

Preliminary Note: A “Scoring” System

The following “scoring system” can help to locate where a man is relative to the benchmarks required by the PPF. The “scoring” is about sounding the depths of the man’s integration. Depth gets revealed in the details of a man’s life. How genuinely operative are the Church’s formative standards for a priestly life in the details of the man’s existence?

A man can be really good at “being a seminarian.” He’s a good guy, he shows up on time, he gets his work done. That’s important. But, if formation terminates with agreeable behavior and pleasing functionality, we may be only indulging a “Good Boy or Good Seminarian Syndrome.”¹ The Church asks more at the heart of our standard for advancement to Holy Orders. Fundamentally we’re looking for a man who knows Jesus and is able to share Jesus with others in every dimension and increasingly at every stage.

Think about what happens when a formation advisor asks a man how he’s doing in each dimension of his formation. Pick your favorite or most formative question. (Can you share a recent, concrete experience of God’s love in your life? Tell me about your experience of receiving celibacy as a generative gift.) How does the man respond? Here’s a basic framework:

Blank Stare: The man gives you a blank stare. He doesn’t know what you’re talking about. He has no concept of this dimension of priestly life, even on an intellectual level.

The first step of developmental growth is missing, i.e. awareness. Plus, you see *no* evidence of it in his life.

Conceptual: The man sort of gets it. That is, he gets the *concept* and can talk about it on an intellectual level. He knows the right words to say. He might even quote Scripture. But he can’t give any *particular examples* from his own life – and you don’t see them, either. He speaks generically, not specifically. He may have some awareness and understanding, but the self-possession and integration is missing.

Integrated: The man gets the concept and can give particular examples of it from his own life. (Or: you can see the examples.)

The man is responding to formation with a growing sense of his life’s experience to be an action in service to communion – receiving what is of God and resisting what is not of God. The steps of discernment get echoed in this growth model – aware, understand, take action. The details of a man’s whole range of human activities have a spiritual integration that is not forced or fabricated, but simply and easily noticed.

From the initial assessment of where the man is, you can ask some follow-up questions:

If the man is at the “Blank Stare” level here are some options: 1) The man may need some basic instruction. Perhaps, after a brief explanation, his eyes will be opened, and he can begin to notice

¹ The “Good Boy” does what is asked to please his formators and others. The “Good Seminarian” does what is asked mostly to avoid trouble, but has little insight into his motivations. Being a seminarian gives him identity and purpose in an artificial or needfully unhealthy manner. Outside of the seminary the question would not only be “What do I do?” but more urgently “Who am I?”

something new in his life. 2) Perhaps he's not there yet, and not ready to go there. If so, simply move on to the next question.

If the man is at the "Conceptual" level – he sort of gets the concept but doesn't give details – you might ask: *How did that come alive for you? Can you give a particular example?* You might even prompt him with an example you have seen in his life.

If a man persists with a menagerie of platitudes, factoids, maxims, quotes, sayings, and subtle deflections then, as above, there are various options: 1) You might simply move on. The man is not there yet, and your sense is that he's not ready to move to the next level of learning and integration. 2) Or, perhaps his spiritual and human formation requires a new inquiry: "Have you ever experienced God's consoling love?" Perhaps, with some instruction, his eyes will be opened. It sometimes happens that a man has *experienced* something but doesn't yet have the categories to *notice* or *explain* it.

If the man is at the "Integrated" level – he can give particular examples from his own life – you can go on to ask: *Has that experience deepened over time?* If it's a new reality simply let him relish it, and the inquiry is over. If he's experienced it before, let him unpack its trajectory.

If a man can describe how his experience has deepened over time, you can go on to ask a final question: *Have you ever invited or led others into this?* What you're probing here is this: the man may be aware of this growth *in himself*, but does he have the experience of spiritual fatherhood, of leading others into the same truth about themselves? How does he handle success and failure in that endeavor?

Where are you? Locating the man in Christ and mediating his movement with Christ

There's a simple pattern of inquiry here: discovering where a man is, inviting him into the next level of growth, and knowing when to let go. The pattern can be repeated in every dimension of formation and at every stage of formation.

Challenging or encouraging a man's movement from the "conceptual" to the "integration" level is the primary work of the formation advisor at every stage of formation. The more a man can articulate his experience of God's stable and ever deepening plan of love in every dimension of his formation, the more trustworthy and effective he will be as a father and shepherd. If there is no real experience of God's love operative in his life it matters little that the man can achieve excellent grades or show up consistently. Unless the man has a real and abiding sense of being loved he cannot truly advance or mature in formation. Only an experience of love will allow for the kind of integration Saint John Paul II envisioned for priestly formation.²

The key skills we hope to foster in the formation advisor in the following pages are:

- 1) the ability to "locate where a man lives," and
 - 2) the wisdom to ask formative questions that help a man discover where God is leading him next.
- This "scoring system," when combined with the benchmarks, questions, and indicators on the following pages, is meant to help a formation advisor locate a man more quickly and draw him more deeply into the formation God intends for him.

² Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it. This, as has already been said, is why Christ the Redeemer "fully reveals man to himself".
Redemptor Hominis #10

During a meeting the formation advisor asks the seminarian: "Can you tell me about your experience of receiving celibacy as a generative gift?" The seminarian's ability to offer a meaningful response is highly indicative of his affective maturity and readiness to advance through the stages of seminary formation. The new *Ratio Fundamentalis* and the 6th edition of the PPF make special efforts to outline the man's personal integration of formation which may not happen at the same rate and depth for every man.³ Individualized attention to the man's capacities and responses will be critical for assisting him and the Church in a mutual discernment and formation relationship.

Here is how the "scoring system" would work with respect to the seminarian's response to this specific question: "Can you tell me about your experience of receiving celibacy as a generative gift?"

PROPAEDEUTIC STAGE

Unaware: *"Generative what? Hub?"*

A man at the start of the propaedeutic stage may still be at the "blank stare" level. The very concept of celibacy as a "generative gift" is new to him. But a man should not move into the discipleship stage without some basic conceptual awareness of celibacy as a generative gift.

DISCIPLESHIP STAGE

Conceptual: Abstract knowledge from book, document or class.

"I know that celibacy makes me more available to work for the Church and proclaim that the Kingdom of God is at hand like Jesus."

Learning: Initial knowledge. Tries to describe a personal experience, but the attempt lacks clarity. He is developing and moving into a concrete awareness of how he is being invited to participate in Jesus' own priestly life and identity.

"The other day I noticed that the Gospel was all about Jesus being 'consumed with zeal,' and I asked one of my friends what has been consuming his attention lately. We had a lengthy discussion about celibacy as an expression of 'being consumed.' We both have brothers with young families. Their lives are consumed with family life. We saw the same thing happening to us in studies, apostolates, and community life"

A man at the start of the discipleship stage should at least have a conceptual knowledge of basic elements of priestly identity (like celibacy as a generative gift). But he should not stay at the conceptual level. As he progresses through the discipleship stage he should begin to develop and articulate an awareness of the experiential elements of this and other fundamental concepts of priestly identity.

³ "The concept of integral formation is of the greatest importance, since it is the whole person, with all that he is and all that he possesses, who will be at the Lord's service in the Christian community. It is necessary to adopt an integrated pedagogical model in order to reach this objective: a journey that allow the formative community to cooperate with the action of the Holy Spirit, ensuring a proper balance between the different dimensions of formation" *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation*, Congregation for the Clergy, 2016, #92.

CONFIGURATION STAGE

Integration: Clear knowledge and capacity to describe personal experience, plus examples of how those have helped him in serving others. He is able to “make disciples” as he teaches, leads, and ministers to others. His development is resolving into habits.

A man should not move into the Configuration stage unless the truth of these elements of priestly identity have dawned on him in concrete ways, and he can articulate them with some clarity. The Configuration stage presumes such concrete awareness as a baseline and works to develop those experiences into deep personal habits. In other words, what he has been developing becomes resolved. He can respond to the Bishop’s questions for the promises of Holy Orders, “Are you resolved...” with real conviction and clarity in his lived experience and habits of life.

PASTORAL SYNTHESIS STAGE

Equip Disciple-Makers: The highest level of integration occurs when a man can not only make disciples but equip those disciples to make disciples. This level of integration, to equip a disciple-maker, truly moves him into the Great Commission as an *Alter Christus*.

In the Pastoral Synthesis stage, a man should already have solidly established personal habits, and should begin to mentor others in their movement through the stages of formation. At this stage the man should be learning how to form and send disciples. His discipleship is not only fruitful for *him*; his preaching, teaching, counseling, and spiritual direction eventually allow *others* to be fruitful. In this way, the man never becomes a “guru,” celebrity, or focus of others’ attention. He can make disciples and then equip disciple makers. His chief concern is to make sure Christ’s own mission and his primary duty, his first task (*primum officium*) as a priest is being fulfilled: “*To proclaim the Gospel of God to all.*” (*Presbyterorum Ordinis* #4)

It may be helpful to clarify with the man that the judgement of any “scoring” is being made about his “readiness for advancement.” The seminarian and the Church are being called upon to assess and judge “readiness” to be advanced and not the person. Every man who is accepted into seminary is presumably aware of his intrinsic goodness. That is never in question. In fact, the challenges and constructive criticisms he encounters in seminary formation are predicated upon his worth. He is worth the effort and challenge. If a medical school were capriciously to say that an M1 student is ready to perform open-heart surgery, that would not be good for the student or the patient. The M1 student is simply not ready. To declare readiness prematurely is a violation of the student’s good and all others involved. To put forward a man before he is ready would be gravely unjust to him and the Church. Again, when determining the readiness to advance, the good of the man and the good of the Church are perhaps in tension, but never in conflict or competition.