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## What Kind of Culture Are Our Seminaries Producing?

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### *Seminaries as producers of culture*

Seminaries, like churches and schools, are agencies of secondary socialization. Unlike families, which are agents of primary socialization, seminaries are agents of secondary or professional socialization. The role of a seminary is to train, form and educate candidates for a professional role, the priesthood. In this respect, they 'socialize' the candidate and prepare him for his future role as priest by helping him to internalize a set of attitudes and values.

Since values and attitudes are a specific form of culture (Geertz 1973; Keesing 1974), we might say that seminaries are institutions that are *primarily engaged in producing and mediating cultures*. They inherit, embody, transform, dramatize and pass on particular traditions, beliefs, perspectives, ideas and practices, (Carroll et al., 1997:254).

The key process transpiring in the seminary then is the production and transmission of culture. By looking at the seminary as a producer of 'culture', rather than as a producer of 'values', we are assuming a broader understanding of the way in which culture shapes action. According to the Weberian/Parsonian *Values Paradigm*, action is influenced by supplying ultimate ends or values. Thus values, like switchmen on a railway track, are the main driving element of culture (Weber 1946:280). However, according to another paradigm, Swidler's *Toolkit Paradigm*, values are only one element of culture. Culture offers an entire "toolkit" of components – symbols, values, attitudes, beliefs, ceremonies, stories, worldviews – from which a person may choose when constructing his strategy of action. Values, symbols, beliefs are often in conflict with each other, so, when choosing to act, we select only those values, symbols or beliefs, which fit in with our cultural equipment, our cultural style and our ethos (Swidler, 273).

The second paradigm is more modest. When, for instance, we say that in a seminary there is a culture of environmental awareness, we are not saying that every single seminarian, when ordained, will 'turn out' to be environmentally aware. There is no one-to-one causal correspondence. In fact, it is quite possible that some faculty and some structures in the seminary may be ecologically un-

aware and uncaring. What we are simply saying is that seminarians, who are a product of this culture, will have among the many cultural components offered to them an emphasis on ecological awareness and there is a strong likelihood that most of them will become ecologically aware. But that does not preclude the possibility that a few seminarians may turn out to be environmentally destructive.

This more or less adequately describes the process that takes place in the seminary. It is difficult to say that a seminary tries to 'produce' a priest with X, Y or Z set of values and the seminarian simply imbibes the same X, Y, Z set of values during his stay in the seminary. One would rather say that the seminary aims at developing a culture, from which the student chooses, selects, his set of values that would most prepare him for the priesthood. Our aim in this paper then is to describe the kind of culture that presently exists in seminaries, and the kind of priest it gives rise to, with the hope that if the culture is changed, the type of priest being formed will also most likely be different.

### ***Three Research Studies***

To find out what kind of culture seminaries are producing, we make use of the conclusions of three studies on Seminary Formation completed in the nineties. The first is an *Evaluation of Formation* in the Pune Papal seminary, on the occasion of its centenary, by *priests* who passed out of its portals. Four hundred and fifty priests filled out this questionnaire and the data was collected in 1992. This study (henceforth called the Papal Seminary study) looked at formation and pastoral effectiveness..

The next study assessed the impact of JDV (Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth), Pune, on the *spiritual formation* of priestly candidates. Here the sample consisted of 294 seminarians, who belonged to diverse religious congregations and different dioceses. The data was collected in 1993. This study (henceforth called the JDV study) focussed on formation and spirituality.

Finally, the third study attempted to measure the impact of SVD (Society of the Divine Word) *Seminary Formation on the psychological character* of its seminarians. For this study, completed in 1998, 413 seminarians from various countries of Asia were tested at two stages of their formation, at the beginning and at the end stage and a comparison was made. This study (henceforth called the SVD Study) concentrated on formation and psychological character.

The socio-economic background of the seminarians and the priests in all the 3 studies is very similar (see Appendix 1). So, by comparing ordained priests with seminarians at two stages of their formation - seniors (about to finish training) and novices (who have just begun) we have 3 nodal stages of assessment – priests, seniors and novices - and a longitudinal research design. Further, since the Papal Seminary and JDV house students from all over India, and the SVD sample is an

all-Asia sample, the 3 studies permit us to draw fairly “general” conclusions about the type of culture being produced in Indian seminaries.<sup>1</sup>

*Characteristics of the culture in our seminaries*

Although the three studies had different objectives in mind, there are some themes, which are like a common thread running through them. These are the findings we shall focus on, pulling them together from the different studies, so as to describe facets of the culture prevailing in seminaries. From our findings, we arrive ultimately at four characteristics of seminary culture, pertaining to four central features of seminary life: pastoral work, academics, spirituality and discipline (Amaladoss 1989:258). The four characteristics of seminary culture that can be gathered from the findings of the research studies are:

- 1. A culture, which is deficient in the pastoral dimension
- 2. A culture, which emphasizes a theoretical (and cognitive) orientation.
- 3. A culture, which lacks the horizontal dimension of spirituality
- 4. A culture which exhibits some elements of rule-consciousness, conformity and fear

Each of these characteristics will be described and supported by the findings of the three research studies. No doubt the research studies also found some very positive aspects of seminary culture, but this paper, following a critical approach, will focus only on those aspects, wherein the training process in seminaries can be enhanced. The ultimate aim is to point towards the direction and shape of relevant new structures and relevant new cultures.

**I. A Culture which is deficient in the pastoral dimension**

We begin by looking more closely at the Papal Seminary study. One of its objectives was to assess the relevance of seminary formation in terms of its pastoral effectiveness. One major question asked of the 450 ordained priests was to look back and state the missing elements in their seminary formation.

*The missing element in formation*

Out of the 12 elements they mentioned, the most outstanding element missing in their formation was *pastoral experience*. Over 52 percent mentioned this as a missing element. Table one displays the entire list. (Many mentioned more than one factor, so the percentages do not total 100).

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1. In the Papal Seminary study, the sample of 450 priests comprised 380 from 97 different dioceses and the remaining 70 from various religious congregations. The 294 seminarians of the JDV study came from 14 different religious congregations and about 55 dioceses. Finally, in the SVD study, the 413 seminarians hailed from Indonesia (59 percent), Philippines (17 percent), India (17 percent) and the remaining from Vietnam, Japan, Taiwan and Papua New Guinea.

**Table 1 : Missing Elements in Seminary Formation**

<i>Missing Elements</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
1. Pastoral experience	52.47
2. Social Justice Formation	15.18
3. Personal Guidance	14.52
4. Pastorally related studies	12.54
5. Personality Development	12.54
6. Prayer Life	11.88
7. Open relationships with women	9.90
8. Knowledge of Scripture	8.58
9. Community Organization Skills	6.60
10. A Caring Staff	6.60
11. Skill in Homiletics	6.27
12. Maturity	3.63

The table also demonstrates that the next most significant missing element was the lack of social justice formation, but this was mentioned by just 15 percent of the respondents. The main criticism, however, was that seminary formation was in a vacuum, with insufficient pastoral opportunities, no hands-on training. In the words of one parish priest, “We were not aware of the real life of the pastor and the struggles in his parish”. Others said: “Unlike most professionals, we had no apprenticeship training! There was no opportunity for pastoral work in the seminary curriculum!” (No doubt some of these priests were ordained before the Vatican II and they were speaking of a seminary culture that existed in those times). However, when constructive suggestions were asked for, this is what they said: “We need more courses on:

- counselling skills,
- community organizing skills, including formation of societies, trusts and training of leaders,
- courses in the communication media,
- management studies (how to administer a parish or school) ,
- accounting and financial management,
- legal education, specifically on land rights, land disputes and labour laws
- project management skills
- procedures for the construction of buildings, and dealing with government officials
- techniques and strategies for social action.

A priest, ordained for the last 22 years, illustrated this lack of pastoral experience with his own attitude to economics and finances. He remarked: “For 7 or 8 years as a seminarian I had little or no money at all. Then suddenly as a parish priest or as principal of a school or as director of a social works program, I suddenly had large sums of money thrust into my hands and often did not know how

to invest it. Seminary training did not give me the least idea of how to handle money. A priest colleague of mine, who had collected 7 lakhs of rupees from a raffle, naively kept it in his unlocked desk drawer for three months. Whether he forgot about it or failed to invest it is immaterial. What comes out clearly is the non- experience in dealing with finances.”

*Characteristics required for the priest of today*

A second piece of evidence confirming that the priests felt that seminary formation was insufficiently pastoral was given by another set of answers in the same study. Priests were asked to rank the most important characteristics for the priest of today (Table 2), and compare these with the most important characteristics as presented to them (in the past) during their period of formation (Table 3). The comparison between now and then demonstrates the difference in thinking and indicates the direction in which they want seminary culture to move. Tables 2 and 3 display both the lists (then and now) with their respective rankings of the characteristics required of the priest. The contrast stands out clearly.

*Table 2*

Characteristics required for candidates to the priesthood as understood during time of formation

*Table 3*

Characteristics required for candidates to the priesthood as mentioned now by priests today

<i>List in time of formation</i>		<i>Today's list</i>	
1	Faithfulness to spiritual exercises 78.7	1	Excellent Human Relations 71.1
2	Spirit of obedience to superiors 66.0	2	Love for prayer 66.2
3	Love for prayer 55.1	3	A sense of vision 63.1
4	Excellent human relations 54.4	4	Love for the poor 58.2
5	Academic excellence 47.3	5	Faithfulness to spiritual exercises 45.6
6	A sense of vision 36.2	6	Helpfulness and compassion 44.2
7	A spirit of adaptability 34.2	7	A spirit of adaptability 37.8
8	Helpfulness and compassion 27.3	8	Spirit of obedience to superiors 24.0
9	Community organization skills 19.8	9	Community organization skills 22.0
10	Good all rounder 19.6	10	A practical turn of mind 17.3
11	Leadership talent 18.0	11	Good all rounder 16.2
12	Love for the poor 17.8	12	Academic excellence 13.3
13	A practical turn of mind 12.2	13	Leadership Talent 11.6

While the above table affords sufficient material for a long discussion on the qualities required for the priest of today, for our present purpose we draw attention to a few significant facts. Comparing the differences between the past and the present, one cannot but acknowledge that academic excellence has dropped in value. When they were in the seminary, it was ranked fifth on their list. Now, as priests, they rank it twelfth or second last. This means that priests working in the

ministry do not give as much weight to academic excellence as to human relations, prayer or a sense of vision. In fact, 'Human relations', which was ranked fourth in their time of formation, has been valued by priests today as the *first* ranked characteristic,. While 'love for prayer' moved up one notch, the two characteristics of 'faithfulness to spiritual exercises' and 'obedience to superiors' (Table 2) have given way to 'love for the poor' and 'a sense of vision' (table 3). The training in the past emphasized obedience, faithfulness to spiritual exercises and academic excellence. Today's priests want 'human relations' , 'a sense of vision', and 'love for the poor' to be emphasized. This illustrates a significant shift in the paradigm of training towards more pastoral experiences.

It must be noted that what the priests are saying is not that 'academics' itself is unimportant. This would be reading beyond the data. What they are saying is that 'excellence in academics' must be placed in perspective after human relations, love of prayer, sense of vision, love for the poor, etc. This finding becomes meaningful, not if understood by itself, but if understood as an expression of the previously described characteristic of seminary culture, viz., the lack of a pastoral dimension.

The above findings lead directly to a second feature of seminary life – intellectual formation. Here too the priests in the Papal Seminary study have something to say.

## **II. A Culture, which emphasizes a theoretical rather than a practical orientation**

### *Relevance of seminary formation for tasks in the ministry*

When asked to rate the relevance of seminary formation against the tasks they were currently performing, a list of 26 main tasks were outlined by the 450 priests. Seminary formation was given a relevance rating for each one of those tasks. Their responses confirmed a second characteristic of seminary culture, i.e., its too theoretical or cognitive orientation in intellectual formation.

Most said that the tasks for which the seminary trained them most was: teaching in the seminary and faith instruction. Seminary formation had the highest ranks for these tasks. Whereas the tasks, for which seminary formation least prepared them for, were: the construction of buildings, fund raising, the administration of colleges and purchasing provisions and furniture. Their median ranks were the lowest, meaning that seminary formation was irrelevant for these tasks. (See Appendix 2 for full table). A common opinion shared by many was that "The heavy academic slant makes one feel that we are all being trained to become seminary professors rather than parish priests!" A cursory glance at the seminary curriculum of major seminaries reveals the very same fact. Over 100 courses, packed into 6 or 7 years, with more than 90 percent of them having a very 'theoretical' or 'conceptual' content.

Character formation in the Seminary

This finding about the ‘theoretical or conceptual orientation’ of academics is further confirmed by a more recent SVD study. The SVD study compared the characterological profile of Novices (those who had just joined formation) with that of Seniors (those who were about to profess their vows). The instrument used was Cattell’s 16 PF (Personality Factor Test) and the results were mixed. In some respects there was change, in other respects there was little or none. However, the most significant difference was in the *area of practical action*. Below is the table of differences between Seniors and Novices on the 16 factors:

Table 4:  
Mean Score differences (in Stens) between Seniors and Novices  
for the 16 Personality Factors

Factor	Mean Difference between Seniors and Novices	T- Value
A Warmth	0.402	Significant
B Reasoning capacity	0.048	Not significant
C Emotional stability	0.149	Not significant
E Dominant	0.099	Not significant
F Serious	0.284	Not significant
G Dutiful	0.114	Not significant
H Social Boldness	0.411	Significant
L Trusting	0.271	Not significant
I Sensitivity	0.343	Significant
<b>M Abstracted, theoretical, idea oriented</b>	<b>0.919</b>	Significant
N Forthright	0.169	Not significant
O Self Assured	0.717	Significant
Q1 Open to change	0.122	Not significant
Q2 Group Oriented	0.172	Not significant
Q3 Flexible	0.167	Not significant
Q4 Relaxed	0.175	Not significant

The table shows that 5 out of the 16 factors showed significant differences between Seniors and Novices on their sten scores: factors A, H, I, M and O. However, the most significant difference was in factor M, the factor of practicality, the sten score difference being 0.919 (bolded line). With regard to the ‘practical orientation to life’, seniors were found to be more abstracted, more oriented to mental processes, more at home with theories and ideas. Novices or beginners were found to be more grounded and down-to-earth, more focused on their senses, on observable data, and on the outer realities of their environment.

Seminary formation and atmosphere does apparently develop a person’s self-concept and enhances relationship with others. Senior seminarians were found to

be more self-assured, socially bolder, warmer and more sensitive than the novices. However, the greatest difference was found to be in the area of abstractedness. Seniors were found to be theoretical and idea-oriented, novices were grounded and down-to-earth. Evidently, the long process of intellectual formation with its emphasis on rational concepts tends to make students idealistic, abstract and conceptual. After an extensive philosophical and theological training, students have a lot of ideas but often these are not sufficiently grounded in practical reality.

One priest from the Papal Seminary study, echoed this same insight when he said in the space reserved for comments: "After studying such high-level concepts in Eschatology, Christology and Ecclesiology, and reading books of Rahner, Congar and de Lubac, I found it difficult (and meaningless) to put their concepts across in my homilies and talks. Even if I managed to do so, very often my simple parishioners found it difficult to grasp. What I am saying is that we need catechesis as much as theology!"

The research findings are not saying that seminaries should play down their emphasis on intellectual formation; rather, they are saying that there must be a greater correspondence between theology and the needs/interests of the community for which the candidates are ordained. Right now the actors in seminary formation are the faculty, the spiritual directors, the bishops, the seminary policies. An important element is missing. The community for which the future seminarian is going to be ordained has no part to play in his training. M. Amaladoss puts it strongly when he says that 'when the community, where students for the priesthood are going to work, begins to play a more active role in the formation of these students', then their formation is going to be more relevant, more meaningful and more attuned to their needs. Otherwise it will be in a vacuum. (Amaladoss 1990:33).

Thus far we have discovered that seminary culture is too conceptual, too cognitive and lacks a pastoral dimension. One might very well ask 'why is this so?' The answer, I believe, lies in the fact that seminary formation has historically been based on the model of the University with its attendant degrees, professors, classrooms, lectures, theses, dissertations, examinations, syllabi. And this is understandable. The Tridentine decree for the founding of seminaries was issued not very long after the founding of the first universities in Europe. The universities were, at the time, flourishing and successful, and so when seminaries were to be started, what better model to follow than the model of the University. And so many seminaries in Europe, America and subsequently in the mission countries, were structured on the pattern of the European University (O'Malley 1992: 80).

An important question to ask would be: should Indian seminaries continue to be modelled on the same pattern of the European university, especially when Europe herself is discarding this model? Or is there need to look for a new model?



Until now, we have looked at the research studies singly or individually. Putting them together however, brings to light a third characteristic of seminary culture. This concerns the area of spirituality. Here the findings show that seminary formation exhibits:

### **III. A Culture that lacks the horizontal dimension of spirituality**

The definition of spirituality is a very contested one in sociology of religion studies. Nevertheless, no matter how varied the definitions of spirituality and the manner in which it is to be assessed, one cannot deny that there are at least two distinct (though not necessarily separable) aspects or dimensions to it. The first is the *vertical dimension* that represents the self's relationship with the divine or transcendent being, the second is the *horizontal dimension* which represents the self's relationship with others, human and sub-human beings. (No doubt these two aspects can be combined in an integrated personality) but historically they have given way to two distinct emphases in the tradition of Indian spirituality – the ashram approach and the social justice approach to spirituality) (see Pieris 1988; Amaladoss 1989:529)

#### ***Vertical and Horizontal dimensions of spirituality***

All three studies assessed the respondents on a spirituality scale, which consisted of 20 statements, 10 of which reflected the vertical dimension and 10 of which represented the horizontal dimension of spirituality. Respondents were asked to agree or disagree on a Likert type scale and given an overall score for each of the two dimensions.

Sample statements reflecting a vertical dimension of spirituality were as follows:

A spiritual person is one:

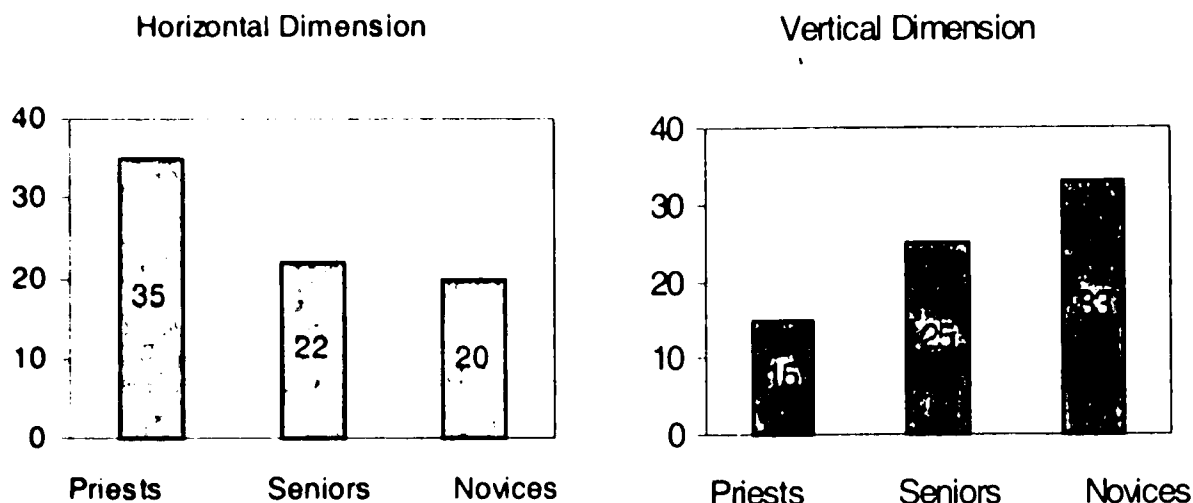
1. who sees in all things the will of God
2. who has a personal relationship with Jesus Christ
3. who spends a lot of time in prayer and in spiritual exercises.
4. who evaluates everything from the faith perspective
5. who feels that the main problem of our country is a spiritual problem.

Sample statements reflecting a horizontal dimension of spirituality were as follows:

1. A spiritual person is one who has a very clear vision of society and his role in it.
2. A spiritual person may be aggressive or confrontative where injustice is concerned.

3. Spirituality consists in a perspective that sees things from the viewpoint of the oppressed
4. Compassion does not necessarily depend on the amount of time one spends in prayer
5. The biggest problem of our country is a problem of inequality.

*Comparison of scores on the vertical and horizontal dimension for priests, senior seminarians and novices*



Putting together the findings of the three research studies, we are able to compare the scores on the two dimensions of spirituality for three groups of the respondents:

- Priests
- Senior seminarians
- Novices or junior seminarians

The bar charts above detail the differences between the three groups.

**Observation one:** The priests have the highest score on the horizontal dimension of spirituality (35), whereas on the vertical dimension they have the lowest score (15). Compared to the priests, the seminarians received lower scores on the horizontal dimension of spirituality (22 and 20), but higher scores on the vertical dimension (25 and 33).

**Observation two:** Among seminarians, on the horizontal dimension, there was scarcely any difference between novices and seniors. While seniors registered a score of 22, the novices had a score of 20. In other words, there was scarcely any growth or change in the horizontal dimension of spirituality. On the vertical dimension of spirituality, novices had a higher score than the seniors; novices scored 33, while seniors had a score of 25. How does one explain these results?

**Explanation for observation one:** Why do priests have a higher score on the horizontal dimension? One reason could be that the context in which they work

appears to influence the priests much more than the training. Whatever the stress on the vertical dimension they received in their training period, this dimension appeared to decrease. In fact, once they get into ministry, the horizontal dimension becomes much stronger.

One possible reason for this phenomenon is the context of poverty and suffering that they see around them in the ministry but from which they were shielded in the seminary. There is no doubt that in the seminary students live in a sort of hothouse or vacuum. They receive food on their table (irrespective of whether there is a famine going on in the country or not); they have rooms to sleep and live in (irrespective of floods, cyclones or storms) and they are not fraught with the tension of making ends meet. Once they get into the ministry, even though their personal situation does not change, nevertheless, they are constantly in contact with their parishioners and consequently with poverty, hunger, unemployment and injustice, with people who cannot make ends meet, who have no home or who are forced to starve. And so they are influenced by the context and circumstances of their ministry.

The sociologist, Howard Becker, while studying the training of physicians, questioned whether the attitudes and values learned as a student will have an effect on the student's behaviour in the distant future. Equally important, he found, in determining future attitudes and behaviours were the characteristics of the contexts and situations, which he faced as a professional. He called this the 'reaction approach to socialization' (Becker 1961:240). If we take this approach seriously, we must accept that even though Formators may train their students very well and arm them with values and beliefs, in the final analysis, the pastoral context in which the priest lives and works is equally if not more crucial in affecting his thinking and values. In fact, in the Papal Seminary study, even the few students who had previous work experience had a higher score on the horizontal dimension than students without any work experience. This forces us to think of alternate strategies of socialization, where the hothouse atmosphere of seminaries is somewhat reduced and opportunities for greater interaction with people are increased. This can be done by a different type of pastoral work, through experiments of students living out in urban slums/rural areas or through a work experience simultaneous with his academic studies. These will be explained in greater detail later in this paper.

#### *Explanation for observation two:*

The fact that there was no difference between seniors and novices on the horizontal dimension can mean either of two things:

- It could mean that seminarians are not given any special formation in the horizontal or social justice dimension of spirituality. If what they started out with and what they finished with is the same, it means that there is no growth in that dimension. It is constant.

- It could also mean that seminarians, already well versed in social justice to begin with, started out with a high score on the horizontal dimension.

This latter hypothesis is very unlikely. Earlier, in table one, we saw that the priests said that one of the missing elements in their formation was social justice training. In table two and three as well, we saw that ‘faithfulness to spiritual exercises’ and ‘spirit of obedience to superiors’ was replaced by ‘love for the poor’ and ‘sense of vision’ as necessary characteristics for the priest of today. These findings confirm that the second hypothesis is hardly feasible and indicate instead that the first hypothesis is more plausible, viz., that a horizontal dimension in spirituality is less emphasized in seminary culture.

In concluding this section, we might say that despite the fact that several ecclesiastical documents have pointed out that Indian spirituality cannot be delinked from the problems of poverty around us, this aspect (call it the horizontal or social justice dimension of spirituality) has been insufficiently stressed in our seminary culture and policies.

What about the fact that in the vertical dimension, seniors had a lower score than the juniors? This decrease can best be explained by the “law of diminishing returns”. This is a famous law of economics, which can be applied to the spiritual life. Over the years of formation, seniors tend to get inured and pay less attention to the purely vertical expressions of spirituality. After one has been living in community for several years and one has assiduously participated in all the community spiritual exercises one tends to suffer from a syndrome called “burn out”. At such a stage one tends to lose enthusiasm for spiritual exercises, especially those that are regular and mechanical, and are often a typical indicator of the vertical dimension of spirituality. The lower score of seniors can also be attributed to their hunger for expressions of spirituality, which are different from the traditional ones.

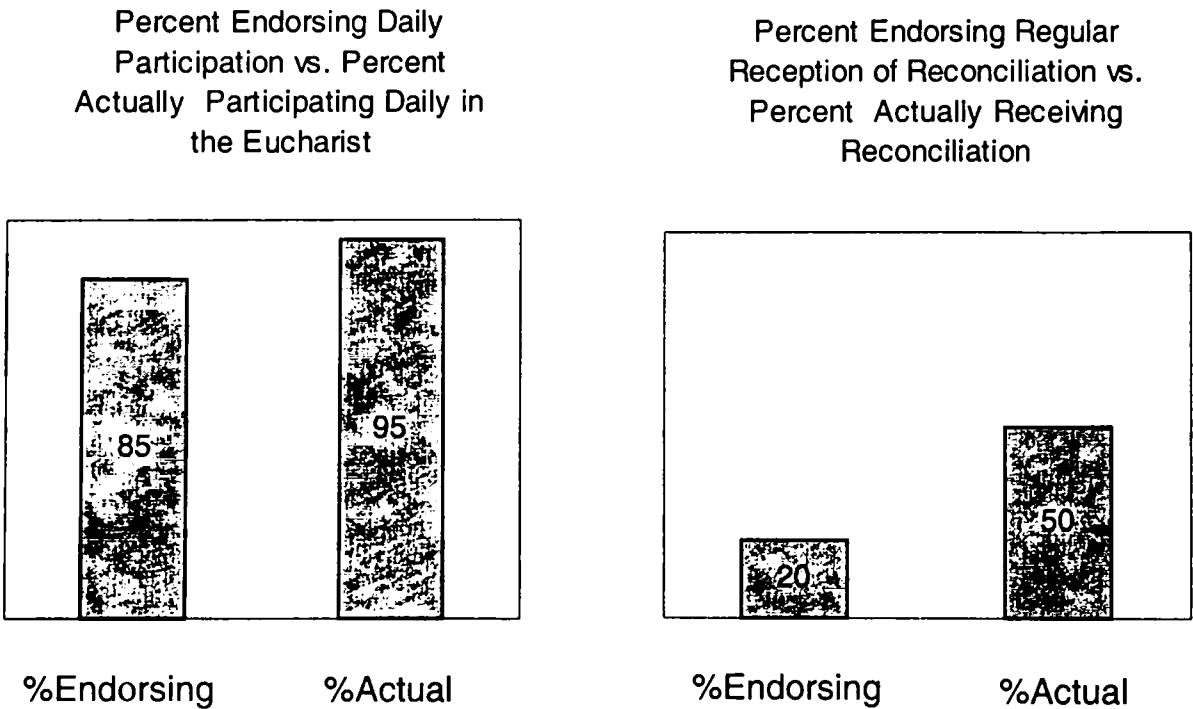
Finally, there is a fourth quality of seminary culture, brought to light by the three studies, and this concerns the area of discipline. It may be described as:

#### **IV. A Culture which exhibits some elements of Rule Conscious-ness, Conformity and Fear:**

One of the key questions in the mind of Formators is whether they should train their students to be leaders or followers. A leader is necessarily innovative and creative, whereas a follower is usually understood to be conformist and submissive. While most formators would agree that they want their students to be innovative, the question that needs to be asked is: is the necessary context provided for it? For innovation and creativity, a student must have freedom. If he does things out of a sense of conformity to the rule or because he is afraid that he will be reprimanded if he breaks the rules, then to that extent he is acting out of conformity and in such an instance, there is no socialization for commitment (Charter of Priestly Formation, CPF 3.1.4.)

To examine the extent of conformity within seminaries, two of the three studies measured the inner conviction of seminarians and compared it with their practice. Students were asked how often they believed they should participate in the sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation and these results were compared with how often they reported that they actually participated. The discrepancy between what they feel they should do and what they actually do revealed the extent or degree of compulsion. Normally, there is always a gap between the ideal and the actual. The ideal is somewhat higher than the actual. However, in the case of seminarians the actual is higher than the ideal. This gap betrays the element of conformity to the rule rather than to conviction.

While approximately 80-85 percent felt that daily participation in the Eucharist was essential, 90-95 percent actually participated. This means that approximately 10 percent were doing so out of compulsion. For the sacrament of Reconciliation the discrepancy was much higher, as much as 20 percent. While only 20 percent stated that reconciliation should be received monthly, around 50 percent reported that they actually participated in it. This shows that roughly 30 percent were acting out of compulsion. This was substantiated in both the studies of seminarians (the JDV study and the SVD study; since there were slight differences in percentages, a range is preferred). The charts below describe the results:



Between 10 and 20 percent of course may not be a very high rate of compulsion, but what this means is that within the context of the seminary, its rule-structure and supervision, at least 10 – 30 percent of seminarians are doing things out of a sense of conformity and submissiveness. Outside of this structure, given the context of relative freedom in the ministry, there is no guarantee that this 10 – 30 percent will perform out of a sense of commitment.

## *A sense of fear*

While a certain amount of compulsion and fear can be expected in any organized community, one would be very suspicious if this fear gets to be inordinate. Comparing the Papal Seminary study and the JDV study (done scarcely within a year of each other) one remarkable observation was the low response rate in the JDV study of seminarians to individual questions. To many of the questions, the seminarians had a missing response rate of between 10 to 15 percent, whereas for the priests the missing response rate was as low as 3 to 8 percent. Now, there can be several reasons for a missing response rate. One reason of course could be that the question was not properly understood or explained; another reason could be that the respondent did not feel that the question was particularly relevant to him or had no interest in filling out the questionnaire.

However, one can also go by the content analysis of the data itself. And the data shows that one major reason for the lack of response or the half-hearted response was: Fear. Reading through the questionnaires one cannot miss the fact that there was an element of fear being expressed by the respondents. This fear can be observed if one reads between the lines, though sometimes it was mentioned quite unreservedly. Despite explicitly emphasizing that the responses to the questionnaire would be kept confidential, several students were afraid that, through their answers, they would be identified and subsequently penalized. Here is a sampling of indices that illustrate the fear that existed in the mind of the respondents:

- One student filled in all his personal details, then on second thoughts cancelled them out in dark ink.
- Another, in response to the remark that all this information will be confidential, asks: Are you sure?
- A third writes at the bottom of his questionnaire: "And why don't you ask my name? All other information is there...."
- A fourth states: "why so much information, you could have asked our name straightaway!!"
- A fifth writes: "There are many obstacles to my spiritual growth. But I don't like to mention them here... for fear of repercussions..."

Nearly all questions that ask about what they think or what they honestly feel about their attendance at meditation, prayer, the eucharist, the sacrament of penance, etc have a missing response rate of 10 - 15 percent. This indicates that several of the students did not wish to say exactly what they thought or felt, lest they be penalized in the future.

From the above it is clear that an element of fear existed in the minds of some students when they were filling out the questionnaire. But perhaps, one might ask, 'why this fear? From where does it arise or originate?' One gets some kind of a clue from some of the responses given. For instance,

- In answer to “why do you participate in the eucharist?” a student replies: “Because I feel scared that my superiors will send a report to my bishop at the end of the year.”
- Another states expressly: “one of the obstacles in my spiritual growth is the *blessed report* that is sent to my superiors..the report seemingly must contain one negative remark..”
- A third asks: “ What guarantee do we have that our superiors will not see what we have written? How then can I write what I really feel? If my bishop knows that this is what I truly feel about spirituality, he may throw me out of the seminary!”

In short, one might say that one reason for the fear among the students is the report that is sent about them at the end of the year by their superiors – either to the Bishop or to the Provincial Superior. Evidently, they do not trust that the responses to the questionnaires would be kept confidential. They were afraid that what they wrote in all honesty would be seen by the immediate superior, kept in mind by him and eventually reported to their Bishop or Provincial. This fear of the eventual report was one of the reasons for the not-so-perfect response to the questionnaires. No doubt the number of students expressing such fear is small, but it is nevertheless indicative of the type of socialization.

As stated earlier, seminary formation is a type of secondary socialization. The key difference between primary and secondary socialization is the element of choice or free will. To the extent, however, that secondary socialization is done in a forced and constrained atmosphere, it approximates primary socialization. If nearly all areas of a person’s life are programmed, such formation becomes a kind of intensive resocialization, or worse, a sort of brain washing. This is what happens in military training, prisons, mental hospitals and cult groups (Rose, Glazer and Glazer, 320-338). The candidate does things without any inner conviction and at the first opportunity where freedom presents itself ‘lets himself go’, quite often going far beyond the norms of societal life, eventually becoming deviant.

The purpose of seminary training is to enthrone commitment in the candidate; and so, besides training in theology, other areas of the candidate’s life must perforce be arranged or scheduled. Nevertheless, all of this needs to be done with a certain amount of freedom or else there is a danger that the candidate may become like a child or mechanized robot. One result of our study has shown that there is some conformity, rule-consciousness and fear in the minds of the respondents. No doubt it is not extreme and in no way approaches the nature of re-socialization. However, so long as these emotions exist, one has always to be suspicious of the nature of commitment being developed. In such a situation, one cannot rest content with enthusing commitment merely by way of sanctions, punishment or the threat of dismissal.

## **Towards a culture and structures that are more relevant**

Our paper has seen that there are four characteristics of seminary culture pertaining to four of the central features of seminary life:

- Firstly, deficiency in the pastoral dimension
- Secondly, theoretical or conceptual nature of academic formation
- Thirdly, lack of a horizontal dimension in the area of spirituality
- Fourthly, some amount of conformity, fear and rule-consciousness

Lest however this paper be construed to be too critical, by way of conclusion it will suggest possibilities for a different culture, possibilities that flow from the nature of the findings described. These recommended programmes will not be in the area of the content or style of teaching. In fact, in two of the studies, the Papal Seminary study and the JDV study, the respondents had the highest praise for the qualifications and teaching competence of the Faculty. They will rather be with regard to the structure and policies of the seminary.

### ***1 Towards a broader understanding of Pastoral work***

Since the time the study was done, no doubt the pastoral dimension in seminaries has received growing attention. Nevertheless, so long as it is still organized like a minor subject or considered an extra-curricular activity (a side activity, which the seminarian may do in his spare time) the pastoral dimension in seminaries will always be deficient. Our research has pointed out that unless pastoral work is given as much importance as a major theological subject and organized as a regular ‘internship’ programme, the spirit of the ‘Charter of Priestly Formation’ will not be implemented (CPF 3.2.4.c)

Currently, the concept of pastoral work is still too narrow. At the present time in several seminaries, pastoral work is understood as parish work and the seminarian is expected to do merely “churchy activities” viz., train a choir, teach Sunday school, conduct the liturgy, distribute communion, look after the altar boys and youth. This can scarcely be called sufficient practicum for a future priest of the new millennium. Pastoral work must be as varied and as comprehensive as possible. Community organization, (the building of small communities), an initiation into adult faith formation and adult literacy programmes, working with disadvantaged groups (like street children, domestic workers), being apprenticed to substance abuse clinics, environmental activism, working with unorganized labour, rural health programs, support for women’s issues, advocacy for poverty and justice issues, networking with secular organizations – all these could be possible settings for pastoral work. It is only when the seminarian is inducted into the diverse priestly activities (as mentioned in Appendix 2) is he truly being socialized into the varied apostolate of the future priest.



## 2. *Towards an intellectual and spiritual formation relevant to the life of the people*

It is a fact that the seminarian finds himself in a unique 'situation'. He lives in dwellings, secluded and apart from common people, where everything is handed to him for the asking: food, books, rooms, laundry facilities, and sometimes even clothes, all expense free,. It is understandable that his thinking and spirituality will be influenced by this 'privileged' situation. If the seminarian had to learn to make ends meet, support himself, face the threat of unemployment, etc., he would develop into a very different person. The basic idea of such a programme is to make the student develop "a perspective" that is similar to the lives of people with whom he is going to work. Literally able to "theologize" from his living situation, his spirituality, too, arising from such a context, where he is close to people, will be very different (CPF 3.2.4.h). Three 'experiments' have been tried out to develop such a perspective.

*A work-study programme* is one of the earliest experiments, where a student for the priesthood has to travel the road of finding a job, work in a team, understand the process of the work environment, balance a budget, rub shoulders with farmers/blue collar workers and prepare for the priesthood at the same time. Within the present Indian set-up, it is difficult to envisage. Perhaps lectures may have to be re-organized, [arranged in the evening for instance] but there is no doubt that a candidate will have much more to gain if he were to work and support himself than if he were to grow up in an environment where everything is given to him on a platter. It is for this reason that the charter speaks of an 'unstructured' or 'free' regency as one possible alternative (CPF 3.2.4.i).

A second structural change is *the option offered to seminarians of living outside the "traditional" seminary* – whether in slums, chawls, or in rural areas - from where they commute daily for lectures to the seminary. This kind of experiment can possibly develop seminarians who are spiritually committed, dedicated and in touch with people. They face the day-to-day troubles of making ends meet, standing in lines, travelling in discomfort, learning the prices of groceries, contending with growing inflation, having water leak from the roof, etc. and their spirituality (as well as theological thinking) is drawn from these conditions rather than from an atmosphere that is cloistered and removed from the life of people.

A third situation is when *the entire seminary or house of formation is relocated* in the midst of the lives of people, whether it be in the rural areas or in the midst of a city. At present, these houses of formation are generally smaller in size. Regional theologates and ashram-style houses of formation are already small attempts in this direction.

## 3. *Towards the principle of Graded and Guided Freedom*

In many seminaries in India (and Asia), there is one Prefect of discipline for 50 or 60 candidates. Thus there is a philosophers' Prefect, a theologians' Prefect,

etc. This Prefect of discipline has a superhuman task before him. It is impossible for him to know each candidate and guide him in his growth towards the priesthood. He has to treat all 50 or 60 candidates with the same yardstick and rule, whether he is a senior or a junior (CPF 4.4.4). Personal attention is impossible. The freedom given to the student, if it is given, is neither graded nor guided. The student is left by and large to fend for himself. Worse still, candidates who are incompetent, uncommitted, neurotic or psychotic, may slip through the net and get ordained.

One structure that tries to overcome this defect is the moderator system, where there is greater proximity between staff and students. There is one moderator for a group of eight or ten students. The eight or ten candidates form a group and are close to their moderator (CPF 3.1.7). They have regular group discussions and group programmes; sometimes group outings. For all practical purposes the moderator is a friend, counsellor and guide rather than a supervisor. All the benefits of group work are utilized. The moderator comes to know each candidate on a very personal level and is much better able to keep track of his growth and development. Further, the horizontal interaction among the students is a very important process of formation. The peer group is able to guide and direct in a way that a moderator may not be able to. There is a possibility for both graded and guided freedom.

## Conclusion

It was the French school of seminary formation, whose founders were Pierre de Berulle, Jean Jacques Olier and St. Vincent de Paul, who first modified and adapted the general directives of the Tridentine decree in order to give a specific formation, a specific culture and specific mentality to future diocesan priests. The French coined the term “*esprit ecclesiastique*” which can be translated in modern terminology as ‘clerical culture’, though understood in a positive sense. (White, 1989).

Today, there is no disputing the fact that the culture of the seminary leaves its stamp or imprint on the student. Whether the student continues into the priesthood or leaves the seminary, he leaves with a certain imprint or trademark that he carries with him, as a part of himself, all through his life. Paul Hendrickson, who interviewed seminary drop-outs and ex-alumni, found a common thread running through all of them. As one of Hendrickson’s classmates said: “I think you’re discovering that you never left...There’s a part of the seminary that always remains with you. I don’t have to search my memory for it either. Seminary Formation gave us a particular, indelible stamp” (Hendrickson, 1983 ).

The purpose of this paper was to describe seminary culture by reporting on research studies. No doubt the sample of seminaries may not have been representative, but the sample of students was. The ultimate aim was not to critique the

culture or to find fault with it, or to show how long-lasting its effects are, but to describe it in such a way that it can be made more effective for future ministry.

**Appendix 1**

*Profile of the respondents:*

The socio-economic background of seminarians, those studying at JDV in Pune and those in the various SVD houses of formation throughout Asia, as well as of the priests who passed out from the Papal Seminary, is very similar. The average age at which they join is between 20 and 22 years and the average age at which they are ordained is approximately between 28 and 30 years. Over 70 per cent grew up in a rural area and hailed from large families with a total household size of approximately 6 or 7. The most common occupation for both parents was farming. Most of the students rated themselves in the lower middle income category. With regard to education, most of the parents (about 45 percent of the fathers and an even greater percentage of the mothers) had done only primary schooling. Less than 5 percent of their parents had professional careers like that of doctor, lawyer or engineer. The religious background can be considered traditional or conservative with about 80 percent of the candidates having spent 3 to 4 years in a minor seminary. Less than 12 percent had any kind of work experience prior to joining the seminary.

Once they had become priests, however, their educational background moved up several notches higher. 63 percent were graduates; 45 percent of these had become post graduates with 12 percent reaching the doctoral level.

**Appendix 2**

*Table 4: Priestly Tasks and How Relevant Seminary Formation Was for Them*

Tasks performed	Relevance Index
1. <i>Teaching in Seminary</i>	3.35
2. <i>Catechesis or Instruction on the Faith</i>	3.11
3. Administering the Sacraments	3.11
4. Administration of Parish	3.10
5. Conducting paraliturgies	2.97
6. Administration of Seminary	2.95
7. Visiting homes, families	2.91
8. Conducting group/parish associations	2.86
9. Counselling	2.83
10. Teaching in Non-formal setting	2.81
11. Community Organization Work	2.75
12. Teaching in School	2.73
13. Work for Justice and Peace	2.71
14. Administration of other institutions	2.69

15. Chaplaincy	2.50
16. Administration of S.W. Projects	2.49
17. Administration of School	2.44
18. Teaching in College	2.39
19. Marriage Tribunal Work	2.38
20. Works of the Communication Media	2.37
21. Secretarial Work	2.16
22. Dealing with government officials, police	2.12
23. Purchasing provisions and furniture	1.96
24. Administration of College	1.88
25. Fund Raising	1.81
26. Construction of Buildings	1.76

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