candidates' right to their own intimacy as guaranteed by can. 220 is not overlooked by official documents. An 8 March 1996 instruction of the Congregation for Catholic Education had as its principal concern a matter it had raised with episcopal conferences once before, namely, the admission to the seminary of candidates coming from other seminaries or religious families and a proper application of can. 241 §3¹⁷. The docu-

¹⁴ The English text of this documents can be found in *Origins* 26, 8 December 2005.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 3.

¹⁷ The text of this document has been published in French and Italian in *Enchiridion Vaticanum* 15/384-394.

ment called upon episcopal conferences to address in future editions of national norms for priestly formation some delicate issues which could readily transcend the specific purpose of this instruction and be taken more broadly with regard to vocational discernment. These issues include «problems concerning affective and human maturity, psychic and sexual anomalies» and «the recourse to psychology in certain cases». The document acknowledges, though does not resolve, the balance between the candidate's privacy rights and the importance of not hiding or obscuring the truth¹⁸.

In his commentary on *In Continuity*, Gianfranco Ghirlanda affirms that where psychological intervention takes place in certain cases, it can only be done with the consent of the candidate, without pressure from the bishop or religious superiors. If the candidate refuses it, the authorities must rely on "the usual methods of discernment" and, if doubts remain, the provision of can. 1052 §3 not to admit to orders is to be invoked¹⁹.

2. National Norms

PDV and other universal documents cited above provided a helpful impulse for the development of national priestly formation plans. Those published since *PDV*'s promulgation cite it extensively and all of

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 3.

¹⁹ G. GHIRLANDA, «Aspetti canonici dell'Istr. *In continuità* del 4 novembre 2005», *Periodica* 95 (2006) 391-448, at 444-445.

them, to a greater or lesser extent, address the issue of human formation along with the other “pillars” of priestly formation. Three such recently published plans will be considered here, namely, the priestly formation programs of the episcopal conferences of Scotland (2005), Ireland (2006), and the United States (2006). The choice was made by reason of their recent publication and common language²⁰. Comments will be focused on the distinctive characteristics of the three documents, especially with regard to the national contexts, and on questions of canonical interest that they raise. Particular attention will be given to the topic of human formation as it is treated in each text, especially any references to human sexuality and to sexual misconduct.

3. Norms of the episcopal conference of Scotland

Norms for Priestly Formation in Scotland [= *NPFS*] was published by the Bishops’ Conference of Scotland in June 2005 after consultation with its Commission on Priestly Formation, the Priests for Scotland Commission (on the promotion of vocations), and the staffs of the Scottish seminaries. It is the Scottish bishops’ second such document, the first having been published in 1994 in response to the impulse of *PDV*. It is interesting to note that, even though there is wide convergence in the two texts, the bishops acknowl-

²⁰ A program was published even more recently by the Italian Episcopal Conference, in 2007. New plans are forthcoming from the bishops of Australia and Anglophone Canada.

edge new challenges for priests to have emerged in the single decade between the two texts that called for a response (cf. *NPFS* 1.2).

It is precisely in this recognition of the changing demands made of priests within its demographic and cultural context that the document of the bishops of Scotland is most satisfying. Priests in Scotland are challenged by the ageing population of Catholics, by a decrease in Mass attendance, by fewer baptisms, marriages, and ordinations, and by an increase in funerals and bereavement ministry. Yet the bishops acknowledge how political devolution in Scotland is a sign of hope, consistent with increasing awareness among the laity of their role in the Church and with a growing spirit of cooperation among Christians of various denominations, an opportunity made all the more timely as the number of interchurch marriages rises (cf. *NPFS* 1.3-1.4, 2.9).

Scotland shares with other increasingly developed countries the challenges to traditional priestly ministry posed by dominant secular values in society. It likewise must adapt its formation programs to the changing patterns of vocation awareness among men of different ages and backgrounds. It has the added burden of adapting to the pastoral needs of new Catholic immigrant groups, their cultures, their languages, and their religious traditions. Catholic Scots of greater stability in the nation present other challenges to the ministry and to the formation of the priests who will serve them: higher levels of secular education among the laity; independent patterns of thinking and acting; and consequently changing attitudes of families toward an ecclesiastical vocation for children with other opportunities. Moral teaching on marriage and family is not universally accepted by Catholics, much less by soci-

ety at large. Moreover, the Church's position on social, economic, and international issues has contributed to the creation of a new kind of isolation for Catholics from the dominant culture, different from their minority immigrant status of former decades (cf. *NPFS* 2.6-2.7).

The implications of these challenges are significant. The *Norms* call for a formation enabling the priest to relate «the word of God in a relevant way to the hopes and fears and needs of the men and women of today» (*NPFS* 3.10). Even though the current text may fall short of identifying sufficiently concrete means of responding to these challenges through formation activities, the very consciousness of the new demands gives the bishops, formators, and priesthood candidates of Scotland a distinct advantage over those from other episcopal conferences which have yet to engage in such reflection.

A number of important issues are confronted by the document in its chapter 4 on vocations. Precisely because potential candidates find less support for their vocation within their families, either because they have long since left home or because their families oppose or are indifferent to their aspirations, parish communities have an increased responsibility to fill the void (cf. *NPFS* 4.4). From the agents of vocations promotion, the text moves on to criteria for seminary admission. Among them it includes «a clear appreciation and a ready acceptance of the Church's moral and social teaching». Perhaps too general is the *Norms'* requirement that the «behavior and lifestyle of the candidate when he offers himself as an applicant must be in keeping with what the Church expects» (*NPFS* 4.21). Somewhat more explicit are the matters to be addressed with candidates in interviews held prior to

their admission to the seminary. These points are made in the *Norms*' Appendix I. Characteristics to be sought in the applicant include «the ability to give oneself to others and to live by a commitment made to others. As well as an awareness of responsibility to individuals, he should also have a sense of community responsibility and an ability for social interaction» (*NPFS*, Appendix 1.11). These guidelines for the pre-admission interviews add briefly: «The interviewer should also pay attention to the sexual maturity and the sexual orientation of the applicant» (*NPFS*, Appendix 1.12). The means or specific objective of "paying attention" are not specified. It is noteworthy that the *recognitio* of the *Norms* preceded by several months the publication of the Instruction *In Continuitate*.

Distinctive in the *Norms* is the Conference's determination that the Seminary Applicants' Year fulfill the expectation of *PDV* 62 that there be a certain period of preparation for seminary formation (cf. *NPFS* 5.5). The value of this propaedeutic year is that it provides a certain common experience and knowledge that is shared by all candidates entering a seminary; guarantees a full and leisurely period of discernment and preparation for all candidates; and fosters cooperation among the dioceses of the national conference.

«Human formation», the Scottish document affirms, «is above all concerned with the candidate's ability to form and maintain mature and appropriate relationships that demonstrate his acceptance not only of the standards expected by society but also a willingness to live by and uphold the teaching of the Gospel as it is set out in the Church's magisterium». The Scottish bishops acknowledge that some candidates share «the confused views of society» about the

Church's understanding of human sexuality and celibacy (cf. *NPFS* 7.3). Accordingly, the Conference confronts unambiguously the errors of the past with respect to pedophilia, and calls for priesthood candidates to be assessed (without specifying how) before admission, and instructed how properly to respond to incidents of it they may encounter in their ministry (cf. *NPFS* 7.4). The *Norms* document goes on: «The ability of candidates to enter into appropriate and supportive relationships with both men and women, as well as with those in authority and those over whom they are expected to exercise a degree of authority is very revealing of the level of psychosexual maturity a candidate has achieved». Here the text offers a concrete consequence for the formation program, calling for the candidate to have experiences in dealing with men and women, responding appropriately in obedience to superiors, and in other circumstances exercising leadership themselves. Strengths and weaknesses in such a range of relationship should be identified and improvement planned and achieved (cf. *NPFS* 7.5).

Within its treatment of the importance of the unity of the presbyterate, the document reminds each man of his «duty to avoid a life-style that means becoming part of any sub-culture that could suggest that the priesthood has to do with anything other than loving service of God and his people». The following are listed as aberrations: love of money, addictions of various kinds, preoccupation with comfort, extravagant standards of living, inappropriate relationships and the gay culture (cf. *NPFS* 7.6). To achieve these objectives «individual and group programmes» are proposed, with the assistance, if needed, of human-development professionals (cf. *NPFS* 7.8).

While the confidentiality requirements of internal and external forum are clear in the law (and in these *Norms*), the material proper to each forum is less so. The Scottish bishops admit this ambiguity when they acknowledge a certain overlap, and caution against too hard a distinction between material proper to one or other forum. Rather, the text reads: «human formation is mainly concerned with the dynamics of human relationships while spiritual direction is more concerned with progress in prayer and the working of the Holy Spirit in the life of the candidate». It calls for a “climate of confidentiality” within the human formation conversation, but says that such dialogue does not belong to the internal forum. This text seems to leave to the prudent formator’s discretion – and to the spontaneous and generous self-disclosure of the candidate – how best to balance a duty to the Church and its right to information about candidates for the priesthood on the one hand, and the can. 220 privacy rights of a candidate for orders on the other (cf. *NPFS* 7.9).

Provision is made in the *Norms* for caution against danger with regard to relationships of seminarians in their pastoral internships. The relevant text reads: «The seminary authorities will be responsible for ensuring that students are not asked to be in unsuitable situations and that all the necessary safeguards and monitoring procedures are in place where children or vulnerable adults are concerned or where the student himself might be placed in a vulnerable situation» (*NPFS* 10.11). One might hope that such appropriate protection would also be an opportunity for the seminarians to learn good principles of observing boundaries and thus guarding against dangers to others and to themselves.

In summary, the Scottish *Norms* are praiseworthy for the national context the document describes, for its honest confrontation of delicate issues, and for the imaginative pre-admission program it has instituted on a national scale. The text could be improved by the identification of more concrete formation activities designed to achieve the objectives outlined in the national formation program. A future revision would profit from summary statements of specific, measurable norms that follow more descriptive values and goals in priestly formation.

4. Irish Norms

The Irish Bishops' Conference published in 2006 their «Programme for the Formation of Priests in Irish Seminaries» [= *PFPIS*]. The booklet in which the document appears makes no mention of the text's stages of development nor does it carry notice of the *recognitio* granted by the Holy See. Its organization in four chapters is very straightforward and reflects the topics covered in the *Ratio Fundamentalis* and *PDV*: the nature, mission, and spirituality of the priest; seminary formation (subdivided according to agents, the four pillars of formation, and the areas of study); and ongoing formation.

The document is disappointing in its failure to relate in a significant way the formation of Irish seminarians to the particular situation of the Church in Ireland. There are, to be sure, passing references to Irish saints in the liturgical calendar (cf. *PFPIS* 209), to the study by seminarians of the history of the Church in Ireland (cf. *PFPIS* 311) and to preparation to minister in the Irish language in those dioceses

where it is spoken (cf. *PFPIS* 228). Beyond these, there seem to be only rare and general attempts (unlike with the Scottish *Norms*) to identify particular challenges and opportunities for priests and their ministry in Ireland. How, for example, do patterns of economic growth and strength, secularization of cultural values, and the influx of immigrants from Eastern Europe affect the ministry of priests and what elements in priestly formation programs are designed to support these new demands? The only reference to cultural diversity is made with respect to the value of future priests learning a second language (cf. *PFPIS* 228). The unique problem of national and religious differences in Ireland are not specifically highlighted, except perhaps by reference to the academic study of the 1976 *Directory on Ecumenism in Ireland* and other norms for sacramental sharing and mixed marriages. Rather than providing such an historical and cultural context, the document begins simply by highlighting several of the familiar issues found in the relevant texts of Vatican II and in *PDV* which the *Programme* cites frequently and whose structure of contents the *Programme* largely follows. Central among these is the essential difference between the universal priesthood and the ministerial priesthood, in that the latter acts in the person of Christ the Head to whom the ordained are configured (cf. *PFPIS* 7). The document does not reflect on how such principles are concretely inculcated in seminary formation, except by implication.

The second chapter, on vocations, is much more practical and does, in fact, make one reference to what may be a specifically Irish phenomenon, namely, that of what was once called "the mother's or father's vocation" that unduly encouraged young persons to enter

seminaries and religious institutes. Now, the bishops observe, the opposite seems to be the case and vocations «are often discouraged by parents and huge obstacles are put in the way of young people thinking of this way of life» (*PFPIS* 52). While the document calls for the establishment of a «Vocations Organization in every diocese» (*PFPIS* 55), it also affirms that a «coherent national approach to the promotion of vocations and the admission of candidates should be developed» (*PFPIS* 58).

One innovation of the Irish *Programme* is its provision of an internal-forum spiritual director appointed by the bishop to assist in the discernment activity of candidates for admission to the seminary (cf. *PFPIS* 83). Here the particular law adopts for the benefit of those not yet admitted to formation a function that the universal law has established for seminaries (can. 239 §2).

A “propaedeutic or foundational period of at least a year” is established in the Irish *Programme* «as essential for the formation of seminarians in Ireland today». The activities of the year are directed to make up for the «considerable discrepancy between the foregoing style of life of candidates and the style of life expected of them in seminary» (*PFPIS* 68). The human-development dimension of this period is to include «a module on emotional and sexual development» with due attention to obstacles to making a free response to a vocation, such as «fears, anger, anxieties, poor self-image etc.» (*PFPIS* 69).

In 2002 the Conference had produced a document entitled «Enquiries and Applications for Admission into Formation for Diocesan Priesthood», apparently the “national approach” referred to above (cf. *PFPIS* 71). Such a process can include a “psychological as-

essment" which «may help both the candidate and the bishop to make an informed decision in each case». It is noteworthy that such assessment is not termed as obligatory or as a condition for admission, but that it may help candidates «to sort out the motives of their intention» (*PFPIS* 76). Working relationships between experts and church authorities are commended as is an agreed upon «set of key areas to be assessed» (*PFPIS* 75). Dioceses are to inform experts and others involved in the admissions process of those traits suggesting a vocation and those that are counter-indicative. This is especially important in the case of psychologists who are to be fully informed of the Church's understanding of celibacy. The document specifies sexual identity as an example of the kind of subject to be covered in the assessment (cf. *PFPIS* 76). Without insisting on it as an absolute condition, and affirming the necessity of a candidate's consent before testing proceeds, the document subtly suggests the necessity of participation in the assessment when it identifies a candidate's willingness to submit to it as a sign of his docility to the Church's right and responsibility in calling someone to orders (cf. *PFPIS* 77). The text clearly affirms that the candidate's «level of insight and motivation to address areas such as interpersonal relations and psychosexual development are important criteria for admission» (*PFPIS* 79). Should the process reveal the need for significant psychotherapy, the document wisely directs that it be successfully completed before a candidate's admission to the seminary (cf. *PFPIS* 80).

With respect to the continuing evaluation of seminarians, the Irish *Programme* lists the following as external-forum criteria for a seminarian's continuation in formation and eventual ordination: «intelligence,

personal maturity, interpersonal skills, moral character, aptitude for ministry, participation in seminary spiritual exercises, growth as a man of faith, simplicity of life, ability to assume responsibility, mature respect for church authority, habits in prayer, and commitment to the spiritual life». This list acknowledges the potential overlap in matters treated in the external and internal fora (cf. *PFPI* 133).

The *Programme*'s treatment of human formation tends to be somewhat abstract. «The goal of human formation», it says, «is that a candidate, understanding himself and integrating his human nature and the gift of grace inherent in the call to priesthood, may be better prepared for the service of mission that will be his for the rest of his life» (*PFPI* 167). Later in the same section, the document, citing *PDV* 43-44, affirms that today's «seminarians need a "training in freedom" in the areas of interpersonal relations and affective maturity, especially celibacy» (*PFPI* 168). This document would have been much more useful if it had included concrete examples of what these good relationships and this affective maturity looked like, and what kinds of educational and formational activities could be reasonably expected to promote them.

Elsewhere the *Programme* lists those essential matters that are proper to the spiritual direction relationship as the following: prayer, spiritual reading, relationship with Christ, sexuality, celibate chastity, justice, personal relationships, commitment, simplicity of lifestyle and interiorization (cf. *PFPI* 196). The relatively brief norms that follow the expository section on human formation are worthy of note. One makes an observation about overlap similar to that of the Scots bishops: «Since there is an intimate connection between human and spiritual formation, these

areas while treated separately in this document, should not be viewed by formators as mutually exclusive» (*PFPIS* 175).

Another norm creates the figure of a "vocations growth counselor" whose function it is to help seminary students integrate the four *PDV* areas of formation. This formator, who is to have a strong Catholic faith and religious commitment, «does not function as a spiritual director [...] or as a psychologist» (*PFPIS* 176). A future edition of the *Programme* might profitably specify whether this counselor functions in the internal or external forum.

Still another "norm" for human formation reads: «Effective seminary formation for celibacy presupposes appropriate psychosexual development and helps a seminarian to appreciate and develop in a wholesome manner the affective and relational dimensions of his personality» (*PFPIS* 180). Here, as elsewhere, it is difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of this affirmation as a "norm". It would be more useful if it were to call for the development of the affective and relational dimensions of seminarians' responsibility through specific formational activities whose successful completion can be measured.

The final norm in this series is a good and clear one. It calls for legal (presumably civil) requirements to be observed for the release and use of psychological materials in the formation setting (cf. *PFPIS* 181).

In summary, the Irish *Programme*, though not obviously particular to the situation of the Church in Ireland, is to be nonetheless commended for its use of summary norms, but their character is not consistently prescriptive, that is, specific and measurable. It properly calls for the use of assistance from psychological experts and methods while seeking to protect the sem-

inarians' can. 220 right to privacy, balancing it with the Church's right to make an informed judgment on aptitude for orders based on a suitable variety of reliable sources of information.

5. USA norms

In June 2005 the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) approved the fifth edition of its *Program of Priestly Formation* [= *PPF5*]. It received the *recognitio* of the Holy See in November of the same year and was promulgated by the USCCB in August 2006. The fourth edition of the *PPF* had only been published in 1992, just a few months after the publication of *PDV*. The fourth edition had been prepared in large measure as a response to the apostolic visitations of seminaries in the 1980s and could not sufficiently have assimilated the richness of *PDV*. *PPF5* has been more directly responsive to *PDV*, especially in its emphasis on the pillar of human formation. Other influences on *PPF5* include the fruits of the voluntary episcopal visitations of seminaries organized during the 1990s by the USCCB and based on *PDV* criteria.

The Synod on the Church in America and its subsequent Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America*²¹ as well as the closing document of the Great Millennium of the Year 2000, the 2001 Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*²² are further stated sources for the

²¹ *AAS* 91 (1999) 737-815.

²² *AAS* 93 (2001) 266-309.

insights and priorities of *PPF5*. Undoubtedly a central focus too was the crisis of the sexual abuse of minors by clergy and the subsequent *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, adopted by the USCCB in Dallas in June 2002, and its accompanying *Essential Norms* which received the *recognitio* of the Holy See. In April 2002 the Cardinals of the USA and the leadership of the USCCB had met in Rome with Pope John Paul II and the superiors of several Curial dicasteries to address the abuse crisis. One of the results of this meeting was to launch a new apostolic visitation of US seminaries (whose results are yet to be made public) centering attention on formation for chastity and on the fidelity and integrity in the teaching of moral theology in seminaries²³. Finally, the Instruction *In Continuity* concerning the admission to seminaries of persons with homosexual tendencies also preceded the publication of *PPF5*.

This latest edition of the *PPF* modifies somewhat and streamlines the structure of its immediate predecessor by following more directly the outline of *PDV*. The former *PPF* emphasized differences in the various levels of seminary formation, while *PPF5* tries to avoid the repetition created by the prior approach. The avoidance of repetition is not always successful, for example, in the treatment of college seminaries and pre-theology programs, both of which have as their academic elements studies in philosophy, elementary theology, and the humanities. The document is also somewhat tedious in its perhaps overly detailed sections on seminary administration.

²³ Cf. J.J. CONN, «Visite apostoliche nei seminari degli Stati Uniti», *Periodica* 95 (2006) 465-482.

These minor limitations of a general nature, however, detract only modestly from an impressive effort on the part of the USCCB to respond to the provision of can. 242. Many of the elements of *PPF5* are proper to the USA landscape, especially with respect to the academic system within which USA seminaries function. But like the bishops of Scotland, the USCCB made an effort in *PPF5* to contextualize the formation of priests in the special circumstances that challenge the future life and work of priests in the USA. These include: the paradox between the spiritual thirst of Americans and the nation's prevailing secular ethos; moral relativism even in the Church as exemplified by the abuse crisis; large numbers of unchurched people in the USA; similarly large numbers of inactive and semi-active Catholics; the commitment of the Church to ecumenical and inter-religious dialog; the demands of globalization; patterns of immigration and consequent cultural, linguistic, and economic diversity; diversity among candidates for the priesthood; vocations coming from dysfunctional families; fewer priests for an increasing Catholic population; collaboration in ministry; differences about what is essential to Catholic belief (here the document may be referring to ecclesiological differences among candidates and between candidates and senior clergy); hope created by the Great Jubilee (cf. *PPF5* 12).

While these contextual observations suggest some significant reflection on the current situation of the Church in the USA, it is not so clear how many of the norms that follow in *PPF5* specifically address the points made about context in the introduction. On the other hand, *PPF5* is very careful to follow its descriptive sections with concrete norms expressed in prescriptive language of various types.

An important factor in *PPF5* is its applicability to the formation of priesthood candidates who belong to institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life. Both cans. 242 §2 and 659 §3 suggest that religious are not bound to observe national plans for priestly formation. Even so, the Conference of Major Superiors of Men participated in drafting *PPF5* and has made the following statement in its regard:

The Conference of Major Superiors of Men adopts the *Program of Priestly Formation Fifth Edition* as applicable to all religious seminaries in the United States. We do this at the invitation of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, preserving the rights and privileges granted religious in church law, especially regarding the religious and spiritual formation of their own candidates²⁴.

It is unclear how individual major superiors are bound by this statement or how extensive the superiors' list of their institutes' rights and privileges is.

The norms for the admission of candidates have several salient elements. There are to be clear, written statements of admissions policies, and the criteria are to be behavioral and therefore measurable (cf. *PPF5* 42). The norms state that a «psychological assessment is an integral part of the admissions process», and so suggest that it is a requirement, or a condition for admission. At the same time, the methods used are not to violate the privacy of candidates; that is, one assumes, the candidate is to be aware of how he is responding and in control of the information he provides (cf. *PPF5* 52). Psychologists are to be provided guidelines

²⁴ "Statement" following Decree of Promulgation of *PPF5*.

by seminaries, and the professionals employed in assessing applicants for admission are to be «well versed and supportive of the Church's expectations of candidates for the priesthood» (*PPF5* 51).

In certain areas these norms are highly explicit in *PPF5*, avoiding the delicacy of other documents. Candidates' insight and self-knowledge about such matters as sexual development «can be an important gauge of their readiness to enter a seminary program» and the candidates should «give evidence of having lived in continence for a sustained period of time, which would be for at least two years before entering a priestly formation program» (*PPF5* 54). Criminal sexual activity with a minor or an inclination toward it disqualifies a person as a candidate (cf. *PPF5* 55), while with respect «to those with same-sex experiences and/or inclinations, the guidelines provided by the Holy See must be followed» (*PPF5* 56). It is noteworthy that no further interpretation of the Instruction *In Continuity* is provided. A health examination, *PPF5* continues, should include HIV testing (cf. *PPF5* 65). *PPF5* has 26 norms of this sort on the admission of candidates. The fourth edition had nineteen points on the subject of admissions, but they were not phrased in the form of norms.

Far more significant is that in the 1992 *PPF* there was no specific section on human formation, nor were there prescriptive norms to be observed. On human formation *PPF5* has nine descriptive paragraphs containing a total of 24 bullet points along with 22 prescriptive norms. The emphasis on human formation in this document could not escape even a causal observer's attention.

The document describes the human qualities necessary to be an instrument of God's grace as a priest;

each more abstract description is followed by concrete examples of how the quality is manifested. Some of the descriptive adjectives are: free, prudent, and discerning. Other qualities are described by verbs: a man who respects, cares for, and has vigilance over his body; a man who can take on the role of a public person. Still others are nouns: a person of affective maturity. That abstract description is spelled out in more concrete terms. Affective maturity is reflected in «his ability to live well with authority and in his ability to take direction from another, and to exercise authority well among his peers, as well as an ability to deal productively with conflict and stress». Similarly, «a good steward of material possessions» is more concretely described as «someone who is generous in making charitable contributions and sustaining the poor» (*PPF5* 76). Likewise, *PPF5* makes seven points to describe seminary formation in sexuality and celibate life. Such formation both communicates truths and enables the seminarian to assimilate them. It teaches, for example, the «requisite skills for living chastely: ascetical practice, prudent self-mastery, and paths of self-knowledge such as regular personal inventory and the examination of conscience» (*PPF5* 79). *PPF5* also lists the resources available for human formation in the seminary: instruction, personal reflection, community life and feedback, involvement in the tasks of seminary life, access to mentors, spiritual directors, and counselors (cf. *PPF5* 80). This inclusion of examples of elements of the seminary program that foster the goals for formation is especially gratifying.

In general terms, the section on human formation lists several qualities as goals of human formation: «freedom, openness, honesty and flexibility, joy and inner peace, generosity and justice, interpersonal

skills, common sense, aptitude for ministry, and growth in moral sensibility and character» (*PPF5* 95). More specifically, with respect to chastity, a

[c]andidate must be prepared to accept wholeheartedly the Church's teaching on sexuality in its entirety, be determined to master all sexual temptations, be prepared to meet the challenge of living chastely in all friendships, and, finally, be resolved to fashion his sexual desires and passions in such a way that he is able to live a healthy, celibate lifestyle that expresses self-gift in faithful and life-giving love» (*PPF5* 94).

Written seminary guidelines are to delineate good and unacceptable behavior in this area (cf. *PPF5* 95).

One of the significant accomplishments of *PPF5* is its regular demonstration of how the four *PDV* pillars interact. Here is one example: «Clearly human formation is the foundation of the other three pillars. Spiritual formation informs the other three. Intellectual formation appropriates and understands the other three. Pastoral formation expresses the other three pillars in practice» (*PPF5* 73). Another crucial connection is made between the study of moral theology and the future priest's assimilation of its principles in his own life. Among the norms on intellectual formation in the theologate is that the «teaching of sexual ethics must be thorough and unambiguous in its presentation of the authentic teaching of the Church in sexual moral matters [...]. This is a matter of special import since the seminarian's formation in celibate chastity includes the intellectual assent to, and embrace of, the Church's moral teaching in matters of sexuality» (*PPF5* 207).

On a very practical matter, there is one provision of *PPF5* that will have an important impact on seminary programs in the USA. The USCCB has changed

the philosophy requirement in the academic programs of priesthood candidates from 24 to 30 credits (cf. *PPF5* 185-186). This will make it virtually impossible for a six-year seminary program to be eroded. The guaranteed sixth year of formation is likely to provide additional time for attention to some of the other pillars as well.

Of the national plans examined, the one produced by the USCCB, though perhaps excessively long and detailed, is ultimately the most successful precisely because of its specificity and concreteness. Its goals are clearly stated, its outcomes are measurable, and the activities are designed to produce the outcomes and promote the goals. The task to be accomplished now is to identify appropriate agents for the demanding work of priestly formation. It can only be hoped that they will be generous in their response to the invitation to assist the Church's efforts to foster a strong, loving, and wise clergy to teach, sanctify, and pastor God's people.

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