

Address To National Council of Churches, March 21, 2019, St Stephens Uniting Church Sydney

Best Practice in Psychological Assessment for Ministerial Candidates

PART 1

Recommendation 16.42 from Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. One of the recommendations to all Religious Institutions in Australia.

Consistent with Child Safety Standard 5, each religious institution should require that candidates for religious ministry undergo external psychological testing, including psychosexual assessment, for the purposes of determining their suitability to be a person in religious ministry and to undertake work involving children.

A bit about me. Was a seminary formator for 10 years ending time in 2003. Since then I have operated in private practice as a clinical psychologist, and taught in Dept of Christian Life and Ministry at the Catholic Institute of Sydney. During the last 16 years, I have consulted to many dioceses and religious institutes, and provided therapy to many priests and religious, and supervision to those who minister in both the Catholic and Uniting Churches. In recent times, I have provided a more intensive service to various dioceses in the form of providing psychometric assessment for candidates for priesthood, religious life and for the permanent diaconate in the Archdiocese of Sydney, Dioceses of Wollongong, Maitland Newcastle and Broken Bay. There are unique aspects to assessing potential ordained ministers in the Catholic world.

I was challenged by the invitation to think theologically about psychological assessment. In fact, I had not consciously thought about psychometric testing from a theological perspective until I was invited to deliver this presentation.

I must confess to not really being attracted to psychometric testing, as a primary way to exercise my skills as a clinician. I prefer to work relationally within a psychoanalytically informed psychotherapeutic framework. However, I have been aware of a question that has settled on the horizon of my thinking, since encountering both victims and perpetrators of clerical abuse and boundary violations. And that is how to think theologically about the sorts of interventions that must come into play to remedy and repair the current abuse crisis. And well conducted ecclesially sensitive psychological assessment is one such reparative strategy.

There has been an increasing awareness within the formation world of the Catholic Church of the need for more objective evidence-based measures to evaluate potential candidates. I was pressed into service about 18 months ago to provide assessment of candidates from several Catholic dioceses. This involvement has provided me with a lot of information that otherwise I would not have had, about prospective candidates for ministry, about the value of psychometric testing, and about the way that the Church uses psychological information.

Now, let's turn to the question of what theological formulation might serve as a backdrop to a consideration of the significance of psychological assessment of potential ministerial candidates in the current climate? I stress that I am a clinical psychologist not a theologian, so I offer the following reflections tentatively, and will invite your feedback at the end. Let's begin by turning to the scriptures.

HEBREWS 4; 13. *And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*

This is one of the many passages in the Bible that points out the futility of hiding from God. Adam & Eve tried to hide from God in Genesis 3; Cain tried to hide his murder of Abel from God (Genesis 4). Jonah hid in a boat (Jonah 1;1-4) Everything we think is hidden is crystal clear to God, including our

thoughts and motivations. Perhaps psychological assessment can be regarded as a way to bring forth the truth of a person's motivation to him or herself, a truth that is already known to God.

Then there is the solid common sense contained in I Timothy;

1Timothy 3;1-5 *If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's Church?*

If someone wishes to be a spiritual leader he, or she,...must be manifestly a person of virtue, humility and wisdom. An individual is not always the best source of his or her own self evaluation

And finally, I was reminded of the story of Gideon's encounter with the Midianites in the Book of Judges, Chapter 7, verse 4. Gideon is required by God to reduce the size of his army to a mere 300, as he contemplates battle with the Midianites.

QUOTE;

JUDGES 7:4. *Then the Lord said to Gideon, The troops are still too many; take them down to the water and I will sift them out for you there. When I say 'This one shall go with you' he shall go with you, and when I say, 'This one shall not go with you,' he shall not go. So he brought the troops down to the water; and the Lord said to Gideon 'All those who lap the water with their tongues as a dog laps, you shall put to one side: all those who kneel down to drink, putting their hands to their mouths, you shall put to the other side'. The number of those who lapped was three hundred, but all of the rest of the troops knelt down to drink water. Then the Lord said to Gideon, "With the three hundred that lapped I will deliver you, and give the Midianites into your hands. Let all the others go to their homes"*

Thus Gideon is forced to focus on the Lord, and not his own pragmatic evaluation. It is the Lord whose victory it is.

This story is about coming to terms with human aspiration and its relationship with God's will and plan. Just because I have an aspiration to minister does not mean that that aspiration is, of necessity, part of God's plan.

This scripture passage has always reminded me that activity and prudence on our part must go hand in hand with dependence on God for help in all our endeavours. So, in my endeavour to use a process of psychological testing to assist in the selection of prospective ministers, how am I regarding the process and the results? As foolproof, like a blood test or MRI, or tentatively and in conjunction with other means of discernment that my particular tradition has allowed? There is a need for certainty at the moment, and in some quarters there is an unrealistic reliance on the results that emerge from the testing process.

God's assessment procedure was to choose only those who drank water by lapping it, "as a dog laps". Thankfully, in the field of psychological testing, we have moved a long way from there!

A theological concept that has operated as a backdrop to my work as a psychotherapist ever since I encountered it is the concept of Karl Rahner's "Christian pessimism", a term that is self-consciously paradoxical.

I would like to examine this concept in this context, because I believe it offers a theological framework within which the imperative of a careful selection of ministers, priests and religious can be understood and pastorally embraced. I have used a summary of Rahner's concept from a work by Paul Crowley, SJ entitled "Unwanted Wisdom", published in 2005

The starting point for most of Rahner's theology is an unflinching acceptance of the full reality of the human condition, a commitment to truth...and that is to begin with what is actually the case. Rahner is one of a great pantheon of 20th C theologians who gazed upon the human condition and concluded that Christianity could allow no escape from the real and that it is a command of Christian life to enter fully into it. This is the demand of the Cross. And if the demand of the Cross can only be found by facing and penetrating the reality of suffering which marks the real in a Christian theological sense, that is because the real is made sacred by virtue of the incarnation, the entry of God into human flesh and blood. Beset as it is by suffering and brokenness, the Christian Church is in need of a redemption that will be its source of final hope. That redemption is accomplished by the cross, a symbol of the entry into the bloody history of the human race of the saving God of Israel. There is no authentic Christianity apart from the cross.

Still if the cross is to stand as a symbol of hope, there is some need to explain this unusual expression, "Christian pessimism".

In a short address of the same title, published near the end of his career, Rahner described our human predicament as one of "radical perplexity". Taking his cue from 2 Corinthians 4:8-10, where Paul writes that "we are perplexed but not driven to despair" Rahner argued that perplexity is a permanent existential human state, a given fact of human life, an integral dimension of human existence. It does not force us to despair, but as a permanent existential, it will not be overcome within the span of human life itself. It will only be overcome within the ambit of God's provident mercy, the fulfillment of which takes place in God's future, which Christian theology calls the eschaton. Rahner elaborated upon what he meant here in his later writings about radical perplexity. He meant firstly that life is ultimately uncontrollable by human means alone, by great thrusts towards knowledge and manipulation of reality undertaken on our own. We cannot heal ourselves, we need help to imagine or envision new scenarios for life. In the midst of our perplexity, human life can become a dauntingly uncontrollable reality; no one theory about its meaning, no politics or technology, no genetics or medical therapy, no psychology, no philosophy or theology can encompass the entire mystery of human existence, much less 'fix' it.

Evil continues to insinuate itself into the heart of our finite reality, mutating into ever new forms. One of these forms is widespread incidence of sexual abuse by Christian clergy, often bringing about intense suffering and even the destruction of very good lives. Another is the slaughter of 50 praying people in a mosque in Christchurch. This aspect of perplexity pertains to the darkness of human existence, our entanglements in sin, suffering and death that come to light in tragedies of these kinds. There is also the darkness, the anguish of confronting the truth about ourselves, of coming up against the limitations of our own lives and facing the complexities and limitations of our moral, physical and spiritual selves in relation to others and to God. The experience of facing truth can be accompanied by the sickness of confusion because what one sees is just how perplexing life is, an admixture of great goodness of desire and incalculable failure and loss. Darkness here includes the mass of suffering that takes place on a wide scale. Those of you who deal with both the victims of sexual abuse, and the perpetrators who abused the trust of both children and adults, encounter profound suffering on a personal level that is constituted in its very nature by being part of an incomprehensibly larger theatre of human misery.

The Christian, says Rahner, is entitled, even called, to be a realist, a kind of pessimistic realist, because faith obliges us to see that there are no short-range answers to this harsh aspect of reality on the human side of the scale. Only by running the risks of this existence and facing and embracing the sorrows that it brings in its wake, as God did in Christ, can we truly begin to speak of hope.

Rahner thus held together in an uneasy unity 2 realities in this phrase "Christian pessimism"; the pessimism part is derived from an unflinching realism before the human condition, and the Christian hope for human beings that can only begin with what is painfully real. But we must always keep in

mind that reality for the Christian includes that which cannot be seen, that which is promised as our hope

Christian pessimism therefore describes the experience of being a Christian within the perplexing and often dark reality of existence. But this is not an everyday sort of pessimism, a despondency bordering on despair, or thinly veiled cynicism, or suppressed rage. It is Christian because it is precisely in the experience of perplexity that Jesus knew in Gethsemane and on the Cross that the Christian finds hope, not as the possibility of an escape from suffering but as the locus of the encounter with God. It is within that reality that Christian faith believes God to have been most fully revealed in relation to us all.

In adopting this realism, we find that there is much that people cannot find a way to change, and that this fact seriously shapes their future, Rahner used the dramatic metaphor of imprisonment to describe much of human existence, to denote what is finally inescapable., and also to denote the sheer force of the objective reality that we are born into and through which in fact we exercise our freedom and actualize ourselves as persons; our gender, health, cultural influences, intelligence imagination, socioeconomic level and so on. None of these factors absolutely determines my future and yet none is completely under my control. We are bound within a radical finitude that resolves finally in death. But hope for a final freedom from suffering is found by living within the imprisonments of this finitude and also by living through them. Says Rahner, a Christian believes that there is a path to freedom which lies in going through this imprisonment. This freedom is not simply gained by endurance, or sheer will power in overcoming obstacles. We do not seize it by force, but rather it is given to us by God insofar as he gives himself to us through all of the imprisonments of our existence." As we accept God's self-gift, this gift of freedom, we are empowered to go through reality as it is, even within the confines of our various imprisonments. What Rahner emphasizes is that our "going through" is not a sheer act of will; it is the grace-assisted actualization of our freedom.

NOW...what has all that got to do with psychometric testing? Recommendation 16.42 is one injunction, among many on the part of a legitimate Commission of Inquiry, for the Churches to do what Rahner says.... face what is real and move through it with hope. I think without such a reflection as a back grounding, psychological testing can become a rather forensic exercise, fulfilling a legal requirement, and not carried out within a spirit of respect either for the person being assessed, the Tradition to be served or for the value and limits of the process itself.

What will follow in the second part of this presentation are reflections that stem from my experience not only in administering the testing and providing reports on prospective candidates, but on the manner in which the testing is sought by those responsible for ministerial training and formation, and finally on what happens to the resulting report afterwards, when it reaches the hands of those who required it.

And I make the following comments in the spirit of contributing to the Catholic Church's compliance with those recommendations. We have a long way to go.

PART 2

Let us begin the second half of this presentation by examining the reasons for assessing prospective candidates psychologically. These reasons are intuitively obvious but need to be articulated. The assessment needs to address an individual's psychological suitability for the ministerial role. This includes

- Affective maturity, and self-awareness.
- Presence of mood or personality disorders.
- interpersonal skills,
- empathic abilities
- psychosexual development,
- capacity for self transcendence, i.e. turning away from self to focus of the reality of the other.
- whether the candidate is likely to impose a risk to others.

I prefer the term psychometric assessment to psychological screening. The latter phrase connotes "weeding out". "Assessment" means certainly assessing for a person's basic suitability, but also the provision of information that will offer useful psychological information to individuals as they travel through their training. This term "psychological assessment" can conjure an image in the popular mind of someone sitting in front of a computer or at a desk, answering an endless stream of T/F questions or staring at inkblots and coming up with a response. There are, actually, 3 parts to this assessment process... or there should be. These are the initial interview(s), the testing process, and feedback session. Now let's look at these.

The first part;

The first part begins with a request on my part for a comprehensive autobiography from the candidate. If there is time, I send out guidelines to assist its production. The manner in which the candidate reflects upon himself is frequently present in these scripts. I can also gauge the literacy level.

I then conduct a face to face assessment of the candidate that may extend over several sessions, to gain additional information about the individual's autobiographical details. These details include information about family of origin, early formative experiences in childhood, such as frequent moving addresses, loss of early relationships, illnesses that impacted the person socially, the individual's experience of education, including being bullied, psychosocial milieu of adolescence, history of relationships and dating, interests sporting achievements. Trauma. Health. How does the person look after his/ her physical self?

Also there needs to be a discussion about the individual's psychosexual development. This is a tender area, and one that often yields little in the way of candid self-disclosure. This is not surprising. It is of course difficult for a person to talk with someone they have just met about their sexual experiences...or lack thereof... and sexual orientation. This is particularly problematic in screening 20 something seminarians who are contemplating a life of sexual continence. I have yet to meet a prospective seminarian who has been upfront about their sexual history, or whether he experiences same sex attraction. There have been many times when it seemed that the individual had to assume a heterosexual stance, because it seemed that that was what was expected of him,

It has become increasingly common to find addiction to pornography in young candidates. It is surprising to find this so easily admitted. It seems that this is a common experience that is generally acknowledged among young men, a shared weakness and easier to admit than individual personal self-disclosure.

There must also be some discussion around the individual's faith journey, whether they grew up in a Christian family, their association with the Church, when they encountered Christ personally. This is

not the subject of a psychometric test; it is a discussion that is an intimate part of a person's self-experience and should be treated as such. I do record as faithfully as I can into the report (and often verbatim, if I have been supplied with a written autobiography), the candidate's own wording about their faith journey and developing a consciousness of a relationship with Christ.

The second part is the administration of the tests themselves.

It is the utilisation of the results yielded by the accurate administration of valid and reliable testing instruments to discover information about a person's personality structure, current and characteristic mood state, capacity for relationship and social interaction, psychosexual development and capacity for concern for others. There is no psychometric instrument that will determine if someone is, or has been, engaged in deviant sexual behaviour or paedophilia in the absence of frank self-disclosure. However, there can be some indications that may raise red flags about the individual's capacity for sexual awareness and appropriate interpersonal deportment.

- The nature of the individual's sexual history, Did he/she commence sexual activity at an early age... early teens. Has this been accompanied by a series of sexual encounters where it seems that there has been little or no relational engagement?
- Has there been a history of sexual trauma? Either in the early development years, adolescence or adulthood?
- An absence of relationships that would be age appropriate and the tendency to be involved with much younger individuals, as a leader in youth groups, Antioch or such.

The tests I use at the moment are 6 in number;

- Paulus Deception Scale. Takes 10-15 mins and identifies whether an individual distorts their responses in assessments, to appear in a better light than is the reality
- Symptom Checklist-90 this helps evaluate a broad range of psychological problems and symptoms. It asks for a lot of info about the candidate's physical state. It locates the area of inquiry to the last 7 days.
- NEO-Personality Inventory-3. This examines the 5 factor personality traits.... openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism. These are the major personality factors that most researchers tend to agree upon.
- MMPI-2-RF An adult measure of psychopathology and personality structure.
- Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory-3 A measure of 24 personality disorders and clinical syndromes.
- Garos Sexual Attitudes Inventory. A measure of sexual behaviour and adjustment

They take about 3.5 – 4 hours to complete.

This is not a definitive list, and there are other testing instruments that may work as well, such as the PAI in place of the MMPI-2-rf.

Why 6 tests? I know that some clinicians have exposed candidates to 3 days of solid psychometrics, and I can't see the value of that. In my estimation, 6 is the limit in one sitting and gives me enough material to reflect upon together with the autobiographical material.

- The tests tend to corroborate each other. E.g. the presence of depression in the results of the NEO are almost always correlated with its appearance in the MMPI-2-RF. If there is a conflict in the results it is incumbent upon me to find out why, by checking the actual responses to individual items within the testing instruments and discussing the findings with the person in the feedback session.

There are issues here that I have encountered, as follows;

1. The above tests are all in self-report form. Most are T/F form or Likert scale. Although the tests have built into them processes that allow the detection of inconsistent responding or the presence of a too positive or too negative sense of self, it is still not always clear if a person is answering the test from an idealized self-concept. The presence of an idealized self-concept is almost always present to some degree in the results of young prospective seminarians, or I would imagine, anyone under the age of 30 who is presenting for Christian ministry. This does not invalidate the results but means that the test results must be interpreted with caution.

So I have decided this year to add a projective test. This kind of test requires the individual to respond affectively to a stimulus verbally or in writing, and those responses are recorded and interpreted. The theory is that this elicits the individual's true but unconscious response or opinion. The most famous of these is the Rorschach Inkblot test. Another is the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT for short). Occasionally a candidate requires the completion of the Rorschach if he is travelling to a European house of formation. I find its administration clumsy in the extreme, and the test has been caricatured as one of the more arcane objects in the psychological armoury and that its successful completion is hampered by its novelty value.

This year, I will add Rotters Incomplete Sentences Blank. It is what it says.... a series of 40 half completed sentences, the results of which are able to be interpreted using what appear to be standardised norms. It has been appraised for validity and reliability, 2 important features of appropriate testing instruments: Validity.... the instrument actually measures what it purports to measure, and Reliability.....its capacity to measure is able to be replicated.

I would like to spend a little more time examining the presence of the false self-structure that in my experience the testing results can overlook. In some candidates, there is clearly a consistent but somewhat idealized self-perception, and it is this self-perception that is assessed by the testing.

The testing for idealistic 21 year olds who have had a supportive, consistent and relatively uneventful family life can offer results that would be more appropriate to a 50 year old self aware individual. E.g. They exhibit low aggression, do not suffer from mood swings, have never abused alcohol or drugs and have their sexual energy under control. There are several reasons for this. They can be good reasons but need to be kept in mind. The individual- in the Catholic world- male- has often introjected from an early age an identification with the priestly function. The goal of being priest has exerted a shaping of the personality, a shaping which masks the manner of growing self-awareness that all of us have to acquire through living through the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

This is most often the case with candidates who have grown up in a culture where the priest still holds a revered place in the society, such as the Middle East, Asia, or the Pacific rim. It is also sometimes the case that the individual's awareness of their same sex attraction can be denied or repressed and replaced with an idealized but entirely consistent heterosexual self-structure. The reasons for this are obvious. This idealized self-structure can remain unchallenged for years. It is one of the reasons for questioning the wisdom of young men going into formation for priesthood in a seminary for 7 years. The environment is too homogeneous, and protected, and has the tendency to reinforce the idealized false self -structure by not allowing the individual to be challenged in the normal tides of everyday life.

In the last 2 years, I have also offered psychometric testing to diaconal candidates in the Diocese of Parramatta. These men have all been over 50, all married, having raised families and financially survived. Their testing results indicate a more realistic self-appraisal and it is interesting to note that there is only a minimal variability of personality traits picked up in their assessments.

2. Among ministry candidates, literacy has not been an issue. This is because candidates have all reached a certain educational standard. However, an increasing problem is presented in those candidates for whom English is not their first language, sometimes not even their second or third. Sometimes this is not obvious until the candidate presents for an initial interview. Even though I request biographical information this is not always forthcoming and those responsible for referring are not aware that the person's literate capacity will have to express itself in English. There are not always equivalent psychometric instruments in other languages. On some occasions I have simply abandoned the testing altogether and relied on several interviews. I have had recourse to STARTTS at Canley Vale for Vietnamese candidates and am now liaising with the Columban Fathers, a missionary order, to get assistance in assessing candidates from Oceania.

3. Some results can be skewed because they are being answered from a Christian perspective, e.g. there is frequently a raised score for the category of "Uncommon Virtues" in the MMPI-2-RF. The interpretative manual for the MMPI cautions against taking high scores at face value, as they are usually indicative of someone who wants to be seen in a favourable light. However, when the individual answers in the category are examined, you can see that this is an accurate reflection of the person's behaviour and motivation.

4. Associated with this are the skewed results coming from the cultural context of the person. E.g. a raised score in the field of psychoticism, when the person has answered yes to questions about being influenced by spirits, and believing that my thoughts can affect others, and it seems that people are talking about me. On one occasion, a man's scores indicated a rather defensive, closed disposition until it became obvious that his culture encouraged a degree of emotional reserve esp. for males.

5. Even though I have some idea who will read the results of the assessment, I am not always confident in their level of psychological literacy, and this has the effect of restricting the depth of information that I am willing to provide. I am also uncertain about the level of confidentiality that I can promise the candidate. At the moment, in some dioceses, it is the Bishop alone who has the final say on whether a candidate is accepted for ministerial training. I am never sure how much the assessment report is used in this final evaluation. I have been assured that it is. However, there has been at least one occasion in the last 18 months where I strongly suggested that the candidate's entry be delayed. This advice was ignored. No discussion was entered into, despite my attempts to begin such a discussion.

The third part is feedback and preparation of a report.

I do not complete the report until I have shared the results with the candidate. An individual who fronts up to be a minister needs to be able to take on board the information that a psychological assessment provides, if it is offered respectfully and in a manner that the candidate can understand. In this final meeting, the candidate, now more relaxed, is likely to proffer more personal information. Their reaction is also included in the report. The report is prepared in final draft, and the candidate is asked to sign a release form to enable me to distribute the report to the appropriate person or people, e.g., seminary rector, Bishop, religious vocation director. The candidate gets a copy of the report.

Now, this testing takes place not in a vacuum but is in a particular ecclesiastical milieu where it is only lately being realised that psych tests are now a necessary step in the process of candidate selection. In my experience, religious orders have used psychological assessment for some time.

- Candidates are referred by the Vocation Director of individual dioceses or the religious order. I am often left wondering...what do those who refer the candidate understand about the significance of the process of assessment and its limits? I have met those who believe that psychometric testing is akin to a blood test. I am sometimes left wondering about the hidden expectations of an assessment referral. The following is an example of an inappropriate referral. I have had the experience several year ago of a young man being

referred to me by the vocation's director (VD) of a certain diocese who was clearly not ready to undertake seminary training. He had not passed his HSC, had been unemployed for 18 months, and had suffered the recent grief of his mother's death. He was late for his initial appt and slept in for the second, missing it entirely. Why it had occurred to his VD that he was suitable to begin seminary training? I think his VD had hoped that in testing him I would provide the final NO.

- That milieu may appreciate the information that psych testing and psychology in general has to offer.... or it may not. This raises the whole question of the current use of psychology as practical information that helps us understand more about human behaviour.

The Catholic Church, unlike the Protestant churches, has been rather complacent in the assumption of its own understanding of anthropology, particularly in regard to priestly formation. By this I mean an understanding of the human person without reference to the modern behavioural sciences. One gets the feeling that reflection upon human behaviour reached its zenith with St Thomas Aquinas. We have tended to make do with exhortatory statements about who the human person could be, (and that human person is mostly male) without reference to the phenomenological categories that the psychologies provide, i.e. what is ACTUALLY going on in the inner world of thought, feeling and meaning making, and the motivational system, of the individual. Just as we can talk about the biology of the human body, we can now talk about the structure and component parts of the human psyche. Psychology can provide descriptive language of current functioning, normal or otherwise. In my experience, there has been an underutilising of the results of the assessment. There are a number of reasons for this. The 2 chief reasons are;

- Psychological assessment still operates at the level of a legal requirement. The benefits of the information contained in the reports proceeding from the assessment have yet to be enjoyed.
- The facts that psychological assessment yields are not easily integrated into the lens that is used for evaluating and assessing prospective clergy. This seems to derive partly from the fact that psychological language is alien to those who make decisions about the suitability of prospective candidates. A panel discussion informed by a psychologist...preferably the testing psychologist.....would enable the current discourse around candidate selection to be broadened and more comprehensive. This must surely provide the Bishop/Church Authority with a richer source of information from which to make a decision. It would also allow the individual psychologist to gain more insight to enable a refinement of the assessment process.

IN MY OPINION

There is an urgent need for this process of psychological assessment to be altered to allow a panel of stakeholders, including the assessing psychologist, to meet and review the candidate, the psychological report and any other background material that may bear upon his suitability for ministry. This panel could be convened within a Diocese, preferably with the Bishop present, prior to the candidate being accepted for seminary training. The decision to accept the candidate would therefore be a collective one, the result of a discussion among a cross-section of those to whom they will minister. The Bishop or Superior must have the final say from a juridical point of view. However, it seems imperative that the Bishop or Superior is part of a collegial decision making process. I am indebted to Fr Gerry Gleeson for making the point that; If a Church Authority were to go against the consensus view of the panel, his or her reasons for doing so should be clearly documented – not least, as a further protection if there is subsequent civil or criminal litigation in relation to the candidate.

ACBC (Australian Catholic Bishop's Conference) has yet to formulate a protocol for the use of psych testing.

Janiene Wilson