

**An Integrative Approach to Teaching Scripture in Catholic Seminaries:  
Combining the four-fold method of Catholic exegesis  
with the four pillars of priestly formation.**

**Dr. Caroline J. Nolan,  
Newman Theological College,  
Edmonton, AB, Canada.**

**Current Practical Issues regarding the Teaching of Sacred Scripture in  
Catholic Seminaries**

Speaking from a Western Perspective there are common challenges to the professor of Sacred Scripture teaching in Catholic seminaries. The main challenge is the decline in vocations and efforts of the various dioceses to ensure that the intake of men is maintained. Some problems emerging are as follows: (1) Seminarians are not as academically strong as their counterparts in decades past. They have not been schooled in classical languages and many of them have never had the opportunity or need to learn a foreign language with the result that even the mention of a Greek or Hebrew word in a Scripture class can be off-putting to them. Also writing skills and the ability to engage in critical analysis can be poor due to an educational system in the West that has placed in recent years more emphasis on the ‘opinion’ of the student without any academic grounding. (2) Many dioceses are taking in foreign seminarians for whom English is not their first language. Many of these young men struggle to understand their lectures and read their textbooks and subsequently find it difficult to write papers in English and to express themselves in oral examinations. Other issues also arise because in some cultures, an awareness of such issues like academic honesty and plagiarism are not given due attention. (3) Quite a proportion of seminarians are converts. They come from other Christian denominations or were previously self-proclaimed agnostics or atheists. Joining them are those seminarians who were cradle Catholics and who had strayed from their faith and who now have returned to their Catholic roots due to some conversion experience. Many of these converts, no matter what their backgrounds tend to hold rigidly to the Catholic faith with the result that the introduction of a Scripture article or commentary that was written by a non-Catholic scholar can be seen as being heretical and the cause of unrest. Ironically, it is often the ‘newer’ Catholics who are quite fundamental in their interpretation of Scripture than that of, for example, Protestant Evangelical seminarians who may be sitting in the same class.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The author of this paper teaches at Newman Theological College, Edmonton, AB, Canada. M.Div. students at NTC are primarily Roman Catholic Seminarians from St. Joseph Seminary and seminarians from the Ukrainian Catholic Rite (Basilian Fathers). However, the M.Div. classes are often taken by seminarians from the Anglican Archdiocese of Edmonton and lay students from a variety of Christian backgrounds. Cf. *Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church*, Rome 2008, Proposition 36, Sacred Scripture and Christian unity: “The Bible is truly a privileged place of encounter between the different Churches and ecclesial communities.” N.B., further references to this document appear as *Word of God* and the English translation quoted in this document is courtesy of the international news agency, Zenit.

In light of the problems highlighted above, it is clear that teaching Scripture in a Catholic seminary today is far more complex than it has been in years gone by. The initial starting point for a professor is his or her own identity as a teacher of Sacred Scripture. This identity ought to stem from an awareness that he or she, while not a member of the Magisterium, is entrusted with a mandate by the local and universal Church to inspire in the seminarians a love of God's word so that the seminarians in turn, when they graduate and are ordained, will inspire all they encounter to come to know or deepen their own faith and relationship with God.

The methodology used by Scripture professors is pivotal to the overall goal of educating seminarians for service in the Church. The Scripture method must be introduced to the seminarians from day one and it is important that it is seen to be balanced and rooted within the tradition of the Catholic Church. Over the last few years there have been many Scripture scholars who have discarded historical approaches for literary ones and who have given little or no time to conventional theology. Scripture studies over the last few decades appear at times to be nothing more than word games and obscure academic insights which do little for sustaining or enriching the faith of believers. It is as a result of this that an Episcopal Assembly was held in Rome in the Fall of 2008 on 'Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church'. The synod concluded with fifty five propositions. With these propositions in mind, this paper will explore the four-fold method of exegesis in tandem with the four pillars of priestly formation in an effort to put forth an integrative methodology that can help bring the hopes and intentions of those at the synod to fruition.

## **The Four-fold Method of Catholic Exegesis<sup>2</sup>**

Working from the principles of Catholic exegesis as outlined in The Pontifical Biblical Commission's document 'The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church' (1993) there are four essential steps to examining texts from Sacred Scripture: (1) Historical, (2) Literary, (3) Theological, (4) Pastoral.<sup>3</sup> The first is looking at the text from the Historical perspective.<sup>4</sup> The culture, time and context of the written text is helpful for the contemporary reader to have a sense of what the author wished to communicate to his reader.

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<sup>2</sup> Exegesis is complex and intricate. It takes many years for students of Sacred Scripture to become fully *au-fait* with exegetical methods and approaches. What is proposed here in this paper, is a basic outline and introduction to some of the central aspects of the four fundamental exegetical steps that can be easily introduced to first year Scripture students.

<sup>3</sup> There are many ways to introduce a class to the methodology of Sacred Scripture. After introducing the class to the various methods of exegetical analysis, a clear four-fold structure can help the students to begin to systematically analyze the texts. This is in keeping with the recommendations from *Word of God*. Proposition 32, on the formation of candidates to holy orders recommends "The discovery of exegesis in its various methods. A precise and ample study is necessary of the hermeneutical rules to overcome the risks of an arbitrary interpretation. The methods of the exegesis must be understood in an appropriate manner, with its possibilities and limits, allowing for correct and fruitful understanding of the Word of God".

<sup>4</sup> It is important to note: "Catholic exegesis is characterized by openness to a plurality of methods and approaches. Although the historical-critical method retains its primacy, literary methods and approaches based on tradition, the social sciences, or particular contemporary contexts can yield important insights into the meaning of the biblical word". Cf., P. Williamson, *Catholic Principles For Interpreting Scripture in the Document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (1993), 344.

The second exegetical step is to examine the text with the aid of a few literary critical approaches. While a text is an historical document, it is also a literary one. Sacred scripture texts were not written to provide empirical chronological information, they were rather literary works to convey theological insights that were relevant to particular groups of people at specific times. The form of text, for example, if it is a legal text, or liturgical, or poetic etc. depends on the author's literary style and what is happening historically. Therefore, the historical and literary elements of a text can never be separated. In light of this, the first two exegetical approaches of historical and literary criticism are inextricably linked and together form the foundation of the key exegetical goal of interpreting the text theologically.

With the historical underpinnings and the literary analysis in hand, an exegete can then look at the text theologically. Pre-requisites for engaging the texts theologically are (a) the acknowledgement that the texts convey something about the authors' understanding of God and His relationship with his chosen people (b) a belief in biblical inspiration, i.e., that God has used human beings as his instruments to write Scripture so as to reveal to all of humanity the timeless universal truths concerning the human-divine relationship and (c) that God, as Hans Urs Von Balthasar puts it nicely, is His own exegete<sup>5</sup> through the Incarnation of his 'Word' in the person of Jesus Christ who through His words and deeds, as recorded in the New Testament, fulfilled and interpreted the words of Scripture as found in Old Testament texts. In sum, the real undergirding aspect for theological insights is the faith of the reader in tandem with an exegetical training that embraces the historical and literary critical approaches.

Without faith, the theological insights gleaned from a Scripture text are merely the historical and literary constructs of the textual author. However, with faith, the exegete can be fueled to move to the fourth and final exegetical approach which is the pastoral. Exegetical work pertaining to Sacred Scripture is in-itself valid as academic work but once put within the realm of the Catholic Church it is in a functionary role. Its function is to unpack the truths of divine revelation as it pertains to human beings and thereby propel people into pastoral action that brings this good news to others so that they too come to know and love God. A pastoral outcome is one of the main goals of Catholic exegesis. A truly pastoral approach is one that has all the elements of learning and it is not to be confused with some of the other faith approaches that reduce all theological and pastoral insights as stemming from primarily what a reader 'feels' after reading a text. What differentiates authentic Catholic exegetical work today from the exegetical work done by other Christian faiths is the role of Catholic tradition and the magisterial teachings of the Church. There is a collective wisdom that permeates the work of the Catholic scholar.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. H. U. Von Balthasar, *Communio:International Catholic Review*, "God is His Own Exegete." 13, no. 4 (1986): 280-87.

<sup>6</sup> That being said, Catholic exegetes acknowledge and are very grateful to the historical and literary exegetical work of Protestant and Jewish scholars over the centuries.

## **The Four Pillars of Priestly Formation**

Upon entry into a Catholic seminary, students/seminarians are entering the ‘school of the Gospel’<sup>7</sup>. They are embarking on a four-fold program of formation so that they may become priests. According to *Pastores dabo vobis*, a priest is one is called to be ‘a "living image" of Jesus Christ, head and shepherd of the Church’<sup>8</sup> and who ‘should seek to reflect in himself, as far as possible, the human perfection which shines forth in the incarnate Son of God and which is reflected with particular liveliness in his attitudes toward others as we see narrated in the Gospels.’<sup>9</sup> The foundational aspect for vocational preparation is the seminary’s human formation program which is crafted to address the individual needs and issues of seminarians so as to ensure that the personality and character of the seminarian will not to be a barrier for his future priestly ministry to the people of God.

In tandem with his growth in personal awareness and growth through the human formation program, a seminarian grows spiritually. His interior life is fostered through the seminaries spiritual formation program that is outwardly manifested in his participation in the rich community prayer life of the seminary such as The Eucharist, The Liturgy of the Hours, Retreats, and also through monthly meetings with his spiritual director and times of private prayer. With a solid base in place, a seminarian is equipped to embrace his philosophical and theological studies with a sense of purpose and diligence.

Intellectual formation is vital to a solid and productive priesthood that is not afraid to address the questions and debates of contemporary society. Having a knowledge of theology allows a priest to enter into dialogue with people and exemplify through their faith and reason the beauty of the Gospel message for all. In order to be effective, a priest must be able to speak with authority that comes from studying the faith documents of the Church, those of Systematic Theology and those that inform them, the texts of Sacred Scripture.

It is paramount that Catholic seminarians, be trained, educated and encouraged to truly encounter the Word of God not only in prayer but also in their Scripture studies along with the tradition and teachings of the Catholic Church, so that they will be equipped to yield a myriad of theological insights from the text that can inform and color their vocational growth and foster in them a deep and abiding relationship with God that will permeate to those that they encounter in future pastoral ministry. It is precisely pastoral ministry that is the goal of seminary formation. Genuine pastoral formation is rooted in all that precedes it, i.e., the human, the spiritual and intellectual formation. Pastoral work is not merely about passing feelings, it is rather about the truth of the Gospel, that brings everlasting peace and joy to all who hear it and integrate it into their lives.

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<sup>7</sup> *Pastores dabo vobis*, “Following Christ as the Apostles Did”, (1992), 5.42.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, “Human Formation, the Basis of All Priestly Formation” (1992), 5.43.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

## The Connection between the Exegetical Approach and the Formational Approach

The four elements of Catholic Exegesis and the four elements of Priestly Formation while coming out different disciplines are worth considering together since they are complimentary. For Catholic seminarians, there ought to be no division between their Scripture studies in the classroom and what goes on in their seminary formation-wise. There is an intrinsic link between what is learned in the academic arena and what is imparted in the seminary formation program.

The goal of the Scripture scholar in a seminary context is not just to impart the curriculum but to foster a love of the subject but also, and more importantly, to contribute to the overall goal of the institution, i.e., the formation of the seminarians for Roman Catholic Priesthood. There is a responsibility given to the seminary professor to share in the work of the formation team, implicitly and yet, explicitly.<sup>10</sup> Paralleling the four elements of the Catholic Exegetical Method with the four elements of Priestly Formation can be helpful to the professor who embraces the full import of his/her mandate to teach Scripture in a Catholic seminary. Looking at each category broadly<sup>11</sup>, a similarity of purpose and intention may be identified as follows:

The Four-Fold Method of Catholic Exegesis	The Four Pillars of Priestly Formation
Historical	Human
Literary	Spiritual
Theological	Intellectual
Pastoral	Pastoral

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. The Salesians of Don Bosco's document, *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis et Studiorum* 2000, section 4.3.3.1.3. The writer of this paper could draw from many documents of religious orders and societies regarding formation. The author chose Salesian texts due to her familiarity of relevant documentation and her personal experience of working with Salesian formators, most notably Don Gianni Sirca, SDB, Gerini, Rome. While referring to Salesian teachers, what is stated here is applicable to all religious and diocesan seminary teachers. Section 240: *The teachers and experts*, states that the teachers "are true formation guides, even when they are occupied only in the academic field. They work in close collaboration with the others responsible for formation and within the overall framework of the formation plan and process".

<sup>11</sup> Note the use of the term 'broadly'. The purpose of the paper is to broadly or widely highlight that there can be a continuity between what happens in the classroom as well as in the seminary seminars/conferences etc. and *vice versa*. Making the connection for seminarians that what they are learning in Scripture bears direct correlation to what they are being prepared for in the seminary is pivotal. Scripture when taught according to the four-fold method as outlined above will enhance all the aspects of seminary formation. Scripture is the foundation upon which everything rests. Scripture is the root of the seminary. Scripture is part of the prayer and liturgical life of the seminary. Scripture is the foundation of theology. Scripture is the font from which to draw wisdom for pastoral ministry. Therefore, the connection between the academic study of Scripture cannot be separate from any other seminary activity as it is the fuel which ignites everything else.

## **Historical Analysis and Human Formation**

Historical Analysis asks the who, when, why, where questions – regarding the history of the chosen people. The social milieu from which a text emerged is crucial for an understanding its message. It is helpful to know something of the influences upon the author and to try and discern his motivation in writing and his theological message. Looking at the text from an historical perspective helps root the text for the reader and serves as the necessary foundation from which to work on a contemporary interpretation of the text that sees the text as having a message today and also in the future. The history of the text is the initial starting point for understanding the Word of God.<sup>12</sup> Similarly when speaking about human formation in a seminary context, the personal history of the seminarian is the fundamental starting point in the preparation for priestly ministry.

Human Formation asks the who, when, why, where questions - regarding the history of the seminarian. The social milieu (family of origin and culture) from which a seminarian emerges is crucial for an understanding of who he is. Seminarians upon entry into the seminary are embarking on a new way of life, part of a seminary community in preparation for future priestly ministry. The task of the formation team is to equip the seminarian with what he needs for priesthood. The psychological balance and emotional maturity of the seminarian is essential for productive and healthy service to the Church. Human formation looks at issues like the seminarians ability to live chaste celibate lives calmly and happily amongst others. It also looks at a wide variety of other anthropological issues so as to ensure that the seminarian will be ready to go forth to bring Christ to all those he meets without being hindered. The main thrust of human formation is usually an integration of the seminarian's past experiences and mode of doing things with what is now required of him as a seminarian and future priest. The past must be something to be understood and accepted and built upon so that the seminarian is ready to live his life today. The personal history of each seminarian is never left at the door of the seminary. It is relevant today as it was yesterday and tomorrow.

## **Literary Analysis and Spiritual Formation**

Literary Analysis works to identify the message of the themes and symbols of the texts for the people of God. Being able to draw out various concepts and ideas that are running through biblical books or specific Scripture texts makes texts more memorable. Patterns and repetitions or the use of certain words or phrases can help the reader in his/her discernment of the overall meaning and message of the text. There are many different literary styles in Sacred Scripture. Legal texts, liturgical texts, narratives, poetry, prophetic genre to name but a few. An early

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<sup>12</sup>Cf. *Word of God*, Proposition 46, Faithful reading of Scripture: historical authenticity and fundamentalism: "Faithful reading of sacred Scripture, practiced since antiquity in the Tradition of the Church, seeks the truth that saves for the life of each faithful and for the Church. This reading acknowledges the historic value of the biblical tradition. It is precisely because of this value of historic testimony that it desires to rediscover the profound meaning of sacred Scripture destined also for the life of today's believer."

detection of the literary style is crucial to getting to the heart of the text and ultimately what will help the exegete to glean the theology of the text that was intended by the author.

Spiritual Formation is essential to the stability of the seminarian both in the seminary and ultimately when he is out in a parish and community.<sup>13</sup> Spiritual nourishment is the sustenance required for the human-divine relationship. Prayer forms a major role in daily seminary life. From the initial entry into the seminary, seminarians are praying with the Scriptures and attending spiritual talks and seminars that are Scripture based. The sooner the seminarians encounter some of the literary themes in Scripture the easier it will be for them to fully participate in the seminary prayer life, e.g., The Liturgy of the Hours. Also, seminarians are not a generic group of people, they have different personalities and interests. Therefore, not every text will speak to each one of them in the same way. An awareness of the different literary styles of Scripture texts will facilitate the seminarians' reflective prayer lives. They can choose for personal prayer a text they find easier to read or one that helps them to meditate more easily. The sooner they are able to do this, the sooner they will be able to make the connection between the Scripture themes and their own lives. The literary themes that are uncovered by an exegete are ultimately indicative of the anthropological condition and the relationship between the human person and God. It is precisely this connection that makes seminary professors literary analysis most fruitful in the lives of their students and for their future priestly ministry.

### **Theological Analysis and Intellectual Formation**

Turning then to the next exegetical step, i.e., the theological analysis of Scripture texts, the goal of this step is to uncover the essence of the human-divine relationship as it has been revealed and handed down by Catholic exegetes and theologians over the centuries. Along with independent study and that of various scholars, seminarians are exposed to the rich theological insights dating back to the times of the Kings of Israel. Such theology uncovered and commented upon in class serves to guide and prepare seminarians for their future work as priests amongst the people of God. This is a key element in the intellectual formation of seminarians. They must be equipped to articulate their faith. Theology is built upon the foundation base of Sacred Scripture. As part of the comprehensive intellectual rigors of the discipline of Theology, seminarians must become familiar with the content of the sacred texts and be able to interpret them for themselves and others. Within the academic setting, seminarians are exposed to various biblical methods of exegesis and ways of interpreting the texts.

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, Proposition 31, Word of God and priests: "Priests, especially parish priests, are called to nourish themselves every day with the sacred Scriptures and to communicate them with wisdom and generosity to the faithful entrusted to their care."

## **Pastoral Analysis and Pastoral Formation**

Apart from examinations, seminarians as they progress through the seminary will show the fruits of their exegetical skills and biblical theological insights through such exercises like delivering a sample homily to their peer group. While a homily is first and foremost a pastoral initiative, its roots are firmly planted within the soil of theology that emerges from an intellectual starting point. The pastoral analysis of texts presented in class is an excellent exegetical tool to show how the message of the texts may be applied by seminarians and priests in their pastoral placements and ministry. The pastoral formation of the seminarians is at work simultaneously with pastoral analysis. Seminarians learn how to read a text, analyze it and how to draw from it and integrate it not only with their overall theological education but very practically in their pastoral placements and ministry. An example of which is given below.<sup>14</sup> So in light of all this, how does an awareness of these four-fold elements and their inter-connectedness bear out in an academic methodology?

## **The Application of the four-fold elements of Catholic Exegesis and Seminary Formation in the Teaching of Sacred Scripture**

For example purposes – let us say the seminary course is on The Gospel of Mark and the textual *pericope* 1:16-20 is being studied as part of a class teaching session. The following is a very basic and quick example of how the interpretation of the text can be made while being mindful of the goals of seminary formation. While the academic focus on the curriculum for Sacred Scripture will always form the main percentage of class and course content, a few moments of reflection and connection to the formation of seminarians can be done as follows:

RSV Text: <sup>16</sup> And passing along by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net in the sea; for they were fishermen. <sup>17</sup> And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men." <sup>18</sup> And immediately they left their nets and followed him. <sup>19</sup> And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. <sup>20</sup> And immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and followed him.

A basic historical analysis of the text is as follows: Textual delimitation identifies verse 16 as being an opening verse to a ‘call narrative’ since the prior verses deal with the baptism of Jesus and the preaching of John the Baptist. Assuming the appropriate introduction to The Gospel of Mark was done in a prior class, students are aware of the author Mark who was writing in Rome for persecuted Christians – the significance of this will be addressed further on in class as part of the theological analytical section. Focusing on the historical time that the author is referring to, the following information is highlighted. The call to the apostles took place as Jesus was (v.16) ‘passing along by the Sea of Galilee’ while Simon and Andrew were casting a net in the sea (v. 16) and as James and John were in their boat mending the nets (v. 19). The information captures

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. paper section: ‘The Seminarians’ Successful Integration of the Exegetical and Priestly Formation Steps’.



the reality that Jesus called men who were at work. Jesus came alongside them and called them to follow him. He took the initiative in the midst of the ordinary, daily routine of fishermen's work.

Before moving on to the next exegetical step in relation to the text, an explicit connection can be made regarding the historical material and the human formation of the seminarians. An example of such is as follows: When did the seminarians perceive their call to follow Christ? Where were they when they perceived explicitly a call to priesthood? Was their response immediate? Why? All of these questions are important to answer. While the answers are part of the seminarian's past life, the answers are relevant to where they are in their seminary formation. The historical questions prompt the seminarian to reflect on what they thought Christ was calling them to do in the past. They can reflect on how they responded to that call. Then they can compare their thoughts about their vocations today. Is Christ still calling them to follow him? Is their response the same, are they quick to say 'Yes' or are they more doubtful? Are they more joyous now or were they more so in the past? Are they joyous at all? Were they ever joyous? Is this a free choice for them now? Are they in a process that they would rather not be? The ordinariness of the call to the disciples in their place of work shows that the call is amazing and yet so very calm, it is something that is encountered in the rather regular humdrum ways of life, such as at work. Is Christ still calling the seminarian in his place of study, in the ordinariness of his seminary scheduled life?

Looking at the account from a literary perspective, the pattern of action is clear. Looking at the five verses (vv. 16-20), Jesus calls four people (Simon and Andrew, then James the son of Zebedee and John his brother) to follow him as his disciples. The details of the stories are reduced to the bare essentials. Similarly in the story of the call of Levi (Mark 2:14) everything happens with one verse which reads: 'And as he passed on, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him'. The narrative telling time is very quick. It conveys how out of the blue the call to follow Jesus can come. The action in the text conveys the suddenness of everything. It is life altering. Jesus calls, he requires a response, the men hear him, and all of the men (Simon, Andrew, James, John and Levi) follow him immediately. The common element also is the presence of trust. The men had to trust Jesus and in following him they exhibited that trust. The men were called into community life with him and they in turn would be expected to call others in the future. The simplicity of the stories also allows for the easy insertion of the reader into the text, it is easy to imagine being in the boat or behind the table and being called. The call is a personal call. It is a call to travel with Jesus, to walk with him, to be with him, why? So that he could make them 'fishers of men'. While this metaphor for 'priesthood' could not have been clear to the new disciples at that point, the truth like many things in the Gospel of Mark, will unfold in the following chapters.

The spiritual formation application for seminarians emerging from the literary study of the text may be initiated by the following questions: Like the disciples, do I trust Jesus' call? Can I truly abandon myself to Jesus? Am I good enough to become a priest and to call others to the same vocation? It would be good for seminarians to pray with these Markan verses every so often so as to re-evaluate or renew their spiritual 'yes' to Christ's invitation to follow Him. Themes such as trust and abandoning oneself to Jesus can be pursued in prayer. Through the academic

drawing out of certain themes, the seminarians can be encouraged to reflect on their vocational sense and call. When they take time to pray silently alone in the chapel or in their rooms, they can ask themselves if they feel a sense of peace and calm in relation to their decision to date. They have embarked on the journey to follow Jesus. They have left their prior lives and family members in response to Jesus' call. Have they done the right thing? Would they encourage others to do the same? What does Jesus ask of them now, today? Does he call for total abandonment to him in trust? Such questions will make the passage not only memorable, theme-wise, to the students for their scripture exam or paper, but it will also ensure that it is relevant to them. It is a text that puts forth a challenge to the seminarians, to read it again and again and to reflect on it and to see how it is speaking to them in their current time and place.

It is clear from the Markan text that to be followers of Jesus requires that people be ready to sacrifice themselves so as to allow the Gospel message to spread to all. This was the outlook of the early Christians in Rome. They lived in dangerous times and they had to endure much suffering and hardship as a result of their faith. To be a disciple of Christ, according to Mark, was to take a risk and to trust in Jesus. There was no time to waste, there was an immediacy to responding to the faith that required the Christians to abandon themselves to the divine will to serve him at great personal cost, just like the fishermen and tax collector who had to leave their professions behind them. The Christians were called to foster and nourish vocations to the priesthood and to ignite or nurture the Christian faith. Mark's theology is all about suffering and the inevitable journey to the cross, albeit figuratively, by all disciples. To be a disciple of Christ meant that one had to suffer in some way or another. The image of Jesus portrayed in Mark's gospel is that of the Suffering Messiah. Connecting the theology of Mark and the intellectual formation goal of seminarians, questions emerge. Can the seminarians embrace a Markan theology in their lives? If discipleship comes at great personal cost, are they able to remain faithful to their initial 'yes' to follow Christ. Have they encountered the cross yet or are they still somewhat blind to what the future would hold for them like the Markan disciples at the time of their call? How will the seminarians as a future priests resource themselves in times of crisis and suffering? How does their experience of suffering connect to the theology of suffering that they have discussed or studied in systematic theology? How do the theological concepts of redemption or salvation fit into life as they experience it?

As for the pastoral analysis of the text, the Markan text has many launching points for pastoral work. Clearly, the text of the calling of the disciples mirrors very much many Christian vocation stories. All the calls to follow Christ are full of risk, demand trust and call for abandonment to the will of God. The disciples did not know where Jesus was going or what he was going to do. They were offered no future security. So too with a call to the Christian life, once embraced, it can take people on paths that they never planned to take. Applying these insights particularly to the seminarians with pastoral formation in mind, useful questions can be posed such as: How are the seminarians responding to their call today? Is their 'yes' still operative? Are they still as enthusiastic? Do they share this enthusiasm with others when they are outside the seminary doing pastoral work?

## **The Seminarians' Successful Integration of the Exegetical and Priestly Formation Steps**

In order to impart Sacred Scripture to seminarians in the classroom, it is of paramount importance that the professor be a person well qualified academically according to Catholic exegetical methods. However, methodology alone is not sufficient. A professor of Sacred Scripture must also be a person of faith and well balanced psychologically. Many times professors have failed to impart the central aspects of Scripture to seminarians because they have failed to personally ‘model and encourage strong “priestly identity”’<sup>15</sup> or Catholic identity.<sup>16</sup> However, in most Catholic seminaries today, the professors are well grounded academics and people of faith. The issues that are current, have not to do with the professors in as much as they revolve around some of the seminarians. For example, many distrust what the professors teach and they are usually ‘demonstrate fear-based ideological views and emotional rigidity, resistance to learning, and suspicion toward faculty motives and orthodoxy’.<sup>17</sup> It is important in such cases that the human formation team step in and address such issues immediately.<sup>18</sup> If there is no merit in the seminarians’ complaints or fears, it is of paramount importance that the formation team alleviate such fears and endorse the scripture professor’s competence and good standing in the local and universal Church. It is also in such cases that the holding of a *mandatum* from the local ordinary, i.e., bishop, that can be helpful. However, this is just the starting point. Work with such seminarians is crucial in respect to many different areas, one of which is how they relate to women since most of the daily parish aspects for a priest deal with a higher proportion of women than men. For seminarians to be open to the Word of God in the classroom, they must also be free from any emotional blocks that they may have that would prevent their saturation of the course material and its appropriate integration into their priestly formation and future ministry.

Some useful approaches to helping a seminarian integrate Scripture into his life in a very real and definitive way is to have him pursue, for example, Clinical Pastoral Education Unit (CPE) during the summer. To be cast into situations where Scripture becomes a necessary tool of work can be

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<sup>15</sup> F. Maples and K. Schuth, ‘Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation: Interview Study of Roman Catholic Students and Faculty’, *Theological Education*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (2005), 1-45, 1.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. The Task of the Exegete and the Relationship of Exegesis with Other Theological Disciplines in Williamson, 345, where it states “The primary task of the Catholic exegete is both a work of scholarship and an ecclesial service (III.C.a). Because sound interpretation requires a lived affinity with what is studied and the light of the Holy Spirit, full participation in the life and faith of the believing community (III.A.3.g) and personal prayer are necessary (Address 9).” The Salesians of Don Bosco document is helpful here also. ‘Salesian’ can be omitted for general application purposes. The document states that teachers’ roles are “not confined to the purely intellectual aspect and their teaching goes hand in hand with the witness of their faith-convictions. They impart formation through their friendly and educative presence amongst the Salesian candidates, taking part with them, whenever possible, in their times of prayer, recreation and apostolic activities”. Cf. 4.3.3.1.3. “The teachers and experts”, *Ratio*, 240.

<sup>17</sup> Ironically, students often place their trust in *Wikipedia* and other internet search engines and sites over the material being presented in class. Speaking of the net, wireless internet access in classrooms is posing many challenges in the classrooms around the world, e.g., students surfing a topic and as a result, they are not fully concentrating on what is happening in the room or students emailing each other during class time. That being said, the world of the internet can be very useful at times also, e.g., class assignments, such as pulling up ancient biblical maps, information etc. as directed by professors.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Maples and Schuth, 2.

a positive growth opportunity for a seminarian, intellectually, spiritually, theologically and obviously pastorally.<sup>19</sup> An example of this would be as follows: Michael, a seminarian is working in a Psychiatric Unit in a local hospital. He encounters Lila, a young woman suffering from schizophrenia, who murdered her grandmother because she thought she was possessed by aliens. Lila now stabilized due to medication is clear headed about what happened and is horrified. She asks Michael the following question: ‘How can God forgive me for what I have done?’. There are many ways for Michael to answer the question. One example might be for him to convey to Lila that God is a compassionate God, full of mercy and he may draw from the Psalms to illustrate his faith assertion.<sup>20</sup> But to the average person, such comments may seem like some pious clichés. For Michael then to substantiate his response more fully, by giving the example of Cain and Abel (Gen 4:1-16) he may actually be able to give Lila some comfort. Most people know the story of Cain and Abel but few remember or know the part where God put the mark on Cain’s forehead to protect him after his crime of murdering his brother (Gen 4:15). God protected an intentional murderer because he was still a human being and retained his human dignity as a child of God despite his sin. How much more would God love and want the best for someone whose crime of killing her grandmother was mitigated by the fact that she had schizophrenia. She was not free due to her illness. She is not culpable. If Lila is still not convinced with Michael’s argument from Scripture, he can draw on the example of God clothing Adam and Eve in garments of skin replacing their garments of greenery to protect them outside the garden of Eden (Gen 3:21). Michael could also give the example of God allowing Jacob to be protected initially by Laban when he had sinned against Esau and so on (Gen 28). There are numerous examples that Michael can draw from. Most likely Lila will go later to check out the stories herself in the bible and the seeing of the written word will compound the words of Michael. So too for Michael, when he next sees these passages, he will have a new appreciation of the reality of sin, suffering, compassion and forgiveness and how it taps into his theological worldview.<sup>21</sup> Michael can also take these passages again in the future and pray for Lila and all those who were hurt by her actions and also pray for other people in similar circumstances. It is through the intersection and integration of what Michael learned in his Theology classes and Scripture classes and on the pastoral scene that his vocation as future priest is truly coming to fruition.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Cf. *Word of God*, Proposition 30, Biblical Pastoral Ministry: “ ‘Dei Verbum’ exhorts that the Word of God not only be made the soul of theology but also the soul of the whole of pastoral care, of life and of the mission of the Church (cf. "Dei Verbum," 24). Bishops must be the first promoters of this dynamic in their dioceses. To be a herald and a credible herald, the bishop must first nourish himself with the Word of God, so that he can sustain and make ever more fruitful his own episcopal ministry. The synod recommends increasing "biblical pastoral ministry" not in juxtaposition to other forms of pastoral care but as biblical animation of the whole of pastoral care.”

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, Proposition 35, Health Care and the Bible: it states that “the synodal fathers exhort all those who approach persons afflicted by all sorts of evil to take to them humbly but audaciously the vivifying Word of the Lord Jesus both in Scripture as well as in the Eucharist. Indispensable also today is that the Word of God inspire the whole of health pastoral care.”

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, Proposition 27, To overcome the dualism between exegesis and theology: The synod Fathers wish that exegesis and theology be integrated. In this proposition, They quote His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI who said “When exegesis is not theology, Scripture cannot be the soul of theology and, vice-versa, when theology is not essentially interpretation of Scripture in the Church, such theology loses its foundation’ (Benedict XVI, Oct. 14, 2008).”

<sup>22</sup> Cf. VIS 090528: Pope Benedict XVI addressing the Italian Episcopal Community in Vatican City on May 28<sup>th</sup> 2009 spoke about the forthcoming Year for Priests. Commenting on priestly ministry, Pope Benedict stated it "is a service to the Church and to Christian people, requiring a profound spirituality ... nourished by prayer and by intense personal union with the Lord, in order to be able to serve our brothers and sisters through preaching, the Sacraments,

## **Conclusion**

For the implementation of the integrative approach of the four-fold method of exegesis and the four pillars of priestly formation, it is crucial that seminary professors of Sacred Scripture are aware of and work with the formational objectives of the seminary team as part of their academic work. Similarly, it is through each seminary team's support and encouragement of the seminarians to embrace everything they are exposed to in their Scripture classes that good future priests will emerge, priests who love Scripture, priests who know how to interpret Scripture and priests who will use it to help others to come to know it and love it also. Common and integral to a successful Scripture professor, seminary formator and seminarian is the mutual ongoing study, prayer and personal reflection on the Word of God since it is beautiful and majestic and it strengthens and enhances the lives of those that encounter it.<sup>23</sup>

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orderly community life and help for the poor. All priestly ministry reveals ... the importance of commitment to education, so that people may grow freely and responsibly as mature and conscientious Christians.” Cf. also P. Chavez, “*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life (Jn 6,69) The Word of God and Salesian life today*”, *Letter from the Rector Major, No. 386*, Section 2.1: Don Bosco, Priest of the Word, Biblical Formation and Pastoral Ministry, and Effective Pedagogical Application.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Williamson, 343.