

Fr. Andrew (Andrzej) Szablewski, p.s.s., Director of Human Formation at [St. Joseph Seminary in Edmonton](#), has already written two articles on human formation at the seminary ([Human Formation and Fraternity](#) and [Human Maturity and Relationships in Priestly Formation Today](#)). In this article, he presents intimacy and celibacy as yet another essential aspect of priestly formation, an aspect that is often subject of various interpretations.

INTIMACY AND CELIBACY IN INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS OF PRIESTS.



By Fr. Andrew (Andrzej) Szablewski, p.s.s.

The media and general public today would tend to see celibacy as problematic and at best would feel sorry for those who have chosen to live it. That however, shows that they do not understand the basic value of celibacy. After all, we live in a society that claims to live a value-free existence, where everything is relative.

But [Jesus] said to them, “Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can.” (Matthew 19: 11-12)

Today, the seminary formator together with the whole Church faces a real challenge in making new attempts to further understand and better articulate the relationship between celibacy and intimacy. In the initial formation of the candidates, the human formation director often has to strive to undo broken visions of relationships (often caused by divorce or a distant parent) and immature ways of living one's sexuality and intimacy, which prevent the candidate from freely embracing celibacy as chosen and lived for the sake of the Kingdom.

Intimacy is the emotional type of attachment with one's mother which serves as a pattern for other relationships. It involves promoting closeness and belonging. It is founded mainly on the experience of affection and warmth. Mature intimacy develops over time and includes a growing in respect for each other's boundaries. It develops as both the good and the bad aspects of one's personality are integrated. The need and comfort to be with someone grows with the undisturbed sense of trust that includes emotional, intellectual as well as spiritual and social types of affiliations. But, not all close relationships are intimate.

B. Bonnot presents both celibacy and intimacy as closely related in their developmental lines of psychosexual development and proposes a stage model in which each stage has a distinctive challenge or dilemma that needs to be resolved. He points out or emphasizes that

celibate intimacy is the capacity to share deep friendship without marital involvement and without violating chastity physically or psychologically (B. Bonnot, "Stages in a Celibate's Life", *Human Development* 16, 3 (1995), 18-22).

D. Cozzens supports the latter and points that celibacy is another type of intimacy, or a gift and a grace that is most likely realized in mature priests. After all, emotional maturity requires a high degree of psychosexual development and is the foundation for authentic spirituality and healthy relationships. Conversely, immaturity is experienced in substantial increase in longing and emptiness. Many strive to relieve the emptiness with prestige, power and possessions; but such relief is only temporary because the emptiness increases with time. Further, its increase brings one to exploitative relationships (D. Cozzens, *The Changing Face of the Priesthood*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000).

D. Goergen describes sexual celibacy as an expression of sexuality that is centered on friendship and which strives after non-genital intimacy. He explores the implications of genital sexual activity, particularly masturbation, in the development process of celibacy. He points out that masturbation is an imperfection which we strive to overcome in our process of spiritualization (D. Goergen, *The Sexual Celibate*. New York: Seabury, 1974).

Different authors today, despite cultural relativism and political activism, point out that just as psychosexual development proceeds through stages from less mature and less integrated to more mature and more integrated, so do intimacy and celibacy. It is true that there are those who struggle not only with chaste or celibate life, but also with an inability to relate intimately with others. Conversely, there are those who live a joyful celibate life and effective apostolic life of stable relationships and are good witnesses to all of us. Those who have the courage to be witnesses of the faithful and committed life of celibacy are examples and models for all those who doubt their faith and trust in God or to be able to live faithful and committed marital unions.

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