

A Survey Study of Psychological Assessment Practices in the Screening and Admission Process of Candidates to the Priesthood in the U.S. Catholic Church

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The purpose of this survey study was to investigate the policies and procedures concerning the psychological assessment of candidates to the Catholic priesthood. Diocesan and religious vocation directors and seminary rectors identified 86 different mental health professionals they usually refer to for this type of psychological evaluation. This study used a qualitative methodology comprising focus group interviews and self-reported surveys (with open-ended questions). Most of the respondents (96%) were psychologists. Questions elicited responses on psychological assessment practices of candidates to the Catholic priesthood (e.g., areas of assessment, structure of psychological report, instruments used). The results have implications for the screening of candidates to the priesthood. Ethical and multicultural considerations are discussed, and suggestions are offered for the improvement of policies and procedures, as well as for future research.

Keywords: psychological evaluation, Catholic seminary, seminary screening, priestly formation, seminary–psychologist collaboration

In the past 30 years, the Catholic Church has increasingly relied on mental health professionals, usually qualified, licensed psychologists, to psychologically evaluate candidates to the Catholic priesthood. The Second Vatican Council asked the Church to

engage directly with the modern world in the field of education and specifically stated that “Those involved in theological studies in seminaries and universities should be eager to cooperate with experts versed in other fields of learning by pooling their resources and their points of view” (Flannery, 1984, p. 62). The areas of the social sciences, especially psychology, were noted explicitly in this context. Consultation with psychologists has become especially important given the current sex abuse crisis. Thus, the psychological evaluation has become an intrinsic part of the screening and admission process. The information obtained from the assessment is usually incorporated into the decision-making process. Specific guidelines for the evaluation and admission procedures have been outlined in official Church documents (see, e.g., U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops [USCCB], 2005). Canon law, which is the body of internal ecclesiastical law governing the Roman Catholic Church, broadly considers lack of suitability for seminary formation as any form of psychological impairment that makes a person not able to fulfill the required ministry (Canon 1040, No. 1). More specifically, the U.S. Catholic Bishops specify that candidates must demonstrate a capacity to function competently in ordinary human situations, psychosexual maturity commensurate with chronological age, genuine empathy, and critical thinking (USCCB, 2005).

The assessment of religious populations, and more specifically Catholic clergy, has been the focus of numerous studies (Keddy, Erdberg, & Sammon, 1990; Kennedy, Heckler, Kobler, & Walker, 1977). These studies have investigated specific psychological variables such as depression and anxiety (Knox, Virginia, Thull, & Lombardo, 2005), pedophilia (Plante & Aldridge, 2005), and per-

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sonality traits (Patrick, 1990). However, only one study has actually investigated the psychological assessment process itself (Batsis, 1993). Batsis (1993) surveyed 154 Roman Catholic vocation directors concerning the psychological assessment process of applicants for seminaries and religious orders. He found that an overwhelming percentage of respondents rely on psychological assessments in determining a candidate's suitability for admission.

The purpose of this survey study was to examine the policies, procedures, and practices used by dioceses, religious institutes, and seminaries to test and screen candidates for admission to priestly formation. More specifically, the survey sought to obtain data on the current components of the psychological assessment process; psychological variables typically assessed; requirements and guidelines for the mental health professionals involved in this task; ethical, professional, and legal issues; and feedback on how policies, procedures, and practices can be improved.

For the non-Catholic or those not familiar with the Catholic Church, a brief description of the context of these assessment practices and some definitions of specific terms are helpful. The Catholic priesthood is reserved only for male candidates, who can become religious or diocesan priests. Religious priests are professed members of a religious order (e.g., Jesuits, Dominicans, and Franciscans) or institute and they live according to the rule of their respective orders. In pastoral ministry, they are under the jurisdiction of the local bishop, as well as of the superiors of their order. Diocesan or secular priests, on the other hand, are under the direction of their local bishop, and usually minister in the parishes of the diocese, but may also be assigned to other diocesan posts and ministries. Priests go through a rigorous training (also known as "priestly formation"), most of which takes place at educational institutions known as seminaries, and it comprises four main areas: human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral.

Overall Study Design

The design and methodology in this survey study were systematic and, for ease of understanding, consisted of the following phases: (a) exploration, (b) consultation, (c) commissioning, (d) data collection, and (e) analysis. The Seminary Department of the National Catholic Educational Association initiated the exploration phase on receiving funding to conduct a study of the psychological assessment process for candidates for priestly formation with an objective of developing recommendations or guidelines for seminaries and others involved in the priestly formation process. To this end, the Seminary Department consulted with the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University as well as with various experts in psychological assessment, priestly formation, and priestly life and ministry about the desirability and feasibility of conducting such a study.

In 2007, after serious consideration and searching for an institution with extensive expertise on scientific research on the Catholic Church, the Seminary Department formally assigned (commissioned) CARA the task of designing and conducting a series of surveys or focus groups with diocesan and religious vocation directors, psychologists, seminary rectors, and other formators. In May 2007, the Seminary Department convened an advisory group to help inform and guide the study. The advisory group included representatives from the USCCB, the Conference of Major Superiors of Men, the National Conference of Diocesan Vocation

Directors, and the National Religious Vocation Conference. These organizations and constituencies were chosen because they are all directly and indirectly involved in the education and training of priests in the United States and thus informed the advisory board on specific policies, procedures, and practices on the admission and formation of clergy. To further inform the study, the Seminary Department convened a consultation in January 2008 on confidentiality and privacy issues related to psychological assessment.

For data collection, in 2008 and 2009, CARA conducted a series of surveys of diocesan and religious vocation directors ($n = 379$), seminary rectors ($n = 85$), and mental health professionals ($n = 86$) who conduct the psychological testing for dioceses, religious institutes, and seminaries. Eighty-four of the mental health professionals were psychologists. One respondent was a psychiatrist and one was a psychological associate who was supervised by a licensed psychologist. The following response rates were obtained: diocesan vocation directors ($n = 215$, 73%), vocation directors affiliated with religious institutes and societies of apostolic life ($n = 175$, 46%), rectors of graduate-level seminaries (also known as theologates) and seminary colleges ($n = 204$, 90%), and psychologists ($n = 55$, 67%).

The advisory group convened in fall 2008 to examine the preliminary findings from the surveys of diocesan and religious vocation directors and seminary rectors. CARA presented the preliminary findings and worked with the advisory group to refine the questions for the survey of psychologists. CARA also conducted focus groups with selected groups of vocation directors (at the annual meeting of the National Conference of Diocesan Vocation Directors) and seminary personnel (at the annual meeting of the Midwest Association of Theological Schools) during fall 2008 to further identify and clarify issues and perspectives that surfaced from the surveys and to explore how these issues or concerns might be addressed. In addition, CARA presented preliminary results of the study to the Formation Committee of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men, the East Coast Rectors, and the National Association of College Seminaries. These groups provided additional information for the study and recommendations for the presentation of the findings. In June 2009, members of the advisory group synthesized the research findings. We present the findings here in this article.

Method

Sample

Diocesan and religious vocation directors and seminary rectors identified 86 different mental health professionals they engage for the psychological testing of priesthood candidates. Church officials usually consult or hire psychologists who have familiarity with the Catholic Church. Ninety percent of the psychologists who answered this survey had familiarity with the Catholic Church, whereas 66% had experience working with seminarians, and 48% reported previous experience working with priests. Religious vocation directors, for example, the Jesuits, are more likely to require psychologists that understand the lifestyle of the respective religious order, thereby ensuring that they would be in a position to assess the capacity to live the charism of the religious order. Researchers at CARA mailed a questionnaire to each mental health professional in winter 2009 and conducted follow-up with nonre-

spondents. Four questionnaires were returned as undeliverable. At the end of February 2009, CARA received a total of 55 completed surveys, for a response rate of 67%.

The respondents were asked to indicate which type of mental health professional best described them. Nearly all (96%) of the respondents were psychologists. All of the psychologists reported being licensed, except for one whose license was pending. Most commonly, the psychologists who responded to the survey were licensed in New York (15%), Pennsylvania (9%), or Texas (9%). They reported an average of 26 years of experience conducting psychological testing and evaluation, with an average of 16 years evaluating candidates to the priesthood. In this sample, psychologists reported the following states where they most commonly evaluate candidates: New York (11%), Texas (11%), Pennsylvania (9%), and Wisconsin (9%). Psychologists reported that on average they conduct nine psychological evaluations of candidates to the priesthood every year.

Survey Measures

Three survey measures were created for diocesan vocation directors (178 items), for seminary rectors (175 items), and for psychologists (117 items). The survey items went through a series of reviews by psychologists and vocation screening personnel (vocation directors, seminary rectors) familiar with the entire psychological screening process. The surveys comprised several item formats, which included checklists, open-ended questions, lists of items with a yes–no format, and items to be ranked along a frequency scale with four answer anchors (*not at all*, *only a little*, *somewhat*, *very much*). Unipolar rating scales with four verbal descriptors placed at intervals along the response continuum are usually constructed to elicit categorical numeric responses. The rated characteristic is completely present at one end of the continuum (i.e., *not at all*) and completely present at the other end of the continuum (i.e., *very much*; Christ & Boice, 2009). For example, the survey measure for psychologists included a checklist with 10 items asking psychologists to indicate the aspects of a candidate's background and history they typically explore as part of the psychological assessment process. A list of 19 items asked psychologists to indicate the extent (*not at all*, *only a little*, *somewhat*, *very much*) to which they assess various skills of candidates to the priesthood. Two other checklists asked psychologists to report the format of their psychological report given to the seminary (e.g., raw scores, full written report, summary written report, etc.) and for how long they keep the results.

Results

Patterns of Assessment Usage

Role of psychological assessment in the admission process. The survey questionnaire asked respondents to estimate the use of psychological assessment in the seminary admission process. The respondents' estimation was based on their interface with church officials, their participation in providing feedback on psychological testing results to seminary officials, and in their general professional experience. Nearly all of the psychologists (93%) reported that in their experience the results of the psychological assessment are used somewhat or very much by dioceses, religious

institutes, and seminaries for screening applicants. Over half (56%) reported that they are used very much for this purpose. About 89% of psychologists reported that the results of the psychological assessment are used somewhat or very much by dioceses, religious institutes, and seminaries as a resource for formation. About half (49%) reported that they are used very much for this purpose. Concerning recommendations and emphasis of the content, 58% reported that they typically make a recommendation about whether a candidate should be accepted or rejected for priestly formation.

Cost and payment. Responding psychologists reported that their charge for psychological testing and evaluation of a candidate for priestly formation were dependent on the needs of the referring diocese or religious order. According to 98% of the respondents, the cost of required psychological testing is nearly always paid by the archdiocese, diocese, or religious institute. In a few cases (4%), both the candidate and the referral source (e.g., diocese) contribute to the payment. None of the psychologists reported that the candidate alone typically pays for the required testing.

Assessment Content and Structure

Candidate's background and history. The psychologists were asked to identify the aspects of the candidate's background and history that are typically explored as part of the psychological assessment process. All of the psychologists indicated that the candidate's educational background, family background, history of mental health, and social relationships are part of the assessment. Survey respondents indicated that they also assess for employment history (98%), vocational discernment (93%), physical health and history (89%), ministry experience (78%), spiritual development (78%), and financial status and history (53%).

Regarding ethnically diverse backgrounds, 98% of the psychologists reported that they evaluate candidates born outside the United States. Eighty-seven percent reported that all or most of the assessment is the same for candidates regardless of nationality or place of birth. When needed, 60% indicated that they make cultural accommodations for candidates born outside of the United States. The survey included an open-ended question where respondents were asked to specifically describe any accommodations that are made in consideration of ethnic, cultural, racial, and linguistic issues. The responses mentioned a broad spectrum of accommodations, and most of them were in reference to language difficulties, including use of interpreters to conduct the interviews and translation of specific test items (e.g., difficult Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory—II items) and the review of items to determine whether the questions are readable, culturally relevant, or meaningful for the candidate. Psychologists also mentioned the use of tests or methods of assessment in the candidate's own language, use of a dictionary for specific tests and items, use of "culture-free" tests (e.g., General Ability Measure for Adults for estimating nonverbal intelligence), assessment of candidate's language skills using standardized assessment (e.g., Wide Range Achievement Test—Revised for vocabulary), and use of nonverbal tests when appropriate. Psychologists were also cognizant of interpretation issues and reported use of cultural norms for culturally sensitive interpretation of test results, consideration of culturally relevant behaviors (e.g., eye contact among Asian populations), and the assessment of levels of acculturation in the candidate.

Areas of assessment. Characteristics or abilities of candidates for priestly formation were listed on the survey, with respondents asked to indicate which are assessed somewhat or very much. Table 1 shows the results.

Affective maturity, interpersonal skills, capacity for empathy, and psychosexual development are the characteristics most likely to be part of the psychological assessment process. At least eight of 10 psychologists reported that these are assessed very much. At least seven of 10 psychologists reported that sexual experience, history of substance abuse, sexual orientation or inclination, and the capacity to live celibate chastity are assessed very much as part of the evaluation process. Two thirds of the psychologists reported that the manner of dealing with authority, the level of self-knowledge, and the capacity for self-reflection are assessed very much. About six of 10 psychologists reported that the ability to communicate effectively is very much part of the assessment process, whereas half of the respondents reported that the capacity for growth and conversion is very much part of the process. Psychologists in this study were least likely to say that the capacity for critical thinking and cross-cultural adaptability are very much part of the evaluation process.

In addition to specific traits, the respondents were asked whether the evaluation process assesses for certain types of addictions or addictive behaviors. Nearly all of the psychologists (96%) indicated that the evaluation process is designed to assess addictive behaviors related to alcohol and drugs. Eighty percent of psychologists reported that the evaluation is designed to assess addictive behaviors related to pornography, and 62% said that it is designed to assess addictive behaviors related to the Internet. About 47% of the respondents indicated that the evaluation process includes an assessment of addictive behaviors related to gambling activity. Sixteen percent of the respondents also evaluate eating disorders and sexual activity.

Table 1
Areas of Assessment

Area	Rating (%)	
	<i>Somewhat or very much</i>	<i>Very much only</i>
Affective maturity	96	89
Interpersonal skills	98	82
Capacity for empathy	96	80
Psychosexual development	95	80
Sexual experience	98	78
History of substance abuse	95	73
Sexual orientation or inclination	95	73
Capacity to live celibate chastity	98	71
Manner of dealing with authority	95	67
Level of self-knowledge	95	67
Capacity for self-reflection	91	67
Ability to communicate effectively	98	62
Capacity for growth and conversion	95	51
Ability to grasp abstract questions	89	46
Capacity for leadership	89	44
Decision-making skills	93	42
Ability to grasp practical questions	86	40
Capacity for critical thinking	95	36
Cross-cultural adaptability	49	16

In an open-ended format to elicit comments from the respondents, they were asked the question, "In your experience, what aspects of the psychological assessment process are most helpful in evaluating a candidate for admission to priestly formation?" A substantive number of comments mentioned that a detailed clinical interview with special emphasis on psychosexual development and history with a balanced assessment that considers both strengths and pathological features, in conjunction with a multidimensional and multimethod battery of tests that includes both objective and performance-based evaluation methods, is the most optimal approach in the psychological assessment of candidates. These comments also highlighted the need to have a strong and honest relationship between the psychologist and the vocation director that facilitates an informed discussion of the candidate's psychological results.

Format and instruments used. Respondents were asked whether a clinical interview is typically part of the evaluation process and 98% reported that it is. They were also asked to indicate specific tests that are included in the typical battery of psychological tests for candidates for priestly formation. We present the findings categorized according to the types of assessment areas, that is, those assessing primarily cognitive functioning and personality (objective and performance based).

Psychologists were most likely to report that the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale—Revised III (47%) and the Wechsler Abbreviated Scale of Intelligence (15%) are most typically included to assess cognitive functioning (see Table 2). Under the category "other," psychologists also reported using academic history (e.g., college grades, SAT scores) and the Kaufman Brief Intelligence Test.

All of the psychologists report using the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory—II as part of the typical personality assessment battery. About one third reported that their battery includes the 16 Personality Factor Questionnaire and the Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory. Relatively few indicated using any of the other personality assessment tests listed in Table 3. Under the category "other," psychologists also mentioned using the NEO-PI-R Five-Factor Inventory and the Myers–Briggs Type Indicator.

The most common performance-based methods of assessment used by psychologists (formerly called projective methods) include the Rorschach Inkblot Test. More than half of respondents reported that their battery includes the Incomplete Sentence Blank, and about 40% reported that they use the Thematic Apperception Test. Only a few psychologists reported using the Personal Sentence Completion Inventory. Examples of other tests in this category include the Draw-a-Person Test and projective drawings. One psychologist reported using the Spiritual Well-Being Scale and the Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory. Other tests mentioned (29%) include the Career Assessment Inventory and the Strong Interest Inventory.

The survey included an open-ended question in which respondents were asked to include any other tests they think should be part of the typical assessment battery when evaluating candidates to the priesthood. Comments included the use of personality assessment instruments that measure the normal range of personality (e.g., NEO-PI-R) along with measures of emotional intelligence. The importance of including scales for the assessment of more severe issues (e.g., Psychopathy Scale, Diana Screen for sexual abuse) was highlighted.

Table 2
Cognitive Functioning

Test	Rating	
	<i>n</i>	%
Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale—Revised III	26	47
Wechsler Abbreviated Scale of Intelligence	8	15
Shibley Institute of Living Scale	5	9
Neuropsychological Impairment Scale—Self-Report	1	2
Connors' Adult ADHD Rating Scale	1	2
Other	21	38

Ethical and Professional Issues

Rights to privacy and confidentiality. The questionnaire also asked participants whether the candidate is informed of rights to privacy and confidentiality regarding the results of the psychological testing. All of the psychologists reported that candidates are fully informed of their confidentiality rights. Respondents are most likely (54%) to inform the candidates both orally and in writing, with 33% informing them of their rights verbally and 13% in writing.

Guidelines for psychological testing. Respondents were asked to indicate the guidelines for psychological testing that are typically provided by dioceses, religious institutes, and seminaries. Sixty-nine percent indicated that they are typically provided guidelines that specify the traits and qualities consonant with a vocation to the priesthood. Fifty-one percent of the psychologists reported that they are typically provided guidelines as to the type of tests to be conducted. Forty percent indicated that the Church's expectations regarding celibacy are typically specified in the guidelines, along with counterindications of suitability for celibacy. The psychologists are less likely to report that the Church's expectations regarding permanence of commitment are typically specified in the guidelines.

The survey also included the following question: "Do you have any recommendations for dioceses, religious institutes, and/or seminaries to improve the psychological assessment process for candidates for priestly formation?" This question generated some of the most elaborate and detailed recommendations of all the open-ended questions in the survey. These recommendations can be grouped into several categories. (a) *Uniformity and consistency of protocol:* Psychologists stated that it would be useful to use a consistent battery of tests and protocols across dioceses and seminaries, based on best practices, with some latitude for professional judgment of each case. (b) *Clear expectations and guidelines from the Church:* They recommended the development of three sets of guidelines: guidelines on tests to be used, guidelines on what traits and qualities are considered to be consonant with a vocation to the priesthood, and guidelines on counterindicators for the priesthood, especially in regards to celibacy and commitment permanence. Similarly, they suggested that it is important to refer to psychologists who have some understanding of and background in the Church and its requirements for candidates. (c) *Psychological mindedness of the vocation admissions committee:* Some psychologists said that it is extremely difficult and frustrating trying to explain psychological profiles to decision makers who have ex-

remely limited psychological awareness and understanding of how cognitive function and personality dovetail with spirituality and capacity to minister to others. (d) *Ecclesiastical and religious mindedness of psychologists:* Psychologists also felt that psychologists should have a broad understanding of the Catholic faith and the role occupied by the priest in Catholic religious culture. (e) *Courtesy to candidates:* Psychologists indicated that, according to the guidelines of the American Psychological Association, candidates should be given an interpretative summary of test results, and noted that sometimes church officials do not provide candidates with psychological findings and results. Some psychologists have made it a policy to review the written report of test results with candidates and the vocation director, reading the report together and urging the candidate to ask questions about anything in it, to indicate anything he disagrees with, and to discuss implications for priestly formation and discernment. (f) *Ongoing assessment:* Psychologists suggested that assessment should be ongoing during seminary training, and that it would be helpful to include an assessment midway through the formation process. (g) *Development of solid norms:* Psychologists pointed out that solid norms that are tested empirically, including local norms, should be developed in cooperation with psychologists, seminaries, and dioceses.

Release form or waiver. Ninety-two percent of psychologists indicated that the candidate is required to sign a waiver to release the results of psychological testing. When asked to provide a more detailed description of what is to be included in the release, 92% indicated that the release should specify to whom the results would be released, and 75% stated that the release form should explain how the results from the psychological assessment would be used. Somewhat over half of the respondents (54%) said that the release should specify who would have access to the results, and some of them (29%) thought it is also important for the form to specify how long the results would be kept. Psychologists reported that they typically retain the "results of the testing" from 5 to 15 years. On average, they retain these results for 9 years. Also, they indicated that they typically retain the "records that the testing took place" from 5 to 29 years, with an average of 7 years.

Reporting findings. All psychologists indicated that they give some kind of report of psychological testing results to the vocation director. Recipients of the report vary, and in some cases these include the seminary rector, bishop, major superior, vocation team, seminary admissions board, and formation personnel. Only

Table 3
Personality Assessment—Self-Report Tests

Test	Rating	
	<i>n</i>	%
Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory—II	55	100
16 Personality Factor Questionnaire	18	33
Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory	17	31
Personality Assessment Inventory	6	11
Edwards Personal Preference Schedule	5	9
Fundamental Interpersonal Relationship Orientation—Behavior	5	9
Other	21	38

75% of psychologists indicated that they give a report of the results to the candidate, a troubling number because American Psychological Association ethical guidelines state that results should be given to the person tested. Of those who do give results to the candidate, 76% of them indicated that they give an oral report, whereas 32% give a full written report. Fifteen percent of the respondents indicated that they provide only a summary written report to the candidate. Respondents indicated that they are much less likely to release raw scores to candidates. Psychologists indicated that they give some kind of report of psychological testing results to the vocation director, often both oral and written. Ninety-eight percent provide a full written report, 27% an oral report, with only 6% including raw scores. The majority of psychologists (80%) indicated that they give a full written report to the seminary, but only 10% provide a summary written report to the seminary.

Discussion

The aim of this qualitative survey was not hypothesis testing, given the absence of previous theoretical frameworks on the psychological assessment of Catholic seminarians and clergy. It focused primarily on assessing the current practice of professional psychological assessment of candidates to the priesthood in the Catholic Church. It attempted this by directly asking specific questions to a select number of psychologists with extensive collaborative experience with Church officials involved in priestly formation. The qualitative methodology used in this study has some inherent limitations, which includes a selected sample of respondents as opposed to a random sample of participants, the use of frequency data based solely on percentages, determination of very narrow a priori questions limiting the richness or depth of the obtained information, and limited generalizability of the findings. Also, some of the sections of this report provide descriptive summaries for each of the survey categories and the specific answers given by respondents were not included. (More specific answers or detailed tables with percentage data can be obtained from the first author.) Therefore, the results of this survey are preliminary, and they provide estimates of processes, practices, and procedures of psychological assessment in the Catholic Church but do not necessarily generalize to assessment practices in other religious organizations. The survey raises questions worthy of further exploration. It is worth questioning, for example, whether these assessment practices are also found in other major religious denominations. Future research may also investigate to what extent psychological assessment is predictive of the development and integration of the four dimensions (human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral) as outlined by the official Program of Priestly Formation.

Implications for Standards of Practice

The results of this study have implications for both psychologists and seminary personnel who evaluate candidates to the priesthood. We identified three salient concerns: a need for more clear communication and collaboration; a need for standardization; and a need for more systematic, culturally competent, and sensitive assessment practices.

Psychologists noted the lack of clear expectations and guidelines by the referral source (i.e., various church leaders). Part of the

inadequate communication between referral source and the psychologist is attributed to the different professional worldviews and expectations, which may be expressed and articulated in different languages (e.g., ecclesiastical vs. psychological). Plante (2003) recommended that this type of collaboration should strive toward developing a "shared language." In addition, prior to starting an evaluation, the psychologist should work closely with the referral source to clarify the referral question and decisional needs (Armengol, 2001). For example, church officials often expect psychological reports that speak to issues of celibacy, commitment permanence, and other predictors of the priestly lifestyle and vocation. Groth-Marnat (2003) highlighted that it is the duty of psychologists to clarify the requests they receive for psychological assessment. In the process, psychologists "may need to uncover hidden agendas, unspoken expectations, and complex interpersonal relationships, as well as explain the specific limitations of psychological tests" (p. 31). It is suggested that evaluators understand the vocabulary, conceptual model, dynamics, and expectations of the referral source (Groth-Marnat, 2003).

Respondents also noted the lack of standardization in assessment procedures. They mentioned, for example, that it would be very informative and useful for the Church to implement some standardization process based on best practices. Maloney (2000) discussed this problem among the major religious organizations that require psychological evaluation for clergy applicants. He cited the United Methodist Church (UMC) as the only major religious group that has instituted a standardized procedure for psychological evaluations. For example, the UMC has recommended a set of specific psychological measures for use by evaluators. It also created a Board of Higher Education and Ministry that provides a scoring service for its psychologists. The board allows data to be collected and programmatic research across denominations to be undertaken. The psychological evaluation is then incorporated into a multiphase, multiyear plan that includes fieldwork evaluation, written statements, periodic reviews, and seminary training. Also, a denomination-wide steering committee routinely convenes the UMC's "psychological evaluation specialists" for the sharing of ideas and the encouragement of standard procedures throughout the United States (Hunt & Maloney, 1990). Maloney (2000) pointed out that in spite of the UMC's clear standards, "actual evaluation procedures vary widely. . . . A diverse set of formats and assessment procedures are used" (p. 522). It is a delicate balance between standardization and flexibility that allows psychologists to address examinee-specific assessment needs. It is worth noting that within the Catholic Church several proposals have been put forth advocating the need for more standardized procedures in the psychological evaluation of Catholic clergy (Plante & Boccaccini, 1998). However, no policy or official set of guidelines has been implemented at the national level.

Recent surveys show that the U.S. Catholic priesthood is increasingly becoming more culturally diverse, with significant numbers of Hispanic/Latino, African, African American, and Asian and Pacific Islander priests. One quarter of the priests ordained in the United States in 2009 were born outside the United States, with the largest numbers coming from Mexico, Vietnam, Poland, and the Philippines (CARA, 2009). This has implications for the professional practice of psychological assessment, with 98% of the surveyed psychologists reporting that they evaluate these candidates to the priesthood. In assessing foreign-born can-

didates, 63% of evaluators reported making some accommodations for these culturally diverse candidates. Only 16% of respondents reported giving very much consideration to cross-cultural adaptability as an important component to be assessed in the psychological evaluation. These results suggest the need for developing a more consistent, comprehensive, and systematic process of culturally competent psychological evaluation of candidates to the priesthood, especially for applicants from other countries. Although a broad range of accommodations is being implemented, this is simply not enough, and we suggest that evaluators make use of available practice guidelines for the development and maintenance of cultural competence in psychological assessment (see Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing; American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, & National Council on Measurement in Education, 1999). Evaluating candidates from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds is a complex process and needs to be performed with professional care and consideration. For example, the incorporation of cultural factors into the selection of assessment approaches and the interpretation of results is of paramount importance. The use of instruments whose validity has been demonstrated is strongly recommended (Acevedo-Polakovich et al., 2007).

Conclusions

Given that psychologists appear to have a large and very important role in the screening and selection process of who gets admitted into priestly formation, it is important that evaluation procedures and reports be comprehensive and of high quality, and that they adhere to best practices.

It is our hope that the results of this survey will be a first step in providing more detailed information about the current practice of psychological evaluation and that the recommendations we have offered will be implemented by Church officials and individual psychologists. We hope that our findings will promote increased consistency across practitioners and increased quality in the assessment of candidates to the clergy.

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