

**MERCIFUL HEART AN APPROACH IN HUMAN FORMATION OF
SEMINARIANS FOR EFFECTIVE PRIESTLY MINISTRY IN
MACHAKOS CATHOLIC DIOCESE, KENYA**

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ABSTRACT

Background of the Study: This study investigated how merciful heart can be used as an approach in human formation of seminarians for effective priestly ministry in Machakos Catholic Diocese, Kenya.

Objective of the Study: The objectives of this study were to find out how formators may help seminarians to develop healthy human relationships amid celebration of divine mercy; to seek out ways in which affective human maturity can be instilled in seminarians as agents of consoling mercy of God; to establish means through which seminarians can be aided to form right moral conscience as agents of redeeming and renewing mercy of God and to propose possible intervention strategies for addressing issues related to the formation of merciful human heart in seminarians. The study was guided by Westerhoff (1976) theory, on four stages of faith development, which is within the context of Christianity and spirituality.

Methodology: The study adopted convergent parallel design which collects, analyses, compares and relates both quantitative and qualitative data, then interprets it. The target population was 90 respondents. They comprised of 79 Diocesan seminarians and 11 Formators both from Machakos Diocese from whom, a sample size of 72 respondents was drawn, which

represented 80% of target population. Questionnaires and interview guide were employed to collect data from the participants.

Results and Findings: The findings of the study revealed that genuine celebrations of divine mercy in the liturgical life of the church do contribute to health human relationships among the seminarians and the people they come across. The results showed assisting seminarians to grow to affective maturity greatly helps them to be ministers of consoling mercy of God to the people they encounter. The study established that right formation of moral conscience benefits the seminarians to experience the redeeming and renewing mercy of God in their personal lives and the ability to communicate the same mercy to other people.

Keywords: *Mercy, Heart, Human, Seminarians, Effective, Priestly, Ministry, Diocese, Machakos.*

1.1 Introduction

The primacy of human formation of seminarians towards priestly ministry has been emphasized by Pope John Paul II (1992) in *Pastores dabo vobis*, for “the whole work of priestly formation would be deprived of its necessary foundation if it lacked a suitable human formation. (no.43). In Africa setting, *ubuntu*, constitutes, a quality of being human, a perfect humanity, an ultimate or accomplished humanness as Magesa (2013) discusses. According to Magesa, “Humanity must constantly interact intelligently and compassionately with all spiritual powers for its own good and that of the entire universe.”(pg. 40).

The sense of compassion was awakened to the entire people of God by Pope Francis (2015) in his *Misericordiae vultus*. The message of mercy was also once highlighted by Pope Francis (2016) as *Misericordia et misera* expounds. Compassion is among the qualities expected for effective priestly ministry in Africa as Lukwata, Wanjala and Ogula (2017) observes. On the other hand, vocation and mercy are intimately connected, just as Neafsey (2006) maintains, “Our sense of vocation is intimately linked to the people and things that move us to passion and compassion.”(pg.71). Similarly, Magesa (2013), reports that, African spirituality is enshrined in the whole of human existential experience in the world and in the entire being of people and things. While acknowledging the increased number of priestly and religious vocations in Africa, Rwiza (2001), observes that the kind of priests we shall have tomorrow largely depends on the kind of candidates we have in formation today. He then remarks the need for sound criteria in formation of candidates at all levels based on the real needs, aspirations and expectations of the Christian community. Particularly, according to *Pastores dabo vobis* human formation of seminarians is to consider formation of their human relationships, growth to affective maturity and formation of right moral conscience. Besides *Misericordia et misera* illustrates divine mercy as that which is celebrated, that which consoles and that which redeems and renews.

This article thus incorporated both the elements of human formation of seminarians and those of divine mercy to illustrate how they contribute to effective priestly ministry in Machakos Catholic Diocese. The heart becomes the paradigm through which such goal is to be realized. Addressing Superiors Generals of men congregations on the needed formation of seminarians Pope Francis (2014) notes, “formation is a work of art, not a police action. We must form their hearts. Otherwise, we are creating little monsters. Then these little monsters mould the people of God. This really gives me goose bumps.”

2.1 Literature Review on merciful Heart an Approach in Human Formation of Seminarians

2.1.1 Human Relationships amid Celebration of Divine Mercy

The Code of Canon Law (1983) insists that philosophical training of seminarians has to address their human formation as they prepare for their Theological studies. Nevertheless, Kenel (2002) remarks that, “many formation or seminary programs do not specifically address relationship issues, as their focus is on theological studies.”(pg.29). Three dimensions govern relationships in Africa as Magesa (2013) puts it, these are, “community of place or geographical location; community of collective memory or shared history; and psychological community of personal interaction...” (pg .35).

Healthy human relationships among seminarians hence have to be governed by sincere celebration of the divine mercy in the liturgical life of the church by the seminary community sharing common elements. If such celebrations are to be effective in regulating concrete human relationships, they are however, to go beyond a matter of daily routine or a seminary timetable to be followed. Pope Francis (2016) in his *Misericordia et misera* emphasizes that, “the temptation to theorize ‘about’ mercy can be overcome to the extent that our daily life becomes one of participation and sharing.”(no.20). If seminarians are to effectively relate with people of God in a health manner then celebration of divine mercy in the liturgical life of the church has to be made real in their daily relations both in the seminary and outside the seminary.

2.1.2 Training Seminarians in Human Relations

The capacity to relate with others is highlighted by John Paul II (1992) as very basic in human formation of seminarians. Indeed, McClone (2002) illustrates that Cultivation of good relations with friends, family, colleagues, and spiritual director coupled with prayerful relationship with God as key in the formation of seminarian as future priests. Vatican II Fathers in their *Presbyterorum ordinis* (1965) also urges pastors on the need to develop good relationship with their bishop, fellow priests and the laity.

Among the Africans, two virtues constitute *ubuntu*, that is, interpersonal relationships and intrapersonal relationships as Magesa (2013) discusses. The Seminarian ability to relate, his emotional life and sexuality are seen however as greatly impaired by his personality traits, unchecked domineering tendency, poor socialization process, societal baggage and cultural blocks as Kenel (2002) records. If such is unchecked, this can lead to depression and destructive anger. Affecting some celibate’s ability to relate is also the isolation tendency and compulsive addictive behaviors such as alcoholism and sexual deviations as put by Rossetti (2002).

According to Sperry (2002) as Cicero maintains, people can however relate intimately and in diverse ways: sexually, physically but non-sexually, psychologically, intellectually, emotionally, socially and spiritually. He then clarifies that for celibates mature sexuality entails all such intimacies with exception of sexual intimacy. Mondo (2014), notes, “ministry cannot be exercised without empathy and a certain degree of intimacy...(however) pastoral ministry always excludes touches or expression of affection that are only appropriate in courtship or marriage.” (pg.153). Moreover, Kenel (2003) affirms that ethical standards of maturity are to govern such intimacies in respect to one’s social status and vocational commitment.

Apart from human intimacies, *Presbyterorum ordinis* (1965) recommends the need for priests to foster strong bond with Christ in all circumstances to develop their interior spiritual life. This devout life is to be nurtured by the love of the word of God, meditation, devotion to the Eucharist, penance, daily examination of conscience, spiritual reading, docility to the Blessed

Virgin Mary, visit to the Blessed Sacrament, mental and vocal prayer, Spiritual retreat, spiritual direction and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. The same position is upheld by the code of canon law (1983).

2.1.3 The Connection between Mercy, Heart and Relations

Pope Francis (2015) in his *Misericordiae vultus* gives the link between mercy and heart by describing mercy as the law within our heart and bridge that connect us with God. The Bible depicts Christ as the merciful high priest (Cf. Hebrews 4:14-16) even in his relations with the multitude (Cf. Matthew 9:36). He urges his followers to relate in charity (Cf. Mark 12:30-31//Matthew 22:36-40). In his *christus vivit*, Pope Francis (2016) remarks “Jesus, himself eternally young, wants to give us hearts that are ever young.”(no.1). Formation of priests’ heart is thus vital. Christ wills to give the church priests after his own heart just as the opening statement of *Pastores dabō vobis* echoing the words of Prophet Jeremiah depicts, “I will give you shepherds after my own heart (Jer. 3:15).” (no.1). Among the beatitudes we are invited to be merciful and to be pure of heart (Cf. Matthew 5:7-8). Moreover, the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1992) records, “the beatitudes are at the heart of Jesus’ preaching. They take up the promises made to chosen people since Abraham.” (no.1716).

2.1.4 The Celebration of Divine Mercy in Human Relations

It is important to encourage seminarians to celebrate divine mercy both in their individual life and in the seminary community for a health seminary community to flourish. Africans understandings of piety, worship and health is interconnected as Magesa (2013) upholds. It is in the sanctuary where vital power is dispersed to the community for the sake of much healing and health. Moreover Magesa expounds that for Africans “...*ubuntu* is also a quality of groups, and communities, in which certain reputations of kindness, hospitality and sharing are perceived.” (pg. 97).

The Celebration of divine mercy in the church’s liturgy and practice, devotions and sacraments hence ought to enrich human relations and that of the community. Pope Francis (2016) in *Misericordia et misera* explains, “...we are called to celebrate mercy.” (no.5). While John Paul II (1980) in *Dives in Misericordia* elucidates, “...mercy becomes an indispensable element for shaping mutual relationships between people, in a spirit of deepest respect for what is human, and in a spirit of mutual brotherhood.” (no.14).

Moreover, as Kenel (2003) puts it, “once an intimate relationship is established; it will continue to thrive and grow only when the partners are able to bring to the relationship such qualities as creative fidelity and merciful forgiveness.”(pg.34). Infact, Magesa (2013) points that Africans strongly believe that reconciliation brings peace, noting that for Africans tolerant is encouraged and to them anger is short lived. The aspect of reconciliation is therefore very central in building relationships. Reconciled heart is given by Rossetti (2002) as a demand of priestly life. Such heart has four aspects: a solid sense of self- identity and a secure self-image; an integration of one’s emotions and sexuality; seeing the complexities and nuances in life; and mature faith.

Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization (2016), in their document, *The Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy* elaborates that the celebration of both corporal and spiritual works of mercy also builds human relations in a spirit of deep solidarity which goes beyond language, race, religion, or place of origin. Seminarians are then to be encouraged to celebrate, cultivate and to be involved in this spirituality of communion and love to the poor

and the marginalized whether within or outside the seminaries. They are to learn to relate with affection.

2.2 Affective Human Maturity and Ministering of the Consoling Mercy of God

Pope John Paul II (1992) in *Pastores dabo vobis* underlines that, “affective maturity, which is the result of an education in true and responsible love, is a significant and decisive factor in the formation of candidates for the priesthood.” (no.43). Sandwiched to this, is training in freedom and obedience to the truth as the Pope further expresses.

Africans as Bansikiza (2001) supports hold that, “right from birth one needs to experience constant love and affection. The very constancy and stability of love builds and strengthens a sense of moral formation as it provides security.” (pg.10). Africans upholds that maturity means insertion into, connectivity to, and interaction with community and not just attainment of puberty as Magesa (2013) reports. Seminarians are thus to be trained to uphold both family and community values in a responsible manner in everything they do. Vatican II Council Fathers in *Optatam totius* (1965) underline that seminary discipline ought to promote such growth in maturity by fostering self- control, solid personality and those traits of character essential for an ordered and fruitful ministry of the church. Not unless, we have seminarians trained into affective maturity then it becomes difficult to expect future ministers who can effectively offer true consolation to people facing pain, suffering and difficulties in their lives.

2.2.1 Training Seminarians into Growth of Affective Maturity

Training to affective maturity as Rossetti (2002) expounds also implies maturity of faith and upholding of truth. It also carries with it fruits of mature obedience (but not blind one) to figures in authority as suggested by American Bishops’ committee on priestly formation (1968). Among the Africans, an offense against the elder implied an assault to his whole age group as Magesa (2013) maintains. If seminarians are thus to be helped to grow to maturity, Snehinand (2012) underlines on the need for formators to first understand the difficulties faced by the individual candidates so as to know the type of formation they require. Pope Francis (2016) in *Misericordia et misera* argues that, “We have to remember each of us carries the richness and the burdens of our personal history; this is what makes us different from everyone else. Our life, with its joys and sorrows, is something unique and unrepeatable that takes place under the merciful gaze of God.” (no.14).

Today we find in the seminaries, seminarians coming from families faced by some peculiar challenges. Among the challenges facing the Christian family in Africa today as Bansikiza (2001) observes are irresponsible parenting, sexual exploitation, influence of mass media, unemployment, armed conflicts and violence, domestic violence, disintegration of African family values, globalization, lack of communication and loss of sacramental life.

Envisaging seminarian family background can therefore help in accompanying him in his personal journey towards affective maturity. John Paul II (1992) in *Pastores dabo vobis* elaborates, “...Sometimes the very family situations in which priestly vocations arise will display not a few weaknesses and at times even serious failings.” (no.44). Memories of childhood and personal development as Rolheiser (2014) discusses, leave deep scars. Although these may be overcome in youthful age, if they are not well addressed, they do resurface in midlife. Such wounds recur in incidents of unfairness, cruelty, destructive anger and power abuse. Priest are not exceptional to this, as Rossetti (2002) displays, “many carry a variety of unhealed hurts and traumas from childhood...more than a few have to come to terms with their sexual feelings and associate much guilt and shame with them.” (pg.177).

Besides seminarians as they grow to maturity are cautioned in *Optatam totius* (1965) to guard against dangers to chastity, “they should be put on their guard against the dangers which threaten their chastity, especially in the present society...they themselves will acquire greater mastery of mind and body, will grow in maturity and receive greater measure of the blessedness promised in the Gospel.” (no.10). Equally important is, peaceful friendship, brotherhood and personal love to Christ among the celibates John Paul II (1992) expound in *Pastores dabo vobis*.

Training in affective maturity thus has to consider possible presence of painful experiences in the lives of seminarians as far as their family background and upbringing is concerned. Helping them to heal such wounds would better prepare them to effectively render the message of consolation to the people they will encounter as future ministers. Pope Francis (2016) in *Misericordia et misera* invites the church to contemplate on the consoling mercy of God, “Another face of mercy is consolation. “Comfort, comfort my people” (Is 40:1) is the heartfelt plea that the prophet continues to make today, so that a word of hope may come to all those who experience suffering and pain.” (no.13).

2.2.2 The Association between Mercy, Heart and Affective Maturity

The aspect of affective maturity is closely linked to the heart, as the centre of one’s personality. Gula (1997) expresses, “in the New Testament, Jesus reflects the Hebrew understanding that the unity of the person is the heart. From a person’s heart come the evil ideas that lead one to do immoral things (Mk 7:21), whereas a good person produces good from the goodness in his heart (Lk 6:45).” (pg.16). The heart can easily lure one in his or her struggle with sin, to do evil than the good. This becomes a challenge towards growth to affective maturity (Cf. Romans 7:14-24). The Gospels indicates to us that both vices and sins which destroy a human person come from his or her heart (Cf. Matthew 15:18-20 *vis a vis* Mark 7:17-20). Africans spirituality as Magesa (2013) illustrates also depicts human condition as beautiful and as well as ugly (evil) especially when faced with moral deficiencies comprising of viciousness, hatred, jealousy, selfishness, anger, pride and crimes against humanity and nature.

In our time, Hall (2006) observes that, failure to address the area of affective maturity is evident in crimes against humanity such as terrorism, prostitution, murder, theft and fraud among others, to the subtle pervasions of human heart such as jealousy, greed, gluttony among other capital sins. In agreement with Hall, Cole (2007) in his book, *the hidden enemies of the priesthood: the contributions of St. Thomas* discuss on how the seven deadly sins in subtle, certain and extensive ways damage the life of priests and the church. Rolheiser (2014) sees the ability to overcome these seven deadly sins as key to maturity.

2.2.3 Seminary Training on Affective Maturity and Consolation Ministry

John Paul II (1992) in *Pastores dabo vobis* records, “affective maturity presupposes awareness that love has a central role in human life...We are speaking of a love that involves the entire person, in all his or her aspects - physical, psychic and spiritual...” (no.44). A seminarian is thus to be helped to be self- aware of his affective and emotional needs which can only work when his heart is addressed but not just his head considering that Mcclone (2002), rightly expounds to a great measure men unlike women, tend to develop their intellectual and cognitive capacities to detriment of their emotional lives .

Formation of heart however has to pay attention to the cunning tendency of human heart. By inferring from Jeremiah17:9, Hall (2006), explains on how the human heart has the power to deceive us, just as it lured Adam and Eve to disobey God; enticed David, the great King, to sin

gravely (Cf. 2 Sam, 11; 24; 1 Chronicles. 21); tempted Peter to deny Christ (Cf. John 13:37-38) and beguiled Saul to persecute Christians (Cf. Acts 9:1ff). Without gain saying, however, the experience of consoling mercy of God prompted a life of conversion to in the life of king David (Cf. Psalm 51), in that of St. Peter (Cf. John 21:15-18) and in that of St. Paul (Cf. Acts 9:1-19). King David repented, St. Peter renewed his love for Christ and his sheep and St. Paul becomes the chosen instrument of Christ to take the Gospel to the gentiles. Indeed, Pope Francis (2016) in *Misericordia et misera* reports, “Once mercy has been truly experienced, it is impossible to turn back. It grows constantly and it changes our lives. It is an authentic new creation: it brings about a new heart, capable of loving to the full, and it purifies our eyes to perceive hidden needs.” (no.16).

Human formation of seminarians to affective maturity, hence, ought to be informed by that divine mercy which consoles and inspires a life of moral conversion. In fact, Pope Francis (2016) in *Misericordia et misera* further says, “the personal experience of mercy is the best way to make it a true message of consolation and conversion in the pastoral ministry. Both homiletics and catechesis need to be sustained by this pulsing heart of the Christian life.” (no.6). Pope Francis thus in the same document, once invites us to offer a message of consolation to the afflicted, the misunderstood, the angry, to the families, to the suffering and the bereaved. Sometimes the magnitude of suffering being too great we find ourselves lacking even words to give, but in such instances, an embrace and loving presence, to the concerned, offers a message of consolation to them.

Fostering group formation in which one formator accompanies a small group of seminarians can greatly help in accompanying each seminarian in the journey towards affective maturity and to be of desire to offer consolation. In this, seminarians are to open their hearts and let their life story be known to their formators without fear of being judged. This will contribute to sound moral formation.

2.3 Right Moral Conscience at Rendering the Redeeming and Renewing Mercy of God

Training of future priests in essence is to provide for formation of their moral conscience, as *Pastores dabo vobis*, puts it, “the human maturity of the priest...should include especially the formation of his conscience. In order that the candidate may faithfully meet his obligations with regard to God and the Church and wisely guide the consciences of the faithful.” (no.44). Formation of conscience among Christians in Africa as Rwiza (2001) highlights though becomes a challenge particularly when the African people tend to dichotomize their lives. They tend to be genuine Christians in a time of joy and peace but when faced with misfortunes they resolve to rites and beliefs that are contrary to the teaching of the church.

Nevertheless Rwiza (2001) notes, “formation of Christian conscience focuses on the importance of the subject or the acting person as a moral agent...In scripture oriented approach, conscience is seen as the sanctuary of a person where one is alone with God.” (pg.97). If one is to be fully human one has to take care of his conscience and so be in union with God, “a good moral conscience is a response to God’s call to be fully human.”(pg.40), as Bansikiza (2001) communicates. Good conscience also puts one at peace with himself and other people. According to Rwiza (2001), formation of conscience first of all is for persons indicating what a person should be like in a human community. The human person has to endeavor to strike balance between autonomy and communion, solitude and fusion.

2.3.1 Training of Seminarians in Right Moral Conscience

Speaking on helps towards interior life of a priest, *Presbyterorum ordinis* (1965) elucidates, "...by a daily examination of conscience, it is a powerful incentive to essential conversion of heart to the love of the Father of mercies." (no.18). We are to act according to our conscience Pope John Paul II (1993) explains, in *Veritatis splendor*, "like the natural law itself and all practical knowledge, the judgment of conscience also has an imperative character: man must act in accordance with it. If man acts against this judgment or, in a case where he lacks certainty about the rightness and goodness of a determined act, still performs that act, he stands condemned by his own conscience, the proximate norm of personal morality." (no.60). Among the factors affecting moral formation in Africa as Bansikiza (2001) reports are; decline of the moral value of the family, urbanization, pornography, sexual promiscuity and homelessness. Training of seminarian conscience is thus to consider what affects their moral formation and so to provide possible remedies.

The three dimensions as of conscience as Gula (1997) portrays are: a capacity; a process; and a judgment; a capacity to discern good and evil; a process of discovering what it takes to be a good person and what particular action is morally right or wrong; a judgment on what moral truth demands. Moreover, Gula says, "the obligation to follow conscience presupposes that we have properly formed our conscience. This is a function of the second dimension of conscience...conscience as a process of discernment."(pg.21).

True conscience is to be distinguished from what Freud calls superego, as Neafsey (2006) indicates, superego is, "...the critical, rule- oriented voice in our heads, often associated with parental or religious or societal 'should,' that tends to induce needless guilt and unproductive anxiety in us about things that do not matter." (pg.134). Furthermore, (Rwiza, 2001) quoting from R. Duska & M Whelan (1978) reveals that if one spends his whole time doing what he has been told by authority simply because of fear of authority, or pleasure, or group expectation, or law fulfillment then that person has never really made moral decisions which are his own decisions.

Fostering genuine obedience therefore helps moral education of conscience as *Pastores dabo vobis* discusses. Vatican II council Fathers in *Gaudium et spes* (1965) make clear that, "deep within his conscience man discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey. Its voice ever calling him to love and to do what is good and to avoid what is evil, tells him inwardly at the right moment: do this, shun that. For man has in his heart a law inscribed by God...His conscience is man's most secret core, and his sanctuary." (no.16). Formation of conscience thus becomes a lifelong task of human beings who are prone to negative influences and temptations to sin as the catechism of the catholic church (1995) elaborates.

John Paul II (1993) in *Veritatis splendor* clarifies that, "the Church puts herself always and only at the service of conscience, helping it to avoid being tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine proposed by human deceit (Cf. Eph. 4:14), and helping it not to swerve from the truth..."(no.64). Within the Catholic Church as Overberg (1991) demonstrates, "...the pope and the bishops in union with the pope enjoy teaching prerogatives of a unique kind. The Pope and bishops are commissioned to teach authoritatively on faith and morals in a way no other teacher in the church can claim to do." (pg.80).

In interpreting traditions of Christian life as Catholics Gula (1997) explains that we also borrow from the testimony of scriptures, words and deeds of Jesus, religious creeds, the lives of virtuous persons and informed judgment of theologians. We draw from rich heritage of stories, images, devotional practices and spiritual disciplines. Moreover, *Veritatis splendor* gives great

role played by the law of God, Theological and Cardinal virtues. In this, we also need to treasure African cherished values and virtues as part of conscience formation.

Likewise, the church recommends seminarians to regularly open their conscience in the sacrament of confession. The code of canon law (1983) explains, “the students are to be accustomed to approach the sacrament of penance frequently. It is recommended that each should have a director of his spiritual life, freely chosen, to whom he can trustfully reveal his conscience.” (Canon 246 § 4).

The Council for the promotion of the new evangelization (2016) in her document *Confession: The Sacrament of Mercy* observes that shunning away from the sacrament of reconciliation as a serious contradiction and a kind of disease of people of our time. This blocks the gift of grace received through the Holy spirit and obscures true dignity of the human person and the truth that his sins can be forgiven. The same council in the same work clarifies, “the sacrament of reconciliation is premised on the need to form conscience.” (pg.66). Pope Francis in his apostolic letter, *Misericordia et misera*, expresses how confessors have witnessed penitents undergoing conversions when they encounter the father of all mercies in confessionals.

2.3.2 The Relationship between Mercy, Heart and Conscience

According to Gula (1997), “what we understand today by conscience is rooted in the biblical notion of the heart. The heart is the seat of vital decisions, for it is the centre of feeling and reason, decision and action, intention and consciousness.” (pg.16). There is close correlation between conscience and mercy as Neafsey (2006) alludes, “Conscience is not only about guilt. It is also about love and compassion...there is a connection between empathy and conscience. ‘Having a heart’ has to do with our capacity for empathy... And so formation of conscience is also a kind of education or schooling of the heart.”(pgs.140-141).

St. Paul’s writing, connects mercy, heart and conscience as necessary for fruitful ministry, “therefore, since we have this ministry through the mercy shown to us, we are not discouraged...we commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God...for God who said, ‘let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to bring to light the knowledge of glory on the face of (Jesus) Christ.” (2 Corinthians 4:1, 2, 6-7). Neafsey (2006) while quoting from Russell Connors and Patrick Cormick, in their book, “*Character, Choices and Community: The Three Faces of Christian Ethics*” argues that in Hebrew Bible, there being no specific word for conscience, the notion of the heart embodies the concept of conscience as we find in Psalm 51:8 in which the Psalmist beseeches God to teach him wisdom in his heart, that is, truth in the inner being, in the conscience. The Scriptures emphasizes that the law of God is written in our hearts. (Cf. Romans 2:15// Hebrews 8:10; 10:16)

When morality is devoid of mercy deep from our natural heart, Neafsey (2006), then demonstrates that we speak of deformed conscience and this result to indifferentism or emotional or spiritual numbness that is lack of empathy. This characterized by the inability to be touched by pain and suffering of other people. As a result then we need to seek for personal spiritual renewal and moral conversion.

2.3.3 Right Moral Conscience at the service of Redeeming and renewing Mercy of God

Elaborating on finding new life renewed in Christ, St. Paul stresses on the need to get rid of the old self used to sin so as to conform to the image of our creator. Among the things he mentions is letting the heartfelt compassion give us peace in our hearts. (Cf. Colossians3: 9-15). Reflecting on Psalm 1, Feeney (2002) elaborates that in pondering the law of the Lord in our

hearts we live happy lives while at the same time pointing that the inability to always adhere to this divine law inscribed in our hearts is the reason for the need to undergo moral conversion.

True conversion of heart, is mentioned by Pereira (2002), as means to compassion. He writes, “recognizing and owning ones shadow helps us on the road to a conversion from within. As a result...we find ourselves becoming more humble, compassionate, large hearted and forgiving.” (pg.216). This Conversion of heart is closely related to spiritual renewal as Kofler (2001) remarks, “even more important in the need of those who come to formation to experience a personal spiritual renewal or conversion. Subjects need to be presented in ways that nourish students, candidates, and novices spiritually and psychologically...Both aspects are important for holistic formation.” (pg.14).

Seminarians are additionally to be helped to do right discernment for this will help them to distinguishing what Neafsey (2006) borrowing from Christian’s tradition refers to ‘sting of conscience’ that is, real guilt arising from true conscience as differentiated from false guilt which comes from the superego. He compares this to St. Ignatius of Loyola, rules on discernment of spirits, in which the good spirit arouses feelings of genuine remorse to people moving to wrong direction, while the evil spirit stirs up people who are on path of genuine spiritual progress with false doubt and anxiety (that is, false or neurotic guilt). The Pontifical Council for the promotion of the new evangelization (2016) in her document *Confession: The Sacrament of Mercy*, remarks that, “Priests, as confessors and spiritual directors to whom the faithful open their conscience and whom are asked for enlightenment and advice, have the great responsibility, linked to their own ministry, to be masters of spiritual life. So they themselves need a careful education in the discernment of spirits.” (Pg.68).

Right conscience brings about gradual process of self- renewal in all aspects of development while for superego, that self- renewal is rapidly achieved by confessing authority as Gula (1997) reports. The need for formation of conscience particularly in our time is echoed by John Paul II (1997) in *Redemptor hominis*, since, “...the man of today seems ever to be under threat from what he produces, that is to say from the result of the work of his hands and, even more so, of the work of his intellect and the tendencies of his will.” (no.15).

The Vatican II Council Fathers in the decree *Optatam totius* (1965) affirms that, “... the desired renewal of the whole church depends in great part upon the priestly ministry animated by the spirit of Christ.” (introduction section of the decree). In order to realize this renewal, there is need to experience the mercy of God deep in our hearts considering that, *Misericordia et misera* indicates, “mercy renews and redeems, because it is the meeting of two hearts: the heart of God who comes to meet the human heart. The latter is warmed and healed by the former. Our hearts of stone become hearts of flesh (cf. *Ezek 36:26*) capable of love despite our sinfulness.” (no.16).

Moreover, the aspect of redeeming mercy in essence lies in the paschal mystery. *Redemptor hominis* specifies, “the redeemer of man, Jesus Christ, is the centre of the universe and of history.” (no.1). The catechism of the Catholic Church thus advises, “...we must also examine our conscience before the Lord’s Cross. (no.1785). *Redemptor hominis* further elaborates that we experience the redeeming merits of Christ when we conform our hearts, intellect and will thus to the truth which sets us free, by relying on the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the unity of faith, in life of service, in sacraments and in filial devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of mercy. In this renewal of heart, the formation of conscience is as well achieved.

Elaborating more on renewal of priestly life Rossetti (2005), articulates, “what, then, is this ‘renewal as priests’ that both bishops and priests ought to undergo? It seems to me that our living out of the priesthood tends to vacillate between two poles of the truth: the sacredness of

the priesthood and the frailty of our humanity.”(pg.194). It demands that priests renew their Christian and priestly vocation as well as their leadership role in community as Rossetti affirms. St. Paul exhorts, “I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship. Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.” (Galatians 12:1-12).

Our ultimate redemption is however realized in the beatific vision as Hall (2006) argues, for if we probe into our hearts we find we not only have the spirit, but we also have the flesh, and the spirit and the flesh fight against each other to gain control over us (Cf. Galatians 5:16-17). Hence, in the spirit of St. Paul we can say, “it is not that I have taken hold of it or already attained perfect maturity, but I continue my pursuit in hope that I may possess it, since I have indeed been taken possession of by Christ (Jesus)... Just one thing: forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead. I continue my pursuit towards the goal, the prize of God’s upward calling, in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians.3:12-14).

3.1 Research Methods

The study adopted convergent parallel design, for it being a mixed research design according to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), its approach is both qualitative and quantitative. This makes it advantageous and complementary. The researcher collected data by using a case study of seminarians from Catholic Diocese of Machakos. The population of our research comprised of a total of 79 Diocesan seminarians and 11 Formators from Machakos Diocese, making a total of 90 respondents. The seminarians were in different stages of formation, 9 of them in spiritual year, 36 of them in Philosophy, 25 of them in Theology and 9 of them in pastoral year. Among the 11 Formators, 4 of them were currently in the seminary and 7 of them had gone back to the Diocese after their years of service in the seminary.

Considering that the target population was less than 10,000, using Mugenda (2003) formula the researcher come up with sample size to be 72 respondents which meant it possible to obtain 0.8 % respondents from each stratum. The sample size of 72 respondents, as a result represented 80 % of our target population of 90 respondents. Questionnaires and interview guide was employed to collect data from the seminarians and formators respectively. The quantitative data from the questionnaires was coded, tabulated and presented according to frequencies and percentages. The qualitative was analyzed according to the emerging themes and in line with the research objectives. The possible findings from the qualitative data were presented in narrative form.

4.1 Results and findings

On Human relationships amid celebration of divine mercy

The researcher gathered data to find out respondents' views on whether they agree that the content of seminary formation adequately equips seminarians with skills of grace filled human relationships. The findings are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Seminary Formation and Skills of Relationships

Respondent	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total
Spiritual year	2	5	0	0	0	7
Philosophy	13	12	0	0	0	25
Theology	8	9	0	0	0	17
Pastoral Year	3	3	0	0	0	6

Based on the findings from Table 1, fewer seminarians 2 (28.6%) in spiritual year strongly agreed while majority 5 (71.4%) of them agreed that the content of seminary formation adequately equips seminarians with skills of grace filled human relationships. Many seminarians in philosophy 13 (52%) strongly agreed on the same view, with fewer of them, 12 (48%) agreeing. Lesser Seminarians in Theology, 8 (47.1%) strongly agreed on the similar view, with more of them 9 (52.9%) agreeing. Half of seminarians in pastoral year 3 (50%) strongly agreed on the same with the other half 3 (50%) agreeing. All the participants responded to this question, bringing the number of respondents to 55 (100%). One interview respondent stated, "Human formation of seminarians should entail formation in human values of love, kindness, forgiveness, virtues, liturgical and spiritual formation and well integrated personality." (Formator R1, Personal communication, January 20, 2021).

Basically all seminarians thus agreed that the content of current seminary formation equips them with skills of grace filled relationships. Similar view was also established from all the formators. In more particular way on whether seminary training promotes skills of human relations, one formator noted, "partly yes and no because all these things are done theoretically than in the practical application of this knowledge. So many seminarians come out with theoretical knowledge but with limited practical knowledge because the reality of their physical self and spiritual self is not well addressed." (Formator R2, Personal communication, January 14, 2021).

On the content of seminary formation facilitating human relations another formator remarked, "The content adequately equips but more can still be done. We live in a world full of broken human relationships. Seminarians find themselves coming from such broken homes, and they do not know how to handle the cases. Seminary formation should thus consider this area of mercy and human relationships as an emerging issue." (Formator R3, Personal communication, January 14, 2021).

On Affective Human Maturity and Ministering of the Consoling Mercy of God

The researcher examined on whether the current seminary formation does help seminarians in their growth to affective maturity and the results achieved are given in Table 2.

Table 2: Seminary Formation and Growth into Affective Maturity

Respondent	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total
Spiritual year	4	2	0	1	0	7
Philosophy	11	12	0	2	0	25
Theology	5	9	1	1	1	17
Pastoral Year	0	6	0	0	0	6

Table 2 reveals that majority of seminarians out of the 55 (100%) who responded to this item of questionnaire accepted that the current seminary formation aids seminarian growth into affective maturity. Among those in spirituality 4 (57.1%) strongly agreed, 2 (28.6%) agreed while 1(14.3%) disagreed. From Philosophers 11(44%) strongly agreed, 12 (48%) agreed and 2 (8%) disagreed. Amongst Theologians 5 (29.4%) strongly agreed, 9 (52.9%) agreed, 1 (5.9%) was uncertain, 1 (5.9%) disagreed and 1 (5.9%) strongly disagreed. All seminarians 6 (100%) in pastoral year agreed that seminary formation fosters seminarian growth into affective maturity.

John Paul II (1992) in his *Pastores dabo vobis* expounds that, “Affective maturity presupposes awareness that love has a central role in human life... Education for responsible love and the affective maturity of the person are totally necessary for those who, like the priest, are called to celibacy, that is, to offer with the grace of the Spirit and the free response of one's own will the whole of one's love and care to Jesus Christ and to his Church.”(no.44).

On if seminary formation helps seminarians enough towards development to affective maturity, one interview respondent noted, “Yes it does, but it can as well be improved. A particular course on this area should be introduced.” (Formator R7, Personal communication, January 20, 2021). Another interview response went, “Not adequate unless it helps a seminarian to know how to take initiative, to be responsible and have the ability to appreciate the importance of doing the right thing at the right time other than carrying duties for duty sake” (Formator R1, Personal communication, January 14, 2021).

Rolheiser (2014) emphasis that “The years of our maturity are the heavy working years of our lives...when major responsibilities fall on our shoulders ...like Martha in scripture, it is easy to feel resentment ... many are the people who deeply regret that during the healthiest and most productive years of their lives they were too driven and too unaware of the richness of their own lives to appreciate and enjoy what they were doing.” (pgs. 75-77).

In *Pastores dabo vobis*, John Paul II (1992) discusses on the importance of future priests being helped to cultivate such human qualities essential for both their personal growth and fruitful ministry. Such qualities include being balanced, strong and free, capable of bearing the weight of pastoral responsibilities, being educated to love of the truth, being loyal, being respectful, to have sense of justice, to cultivate truthfulness, genuine compassion, and integrity and to be balanced in judgment and behaviour.

On Right Moral Conscience at Rendering the Redeeming and Renewing Mercy of God

The study aimed to find out if the experience of the redeeming and renewing mercy of God can influence seminarians’ development of the right moral conscience. The findings are given in Table 3.

Table 3: Redeeming and Renewing Mercy of God with Moral Conscience

Respondent	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total
Spiritual year	3	4	0	0	0	7
Philosophy	13	11	1	0	0	25
Theology	12	4	1	0	0	17
Pastoral Year	3	3	0	0	0	6

According to Table 3, most seminarians accepted that the experience of the redeeming and renewing mercy of God promotes the foundation of seminarians’ development of right moral conscience. Among those in spiritual year 3 (42.9%) of them strongly agreed while 4 (57.1%) agreed. Amongst the philosophers 13 (52%) strongly agreed, 11 (44%) agreed and 1(4%) was uncertain. With Theologians 12 (70.6%) strongly agreed, 4 (23.5%) agreed and 1 (5.9%) was uncertain. From seminarians in pastoral experience 3 (50%) strongly agreed and the other 3 (50%) agreed. The 55 (100%) respondents gave their replies to this item of our questionnaires.

In her document, *Confession: the sacrament of mercy*, The Pontifical Council for the promotion of the new evangelization (2016) expresses that, “Today care for the formation of conscience is a more urgent task than ever. Every believer should take responsibility for it, and confessors, spiritual directors, parents, and all educators should reserve special attention for it, in general...loss or silence of the conscience may become the disease that poisons not only the life of faith but an entire civilization.” (pgs. 66-67).

Indeed, formation of moral conscience is very essential both in moral development of a human person, in his relationship with other people and in his relationship with his Creator, The ultimate end of a human being. John Paul II (1996) in his work, *Veritatis splendor* testifies, “Consequently the moral life has an essential ‘teleological’ character, since it consists in the deliberate ordering of human acts to God, the supreme good and ultimate end (*telos*) of man.”(no. 74). One interview respondent expressed, “we need to grasp the person of Christ who come as redeemer. He effected this renewal in the lives of people by bringing everybody into board. In this we should be ready to forgive and avoid being selfish” (Formator R1, Personal communication, June 20, 2020).

5.1 Conclusion

This article explored on merciful heart an approach in human formation of seminarians for effective priestly ministry in Machakos Catholic Diocese. It discovered that among the Africans both acts of worship and relations are community based. Seminary community hence inspired by celebration of divine mercy in the light of liturgical life of the church ought to regulate and improve interpersonal relations, both in the spirit of *ubuntu* and Christian charity. Proper understanding and practice of intimacy is to be encouraged. There is need to get rid of what obstructs both interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships. Such obstacles may be personal, communitarian, cultural, societal, environmental and psychological. Spirit of

forgiveness, tolerance and reconciliations should regulate such human relationships if at all they are to grow. Seminarians are also to be encouraged to create as well personal relationship with Jesus and the Blessed Virgin Mary and to have profound solidarity with the poor and the suffering.

Seminarians' growth to affective maturity is to help them to truly love in a responsible way and to be ready to obey the truth. In African setting such values are taught in a family and community setting. Training into affective maturity helps seminarians to be ministers of divine consolation to those most need of it. This will happen provided the seminarians themselves are first helped while in training to overcome their personal difficulties, pains, burdens and vices. Important values contributing to affective maturity are chastity, cultivation of virtues, peaceful friendship, brotherhood and personal love to Christ.

Formation of right moral conscience among seminarians is to help them to be masters of their own conscience and to be able to educate the conscience of the people they will encounter. The law of God is inscribed in our conscience and the human person must act according to his or her conscience otherwise he or she stands condemned by his or her conscience which is the proximate norm of morality. True conscience is to be differentiated from false guilt. Seminarians are to be helped to form their conscience using the appropriate means. Right conscience also means having a heart, being empathetic and compassionate. It inspires life of conversion, from evil to good, thus bringing to reality the experience of the redeeming and renewing mercy of God in our lives.

Important are also other intervening strategies which can contribute to effective priestly ministry such as Spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation of seminarians. Significant is also inculturation of African values in training of seminarians while paying attention to what church prescribes as prerequisite requirements for one to be ordained. Recourse to experts when necessary can as well contribute to effective priestly ministry in Africa.

6.1 Recommendations for the study

On Healthy Human Relationships amid Celebration of God's Mercy

The study proposes celebration of God's mercy in liturgy, sacraments and prayer life be given due attention in human formation of seminarians. Such celebrations should not be a matter of routine or timetable to be followed as in the seminary program but it must relate to day to day relationships in concrete life situations. It also proposes the need to clear the gap between formators and seminarians by letting them interact freely. Seminarians are encouraged to share freely with their formators on what blocks them from relating well with others be it from their family background, environment or upbringing. Formators are to listen to them in mercy without judging them and to help them to improve in their human relationship with other people and even in cultivating strong bond with Christ. The study suggests to formators to be good role models to the seminarians by both their words and actions, to closely accompany them and still to encourage the seminarians to share the experiences of divine mercy and how it affects their human relationships. This can be done either in public or private forums as different situations permit it.

On Affective Human Maturity at the Service of Consoling Mercy of God

The study recommends an exhaustive course on affective maturity to be introduced in the seminary studies. The study should particularly focus on personal initiative, freedom and responsibility, decision making, obedience, relationships, sexuality, celibacy and chastity among others. It also suggests the need of common activities between formators and

seminarians. Formators are encouraged to create room for seminarians to experience the consoling mercy of God in their lives especially when they face difficulties of life. The study further proposes to let the consoling mercy of God be felt by encouraging formators and seminarians to be ready to forgive and support each other in moments of pain, suffering and other life challenges. Seminarians on their part, are to be open to their formators in order to be helped. To effect this, seminarians are to be helped to grow to maturity and faith so as that they may express the fruits of consoling mercy of God they experienced in other relationships, duties and apostolate. Where need arises, in spirit of good understanding and freedom, psychological experts and other specialists can be consulted.

On Formation of Right Moral Conscience at Mercy that Redeems and Renews

The study suggests the need of special attention to be given to proper formation of seminarian moral conscience through the recommended ways. In this they are to be taught the art of true discernment. The study once more advises formators to facilitate those ways through which seminarians can experience the grace of the redeeming and renewing mercy of God in their consciences. It proposes the need to give room for the execution of justice so as to keep alive the moral fiber of the seminary community and society at large. It advises the need to allow seminarians to share their experiences of ministering the redeeming and renewing mercy of God as necessary means of formation of their moral conscience. It suggests on the need to help seminarians to listen to the voice of God in their consciences and to follow it as proximate norm of morality. It suggests the importance of educating and forming seminarian conscience so that as future priests they can rightly direct the conscience of the people entrusted to them.

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