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Counseling by Mail: A Longitudinal Study of Correspondence between Minor Seminarians and Their Spiritual Director, Especially in Relation to Vocational Perseverance

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COUNSELING BY MAIL

A longitudinal study of correspondence between minor seminarians and their spiritual director, especially in relation to vocational perseverance

Submitted in Application for a
Master's Degree in Psychology

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Chapter I - The Purpose and Relevance of This Study

This thesis is a psychological study of a particular and peculiar counseling procedure. A large minor seminary, a day school, located in the middle of a midwestern city, used spiritual directors as an important part of the student formation program. The spiritual director for the freshmen engaged in a somewhat structured correspondence with the students during the summer. This correspondence, we believe, was an effective tool for personality and vocational counseling. We will study the program of this school to see whether this spiritual direction can rightly be called psychological counseling and also to see whether the correspondence program is a valid and effective counseling method. We will use perseverance in the seminary as a criterion of effectiveness.

Theoretical as well as practical considerations seem to justify our study. The essence and the effectiveness of counseling is found by many psychologists to lie in the interpersonal relationship established between counselor and counselee. Patterson's study, Theories of Counseling and Psychotherapy (24) finds this insistence on the relationship as a common theme in authors of quite divergent schools. As Brammer and Shostrum say, "We are becoming more and more convinced that the relationship in psychotherapy and counseling is a curative agent in its own right." (9,p.144). This relationship, Carl Rogers maintains, is not "different in kind from all others which occur in everyday life . . . The therapeutic relationship is seen as a heightening of the constructive qualities which often exist in part in other relationships, and an extension through time of qualities which in

other relationships tend at best to be momentary." (29, p.102). Rev. Eugene Kennedy applies these thoughts directly to the topic of seminary spiritual directors when he writes, "Do the cautions and distinctions about spiritual direction and counseling reflect a mathematical viewpoint toward human persons . . .? What makes good spiritual direction effective is basically what makes good counseling effective. Spiritual direction works when there is a genuine interpersonal relationship between the people involved." (12, p.102).

Such authors encourage us to maintain that when spiritual direction aims at personality development, at growth in maturity of the 14 year old, at helping to solve school and family problems, at assisting in vocational choice, at building a commitment to clearly seen values, then such spiritual direction is psychological counseling. As Edward Bordin maintains, "If a religious counselor is concerned primarily with the personality development of a client and secondarily with his religious beliefs, then he is engaged in psychological counseling . . . Various positions with respect to counseling and psychotherapy can be reconciled and integrated, at least in part, for the therapeutic character of interpersonal relationships is multiply determined." (24, p.281).

The supposition must be made that the spiritual director is adequately prepared for such relationships: he is himself relatively free from personal problems of his own; he has an adequate knowledge of personality development from sound psychology; he has practical experience in this field. This is the conviction of Ford and Urban (14, p.687) about therapist training in their study of systems of psychotherapy. In our study, the spiritual director was a graduate student in psychology, working for a Master's degree; he had several years of experience in school counseling and was also part time chaplain at the

city juvenile detention home, where his task was completely one of interviewing and counseling. His intent with the seminary freshmen was to be of assistance particularly with questions of personal maturity and vocational commitment, because more completely religious matters were handled in religion class and in the confessional.

For these reasons, we maintain that spiritual direction is, or can be, psychological counseling. By a detailed exposition of this particular spiritual direction program, we will see that the program was truly counseling.

Furthermore, correspondence is, or can be, a legitimate tool in counseling. In more recent years, we have seen that counseling does not have to be a one-to-one relationship, because group counseling is effective. Counseling does not have to be face-to-face conversation either, since tests and inventories and bibliotherapy are effective tools of counseling. Emergency telephone counseling for alcoholics and potential suicides is being tried. Various psychologists tell of the usefulness of letters and of note-keeping as well as of the difficulty of abrupt terminations in counseling. We will investigate how this particular correspondence program was structured and what was the content of the letters to see that this was truly a counseling correspondence.

To gauge the effectiveness of this counseling tool, we will compare the rate of perseverance of writers and non-writers. Remaining in school until graduation is a legitimate criterion to use in school counseling. It is a sign that the student identifies with the school and its programs, that he is progressing effectively toward the goals he had chosen and therefore it is a sign of his ability to make a commitment, a sign of maturing. The student who writes, maintaining an on-going relationship of his own accord with the

spiritual director, tying his summer and his daily behavior with his long range goals, is using the present for the future in a manner adapted to his age level and is thereby showing a greater degree of vocational maturity. And this vocational maturity is a valid predictor of vocational adjustment. We believe this position is in conformity with the observations of Donald Super in his vocational studies (33, pp.8,63).

We have said that there are practical as well as theoretical reasons for this study. Adolescence, authority, celibacy, commitment, identity, institutions, priesthood, seminary--all these are themes which presently unleash strong feelings and sharp discussion. Titles like Seminary in Crisis (26), and Seminary Education in a Time of Change (17) indicate that those who deal with the training of priests feel a great sense of urgency. The Second Vatican Council urges us to apply the findings of a healthy psychology to the seminary training of young men, so that their personal development and their training would be in no way deficient (1, p.441). Some educators and psychologists agree with James Lee and George Hagmaier, who denounce the minor seminary for perpetrating poor education and poor personality development of our young men. They lament the influence particularly of the spiritual director. Others are with Eugene Kennedy as he calls on the seminary to be a stimulating environment and on the spiritual director to be a source of rich interpersonal relationship. And so, spiritual direction of young adolescents in a minor seminary is a good topic for psychological research.

Therefore, in this counseling study, I want to observe one large minor seminary. We will explore what kind of relationship existed between a spiritual director there and the students he worked with. We will look at a correspondence program he and the students used to see whether it was an effective

counseling tool. We will see whether those who used this type of relationship as freshmen were more likely to persevere until graduation than those who chose to forego the correspondence program. We will expose the spiritual director's procedure to see how it fits the definition of psychological counseling. We will study the correspondence in itself and in comparison to personal interviews. We will compare the results of this writing program with successes obtained in other types of counseling programs. We will see whether frequency of correspondence and the rate of perseverance in school vary in direct proportion. We will further observe the writing program in terms of the academic achievement of the students to see what part academic grades play in the success of this counseling.

We propose this null hypothesis and its alternate: There is no significant difference between those who participated in the correspondence program and those who did not participate in regard to perseverance in the seminary. Or alternately, there is a significant difference. We predict that there is more than a chance difference in perseverance rates of writers and non-writers.

Chapter II - Related Literature

There are various journals that publish brief studies of religious or pastoral counseling. But extended treatments of the topics we are exploring are not readily available. We find that a few authors write in detail about psychological aspects of spiritual direction and seminary training. A scattering of references can be found about counseling by mail. And, of course, many papers treat of school counseling, using perseverance as a criterion of success.

On the topic of spiritual direction, we have a thorough study by a French Jesuit, Jean Laplace, entitled The Direction of Conscience (16). The book is based on the author's lengthy experience as spiritual director, but he does not cite any statistical data or controlled experiments or case studies. It is a theoretical rather than a clinical study. Laplace averts to various criticisms of spiritual direction: that it works against the client's freedom and individual development; that it is an institutional approach stressing practices to be mechanically performed; that it is really meddling in what is properly the realm of psychology; that it is too individualistic an age of community and group dynamics; that it implies an elite; that the very term smacks of medieval authoritarianism. Laplace replies that true spiritual direction must respect the individual personality, that it must see behind practices to find what they reveal about the person, that group dynamics are not suited for all of a man's formation. As for a spiritual elite, Laplace retorts that there can be no false equalitarianism--each follows his rhythm; each has to develop his own particular gift and should find aid in the Church for that development. The priest director is not a dictator, but he is a

father, giving life to another and then helping the young man grow till he is self sufficient and can stand alongside the director. He is sure that in our era this is precisely the type of service that a priest is called to give others.

As for the nature of spiritual direction, Laplace calls the process a dialogue implying deep personal relationship and rooted in the needs of human nature. This is a hallowed and needed office in every civilization and time. The director is in the tradition of the gurus whom the Hindus seek out or the staretz that the Russian Orthodox venerate, where one more experienced is the confidant and guide for growth to religious manhood. One essential presupposition is that outside help for psychological problems will be sought, just as a parent will have recourse to a doctor if more than first aid or proper health care is needed. And of course the director has to be receptive and open to others, knowledgable about human nature and spirituality, not psychologizing or deceived by hidden motives, at peace, yet always busy so that the other person would be in ever closer relationship to Christ.

Laplace mentions specific kinds of direction, all of which involve helping a person see his own freedom and unique opportunities for development. As for direction by letter, he believes it is a respected form which we can find all through history among Christians and non-Christians. It has indeed become a separate literary form. It can be profitable as a means of preserving continuity. And there is the obvious advantage of having a record. He cautions the director to attend not to the details mentioned but to the aggregate impression he gets from the letter, and to respond to that.

In the direction of the young, emphasis should be mostly on laying

natural foundations for a fully Christian life. The direction will have the stages of development a young person goes through and will have to advert to attitudes without insisting on a multitude of practices. In regard to vocation, the task is to help a person be truly free, so that he makes his choice with no self-deception and with personal peace. On the part of the directed, we will have to find intelligence, humility, transparency, trust, and faith, if this relationship is to be fruitful.

Here in outline, is the thought of Jean Laplace on the value of the spiritual director relationship. The application to direction by mail and to vocational choice and perseverance is not intensively treated however.

Thomas Merton recently has written more briefly on the same topic and with much the same outlook in another handbook on spiritual direction entitled Spiritual Direction and Meditation. (20). It is certainly not an a priori study, but like Laplace, it is more a matter of simple observation than controlled study, although Merton is speaking from a great deal of experience as a spiritual director.

On the difference between direction and counseling or psychotherapy he cautions:

There is a temptation to think that spiritual direction is the guidance of one's spiritual activities, considered as a small part or department of one's life This is completely false. The spiritual director is concerned with the whole person, for the spiritual life is not just the life of the mind, or of the affections, or of the "summit of the soul" - it is the life of the whole person. (20, p.6).

For Merton, the purpose of spiritual direction is:

. . . to penetrate beneath the surface of a man's life, to get behind the facade of conventional gestures and attitudes which he presents to the world, and to bring out his inner spiritual freedom. (20, p.8).

The first thing required is a normal, spontaneous human relationship. Then the director is to instruct his disciples how they may themselves find out the way proper for them.

It would seem that spiritual direction is morally necessary for a religious. And this means something that is much deeper than a mere exterior formation:

Without a really interior and sensitive direction during the crucial period of formation, a young religious is likely to be placed in a very delicate situation, and, indeed, his whole life may be turned into a meaningless pantomime of perfection . . . (20, p.15).

In reference to our concern about drop-outs, Merton says that spiritual directors are not easy to find, and no doubt many losses of vocation could have been prevented by a really solid and firm spiritual direction.

What, according to Merton, are we normally entitled to expect from spiritual direction? It should not be dependence on someone else to solve problems that we ought to be able to solve. Nevertheless, the kindly support and wise advice of one whom we trust often enables us to accept more perfectly what we already know and see in an obscure way. We ought not to be constantly observing our own efforts at progress and paying exaggerated attention to our "spiritual life".

Direction is, by its very nature, something personal. . . . We must avoid inertia and passivity What we need to do is bring the director in contact with our real self This implies a relaxed, humble attitude in which we let go of ourselves and renounce our unconscious efforts to maintain a facade The manifestation of conscience supposed by ordinary spiritual direction implies an atmosphere of unhurried leisure, a friendly, sincere and informal conversation, on a basis of personal intimacy. The director is interested in our very self, in all its uniqueness, its pitiable misery and its breathtaking greatness. A true director can never get over the awe he feels in the presence of a person, an immortal soul, loved

by Christ It is, in fact, this respect for the mystery of personality that makes a real director . . . he does not merely want to know our problems, our difficulties, our secrets . . . the director wants to know our inmost self, our real self. He wants to know us not as we are in the eyes of men, or even as we are in our own eyes, but as we are in the eyes of God . . . (20, pp.22,25,30).

What is the value of direction by mail? According to Merton, it should not be overestimated. This may be of some value. But direction by mail is seriously handicapped by one important thing: the lack of personal contact. Of course, letters from a really good director are perhaps better than direct contact with a bad one. But most good directors have very little time to write long letters.

One must not imagine that one owes strict obedience to the spiritual director. The director is not a superior. Our relation to him is the relation of a friend to an adviser. Hence the virtue to be exercised in direction is docility (teachableness) rather than obedience, and docility is a matter of prudence.

Merton makes several points about psychotherapy. The director is not a psychoanalyst. He should not become an amateur in psychotherapy. He should not make the mistake of giving a direction that reinforces unconscious and infantile authoritarian trends. At the same time, he should not be too easy and too soothing. Secondly, he should realize that psychological problems are very real. He should know when to refer to a psychiatrist for proper treatment.

Merton's book gives us his convictions after years of directing novices and lay people. The conclusions are empiric but not scientifically validated by controlled research.

These two authors, Laplace and Merton, are the most articulate

defenders and proponents of spiritual direction for today. They sum up, I think, the apologia for spiritual direction in more cogent and modern terms than earlier authors like Parente (23). They have been spiritual directors themselves and feel spiritual direction is a valid and meaningful and necessary form of interpersonal relationship. They are not psychologists who write, but they do touch upon the pertinent psychological issues.

Other authors think that advances in psychology have rendered spiritual direction very much out of date. Speaking precisely about spiritual direction in the minor seminary, Rev. George Hagmaier, in his own books, in The Adolescent: His Search for Understanding (8), in Seminary Education in a Time of Change (17), as well as in many papers given before the National Catholic Educational Association and elsewhere, is not so pleased as Merton and Laplace with spiritual direction, either in theory or in practice. At first, he talks about the great need for good spiritual direction, but as time goes on, seems to despair that it is possible. In 1962, before the National Catholic Educational Association, he said, on the one hand, that this direction is called for, especially in the very young seminary candidate:

It is most important to see that the young man receives adequate and regular spiritual direction from an appealing and qualified individual. We cannot over-emphasize the importance of good spiritual direction and counseling in the seminary.

Yet he has reservations and complains:

Needless to say, the art of counseling, and especially spiritual direction, is woefully uncultivated, and constitutes one of the most serious defects of our seminary system today (37, pp.115,117).

Then in 1963, Hagmaier says that in the first place, spiritual direction isn't always practical, and, besides, whatever of spiritual

direction there has been, hasn't done much good anyway. In the Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America we find:

Most priests have not received rewarding spiritual direction themselves. Seminarians, for whom direction is expected and often prescribed, express widespread dissatisfaction . . . All too often the director seems to take the dominant role - probing, diagnosing, prescribing for the penitent who has hardly any active role in the relationship. (36, p.125).

And in his chapter on "The Pastoral Counselor," in Bier's book, The Adolescent: His Search for Understanding, published the same year, we find:

The teenager wants a guide who does not share the turmoil and confusion of adolescence, but who does reflect stability, who communicates empathy, compassion, interest The adolescent wants a value system, he wants to set limits for himself (The ideal priest-counselor) does not value sharp, absolute and legalistic compliance to a moral code above the slow, stumbling, yet certain emergence of attitudes toward morality It is my impression that a very large amount of counseling with teenagers can be done through group contact, rather than by becoming involved in a great number of individual interviews. As I indicated earlier, the impact of sheer numbers is an obstacle that individual counseling cannot overcome. Secondly the average adolescent is naturally reluctant to discuss his problems in a one-to-one relationship. (8, pp.171-2).

In 1965, talking not of spiritual directors in particular but of seminary authorities in general, he sees some good possibly coming from the contact between generations that these relationships afford:

One big task of seminary authorities is to facilitate the increasingly difficult communication between the generations It is a basic task of seminary officials to work actively to close the gap between these age groups How effective can be the influence of the older priest, mellowed with wisdom and experience, who reaches out to his younger colleagues with encouragement and approval, spurs them on to new creative ventures, reassures them in the face of failure, and receives their confidences with a kindly ear. (17, p.276).

But in 1966, he seems more unhappy and makes more of a dichotomy between spiritual direction and counseling, giving the impression that it may be well to forget about the one and concentrate on the other.

It is most important that professional counselors be available to deal with the myriad and unique developmental challenges of the young. . . . Note please that I said counseling, not spiritual direction. In the past, all kinds of unhappy things have been done under the title "spiritual direction." (37, p.202).

Here before the Educational Association, he raises a number of issues about the minor seminary, but he qualifies his criticisms by prescinding from the day school, which is our precise field of interest.

The day seminary is quite a different institution and has much to recommend it, if properly administered. (37, p.196).

Several other authors seem generally to share Father Hagmaier's views, people like Adrian Van Kaam and James Lee. Van Kaam, in Seminary Education in a Time of Change, (17) sees a need for drastic alterations in spiritual direction in the wake of new insights of psychology and philosophy. Certainly, he indicates, the term and the concept of "religious counseling" should be substituted in its stead. We should surely drop what we've been doing, but it's not clear exactly what we should do instead.

Religious counselors may find themselves temporarily in a kind of vacuum in which old ways of spiritual direction are insufficient and new roads are not yet opened up . . . (17, p.331).

In general terms, he calls for spiritual direction to be a partnership in dialogue. It should avoid a behavioristic and legalistic stress on behavior. It should take on more of a community dimension and supplement individual counseling with group counseling.

James Lee in the same book paints with a heavy brush. He feels that not just in general but especially in guidance and counseling programs American seminaries use European models and directives, but "just because European seminaries are educationally retarded in that they have no concept of professionalized school guidance is no reason for American seminaries to imitate this retardation." (17, p.296).

As for drop outs, he feels sure that "empirical studies have indicated that the two major factors which have discouraged boys from entering the seminary and have contributed to their withdrawal from the house of formation have been the requisite academic achievement and celibacy." (17, p.119). He cites Fichter's Religion as an Occupation (13) as his authority.

Mr. Lee advocates the closing of all minor seminaries. "There would seem to be many cogent reasons for abolition of all seminaries below the theologate . . . A goodly proportion of the older priests, and almost all the younger priests seem to strongly favor abolition of the minor seminary, particularly its high school division . . ." (17, p.130). A major reason for that proposal is the excessive drop out rate.

He further feels the minor seminary has not that much to contribute to the young man's development. His conclusion on reading Van Kaam is "that the post of spiritual director is obsolete and indeed injurious in the light of contemporary psychological developments. The director should be replaced by the professionally prepared religious counselor." (17, p.326). He urges much more reliance on batteries of psychological tests for seminary counseling.

Mr. Lee, as may be suspected, is not widely regarded as a prophet by those actively engaged in the day-to-day difficulties of seminary work.

Father William Bier, chairman of the psychology department of Fordham University, wants to make some careful distinctions in regard to the spiritual director in the minor seminary. He believes the role of the spiritual director in the seminary is one which has been sanctified by a long and honorable tradition. It is a role second in importance to none. . . . "In the case of the diocesan seminarian, the role of the spiritual director is of crucial importance in the formation of the spiritual life of the seminarian." (37, p.112).

But he sees the director as a teacher, one involved in guidance.

He teaches through conferences. These conferences yield in importance and significance to none of the formal classes which the seminarians attend. The spiritual director also instructs on an individual basis in the spiritual direction which he provides for each of the seminarians personally. This spiritual direction is guidance . . . ; it is individualized instruction.

His specialized field, I should suggest, should be ascetical and pastoral theology. The spiritual director should have some knowledge of psychology because he needs to be able to recognize psychological problems in the seminarians in order to refer them to the seminary counselor or, if need be, to the professional psychotherapist. I do not think, however, that he needs to have a degree in psychology, and it might even be disadvantageous for him to have one because this might lure him away from his guidance role into a counseling relationship with the seminarians and this, I believe, would not be advantageous at least not in terms of his proper role as a spiritual director . . .

The spiritual director needs to be able to bring to his task a sympathetic understanding of and tolerance for the foibles and immaturity of youth Above all, however, he needs the ability and willingness to listen If the spiritual director is to guide the seminarian on an individual basis, he needs to know the seminarian as an individual, and this means that he must be willing to listen to him long enough to understand both his individual characteristics and his individual problems. (37, pp.113-14).

So Bier sees the need to keep the traditional office of spiritual director

"I think it is his proper role and I would hope that we would not try to solve the problems of the modern seminary by moving him out of this role or by burdening him with other obligations and responsibilities which are not appropriately his, and which can only detract from his essential role if they are assigned him." (37, p.114).

According to Bier, the spiritual director is for all seminarians, to guide them in their spiritual growth and vocation; if there is some obstacle that interferes and makes this guidance ineffective, then there should be a counselor who by non-directive procedures would take care of emotional and psychological problems. In the case of non-ordinary problems such as neuroses or pre-psychotic

behavior a professional psychotherapist should be consulted. Problems are to be expected and are no sign of the failure of spiritual direction. "Since minor seminarians are young adolescents, it is to be expected that there will be found among them a certain number of psychological problems characteristic of adolescence, notably problems in the formation of self-identity, in the resolution of the dependence-independence antinomy, and in sexual orientation. These areas which are troublesome for the adolescent generally are likely to be particularly so for the minor seminarian because of his attempt to combine the solution of them with the simultaneous assimilation of the ideals of priestly formation" It should really come as no surprise, therefore, that a certain number of psychological problems should develop in the minor seminary. . . . This is why the seminary counselor has an important role to fulfill in the minor seminary, and a role which, as described, encroaches in no way upon the functions of the spiritual director. (37, pp. 119-20).

In The Genius of the Apostolate, Father Kennedy and Father D'Arcy observe that studies coming from Columbia Teachers College indicate that some have the maturity at the ninth grade to work effectively toward a vocation, and so the minor seminary can be theoretically justified. And they seem unhappy with a too easy distinction between spiritual direction and counseling. They are afraid that such distinctions reflect a mathematical viewpoint toward human persons. (12).

It may, after all, be a naive and unchristian approach to speak of separate treatments for the soul and the emotions. What is dealt with is the living, breathing human person who lives in a world of nature and grace and works toward the fulfillment of his supernatural destiny. Here again the whole man is treated or the man is not treated at all. The spiritual director must deal precisely with persons, not just intellects; he must be deeply attuned to the whole complex psychosomatic unity we meet in individual men. (12, P.104).

Somehow, they feel, we must keep an holistic, not a compartmental, approach toward the seminarian and his development. And if Kennedy has some trenchant comments and suggestions for the spiritual director, he respects the office of spiritual direction and past directors such as de Guibert and LeClerq. It is certainly no "throw the rascals out!" approach that Kennedy suggests as a solution for the many problems of the seminary spiritual director of today.

In another place, (37, 509-12) he suggests that one very important factor in the "vocation crisis" is the fact that young people do not enter into deep and genuine relationships with priests. We have to look closely at these poor relationships if we want vocations and vocations that will last.

Father Kennedy's cautioning about clear cut distinctions is precisely what the Protestant observer of the Catholic seminaries, Walter Wagoner, (34) finds important. He quotes Bier and then comments, ". . . Much of the prevailing Catholic psychology of the spiritual life is a rationalistic first cousin to the faculty psychology which divides man into thinking, feeling, and willing components . . . most writing about spiritual directing very quickly makes the point that the Spiritual Director is not a personal counselor concerned with the deeper problems of maturation, identity, etc. . . . Is it true that the quest for charity, for the inspirited life, can be so neatly or formally separated from the holistic understanding of personal growth? Can prayer and rectitude for example possibly be separated out, like curds and whey, from the hundred and one problems flesh is heir to? Human behavior, motivation, and development is so complex that too narrow a definition of spiritual directing seems highly suspect." (34, pp. 41,43).

Wagoner, after these observations, concludes that although spiritual

maturity is the end result of many influences, from openness to the arts, literature, companionship, the very stuff of ordinary daily living, still there is a place within the Protestant seminary for a spiritual director. No faculty should be without one or more persons of proven competence in the traditions, the heritage of prayer and spirituality.

Father Stafford Poole, in Seminary in Crisis, (26) has a few observations relative to our search. He finds it hard to make specific suggestions, but he does criticize a tendency to formalism: "Spiritual programs of seminaries . . . tend to equate spirituality with the performance of exercises . . ." (26, p.125). He urges more use of group dynamics. His study of the literature available leads him to observe that the role of the seminary in the perseverance of vocations has never really been adequately studied. And further, "what has been written on the subject of seminary drop outs has been for the most part rather superficial." (26, p.189). He suggests a good deal of correlation exists between perseverance and the amount of relationship with "the right priest": "The seminary faculty member is above all the one priest with whom the seminarian has closest contact outside the parish and from whom he derives his ideas of priesthood. Unlike the parish priest, the seminary priest is the man available for comparison and estimation as the seminarian learns the theory of what a priest should be." (26, p.169).

A number of people have addressed themselves specifically to the question of seminary dropouts. Bishop Wright (37, pp.103-11) suggests acedia, a spiritual boredom and fatigue, as the major cause of leaving, and he hopes that a combination of example, encouragement, sacraments, good libraries, apostolic works, wholesome recreation will shake off any dangerous torpor. A survey of spiritual directors of minor seminaries, reported by Father Thomas

Murphy (37, 123-28) of New York, lists lack of mental ability, lack of the spirit of sacrifice and generosity, no vocation, the attraction of the world, and a lack of purity as the five most important causes, in that order, for boys discontinuing their preparation for the priesthood. He concludes that a good many should never have been admitted to the seminary in the first place. Then we could have spent our time and effort developing the others and increasing their chance of persevering. And those who shouldn't have come would not have had any demoralizing and corrupting influence on the rest. And he ends with the reminder that "When we are what we are supposed to be, then our novitiates will be full," and, "It is an undeniable fact that vocations flourish where there are real men of God."

A strictly statistical study of dropouts was made by Rev. Cornelius Cuyler (37, pp.151-56). He reported on 99 high school seminaries. But only 7 of these were day schools and only 3 of the 7 have usable data. He reports that by the end of high school 64 percent dropped out in the years between 1935 and 1952, but that percentage is increasing steadily in recent years.

All of these studies mentioned obviously treat of our subject in a general way. They give ideas or criticisms about spiritual direction, the minor seminary, dropouts. They discuss some facet of our topic, the correlation between a spiritual director's counseling by mail with seminary perseverance only tangentially. Even the more psychologically sophisticated studies made on seminarians are not helpful in this regard. A much earlier study, Spiritual Guidance and the Varieties of Character, (31) is a careful documentation on the effectiveness of spiritual direction but it deals with a population that is approximately 24 years of age; it is not a longitudinal study, but a here-and-now survey on a group that is almost in entirety going to be ordained; it

says nothing of dropouts or minor seminarians or types of counseling. It studies how the various types of character receive and profit by direction. It is based on the introspection of the seminarians. But it is a pioneer study of much significance on spiritual direction in the seminary. Screening Candidates for the Priesthood and Religious Life (6) concerns itself with the perseverance of seminarians and mentions the results of various studies done by others. But these research papers invariably deal with some kind of measurement of the seminarian by psychological testing. They are not immediately concerned with the counseling of seminarians. And significantly almost no studies involve seminarians of high school freshman age. A study was made 20 years ago by Burke comparing first year high school and fourth year high school minor seminarians. The study aimed to discover predictors of success in the minor seminary and used a faculty rating scale as well as a battery of standard psychological tests. One of Burke's conclusions was that there were at that time no indicators of success that had real predictive value. On this topic, Dr. Schneiders observes, "We can be very sure that no program of prediction will ever develop to the point where the majority of potential failures can be singled out." (37, p.476). In that paper he urges that whenever we speak of the dynamic factors in vocational choices we must take into account not only those influences which originate within the personality but also those conditions and determinants that affect the personality from without. It is with his monitum in mind that we propose to study the historical factor of correspondence between a 14 year old and his spiritual director during his vacation time to see if that event is one of the various dynamics that lead to a confirmation in vocational choice. As Dr. Schneiders says, "We must not be lured without warning into the conviction that the process of rational decision

is determined solely by psychological antecedents, and without a consideration of all such causes, whether remote or proximate, we may not be able to understand any single decision at all." (37, p.479).

On the topic of counseling by mail, we reported the opinions held by Laplace and Merton. The book, A History of the Cure of Souls, (19) delves into the practice of spiritual direction by all faiths, ranging from the philosophers of Greece to the gurus of India and "elders" of Russia. In Roman Catholicism, the author studies particularly the procedure of Fenelon, de Sales and Bossuet. He is very uneasy about the idea of entrusting one's soul to the will of another but feels that the letters of direction can be a tremendous help:

The thoughtful reader will obtain, alike in the brilliant letters of the great directors and in the often dreary compilations of casuists, innumerable insights into the states and needs of the soul . . . There has always been a great deal of private help imparted outside the framework of ecclesiastical canons and sacraments. Even where sacramental views of penance are assumed, private direction apart from the sacrament has often flourished . . . Its nature is now best discovered through the preserved correspondence of great directors. The art of writing letters of counsel was, as we saw, widely practiced in antiquity, and Christianity has made very extensive use of it. All branches of the Western Church that have been noticed here present a considerable body of this material. (19, pp.306,328).

We do not find any extensive treatment of correspondence in the usual textbooks on counseling. Gordon Allport, however, has a few brief pertinent comments. He says:

Personality is so complex a thing that every legitimate method must be employed in its study. Excluded only are those fallacious ways that science has long since learned to avoid: hearsay, prejudiced observation, impressive coincidence, the overweighted single instance, old wives' tales, question-begging inductions and deductions, and the like . . . But apart from these, there are a great many legitimate methods of studying personality, each with a proper place in the armentarium of the psychologist . . .

Special significance must be attached to . . . those documents prepared by oneself for the express purpose of giving vent to

one's feelings and private thoughts . . . (Diaries are) often of great value as psychological data . . . There has as yet been little attempt to systematize such collections for comparative study . . . Systematic guides to self-study may range from informal casually arranged questions to be answered by the subject in any way he chooses, to the standardized pencil and paper test . . . A neglected method is the analysis of personal correspondence. Often series of letters . . . are available for study. Such collections have often been published, chiefly for their belletristic value. Psychologists have as yet made little systematic use of such material. (4, pp.370,377).

Allport in several places, notably The Use of Personal Documents in Psychological Research (5) and Letters from Jenny (3), urges the importance of correspondence, but in a didactic, not experimental manner with control groups for comparison. There is a research paper by Helen Pancerz, The Structured Diary as an Aid in Counseling Parents (22) which studies the use of a type of checklist in counseling interviews, but there is no actual counseling correspondence back and forth in her study.

Some smaller studies, such as those done by Batiste on epistolary psychotherapy (38) and by Stone and Simos (49) on personal counseling versus counseling by letter, are more similar to our project, but Batiste's study is a description of the treatment of one psychotic by mail, and the article of Stone and Simos deals with help offered to 400 unemployed adults and it did not involve an ongoing relationship of repeated correspondence.

There is certainly a superabundance of studies (18, 39, 41, 45, 46, 47) on various levels of psychological sophistication which attempt to evaluate the success of particular counseling programs with adolescents. But neither these nor the many other studies which we have consulted treat of correspondence as the means of counseling, although some involve the use of documentary analysis, of diaries, and of autobiographies.

And amongst the psychotherapists, we find a few casual remarks that are pertinent. Dr. Wolberg mentions, "A neglected aspect of therapy are follow up sessions . . . A friendly letter may be sent asking him to write the therapist detailing his feelings and progress if any. Patients are flattered by the therapist's interest." (35, p.192). Bellak and Small write that if there are only a few sessions between the therapist and client, "The therapist may attempt to guard against feelings of rejection by arranging for regular telephone contact at intervals after the brief therapeutic experience is terminated." And again: "A definite motivating force, which helps maintain both the positive transference and reassures the patient of the availability of the therapist, is to ask for periodic follow up reports from the patient. These can be made by letter or by telephone, depending on the individual circumstances." (7, pp.41,73). These are sample observations that will be found in various psychology and psychotherapy books, even though we find no well developed theories about the value and use of correspondence.

In summary, we notice many opinions on the nature of spiritual direction and its relation to or identification with counseling. We find a few brief observations on the value of correspondence in counseling. We notice that there are some studies about the development of adolescent seminarians and the prediction of dropouts. But looking at all the above literature, it is obvious that our present study is unique. This thesis will investigate one type of counseling by a spiritual director in one minor day seminary. It will be a description and evaluation of a de facto, on-going relationship between spiritual director and freshmen. It will involve a longitudinal study of one group of students to see whether this counseling technique of correspondence has some sort of value as a discriminant for perseverance in the seminary.

Herein lies its unique contribution to the literature on the minor seminary. There are presumably similar programs going on, but I have seen or heard or read of no such program elsewhere. That probably is an argument against such a procedure. Perhaps our investigation will determine just that.

Yet our study, although singular, does seem to have applications to religious counseling, adolescent counseling, vocational counseling, and counseling by mail.

Chapter III - Situation and Procedure

The setting for our study is a day school minor seminary in a large midwestern city. In 1962, the school had an enrollment of approximately 750 teenagers of varied social background. Some were from inner city parishes, the majority from large middle-class neighborhoods, and a very sizeable (30 to 40 percent) number from the suburbs.

One unique feature of the school, that would not be found in the other high schools of the city or suburbs, was the program of spiritual direction. The school had four spiritual directors. The student was free to choose among them, but one of the four was designated for each class to give group conferences in chapel and to see the students who expressed no real preference for one director over the others. The spiritual director thus assigned for the freshman class had a group conference with all the freshmen once a week for 30 to 45 minutes. The topics discussed dealt with vocation, study, home, personal qualities--such topics as would serve the needs of early adolescence, vocational development, and Christian formation. Apart from the group conferences, the spiritual director spent three hours daily in individual counseling. Students could request an individual conference; if they did not, it was understood that they would be seen at least a couple of times during the school year. The average number of individual interviews per student, supplementing the group conferences, was four. The average amount of time per interview was twenty to forty minutes.

The spiritual director saw his role as an eclectic one. Certainly in Chapel and often enough in private conference, he dealt with information,

about Christian formation, vocation, school success, etc. In some of the requested interviews the director was supportive because it seemed like an emergency or transient difficulty. And a good deal of the time, when the issue was a matter of self-awareness and personal development, he would be non-directive in his approach. So generally, the spiritual director was non-directive in individual conferences, while in group conferences he used guidance procedures.

As the end of the school year drew near, the spiritual director used two of the chapel periods, one to sum up what happened this past year and the second to look forward to the summer. The talk about the summer covered several items--a comparison of various possible attitudes about vacation, suggestions about a spiritual routine for the summer, family, friends, activities. In this conference, he mentioned the idea of corresponding during the summer. He showed the students a sample card that might be used. Stapled together with the sample card was an instruction sheet (See Figures 1 and 2, pages 27 and 28). Explaining the card first of all, he remarked that the top half was arranged so that some items of the student's spiritual routine could be checked off. This would certainly be one obvious topic in any correspondence with the spiritual director. These were topics that were points of interest during the school year and they were practices the school urged upon the seminarians during the summer. The second half of the card was blank and therefore open for any type of comment the student might feel was appropriate. The card was made in this fashion and mimeographed on a thick poster-type grade of paper stock, so that it could be folded over and mailed as a postcard without envelope. Convenience was the principal reason for the format. It was mentioned in the conference

Figure 1

Sample Copy of Correspondence Card

Week of:

Sun. Mon. Tues. Wed. Thurs. Fri. Sat.

Mass							
Confession							
Rosary							
Visit							
Sp. reading							
Self denial							

Name:

Address:

Dear Father:

Figure 2

Sample Instruction Sheet

Addresses of Spiritual Directors

(subject to change in 2 weeks. Check the New World then to see if they are changed to another parish.)

Rev. Thomas Crosby
Holy Name Cathedral
730 No. Wabash Ave.
Chicago, Ill. 60611

Rev. William Sheridan
St. Philip Neri Parish
2132 East 72nd St.
Chicago, Ill. 60649

Rev. Eugene Faucher
Our Lady of Mt. Carmel
690 Belmont Ave.
Chicago, Ill. 60614

Rev. Richard Saudis
St. Sylvester Parish
2157 No. Humboldt Blvd.
Chicago, Ill. 60647

Correspondence

For a number of reasons, it's good to hear from you and know how you're doing. These cards may make that easier. Include anything personal: e.g., you got poison ivy, or you shot a 78 in golf, etc. Perhaps you won't get an immediate reply, but we'll try to answer and we'll be watching your progress. Keep writing even if there is nothing to brag about. This isn't an official report or a way to impress the authorities, just a way to keep in touch and to check on yourself. Put the cards where you'll notice them. At the end of the week, fold the card in half, scotch tape it or staple it, and mail it to the priest you wish.

Spiritual Duties

Keep up the spiritual routine you had all year. Be cheerful, generous, modest - and it'll be a great summer. The best feeling after summer will be knowing you've grown in character and you've lived up to the Church's expectations. Don't be too soft - pick a self-denial each week - skip TV or candy, get in early at night, say the rosary on your knees, wash the car, volunteer for jobs at home, etc. Summer is a time for friendships: be courteous, get to know people, get together with classmates when you can. And get to know some saints through reading - take home biographies that look interesting and entertaining.

Let's all pray for one another during the summer.
May your vacation help your vocation grow.

that the main concern was not that this report would be some kind of spur to get the individual to perform spiritual duties or that the report would enable the school to keep a close check on the student for purposes of evaluation. It was offered as an optional summer activity, if the student felt it would be of some value to him. The check list would facilitate, for writer and reader both, getting a clear picture of the spiritual activities of the summer. It would be a take-off point for any other items of communication.

After looking at the card itself, the students looked over the attached instruction sheet. The names and addresses of all the spiritual directors were on the top of the sheet, because the students were always free in the choice of spiritual directors for individual conferences. The reasons for writing, adverted to in the instruction sheet, were developed in the chapel talk. If there was an on-going relationship during the school year, the spiritual director wanted to leave an opening for that relationship to continue during the summer as well. Perhaps such a card would help prevent a misconception, namely, that we might identify being a seminarian with being in this school. This might show that someone can work on vocation and Christian manhood by prayer and thought the whole activity of the summer. His total growth didn't have to cease for three months. One more reason for writing was that the student, by checking with the director, would check on himself. It was far different to sit down and write than to get some kind of reminder in the mail or to try to think about these things by oneself. And perhaps the chief reason for writing would be personal, nothing official--the director would like to know what's going on; the student would like to keep in touch. The relationship was not just a formal, business matter of

school hours; it was a matter of involvement of this priest in the life and growth and ambitions of this young man. It was stated clearly that this would be regarded as a matter of personal mail and not any type of official record to be brought up to the student later. So the director didn't want to give the impression that the student really should write and prove he's a model seminarian. So if he felt it would be a waste of time writing or an imposition, an extra chore, or if he didn't like being checked on, the student should ignore the whole project. But if it looked like a good idea to share anything of the summer with his spiritual director, the director would know him a bit better perhaps and in turn would try to respond to whatever was sent him. The stress throughout was on what the student would do and not on what the spiritual director would write--the idea was that he would respond according to the correspondence that the student originated.

The last part of the instruction sheet provided some ideas about using the summer well. It tried to convey the idea that there were many positive enjoyable and worthwhile features to the summer for the young man who knows how to use the vacation.

This instruction sheet and the sample card were shown to the Freshman class, as we said, at a group conference a week or two before the end of school. On the very last day of school, everyone received his report card at the principal's office. In the corridor, between the office and the exit to the street outside, a large box was placed. In the box were packets containing a dozen of the correspondence cards (one for each week of vacation) and one of the instruction sheets. They were in full sight of everyone who walked down the hallway, but not in any office where they might look official; and they were left there so that those who wanted to take them could

do so according to their own good pleasure.

Where did this practice originate? A few years earlier, when the enrollment was twice as large and the school was tremendously over-crowded, before another seminary was built in another part of the city, the previous spiritual director found himself overwhelmed by the numbers and would frequently mimeograph bulletins to be distributed by the Religion teachers. These bulletins would be fact sheets in preparation for retreats, Days of Recollection, etc. They proved to be very helpful to the spiritual director at a time when he felt a tremendous difficulty keeping in touch with the individual students. From this practical necessity and from his concern that director-student contact was far too seldom and too brief came the expedient of using the summer as well as the school year for spiritual direction. There no doubt were other persuasive reasons that moved the spiritual director to try this device, one important reason being that even before the use of these cards, students would write or telephone to talk about transferring to another school or about some other matter on which they wanted to consult with their spiritual director. But basically, necessity seems to have been the mother of invention here. And so to some extent, theoretical justifications came after the program was under way.

At the time of our study, therefore, this was a custom of a few years, inherited from the previous Freshman spiritual director and recommended by the other spiritual directors who thought it a worthwhile project. We are studying this given year primarily because the data is available. The correspondence of the previous spiritual director has not been preserved and is not available for a study embracing so many years.

The psychological theory behind the procedure stems from the principles enunciated by such men as Carl Rogers, who states that the aim of the therapist is to communicate "empathic understanding." (29, p.96). In Roy Grinker's terminology, psychotherapy means being in transaction and transaction means that we "share common experiences." (24, p.389). Or as the existentialist psychiatrist, L. Binswanger, puts it, the therapeutic relationship is "being-together" with one another in genuine presence. (24, p.448). And Father Kennedy more specifically asserts, "People crave understanding and adolescents perhaps more than any other group. . . . Psychological testing has revealed a curious truth about the typical American seminarian. While he has a great desire to help other people, he has a built in difficulty in making easy relationships with them." (12, p.24). Assuming Kennedy and the others are correct, the spiritual director chose summer writing as one practical way to maintain presence and continue the interpersonal relationship of the school year. Through this writing relationship of student and director, the opportunity was given for release or catharsis, and supportive dialogue was possible. The "discussion of spiritual problems, questions of life-meaning, that Frankl (24, p.464) emphasizes, or the "consultation about human development with a particular student in the process of development" that Lee and Pallone (21, p.74) see as the essence of counseling would be possible during the three summer months as well as the school months. Through the letters the "forced endings" of school counseling that Bordin warns about (24, p.289) could be avoided. And why include the check list? Because this was not meant to be just a friend's postcard, but a somewhat structured relationship. And it was meant to be an opening or point of departure, because boys in early adolescence seem to find letter-writing

terribly difficult. Also to a minor degree, the spiritual director was somewhat in agreement with the Pepinskys' view of counseling where they insist that "the client's observed behaviors are the basic data of counseling." (24, p.222).

These were the theoretical considerations that justified the program in the mind of the spiritual director.

As for the procedure in this paper, we want to investigate this program of correspondence, evaluate it as a counseling method, and see whether it has any effect on seminary perseverance. The experiment involves a longitudinal study of a freshman class, testing whether there is a significant difference between correspondents (counseled) and non-correspondents (uncounseled). It is a study of the freshman class of 1962 and a replication study with the class of 1963 to check for consistency in results. The collection of materials involves tabulating all the cards that were sent by students. All the cards sent to the spiritual director are on file and available for study. The actual letters of response to the students by the director are of course not on hand, but we do have the pencilled notes from which the letters to individual students were typed.

The population of our study is divided into a control group, the students who did not write (approximately 150 each year), and an experimental group, the writers, (approximately 75 each time). The independent variable in the experiment is the counseling correspondence. The dependent variable is perseverance in the seminary, that is, graduation from the minor seminary. By application of the Chi-Square formula and the Coefficient of Correlation, we will see whether those who did correspond remained in the seminary in significantly higher numbers. We will test for significance at the 5 percent and 1 percent levels of confidence.

Chapter IV - Analysis of Data

In June of 1962, after some freshmen transferred to other schools, there were 215 freshmen who were staying in the seminary. Of this total, 75 students corresponded with the spiritual director during the summer in the manner we described in the previous chapter. This number of writers constituted 34.9 percent of the class (Table 1, page 35). Of this number, 60 wrote to one spiritual director while 15 wrote to one of the other three directors. These 75 students wrote approximately 460 separate pieces of correspondence, an average of six letters per student over the entire summer. (During the school year, the average number of personal conferences with the spiritual director was three or four.) The frequency distribution of letters did not follow a normal curve (Table 2, page 36). Instead it was a fairly even distribution, being rather bimodal, with one letter or twelve letters as the most frequent amount. The distribution of letters per student in the 1963 class was similar (Table 2).

We do not want to analyze all the points of variance in the checklist portion of the correspondence card, since that data does not enter directly into our hypothesis. We are not studying whether daily Mass during the summer helps seminary perseverance but whether counseling by mail is helpful. And in regard to the letter portion of the card, the following samples will illustrate the topics of discussion as well as the level of relationship and self-revelation.

"This has been a boring week. I've been staying home watching the kids because my mom might have to go to the hospital."

Table 1
Comparison of Correspondents and Non-Correspondents
According to Perseverance

Number
of
Students

160
150
140
130
120
110
100
90
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10

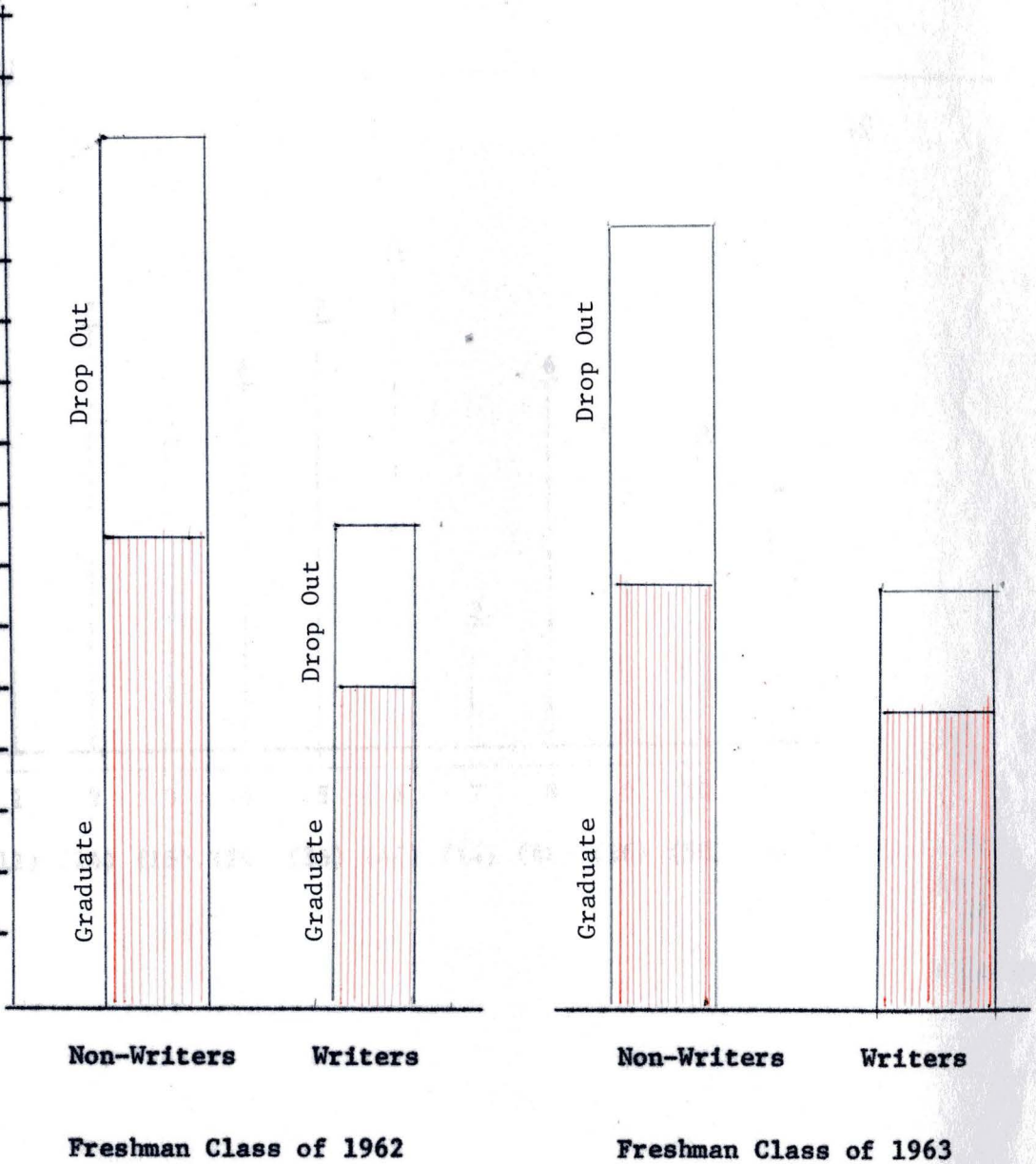
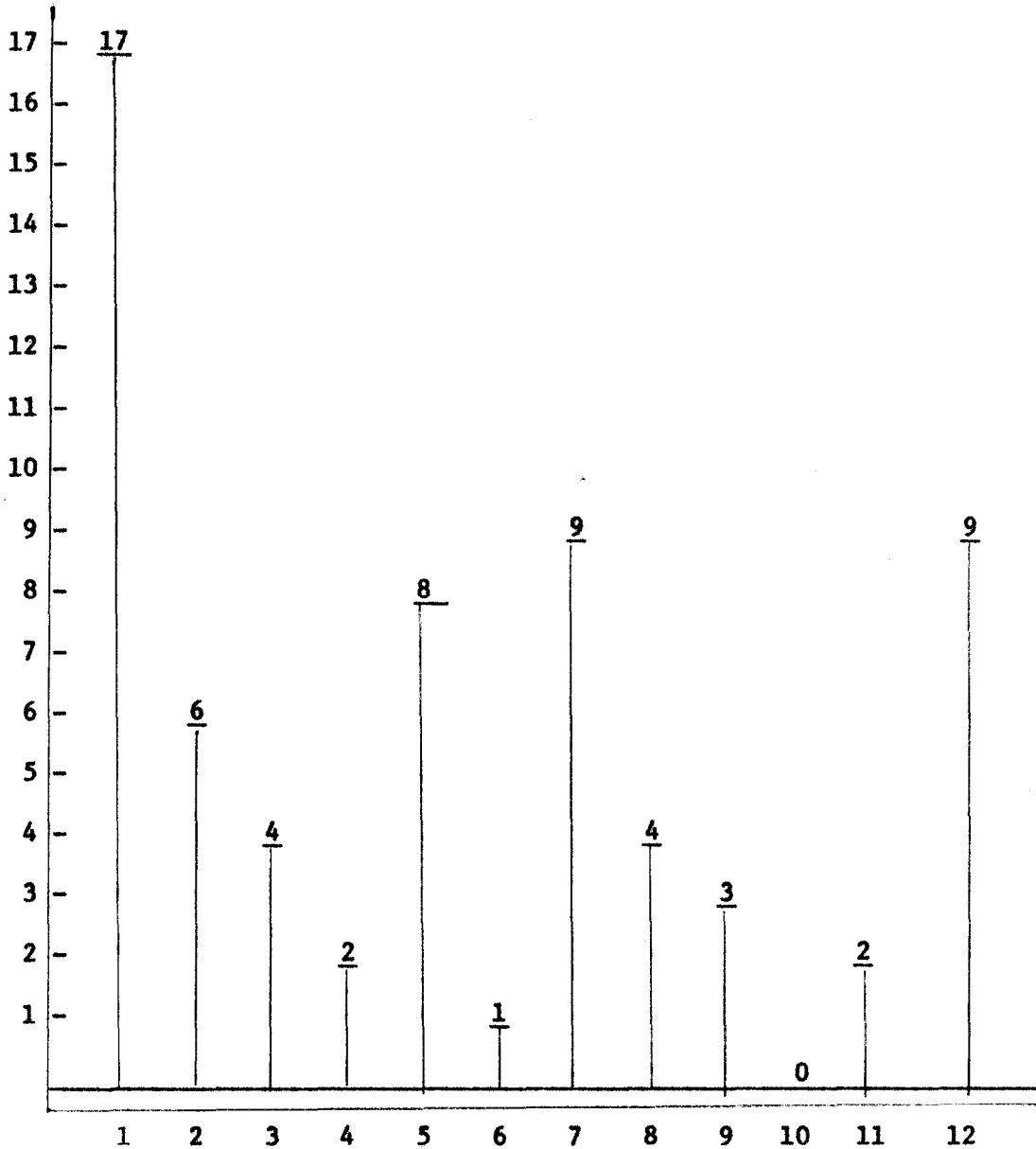


Table 2-Continued

Students

1963

total - (17) (12) (12) (8) (40) (6) (63) (32) (27) (0) (22) (108)

letters
per group

= 347
letters
from
65
students

"In case you are wondering, I am not angry at the Rector any more. I am even beginning to realize that he was right."

"I have nothing to do all week because the only boy who is old enough for me is going to Wisconsin. I have been trying to get a job but most places want a boy who is 16."

"I hope you will be pleased to know that I have been mixing in with new acquaintances as well as with those that I already know. Seeing as the season is just starting, I am looking toward a good launching of a new self."

"I don't know, I just seem to be in a kind of a slump. . . . I am really scared about starting school in September. . . . I have been a little lazy about going to Mass in the morning. I seem to be lazy all the time now. I wish I could get some ambition."

"Can't wait to get back to school again. The summer gets rather boring."

"My brother is pestering me as usual."

"When I look back at first year I see that I hadn't really been trying at anything. When I took the entrance exams, I came in the highest group. . . . My teacher was very proud of me. . . . I also had straight A's in the 8th grade. This year I wind up with a 81% final average. Next year I intend to try harder at everything, especially at daily Mass during the summer. I found out what I have been doing wrong. . . ."

"This week I have decided to tell you that I'm not too interested in the seminary any more. . . . In your next letter would you please advise me."

"By the way thanks for answering my letters. It makes me feel good to have someone to talk to and confide in."

"I think these cards are a great check up."

"This was my mother's idea not mine. I did not intend to send any in.
Yours truly, . . ."

"It has been another week dragging by. But I honestly cannot say I'd rather be at school because I prefer sitting around to school."

"You may be interested in a project of mine. I am talking with old people, who, seeming to be lonely, have more to talk about than I imagined. It's difficult to determine who benefits more--the person I talk to or me!"

"My mother wanted me to ask you if I could go to a couple of parish dances to get acquainted with social life and she wondered if I could go without breaking the rules at the seminary?"

"I have worked like a dog to earn \$300 so as to pay for both tuition, books, and transportation down to school. . . . I wake up at 6:00 and get dressed for 6:30 Mass. At 7:10 I finish my thanksgiving and get on my bike and race to the caddy house which is 3-1/2 miles away. I have to get there at 7:30 or I do not get out until the afternoon . . ."

"I've been eating too much and getting fat, I better start working it off to get in shape again."

"I have a little problem. . . . Many of my friends have started smoking, what I wanted to know if it is wrong to smoke at our age."

"Now I am going to be a little serious. It's just that I'm disgusted with my neighborhood. A big change has come over it, which I don't particularly like. It seems the boys think they have to be hard to be great. Mike and Steve to mention a couple. Mike will follow anybody that seems tough. Steve too. He is just a coward with a big mouth and imagination. I met some of them Saturday and it made me sick talking to them. All of them trying their best to impress me, and all of them making me think less and less of them. They've got

a gang now, called the "Gents." They think Bob and guys like him are fruits but most of them are chickens, brave only with a gang backing them up. I myself have little to worry about because they know I do what I want and can handle myself adequately. It's just that I can't stand to see guys far better than me or them mocked and looked down on. Well, I guess it's like that in many neighborhoods; it's just too bad something can't be done about it."

"The first week of vacation was great. It's wonderful not to have to worry about finishing your homework . . . Last week I got a letter from school. They told me I am promoted but on probation. The letter just said probation. It didn't mention that I wasn't giving everything that I could even if I did pass everything. I plan to work harder so the profs will have no reason to doubt my sincerity. . . . I and my sisters went to our cottage this weekend and I came back with big red blotches all over me. Maybe from the water but I don't know . . . Besides this it was a nice quiet week. Hope you're enjoying yourself . . ."

These are excerpts from sample cards. How similar were these letters to the conferences at school? The letters were mostly in a lighter vein than the interviews, although it might be more precise to say they were less searching. They were concerned with activities; there was not so much introspection. For example, topics like vocation, purity, school problems, of course, were more predominant in the conferences at school. The relationship with the spiritual director, instead of being rather formal because of the letter-writing approach seemed more relaxed, perhaps just because of summer or the gradual growth of the relationship over the school year or because of the type of response the spiritual director made to the letters or because of some other reasons.

The spiritual director's response to these cards varied. He answered the letters as much as he could. He was attending Graduate School courses at the time and was limited by that consideration. He wrote about three times over the summer to each student, presuming of course that the student had corresponded again after any previous letter from the spiritual director. So usually it worked in this way: he wrote shortly after receiving the first card from a student, then some time in the middle of the summer, and finally in the middle of August. If some cards asked for information or seemed from the content to rate a priority of attention, then those cards were answered first or more often. The spiritual director wrote about 200 responses in the summer of 1962 and slightly less than that in 1963. The spiritual director responded to the tone of the entire letter or series of letters he had received. He did not particularly refer to the check list unless it was mentioned by the student in the letter portion of the card. However, we note that if the spiritual activities were rather poorly carried out, the student almost always made some mention of it in the letter. If the basic attitude in the student's letter was one of enjoyment or boredom or concern over the family or over his social development, then the spiritual director would address himself to this. The approach was mostly non-directive and not particularly instructional unless some definite questions had been asked. When the students' letters were light-hearted in their general tone, the priests' letters were that way too. From the comments on the cards or from the students when they came back to school, they generally enjoyed or appreciated the response they got. We have no itemized statistical data to illustrate that statement, but we do have as feedback the comments of a substantial number who remarked favorably about receiving the letters from the spiritual director; and on the

negative side, we found absolutely no comments adverse to his replies. The only adverse comment was that they wished they had gotten more replies. Even after the passage of four or five years, former students will hearken back to those letters and responses as a special meaningful experience.

Looking ahead from June 1962, when the freshmen wrote, to June 1965, when that class graduated, we find that we have 122 graduates. This number is 56.7 percent of the number who were seminarians in the summer of 1962. Of these 122 graduates, an even 50 had been engaged in our correspondence project. As we noted above, 75 of 215 freshmen wrote (34.9 percent). Therefore, exactly two-thirds of the writers persevered through the minor seminary, while slightly more than half (51.4 percent) of the non-writers persevered. Even at first glance, there is a noticeable difference between the writers and non-writers, and a positive correlation between writing and persevering in the seminary is indicated. We will have to see how significant these figures are. And at this time we further observe that, of the 11 students who wrote only once, 7 persevered and 4 quit. Of the ten who wrote weekly, 7 persevered and 3 quit. Of the 8 who wrote six times, 6 graduated and 2 did not. So it seems that the number of letters the students wrote did not affect the rate of perseverance, but the fact of whether they wrote or not did affect the rate.

Before we address ourselves to the testing of our hypothesis, we want to inspect the raw data concerning the next class in the seminary as well. In June 1963, there were 190 students at the end of their freshman year. Of these 190, 65 (or 34.2 percent of the entire class) wrote to the spiritual director that summer. And of these 65, 44 graduated in 1966 (67.7 percent of the writers). Of the 125 non-writers in 1963, 65 persevered in the minor seminary until graduation (52 percent). We notice that although the total population is smaller in

1963, the rate of perseverance among writers in that class is almost exactly the same (1 percent difference) as that of the previous year (Table 1, page 35). The perseverance rate of non-writers is also almost exactly the same as in the previous year (52 percent compared to 51.4 percent). And here again, the ratio of persevering students to drop outs does not differ much according to the total amount of correspondence each writer sent (10 of the 17 who wrote once graduated; 7 of the 10 who wrote twelve times graduated; 8 of the 9 boys who wrote 7 times graduated).

And so we find that the type of result we got with the Freshman class of 1962 is almost identical with the result achieved in our replication study with the Freshman class of 1963. (See Table 1, page 35).

With this raw data, we proceed to our alternate hypotheses. Either the null hypothesis is true (that there is no significant difference in perseverance between those who corresponded with the spiritual director and those who did not correspond) or the alternative is true (that those who wrote were much more likely to persevere in the seminary). We will test the null hypothesis by applying the Chi-Square Formula to our data and we will see whether the difference between the two groups (of writers and non-writers) is significant at the .05 level and .01 level of confidence. We will do this first with the 1962 group and then with the 1963 group.

Putting our data into a 2x2 table, we get the following chart:

		<u>1962 Class</u>		
		stayed	left	
writers	50	25		
non-writers	72	68		
	122	93		
	graduates	left		
			total	
			75 writers	
			<u>140 non-writers</u>	
			215 total	

Applying the usual Chi-Square Formula to this data, we get a score of 4.69. At one degree of freedom, this score is significant at the .05 level of confidence. The score is not high enough to be significant at the .01 level of confidence. Using the Yates Correction Formula, our Chi-Square becomes 4.09, still significant at the same level.

The data yields the following chart:

1963 Class

	stayed	left	total	
writers	44	21	65	writers
non writers	65	60	<u>125</u>	non-writers
	109	81	190	total
	graduates	left		

Applying the Chi-Square Formula to this data, we get a score of 4.68, almost exactly the score for the previous class. And using the additive property of Chi-Square, we add the two scores and find that the sum 9.37 is significant at two degrees of freedom not only at the .05 level of confidence but also at the .01 level. Therefore the null hypothesis, that there is no significant difference between writers and non-writers in regard to perseverance is not tenable. The alternate hypothesis is accepted, that those who chose to correspond with the spiritual director were more apt to persevere in the seminary than those who did not use this counseling program.

According to the formula $C = \frac{\sqrt{\frac{X^2}{X^2 + N}}}{2}$, the Contingency Coefficient of the relationship between writing and persevering was .1461 for the class of 1962, where the maximum value of C would be .7 (for the two classes combined, the coefficient is only slightly higher). Therefore with the understanding that this coefficient tends to underestimate the amount of correlation, we can see that there is indeed a measurable, though not large amount, of positive

correlation. We would not expect this correlation to be very high because half of the non-writers also persevere and we certainly presume there are other factors in the seminary training that contribute to the perseverance of correspondents and non-correspondents.

Having noticed these statistics, we must at the same time realize that one obvious factor to consider in a study of school perseverance is intellectual ability. The smart succeed and the slower students do not. Now, is there a significant relationship between grades and counseling? A division of students according to grades achieved yielded the following information.

Table 3

Correspondents and Non-Correspondents
Grouped According to Academic Grades

Freshman Class of 1962

Grade	No. of Correspondents	No. of Non-Correspondents
95 - 100	7	6
90 - 94	15	29
85 - 89	25	42
80 - 84	21	41
75 - 79	7	19
70 - 74	0	3

Median = 86.40

Median = 85.33

Mean = 86.32

Mean = 85.30

38.6% of top students (90-100) wrote
35.6% of average students (80-89) wrote
24.1% of lower students (70-79) wrote

Table 3-Continued

Freshman Class of 1963

Grade	No. of Correspondents	No. of Non-Correspondents
95 - 100	1	8
90 - 94	19	20
85 - 89	20	44
80 - 84	17	31
75 - 79	8	19
70 - 74	0	3

Median = 86.38

Median = 85.58

Mean = 86.50

Mean = 85.22

41.7% of top students (90-100) wrote
 33.0% of average students (80-89) wrote
 26.7% of lower students (70-79) wrote

First of all, taking the total population of writers and non-writers, we find no large differences in academic achievement, although the writers had slightly better grades. The mean grade of writers was 86.32 in 1962 and the mean grade of non-writers was 85.30. However, we find that more of the top students availed themselves of this type of counseling although it appears that they had less need of it than the other students. In 1962, 38.6 percent of the top students wrote, while only 24.1 percent of the lower students corresponded. And 77.3 percent of the top student writers persevered, in comparison with 68.6 percent of the top student non-writers. This indicates a slight advantage for the counseled, but not statistically significant. The top students knew how to use counseling when available and were capable enough to succeed by other means if they didn't use the counseling. The lower students

had difficulty graduating whether they corresponded or not. In a school situation, grades are paramount.

Nevertheless, we find that among the average students there was a sizeable difference in perseverance between correspondents and non-correspondents, and yet there is not much difference in the percentage of average and top students who wrote. So, in 1962, 35.6 percent of the average students wrote, while 38.6 percent of the top students wrote. But two-thirds of the average student correspondents graduated while only half of the average non-correspondents graduated.

Table 4

Persevering Students Grouped According to Academic Grades and
Correspondence or Non-Correspondence

Freshman Class of 1962

Top students (90-100)

	Stayed	Left	
Wrote	17	5	77.3% stayed
Didn't write	24	11	68.6% stayed
Total	41	16	71.9% stayed

Average students (80-89)

	Stayed	Left	
Wrote	31	15	67.4% stayed
Didn't write	41	42	49.4% stayed
Total	72	57	55.8% stayed

Lower students (70-79)

	Stayed	Left	
Wrote	2	5	28.6% stayed
Didn't write	7	15	31.8% stayed
Total	9	20	31.0% stayed

Table 4-Continued

Freshman Class of 1963

Top students (90-100)

	Stayed	Left	
Wrote	15	5	75.0% stayed
Didn't write	19	9	67.9% stayed
Total	34	14	70.8% stayed

Average students (80-89)

	Stayed	Left	
Wrote	26	11	70.3% stayed
Didn't write	39	36	52.0% stayed
Total	65	47	58.0% stayed

Lower students (70-79)

	Stayed	Left	
Wrote	3	5	37.5% stayed
Didn't write	7	15	31.8% stayed
Total	10	20	33.3% stayed

The data for the 1963 class do not fall into exactly the same percentages, but are rather similar and tend in the same direction.

Applying the Chi-Square Formula to all the average students, we find that the difference between correspondents and non-correspondents is almost statistically significant at the .05 level of confidence. (The Chi-Square for 1962 and 1963 average students was 5.94, where 5.99 is needed for significance at the .05 level).

It is apparent that the differences between those who wrote and those who didn't are not significant in the top student and lower student groups. As was seen before, in the 1962 and 1963 freshman classes there is clearly a significant difference ($< .01$) in perseverance between writers and non-writers.

When we consider only the average students we find that the difference in perseverance between writers and non-writers approaches significance while this is not true of the top student and lower student groups. There would seem to be enough evidence to accept the original hypothesis as it was formulated since neither the top student nor lower student groups approach significance of difference between writers and non-writers. The above facts would seem sufficient to rule out academic achievement as a significant factor which would override the importance, in this study, of receiving counseling.

Summary. In this section, we observed that in 1962, 75 students corresponded with the spiritual director during the summer. These students wrote an average of six short letters over the summer. They wrote of their spiritual practices, of their recreation and work and worries, sometimes in very cursory fashion, sometimes on a deeper level of self-revelation and involvement with the spiritual director. The director answered these letters with an average of three letters per student. He for the most part responded to the general impression he got from the letters received. Of those who wrote, 50 students persevered in the seminary at least until graduation. This was a significantly higher rate of perseverance than was found in those who did not write. In the replication study with the freshman class of 1963, almost the exact same percentages were obtained: 44 out of 65 writers persevered while 65 out of 125 non-writers remained until graduation, with the result that we find the same significant difference. Freshmen who entered into this relationship with their spiritual director were much more likely to persevere in the seminary. The academically better students used this correspondence the most, but the academically average students were affected the most by it, in regard to perseverance.

Chapter V - Summary and Conclusion

In this paper we first observed that there is much discussion today concerning the minor seminary, concerning drop outs from the seminary, concerning spiritual direction. We have therefore examined some data concerning the spiritual direction program of one minor seminary in reference to a specific counseling program.

A study of related literature shows us that Father Laplace and Father Merton think spiritual direction has psychological validity and very definitely has a role to play in 20th Century Catholicism. They want more of it and a better grade of it. Father Hagmaier seems to be in anguish about spiritual direction as a separate entity or discipline. James Lee wants to shut down all minor seminaries and wants to put all erstwhile spiritual directors to better work. Oddly enough, outsiders like Wagoner and McNeill find spiritual direction to be a rich tradition that should not be lightly tossed away.

As for using correspondence for spiritual direction or counseling or therapy, Laplace and Allport and Wolberg briefly indicate that it's a good thing.

We indicated that one seminary had a program of summer correspondence for its freshmen that was somewhat structured but an optional matter for each student. One-third of the students saw fit to use the program and we note that those who did correspond with the spiritual director were far more apt to persevere in the seminary than those who chose not to write or who just didn't think of it.

This is what we say. Now what are we to conclude? Perhaps we have raised more questions than answers. First of all, is this counseling by mail

a good and early discriminator of those who will stay in the seminary or leave? A fair discriminator, but perhaps other, more obvious, discriminators predict as well--the vigor of sacramental and liturgical life, the sense of identification with the school and its aims, these are perhaps just as easily observed in the young man and may very well be basically the same discriminator.

Why is there a significant difference in perseverance? We are only theorizing now, but we would suggest some sort of study on how much the boy identifies with the seminary--this might provide an answer. If his goals and those of the seminary involve no conflict or confusion, then he will use what the seminary provides him, with a lack of self-consciousness, with energy and good humor. He will be at ease with the director and will avail himself of that priest readily and would more likely participate in any special counseling programs provided him.

Does this study indicate that such correspondence is that efficient a means of formation, that fine a counseling technique? We would hardly conclude this, although there certainly is a paucity of studies on the effectiveness of correspondence. But even if such counseling has not been validated by this study, perhaps we do have here some sort of answer to one big difficulty about school counseling, namely the abrupt and artificial interruption or termination of the counseling relationship because of the school calendar. In gauging the effectiveness, we could only mention isolated comments. Such comments obviously do not give the opinions of all the participants. But the comments all ranged from slightly more positive than neutral to enthusiastic. And now even after four or five years, former students will mention the letters they received as one of the positive features of their time in the seminary. Of all who participated, we have not heard a single complaint later. Of course someone

disenchanted with the idea is not likely to confront the spiritual director about it. But students coming back from college have not been bashful in pointing out other shortcomings of their earlier training. So it seems significant that they didn't latch on to this program for complaint or ridicule.

Even if effective, how good or recommendable is the program? Some might raise the objection that even if this correspondence has a tangible effect, it should be avoided because it keeps the students immature. They are tied to the apron strings of the seminary and even during the summer they have to report in. Some might find it pathetic that the boy isn't left alone for twelve weeks without being spied on. Maybe the objection is partly answered by the fact that the students were free, and the overwhelming majority did not report in. And certainly in structuring the program, the seminary director had to give honest and meaningful reasons for writing and a real option. In the two years studied, only one, whom we have quoted in the study, indicated in any way that he "had to write" and that was because of his mother's urging, not because of the school's. The seminarians seemed to appreciate the opportunity, as attested by the fact that when they went on a vacation trip a picture postcard to the spiritual director usually became a part of the correspondence as well.

Were these the docile students, the ones looking for security in the womb of the seminary? Here, I think, we would need a comparison with their MMPI profiles, which are not considered practical for use with high school freshmen however, or some other personality inventory, to determine what kind of person wrote and what kind or kinds did not. Perhaps there is one personality type involved here. That probably would be the next step if we wished to go further into an analysis of this phenomenon. Let it suffice here to say

that more of the best students academically participated while less of the poorer students wrote. And yet five students who had been regarded by the school authorities as definite "problems" wrote both years. Some of the best athletes and the most socially well-adjusted wrote. This was not a very homogeneous assemblage in terms of external behavior and accomplishment. Leaders as well as followers corresponded.

Is the study longitudinal enough? Shouldn't it consider ordination to the priesthood as the terminus in a measurement of perseverance in the seminary? Admittedly. We will have to see if the difference between correspondents and non-correspondents increases or disappears as years in the seminary go on. But the fact is that there was a decided difference in the minor seminary. Perhaps some factors come into play in early adolescence and other factors as the students approach adulthood, that contribute to vocational perseverance. And besides, if we want a complete longitudinal study, especially in these days of defections, we'll have to observe the next twenty-five to fifty years of their priesthood to talk about perseverance in their vocation. This is as longitudinal as possible in terms of the minor seminary.

Wouldn't it be better if the students forgot all about school over the summer and were busy with family and friends, with other groups, testing other roles, not rushing into a "pseudo-maturity" as Father Hagmaier puts it? It is not within the scope of this study to explore the role testing of adolescents. We would just comment that maintaining this particular relationship with a spiritual director does not seem to preclude any except some obviously objectional forms of role testing. The presumption of course is that the spiritual director is not a Rasputin, dominating the student, and that the student is not a puppet, presenting everything to the director for approval before acting. The cautions

of Laplace and Merton are presumed here. And these are not the "lazy, hazy days of summer" anymore. Even high schoolers don't take off or sit back for a few months--it's summer school or a full time job or apostolic activities, but it's definitely a matter of forging ahead. In our urban and suburban culture it's a social sin not to improve yourself over the summer. The seminary would be bucking the trend of the rest of the student's world if it said, "Forget about all we're doing and come back in three months." But more important perhaps is the warning of the Protestant observer, Wagoner, against a faculty-psychology approach. The student should not be neatly compartmentalized: in school, he doesn't cease to be a member of his family or neighborhood, and out of school he doesn't cease to be a seminarian. He is one person with one set of attitudes and values. The outside forces in his life should not take turns in steering him--we'd hope they all work harmoniously. And perhaps summer is a fit time for spiritual growth as well as the rest of the year.

Should the program be continued? First, perhaps the converse question is more appropriate--is there any reason why it should be dropped? One reason might be the change in minor seminaries even within the space of five short years. What was welcome before may very well be considered gauche right now by a more sophisticated group. So at least some updating of approach, perhaps the scrapping of any checklist, seems called for. A second reason for possible discontinuation would be based on the observation of Thomas Merton, namely the good spiritual director probably doesn't have time for good correspondence. So much depends on the personality, availability, and competence of the spiritual director--this is per se evident, even though we have studied the program and not the director in this paper.

Finally, what over-all impression do we carry away after observing the significant difference indicated by the research project? For one thing, this writing puts the focus on the writer and not on the respondent--to this extent at least it is good counseling since as Charles Curran puts it, counseling is the process of taking counsel with oneself through another (37, p.485).

Secondly, we see that de facto the spiritual director has a significant role in the boy's life; he is more than a school situation; he is a very special person in a unique on-going relationship with the boy. As Dr. Schneiders notes, the big need in early adolescence is for affection, acceptance, and belonging, a need which diminishes with maturity (30, p.173). This counseling-correspondence program comes when that need is perhaps at its strongest and therein rests a good deal of its value.

It seems now, after these questions and remarks, that a number of brief statements in conclusion are at least defensible.

First, spiritual direction is, or can be, counseling in the technical sense. We would agree with Father Kennedy, rather than with the compartmentalizers who call for distinct offices and roles distinguishing spiritual directors from counselors. The deep interpersonal relationship by means of which a person sees himself more clearly seems to be realized at least between some students and their spiritual director. We would agree with Laplace that direction in early adolescence concerns itself with laying the natural foundations for Christian living.

Second, direction by mail fills a need. This practice grew from the impromptu writing or phoning by students who wanted for whatever reasons to maintain a former relationship. It is theoretically justified by the admonitions of people like Carl Rogers and various psychotherapists who caution against

abrupt termination of the counseling relationship, which can easily happen in school counseling. This practice seems to fit the need that Schneiders points out concerning the early adolescent--the need for acceptance and belonging. Since it is an optional matter, the correspondence respects the young man's freedom while providing stability and continuity.

Third, direction by mail is effective. Results obtained here are similar to those obtained in other types of counseling. Levy, in a varied program, achieved the same percentage of success dealing with delinquents. Faries, dealing with college success, obtained similar results from face-to-face interviews. Our conclusion is that such correspondence as we have described either does effect some good or at least is a fair discriminant of those who are working effectively towards a goal and those who are not.

Fourth, possible reasons for the success of this program might be the formation of a pseudo-maturity, as Hagmaier claims. But the Columbia studies on vocational maturity indicate that the more mature ninth grader can be spotted by the practical means he chooses to accomplish his long range goals. And besides, corresponding also seems to indicate a deeper sense of identification with the school and its values, as we mentioned before. These also may be reasons for a correlation between writing and staying.

Fifth, this quite obviously is a limited study--a more longitudinal project would be useful. Furthermore, comparisons with MMPI profiles or other psychological inventories seem called for. The low positive correlation ratio that we observed hints that many factors are involved in seminary perseverance beyond psychological counseling, as should be obvious.

Perhaps our ultimate conclusion is the observation that this may be mostly of historical interest--the seminary may well close its doors because of

financial burdens and lack of applicants. But if the minor seminary remains in operation, we offer this data in the hope that it can be used somehow for the seminary's betterment.

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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Reverend Richard Saudis has been read and approved by the director of the thesis. Furthermore, the final copies have been examined by the director and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content and form.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Jan. 6, 1969
Date

Michael A. Green, C.S.V.
Signature of Adviser