

ABSTRACT

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*Psychological assessment of candidates to the Catholic priesthood.  
A comparison between bishops' and psychologists' views.*

The general aim of this thesis is to analyze the possibility for two professional categories, bishops in the Catholic Church and psychologists, to collaborate in the process of selecting candidates to the priesthood in the Catholic Church in spite of the fact that these professional categories often have different frames of reference, value systems and education. The study compares the two groups' respective views on issues relating to the procedures for selecting candidates to the Catholic priesthood. This issue is important, since some priests have personal problems with celibacy, problems of alcohol abuse, asocial behavior, and even pedophilic tendencies. Psychologists could help bishops to screen out unsuitable candidates.

Two hundred and thirty-seven bishops in 44 countries and six continents and 203 psychologists in the same countries answered a questionnaire (response rate 54% and 46% respectively) concerning the prerequisites of a suitable candidate to the priesthood, and the selection procedure and accompanying ethical problems.

Bishops and psychologists showed agreement on the questions concerning religious attitudes of the candidate, his background, and his personal characteristics. To some extent the respondents' concerns were complementary: bishops emphasized moral and social qualities in the candidate, psychologists attached more importance to life experience and internal aspects such as the aspirant's realistic judgment or ability to control himself. Differences between bishops and psychologists concerned indications of a candidate's ability to remain celibate in the future and the psychological selection procedure itself, especially the question of the confidentiality of the results of the psychological examination. Not surprisingly practicing Catholic psychologists, psychologists who already had collaborated with the bishops, and psychologists who were also priests shared more of the bishops' opinions, compared with the main group of psychologists.

Comparisons between continents showed that the opinions of bishops in Asia differed most from the psychologists' opinions and those of the North American bishops were closest. Moreover, of all the psychologists, the Asian ones were closest to the bishops, while Western European psychologists were most different from the bishops. The findings also showed somewhat divergent views of bishops in different continents. This indicates that Christian faith has been inculturated in countries outside the West. In contrast, psychologists, belonging to a relatively new science, showed a remarkable homogeneity throughout all the continents.

In general, the results of the investigation showed that collaboration between bishops and psychologists can be fruitful, since the specialist knowledge of the psychologists complemented rather than contradicted the knowledge of the bishops. Also when the psychologist does not share the religious faith of the bishop, he or she can still carry out an objective psychological examination of the candidate, provided that the employer – the bishop – clearly indicates what he wants to know about the candidate. However, very different attitudes to the naturalness of living in celibacy might create very severe difficulties in the collaboration between bishops and psychologists. Trust in the dealings between the bishop, the psychologist and the candidate might increase if the procedures of the psychological selection were clear to all those involved.

*Keywords:* Selection of job applicants, candidates to the priesthood in the Catholic Church, continental differences, Catholic bishops, Christian versus secular psychologists, psychological selection procedures, confidentiality.

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