

## **Vocation and Formation of Priests and Religious in India**

### **An Empirical Study**

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In his recent Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Pope John Paul II highlighted the importance of priestly formation in these words: “The formation of future priests, both diocesan and religious, and life-long assiduous care for their personal sanctification in the ministry and for the constant updating of their pastoral commitment are considered by the Church one of the most demanding and important tasks for the future of the evangelization of humanity” (No. 2). Perhaps no other organization invests so much in terms of human and financial resources in the formation of its personnel as the Church does. Few other professions require so many long years of formation as the Catholic priesthood. Today a candidate to the priesthood spends, in addition to regular school and college education, anywhere between 10 to 15 years in formation before he is ordained.

However, data from several studies suggest that, in spite of the enormous investment of time, money and personnel, priestly formation in India today fails to deliver the goods, at least quality goods. For example, a nation-wide survey on the Catholic Priesthood commissioned by the Catholic Bishops Conference of India, in which more than 6000 lay people were interviewed, revealed that the Catholic clergy in India is facing a serious crisis of credibility (Parathazham 1988 & 1994). A more recent study, which investigated why large numbers of Catholics nowadays are leaving the Church to join the Pentecostal sects, found that the Catholic laity attributed this phenomenon mainly to the lack of pastoral care in the Church and the unedifying life of the clergy (Parathazham 1996).

Why do the priests and religious of today seem to lack the ability to provide the kind of spiritual and moral leadership that is expected of them? To what extent are the recruitment policies and formation structures responsible for this state of affairs? The present study<sup>1</sup> attempts to explore these and related questions.

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1. This was originally a field-study project of 18 philosophy students (1998-99 batch) of Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune, India. I gratefully acknowledge the contribution of these students as well as the assistance of my colleague, Dr. Anthony da Silva, SJ, in designing and executing this study. This study was made possible by a research grant from MISSIO.

After a brief note on the methodology and the profile of the sample, the main findings of the study will be presented under the following headings: family background and history of vocation, goals and motivations, perspectives on formation, and present feelings about vocational decision. This will be followed by a discussion of some of the questions the study raises about the formation of the clergy and religious in India.

***1. Methodology and Profile of the Sample***

***1. Methodology***

The data for this study was collected through a structured questionnaire, which was designed to elicit information on the following: (1) family background of the seminarians and the sisters; (2) history of vocation; (3) goals in life and motivation for joining; (4) perspectives on formation; (5) perceptions of oneself vis-a-vis one's peers in the world outside; (5) comparison of home and the formation house; (6) evaluation of formators; and (7) present feelings about the decision to become a priest or religious. The questionnaire contained nearly 150 closed-ended questions.

The primary sample, consisting of 2824 respondents, was drawn from seminarians doing philosophical or theological studies and from sisters who are still in formation or have recently completed their formation. In addition, a secondary sample of 330 lay people of the same age-group was selected in order to make a comparative study of the clergy and the laity on certain personality traits.

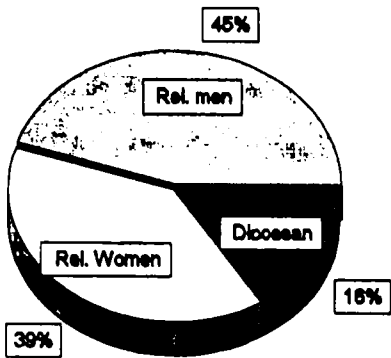
The samples were drawn from the following locations: Shillong, Calcutta, Bhopal, Indore, Pune, Goa, Hyderabad, Vijayawada, Bangalore, Chennai, Alwaye and Kottayam. The questionnaires were hand-delivered to the respondents and collected in sealed envelopes to ensure anonymity.

***2. Profile of the Sample***

**Gender and Status:** Of the 2824 respondents in the primary sample, 61% were male and 39% female. As Chart 1 shows, 45% were seminarians affiliated to religious congregations, 16% were seminarians incardinated to dioceses, and the rest (39%) were religious women.

In the seminarians' sample, there was almost equal number of philosophy students (51%) and theology students (49%).

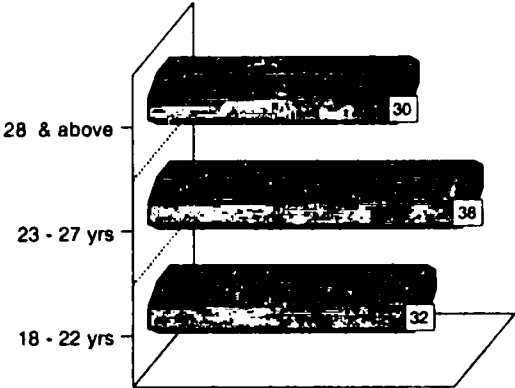
Chart 1: Composition of Sample by Affiliation



About three-fourth of the religious women in the sample were Junior Sisters; the rest had made their final profession in the recent past. Larger numbers of Junior Sisters were included in the sample because, since they are still in formation, their views would be more relevant to our investigation..

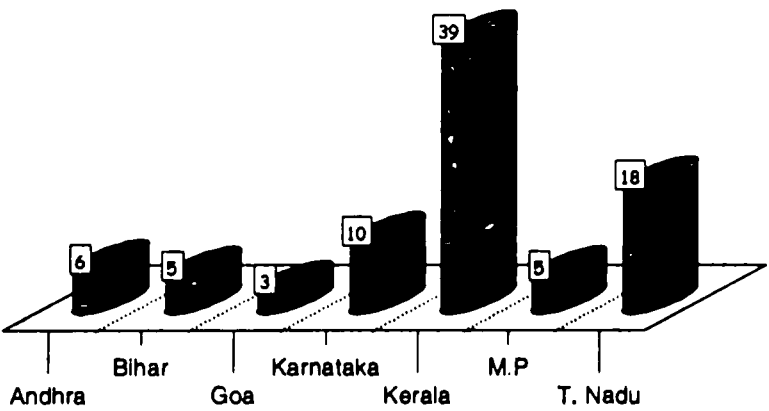
**Age:** The median age of sample is 25 years. The sisters were older than the seminarians, with a median age of 26. As Chart 2 reveals, 32% of the respondents were between 18 and 22 years of age, 38% between 23 and 27 years, and 30% were 28 years of age or older.

Chart 2: Age Distribution (%)



**Region:** The sample for the study, as indicated above, was drawn from seminaries and formation houses in nine States of India, namely, Andhra Pradesh (Hyderabad and Vijayawada), Goa, Madhyapradesh (Indore and Bhopal), Maharashtra (Pune), Meghalaya (Shillong), Karnataka (Bangalore), Kerala (Alwaye and Kottayam), Tamil Nadu (Chennai) and West Bengal (Calcutta). Since many of these are common formation houses with candidates from different parts of India, the sample was representative

Chart 3: Respondents by State of Origin



of the whole country. As Chart 3 indicates, the largest number of respondents were born in Kerala, followed by Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. This skewed distribution is indicative of the fact that by far the largest number of vocations to priesthood and religious life in India come from the South, particularly Kerala.

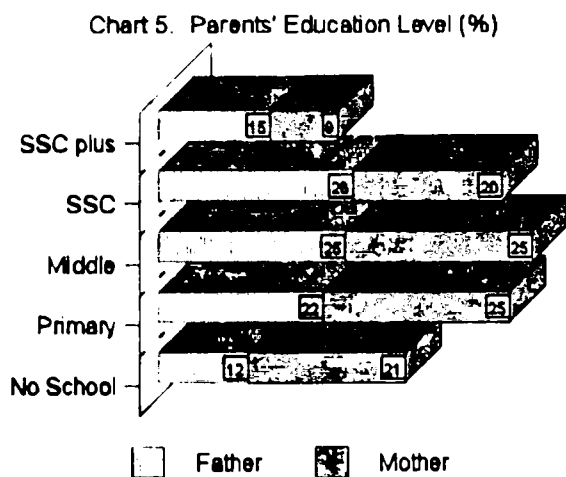
*II. Family Background and History of Vocation*

*1. Family Background*

**Number of Children:** The vast majority of the candidates to priesthood and religious life come from fairly large families. The average number of children in the families of the respondents is 5.4 (median = 5). Three-fourths of the candidates are from families which have four or more children. Less than a fifth of vocations come from smaller families with two to three children. Only 2.8% are from families where the candidate is the only child (see Chart 4). Among single child vocations, the vast

majority (79%) are from the families where the child is a son; only 21% are from families where the only child is a daughter. In other words, there is greater probability of a boy who is an only child becoming a priest than a girl who is an only child becoming a religious sister.

**Parents' Education:** As Chart 5 reveals, among the fathers of the respondents, 12% had never been to school, while 22% had attended only primary school. One-fourth were educated up to middle school and another one-fourth had completed SSC. Only 15% had studied beyond SSC. In fact, less than 7% of the respondents' fathers had a college degree.

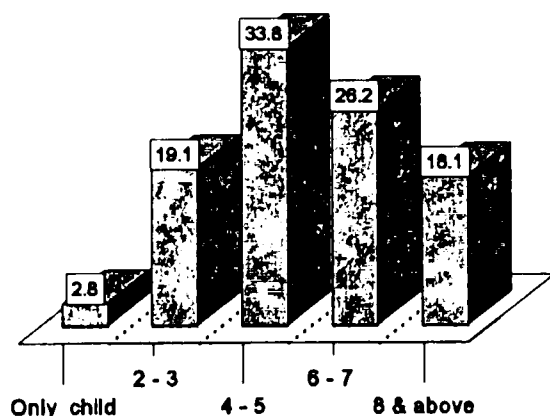


The education level of the mothers of the respondents was considerably lower than that of the fathers. More than one-fifth of them had never been to school. Half of them had primary or middle school level education. While one-fifth had completed SSC, less than ten percent had gone beyond SSC. Only 2.5% of the mothers of the respondents were college graduates.

**Siblings' Education:** The average respondent of the survey has four siblings (median). Of the four siblings, typically only one has graduated from college. In other words, three-fourths of the siblings of the respondents have not had the benefit of college education. Among the respondents themselves, however, 60% are college graduates.

**Parents' Occupation:** The fathers of the majority of candidates to priesthood and/or religious life are farmers or small peasants. Skilled labourer is next most frequently mentioned occupation of the father. Nearly 12% belong to this category. About 8% are lower level professionals like school teachers, police or armed forces, while 6% are self-employed. Less than 5% of the candidates' fathers belong to high income occupational categories like upper division white-collar workers or higher level professionals like doctors or engineers. As for the mothers, the overwhelming majority (84%) are house-wives.

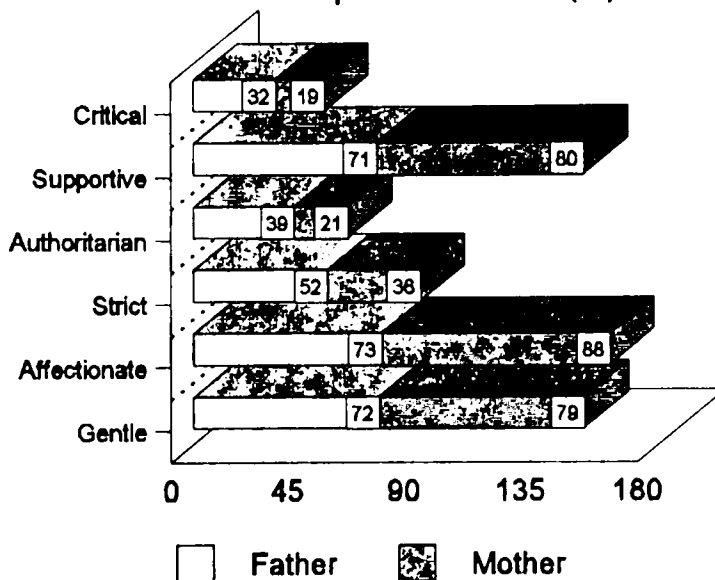
Chart 4: Number of Children in Family (%)



### Perception of Parents:

Relationship with one's parents is generally believed to be a significant factor influencing one's choice of vocation (see, for example, Rulla, Imoda & Riddick 1978, 111-116). In order to understand the kind of relationship the candidates had with their parents, the survey listed six character traits, and the respondents were asked to indicate whether or not each of these would describe their father and/or mother. As Chart

Chart 6: Perception of Parents (%)



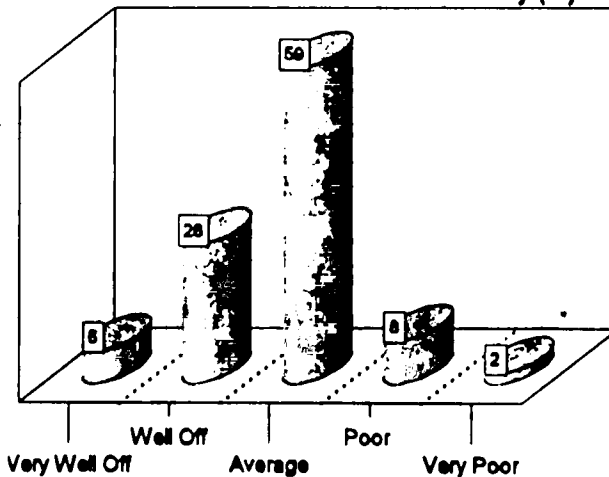
6 indicates, the vast majority evaluate their parents positively. For example, more than 70% of the respondents characterized their parents as *affectionate*, *gentle* and *supportive*. On the other hand, negative descriptors like *authoritarian*, *critical* and *strict* were applied to the parents far less frequently. There is some difference in the respondents' perception of the father vis-a-vis the mother. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the mother emerges as the favourite. In comparison to the father, the mother is more likely to be characterized as *affectionate*, *gentle* and *supportive*, and less likely to be thought of as *authoritarian*, *critical* and *strict*. More than half of the respondents felt that their father was a *strict* disciplinarian; nearly 40% found him to be *authoritarian* and about one-third remember him as being *critical*.

There was some difference in the way the sons and the daughters perceived their parents. The daughters were more likely than the sons to characterize their father as *affectionate* (78% vs 69%) and the mother as *strict* (41% vs 32%). The sons, on the other hand, were somewhat more likely to perceive their father as *critical* (36% vs 28%).

### Economic Status of the Family:

The survey asked the respondents to rate the economic status of their family on a five-point scale ranging from *very well off* to *very poor*. As Chart 7 indicates, the majority (59%) characterized their family's economic status as *average*. While nearly one-third described their family as economically *well off* (26%) or *very well off* (6%), only ten percent reported that their

Chart 7: Economic Situation of the Family (%)

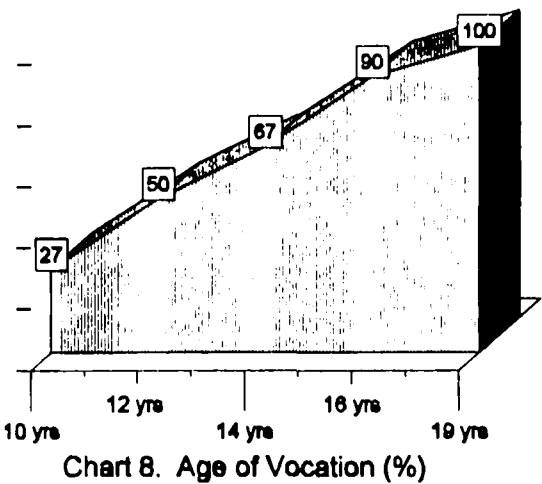


families were *poor* (8%) or *very poor* (2%). The Economic situation of the family is correlated to father's occupation. As expected, the families of those who are in higher level professions or white-collar occupations are better off than those of the unskilled workers and farmers. Those who are unemployed or unable to work are the poorest. There is also a positive correlation between the education level of the father and the economic situation of the family. For example, nearly 60% of the respondents whose fathers have a college degree say that their families are *well off* or *very well off*.

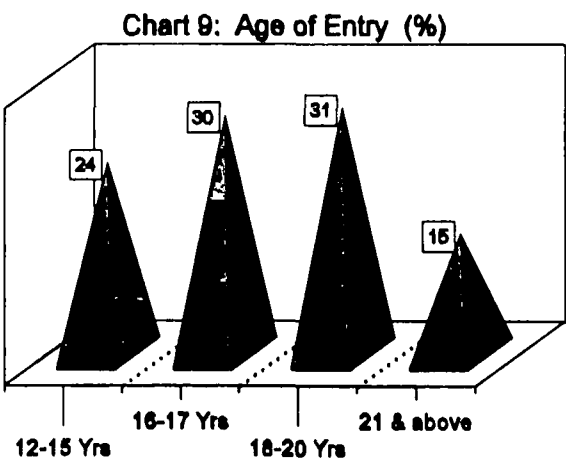
## 2. History of Vocation

### Vocation: A Childhood Dream:

When does a boy or a girl first start thinking about becoming a priest or a religious? We asked our respondents to indicate at what age the thought of becoming a priest or religious occurred to them for the first time. The median age at which they started thinking about their vocation is 12 years (mean=12.67). As Chart 8 indicates, more than a quarter of them had thought of becoming a priest or a religious already by the time they were ten years old. Half the respondents had felt the desire to become a priest or a religious before they entered the teens. By age 14, two-thirds had thought of pursuing a religious vocation. Becoming a priest or a religious was a childhood dream for a large number of our respondents.



**Age of Entry:** Substantial numbers of the candidates to priesthood and religious life entered the formation house at a fairly early age (see Chart 9). A quarter of the respondents reported that they were in the formation house already by the time they were 15 years of age. Another 30% joined when they were 16 or 17. Only 15% of the candidates joined after they were 21 years of age.



There is a significant difference between the Brothers and the Sisters with respect to the age of entry as illustrated in Chart 10. The Brothers typically join at an

earlier age than the Sisters. Nearly one-third (31%) of the Brothers joined at the age of fifteen or earlier, in contrast to only 13% of the sisters. 55% of the Sisters joined after completing 18 years of age, compared to 39% of the Brothers.

Another significant pattern that emerges from the data is that the diocesan seminarians typically join at a younger age, compared to their counterparts in the religious congregations. While 37% of the diocesan seminarians entered the seminary at the age of 15 or earlier, only 21% of the members of the religious congregations joined at this early age. Similarly, whereas nearly half of the religious brothers joined after they were 18 years of age, less than one-third of the diocesans had completed 18 at the time they entered the seminary.

**Education:** Nearly half of the respondents joined the seminary or convent after their SSC, if not before. In fact, about 4% had joined even before they had completed their SSC. Another 40% had completed the 12<sup>th</sup> standard when they joined. Only 13% of our respondents were college graduates when they entered the seminary or formation house (Chart 11).

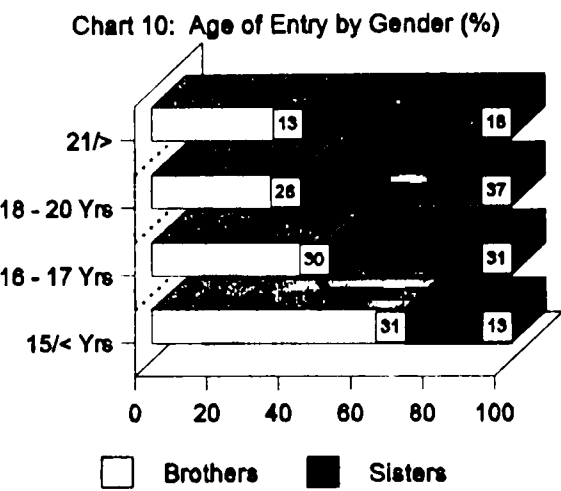


Chart 11. Education at the Time of Joining (%)

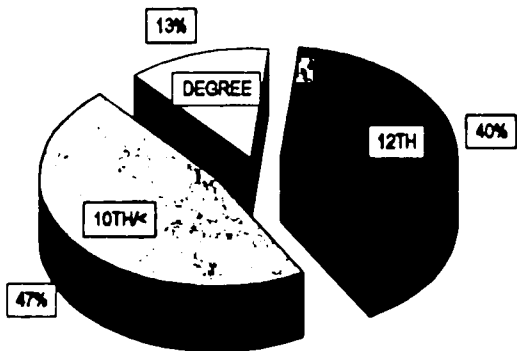
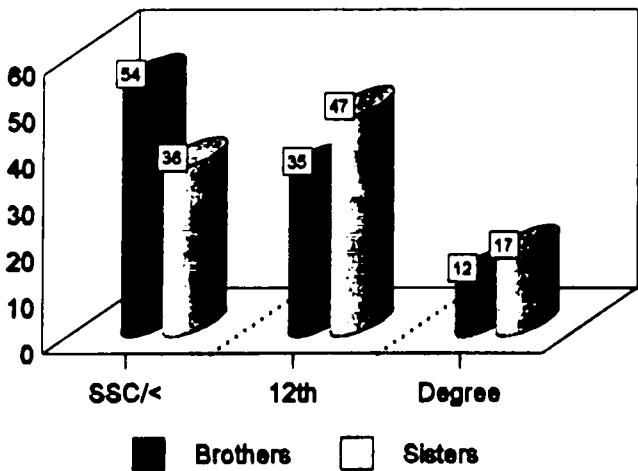


Chart 12: Education at Entry by Gender (%)



As in the case of age, there is a significant difference in the education level of the Brothers and the Sisters at the time of their entry into the formation house. The Sisters generally had a higher education level than the Brothers at the time of joining. As Chart 12 shows, while the majority of the Brothers joined with only SSC education, the majority of the Sisters entered after having completed the 12th. Similarly, more Sisters than Brothers

had a college degree at time of their admission.

Further, among the seminarians themselves, the religious are somewhat more likely to have a higher education level than the diocesans when they enter the seminary. For example, whereas 62% of the diocesans joined with SSC or less, only 51% of the religious joined at this level.

As Chart 13 makes clear, the bulk of those who opt to become priests and religious today do not appear to be particularly gifted intellectually. Two-thirds of them have obtained only second class or pass class marks in the SSC examination. Less than a third of them were placed in the first division. Only a meagre 5% secured a distinction.

Chart 13. Performance in SSC (%)

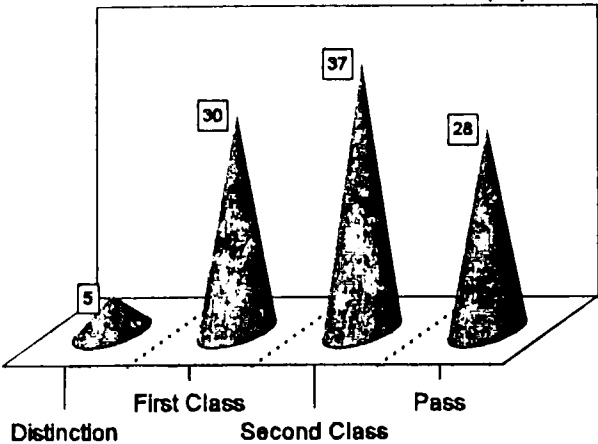
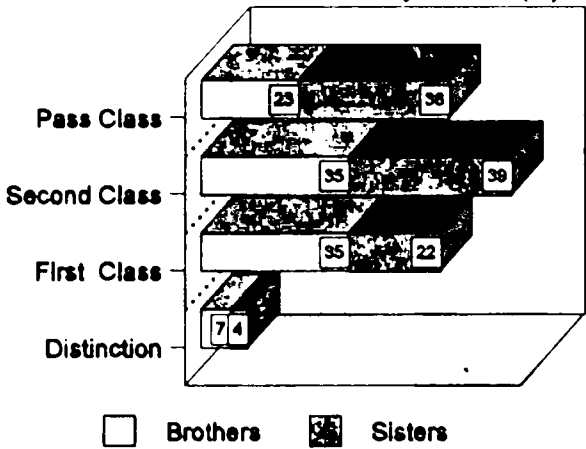


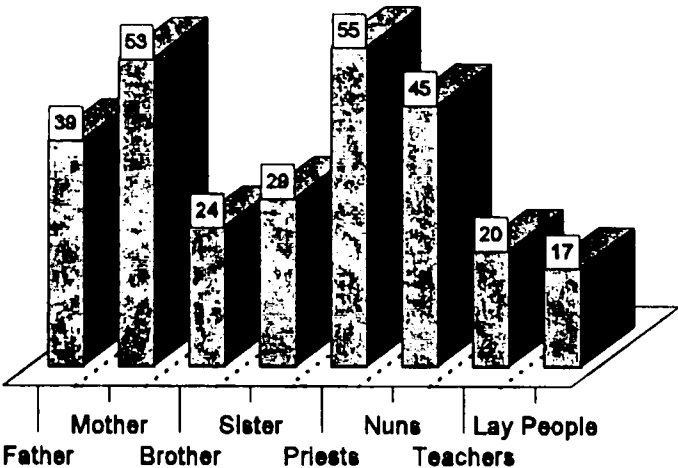
Chart 14. Performance in SSC by Gender (%)



There is a significant difference between the Brothers and the Sisters in terms of academic performance. As Chart 14 reveals, the Brothers in general have performed better than the Sisters in the SSC examination. 42% of the Brothers have secured a first class or a distinction in SSC, in contrast to only 26% of the Sisters. Similarly, whereas 75% of the Sisters passed SSC in the Second class or Pass class, only 58% of the Brothers belonged to this category.

**People Who Influenced:**  
 Chart 15 reveals the role played by different people in the respondents' choice of priestly or religious vocation. Priest and mother are the two figures who are most likely to influence the decision to become a priest or a religious. More than 50% of the respondents reported that they were influenced by them. Nuns are the next most important agents in the

Chart 15. Persons Who Influenced Vocation (%)

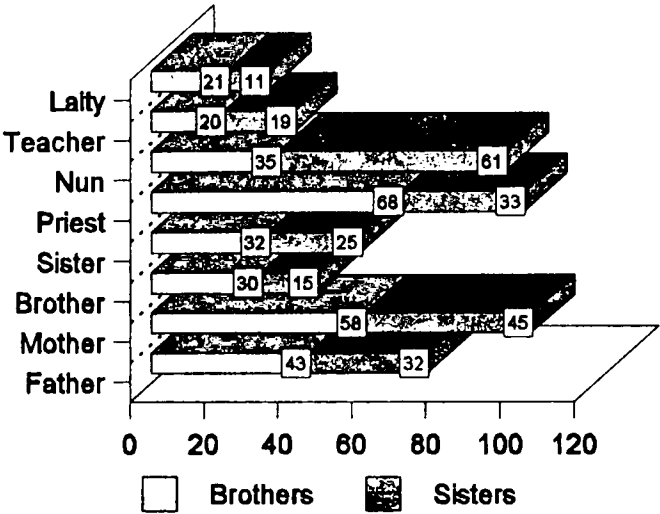




promotion of religious vocations; a sizable 45% of the respondents said that they were inspired by nuns. The father's influence in nurturing vocation in the children is also considerable, but certainly not as strong as that of the mother. Quite a few also reported that they were influenced by their siblings and teachers. Overall, family appears to be the most important agency in the promotion of religious vocations. Two-thirds of our respondents were positively influenced by one or more members of their family in their choice of a religious vocation.

The relative influence of different persons on the vocational choice of the Brothers and the Sisters is shown in Chart 16. For the Brothers the single most important influence is the priest; more than two-thirds of the Brothers indicated that they were influenced by one or more priests as opposed to one-third of the Sisters. For the Sisters, on the other hand, the key figure is the nun, with more than 60% reporting that they were influenced by one or more nuns. The influence of parents and siblings on the choice of vocation seems to be more pronounced on the Brothers than on the Sisters.

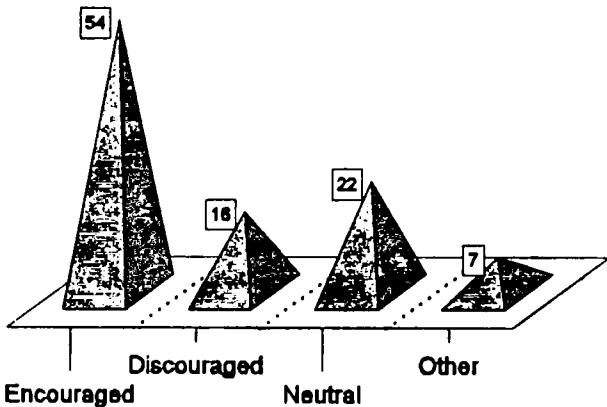
Chart 16. Persons Influencing Vocation by Gender (



5. Family's Response

The majority of the respondents were encouraged by their families to pursue their vocation to priesthood and/or religious life (Chart 17). While 16% were discouraged by their families, 22% were neither encouraged nor discouraged. These findings indicate that the vocation to priesthood and religious life is still highly valued by the vast majority of the Catholic population.

Chart 17. Family's Response to Vocation (%)



Family's response to vocation is correlated to its economic status. As Chart 18 reveals, the poor families are more

likely to encourage vocations than the average and well-to-do families. For example, while almost two-thirds of the poor families encouraged the vocation in their family, less than one-half (48%) of the well-to-do families did so. Similarly, in contrast to only 11% of the economically weaker families, 21% of the economically well off families discouraged the vocation in their family. In other words, the lower the economic status of the family, the greater the enthusiasm for vocations in the family.

Chart 18. Family Response by Economic Status (%)

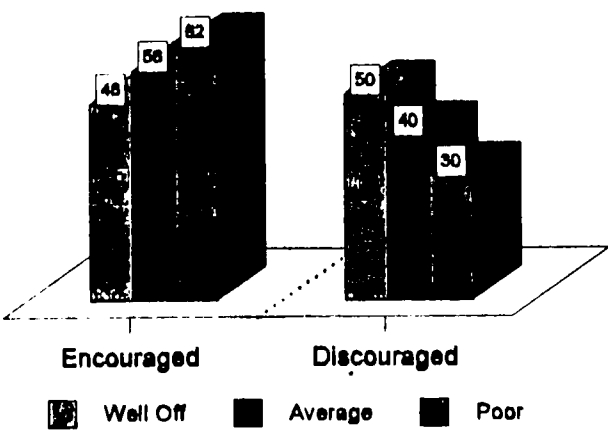
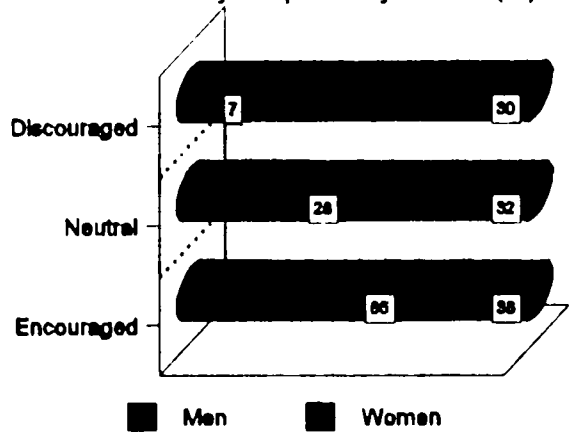


Chart 19. Family Response by Gender (%)



Data also suggests that families are more likely to encourage the male members to become priests than the female members to become nuns. As Chart 19 makes clear, while 65 % male respondents stated that their families encouraged them to pursue their vocation, only 38% of the female respondents said that they were encouraged by their families. Conversely, while only 7% of the families discouraged the vocations of the sons, nearly one-third discouraged the vocations of the daughters.

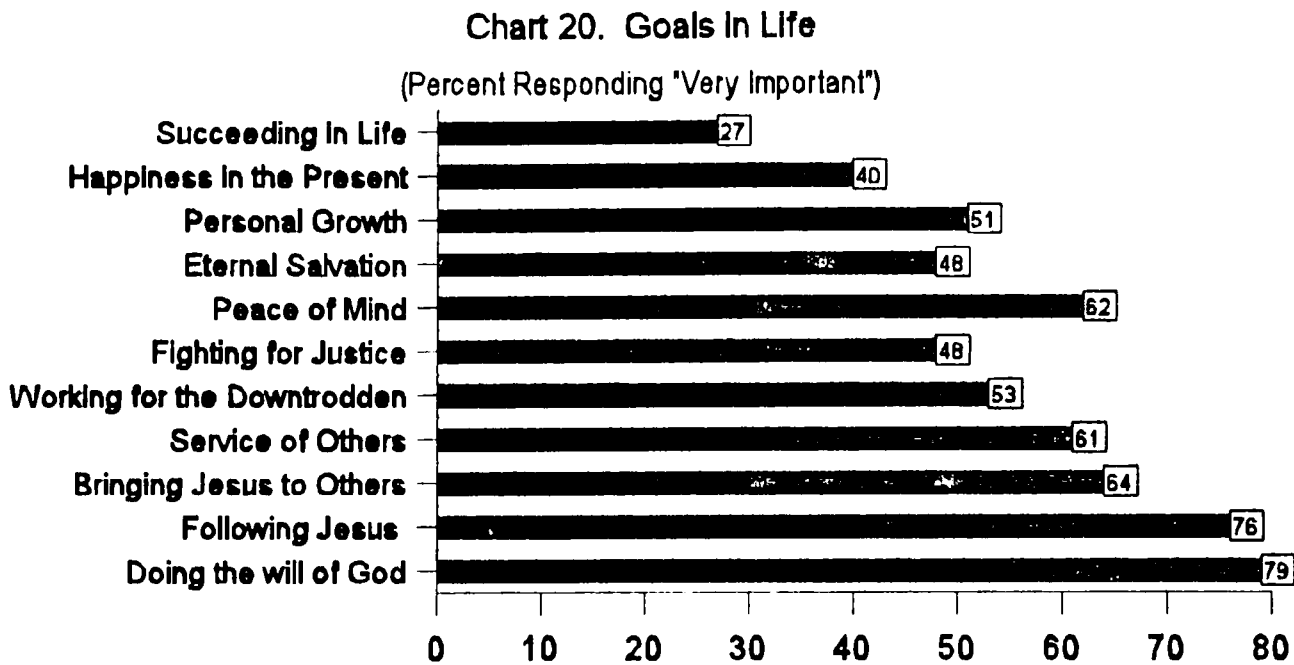
### III. Goals and Motivations

#### 1. Goals in Life

What are the goals of those who aspire to become priests and religious today? In an effort to find out, the respondents were presented with a set of eleven possible goals in life; they were then asked to rate each of these goals on a four-point scale of importance, ranging from “very important” to “not at all important”. Chart 20 below illustrates the relative importance of each of these goals in the respondents’ perspective.

As the Chart makes clear, our respondents attached the greatest importance to God/Jesus oriented goals. The highest number of respondents (79%) chose “doing the will of God,” as a very important goal in their life; the second highest number of

respondents (76%) considered “following Jesus” a very important goal of their life, followed by “bringing Jesus to others,” which was rated very important by 64% of the respondents.



Comparatively fewer respondents have considered social or other-centred goals as very important. While “service to others” in general is endorsed as very important by as many as 61%, social goals that entail a preferential option for the poor like “working for the downtrodden” and “fighting for justice” are rated as very important by considerably fewer number of respondents.

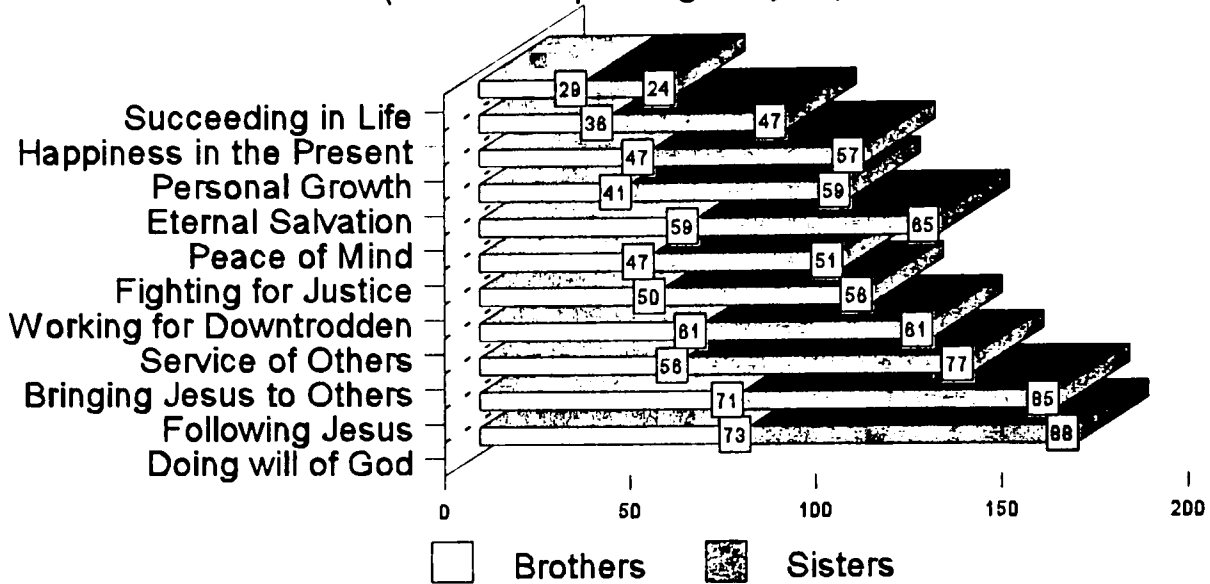
Personal or self-oriented goals have the lowest priority. Except for “peace of mind,” which is rated as very important by 62%, relatively fewer respondents think the other self-oriented goals like “personal growth,” “eternal salvation,” and “happiness in the present” to be very important. “Succeeding in life” receives the lowest rating; only 27% of the respondents see it as a very important goal in their life..

When we break up the data by gender (Chart 21), that is, Brothers versus Sisters, we see that in general the Sisters are more inclined than the Brothers to rate the listed goals as very important. The difference between the Brothers and the Sisters is largest with regard to the God-centred goals. For example, “doing the will of God” is very important to 88% of Sisters in contrast to 73% of the Brothers. Similarly, while 77% of the Sisters consider “bringing Jesus to others” a very important goal in their lives, only 56% of the Brothers feel so.

With regard to the “other-centred” goals, however, the difference between the Brothers and the Sisters is hardly significant. “Service to others” is equally

**Chart 21. Goals in Life: Brothers Versus Sisters**

(Percent responding 'very important')



important to both the groups. As for “working for the downtrodden” and “fighting for justice,” the Sisters rate these only marginally higher than the Brothers.

Personal goals like “eternal salvation,” “personal growth,” “happiness in the present,” and “peace of mind” also received fewer endorsements from the Brothers compared to the Sisters. An exception to this pattern is “succeeding in life,” which was rated somewhat higher in importance by the Brothers.

Taken together, these data suggest that the candidates to priesthood and religious life today are more focussed on God-centred goals, and relatively less concerned about self-oriented and other-oriented goals. The traditional spirituality, which emphasizes one’s relationship with God – the vertical dimension – without laying adequate stress on one’s relationship to self and others – the horizontal dimension –, appears to dominate the consciousness of the Sisters and the Brothers. The disjunction between God-orientation and other/self-orientation raises the question whether formation is still geared to an “otherworldly” spirituality.

## ***2. Motivations for Joining***

The reasons why people choose to become priests or religious are many and varied. Lack of proper motivation in vocation is often cited as one of the reasons for the sagging credibility of the priests and religious today. Ascertaining the real motivations of those who opt for priesthood or religious life is an extremely complex and difficult task. For one thing, such motivations are often unconscious. And even when the candidates are conscious of their real motivations, they may not divulge

them in a survey because of the strong social desirability factor. It would be difficult to admit even anonymously in a public survey that one is becoming a priest or a religious for what the society considers to be the wrong reasons.

**Table 1. Motivations for Joining (%)**

	Very Important	Important	Not so/ Not at all Important
To respond to God’s call	55	32	13
To bring the message of Jesus to others	50	38	12
To serve others	50	39	11
To grow closer to Jesus	53	33	14
To liberate the poor and the oppressed	40	41	19
To ensure eternal salvation	27	39	34
The status of priests and religious	20	33	47
To have a better future	18	26	56
To escape difficulties at home	7	14	79
Not to be a burden to the family	6	14	80
To fulfill the expectations of others	7	25	72
To avoid the challenges of the world	6	14	80
To help support the family	5	11	84

The motivations for opting to become a priest or a religious conform to the pattern observed with regard to the respondents’ goals in life (Table 1). The four most important motivations are: responding to God’s call, growing closer to Jesus, bringing the message of Jesus to others, and service to others. Fifty percent or more respondents rated these as “very important” motivations in their choice of vocation. These correspond to the respondents’ pre-eminent goals in life (see Chart 20). The motivation next in order of importance is the liberation of the poor and the oppressed, which is a “very important” motivating factor to 40% of the respondents.

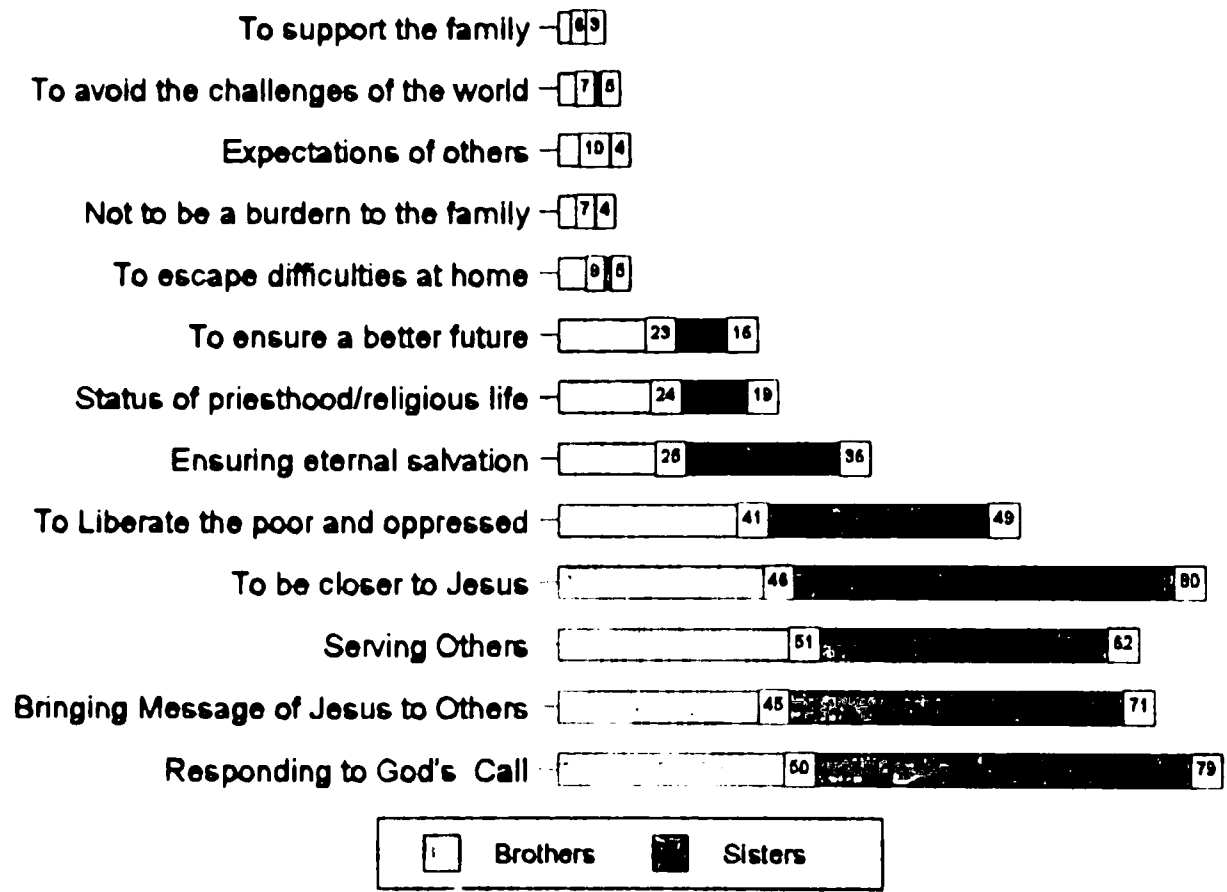
More mundane reasons like the status and the security of priesthood and religious life were “very important” motivations according to about a fifth of the

respondents. Family problems, economic difficulties and expectations of others were reported as “very important” considerations by less than 10% of those surveyed.

As Chart 21 indicates, there are significant differences in the way the Brothers and the Sisters assess the motivations of their companions. God/Jesus-centred motivations are more important for the Sisters than for the Brothers. For example, while as many as 79% of the Sisters feel that “responding to God’s call” is a very important motivation, only 50% of the Brothers are inclined to think so. Similarly, “growing closer to Jesus” is a very important motivation according to 80% of the Sisters in contrast to only 46% of the Brothers. The difference in the perceptions of the Brothers and the Sisters narrows considerably with regard to the relative importance of the other-oriented motivations such as “service” and “liberation of the poor and the oppressed.” And the trend is reversed for the self/family related motivations. For instance, more Brothers than Sisters consider the “status of priests and religious,” “a better future,” and the “expectations of others” as very important motivations.

Chart 22.Motivations: Brothers versus Sisters

(Percent saying “very important”)



Another significant factor that influences the perception of the relative importance of different motivations is the intellectual calibre of the respondents. Candidates who performed poorly in the SSC examination accorded greater

importance to God/Jesus-related motivations in comparison to those who performed well in the SSC. For example, “responding to God’s call” was marked as a very important motivation by 70% of the respondents who passed SSC in the pass class, in contrast to only 45% of those who passed SSC with a distinction. Again, whereas 67% of the respondents with pass class felt that “growing closer to Jesus” is a very important motivating factor, only 41% of those with a distinction agreed with this assessment. The trend was reversed with regard to self/family centred motivations. Double the number of distinction respondents, compared to pass class respondents, rated as very important motivations like “escaping the difficulties at home,” “not being a burden to the family,” “expectations of others,” and “supporting one’s family”.

It should be noted that this difference persisted even after controlling for the effects of gender. Therefore, it does not appear to be a reflection of the difference between the Brothers and the Sisters noted earlier (Chart 21).

#### ***IV. Perspectives on Formation***

##### ***1. Perspectives on Formation***

In order to understand how the candidates to priesthood and religious life view their formation, fourteen statements touching upon various aspects of formation were included in the survey questionnaire. The respondents were asked to indicate if each of these statements would be true or false in their case.

As Table 2 makes clear, the respondents in general are of the view that the formation they have received has helped them to develop several positive qualities and to become better persons. An overwhelming majority of 80% or more claim that their formation has made them better persons with greater self-awareness and sense of responsibility. Similarly, about three-fourths of the respondents believe that their formation has increased their self-confidence and emotional maturity, endowed them with relevant knowledge and interpersonal skills, changed their outlook on life, and deepened their faith. Formation received relatively lower ratings on increasing self-reliance.

While the evaluation of the specific aspects of formation was very favourable, responses to the general questions about the overall effectiveness of formation were not as positive. A substantial 36% of the respondents, for example, indicated that their formation was not worth the time and money invested in it. On the negative side, nearly one-third of the respondents indicated that formation has created doubts about their vocation, and more than a quarter of them stated that it has, in fact, decreased their enthusiasm for vocation.

**Table 2: Evaluation of Formation by Gender**  
(% Responding “True”)

<b>The Formation I have received:</b>	<b>ALL</b>	<b>Brothers</b>	<b>Sisters</b>
Has made me a better person	83	79	90
Has deepened my faith	70	60	85
Has made emotionally more mature	76	72	83
Has made me more self-reliant	63	58	70
Has made me more self-confident	77	75	80
Has helped me to know myself better	90	88	93
Has made me more responsible	80	77	86
Has helped me in interpersonal relations	73	72	76
Has changed the way I look at life	74	74	75
Has decreased enthusiasm for my vocation	27	29	23
Has created doubts about my vocation	31	34	27
Has helped to acquire relevant knowledge	75	72	79
Has prepared me for the ministry	69	61	82
Was worth the time and energy invested in it	64	57	76

A comparison of the responses of the Brothers and the Sisters reveals that the Sisters are far more positive about the formation they receive than the Brothers. While this pattern is consistent throughout the table, the difference is particularly striking with regard to the last two items, which deal with the overall effectiveness of formation. Whereas 82% of the Sisters say that formation has prepared them for their ministry, only 61% of the Brothers agree with this. And while 76% of the Sisters feel that the time and money invested in their formation was well worth it, only 57% of the Brothers endorse this view.

Among the Brothers, there was no significant difference between the philosophy students and the theology students in the way they evaluated the formation, except on the question of deepening the faith and preparing for ministry.



The theology students tend to evaluate their formation somewhat more favourably in these respects.

Another noticeable trend in the data is that, among the Brothers, the brighter students – in terms of their SSC record -- evaluated their formation less favourably than the weaker ones. For example, less than half (49%) of the distinction students said that their formation deepened their faith in contrast to about two-thirds (65%) of the pass class students. Similarly, while 64% of the pass class students felt that their formation prepared them for their ministry, only 42% of the distinction students shared this feeling. And whereas 59% of the pass class students thought that the time and money invested in formation was well worth it, only 41% of the distinction students concurred with this assessment. This trend was not observed among the Sisters.

In sum, the majority of the respondents are of the view that their formation has helped them in different ways. The Sisters are generally more positive about their formation than the Brothers. And among the Brothers, the weak students have greater appreciation for the formation they receive than the bright ones.

## ***2. Formation House Versus the World Outside***

One hypothesis that is often advanced in discussions about priestly and religious formation is that the artificial environment of the formation houses, sheltered as they are from the mainstream of life and its challenges, in fact prevent rather than promote the growth of the candidates into mature and responsible adults (see, for example, D'Lima 1994).

We have seen that our respondents generally feel that their formation has helped them to grow in several respects. But what would have been the situation if they had not entered a convent or a seminary? Had they continued their life out there in the real world like every body else, would they have perhaps been better equipped to face life and its challenges?

In an attempt to answer this question, we asked our respondents to compare themselves with their peers in the world outside on the following personality traits: self-reliance, emotional maturity, self-confidence, ability to relate to others, adaptability to different life-situations, realistic approach to life, initiative, and hard work. The findings are presented in Table 3.

There is a clear and consistent trend in the data. The vast majority of the respondents rated the people of their age in the world outside significantly higher on

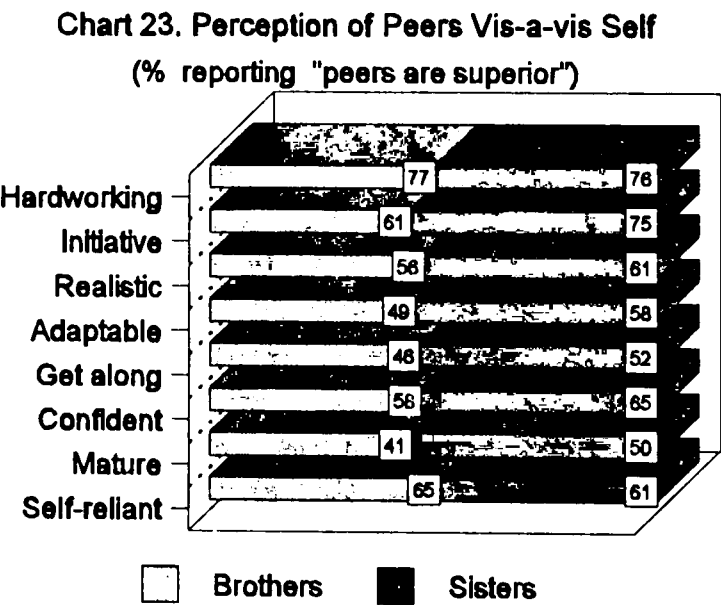
all the qualities. Not even on a single quality did they feel that they were equal, let alone superior, to their peers in the world.

Table 3. Comparison of Self with Peers in the World Outside (%)

People of my age in the world outside:	True	False	Not Sure
Are more self-reliant	62	17	21
Have greater emotional maturity	43	33	24
Face difficulties with greater confidence	59	20	21
Are able to get along better with people	47	27	26
Adapt more easily to different situations	51	27	22
Are more realistic in their approach to life	57	20	23
Take more initiative in life	64	18	18
Are more hardworking	74	13	13

Almost three-fourths of the respondents had no doubts that their peers are more hardworking than themselves. 60% or more were of the view that their peers outside take more initiative in life, are more self-reliant and face difficulties with greater confidence. There is greater variation in the perceptions regarding emotional maturity, ability to get along with people and adaptability to different situations. But even on these, the majority clearly rate their peers outside higher than themselves.

Are there any differences in the way the Brothers and the Sisters rate themselves vis-a-vis the people of their age in the world outside? Chart 23 compares the responses of the Brothers and the Sisters on this question. Although the Sisters evaluated their formation more positively than the Brothers, they too, like the Brothers, rated their peers in the world outside superior to



themselves on all the eight qualities. In fact, more Sisters than Brothers rated their peers in the world as superior to themselves on all the listed qualities except for self-reliance and hard work. The difference was most pronounced with regard to taking initiative in life, emotional maturity and adaptability. \_

Table 4 reveals another significant trend in the data. Throughout the table, the percentages in the left column (4 Years or less) are the lowest, and those in the right column (10 Years or above) are the highest. This means that those who spent longer years in a seminary or formation house are more likely to perceive their peers outside as superior to themselves. In other words, the longer the formation, the greater the sense of inadequacy vis-a-vis one's peers. For example, while 73% of those who have been in formation ten years or longer feel that their peers in the world outside are more self-reliant than themselves, only 57% of those who have been in formation for 4 years or less feel so. Again, in contrast to 67% of those who have been information for ten years or more, only 48% of those who spent four years or less in a formation house find their peers outside more realistic in their approach to life.. This trend is consistent throughout the table.

**Table 4. Comparison of Self with Peers by Number of Years in Formation**  
*(Percent saying "Peers are Superior")*

People of my age in the world outside:	1-4 Years	5-9 Years	10 Yrs & Above
Are more self-reliant	57	61	73
Have greater emotional maturity	38	43	52
Face difficulties with greater confidence	53	60	68
Are able to get along better with people	46	49	48
Adapt more easily to different situations	46	54	56
Are more realistic in their approach to life	48	57	67
Take more initiative in life	62	65	71
Are more hardworking	73	75	82

It is important to note here that the inverse relationship observed between the duration of formation and the sense of adequacy vis-a-vis peers persisted even after

controlling the effects of age. So, it is not the age of the respondents that determines the way they compare themselves with their peers, but rather the number of years they have actually spent in a formation house. In other words, the above data cannot be interpreted to mean that the older Brothers and Sisters, compared to the younger ones, are more likely to consider their peers superior to themselves. The operative factor here is not age, but the duration of formation.

### 3. *Clergy Versus Laity: A Comparative Study*

Are the laity really better equipped to face the challenges of life than the clergy, who have had the benefit of long years of structured formation, as the majority of our respondents seem to suggest? Could it be that the real life-experience in the world outside is more conducive to developmental maturity than the life in a formation house, which is largely insulated from mainstream of life? Or, is it simply a case of the grass looking greener on the other side?

Extensive and well-designed research would be required to answer this question with any measure of confidence. A very limited attempt was made in this study to explore this question by comparing the clergy and the laity on two attributes, namely, achievement orientation<sup>2</sup> and self-abasement.<sup>3</sup> An independent sample of 350 lay people of different walks of life was selected for the purpose of comparison. Care was taken to ensure that the laity sample was comparable to the clerical respondents (Brothers and Sisters) in age, education, and cultural background.

An achievement orientation scale and a self-abasement scale were constructed using items adapted from the *Modified Activities Index* developed by Rulla, Riddick and Imoda (1976: 337).<sup>4</sup> Each scale consisted of six items and could have a maximum score of 12 and a minimum of 0.

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2. *Achievement orientation* implies the need "to accomplish something difficult ... To overcome obstacles and attain a high standard. To excel oneself. To rival and surpass others. To increase self-regard by successful exercise of talent" (Rullah, Imoda and Ridick, 1978:202).

3. *Self-abasement* means "to accept injury, blame, criticism, punishment. To become resigned to fate. To admit inferiority, error, wrongdoing, or defeat... To blame, belittle or mutilate the self. To seek and enjoy pain, punishment, illness or misfortune" ( Rullah, Imoda and Ridick, 1978:202).

4. The items that were used to construct these scales as well as the responses of the clergy and the laity to each item are given in Table A and Table B in the Appendix.

On the achievement orientation scale, the laity scored higher than the clergy (Brothers and Sisters). The laity had a mean score of 8.39, in contrast to the clergy's mean score of 6.93. A t-test comparing the mean scores of the laity and the clergy showed the difference between the two groups on achievement orientation to be statistically significant.<sup>5</sup> Among the clergy, the Sisters' score on achievement orientation was significantly lower than that of the Brothers.

On the self-abasement scale, the clergy scored higher than the laity. The mean scores on this scale were 5.11 for the clergy and 4.22 for the laity. The t-test procedure comparing the means showed that these two groups are significantly different from each other in self-abasement.<sup>6</sup> The clergy are thus more prone to self-abasement, compared to their lay peers in the world outside. And within the clergy, the Sisters scored higher on self-abasement than the Brothers.

These findings on achievement orientation and self-abasement seem to support the hypothesis that, compared to the clergy, their peers in the world outside have greater developmental maturity. However, this does not necessarily mean that formation is responsible for the low achievement orientation and high self-abasement observed among the clergy. It could also be that priesthood and religious life tend to attract those who are by nature low on achievement and high on self-abasement.

#### ***4. Home Versus Formation House***

The Charter of Priestly Formation in India states: "Taking into consideration both the Indian concept of the man totally dedicated to God and the situation in this country where so many lack even the necessities of life, the Seminary in its life and environment should help the seminarians to be not only poor in spirit but also living examples of simplicity and detachment" (3.2.2.f). It has been observed by some that the seminaries and formation houses introduce the candidates to a culture and life-style that is different from their own and thus alienate them from their people and their way of life. Is this observation valid? How different is the life-style of the seminaries and formation institutes from that of the candidates' home? We asked our respondents to compare their life in the formation house with their life at home in several respects. The findings are presented in Table 5.

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5. An Independent Samples t-test yielded a t of -10.65, with a significance level of .000 (2-tailed).

6. Independent Samples t-test resulted in a t value of 6.55, which had significance level of .000 (2-tailed).

**Table 5. Comparison of Home with Formation House (%)**

<b><i>WHEN I WAS AT HOME, I HAD:</i></b>	<b><i>TRUE</i></b>	<b><i>FALSE</i></b>	<b><i>NOT SURE</i></b>
A more simple life-style	67	23	10
Better food to eat	43	43	14
To face more difficulties	34	52	14
More money to spend	22	66	12
To follow stricter discipline	26	63	11
More independence	56	33	11
To do more manual work	39	52	9
A stronger faith	60	19	21
A better opinion of priests and nuns	78	13	9

The vast majority of the candidates agree that, compared to the formation house, they had more a simple life-style at home. Only 22% had more money to spend when they were at home. Opinion is divided with regard to food. 43% said that they had better food to eat at home, and as many disagreed.<sup>7</sup>

The majority of the respondents felt that they had more independence and less strict discipline at home. It is noteworthy, however, that more than a quarter of the respondents came from homes which enjoined a stricter discipline than the formation house. A substantial 39% of the candidates indicated that they did more manual work at home than in the formation house.

On the spiritual front, 60% said that their faith was stronger when they were at home. This might seem to be inconsistent what the majority of the respondents (70%) said in another part of the survey that the formation they have received has helped them to deepen their faith (see Table 2). Perhaps, what they imply is that at

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7. It may be noted here that several respondents who said that they had better food at home offered a clarification that by "better" they mean tastier, and not richer.

home their faith was stronger in terms of certainty, whereas now it is deeper in the sense of being more enlightened and mature.

The vast majority of the respondents also admitted that their perception of priests and nuns has changed since their days at home. 78% of them said that they had a better opinion of the priests and the nuns when they were at home. Possibly, a case of familiarity breeding contempt!

Predictably, the economic situation of the respondent’s family has an effect on the way he or she perceives the formation house as Table 6 reveals. Those who come from economically weaker sections of society are likely to say that, compared to the formation house, at home they had to face more hardships, do more manual labour and lead a more simple life. They are also less likely to state that they had better food to eat and more money to spend when they were at home.

**Table 6 . Home versus Formation House by Economic Status of Family (%)**

<i><b>WHEN I WAS AT HOME, I HAD:</b></i>	<i><b>Well Off</b></i>	<i><b>Average</b></i>	<i><b>Poor/ Very Poor</b></i>
A more simple life-style	60	71	76
Better food to eat	56	40	20
To face more difficulties	24	37	53
More money to spend	34	18	11
To follow stricter discipline	26	26	29
More independence	61	55	50
To do more manual work	28	42	55
A stronger faith	65	59	59
A better opinion of priests and nuns	80	79	74

There is not much difference in the way the Brothers and the Sisters compared their home with the formation house, except for manual work. 45% of the Brothers, as opposed to only 29% of the Sisters, said that they had to do more manual work when they were at home. This is probably a reflection of the fact that in many regions it is the boys, not so much the girls, who are expected to engage in manual

labour. It is also possible that the Sisters in training are required to do more manual work than the Brothers.

**5. Evaluation of Formators**

The effectiveness of priestly and religious formation depends to a large extent on the formators. How effective are the formators in the seminaries and religious houses of formation in India today? The survey sought to elicit the views of the respondents on this question. The questionnaire listed ten character traits, and the respondents were asked to indicate whether each of these traits would be applicable to “most”, “many”, “some” or “a few” of their formators. The findings are presented in Table 7. To simplify presentation, the last two categories “some” and “a few” have been collapsed into a single category.

**Table 7. Evaluation of Formators (%)**

My Formators are/were:	Most	Many	Some/ A Few
Committed	33	28	39
Prayerful	30	28	41
Supportive	24	34	42
Honest	24	32	44
Authoritarian	24	30	46
Open-minded	19	27	54
Exemplary	21	26	53
Just and Impartial	14	26	60
Competent	19	28	53
Overly Strict	13	24	63

Formators will find the data in Table 7 discouraging, to say the least. According to the *Charter of Priestly Formation for India*, formators “should be exemplary priests capable of communicating priestly ideals to the seminarians not only by word but also by their life and pastoral experiences” (No. 4.5.1). However, only about one-fifth of our respondents characterize most of their formators as exemplary; more than half feel that the term exemplary can be applied only to some



or a few of their formators. As for the competence of the formators, only a few or some of them are competent according to more than half of the respondents. Indeed, only 19% consider most of them competent. The question about the open-mindedness of formators drew a similar response.

The formators received the lowest marks for justice and impartiality. As many as 60% were of the opinion that only some or a few of the formators were just and impartial. A meagre 14% considered most of them just and impartial. The formators fared marginally better on honesty. Most of them were seen as honest by about a quarter of the respondents, as opposed to 44% who said that only some or a few are honest. We find a very similar distribution of responses on the question on whether or not they find the formators supportive.

Formators are seen in a comparatively better light with regard to commitment and prayerfulness, with about one-third of the respondents indicating that most of the formators are committed and prayerful. On the negative side, about one-fourth of the respondents feel that most of the formators are authoritarian. Only 13%, however, felt that most of them are overly strict.

**Table 8. Evaluation of Formators by Gender**  
**(% Responding “Most”)**

<b>Most of My Formators Are/Were:</b>	<b>Brothers</b>	<b>Sisters</b>	<b>All</b>
<b>Committed</b>	20	55	33
<b>Prayerful</b>	16	53	30
<b>Supportive</b>	16	37	24
<b>Honest</b>	16	38	24
<b>Authoritarian</b>	25	21	24
<b>Open-minded</b>	12	31	19
<b>Exemplary</b>	13	33	20
<b>Just and Impartial</b>	11	18	14
<b>Competent</b>	15	25	19
<b>Overly Strict</b>	14	11	13

It may be recalled that the Sisters evaluated their formation more favourably than the Brothers. This is true also with regard to the formators. The Sisters tend to perceive their formators a lot more positively than the Brothers (see Table 8).

Whereas more than half of the Sisters perceived most of the formators as committed and prayerful, only 20% or less of the Brothers would say so about most of their formators. Nearly 40% of the Sisters found most of their formators supportive and honest; only 16% of the Brothers applied these descriptors to most of their formators. Again, while about a third of the Sisters characterized most of their formators as exemplary and open-minded, the proportion of the Brothers who thought so was only a little over 10%. Similar differences exist with regard to the other items in the table as well. Clearly, the Sisters see their formators in a much better light than the Brothers.

### **V. Feelings about Vocational Decision**

Finally, we asked the respondents some questions in order to elicit their present feelings about the decision to become a priest or religious.

As Table 9 indicates, close to 40% of the respondents feel that, when they joined, they were not old enough to make a mature choice. Naturally, those who had joined at a younger age are more likely to feel this way than those who joined when they were older. In fact, close to 60% of those who joined when they were 15 or younger – about one-fourth of all those who have joined belong to this category – said they were too young to make a mature choice. In contrast, less than 10% of those who joined when they were 21 or older said that theirs was not a mature decision. Compared to the Brothers, the Sisters were less likely to feel that, when they joined, they were too young to make a mature decision (Table 10). This is to be expected because, as we have seen, the Sisters normally join when they are older.

One-third of the respondents said that they found it hard to adjust to the life-style of the formation house. There was hardly any difference between the Brothers and the Sisters in this respect. Nor was there any correlation between the age of joining and adjustment problems.

About one-fourth of the respondents felt that they could not be their real selves in the formation house. The Brothers are somewhat more likely to own up to going through formation hiding their real selves (Table 10). Age of joining, too, was a significant factor. Those who joined earlier were more likely to say that formation made them hide their real selves.

**Table 9. Feelings about Choice of Vocation (%)**

	<b>True</b>	<b>False</b>	<b>Not Sure</b>
When I joined, I was too young to make a mature decision	38	53	10
It was hard to adjust to the life-style of the formation house	33	59	8
Formation has made me hide my real self	25	60	15
There have been times when I have seriously thought about leaving this way of life	55	34	10
If one of my close relatives or friends shows interest in becoming a priest or religious, I would encourage him/her	65	19	16
If I had a chance to decide all over again, I would not opt for this way of life.	16	67	17

More than half the respondents have at one time or other seriously thought of leaving the way of life they had chosen. And the Brothers are more likely to have entertained thoughts about leaving than the Sisters. As might be expected, those who joined at a younger age are more prone to have second thoughts about their decision. For example, about two-thirds of those who had entered formation when they were 15 years of age or younger had seriously thought about leaving, in contrast to less than half of those who joined when they were 21 or older.

A good test of whether one is happy about the choice one has made is whether or not one would encourage one's friends and relatives to make the same choice. Would our respondents encourage their close relatives and friends if they show interest in becoming a priest or religious? One out every five respondents indicated that he or she would not encourage close relatives or friends to become priests or religious, even if they are interested. And one out every six was unsure. In other words, more than one-third of the Brothers and Sisters, 35% to be precise, are either unwilling or unsure of encouraging their friends and relatives who want to become priests or religious. This seems to be an indication that quite a few of the Brothers and Sisters now feel unhappy or unsure about the choice they have made.

**Table 10. Feelings about Vocational Decision by Gender**  
(% Responding 'True')

	Brothers	Sisters
When I joined, I was too young to make a mature decision	42	32
It was hard for me to adjust to the life-style of the formation house	33	35
Formation has made me hide my real self	30	19
There have been times when I have seriously thought about leaving this way of life	62	47
If one of my close relatives or friends shows interest in becoming a priest or religious, I would encourage him/her	62	73
If I had a chance to decide all over again, I would not opt for this way of life.	18	13

The response pattern to the last item (Table 10) appears to reinforce this conclusion. One out of every six respondents agreed with the statement: "If I had a chance to decide all over again, I would not opt for this way of life." If we add to this those who were unsure, we get one-third of all the respondents who either regret the decision to join or have doubts about the choice they have made.

Fewer Sisters than Brothers seem to be disillusioned about the way of life they have chosen. In addition to the 18% of the Brothers who said that they will not choose this way of life again, there were another 20% who were unsure, taking the total of regretting or doubting candidates to the priesthood to 38%. In contrast, only about 25% of the Sisters fall into this category.

Among the Brothers themselves, there was not much difference between the philosophers and the theologians on this question; 21% of the philosophers said they would not opt again for this way of life as opposed to 16.5% of the theologians. As for the Sisters, there was little difference between the Juniors and the Finally Professed on this count.

The age of joining has some influence on the way they now feel about their decision to join priesthood or religious life. About 20% of those who joined at the age of 15 or earlier said that they will not opt again to become priests or nuns, while only 13% of those who joined after they were 20 felt this way.

## ***VI. Some Issues the Study Raises***

We shall now look at some of the issues the findings of this study raise and their implications for the recruitment and formation of the candidates to priesthood and religious life.

### ***1. Vocation: A Free Decision?***

In his recent Apostolic Exhortation on the formation of Priests, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, of Pope John Paul II recalls the words of his predecessor, Paul VI, in order to emphasize how essential freedom is to vocation: “There cannot be vocations, unless they be free; that is, unless they be spontaneous offerings of oneself, conscious, generous, total... Oblations, we call them: herein lies in practice the heart of the matter... ” (No. 36, para 7).

When a candidate applies to become a priest or religious, it is usually presumed that he or she has made a spontaneous, conscious and free decision to respond to God’s call. However, some of the data reviewed above seem to suggest that this presumption might be unwarranted in a number of cases.

The Charter of Priestly Formation for India emphasizes: “All forms of premature selection of candidates should be discouraged. Selecting candidates at an early age may have several harmful psychological effects. At this stage of their life the candidates are too young to discern their vocation” (2. 4).

The admonition of the Charter notwithstanding, the data show that a large proportion of the candidates, especially the candidates to priesthood, are still being recruited in the early teens, when they are unlikely to be able to discern their vocation (see Chart 9).

Early recruitment is often defended as a way of nurturing vocations, which would otherwise be lost, if they remain exposed to the fleeting attractions of the world. The question, however, is whether a desire one feels in childhood or in the early teens can be realistically considered a vocation, because at that tender age one lacks the psychological and physical maturity to take an informed decision about one’s future. For, as Pope Paul VI said “There cannot be vocations unless they be free.”

Obviously, the decision to enter a seminary or religious house of formation is not a final decision to become a priest or religious. Ideally, seminaries and formation houses are places where one explores and discerns one’s vocation; the candidates have the freedom to discontinue at any stage. Indeed, in principle they are

free to leave. But in reality how free are they to leave? Looking back on their decision to join, 38% of the respondents – nearly 50% if we include the “unsure category” – confessed that when they joined they were too young to make a mature decision. And 55% of the respondents – 62% of the Brothers -- have stated that there have been times when they seriously thought about leaving this way of life. Furthermore, one out of every six respondents categorically stated that, if there was a chance to decide all over again, he or she would not opt for this way of life. And another one-sixth said they were “unsure”. Taken together, we find that one-third of the respondents are either unhappy or unsure about the decision they have made. For the Brothers this figure is as high as 38%. And this is probably an undercount since not every one who feels that he or she has made a wrong decision is likely to be candid about it in a public survey, even when it is anonymous, because of the strong social desirability factor involved.

Yet, so few do in fact leave. There is, therefore, reason to believe that among the seminarians and the Sisters in India today, there are quite a few who wish to leave, but do not feel free to do so. The labelling theory in sociology has highlighted the social processes that make it difficult for someone like a seminarian or a junior sister to leave the way of life they have chosen even when they want to. Take the case of a seminarian, for example. Entering a seminary is akin to a rite of passage. He is immediately accorded a new status and a new title, that of a “Brother”. From then on, society looks upon him and treats him as a “Brother”. He is required to follow a life-style and behaviour pattern different from those of his peers. In some parts of the country, a seminarian is expected to display his special status externally by the kind of clothes he wears and in the way he wears them.

Labelling theorists have elaborated three reasons why, once a special status like that of a Brother is accorded to a person in society, it becomes difficult for him to relinquish it, even if he would like to (Becker, 1963; Sutherland and Cressey, 1974). First of all, *conformity* is easier. In general, people tend to conform to the expectations of society. For example, it has been observed that teenagers who are labelled as delinquents and treated as delinquents tend to become delinquents. If conformity is easier even in the case of a socially undesirable label like ‘delinquent’, how much more would it be true in the case of a socially desirable label like ‘Brother’. It may be recalled here that the majority of the families of the respondents encouraged them to become priests or religious. If they were to leave, their families would be disappointed.

Secondly, labelling results in *differential association*. Once one becomes a Brother, he is grouped with other people who have been similarly labelled. In the seminary, which for all practical purposes becomes his world during the crucial phase of his transition from adolescence to adulthood, he is forced to associate, for the most

part, with other Brothers and Fathers, who idealize the priestly or religious way of life. Naturally, it is the clerical ideal that will be reinforced in him. On the other hand, he does not get as much opportunity to associate with outsiders, especially girls, and be exposed to ideas and influences that might enable him to reexamine the choice he has made in life. Differential association thus works to reinforce the priestly ideal and to block exposure to countervailing tendencies.

A third factor that makes a reconsideration difficult is what labelling theorists call *changed opportunity structure*. If a seminarian leaves and re-enters the mainstream, especially in the later stages of formation, he finds himself in a changed opportunity structure. Job or career opportunities that would have been available to him if had not joined are no longer open to him. The long years he has spent studying philosophy and/or theology are unlikely to be of much help in the job market. Even those with a college degree have it in subjects like philosophy, which is hardly useful to make a living. And he finds himself too old to start from scratch all over again. For these reasons and others, it is likely that once someone enters the seminary he is inclined to continue, even when he has doubts about the choice he has made. And what is said of the Brothers applies to the Sisters as well.

## ***2. Intellectual Formation***

Underlining the need for what it calls “an extremely rigorous intellectual formation” for the candidates to priesthood, the Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* states: “If we expect every Christian ... to be prepared to make a defence of the faith and to account for the hope that is in us, then all the more should candidates for the priesthood and priests have diligent care of the quality of their intellectual formation in their education and pastoral activity”. The present situation of the world, the Exhortation adds, “strongly demands a high level of intellectual formation, such as will enable the priests to proclaim ... the changeless Gospel of Christ and to make it credible to the legitimate demands of human reason” (51, para 2).

The data of an earlier national survey on the Catholic Priesthood in India showed that there is a serious erosion of the credibility of the clergy particularly among the educated laity (Parathazham 1994, 707-708). Viewed against this background, the finding on the academic background of the candidates to priesthood and religious life is a cause for serious concern. We have seen that two-thirds of the candidates to priesthood and religious life today are those who passed the SSC in second class or pass class (Chart 13). Ordinarily, they would not even be eligible for admission to a regular college. And without a college degree one cannot even become a lower division clerk in India today!

Sometimes it is tacitly assumed that seminaries and formation houses can somehow compensate for the intellectual deficiency of the candidates or, at least, act as a sieve to ensure minimum academic qualification. Perhaps, this was the case in the past, when the aptitude of the candidates to priesthood and religious life was adjudged on the basis of their ability to cope with the demands of mastering philosophy and theology. Today it seems to be the other way around: intellectual demands in formation are tailored to match the ability of the candidates. One often hears formators and teachers complaining about the declining intellectual standards of the candidates. But, curiously enough, as the years go by, fewer and fewer students in seminaries seem to fail in the examinations, and even those who fail will get through almost automatically in the second attempt. It is only an exceptionally “unrealistic” teacher, who will fail a candidate a second time! Now a days one hardly ever hears of anyone being disqualified from the priesthood because of a lack of intellectual aptitude (see also “Vianney Syndrome” in Parathazham 1994: 712). This only means that the intellectual demands in the seminaries are undergoing a continuous downward revision to match the capabilities of the candidates who come. It is not the demands of the curriculum that determine the aptitude of the candidates today; on the contrary, the standards of the candidates seem to regulate the kind of demands made on them. This certainly does not augur well for the future of the church in India.

### ***3. Human Formation***

Insisting on the necessity of adequate human formation for the future priests, Pope John Paul II writes in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*: “The whole work of priestly formation should be deprived of its necessary foundation if it lacked a suitable human formation ... Future priests should therefore cultivate a series of human qualities, not only out of proper concern for due growth and realization of self, but also with a view to the ministry” (No. 43). In a similar vein, the *Charter of Priestly Formation for India* says: “To be Christ-like the seminarian will strive to be fully human: a leader of people, gentle and kind, open and ready to listen, cheerful and patient, honest and true to his word; a man of self-respect, sincerity and courage, constantly concerned for truth and justice, unafraid to take decisions and persevering in carrying them out” (3.2.1.a).

If human formation, as the Church documents emphasize, is the necessary foundation of priestly – and religious – formation, the findings of this study suggest that priestly and religious formation in India rests on a rather shaky foundation. As we have seen, on all the eight human qualities listed in the survey questionnaire our respondents uniformly rated their peers in the world outside superior to themselves. It may also be recalled that this is not merely a matter of perception, but a reflection



of the actual state of affairs as indicated by the scores of the laity and the clergy on achievement and self-abasement scales.

It is paradoxical that those who have had the benefit of years of systematically planned formation under the guidance of competent formators should feel that, in terms of human qualities, they are worse off than their peers who have had no such formation. As already indicated, there are two possible explanations for this paradox. It could be the result of a process of self-selection, that is to say, those who feel attracted to the priesthood and religious life are, compared to the others, weak on human qualities to begin with. More research is required to test the validity of this hypothesis.

Alternately, it could be that the artificial atmosphere of the formation houses, insulated as they are from the problems and challenges of real life, is not conducive to the development of human qualities in the candidates. Errol D'Lima has observed in a recent article: "If the priest's task (office) is to enable a believing community to celebrate its worship of God, he must prepare for it by being part of that community, sharing its hopes and failures, its triumphs and trials. He must also be convinced that God's presence will be discovered palpably in the lives of the members of that community. Such a preparation demands continual and in-depth insertion in the life of the community and this is something the seminary and its structures do not allow. In fact, the long years spent in a seminary and away from a living community seem calculated to make the future priest dysfunctional" (1994, 698). Developing human qualities without immersion into real life would be a little bit like teaching someone to swim without ever taking him or her to a pool!

The present study offers some, if limited, evidence in support of the second hypothesis, namely, the current structures and policies of formation may indeed inhibit, rather than promote, the development of human qualities in the candidates. While comparing themselves with their peers outside, those who had spent longer years in formation were more likely than those who spent fewer years to rate their peers superior to themselves. In other words, the longer the duration of formation, the greater the sense of inadequacy vis-a-vis one's peers in the world outside. From the point of view of the candidates at least, it appears that formation has stymied their growth at the human level. However, in the absence of corroborative evidence such a conclusion can at best be only tentative.

Whatever the explanation, the fact remains that "the foundation of priestly and religious formation," the human formation, needs to be urgently reinforced.

#### **4. Spiritual Formation: “Sacristy Spirituality” ?**

The data on the goals and motivations of the Brothers and Sisters reveal a tendency towards a compartmentalized spirituality – one that places God-directed goals at the centre and relegates the other-oriented and self-oriented goals to the periphery. Most of the respondents attach great importance to doing the will of God and following Jesus. Very few of them, however, accord as much importance to serving others, liberating the oppressed, and self-actualization through personal growth. The disjunction between the vertical dimension – God-orientation – and the horizontal dimension – other/self-orientation – seems to suggest that formation is still oriented towards the traditional otherworldly spirituality. The basic thrust of the social teaching of the Church over the last one hundred years, which is best summed up in the dramatic declaration of the Third Synod of Bishops in 1971 that the work for justice and the transformation of the world is a “constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel,” appears to have had little impact on the spiritual formation in the seminaries and religious houses of formation in India.

Pope John Paul II, speaking in Assisi some years ago, emphasized that the social teaching is a clarion call for the Church to move out of the sacristy (see Meehan, 1995, 336). A spirituality that does not translate into social concern, especially for the marginalised, remains a “sacristy spirituality.” If the findings of this study are any indication, formation in India has not moved out of the sacristy yet!

#### **5. Formators**

The vital importance of having well-trained and exemplary formators is underscored in every Church document on priestly and religious formation. The Vatican II decree on Priestly Formation, *Optatam Totius*, says: “Since the training of seminarians hinges, to a very large extent, on wise regulations and suitable teachers, seminary directors and professors should be chosen from among the best, and be painstakingly prepared by sound doctrine, appropriate pastoral experience and special spiritual and pedagogical training” (No. 5).

*Pastores Dabo Vobis* echoes the Council: “It is evident that much of the effectiveness of the training offered depends on the maturity and strength of personality of those entrusted with formation, both from the human and the Gospel points of view. And so it is especially important both to select them carefully and to encourage them to become ever more suitable for carrying out the task entrusted to them” (No. 66, para 2).

The evaluation of their formators by the respondents clearly reveal that not many of the formators today come across as exemplary and inspiring role models. As we have seen, a large number of the respondents call into question the integrity,

impartiality and competence of many, if not most, of their formators. Clearly, they have not always been chosen from among the best as the Church demands; or, if indeed they are the best, then even the best fail to measure up to the expectations of those whose formation they are entrusted with.

Perhaps some of this negativism towards the formators could be attributed to the unrealistic expectations of the idealistic youth. However, it is instructive to note that the Sisters perceive their formators in a much more favourable light than the Brothers. Is this difference in evaluations merely the result of the fact that the Sisters tend to be less critical than the Brothers? Could it be also due to the fact that the Sisters generally select someone as a formator only after a careful evaluation of the aptitude of that person in order to ensure that she has the requisite spiritual, moral, intellectual and human qualities for the job. The selection process of the formators in the seminaries is seldom so rigorous. Priests who have done well in their seminary studies are generally chosen for higher studies. When they return after the higher studies with their doctorates, they are often assigned to the seminaries as teachers and formators. The spiritual, human, emotional and interpersonal aptitude of these “doctors” is seldom looked into and carefully evaluated. “Doctors” become formators almost by default! Needless to say, just because someone has the intellectual resources to obtain a doctorate, it does not necessarily mean that he will also have the requisite spiritual and human resources to be a good formator or the communication skills necessary to be a good teacher.

### *Conclusion*

To sum up, this sociological exploration has drawn attention to several problem areas in the formation of priests and religious in India today. Selection, it is often said, is 90% of formation. And yet this is perhaps the area that is least attended to. Dioceses and Congregations seem to be vying with each other to recruit as many as possible and as early as possible, with little thought for the aptitude or the motivations of the candidates. “A seminary is not a lumber mill or smelter. It cannot take raw youth and, after subjecting him to few approved processes, turn out neatly fashioned or keenly honed priest” (Carter, 1966: 436). Unless stringent quality control measures are introduced in the selection of candidates at all levels, the Church may find soon find itself with a leadership that has lost its credibility.

The study also has shown up the limitations of formation in the artificial and insulated environment of large seminaries and formation houses. Exploring alternative models of formation that allow the candidates to deal with real-life situations and problems on a continuous basis is also an urgent imperative.

Success of the formation process depends largely on the character and competence of the formators. The survey, however, has revealed widespread dissatisfaction with the formators, particularly among the seminarians. This certainly calls for a reassessment of the way the formators are selected and trained. Unless the Council's exhortation to choose formators from among the best and to prepare them painstakingly is taken more seriously, priestly formation in India is unlikely to yield the desired results.

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## *Appendix*

**Table A. Comparison of Clergy and Laity on Achievement Orientation  
(% Responding “True”)**

	Clergy	Laity
1. I have an urge to perform better than others	63	81
2. I like to set difficult goals for myself	47	66
3. I tend to avoid tasks at which I have previously failed	37	25
4. I do not like to compete with others	46	34
5. I do not like to work for someone who demands high standards	59	51
6. I readily sacrifice my free time to achieve something outstanding	59	65

**Table B. Comparison of Clergy and Laity on Self-Abasement  
(% Responding “True”)**

	Clergy	Laity
1. I admit defeat rather easily	35	22
2. I do not always assert my rights	48	37
3. I defend myself when I am unfairly criticized	65	77
4. I do not allow people to take advantage of me	63	69
5. After getting into a fight, I usually blame myself	44	42
6. I feel shy to take part in public activities	37	34

Abstract: In his recent Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Pope John Paul II highlighted the importance of priestly formation in these words: “The formation of future priests, both diocesan and religious, and life-long assiduous care for their personal sanctification in the ministry and for the constant updating of their pastoral commitment are considered by the Church one of the most demanding and important tasks for the future of the evangelization of humanity” (No. 2). Perhaps no other organization invests so much in terms of human and financial resources in the formation of its personnel as the Church does. Few other professions require so many long years of formation as the Catholic priesthood. Today a candidate to the priesthood spends, in addition to regular school and college education, anywhere between 10 to 15 years in formation before he is ordained.