

# Discernment in the Life of the Vocation Director

NCDVD Convention

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# Integration

Priestly formation is a journey of transformation that renews the heart and mind of the person, so that he can “***discern*** what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.” Indeed, the gradual inner growth along the journey of formation should principally be aimed at making the future priest a ‘***man of discernment***’, able to ***read the reality of human life in the light of the Spirit***. In this way he will be able to choose, decide and act according to the will of God. ...

# Integration

The first area of discernment is the ***personal life***. ***It is necessary to integrate one's own personal situation and history into the spiritual life.*** This will ensure that the vocation to the priesthood does not become imprisoned in an abstract ideal, nor run the risk of reducing itself to a merely practical and organizational activism, removed from the conscience of the person. Discerning one's life according to the Gospel means cultivating every day a deep spiritual life, so as to receive it (one's life) and interpret it with full responsibility and growing trust in God, directing the heart towards him each day. ...

# Integration

This means ***working humbly and ceaselessly on oneself***—something that goes beyond mere introspection—so that ***the priest opens himself honestly to the truths of*** life and to the real demands of ministry. He learns to listen to the conscience that judges his movements and the interior urges that motivate his actions. In this way, the priest learns to govern himself using the spiritual and mental powers of mind and body. He grasps the sense of what can be done and what it would be better not to do, or what should not be done. He begins to organize his energies, his plans and his duties with ***a balanced self-discipline and an honest awareness of his own limits and abilities. ...***

# Integration

This work cannot be undertaken satisfactorily by relying only on his own human resources. On the contrary, it relies principally on ***welcoming the gift of divine grace***, that enables him to transcend himself, to go beyond his own needs and external conditioning, to live in the freedom of the children of God. It is a way of 'looking within' and a holistic spiritual outlook, which directs the whole of his life and ministry. In this way he learns how to act with prudence, and to judge the consequences of his actions beyond certain limited circumstances that can impede a clear judgment of things....

# Integration

This ***journey of being honest with oneself*** calls for a special care of the inner life by personal prayer, spiritual direction, daily contact with the Word of God, the contemplation of the priestly life in a spirit of faith along with other priests and the Bishop, and all the other means that help to cultivate the virtues of prudence and right judgment. ***In this ongoing path of discernment, the priest will learn how to interpret and understand his own motivations, his gifts, his needs, and his frailties, so as to “free himself from all disordered affections and, having removed them, to seek out and to find the will of God in the ordering of his life with a view to the salvation of the soul.”*** (St. Ignatius, SE 1)

(Ratio, 43)

# Relationship—Identity--Mission

- Pastoral charity as the “internal principle” of the priest as head and shepherd, that is, pastoral charity as “a ***participation in Jesus Christ’s own pastoral charity***, a gift freely bestowed by the Holy Spirit and likewise a task and a call which demand a free and committed response on the part of the priest.” (PDV 22)
- “Formation is first and foremost cooperation with the grace of God.” (PPF 68)

# Healing in Christ

The seminarian is called to 'go out of himself', to make his way, in Christ, towards the Father and towards others, embracing the call to priesthood, dedicating himself to work with the Holy Spirit, to ***achieve a serene and creative interior synthesis between strength and weakness.*** The educational endeavor helps seminarians to ***bring all aspects of their personality to Christ, in this way making them consciously free for God and others.*** In fact ***it is only in the crucified and risen Christ that this path of integration finds meaning and completion;*** all things are united in him, so that "God might be all in all."

(Ratio, 29)

# Healing in Christ

The pastoral care of the faithful demands that the ***priest have a solid formation and interior maturity***. He cannot limit himself simply to demonstrating a ‘veneer of virtuous habits’, a merely external and formalistic obedience to abstract principles. Rather, ***he is called to act with great interior freedom***. Indeed, it is expected of him that, day after day, ***he will internalize the spirit of the Gospel, thanks to a constant and personal friendship with Christ, leading him to share his sentiments and his attitudes***.

(Ratio, 41)

# Authentic Christian Masculinity

- Contemplative even in action = a lifelong beholding of Christ that stabilizes one's identity, dedicated to beholding the beauty of who he is. Personal identity and pastoral ministry come out of beholding the beauty of Christ...I stop thinking of myself and go to serve the poor.
- See masculine self-gift as the fruit of intimacy with Christ. Is one drawn to live as a man the way that Christ lives his manhood, rather than a worldly masculinity that does not resemble Christ? Come to **full stature in Christ** (Romans 12 / Ephesians)

# Authentic Christian Masculinity

- Importance of proposing an authentic Christian masculinity: Does one love Jesus' manhood as Jesus desires to live this out in the man, rather than the distorted or idolatrous manhood proposed by the world? Does the priest want to live in the manhood that Jesus exercises? ...healing through Jesus' masculinity
- Jesus is not a moral model (imitation); he is indwelling. That is profound intimacy. To become a man who is self-donative, I must yield to this indwelling of Christ, because the moral model will collapse/can't contain a life of self-giving. Christ wants to live his mysteries over again in us (Marmion).
  - The fire comes from the indwelling. I have to meet Christ or I never become the man he was/is, as he was vulnerable to the Father.
  - PPF # 74: Christ is the measure and the foundation

# Pastoral Charity

The call to be pastors of the People of God requires a formation that makes future priests experts in the art of ***pastoral discernment***, that is to say, able to listen deeply to real situations and capable of good judgment in making choices and decisions. To make pastoral discernment effective, the ***evangelical style of listening*** must take central place. This frees the pastor from the temptation to abstraction, to self-promotion, to excessive self-assurance, and to that aloofness, that would make him a 'spiritual accountant' instead of a 'good Samaritan'. He who sets himself to listen to God and to his brothers and sisters knows that it is the Spirit who guides the Church towards the fullness of truth. He also knows that, in keeping with the mystery of the Incarnation, this fullness of truth sprouts gradually in the real life of human beings and in the signs of history.

*(Ratio, 120)*

# Pastoral Charity

In this way, the pastor will learn to leave behind his preconceived certainties and will not think of his ministry as a series of things to be done or norms to be applied, but will make his life a 'place' for listening openly to God and to his brothers and sisters.

In listening closely, respectfully, and without prejudice, the pastor becomes able to read the lives of others without being superficial or judgmental. He enters into the heart of the person and into the contexts of life that distinguish him, above all into the internal and external obstacles that can, at times, produce problematic behavior. He will be able to interpret with wisdom and understanding all kinds of things that condition people and influence their lives. He learns how to offer spiritual and pastoral possibilities that are attainable, and that respond to the life of the faithful and the socio-cultural context in which they are found.

*(Ratio, 120)*

# Discernment requires relationship

The attitude of discernment is a state of constant attention to God, to the Spirit. It is an experiential certainty that God speaks, that God communicates himself, and that my attention to God is already my radical conversion. It is a lifestyle that pervades everything I am and do. It is a certainty that what counts is fixing my gaze on the Lord.

Marko Rupnik, *Discernment: Acquiring the Heart of God*, pp. 28-29

# Discernment requires relationship

Discernment, therefore, is not a calculation, a deductive logic, or a mechanical technology in which one shrewdly weighs means and ends. It's not a discussion, nor an inquiry of majority opinion. ***Discernment is prayer***, the constant ***asceticism of renouncing*** my own will and thoughts, working as if everything depended entirely on me, but leaving everything free. Such an attitude is possible only if one is ***enraptured in a wave of love***, because to accomplish this a radical humility is necessary.