

Seminarian Joe Has Four Conversations

Preamble: While in seminary a man is given the privileged experience of a set of relationships, all of which are designed to assist his growth in every dimension of formation. The authority and expertise of those relationships will alter the content of his sharing. Rather than modulate or calculate what may or may not belong to the internal or external forum, the man entrusts himself to the expertise of each relationship. Here is an example:

Background: As a seminarian in Theology I, Joe has been in seminary formation for almost three years. He has steadily realized the fruits of honesty and generosity in his formation. Spiritual direction every two weeks. Human formation every 3-4 weeks. Counseling every other week. Weekly meetings with his brother seminarians in a sharing of graces. His life is continually revealing how and where God wants to meet him. He's not having the same conversation four different times. He's not concerned with what should or could be revealed. He's simply attentive to how this relationship will help him go deeper into his seminary formation. He reveals himself according to the trust he has and the expertise of the one with whom he is sharing. Can you name the formator involved in these conversations? **A.) Spiritual Director? B.) Counselor? C.) Professor? D.) Priest-formator?**

Conversation #1: Joe starts the conversation with a grace from his lectio. The scripture said that Jesus was tired from his journey. "I too am tired, and it's been increasing. When I begin to share this with Jesus, I realize how much he understands me." The chapel was quiet with that sharing at lectio. He was asked to say more about why the men were so attentive to his sharing. "I suppose it speaks to the time of year. March can be tough in the seminary." He says more about his tiredness. It's not just physical or psychological. He's felt spiritually and humanly like he's been in the sun too long. My parents have been going through the effects of divorce, so am I. It's hard to trust anyone when that relationship crumbles." He explores who he trusts in the seminary, and what those relationships mean to him. **A.) Spiritual Director? B.) Counselor? C.) Professor? D.) Priest-formator**

Conversation #2: Joe described his mom's anger in detail. He often feels responsible for making her feel better. That's been a prominent pattern in his life, but he can never make her happy. Dad's absence started long before the divorce, and that experience carries some resentment. "Did Dad ever really care? He showed up here and there, but I never was convinced that he wanted to be around. There was always more work to do. When I could not keep up, he would send me home or to a friend's house. Being the oldest son, I did not feel like I had much for my younger brother to look up to." Joe is asked to say more about who really cared for him, and what he believed about himself when he was not experiencing care from his parents. **A.) Spiritual Director B.) Counselor C.) Professor D.) Priest-formator**

Conversation #3: When Joe described his sharing with Jesus, he was surprised at the patience Jesus had for his anger, resentment, and unforgiveness he held with his parents' divorce. "There was an understanding of that I did not want, nor was I responsible for this painful stuff I was feeling. I tend to take responsibility, or label my bad feelings as sinful, and that shuts down the sharing or relating. That did not happen in this moment. I was too tired to shut it down. Jesus seemed relieved, more relieved than I was to finally hear more about my hurt. I suppose I'm more hurt than tired. That's what is becoming clearer as I pray without judgement or shame." Joe was invited to notice Jesus' desire to hear more and pray with the rest of that passage, especially: "If you only knew the gift..." **A.) Spiritual Director B.) Counselor C.) Professor D.) Priest-formator**

Conversation #4: Fascinated by the tiredness of Jesus, Joe asked: “What may be the gift in Jesus’ humanity for him?” He’s been reading a lot about the humanity of Jesus. Is there a perfection in Jesus’ limitation and weakness that gets revealed throughout the Gospels? The question has his attention in a profound way and he wonders about the implications for every dimension of his formation. He’s newly interested in how the weakness of Jesus shapes a spirituality of real, masculine strength. When a man reveals his woundedness and weaknesses, he paradoxically expresses true strength. The relationship and identity of fathers and sons seems to be more robust when there is real vulnerability. **A.) Spiritual Director B.) Counselor C.) Professor D.) Priest-formator**

Seminarian Joe through the years

Most of his life has been around education. Being a child of teachers and becoming a teacher, he was familiar with methods of learning and teaching that he realizes have compensated for previous failures in school. Over time and experience he is noticing how much his efforts were based upon fear of failure. He had never really enjoyed learning. He only appreciated achieving, and study was the means to it. None of that came to light until he increasingly studied subjects that would not permit simple mastery. The need for analysis, synthesis, and creative application frustrated him to no end.

Name the Stage (P, D, C, S) Dimension (H, S, I, P) and level of Integration (B, C, L, I)

Whenever speaking of his experience of God or grace in his life, he has very strong categories and references to lean upon. Quotes from saints, commentaries from scripture, insights from journal reflections - all tell the listener that he can talk about God’s love. The ideals of the Christian life are clear and abundantly lived: “Jesus has been good to me and calling me to deeper conversion.” When asked the follow-up: “Can you say more about the goodness you receive from Jesus?” The reply starts with a comparison or image: “Well, it’s like when a child approaches a friend.” Further question: “What are you receiving from your friend in your daily experience?” The reply: “Help, especially when I need it most.” When asked to describe an instance, he’s at a loss.

Name the Stage (P, D, C, S) Dimension (H, S, I, P) and level of Integration (B, C, L, I)

When asked about celibacy he says that he is resolved in his celibacy, because God is aware of his sacrifice. When pressed further about what God sees or cherishes in that sacrifice, the man begins to explain his lack of experience with dating or considering marriage. He sees how other men have “benefitted” from some life experience in dating or imagining married life. God sees his sacrifice of that experience and is pleased with him. When asked to say more about God’s pleasure in him, the man notices a struggle to say something of importance. He returns to the assurance that God sees his sacrifice but realizes this does not speak much of the “gift of celibacy” for the sake of the kingdom. While he can say little about God’s perspective, what God is offering, or what he is receiving from God in the midst of that gaze, he has a hopefulness that more is possible. He’s never really asked God to see the gift of celibacy and how his joyful receptivity to God affects lifelong service.

Name the Stage (P, D, C, S) Dimension (H, S, I, P) and level of Integration (B, C, L, I)

LOCATING the MAN – “Where are you?”

- 1) Where is the man?
 - What gifts from God has he already received?
 - What gifts from God are not yet received (or, there is no evidence he has received them)?

- 2) What’s a plan for moving forward in this dimension of formation?
 - What does the man need? What are the next steps?