
THE SEM EFFECT

MY SEMINARY EXPERIENCE

DRIVE-THRU DISCERNMENT Article 1.3

By: Johnathan Miles Sumpster

Monday, April 20, 2009



Three years of my life was spent as a seminarian for the Diocese of Amarillo. Three years is a long time (nearly a tenth of my life-Time).

No matter what your vocational calling is; God will give you the Grace to fulfill it. Through three years of prayer and discernment, I discerned away from the Priesthood.

I loved parts of the seminary experience; I loathed others. I loved being with the people, doing Bible Studies, studying Church history and teachings, philosophy and theology, participating with the community.

I hated being on the altar, performing liturgy, altar serving, well anything specifically priestly. I loved participating in the liturgy, but not performing in it. I loved receiving and participating in the Sacraments, but not administering them.

My prayer life continually pointed away from the seminary. This confused me because I thought God was calling me to be a priest.

When discussing how my spiritual/prayer life was suffering, my Spiritual Director said, "What would it take for you be happy here?"

I said, "Let me keep everything (the school) except the priesthood and the seminary, and I'd love it!"

My Spiritual Director quipped back, "Then why are you here?" I thought it was obvious, "God wants me to be here, even if I don't!"

"Don't you think that if God was calling you to something, and you were openly discerning it, it wouldn't be so contrary to your prayer life?"

I think the biggest problem most people face with the concept of *discernment* is *directional discernment*, or one-way-only discernment.

The biggest problem most people face with the concept of *discernment* is *directional discernment*, or one-way-only discernment.

I think the reason I stayed in the seminary, is the same reason most people avoid it: control.

Discernment is not a *yes or no* question. Discernment is not a multiple choice question decided once, and then that's it. It's a lifestyle.

I kept on going through the seminary because "God wanted me to be a Priest," and "I am just being selfish by not wanting to live out my calling."

My thought was then, as well as now: Every Catholic man should discern the Priesthood; and

every Catholic woman the religious life. In order to do this, an individual would have to get to know the seminaries and monasteries. If you do not openly attempt to discern this vocation you are not openly discerning any vocation. I tried it, it was not for me.

I think the reason I stayed in the seminary, is the same reason most people avoid it: control. My *one-way-only* mentality of discernment forced me to cease true discernment and focus on the end product.

Discernment is a life long process of what to do in the *Now*. Not, what will I do tomorrow, next year, or five years from now. If you are worried about what steps to take to get to a specific end- you are trying to control your steps now. If you listen and discern where God is calling you *today*, you will already be on the right path for *tomorrow*.

If we try to control our discernment, even if it is for good and holy intentions, we will end up bitter and unfulfilled.

I was called to experience the seminary. This experience changed my life, made me a better person, gave me a prayer life, formed me for where God may be calling me now, and I am ever grateful for it. It however, was not the end of my journey.

What will be my journey, only God knows. My only hope is to step out of the way long enough for God to illuminate the next step in my vocational life long discernment.