

Seminary Formation and Interior Silence

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Above all, the main task of those responsible for the running of a seminary is the formation of the students in interior silence. . . . A seminary must realize that it is preparing future spiritual directors.

—Congregation for Catholic Education,
“Spiritual Formation in Seminaries”

SINCE the themes of pastoral charity, intellectual acumen, and affective maturity are central in other ecclesial documents on priestly formation, it might appear that the Congregation for Catholic Education is engaging in hyperbole when it states that the “main task” of seminary formation is to educate seminarians in interior silence. The surprising nature of this declaration by the Congregation actually elicits the proper response in us: a pause . . . , and a thought, “Are they serious?” How can the formation of a man in interior silence be so central to priestly formation? To answer this question, we will first look at the nature of interior silence, then reflect upon how a man learns to be silent, and conclude with some practical points for seminary formators to ponder.

“Spiritual Formation in Seminaries” (1980)

The Congregational letter from 1980, “Spiritual Formation in Seminaries,” makes it very clear that priests *are to be formed* in interior silence. The letter argues that it is crucial that interior silence be instilled within seminarians because as priests they will need to be teachers of prayer. Seminarians need to “experience God in deep and fervent ways so they can become competent spiritual directors.”¹ The letter goes so far as to say that

¹ Congregation for Catholic Education, “Spiritual Formation in Seminaries” (Jan. 6, 1980), I, no. 5.

“the future of the church at the present moment depends most of all on the spiritual formation of future priests.”² In light of the growth of relativism and secularism, and as the years have passed since 1980, we can say that this charge to emphasize spiritual formation is even more urgent. Many seminarians enter seminary with little or no discipline regarding the interior life. Their days are filled with responses to technological stimuli, and they have become gadabouts, for whom earlier education provided no real tutoring in the virtues of *deliberation* and *discernment*. And we can be relatively certain that there was little or no formation in suffering the silence needed to receive these two virtue-gifts.

On the level of personal maturation, then, there is an urgency to inculcate silence even as the men suffer withdrawal, so to speak, from the habitual use of technology. As the letter notes, “The seminarian will have to free [himself] from everything which . . . could constitute an obstacle to the development in him of the love of Christ. . . . Seminaries must cultivate within the men a sense of genuine interior silence.”³ Of late, Pope Benedict XVI has taken up this prophetic theme of the Congregation as well:

Whoever wants to be a friend of Jesus and become his authentic disciple—be it seminarian, priest, religious or lay person—must cultivate an intimate friendship with him in meditation and prayer. The deepening of Christian truths and the study of theology . . . presupposes an education to silence and contemplation, because one must become capable of listening to God speaking in the heart. Thought must always be purified to be able to enter the dimension where God pronounces his creative and redemptive Word; his Word “comes out of silence,” to use the beautiful expression of St Ignatius of Antioch (*Letter to the Magnesians*, VIII, 2). Only if it is born from the silence of contemplation can our words have some value and usefulness, and not resemble the inflated discourses of the world that seek the consensus of public opinion.⁴

The Congregational letter notes further that there should be periods of *external* silence in the seminary because such silence “serves the purposes” of interior silence. As referred to above, the culture of technology, which present-day seminarians live in as their native land, does not allow them to explore the gifts of external silence. Formators will therefore find resistance to external silence, and hence appropriation of

² Ibid., I, no. 7.

³ Ibid., II, no. 1.

⁴ Benedict XVI, “Address at the Beginning of the Academic Year of the Pontifical Roman Universities” (Rome: 23 October 2006). All papal addresses cited in this essay can be found on the Vatican website.

interior silence as a recognized value will be slow and arduous. Again Benedict XVI is timely on this issue:

But silence and contemplation have a purpose: they serve, in the distractions of daily life, to preserve permanent union with God. This is their purpose: that union with God may always be present in our souls and may transform our entire being. Silence and contemplation . . . help us find this profound, continuous union with God in the distractions of every day. . . . How can we open the world, and first of all ourselves, to the Word without entering into the silence of God from which his Word proceeds? For the purification of our words, hence, also for the purification of the words of the world, we need that silence which becomes contemplation, which introduces us into God's silence and brings us to the point where the Word, the redeeming Word, is born.⁵

External silence preserves the purpose of interior silence. And what is its purpose? It is to live in communion with God. *Interior silence is a disposition that cultivates a state of diminished interference between a man's heart and the Trinity.* Interior silence prepares a man to receive and remain in communion with God. In marriage, silence is the necessary prerequisite to a kiss. One cannot kiss or be kissed by a talking spouse! By giving silence a key position in priestly formation, the Church is instructing the seminarian in the ways of remaining in communion with the Trinity. Silence ordered toward communion with God is the essential way for him to live in happiness as a priest. Silence creates the condition for the possibility of a divine kiss. "The spirituality of St. Bernard's conception of the mystic kiss of Christ . . . signifies nothing else than to receive the inpouring of the Holy Spirit. . . . This gift conveys both the light of knowledge and the unction of piety."⁶

Beloved Pope John Paul II, who was very devoted to St Joseph, left us a wonderful meditation dedicated to him in the Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptoris Custos*. . . . Among the many aspects on which this Document sheds light, the silence of St Joseph is given a special emphasis. His silence is steeped in contemplation of the mystery of God in *an attitude of total availability to the divine desires*. In other words, St Joseph's silence does not express an inner emptiness but, on the contrary, the fullness of the faith he bears in his heart and which guides his every thought and action.⁷

⁵ Benedict XVI, "Homily at Eucharistic Concelebration with the Members of the International Theological Commission" (Rome: 6 October 2006).

⁶ Dom Cuthbert Butler, *Western Mysticism* (New York: Dover, 2003), 98.

⁷ Benedict XVI, "Angelus," St. Peter's Square, 4th Sunday of Advent (Rome: 18 December 2005).

It is Mary, too, who ministers the vitality of silence to the seminarian.

Mary who shows him Jesus her Son, . . . introduces him and . . . enables him to see and touch Jesus, and to take him into his arms. Mary teaches the seminarian to contemplate Jesus with the eyes of the heart and to make Jesus his very life. Each moment of seminary life can be an opportunity for loving experience of the presence of Our Lady, who introduces everyone to an encounter with Christ in the silence of meditation, prayer, fraternity . . . and the Eucharist.⁸

Joseph lives in an “attitude of total availability” as the fruit of his silence. Mary is characterized as being in a state of contemplation so as to introduce the seminarian into a silent encounter with Christ. Silence, then, cradles the dawning of truth about oneself and God. Most significantly, silence transports truth to that place within us that ignites and sustains conversion. Silence is the essential medium for union with the Trinity, which provokes a change of heart. As noted above, silence is not emptiness but a fullness of anticipated union, a union fostered by the activity of listening and desire. Silence is filled with rapt listening and eager desire. Silence reaches its crescendo in the act of self-gift, a quiet handing over of oneself in love. Silence is not the absence of words but the fullness of presence, a presence ordered toward gift.⁹ What we gaze at in silence when we pray, beholding the mystery of Christ, is paradoxically an action, His act of free self-donation.¹⁰ In silence the priest beholds an action, and in turn, his action of beholding Christ’s mystery gives birth to a deeper freedom, a freedom to invite Christ to gift himself to others through his ministry. One invites Christ to live His mysteries over again in himself, but first the priest must receive God, suffer His coming in silent communion. If a priest does this, Christ’s ministry will rightfully be his.

Your . . . times of silent contemplation, and your participation in the Church’s liturgy, bring you closer to God and also *prepare you to serve others*. The saints . . . show us that the life of faith and hope is also a life of charity. Contemplating Jesus on the Cross we see love in its most radical form. We can begin to imagine the path of love along which we must move (cf. *Deus Caritas Est* 12). The opportunities to make this journey are abundant. Look about you with Christ’s eyes, listen with his

⁸ Benedict XVI, “Meeting with Seminarians” (Cologne, Saint Pantaleon: 19 August 2005).

⁹ Aidan Nichols, O.P., *Say It Is Pentecost: A Guide through Balthasar’s Logic* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 79–80.

¹⁰ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Engagement with God* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 4.

ears, feel and think with his heart and mind. Are you ready to give all as he did for truth and justice?¹¹

There is, however, profound *resistance* to entrusting the origin of pastoral ministry to the silent communion one has with the truth about oneself and the One whom one meets in that truth.

My portion is the Lord, says my soul; therefore will I hope in him.
 Good is the Lord to the one who waits for him, to the soul that seeks him;
 It is good to hope in silence for the saving help of the Lord. (Lam 3:22–26)

The seminarian, of course, must learn silence. Sustained interiority is the most fruitful habitat from which acts of love spring. Further, silence is the path that truth takes to become firmly embedded in one's consciousness, conscience, and affect. Without silence, no truth would come to define a man, and so he would never change. In silence there is a new way of knowing truth—receiving it, not taking it. Silence trusts the providence of God. “This is my body, . . . *given for you*” (1 Cor 11:24). All will be well, because all is being given. Only suffering the coming of Christ in silent ongoing availability to his love will soften any resistance to this truth: pastoral ministry originates in intimacy with the Paschal Mystery and is sustained therein as well.

The Congregation for Catholic Education was clear in its recommendation in 1980 that seminaries give to seminarians an “experience of interior silence . . . [and that they] acquire a genuine sense of [such silence].” The Congregation also noted that the men must acquire this interior silence in such a personal way that they can “communicate it to others.”¹² What does interior silence teach us, and how is it taught?

Learning Silence

Before silence is consciously sought as a way of interior living, it is usually first encountered as a suffering. Even though many are seeking silence as a relief from a culture dominated by words and noise, few are seeking silence as a healing for their addiction to the same. Relief is temporary and topical; healing presses into a person's wounds, wounds caused by the regular choice to medicate spiritual and emotional pain through noise.

¹¹ Benedict XVI, Meeting with Young People and Seminarians: Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI, Saint Joseph Seminary (Yonkers, NY: 19 April 2008).

¹² Congregation for Catholic Education, “Spiritual Formation in the Seminaries,” II, no. 1 (Christ the Word of God).

To better understand what it means to experience silence, we can look at what was learned in a 2010 experiment at a Benedictine abbey in England, when several lay people spent many days in silent retreat.¹³ They first encountered silence as pain. The silence itself was painful. This same silence also helpfully revealed to the consciousness of the participants those centers of affective pain that they had been trying to relieve simply through their noisy daily routines. Withdrawing from their daily habit of sound and activity, they experienced the ensuing silence as pain. Dom Jamison, the abbot who was monitoring the visiting lay persons, noted that the participants “lived in *an epidemic* of busy-ness.” The noise of the “real world” is so intense that when the participants returned from the monastery to life as usual, they could only note that silence had affected them but not changed them. Silence was deemed to be akin to a diet that one cheats on: one *wants* to be silent but chooses instead noise and busy-ness. The short experience of silence had little power to fight the epidemic. Participants noticed a desire to enter silence again as part of their daily routines, but this proved very difficult, since sound was “in them.”¹⁴

In the early stages of the monastic experiment, the participants experienced silence as boring, oppressive, relentless, and hard work. They reported that it was vexing to no longer listen to music, text, or engage in conversation. Most telling was the disturbance felt within silence that left each person with, as one said, “only my own thoughts.” To be in possession of one’s own thoughts alone, with no external stimuli, was “scary.” They experienced thoughts as “pouring into their own minds” as if their own ideas were alien intruders never encountered before. To dull the pain of having to commune with the self, there were efforts to rebel against silence: secret communication among the participants, cheating on silence as they walked together on the monastery grounds, and furtive texting to friends and family.

¹³ Abbot Christopher Jamison, *The Big Silence*, video series, 2010, www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00vjcp5.

¹⁴ Regarding the word being “in one,” see Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini* (On the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church, 2010), at notes 232–33: “The word, in fact, can only be spoken and heard in silence, outward and inward. Ours is not an age which fosters recollection; at times one has the impression that people are afraid of detaching themselves, even for a moment, from the mass media. For this reason, it is necessary nowadays that the People of God be educated in the value of silence. Rediscovering the centrality of God’s word in the life of the Church also means rediscovering a sense of recollection and inner repose. The great patristic tradition teaches us that the mysteries of Christ all involve silence. Only in silence can the word of God find a home in us, as it did in Mary, woman of the word and, inseparably, woman of silence.”

It appears that when one moves toward silence—moving at first through external silence, but with the end of developing internal silence—one suffers the anxiety of false isolation. For many years these participants had enveloped themselves in the noise of technology and social gatherings as a way to ease their discomfort with themselves and their own thoughts or questions. As a result of such enveloping, they neglected to cultivate a sense of self as related to truth and God. Since this communion was undeveloped, the participants identified silence with loneliness, isolation, and even rejection. To relieve these discomforts, they left the monastery panting after activity, socializing, and/or technological networking—they sought noise.

Possible Implications for Seminary Formation

In pondering this British experiment and the effects it had upon the participants, I would first invite seminary formators to introduce men to the reality of God's indwelling—the truth that conditions any appropriation of interior silence as a habit of being. Without such a foundation, silence will seem foreboding, filled with isolation, and it will therefore be avoided. If interior silence is the “main task” of seminary formation, how then might formators approach this task in service to the men who enter it? How shall formators avoid merely giving relief to the noise-infected soul? How shall they, instead, attempt to facilitate a complete healing? And what tools can be shared with the seminarians, what kind of environment needs to be created?

Silence in the Seminary

External Silence

The demarcation of certain times within the seminary *horarium* for mandatory silence is essential if a man is to receive interior silence as a way of being. Then, a seminarian's experience of external silence should become the content for conversation within spiritual direction, human formation, and even the classroom. We know from our weakened human nature and the *varia* within human personalities that simply providing scheduled time for external silence will not lead a man to progress in communion with God. The content of such silence has to be engaged as a substantial facet of a seminarian's spiritual growth; otherwise, its potential may be squandered by those who “cheat” external silence using various clandestine escape routes (e.g., headphones, texting, etc). Requiring the men to discuss their experience of external silence in both the internal and external fora provides needed guidance in self-knowledge, as well as an opening God can use to draw seminarians to Himself. Guided

external silence further prepares a seminarian for the natural silence he will encounter in the rectory on occasion, and in the silence that is present within many pastoral situations, such as the silence enshrouding unexpected suffering in a parishioner's life. Will the young priest be tempted to fill these necessary silences with noise, nervous chatter, or even vocal prayer, or will he courageously withstand these external silences, allowing God to arrive within them? To receive external silence as a gift—not to be afraid of it or rush through it—is a crucial lesson for being effective in pastoral ministry. If external silence is never encountered in formation, it will befall the man as a burden to be eradicated in parish life, and thus he will miss the “time of his visitation” (Lk 19:44).

Lectio divina as the School of Interior Silence

With time for external silence secured, seminary formators can more easily introduce a way for interior silence to take root, the way of *lectio divina*. “There is no prayer more able to create the inner silence that men seek, the silence which is true, the silence which comes from God, than the divine office.”¹⁵ Here the Congregation is pointing toward the most ready means of instilling interior silence in a man, the prayerful reading of Scripture. This habit of receiving intimacy with God through the Scriptures will surely promote a state of diminished interference between a man's heart and the Trinity. Christ himself spent forty days in silence, perhaps even repeating the Psalms in his own heart. When he emerged, his mission began in earnest.

Those aspiring to the ministerial priesthood are called to a profound personal relationship with God's word, particularly in *lectio divina*, so that this relationship will in turn nurture their vocation: it is in the light and strength of God's word that one's specific vocation can be discerned and appreciated, loved and followed, and one's proper mission carried out, by nourishing the heart with thoughts of God.¹⁶

In allowing the Word of God to affect the heart, mind, and will, the seminarian is gifted with rest (Mt 11:35), with an *inhabited silence* wherein he and the Trinity converse on all manner of things in a fashion that is living, immediate, and with consequence to behavior. By attending to the Word, the seminarian diminishes the disturbance of his interior beholding of truth, disturbance that wandering and stray thoughts can cause. He rests with God so that he can be still from within and not tossed to and fro by

¹⁵ Congregation for Catholic Education, “Spiritual Formation in Seminaries,” II, no. 1 (Christ the Word of God, prayer of the Church).

¹⁶ Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, at note 274.

emotion. Instead, his affect is nourished by the truth of revelation. This truth stabilizes his interiority and gifts him with rest, a rest that is an intimate relationship with the Trinity¹⁷ and from which arises the pastoral mission of the cleric.

As a stable character trait, such interior silence is gradual and developed, of course. But one either begins such a journey in formation or continues to consume the junk food of the culture of distraction, thus delaying progress in contemplative pastoring. And to delay the contemplation of the Mysteries of Christ is to delay the pastoral effectiveness that any man might possess. This is so because seminary “pastoral study and action direct one to an inner source. . . . This is the ever-deeper communion with the pastoral charity of Jesus . . . which . . . should constitute the . . . driving force of the priestly ministry.”¹⁸

To stay in communion with the charity of Christ demands the way of interior silence, the way that wills receptivity to truth, as truth radiates the beauty of Christ. Silence is the thoroughfare of communion. And since it is Christ who prays in the priest, the priest ought to emulate Jesus’ own interiority, the interiority of “Christ [who] only speaks of that which He beholds.”¹⁹ To behold the beauty of God in the Word does not render a priest speechless but urges him to speak, to speak what is the fruit of his own silent communion with God as God communes with the Church.²⁰ The priest is a spiritual leader;²¹ that is his primary field of expertise. If he does not govern from his interior intimacy with Christ, what will become of his parish?

¹⁷ Ps 131:2: “I have stilled my soul, hushed it like a weaned child. Like a weaned child on its mother’s lap, so is my soul within me.”

¹⁸ John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (On the Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day, 1992), no. 57.

¹⁹ Bl. Dom Marmion, *Christ, the Life of the Soul*, 2nd ed. (St. Louis: Herder, 1925), 315.

²⁰ Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, at note 294: “In this regard, however, one must avoid the risk of an individualistic approach, and remember that God’s word is given to us precisely to build communion, to unite us in the Truth along our path to God. While it is a word addressed to each of us personally, it is also a word which builds community, which builds the Church. Consequently, *the sacred text must always be approached in the communion of the Church.*” See also Adrian Walker, “Love Alone: Hans Urs von Balthasar as a Master of Theological Renewal,” in David L. Schindler, ed., *Love Alone Is Credible*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 33–34.

²¹ “The faithful expect only one thing from priests: that they be specialists in promoting the encounter between man and God. The priest is not asked to be an expert in economics, construction, or politics. He is expected to be an expert in the spiritual life” (Benedict XVI, Warsaw Cathedral, 25 May 2006).

Do not become utterly absorbed in activism. There would be so much to do that one could be working on it constantly. . . . Not becoming totally absorbed in activism means . . . remaining with God. . . . One should not feel obliged to work ceaselessly; this is important for everyone . . . even more so for a Pope. He has to leave many things to others so as to maintain his inner view of the whole, his interior recollection, from which the view of what is essential can proceed.²²

Silence will become an interior and permanent trait of a man if he is led to let Christ teach him “how to speak of that which He beholds.” Of course Christ beheld only the Father, but men are diffused in their willful affections and so need to be immersed in the purity of the Word of God, the word that bathes a man in truth. This kind of bathing will remove years of noise from the soul, replacing such artificial consolation with real consolation: “I only do the will of the One who sent Me” (Jn 5:30). One can do the will of God only if one learns how to listen, and listening requires interior silence.

Benedict XVI underscores this in a meditation on the goal of seminaries:

[Seminary is] a time for discernment, a time for learning, a time for vocation . . . and then, naturally, a time for being with him, a time for praying, for listening to him. Listening, truly learning to listen to him—in the word of sacred Scripture, in the faith of the Church, in the liturgy of the Church [is to be cultivated in seminary]. . . . In exegesis we learn much about the past: what happened, what sources there are, what communities there were, and so on. This is also important. But more important still is that from the past we should learn about the present, we should learn that he *is speaking these words now*, and that they all carry their present within them, and that over and above the historical circumstances in which they arose, they contain a fullness which speaks to all times. . . . But for this, a constant inner journey with the word of God is needed.

Personally being with Christ, with the living God, is one thing; another is that we can only ever believe within the “we”. I sometimes say that St. Paul wrote: “Faith comes from hearing”—not from reading. It needs reading as well, but it comes from hearing, that is to say from the living word, addressed to me by the other, whom I can hear, addressed to me by the Church throughout the ages, from her contemporary word, spoken to me the priests, bishops and my fellow believers.²³

²² Benedict XVI, *Light of the World* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010), 71–72.

²³ Benedict XVI, Freiburg, Germany, 26 September 2011, meeting with a group of seminarians at Borromeo Seminary Chapel. “The Spirit alone searches the depths of God (cf. I Cor 2:10); thus, only in listening to the Spirit can one search the depths of the riches, wisdom and knowledge of God (cf. Rom 11:33).”

The pope here is advocating a “curriculum” of learning to listen, and this listening takes place within the context of the Church and all of its teachings as well as within the heart and all of its intimacies. To live in and out of the Word of God is an existence that gives birth to silence within the heart. A silent heart is a heart that has welcomed truth and now rests quietly while the truth of ecclesial doctrine nourishes the conscience, the love-soaked mind. For the seminarian, this interior silence that enshrouds and protects communion with God may well be one of the greatest gifts he can give to the culture of noise and distraction that now defines Western civilization. It will be a gift that costs a man something: his citizenship in “this age,” an age that the seminarian had conformed himself to as a boy but from which he now must release himself so as to become a man of communion in service to the new evangelization.

The Form of Interior Silence: Discernment and Contemplation

As noted above, I would first invite seminary formators to introduce men to the reality of God’s indwelling—the truth that conditions any appropriation of interior silence as a habit of being. External silence and the reading of Scripture alone will not secure interior silence, for experience tells us that deep within the human soul is a cacophony of voices: some from God, some from the self, some from past authority figures, and even some from demons. Along with external silence and *lectio*, one must be schooled in how to discern, how to distinguish the voices within, and once distinguished, how to relate to them so that nothing can disturb the heart resting in the Trinity. The contemporary master on tutoring the Church in the ways of discernment is Fr. Timothy Gallagher, O.M.V. He notes this about his teacher, St. Ignatius of Loyola: “Ignatius does not ask that we become aware of, understand, and act in regard to all the movements of our hearts, but rather with respect to those which may impact our adherence to the will of God, as strengthening or weakening this adherence.”²⁴ In discernment *we follow* those affective movements that deepen our faith, hope, and love, and we *resist* those movements that undermine those virtues.

In addition to being tutored in how to recognize and then receive the authentic voice of God, the seminarian must be instructed in how to contemplate the face of God, the beauty of God. It is crucial that a man not simply be left in silence. Instead, he is to be instructed in how to look upon God in His revelation, Jesus. He is to be tutored in how to behold the Lamb of God and so to receive ever more deeply the consolation of

²⁴ Timothy Gallagher, *The Discernment of Spirits* (New York: Crossroad, 2005), 25.

divine love. He beholds the holy face of Christ by way of *lectio divina* and the sacramental life. In this way he is assisted by spiritual direction to *acknowledge* the movement of God within; to *relate* all of his thoughts, feelings, and desires to the Sacred Heart; and in turn to *receive* divine love, which prompts him to *respond* to this love by deeper prayer, service, or moral action.²⁵

A conspiracy among the realities of external silence, *lectio divina*, discernment, and contemplation instills interior silence in the seminarian. Such a way of living is a prerequisite to becoming what Benedict XVI recognized as the only expectation people have of their priests: that they become experts in the spiritual life.²⁶

Conclusion

Scottish author John Buchan prophetically described our current culture a quarter century ago:

In such a (nightmare) world everyone would have leisure. But everyone would be restless, for there would be no spiritual disciplines in life. . . . It would be a feverish, bustling world, self-satisfied and yet malcontent, and under the mask of a riotous life there would be death at the heart. In the perpetual hurry of life there would be no chance of quiet for the soul. . . . In such a bagman's paradise, where life would be rationalized and padded with every material comfort, there would be little satisfaction for the immortal part of man.²⁷

This culture possesses within its character certain aspects that carry death. It is to this culture that the future priest brings his unexpected and countercultural gift of interior silence. The Congregation for Catholic Education was more prophetic and less hyperbolic than one might be tempted

²⁵ See John Horn, S.J., *Heart Speaks to Heart* (Omaha, NE: IPF Publications, 2009), for more on this method of prayer.

²⁶ "The faithful expect only one thing from priests: that they be specialists in promoting the encounter between man and God. The priest is not asked to be an expert in economics, construction or politics. He is expected to be an expert in the spiritual life. With this end in view, when a young priest takes his first steps, he needs to be able to refer to an experienced teacher who will help him not to lose his way among the many ideas put forward by the culture of the moment. In the face of the temptations of relativism or the permissive society, there is absolutely no need for the priest to know all the latest, changing currents of thought; what the faithful expect from him is that he be a witness to the eternal wisdom contained in the revealed word. Solicitude for the quality of personal prayer and for good theological formation bears fruit in life" (Benedict XVI, *Meeting with Priests*, Warsaw, May 2006).

²⁷ John Buchan, *The Pilgrim's Way* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1984).

to think when it noted that the main task of those responsible for governing seminaries is the formation of the students in interior silence. From out of such solitude with the Word of God, a priest will be able to minister to a world that seems more interested in seeking temporary relief of its pain in distractions than it does in receiving God's healing. The Church offers a way of life that incorporates affective and physical pain into the mysterious healing heart of Christ Himself. This way of life is offered to the Church through the ministrations of priests who have been mature and courageous enough to suffer the entrance of silence into their hearts, a silence that cradles divine intimacy, not isolation. To form men who enter into communion with Christ through silence is part of the little-heralded dignity of the work accomplished by seminary personnel. **N V**