

Editorial

PRIESTLY FORMATION AND CURRENT CHALLENGES

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Pope Francis convened, very recently, a meeting of the presidents of all the episcopal conferences of the whole world, first of its kind, in the background of the increased child abuse cases, to deliberate on the "Protection of Minors in the Church." One of the various aspects that Pope suggested to the bishops in his concluding address was *formation*: "... requiring criteria for the selection and training of candidates to the priesthood that are not simply negative, concerned above all with excluding problematic personalities, but also positive, *providing a balanced process of formation for suitable candidates, fostering holiness and the virtue of chastity.*"¹ In the past several decades there have been accusations and alleged cases against child abuse cases by clergy. The number of cases increases and covers many continents and nations. Hence, vocation to priesthood and the formation for those called, draw our attention.

All Christian faithful, qualified as the 'people of God' have the vocation to participate, through baptism, in the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and thus share in His common priesthood as well as his prophetic and kingly functions (CCEO c. 7). Further, some are called in a special way to share in the ministerial priesthood of

¹ Address of Pope Francis to the bishops at the end of the concluding Eucharistic Concelebration, on "The Protection Of Minors In The Church" [Vatican's New Synod Hall, 21-24 February 2019], n. 4. Cf. http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/february/documents/papa-francesco_20190224_incontro-protezioneminorichiusura.html. See pp. 143-154 of the current issue of *Iustitia* for the entire document.

² Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Christus Vivit*, March 25, 2019. Cf. http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20190325_christus-vivit.html

Christ as sacred ministers (CCEO c. 329), for continuing, by the administration of the sacraments and sacramentals, the sanctifying function of Christ, bequeathed to us through the apostles.

Speaking about “vocation” in a broad sense, Pope Francis says that understanding vocation as a “calling from God,”- the call to life, to His friendship and to holiness and so on - helps us to see our entire life in relation to Him who loves us. Such a perception enables us to consider nothing in our life as merely accidental and meaningless, but as “a way of responding to the Lord, who has a wonderful plan for us” (*Christus vivit* [CV], 248).²

How is a vocation to priesthood and priestly ministry recognized, fostered, judged and promoted? What are its challenges? The long priestly vocational journey and mission of a person may be divided into four stages: i) family and school considered as a single unit - the first seminary; ii) minor seminary; iii) major seminary and finally iv) on going formation.

It is the Holy Spirit who engenders desire and inspiration in a person to listen to and respond to the call of the Lord. However, it may be through the instrumentality of human agents or circumstances that a vocation manifests itself. In the following way St. Pope John Paul II, in his apostolic exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, describes or defines what vocation is and elucidates the roles that God, the very individual who receives the call, and the Church play in its materialization:

Certainly a vocation is a fathomless mystery involving the relationship established by God with human beings in their absolute uniqueness, a mystery perceived and heard as a call which awaits a response in the depths of one's conscience, which is "a person's most secret core and sanctuary. There one is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths." But this does not eliminate the communitarian and in particular the ecclesial dimension of vocation. The Church is also truly present and at work in the vocation of every priest³ (PDV 38).

² Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Christus Vivit*, March 25, 2019. Cf. http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20190325_christus-vivit.html

³ Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (PDV), On “The Formation Of Priests In The Circumstances Of The Present Day,” March 25, 1992. Cf. http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_25031992_pastores-dabo-vobis.html.

John Paul II appreciates the aspirants, seminarians and priests everywhere in the world, and acknowledges that even those living in “most difficult and dramatic conditions” joyfully “struggle to be faithful to the Lord and to serve his flock unswervingly,” ... *because the Lord himself, with the strength of his Spirit, has called them to incarnate in the earthen vessels of their simple lives the priceless treasure of his good shepherd's love* (PDV- conclusion).

The post-synodal apostolic exhortation *vita consecrata* states in this regard (VC) that “God the Father, through the unceasing gift of Christ and the Spirit, is the educator *par excellence* of those who consecrate themselves to him” and that in their formation, He “makes use of human instruments, placing more mature brothers ... at the side of those whom he calls. Formation then is a sharing in the work of the Father who, through the Spirit, fashions the inner attitudes of the Son in the hearts of young men...” (VC 66).

The codes, while affirming, in line with Vatican Council II (OT 2; AA 11; GS 52) the responsibility of the whole Christian community to foster vocation (PDV 41), acknowledge the great contribution families make in this noble task and attribute a very specific role: i) to **families**, which animated by a spirit of faith, charity and piety, provide a *first seminary*; ii) to **parishes** where youngsters take active part and hence priests especially pastors are bound to encourage and support endeavours to discern and foster vocations; and iii) to **schools, especially Catholic Societies** where **teachers** help the youngsters hear and respond to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and attempt to assist them to recognize a divine vocation and follow it willingly (cf. OT 2; CCEO c. 329 §1, n. 2 ; CIC c. 233 §1).

Two other documents of Vatican Council II disclose the importance of schools and teachers in assisting the students to discern their vocation and “choose their state of life with full consciousness of responsibility” (GS 52) and to offer “wise guidance in the choice of vocation and encourage it with all care” (AA 11).

Thus the parents and other “primary educators” constitute a true *seminarium* or “seedbed” for vocation and the formators mentioned in CCEO c. 329 provide “the opportunity and background in which a vocation can take root and flourish”⁴

⁴ Cf. OT 2; W. Becket Soule, “The Formation of Clerics,” in John D. Faris, Jobe Abbas OFM Conv., *A Practical Commentary to the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, eds., Vol. 1 (Montreal: Wilson & Lafleur inc, 2019) 689.

Yes, a close analysis of the family background of the candidates reveals that genuine vocations come from devout parents and families “which are animated by a spirit of faith, charity and piety,” as we saw above (OT 2). These are families which maintain a Christian and spiritual atmosphere, and uphold and practice human, gospel and Christian values. So also practising catholic teachers who esteem Church values do have an influence on young minds. These kinds of motivating presence and encouraging ambience and actions of the families, teachers and pastors would inspire young boys and would be of a great help to the legitimately responsible ‘vocation promoters’ of dioceses or religious institutions to identify candidates/aspirants with authentic vocations and invite them to minor seminary.

Those in whom preliminary signs or indications of a divine call are noticed, will gradually, after their primary schooling, be chosen by the bishop or competent authority and placed in a still better ambience, called minor seminary or equivalent institution to facilitate further cultivation of their vocation.

St. John Paul II, in reference to *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 48 says that it is good to have a “sufficient period of preparation prior to seminary formation” which according to him is “a period of human, Christian, intellectual and spiritual preparation for the candidates to the major seminary,” and he expects the following basic qualities in such candidates: “a right intention, a sufficient degree of human maturity, a sufficiently broad knowledge of the doctrine of the faith, some introduction into the methods of prayer and behavior in conformity with Christian tradition. They should also have attitudes proper to their regions, through which they can express their effort to find God and the faith” (PDV 62).

Concluding the exhortation John Paul II invited the candidates to conscientiously accept God’s gift of vocation to priesthood and to “deepen their love for Christ the good shepherd, pattern their hearts on his, be ready to go out as his image into the highways of the world to proclaim to all mankind Christ the way, the truth and the life” because “the Church and the world have an absolute need of them.”

CCEO c. 331 describes the scope of initial formation thus: “In the **minor seminary**, those who seem to **show signs of a vocation** to the sacred ministry are especially to be educated, so that they can **more**

easily and clearly discern it themselves and cultivate it with dedication..."

First of all it is to be presumed that those in the minor seminary are the ones who have passed through the **first seminary** comprising of family, school and parish, naturally manifesting signs of a vocation to the sacred ministry. Hence, the minor seminary or equivalent arrangement provides such aspirants a more favourable ambience to "easily and clearly discern" their vocation *themselves* and to "cultivate it with dedication." Yes, minor seminary formation should be simple and stress-free, in the sense that without much complication and complexities and the candidate should be facilitated and oriented in all the way possible to discern beyond all doubts and ambiguity his vocation himself. The canon emphasizes that there should not absolutely be any external force or compulsion in the choice of the clerical state; instead it should be his intentional, personal decision and choice; similarly the seed of vocation requires care and attention, proper watering and manueing in order for it to grow, flourish and bear fruit and hence availing the facilities offered by the seminary circumstances like prayer, guidance, spiritual direction and so on, the candidate has to cultivate the gift of vocation with enthusiasm and commitment.

The legislator envisages an integral formation of candidates and hence CCEO c. 344, having OT 3 as its source, further stipulates that "adolescents and young men living in a minor seminary are to have appropriate relationships with their families and peers which they need for sound psychological, particularly emotional, development; however, they are carefully to avoid all things that, according to sound psychological and pedagogical norms, can diminish in any way the free choice of a state of life."

The fact that one enters seminary does not mean he has completely cut off his ties with his family. Instead, the canon emphasizes that the candidates maintain sufficient connection with their families and their peer group. Because while undergoing formation, in the minor seminary, he should not be totally aloof from the ordinary affairs, relations and concrete realities of life which also help one to mature practically, psychologically and emotionally.

The responsibility of the choice rests absolutely with the candidate. However, minor seminary offers a conducive atmosphere and personnel to facilitate the decision, for example, with good spiritual directors who help them properly and clearly discern their vocation

and nurture it “by a special religious formation and, especially by suitable spiritual direction, to follow Christ the Redeemer with generous souls and pure hearts” (OT 3). The code stipulates, “Students, assisted by suitable spiritual direction, are to be trained in making personal and responsible decisions in the light of the gospel and for cultivating continually the various gifts of their talents, not omitting any appropriate virtues of human nature” (CCEO c. 344 §2). Citing Paul VI’s words *Vita Consecrata* presents that “Spiritual direction has a wonderful purpose. We could say it is indispensable for the moral and spiritual education of young people who want to find what their vocation in life is and follow it wherever it may lead, with utter loyalty.” It continues to say that “It retains its beneficial effect at all stages of life, when in the light and affection of a devout and prudent counsel one asks for a check on one’s own right intention and for support in the generous fulfillment of one’s own duties. It is a very delicate but immensely valuable psychological means” (PDV 81).

Thus minor seminary becomes the fertile soil where the seed of vocation sown in the heart of the candidate is further nurtured for the integral personal growth and development.

Neither the code nor the Vatican documents prescribe a definite period of time for the initial formation in the minor seminary. However, CCEO c. 344 §3 requires that “the curriculum of a minor seminary is to include those studies required in each nation for beginning higher studies...” (CCEO c. 344 §3). This would imply that the duration of the preparatory formation in the minor seminary may require at least three years, and it may vary depending on the local system of education. At this period the candidates should be sufficiently helped and guided to have basic knowledge about various types of vocations, especially about the clerical state he is about to embrace and clarity of his choice.

Vita Consecrata exposes the essential elements of formation process in relation to vocation: “The *primary objective* of the formation process is to prepare people for the total consecration of themselves to God in the following of Christ, at the service of the Church’s mission. To say “yes” to the Lord’s call by taking personal responsibility for maturing in one’s vocation is the inescapable duty of all who have been called. One’s whole life must be open to the action of the Holy Spirit, travelling the road of formation with generosity, and accepting in faith the means of grace offered by the Lord and the Church” (VC 65).

Describing the distinction between the minor and major seminary, Becket Soule says that the former "serves to detect with certainty a true vocation or eliminate a false one; the major seminary tests and strengthens vocations to ministry. While for admission to the major seminary some certainty of a vocation to ecclesiastical ministry is required, for admission to the minor seminary only some *indicia* [indications] are needed."⁵

Having thus passed through, let us say, two stages, that is, the aforementioned 'primary seminary', and minor seminary, the candidate now enters the major seminary, the third stage in his vocational journey. It is the period for confirming the discernment so far arrived at by the candidate regarding his vocation and cultivating it further. Vatican Council II and CCEO affirm this fact. In the major seminary, "the whole training of the students should have as its object to make them true shepherds of souls after the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, teacher, priest and shepherd" (OT 4). Here the responsible ecclesiastical personnel, that is, formators have an important role in properly guiding them to be clear of the choice of their vocation.

Vatican II and Codes state that "major seminaries" are necessary for priestly training" (OT 4.; cf. CCEO c. 331). As the candidates are preparing to be shepherds after the mind and heart of Jesus, the Great Shepherd, the legislator sees to it that there lacks nothing for their integral maturity: "The formation of students is to be completed in the major seminary, supplementing those things which, perhaps, in individual cases, were lacking in their formation in the minor seminary, by integrating the spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation so that they may be effective ministers of Christ in the midst of the Church, light and salt for the contemporary world" (CCEO c. 345). With a positive appraisal of the good results it has been realising so far all over the world, St. John Paul II notes that "the institution of the major seminary, as the best place for formation, is to be certainly reaffirmed as the normal place, in the material sense as well, for a community and hierarchical life, indeed as the proper home for the formation of candidates for the priesthood, with superiors who are truly dedicated to this service" (PDV 60).

As in the previous stage, but more intensely at this stage the presence of other formation personnel, like rector (CCEO c. 338 §1), spiritual directors and confessors (CCEO c. 339 §§1, 2) and an adequate number

⁵ W. Becket Soule, "The Formation of Clerics," 694.

of teachers/professors “properly selected” (CCEO c. 340 §1) is very important. Vatican II requires that the formation personnel, that is, seminary superiors and professors must be chosen from among the best, should be well prepared in sound doctrine, should have appropriate pastoral experience and finally special training in spirituality and teaching methods (OT 11).

Even though the responsibility of decision and discernment rests with each candidate, he is to co-operate with the formation personnel and the norms and systems envisaged for the same. As one chosen for pastoral ministry, partaking in the ministerial priesthood of Christ, it is imperative that the candidate attain an all-round maturity and development as projected in CCEO 330 §3: “The formation programme of clerics is to include ... more specific norms regarding the personal, spiritual, doctrinal and pastoral formation of students as well as individual disciplines...” In order to ensure that the candidate attain the required integral growth and maturity, CCEO c. 331 §2 instructs: “In the major seminary the vocation of those who by certain signs are already considered suitable to assume the sacred ministries permanently is more intensely cultivated, proven and confirmed.”

The fact that the family and school educators had discovered initial indications of priestly vocation and that the concerned authorities of the minor seminary promoted one candidate to major seminary, does not mean that one is automatically recognised suitable for ordination and subsequent priestly ministry. Instead each candidate’s entire life – intention, motivation, human or personal formation, physical fitness, psychological and emotional maturity - is subjected to test and verification by the Church or seminary authorities again: “Each candidate should be subjected to vigilant and careful enquiry, keeping in mind his age and development, concerning his right *intention and freedom of choice, his spiritual, moral and intellectual fitness, adequate physical and mental health, and possible hereditary traits*” (OT 6). The same document, highlighting the significance of the responsibilities that priesthood and pastoral ministry entail, states that “the candidate’s capacity for undertaking the obligations of the priesthood and carrying out his pastoral duties” (OT 6) should be examined because the purpose of the disciplinary measures in the seminary “is to inculcate self-control, to promote solid maturity of personality and the formation of those other traits of character which are most useful for the ordered and fruitful activity of the Church” (OT 11). Speaking about the disciplinary norms in seminary, the code states that they

prepare and enable the candidate to use "their freedom wisely and act[ing] voluntarily and diligently" (CCEO c. 346 §3).

The aim of the long and various stages of formation is to ensure the candidate's personal, moral, psychological, spiritual, pastoral and theological growth and maturity along with various other aspects his life, before he is promoted to ordination. While from his part the candidate manifests voluntarily his decision to go ahead, the ecclesiastical authorities also observe and weigh him so closely in order to test, verify and confirm if he has attained the required all-round fitness to assume the pastoral ministry. Because as St. John Paul II affirms, "Formation is a path of gradual identification with the attitude of Christ towards the Father," and hence, "the manner of preparing for it should include and express *the character of wholeness*. Formation should involve the whole person, in every aspect of the personality, in behaviour and intentions" (VC 65).

Celibacy is an essential element of Catholic priesthood, especially in the Latin Church. As such the words of Saint Paul VI, cited by Pope Francis, are worth noting here: "the life of the celibate priest, which engages the whole man so totally and so sensitively, excludes those of insufficient physical, psychic and moral qualifications. Nor should anyone pretend that grace supplies for the defects of nature in such a man."⁶ The need to ensure maturity in this aspect of one's life is all the more necessary in the present day context.

A candidate is, thus, permitted to proceed to his ordination only after a rigorous and long, at least eight - nine years of formation (around three years of preparatory studies prior to the ecclesiastical disciplines which lasts for six year, (cf. CCEO. c. 348) so that he can be an effective ecclesiastical minister, a true shepherd.

All in whom initial indications of vocation are noticed need not and do not, necessarily, reach the final goal. During the vocational journey some of the candidates themselves come to know through prayer, proper guidance and deliberation that their vocation is something different from priestly or celibate life and choose that, leaving the seminary. Similarly the Church authorities from their part, subsequent to close accompaniment, observation, tests, evaluation etc., eliminate

⁶ Paul VI, encyclical *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, no. 64, as quoted in Francis, "The Protection of Minors in the Church," n. 4. Cf. http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/february/documents/papa-francesco_20190224_incontro-protezioneminorichiusura.html.

graciously certain candidates who are found unworthy to assume clerical state and pastoral ministry.

It is with such an eventuality in view that Vatican fathers and the codes stipulate very carefully that during the formation period the courses of studies should be so organized that if somebody happens to leave the seminary, he should be able to pursue his secular studies without any inconvenience: "The curriculum of a minor seminary is to include those studies required in each nation for beginning higher studies, ... Care is generally to be taken that students obtain a civil degree, so that their studies can be pursued somewhere else as well, if such happens to their choice" (CCEO c. 344 §3; cf. OT 3).

There is sometimes a misconception that with ordination priestly formation is over. The fact, however, is that formation never ends, but it continues forever in diverse ways at different stages of a person's growth and development. Pope Francis in a recent document says, "Precisely because it aims at the transformation of the whole person, it is clear that *the commitment to formation never ends*" (CV 279). Even the business corporates in the secular world offer to their employees renewal programmes at regular intervals so that they may ever remain updated and prompt to face new challenges in their respective fields.

On going formation helps priests for renewal, to be strengthened to persevere faithfully in pastoral ministry out of love for Christ and to have the power to resist the manifold temptations and attractions they have to confront in the modern world.

St. John Paul II advocates that vocation which is a gift from God, needs ongoing formation and that the universal Church, the particular Churches, families and the individual priests – all of them have a role in providing and benefitting from permanent / ongoing formation. In document *Pastores dabo vobis* he reiterates that ongoing formation that increases priest's awareness of his role in the Church's mission, is not only a necessary condition but also an indispensable means "for constantly refocusing on the meaning of his mission and for ensuring that he is carrying it out with fidelity and generosity." The ongoing formation whereby priests grow in human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral maturity is a great benefit for the people of God itself because the priest is not for himself. Further it presents the individual priest himself as the protagonist in this endeavor. In order to benefit from this, a priest, "rooted in the sacrament of holy orders," has to be "personally convinced of its need" and "determined to make use of the opportunities, times and forms in which it comes" (PDV 75, 78 &

79). Concluding the document he says that, "the Church responds to grace through the commitment which priests make to receive that ongoing formation which is required by the dignity and responsibility conferred on them by the sacrament of holy orders" (PDV conclusion).

St. John Paul II proposes some ways and means to make the ongoing formation effective: i) '**different forms of common life among priests**' appear to be beneficial to all fellow priests and to the faithful, as a "shining example of charity and unity;" ii) '**Priestly associations**' like priestly secular institutes or "all the forms of "priestly fraternity" approved by the Church which enhance the spiritual life as well as the apostolic and pastoral life and iii) '**spiritual direction**' is proposed as one of the proven means of ongoing formation as it helps priests to be united to the Lord and to be ever faithful and generous in discharging the pastoral ministry (PDV 81).

Indicating the possible threats to vocations, Pope Francis cautions the priests to be ever vigilant and watchful (CV 279). The "young are immersed in a culture of zapping. We can navigate simultaneously on two or more screens and interact at the same time with two or three virtual scenarios. Without the wisdom of discernment, we can easily become prey to every passing trend." Indeed, "this is all the more important when some novelty presents itself in our lives. Then we have to decide whether it is new wine brought by God or an illusion created by the spirit of this world or the spirit of the devil" (CV 279)

In the present day context of the increase of child abuse cases and subsequent scandal to the Church by the priests, both religious and secular or abandonment of priestly, celibate life due to inappropriate love-relationship with opposite sex or due to any other misconduct unbecoming of priestly dignity, it is worth reevaluating the church's system of and rules and regulations regarding priestly vocation and formation with a view to making it effective.

On going formation is definitively a protective means to withstand and overcome temptations and novel attractions of the modern world. St. John Paul II maintains that there is an enticement "to reduce his ministry to an activism which becomes an end in itself, to the provision of impersonal services, even if these are spiritual or sacred, or to a businesslike function which he carries out for the Church" and he teaches that in such occasions "Only ongoing formation enables the priest to safeguard with vigilant love the "mystery" which he bears within his heart for the good of the Church and of mankind" (PDV 72).

Vatican Fathers also stated that with “proper knowledge of the duties and dignity of Christian marriage, (cf. Eph. 5:32). ... one can “guard against the dangers which threaten their chastity, especially in present-day society” (OT 10).

Tharakkunnel Benny’s article “Indigenous Structures of Governance of the Church of St. Thomas Christians in India” in the current issue of *Iustitia*, examines historically and canonically how the St. Thomas Christians which had the administrative self-sufficiency under the guidance of the indigenous ecclesiastical leader called archdeacon, lost all her powers and indigenous structures along with autonomy and later, passing through much vicissitudes restored it to the maximum possible extent. “The archdeacon clearly enjoyed extensive authority, prestige and privilege before Western missionaries arrived in India. Admittedly, some may find it difficult to imagine a non-Episcopal figure who possessed more extensive day-to-day administrative authority in an eparchy than does the eparchial bishop himself” (p. 27).

“Competence of Major Superiors in the Protection of Minors” by Luigi Sabbarese is an effort to seriously disclose the moral and canonical responsibility of the Major Superiors when faced with cases of sexual abuse of minors by clerics and or religious subject to them. While treating the various procedures involved in such cases he sustains that “The Major Superior must ensure the accused a fraternal, respectful and understanding listening. Adequate moral, spiritual and psychological support will be offered to him through a competent person, who can also act as an intermediary between him, the investigator and the Superiors, in the various stages of the procedure” (see p. 45 below).

Maria Tresa in her article “The Notions of Consecration and Profession in the Monastic Profession and Profession in Orders and Congregations of CCEO,” makes a thorough analysis, as the title indicates, of the concept of Consecration and Profession in institutes of consecrated life - monasteries, orders and congregations. “These variations in usage can create ambiguities. In common parlance, “consecration” and “profession” often have the same meaning. However, these terms have significantly different theological and canonical connotations. Consequently, their correct usage and understanding requires a prior and more fundamental understanding of religious consecration and profession. The current canonical usage, found in CCEO, uses both terms to denote the commitment that marks one’s entrance into religious life, namely, “consecration or monastic

profession" and "profession in orders and congregations." In this way, CCEO respects both the traditional usage and the Conciliar teaching" (see pp. 93-94 below).

The article "Catechumenate and Its Implications," by Noble Therese analyses the canons on Catechumenate in both CIC as well as CCEO and evaluates that 'sacramental initiation is not possible without due preparation and the catechumenate is an essential requirement for adult baptism. The author affirms that "the purpose of the catechumenate is, thus, not only to impart, for example, the teaching of the Church's faith, morals, catechism, prayers, etc. but also intends to give a holistic Christian formation to the catechumens covering the spiritual, liturgical and exemplary way of living (see p. 67 below). She confirms that in the eyes of the Church "the Catechumens were never considered as persons outside the Church, but they were the visible and active participants of the Church's liturgical and disciplinary order (see p. 77 below)."

Mons. Andrea Ripa's article in Italian language, "Educative Challenges for the Initial and Permanent Formation: Some Considerations Starting from the Requests for Dispensation from the Obligations Deriving from the Holy Ordination presented to the Congregation for the Clergy," establishes that the presence of the following unaddressed "fundamental drawbacks" and "fragility" in the formee, - uncritical dependence on or influence of certain 'charismatic vocation promoters,' family atmosphere, tendency to flee from the world, affective immaturity, its compensatory external expressions in rigidity and formalism, lukewarm spirituality and 'Marteism' or excessive activity at the cost of profound prayer and spirituality etc., - are the main reasons which lead to abandoning the priestly ministry and seeking dispensations from the obligations of ordination. He also observes that the role of the formators and the competent bishop is very important in this regard.

Though the sexual abuse cases and accusations of cover-ups were present among clergy earlier also, it got unprecedented media attention and coverage in the last few decades of the 20th century. The trend is not different in the recent past either. The former popes, John Paul II and Benedict XVI, have condemned the child abuse cases by priests. "In a 2001 apology, John Paul II called sexual abuse within the Church "a profound contradiction of the teaching and witness of Jesus Christ." Benedict XVI apologised, met with victims, and spoke of his "shame at the evil of abuse, calling for perpetrators to be brought to

justice, and denouncing mishandling by church authorities.”⁷ And Pope Francis has also shown zero tolerance policy towards such crimes.

We also learn that nearly eight to nine hundred requests for dispensation from the obligation of priestly celibacy etc., become registered in the Congregation for the Clergy every year. Obviously it does much damage to the Church. In the light of these sad developments in the Church, speciously among the clergy, therefore, is it not time to rethink about vocation, formation programme, norms and regulations on priestly celibacy and so on?

⁷Cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholic_Church_sexual_abuse_cases