

Seminary Admission and Formation

The issue of how entrants to the priesthood are selected, screened and trained has been identified to this Inquiry as an area that has undergone considerable change in response *inter alia* to the crisis of child sexual abuse that has occurred in the Catholic Church in recent years.

A former dean of St Peter's seminary told the Inquiry that most clerical students were sent to St Peter's by the Bishop of Ferns, the Bishop of Down and Connor and a few by Bishops of other dioceses. Where referred by a Bishop, a candidate was not vetted before admission. Two priests described to the Inquiry that they entered the seminary in Maynooth in 1961 with absolutely no preliminary screening at all. Candidates were admitted on the basis that they had an interest in becoming a priest and their suitability was reviewed in the course of seminary training. In "Time to Listen", a lack of seminary training on the issue of sexual abuse of children by priests was particularly identified as a failing³⁷ and this has been confirmed by a number of clerical witnesses who came before this Inquiry.

Dr Conrad Baars, a psychiatrist with many years experience in treating priests, presented a research paper to the 1971 Synod of Bishops in Rome in which he identified emotional and psychosexual immaturity, which manifested itself in hetero- or homosexual activity, as a serious problem for ordained priests. This research was confirmed by subsequent studies and in 1976, Fr Eugene Kennedy, in a comprehensive study commissioned by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, found that a significant number of American priests were emotionally or psychologically underdeveloped.

Fr Kennedy reported that the underdeveloped priests were generally "allowed" to maintain inappropriate or even destructive behaviour patterns or lifestyles due to a lack of adequate and effective guidance and supervision. Any mentoring of young priests centred on the performance of their priestly duties and did not focus on their total human development.

The Inquiry understands from senior staff members who were in St Peter's at the time, that at the time when Fr Sean Fortune entered the seminary (1973), no screening of those candidates recommended by their Bishops occurred. The Inquiry understands that Fr Sean Fortune was not himself sponsored by a Bishop when he entered St Peter's but was subsequently adopted by the Diocese of Ferns. His attendance at a Christian Brother Juniorate immediately prior to his attendance at St. Peter's allowed him to enter the seminary without assessment. The Inquiry has seen extensive questionnaires completed by serving members of the clergy who monitored Sean Fortune during summer placements whilst he was still a seminarian. Whilst serious personality defects were identified by some of these assessments, there was no identification of any sexual problems at that time. Nevertheless, the Inquiry is satisfied that Sean Fortune did engage in child sexual abuse during his years as a seminarian and in spite of clear warning signs from his own behaviour apart from any warnings that may have been communicated to the authorities in St Peter's, this did not prevent his ordination.

³⁷ "Time to Listen" p61

Similarly, grave doubts were expressed about Fr James Doyle's suitability for the Diocesan priesthood but his ordination was proceeded with in spite of this.

Norms for Priestly Training in Ireland were promulgated by the Episcopal Conference in 1973 and they stated:

32. As far as possible the suitability of a candidate for a seminary should be assessed before admission.....

A thorough medical examination should be made.....

A thorough psychological assessment should also be made, before acceptance if possible, otherwise shortly after, to ascertain whether he has the necessary qualities of personality for exercising the duties and sustaining the obligations of the life he has chosen as well as to help him with his own development.

34 Each student's position should, with his own cooperation, be kept under review so that a student unsuited to the priesthood may be enabled as soon as possible to recognise this fact, and may be helped to choose another state in life.

The Inquiry has spoken to former presidents, deans and senior staff members in St Peter's and examined files furnished to the Inquiry in respect of priests who attended the college who were accused of child sexual abuse. The Inquiry could not identify any reference to these norms or their implementation in St Peter's. Had they been properly implemented, it is difficult to understand how the ordinations of clearly unsuitable men were allowed to proceed.

The Inquiry has been informed that from the early 1980s more emphasis was placed on the personal development of seminarians in St. Peter's, and in 1988 a stringent interview process was introduced prior to admission of all candidates. A course on personal formation given by qualified psychologists was also introduced from 1989.

Current Selection Procedures for Maynooth Seminary

All candidates for the diocesan priesthood in Ireland now attend seminary training in Maynooth College in Kildare or in the Irish College in Rome. The Inquiry is indebted to Monsignor Dermot Farrell, President, St Patrick's College Maynooth, who offered a full account of the present arrangements regarding seminary admission to Maynooth. Monsignor Farrell first pointed out that it was the primary responsibility and task of a Bishop to examine the suitability of candidates for the priesthood and to select them (Can. 241). The canonical requirements governing the admission of candidates to the seminary state that "*the Diocesan Bishop is to admit to the major seminary only those whose human, moral, spiritual and intellectual gifts as well as physical and psychological health and right intention, show that they are capable of dedicating themselves permanently to the sacred ministries*". The Inquiry notes that this canonical power is now exercised with the assistance of professional advice.

In practical terms the Inquiry is informed that it is considered necessary to consider the following areas when assessing the suitability of seminarians:

- *Life and family history;*
- *Age: a candidate must be at least eighteen years old;*
- *Faith History: there must be a reasonably clear understanding of the priesthood;*
- *Capacity for Friendship: candidate must relate to men and women in a healthy way;*
- *Academic Suitability: he should have passed five subjects in his Leaving Certificate;*
- *Sexual History;*
- *Medical History;*
- *Transfer between Seminaries.*

With regard to sexual history the following issues are addressed:

- *An applicant who has been in a prior relationship should have concluded that relationship and have allowed for a significant period of time before being accepted by a Diocese. In the case of a candidate who has had a sexual relationship (heterosexual), a substantial period of celibate living should precede entry into the seminary;*
- *In a recently expressed judgement of the Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments, the Cardinal Prefect stated "The ordination to the Diaconate or to the priesthood of homosexual persons or those with a homosexual tendency is absolutely inadvisable and imprudent and, from a pastoral point of view, very risky... A person who is homosexual or who has homosexual tendencies is not, therefore, suitable to receive the sacrament of sacred orders." (Congregations Bulletin, December 2002). According to Dr Farrell, the College in Maynooth accepts the force of this reasoning and advice;*
- *If it becomes known that a seminarian is engaging in physical genital activity with another person while he is in formation, he is asked to leave immediately. Certain other kinds of behaviour are also inconsistent with celibate chastity e.g. engaging in flirtatious or seductive behaviour and dating. It goes without saying that being in possession of, or accessing, pornographic material (whether print, video, electronic, digital etc.) is completely incompatible with being a seminarian. It is also unacceptable to participate in or to advocate the gay subculture by which is meant allowing a seminarian to define his personality, outlook or self-understanding by virtue of same-sex attraction;*
- *Insofar as it is possible to determine, the older applicant should have achieved a successful integration of his sexuality and the younger applicant should have the capacity for such integration. Where there are clear contrary indications, the applicant should not be accepted;*
- *A competent person should take a full history of the candidate. Particular attention should be paid to the presence of sexual abuse, sexual acting out or sexual orientation problems etc;*
- *The child protection policy as set down by the Episcopal Conference should be fully complied with.*

Dr Farrell informed the Inquiry that Maynooth College recommends strongly that the bishop should consider a psychological assessment as an integral part of the admission procedure; it is the understanding of the Inquiry that this is generally done.

St Peter's seminary introduced such a screening process in 1988. This psychological assessment – a combination of written tests and interview – should be carried out during the initial selection process by a trained psychologist who is chosen by the individual bishop or diocese and again during the formation of the student. In addition, Maynooth College has for many years employed a trained counsellor whose ministry includes assisting candidates with their personal and emotional development for priesthood. If, for a just reason, a psychologist or a psychiatrist is required to furnish a certificate of a candidate's state of psychological health (can. 1051:1), one is called in from outside the seminary.

According to Dr Farrell, the past four decades have seen considerable development in the Church's approach to assessing and screening candidates for entry to seminary. The Conciliar document *Optatam Totius*, dealing expressly with the priesthood, outlines a broad range of criteria, which should be taken into consideration before accepting candidates: "*Each candidate should be subjected to vigilant and careful inquiry, 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. Account should also be taken of the candidate's capacity for undertaking the obligations of the priesthood and carrying out his pastoral duties*". (OC III 6, 1965)

Less than a decade later, the magisterial documents began to advert to the need to carry out admission and selection procedures in "*accordance with modern psychological diagnosis*" but "*without losing sight of the complexities of human influences on an individual*" (*Directorium* Congregation for Catholic Education (#38/1974). This reference to the admissibility of recourse to psychology is gradually strengthened until eventually it is described by the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* (1985) as a resource which "*as a general rule*" should be availed of whenever the case merits.

Five years later the Holy See advised that candidates accepted for seminary should already display a "*balanced affectivity – especially a sexual balance which presupposes an acceptance of the other*". It reaffirmed that psychological assessments could play a useful role here.

These insights were incorporated into the *Irish Bishops Document of Child sexual Abuse: Framework for a Church Response* (1996). It states that the "*screening of candidates should normally include a full psychological assessment by an experienced psychologist well versed in and supportive of the Church's expectations for the priesthood and religious life, especially in regard to celibacy*".

Thus, much has changed in the screening process and in the overall formation of seminarians in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council. Today a much greater emphasis is placed on screening for men who are able to live a life of chaste celibacy. In order to ensure that candidates possess the psycho-sexual-socio maturity necessary for priests today, Maynooth College has been providing more resources for students, which is a vast contrast to the situation 40 years ago. Celibacy formation is integrated into the entire seminary programme through conferences, formal lectures and advice from formation personnel, spiritual direction and the fulltime availability of professional counselling.

What it is clear from the foregoing is that celibacy and the ability of young men to live chaste celibate lives was one of the major issues addressed by church authorities in dealing with the growing problem of child sexual abuse within the Church.

Celibacy is the state of being unmarried. Chastity is the avoidance of all sexual activity outside the married state.³⁸ For a Roman Catholic priest, a vow of celibacy must also include a vow of chastity.

It must be remembered that the vow of celibacy taken by a priest is a conscious spiritual decision reinforced by prayer and faith. It is a vow that is sincerely meant in the majority of cases. If a man wishes to live his life as a Latin rite Roman Catholic priest, a vow of celibacy is mandatory.

The Expert Group was unanimous in its view that the vow of celibacy contributed to the problem of child sexual abuse in the Church. There have been important changes brought about in seminary selection and training with regard to assessing the suitability of men to adhere to a celibate lifestyle and to provide ongoing support in this regard. The Inquiry believes that such changes represent a response on the part of Church authorities to the growing awareness of the problem of clerical child sexual abuse.

Dr Patrick Randles, a senior therapist with the Granada Institute, is experienced in the assessment of candidates. He commented that in the past the standard of evaluation by psychologists had been quite variable and that for some it was a very quick assessment which sought to establish whether a candidate suffered from specific psychopathology. More recently according to Dr Randles, religious orders and dioceses have become more demanding with regard to the comprehensiveness they expect from an assessment. There is no definitive test which would assess a person's suitability for priesthood; although it is possible to identify psychological factors which would indicate unsuitability.

Mr Joseph Sullivan, formerly of The Lucy Faithful Foundation in Nottingham, pointed out that in the course of his research, he conducted a study of 41 professionals who had all been referred to him because of child abuse. Of these, 92.5 per cent said that they were aware by the time they were 21 years of age, that they had a sexual interest in children. This would indicate that when these men made the final step into their profession or vocation, they were aware of their attraction to children and this attraction was a motivating factor in their choice of career. It would, of course, be of vital importance if this attraction could be identified prior to their achieving a qualification that gave them access to children. Regrettably, the current state of knowledge in this area does not make it possible to assess with any degree of certainty whether a man was likely to be a child abuser. What can be assessed however is the level of maturity and awareness that a person has in respect of his or her sexuality. A sexually immature man may be a potential risk to children.

³⁸ Walsh, H. A., "Mandatory Celibacy and Sexual Ethics in the Latin Rite of the Roman Catholic Church" *Electronic Journal of Human Sexuality*. Vol. 2, Feb 6, 1999.

Whilst the rigorous standards now in place in Maynooth would be of assistance in ensuring that only men who are emotionally, intellectually and sexually mature are admitted for ordination, the reality is that very few diocesan priests are ordained in Ireland in any year. Increasingly, parishes are welcoming priests ordained abroad to replace retiring clergy. Priests who are ordained in seminaries outside Ireland should be subjected to the same level of assessment as has been undertaken by seminaries such as Maynooth.

Canon law

The right of a religious denomination to regulate its own affairs is recognised by Article 44.2.5 of the 1937 Constitution of Ireland, which states: “*Every religious denomination shall have the right to manage its own affairs, own, acquire and administer property, moveable and immovable, and maintain institutions for religious or charitable purposes*”.

Until its amendment in 1973, Article 44.1.2 of the Constitution referred to the special position of the Catholic Church in Ireland. The removal of this provision by referendum means that the Catholic Church in Ireland now stands equally with all other religious denominations in the State and enjoys the same constitutional guarantee of freedom and no more.

Vatican Council II tackled the matter of Church/State relations in Chapter IV of Part II of the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in Today’s World, *Gaudium et Spes*. Catholic teaching in this area emphasises the principle that the temporal and the religious are two distinct competences with respective powers and faculties. It is summarised in *Gaudium et Spes* as follows: “*The political community and the Church are autonomous and independent of each other in their own fields.*”

Canon law has a long history, having its roots in the Old and especially the New Testament. Various connections of norms can be found during the first three centuries of the Christian era (e.g., the didascalia). In the 6th century, the Emperor Justinian compiled collections of law, to be called the *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, which included some Canonical norms. After the Dark Ages this work inspired Canonists to collect and organise many earlier collections of Canonical norms and so to form material for the *Corpus Iuris Canonici* which was the standard for Canonists from the Middle Ages until Pope Benedict XV promulgated the first Code of Canon law in 1917 following the model of the Napoleonic Code. After the reform of the Second Vatican Council, Pope John Paul II promulgated the revised Code of Canon law for the Latin Church in 1983.

The Irish legal system recognises Canon law as a scientific legal system and body of law, both substantive and adjective. It is a body of rules emanating from a legislative authority for the ordering of the conduct, regulating the social and domestic relations and punishing the disobedience of those who recognise that authority, and which speaks and gives judgement through its own tribunals. Canon law regulates the relationship between a Bishop and a priest of his diocese. As both Bishop and priest, by their ordination agree to be bound by Canon law, the relationship between them might be seen, in practical terms, as consisting of a contract comprising the material provisions of Canon law. The strict legal position is otherwise. Both parties are seen