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## APPLICATION OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY TO HUMAN FORMATION OF PRIESTS AND RELIGIOUS: THE ACTIVE PROGRAM OF POSITIVE PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT (APPRO)

### 1. PRELIMINARY ISSUE

Pope John Paul II, in the Apostolic Exhortation on the Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day, indicated that: "The formation of future priests, both diocesan and religious, and lifelong assiduous care for their personal sanctification in the ministry and for the constant updating of their pastoral commitment, is considered by the Church one of the most demanding and important tasks for the future of the evangelization of humanity"<sup>1</sup>.

At the beginning of this reflection on Priestly formation, several fundamental questions must be posed: Is there a real need? Is there room for new programs? If the response is affirmative, can positive psychology introduce a noteworthy and useful approach? For example, Guindon has called for a more systematic approach, "In contemporary practice, the human dimension of formation is not ignored, but neither does it seem that it is carried out in a conscious and systematic way"<sup>2</sup>. Meanwhile, Dyrek in *Formacja ludzka do kapłaństwa* [Human formation for the Priesthood], states that there is a strong indication for a comprehensive elaboration of programs in human formation<sup>3</sup>. The need for programs is also demonstrated by official documents of the Church<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation on the Formation of Priests *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (March 25, 1992), AAS 84 (1992), p. 657-804, no. 2.

<sup>2</sup> J. Guindon, *The Integral Human Formation of Candidates for the Priesthood*, Editions Paulines, Montreal 1993, p. 78-79.

<sup>3</sup> Por. K. Dyrek, *Formacja ludzka do kapłaństwa*, WAM, Kraków 1999, p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> "Since only general laws can be made where there exists a wide variety of nations and regions, a special 'program of priestly training' is to be undertaken by each country or rite. It must be set up by the episcopal conferences, revised from time to time and approved by the Apostolic See. In this way will the universal laws be adapted to the particular circumstances of the times and localities so that the priestly training will always be in tune with the pastoral needs of those regions in which the ministry is to be exercised". Second Vatican Council, Decree on Priestly Training *Optatum Totius* (October 28, 1965), AAS 58 (1966), p. 713-727, no. 1. "What needs to be done is to transfer this spirit - which can never be lacking in the Church - to the social, psychological, political and cultural con-

Positive psychology is used in many areas of individual and social life e.g., education, coaching, organizations, family, psychotherapy, nursing, the military, business<sup>5</sup>. The question of the application of positive psychology to Priestly formation in the Roman Catholic Church has been raised<sup>6</sup>.

The problem of Priestly formation today is a complex contemporary issue impacted by candidates' personal issues, the complex nature of post-modern society, and current situation in the Church<sup>7</sup>. Of necessity, Priestly formation must be concerned with the individual human issues that men bring with them to seminary or houses of formation (e.g., immaturity, underdeveloped virtues, lack of life experience, underdeveloped relationship with God, social problems, difficulty with sacrifice, dysfunctional family of origin, anger issues, sexual problems,

conditions of the world today, conditions which are so varied and complex, as the synod fathers have confirmed, bearing in mind the different particular churches. The fathers, with words expressing thoughtful concern but at the same time great hope, have shown awareness of and reflected at length on the efforts going on in all their churches to identify and update methods of training candidates for the priesthood". Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation on the Formation of Priests *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (March 25, 1992), AAS 84 (1992), p. 657-804, no. 42.

"Every seminary must have a program of human formation appropriate to the stage of the candidates' preparation, which seeks to prepare men to be bridges for, not obstacles to, the spread of the Gospel [...] This program must have a clear focus on the ordained priesthood as a vocation that brings the candidates to full human and spiritual potential through love of God and service of others". United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Program of Priestly Formation*, 5th ed., Washington 2005, no. 83-84.

<sup>5</sup> Por. R. Biswas-Diener, B. Dean, *Positive Psychology Coaching: Putting the Science of Happiness to Work for Your Clients*, John Wiley & Sons, New Jersey 2007; A.L. Duckworth, T.A. Steen, M.E.P. Seligman, *Positive psychology in clinical practice*, Annual Review of Clinical Psychology 1(2005), p. 629-651; P. Kwiatek, P. Bajer, *Aplikacja Psychologii Pozytywnej w edukacji na przykładzie doświadczenia Geelong Grammar School w Australii*, Przegląd Badań Edukacyjnych 17(2/2013), p. 227-245; M.D. Terjesen, M.D. Jacofsky, J.J. Froh, R.A. DiGiuseppe, *Integrating positive psychology into schools: Implications for practice*, Psychology in the Schools 41(2004), p. 163-172; M.E.P. Seligman, *Positive Health*, Applied Psychology: An International Review 57(2008), p. 3-18; M.E.P. Seligman, *Positive Education and the new prosperity: Australia's edge*, Education Today (2008), p. 20-21; C.D. Conoley, J.C. Conoley, *Positive Psychology and Family Therapy. Creative Techniques and Practical Tools for Guiding Change and Enhancing Growth*, John Wiley & Sons, New Jersey 2009; P.A. Linley, S. Joseph, *Applied positive psychology: A new perspective for professional practice*, John Wiley & Sons, New Jersey 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Por. P. Kwiatek, *Psychologia pozytywna a formacja ludzka w kontekście przygotowania do prezbiteratu*, Seminarie 28(2010), p. 201-211; Z. Formella, P. Kwiatek, *Grounds for Talking a Positive Psychology Approach to "Human Formation" in Preparation for the Priesthood*, Orientamenti Pedagogici 57(2010), p. 1109-1120.

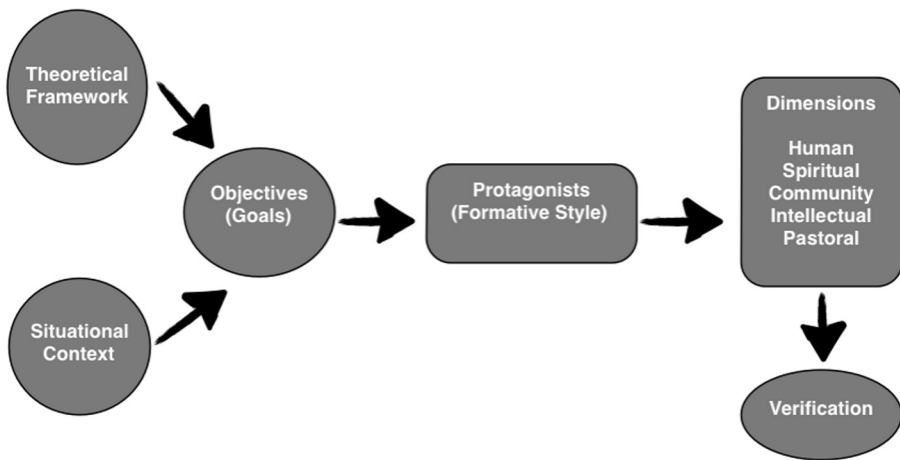
<sup>7</sup> Por. R. Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis: a secret world revisited*, Brunner-Routledge, London 2003; J. Ciarrocchi, R.J. Wicks, *Psychotapia duchownych i osób zakonnych*, tłum. A. Rozwadowska, GWP, Gdańsk 2005; J. Baniak, *Czynniki kryzysu tożsamości kapłańskiej wśród księży rzymskokatolickich w Polsce. Studium socjologiczne*, Teologia Praktyczna 8(2007), p. 209-265; A. Cencini, *I sentimenti del figlio. Il cammino formativo nella vocazione presbiterale e consacrata*, EDB, Bologna 2005; V. Andreoli, *Preti. Viaggio fra gli uomini del sacro*, Piemme, Milano 2009; C. De Nitto, A. Arto, *Psicologia e formazione. Commento su orientamenti per l'utilizzo delle competenze psicologiche nell'amministrazione e formazione dei candidati al sacerdozio*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Roma 2009; *Sztuka bycia księdzem. Poradnik*, red. J. Augustyn, WAM, Kraków 2010.

etc). However, instead of merely repairing defects and highlighting what does not work, positive psychology focuses on that which is unique, beautiful, and good about the candidates. However is important to not focus solely on repairing faults or the resolving difficulties with which a man is struggling – although it certainly includes this dimension – but rather, it seeks to optimize the positive developmental factors responsible for his sense of happiness and human well-being.

## 2. ELEMENST OF THE FORMATIVE PROGRAM

According to Mèthode Gahungu and Vittorio Gambino, authors of *Formare i presbiteri. Principi e linee di metodologia pedagogica* [To Form Priests: Principles and Lines of Methodology and Pedagogy], there are six elements in any project concerning priestly formation: theoretical background, situational framework, aims and objectives, style and protagonists, formation's dimension, and, evaluation or assessment<sup>8</sup>.

Figure (1). Components of a Project in Priestly Formation



Source: Gahungu & Source: Gambino, 2003, p. 29.

According to the aforementioned authors, formation consists of a plan and some proposals organized for community formation<sup>9</sup>. The first element is a theoretical framework. The field of formation for the Roman Catholic Priest-

<sup>8</sup> Por. M. Gahungu, V. Gambino, *Formare i presbiteri. Principi e linee di metodologia pedagogica*, LAS, Roma 2003, p. 29-31.

<sup>9</sup> Por. tamže, p. 25.

hood refers to Church policy as theological teaching, faith, pastoral mission, and the Christian anthropological vision of the human being. In the APPRO model, the theoretical framework is also drawn from positive psychology. The second element embraces the situational context of the Church, contemporary society, culture, and politics. Positive psychology presents its own answer to the present condition of human beings<sup>10</sup>. The third element consists of objectives (i.e., what kinds of goals are to be met by the program). Positive psychology emphasizes the importance of flourishing and well-being and builds on virtues and strengths. The fourth essential element is protagonist. This refers to listening to the Church's teaching about who should be a formator and what kind of formation is needed in the Church today. In the context of APPRO, such a person could be internal (Spiritual director, Priest-mentor, or Seminary professor) or external (psychologist or counselor in agreement with the magisterium and worldview of the Church<sup>11</sup>) and could introduce positive psychology and help candidates integrate it into the faith dimension.

The final factor in formation projects is a process of verification or assessment. This may likely be the weakest part of many projects. Strategies that may be utilized by formation programs might encompass self-report statements, observation, and dialog. These, however, would necessitate developing objective tools such as tests to bring new insight into the formation process. Positive psychology, with its rapidly expanding development of assessments, promises to be an important contributor in this endeavor.

Last but not least are the areas of Priestly formation. According to the *Patores Dabo Vobis*, these are: human, spiritual, intellectual, and, pastoral<sup>12</sup>. Some authors add a fifth area, community, because they wish to address the lifestyle of religious priests who live in community<sup>13</sup>, but this could also be applied to the facilitation of mutual support and a sense of community among diocesan seminarians, even continuing after ordination.

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<sup>10</sup> Por. M.E.P. Seligman, *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being*, The Free Press, New York 2011.

<sup>11</sup> Por. Congregazione per L'Educazione Cattolica, *Orientamenti per l'utilizzo delle competenze psicologiche nell'ammissione e nella formazione dei candidati al sacerdozio*, Città del Vaticano, Watykan 2008.

<sup>12</sup> Por. no. 43-59.

<sup>13</sup> The difference relates to religious priests and diocesan priests. The first group lives in community, therefore, there will be an emphasis on the community dimension in formation. The second group (diocesan Priests), usually lives in solitude in a parish, therefore, during the process of formation there is not generally a large emphasis on this dimension. However, it could be very useful for diocesan Priests to be in communication with and connected to their peers. Por. M. Mulvey, *Priests of the Future Formation and Communion*, New City Press, New York 1991; M. Gahungu, *Formazione permanente dei presbiteri*, LAS, Roma 2008.

### 3. ROOTS AND TERMINOLOGY OF THE APPRO PROGRAM

This section will present the theoretical influences on the form and content of the APPRO model, followed by the meaning of the acronym. The program was derived from several years of personal research by the author as he strove to integrate psychological knowledge with spiritual experience. The following psychological approaches had a significant impact: *Positive Psychology*<sup>14</sup>, *Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy* (REBT)<sup>15</sup>, and *Hope Theory* (attributed to the psychologist Charles R. Snyder)<sup>16</sup>. Of note is the concept of *Emotional Intelligence*<sup>17</sup>, specifically, the issue of *Positive Emotions* according to Fredrickson<sup>18</sup>. Also considered is the concept of *Problem Solving*<sup>19</sup>, and the *Gestalt Therapy Model*<sup>20</sup>. The literature

<sup>14</sup> Por. M.E.P. Seligman, M. Csikszentmihalyi, *Positive Psychology: An Introduction*, *American Psychologist* 55(2000), p. 5-14; M.E.P. Seligman, *Authentic happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment*, The Free Press, New York 2002; C. Snyder, S.J. Lopez, *Positive psychology: The scientific and practical explorations of human strengths*, SAGE Publications, Thousand Oaks 2007; C. Peterson, M.E.P. Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification*, Oxford University Press, New York 2004.

<sup>15</sup> Por. A. Ellis, *How to make yourself happy and remarkably less disturbable*, Impact Publishers, Atascadero 1999; A. Ellis, *Feeling better, getting better, staying better: Profound self-help therapy for your emotions*, Impact Publishers, Atascadero 2001; A. Ellis, *Rational emotive behavior therapy: It works for me—it can work for you*, Prometheus, Amherst 2004; A. Ellis, S. Blau, *The Albert Ellis reader: A guide to well-being using rational emotive behavior therapy*, Kensington Publishing Corp, New York 2001; A. Ellis, W. Dryden, *The practice of rational emotive behavior therapy*, Springer Publishing Company, New York 1997; A. Ellis, C. MacLaren, *Rational emotive behavior therapy: A therapist's guide*, Impact Publishers, Atascadero 1998.

<sup>16</sup> Por. C.R. Snyder, *The Psychology of Hope: You Can Get There From Here*, The Free Press, New York 1994; C.R. Snyder, *Hope Theory: Rainbows in the Mind*, *Psychological Inquiry* 13 (4/2002), p. 249-275; D. McDermott, C.R. Snyder, *Making Hope Happen*, New Harbinger Publications, Oakland 1999; D. McDermott, C.R. Snyder, *The Great Big Book of Hope*, New Harbinger Publications, Oakland 2000; P. Kwiatek, *Znaczenie i rozwój psychologii nadziei w ujęciu Charlesa Richarda Snydera*, *Seminare* 31(2012), p. 157-170.

<sup>17</sup> Por. J.D. Mayer, P. Salovey, *What is emotional intelligence?*, w: *Emotional Development and Emotional Intelligence: Educational Implications*, red. P. Salovey, D.J. Sluyter, BasicBooks, New York 1997, p. 3-31; J.D. Mayer, P. Salovey, D.R. Caruso, *Models of emotional intelligence*, w: *Handbook of Intelligence*, red. R. J. Sternberg, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2000; P. Salovey, A. Woolery, J.D. Mayer, *Emotional intelligence: Conceptualization and measurement*, w: *The Blackwell Handbook of Social Psychology*, red. G. Fletcher, M. Clark, London 2001; D. Goleman, *Emotional intelligence*, Blackwell Publishing, New York 1995.

<sup>18</sup> Por. B.L. Fredrickson, *What good are positive emotions?*, *Review of General Psychology* 2(1998), p. 300-319; B.L. Fredrickson, *The Role of Positive Emotions in Positive Psychology: The Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions*, *American Psychologist* 56(2001), p. 218-226; B.L. Fredrickson, *Pozytywność*, tłum. J. Gilewicz, Zysk i S-ka, Poznań, 2011.

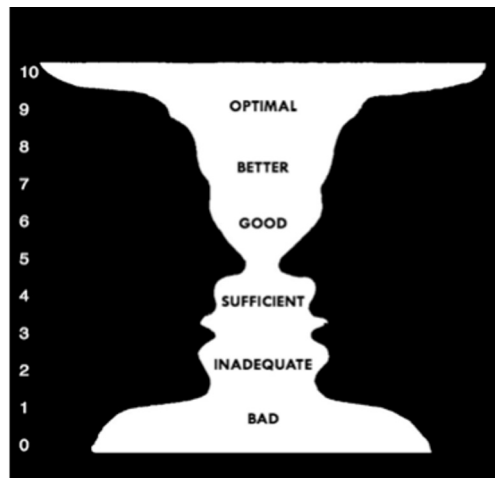
<sup>19</sup> Por. A. Newell, H.A. Simon, *Human problem solving*, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs 1972; *Complex problem solving: Principles and mechanisms*, red. R.J. Sternberg, P.A. Frensch, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Hillsdale 1991.

<sup>20</sup> Por. F. Perls, *Gestalt Therapy Verbatim*, Gestalt Journal Press, Moab 1969; F. Perls, *The Gestalt Approach & Eye Witness to Therapy*, Science and Behavior Books, New York 1973; F. Perls, R. Hefferline, P. Goodman, *Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and growth in the human personality*, The Gestalt Journal Press, New York 1951.

regarding *Mindfulness* and *Contemplation* by Kabat-Zinn and Franz Jalics<sup>21</sup> were also significant influences.

At the beginning, the APPRO program was presented to individuals and then it was offered to select groups in formation (a group of parishes in Philadelphia, PA, USA). Feedback was obtained, and after careful analysis, the project matured to its present form. The present program awaits validation of its effectiveness in contributing to Priests' sense of happiness and well-being. The term *Ephphatha*, "Be opened!" (Mk 7:32-35) is of key importance to the APPRO Model. It can be read in many semantic colors: "Be opened!" means to be aware, be engaged or involved, discover, integrate, optimize, intensify, etc. All of this applies to all human dimensions (physical, emotional, cognitive, social, and spiritual). The APPRO program seeks to support and continue the positive processes responsible for increasing well-being. This is accomplished through the optimization of human potential in the aforementioned five dimensions. "Be opened!" also includes an invitation to meet the "shadow of one's own personality" with courage; this applies to daily hardships and struggles. Challenges may concern a crisis, problem, difficulty, or sin, but may also be neutral or even positive. For instance, a challenge could be the improvement of performance that is already good. Here, a man needs courage and must believe that is possible to go from good to better, and from better to optimal.

Figure (2). Different Levels of Religious / Vocational Functioning



Source: Personal elaboration, based on Perls, et al., 1951, p. 26.

<sup>21</sup> Por. J. Kabat-Zinn, *Wherever You Go There You Are*, Hyperion, New York 1994; J. Kabat-Zinn, *Mindfulness-based interventions in context: Past, present, and future*. *Clinical Psychology, Science and Practice* 10(2/2003), p. 144-156; J. Kabat-Zinn, *Coming to Our Senses: Healing Ourselves and the World Through Mindfulness*, Hyperion, New York 2006; F. Jalics, *Contemplative Retreat, An Introduction to the Contemplative Way to Life and to the Jesus Prayer*, Xulon Press, Florida 2003.

The second figure shows how APPRO fulfills this challenge in improving performance. It points to a “positive sphere” consisting of – good, better, optimum, and is adapted from the well-known gestalt “figure-background”<sup>22</sup>. The APPRO program is not limited only to the richness of human experience in a two-dimensional way such as white-black, or positive-negative. It sees a human being and his space experience (operation) as significantly broader and deeper. It is a turning to the whole person (holism), as it specifically seeks to emphasize those positive and sometime forgotten aspects of human formation such as passion, enthusiasm, creativity, flow, honesty, spontaneity. A particular area of formation also describes these dimensions as: sufficient, good, better, optimum. We will now explore the specific terms contained in the acronym APPRO: a) *Active*, b) *Program*, c) *Positive*, d) *Development*, e) *Personal*.

a) *Active* – The APPRO model is active in that it invites one to be actively – not passively – involved in one’s personal growth and take responsibility for one’s own life. “Ironically, to grow into the fullness of who we actually already are is the challenge of a lifetime for each of us as human beings”<sup>23</sup>. The APPRO model engages the whole person and encourages self-awareness of one’s history, desires, emotions, constraints, relationships, abilities, talents, creativity, knowledge, and faith. The APPRO model is designed to help actively educate and responsibly men’s human values, develop a personal identity, and support the decision making process. As a result, it allows men the space to actively and consciously explore their desires and in so doing bring them into contact with the nature of vocational life in the priesthood. Everyone possesses valuable gifts, such as: intelligence – the ability to learn; a heart – the ability to love and forgive; free will – the ability to make choices; and, faith – the ability to transcend empiricism; time – space operations and growth. The idea of “activity” calls for a creative participation in the building of one’s life history through conscious choices and clear objectives, so that all is coherent with a man’s Faith, values, personal character, and purpose of life, priestly vocation, and mission.

b) *Program* – This refers to a step that is planned, organized, thoughtful, and, synchronized with the duties, status, age, talent, and individuality. This refers to the daily rhythm of growth in grace and virtue. It may be the nature of the regularity with which the work of APPRO is done: weekly, daily, or periodically, depending on one’s responsibilities, time, and, human need. However, it should be enacted consistently for a fixed period to effectively help the individual interface with his life, and make qualitative changes that can bring joy and a sense of realization. Strictly speaking, APPRO is not a program to be simply understood broadly and

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<sup>22</sup> Por. F. Perls, R. Hefferline, P. Goodman, *Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and growth in the human personality*, The Gestalt Journal Press, New York 1951, p. 26.

<sup>23</sup> J. Kabat-Zinn, *Mindfulness for Beginners. Reclaiming the Present Moment-and Your Life*, Sounds True, Boulder 2012, p. 14.

globally envisioned<sup>24</sup>; rather it is a pre-program or outline of a model that can be integrated in the wider context of human formation in its entirety.

c) *Positive* – this term refers to the entire APPRO model. It does not focus solely on the removal of difficulties, but rather on developing a man's talents and strengths. The program APPRO is a reversal of these proportions; it is an introduction of a healthy balance.

For example, in the dimension of positive emotions, which are practically still poorly known in the life of individuals<sup>25</sup>, the APPRO program helps to bring them to light, thus facilitating more efficient use of their potential. In addition to negative emotions such as anger, sadness, contempt, etc., APPRO pays particular attention to the positive including joy, optimism, peace, love, inspiring enthusiasm, because herein lies a vast potential for a joyful life (Seligman, 2002a).

d) *Development* – In APPRO, development refers to the transition from point (A) where the person is currently, to point (B) where he would like to be (Snyder, 1994). Development is not just about physical changes but mental and spiritual as well. It can also be experienced when the individual takes time out to reflect upon and bring to awareness his own experiences, goals, life. It is difficult to embark upon a journey without recognizing a fixed point of departure and destination point. A lack of effectiveness and efficiency in education or formation is sometimes associated with misunderstanding or underestimation of the beginning i.e., the departure point (A) and, at the same time, too much emphasis on the arrival point (B), such as holiness, maturity, responsibility. The problem lies in a lack of strategy as well as a lack of awareness and acceptance of the “here and now”. In the human formation for the priesthood there is a need to show the process of acquiring (development) stage-by-stage, maturity and holiness. One consequence of stressing solely the arrival point (B) in the process of formation is the lack of appreciation for the dynamism of development which may take the form of “two steps forward one back”. Secondly, what is often not considered during the gradual process of growth is the introduction of disappointment and discouragement, and consequently the withdrawal of formerly great desires and goals. Therefore, before a man sets off to attain new goals, he needs to carefully and honestly take note of who and where he actually is, in all humility. Moreover, it would be of great value to pursue all natural resources available and deal with obstacles to the extent that he is aware of which may slow or disturb his developmental process.

e) *Personal* – Professor Kabat-Zinn, who introduced the concept of mindfulness to the field of psychology wrote, “Obviously, no one else can undertake this work for you, just as no one can live your life for you”<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> Por. M. Gahungu, V. Gambino, *Formare i presbiteri. Principi e linee di metodologia pedagogica*, LAS, Roma 2003, p. 23-33.

<sup>25</sup> Por. B.L. Fredrickson, *What good are positive emotions?*, *Review of General Psychology* 2(1998), p. 300-319.

<sup>26</sup> J. Kabat-Zinn, *Mindfulness for Beginners. Reclaiming the Present Moment-and Your Life*, Sounds True, Boulder 2012, p. 15.



Participants in APPRO are major players in their own progress and development, which is a partnership with God. It is the individual who has the responsibility to discern the nature and details of his individual call. From the beginning, whether he knows it or not, a man is directly involved in everything that will exist for him in the future, and he needs to take direct responsibility for how his personal and vocational life develops. The APPRO model is therefore a very personal approach. It is, after all, the man who has free will and authority over his own thoughts and feelings as a consequence of his values, choices, and actions. Personal character and the quality of interpersonal relationships as lived within community cannot be transformative without conscious and intentional self-transformation. This is how one gets from “Point A” to “Point B”.

#### 4. THE FIVE DIMENSIONS OF APPRO

APPRO consists of five dimensions that are significantly related to quality of life and well-being. In addition, they are all linked amongst each other as well: 1) Gratitude, *blessings*, 2) Planning, *time management*, 3) Challenge, *facing problems*, 4) Understand and managing emotions, *feelings*, 5) Cultivating the spiritual dimension, *mindfulness-contemplation*. An awareness of these five universal human experiences can be helpful to systematize the relationship between the organism and environment and build a fruitful contact boundary „[...] awareness is a state of consciousness that develops spontaneously when organismic attention becomes focused on some particular region of the organism-environment contact boundary at which an especially important and complex transaction is occurring”<sup>27</sup>. Fritz Perls, the founder of Gestalt therapy, noticed that “awareness per se of and by itself can be curative”<sup>28</sup>. The author of the book *The Integral Human Formation of Candidates for the Priesthood* wrote that, “Human growth takes place essentially through different acts of a person’s coming to self-awareness of both his vital force and his limitations”<sup>29</sup>. The first goal of APPRO is to build awareness, which can be useful to understand the reality of a man and all that it is located outside of him. Awareness also helps a man capture what occurs between himself and his environment. This may facilitate a more efficient process of assimilation and accommodation of the environment, bringing a new balance to his life<sup>30</sup>.

The selection of the five specific dimensions of human experience is based on specific theoretical and practical knowledge as well as an observation of life

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<sup>27</sup> J.B. Enright, *An introduction to Gestalt techniques*, w: *Gestalt Therapy Now*, red. J. Fagan, I.L. Shepherd, The Gestalt Journal Press, California 1970, p. 108.

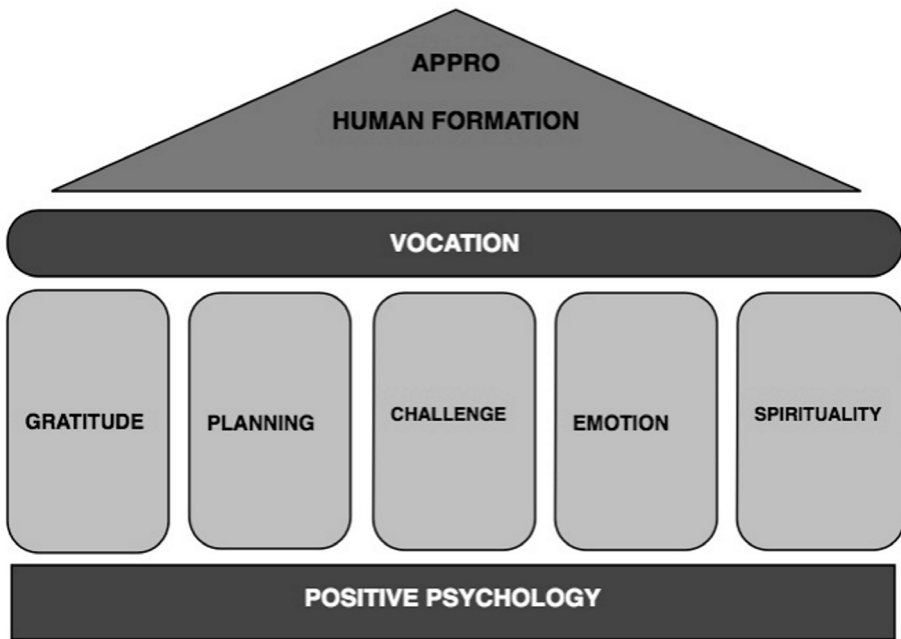
<sup>28</sup> Por. F. Perls, *Ego, Hunger and Aggression*, Vintage Books, New York, 1969, p. 16.

<sup>29</sup> J. Guindon, *The Integral Human Formation of Candidates for the Priesthood*, Editions Paulines, Montreal 1993, p. 73.

<sup>30</sup> Por. F. Perls, *The Gestalt Approach & Eye Witness to Therapy*, Science and Behavior Books, New York 1973, p. 27-31.

and human needs. Each of the five dimensions refers to certain generally accepted and recognized theories used in psychology context mentioned before (see: Roots and Terminology of the APPRO Program). Below is a graphic representation of APPRO's five dimensions<sup>31</sup>.

Figure (3). The Five Dimensions of APPRO



Source: Personal elaboration.

### 5. METHODS OF APPLYING THE MODEL

The APPRO program aims to help men in formation in a very basic and yet individual way; the program is individually tailored to each participant in accord with his needs. This is done to allow the participant to eventually become his own formator and take on the continuing responsibility for his spiritual and human development, even beyond his formation experience in seminary. Although in its conception, APPRO was designed for individuals in Priestly formation, it may also be applied to groups or to community.

An important issue is the experience of writing. The value of the expression of emotions and other experiences, life goals on paper, has been confirmed by

<sup>31</sup> The Five Dimensions of APPRO will be discussed in a separate article devoted exclusively to the topic.

several recent researchers<sup>32</sup>. Writing is a therapeutic activity; it allows individual to stop the stream of consciousness in order to discover a fuller meaning. Writing can be used in several dimensions: to keep a daily record of the complete APPRO form (i.e., the five dimensions) or to record elements of the APPRO model (i.e., one or two dimension). Moreover, it can be done frequently and regularly or occasionally; 1) Daily full or partial use of the five dimensions - depending on one's personal needs and context in life. This can be done in the full (five dimensions) or in an abbreviated form (e.g., taking time each day to work only one or two dimensions, such as Monday (planning), Tuesday (spirituality), Wednesday (feeling), Thursday (challenge), Friday (gratitude); 2) Weekly work - Weekly work with the APPRO model is carried out only once a week, often on the weekend, depending on time and responsibilities. It is good to choose one day a week in which a Priest or seminarian will have more free time, allowing him time to simply meditate and fill out the APPRO columns. This could be done in the context of summarizing the week or in the context of starting a new week. Past experiences, feelings, events, etc., can be excellent material. Here, the important thing is consistency and determination. For example, "spirituality" could be focused around a weekly Sunday Mass; participation in (or for priests, celebration of) Sunday Mass shapes not only a Man's faith but the whole life; 3) Periodic work - In periodic work with the APPRO model, APPRO could be used less frequently but at important points (e.g., retreats, days of recollection, while experiencing a crisis, or during times of transition).

The APPRO model is certainly not in itself a miracle cure for lack of happiness or joy. It does not automatically change the structure of thinking or alter difficult experiences. As Csikszentmihalyi wrote: "However well-intentioned, books cannot give recipes for how to be happy. Because optimal experience depends on the ability to control what happens in consciousness moment by moment, each person has to achieve it on the basis of his own individual efforts and creativity"<sup>33</sup>. Nonetheless, it can be a helpful tool to facilitate a priest or seminarian's positive experience of himself and the world.

## 6. DISCUSSION

Like any other formative program, APPRO has strengths and limitations. Its main strengths include: multiple ways in which it can be applied to one's personal life in accord with current needs and challenges; It can positively im-

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<sup>32</sup> Por. J.W. Pennebaker, *Writing about emotional experiences as a therapeutic process*, Psychological Science 8(1997), p. 162-166; J.W. Pennebaker, J.D. Seagal, *Forming a story: The health benefits of narrative*, Journal of Clinical Psychology 55(1999), p. 1243-1254; *The writing cure: How expressive writing promotes health and emotional well-being*, red. S.J. Lepore, J.M. Smyth, APA, Washington, DC 2002.

<sup>33</sup> M. Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, Harper Perennial Modern Classics, New York 1990, p. 5.

pact well-being and vocation which rely on internal factors (e.g., motivation to work, determination, and regularity of practice), and external factors (e.g., circumstances, time, place, state). Determination and regularity or consistency (internal factors), are deemed more important than the external, because they have a greater impact on the effectiveness of the entire program. Paradoxically, everything linked to the strengths of the program can also be limitations. If a man lacks commitment to his vocation or Priesthood, APPRO in itself does not necessarily offer him a miraculous change. Individuals who are poorly motivated will experience more difficulty using this program, since it requires self-work and therefore a great degree of determination, commitment, and internal effort. Thus, having awareness, although a prerequisite for change, is not sufficient for achieving change. Many who have problems with consistency may experience great difficulties in continuing the practice outlined in APPRO. On a positive note, the program offers a way to overcome these obstacles to change. It provides a method to address the following: How can one increase his level of commitment and motivation? What can be done in order to maintain or enter into better self-formation? The expectations of the program realistically do not anticipate a 100 percent achievement of a specific goal but seek to broaden one's abilities and increase one's talents, skills and commitment to ministry. In addition, APPRO furthers individual paths to optimal functioning through psycho-spiritual growth and happiness. "The optimal lies in the relationship between the degree of difficulty and the skill of man"<sup>34</sup>. Daniel Kidd's article, *Promoting Wellness for Our Clergy Is Everyone's Business in the Church*<sup>35</sup>, stresses the topic of promotion of well-being and shows the responsibility of all Church members for such an objective. The APPRO model can be viewed as small participation in this important task. While it may not necessarily resolve all of today's problems or even diminish them, it certainly seeks to promote health and develop strengths and virtues of men living in the context of a vocation.

The APPRO model is based on theoretical knowledge derived from positive psychology, the Church's writings on formation, the personal experiences of the author, research, *Gestalt Therapy*, *Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy* (REBT), *Problem Solving*, *Hope Theory*, *Mindfulness*, and *Spirituality*. It is adapted to the needs of not only the individual but also to the community and includes human and spiritual aspects vital to the formation of candidates for the Priesthood. This is done by using five dimensions of everyday human experience. The strength of this article is that it draws attention to new possibilities in the application of positive psychology to priestly formation. This is not a pursuit of novelty, but rather an authentically Catholic answer to the call of the "aggiornamento" of the

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<sup>34</sup> M. Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*, Harper Perennial Modern Classics, New York 1996.

<sup>35</sup> Por. D. Kidd, *Promoting Wellness for Our Clergy Is Everyone's Business in the Church*, *Seminary Journal* 10(2004), p. 66-68.

Second Vatican Council. However, it must be emphasized that the Church, on a practical level, has had both helpful and harmful experiences with the application of psychology to assist Christian formation, the Priesthood, and religious life. A solidly Christian psychological understanding of individual and group dynamics and the crisis in the Church is helpful. However, one must be on constant watch for an overemphasis on psychology, scientific or unscientific, that supplants and replaces fundamental Christian beliefs – and excessive emphases on psychology in the spiritual dimension, especially those that replace the role of the spiritual father with that of a psychotherapist. It is hoped that the application of positive psychology to the Priesthood will avoid mistakes already made and create a new, more effective option to assist the growth of candidates for the Priesthood with full awareness of individuals' diversity, the nature and reality of their vocations and pastoral mission, and the legitimately good ways in which psychology and research can be applied. Therefore, positive psychology can be used as a tool to enrich existing formations in this area.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

Every human being wants to be not only healthy but also happy, so helping men to grow in terms of their virtues and mental well-being does not oppose their growth in Grace and vocation. On the contrary, one can only help the other. Positive psychology has innovated many other different tools, methods, questionnaires, and standardized tests that can be applied to priestly human formation<sup>36</sup>. Moreover, it is also very young and quickly growing trend in psychology, which is associated with a significant increase of tools and theoretical knowledge. This opens up a wide range of options that can contribute not only to human development, but also to the joy and enthusiasm of all those involved in the process of formation. For example, Martin Seligman wrote about the MAPP program, the Master of applied positive psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, and reveals why its ingredients are “magic”. First, the content is challenging, informative, and uplifting. Second, positive psychology is personally and professionally transformative. The third ingredient is that positive psychology is a calling<sup>37</sup>. The APPRO model is only a beginning. It opens doors to a wide spectrum of applications of positive psychology in priestly formation, or more broadly in the lives of believers and religious communities. It seems that next important step is towards validation of the ideas presented in this paper could be an attempt to use APPRO with candidates for the Priesthood. By doing this, we could verify that the total

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<sup>36</sup> Por. *Handbook of positive psychology*, red. C.R. Snyder, S.J. Lopez, Oxford University Press, London 2002; C.R. Snyder, S.J. Lopez, *Positive psychology: The scientific and practical explorations of human strengths*, SAGE Publications, Thousand Oaks 2007; P.A. Linley, S. Joseph, *Applied positive psychology: A new perspective for professional practice*, John Wiley & Sons, Hoboken 2004.

<sup>37</sup> Por. M.E.P. Seligman, *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being*, Atria Books, New York 2011, p. 64.

program and its elements are practical and effective and explore how its use could enhance well-being and other factors. While the program has already been applied to a religious group in Philadelphia, this was not a formal study. Such an experience would show how much the program really helps individuals to develop character strengths and integrate them with the Priestly vocation. The possibilities of positive psychology's application in the context of the Church and preparation the priesthood are significantly greater than those that have been presented here. It is undoubtedly necessary to continue research on this subject, and it will be essential to collect data in the context of practical situations.

THE APPLICATION OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY TO THE HUMAN FORMATION  
OF PRIESTS AND RELIGIOUS: THE ACTIVE PROGRAM  
OF POSITIVE PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT (APPRO)

Summary

This article presents a specific opportunity to apply the knowledge of positive psychology in furthering the human formation of clergy and religious. The APPRO program was conceived specifically to address the needs of seminarians, priests, and consecrated persons in their initial formation as well as their continuing personal growth for effective ministry. It focuses on the psychological well-being of the individual which undoubtedly can enhance and optimize the ongoing formation of the person.

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**Keywords:** APPRO, positive psychology, human formation, program

ZASTOSOWANIE PSYCHOLOGII POZYTYWNEJ  
W FORMACJI LUDZKIEJ KAPŁANÓW I OSÓB ZAKONNYCH.  
AKTYWNY PROGRAM POZYTYWNEGO ROZWOJU OSOBISTEGO (APPRO)

Abstrakt

Artykuł przedstawia jedną z wielu form zastosowania wiedzy psychologii pozytywnej w formacji ludzkiej kapłanów i osób zakonnych. Program APPRO został stworzony na potrzeby seminarzystów, księży oraz osób konsekrowanych, będących nie tylko w formacji początkowej, ale również i stałej. Ukierunkowany jest on na rozwój dobrostanu ludzkiego, co pośrednio wzmacnia i optymalizuje inne cele formacyjne.

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**Słowa kluczowe:** APPRO, psychologia pozytywna, ludzka formacja, program