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## The five dimensions of the APPRO program : explanation and specification

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## THE FIVE DIMENSIONS OF THE APPRO PROGRAM: EXPLANATION AND SPECIFICATION

### 1. INTRODUCTION

APPRO, which is positive psychology applied to the formation of priests and religious has been presented previously<sup>1</sup>. The goal of the present article is to explore APPRO's five dimensions. APPRO is largely based on is formulated to optimize the positive experiences, emotions, relationships, and meaning and help priests and religious to integrate them with well-being and the mission of the Church.

This article continues previous publications<sup>2</sup> in which APPRO's theoretical framework was introduced. It consists of five dimensions related to quality of life and well-being: 1) Gratitude, blessings; 2) Planning, time management; 3) Challenges, facing problems; 4) Understanding and managing emotions; 5) Cultivating spirituality and mindfulness-contemplation in a Catholic context.

### 2. GRATITUDE: EXPERIENCING LIFE AS A GIFT

Everyone has had some experience with giving and receiving, although not everyone focuses on it in daily life. Undoubtedly, gratitude is an essential factor

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<sup>1</sup> Por. Z. Formella, P. Kwiatek, *Grounds for Talking a Positive Psychology Approach to "Human Formation" in Preparation for the Priesthood*, *Orientamenti Pedagogici* 57(2010), p. 1109-1120; P. Kwiatek, *Psychologia pozytywna a formacja ludzka w kontekście przygotowania do prezbiteratu*, *Seminare* 28(2010), p. 201-211; P. Kwiatek, A. Pecoraro, *What can Positive Psychology contribute to the Human Formation for the future Priests and Religious in the Catholic Church?*, in: *Izgrađivati zreli osobnost za plodne međuljudske odnose*, ed. J. Bošnjaković, *Glas Slavonije, Đakovo* 2014, p. 159-171.

<sup>2</sup> Por. P. Kwiatek, *Application of Positive Psychology to Human Formation of Priests and Religious: The Active Program of Positive Personal Development (APPRO)*, *Seminare* 35(2014), p. 99-113.

involved in well-being<sup>3</sup>. Gratitude can be described as an emotion, attitude, pro-social behavior, virtue, moral duty, and ethical reality<sup>4</sup>. Cicero wrote, “Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all others”<sup>5</sup>. According to St. Thomas Aquinas, gratitude is a social virtue, in which man cultivates relationships and develops relationships with others<sup>6</sup>. Although gratitude is a universal social value, researchers have not explored it sufficiently<sup>7</sup>. Only recently has it experienced a renaissance, and it is now addressed by psychologists, anthropologists, and sociologists<sup>8</sup>. Nevertheless, there is still much left to learn from research<sup>9</sup>.

Contemporary research demonstrates a strong relationship between positive emotions, relationships, gratitude, and well-being<sup>10</sup>. Gratitude influences happiness and life satisfaction, affects mental and physical health, and is correlated with compassion, generosity, altruism, friendship, openness, ability to cooperate, and confidence<sup>11</sup>. Another important area in the application of gratitude

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<sup>3</sup> Por. R.A. Emmons, C.A. Crumpler, *Gratitude as a human strength: Appraising the evidence*, Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology 19(2000), p. 56-69; R.A. Emmons, *Thanks! How the new science of gratitude can make you happier*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, New York 2007; R.A. Emmons, M. Mishra, *Why gratitude enhances well-being: What we know, what we need to know*, in: *Designing the future of positive psychology: Taking stock and moving forward*, ed. K. Sheldon, T. Kashdan, M.F. Steger, New York 2011, p. 248-262; J.J. Froh, C. Yurkewicz, T.B. Kashdan, *Gratitude and subjective well-being in early adolescence: Examining gender differences*, Journal of Adolescence 32(2009), p. 633-650; A.M. Wood, J.J. Froh, A. Geraghty, *Gratitude and well-being: A review and theoretical integration*, Clinical Psychology Review 30(2010), p. 890-905.

<sup>4</sup> Por. R.A. Emmons, M.E. McCullough, *The psychology of gratitude*, Oxford University Press, New York 2004, p. 10; M.E. McCullough, R.A. Emmons, J. Tsang, *The grateful disposition: A conceptual and empirical topography*, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 82(2002), p. 112-127.

<sup>5</sup> Por. M.E. McCullough, J. Tsang, *Parent of Virtues. The Prosocial Contours of Gratitude*, in: R.A. Emmons, M.E. McCullough, *The psychology of gratitude*, Oxford University Press, New York 2004, p. 123.

<sup>6</sup> Por. Ibidem.

<sup>7</sup> Por. R.A. Emmons, C.S. Shelton, *Gratitude and the science of positive psychology*, in: *Handbook of positive psychology*, ed. C.R. Snyder, S.J. Lopez, Oxford University Press, New York 2002, p. 459-460.

<sup>8</sup> Por. F. Baumgartner-Tramer, *Gratitude in children and adolescents*, Ethik 13(1936), p. 1-11; F. Baumgartner-Tramer, *Gratefulness in children and young people*, Journal of Genetic Psychology 53(1938), p. 53-66; E. Bergler, *Debts of gratitude paid in “guilt denomination”*, Journal of Clinical Psychopathology 11(1950), p. 57-62; M. Klein, *Envy and gratitude*, Psyche 11(1957a), p. 241-255; M. Klein, *Envy and gratitude: A study of unconscious source*, Routledge, New York 1957b; G. Heilbrunn, *Thank you*, Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association 20(1972), p. 512-516.

<sup>9</sup> Por. M.E. McCullough, S.D. Kilpatrick, R.A. Emmons, D.B. Larson, *Is gratitude a moral affect?*, Psychological Bulletin 127(2001), p. 249-266.

<sup>10</sup> Por. B.L. Fredrickson, *What good are positive emotions?*, Review of General Psychology 2(1998), p. 300-319; B.L. Fredrickson, *Positivity: Groundbreaking Research Reveals How to Embrace the Hidden Strength of Positive Emotions, Overcome Negativity, and Thrive*, Crown Archetype, New York 2009.

<sup>11</sup> Por. M.Y. Bartlett, D. DeSteno, *Gratitude and prosocial behavior: Helping when it costs you*, Psychological Science 17(2006), p. 319-325; M.E. McCullough, M.B. Kimeldorf, A.D. Cohen, *An adaptation for altruism? The social causes, social effects, and social evolution of gratitude*, Current Directions in Psychological Science 17(2008), p. 281-284.

is coping. Gratitude strengthens adaptive capacity<sup>12</sup>. With gratitude, selfishness and consumption of material goods are reduced<sup>13</sup>. People who live with gratitude are less jealous, do not judge others based on material possessions, and are more willing to help others. Those with high levels of appreciation have a wider worldview, experience life as a gift, and live it more consciously. They are more open to new experiences and enjoy greater optimism, hope, vitality, and life satisfaction<sup>14</sup>.

In APPRO, gratitude is especially important because it is intrinsically connected with happiness and well-being. Keeping a daily journal and counting one's blessings underscores is not merely a superficial assignment that operates on a cognitive level but is a reality of the human experience. APPRO participants are invited to see things not in a falsely positive way, but realistically. The awareness of goodness builds strength and hope. Gratitude is associated with recognizing the resources that one actually possesses and which provide a person with courage to move towards the unknown future. Contemplation of goodness gives a person the conviction that life itself consists of blessings, even in the face of suffering. Therefore, individuals are able to see that the dignity and greatness of their being created by God is in itself a gift. Every person has free will, the ability to make decisions, the chance to discover beauty and goodness, and the possibility of becoming, thus helping us to find meaning in life.

"Counting Blessings" is one of the most widely used techniques to enhance well-being in positive psychology<sup>15</sup>. This method takes the form of a diary. Every day (morning or evening) for a period of several weeks, the individual records 3 to 5 good events for which he is grateful. A person can experience blessings in unexpected events and even during the course of daily routine situations. For instance, one can be grateful for relationships, the weather, good sleep, meals, etc. In order to significantly build psychological strength and well-being from this exercise, it is important that it is done frequently<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Por. A.M. Wood, J. Maltby, R. Gillett, P.A. Linley, S. Joseph, *The role of gratitude in the development of social support, stress, and depression: Two longitudinal studies*, Journal of Research in Personality 42(2008), p. 854-871.

<sup>13</sup> Por. E. Polak, M.E. McCullough, *Is gratitude an alternative to materialism?*, Journal of Happiness Studies 7(2006), p. 343-360; N.M. Lambert, F.D. Fincham, T.F. Stillman, L. Dean, *More gratitude, less materialism: The mediating role of life satisfaction*, Journal of Positive Psychology 4(2009), p. 32-42.

<sup>14</sup> Por. M.E. McCullough, J. Tsang, *Parent of Virtues. The Prosocial ...*, p. 123-141.

<sup>15</sup> Por. R.A. Emmons, M.E. McCullough, *Counting blessings versus burdens: An experimental investigation of gratitude and subjective well-being in daily life*, Journal of Personality & Social Psychology 88(2003), p. 377-389; V.E. Worthen, R.L. Isakon, *The Therapeutic Value of Experiencing and Expressing Gratitude*, Issues in Religion and Psychotherapy 31(2007), p. 33-46; J.J. Froh, W.J. Sefick, R.A. Emmons, *Counting blessings in early adolescents: An experimental study of gratitude and subjective well-being*, Journal of School Psychology 46(2008), p. 213-233; M.L. Martínez-Martí, M.D. Avia, M.J. Hernández-Lloreda, *The effects of counting blessings on subjective well-being: a gratitude intervention in a Spanish sample*, Spanish Journal Psychology 13(2010), p. 886-896.

<sup>16</sup> Por. R.A. Emmons, *Thanks!...*, p. 32-34.

### 3. PLANNING: EFFECTIVE USE OF PERSONAL RESOURCES

Time management is well-addressed in the literature<sup>17</sup>. Planning and time management involve not only “how to recognize the problem” but also “how to put it into practice.” In other words, time management is about discipline. The author of the book, *How to Get Control of Your Time and Your Life* wrote, “Time is life. It is irreversible and irreplaceable. To waste your time is to waste your life, but to master your time is to master your life and make the most of it”<sup>18</sup>.

Too little time and too much to do is a common problem today, especially among seminarians, deacons, priests, and male and female religious during the current vocation crisis<sup>19</sup>. There are often conflicts between personal needs and mission/ministry needs. Especially when realistic expectations and boundaries have not been established, the tensions between being totally available for ministry and doing what is healthy and realistically possible can contribute to fatigue, stress, burnout, anger, and diminished quality of life. Prudent time management, planning, and instruction in this area will help individuals and communities to resolve these problems. Therefore, the importance of health and well-being in one’s vocation is included in the APPRO model.

In APPRO, planning and time management includes a broad look at the totality of an individual’s life goals, choices, and techniques. APPRO helps people to develop a healthy rhythm of work while building self-discipline. Participants develop the ability to plan and organize time, energy, talents, skills, and relationships. It systematically aligns personal choices with proximal and distal goals.

What can priests or religious-or those in formation- do with their talents or energy? What precisely leads them to flourish? Balancing work and leisure, or work and faith development, are real challenges. The APPRO worksheet’s “planning” column helps individuals to create goal lists, set priorities, and find the courage and a way to say “no” or “yes”, at appropriate times.

APPRO addresses monthly or annual goals, as well as daily time management. Other aspects that can be included are free time, procrastination, and techniques to increase work efficiency, such as delegation. Exercises to help individuals to analyze time and energy from a positive perspective include:

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<sup>17</sup> Por. M.E. Douglass, D.N Douglass, *Manage your time, manage your work, manage yourself*, AMACOM, New York 1980; S.R. Covey, *The 7 habits of highly effective people*, DC Books, New York 1989; S.R. Covey, A.R. Merrill, R. Merrill, *First things first*, Free Press, New York 1994; A. McKenzie, *The time trap*, AMACOM, New York 1990; H.W. Smith, *10 Natural Laws of Successful Time and Life Management: Proven Strategies for Increased Productivity and Inner Peace*, Business Plus, New York 1994; J. Morgenstern, *Time Management from the Inside Out*, Holt Paperbacks, New York 2004; G. Crandell, *Time management for more effective results*, The Department Chair 15(2005), p. 11-12; M. Mancini, *Time management: 24 techniques to make each minute count at work*, McGraw-Hill, New York 2007; J. Hoover, *Best Practices: Time Management*, HarperCollins, New York 2007; S. Felton, M. Sims, *Organizing your day: time management techniques that will work for you*, Revell, Grand Rapids 2009.

<sup>18</sup> A. Lakein, *How to Get Control of Your Time and Your Life*, Signet, New York 1974, p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> Por. J.W. Ciarrocchi, R.J. Wicks, *Psychotherapy with priests, Protestant clergy, and Catholic religious: A practical guide*, Psychosocial Press, Madison 2000.

**Exercise (1) What Works?**

Fill in as many answers as you can think of:

- No matter how busy I get, I always find time to .....
- My goals are well defined when it comes to .....
- I'm pretty clear on how long it takes me to .....
- I never procrastinate about .....
- I am never late for .....
- I enjoy exercising when .....
- I'm able to tackle difficult projects when .....
- I always build in transition time between .....
- It's easy for me to say no to .....
- Meeting deadlines is easiest for me when .....
- I am at my happiest when I am .....
- The things that I delegate easily are .....

Sample answer:

No matter how busy I get, I always find time to... clean out my fridge, see new clients, get the invoices out<sup>20</sup>.

**Exercise (2) Identifying Energy Cycles<sup>21</sup>**

Complete the following sentences:

- Mornings are the best time for me to .....  
and the worst time for me to .....
- Afternoons are the best time for me to .....  
and the worst time for me to .....
- Evenings are the best time for me to .....  
and the worst time for me to .....
- Late night is the best time for me to .....  
and the worst time for me to .....

As in the “planning” dimension, the primary goal is to organize and map objectives and propose practical ways to reach them.

**4. CHALLENGES: FACING PROBLEMS AND DIFFICULTIES**

Challenges are part of the human experience. Although problems are often viewed as negative or something to be fixed, a challenge may be seen positively as offering a valuable learning experience that facilitates growth and well-being.

APPRO's challenges column enables participants to ultimately move from a good experiences to better experiences, and from better to optimal. Challenges may include

<sup>20</sup> Por. J. Morgenstern, *Time Management...*, p. 127.

<sup>21</sup> Por. Ibidem, p. 137.

one's self, others, relationships, situations, and discovering a vocation within a vocation. Participants are invited to ask themselves: "What is my challenge for today? How can I describe it positively? Are there other more effective problem solving methods to use?" These types of questions are subjects for reflection and prayer, and *Creative Problem Solving*<sup>22</sup> is employed.

Some personal growth factors are connected with a person's environmental context and personal involvement. In APPRO's "daily challenges" dimension, the individual uses cognitive techniques to generate better strategies to reach their goals. The aim is to search for optimal pathways leading to goal attainment while taking into account the full circumstances, time and place, and nature of an individual's vocation.

A helpful tool for APPRO's Challenge dimension is the *Problem Solving Method*<sup>23</sup>. Creative potential exists among all people<sup>24</sup> and can be expressed perhaps in a nearly infinite number of ways. People might function creatively, while being productive, at different levels<sup>25</sup>. In addition, creativity is manifested according to preferences, interests, or styles<sup>26</sup>. Through personal assessment and intervention in the form of training or instruction, individuals can make better use of their creative styles, enhance their level of creative accomplishment, and thus realize their creative potential.

Cox, Dufault, & Hopkins distinguished 50 creative techniques for problem solving (Creative Problem Solving; CPS)<sup>27</sup>, which have been adapted for the APPRO model. Again, prior to working in this dimension, it is important to teach the CPS method. The next step could be to have each person analyze their own problem and write about it: to specify the problem (challenge) and generate problem solving strategies.

## 5. EMOTIONS: RECOGNITION AND MANAGEMENT

Emotions and cognition are very important aspects of the human psyche. They directly impact not only quality of life but also life itself, even longevity<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> Por. S.G. Isaksen, K.B. Dorval, D.J. Treffinger, *Creative approaches to problem solving: A framework for innovation and change*, SAGE Publications, Thousand Oaks 2011; D.J. Treffinger, D.G. Isaksen, K.B. Dorval, *An introduction to creative problem solving*, Prufrock Press, Waco 2000; D.J. Treffinger, S.G. Isaksen, *Creative problem solving: History, development, and implications for gifted education and talent development*, *The Gifted Child Quarterly* 49(2005), p. 342-353.

<sup>23</sup> Por. R.J. Sternberg, P.A. Frensch, *Complex problem solving: Principles and mechanisms*, Psychology Press, Hillsdale 1991; J.E. Davidson, R.J. Sternberg, *The Psychology of Problem Solving*, Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom 2003; J.E. Pretz, A.J. Naples, R.J. Sternberg, *Recognizing, defining, and representing problems*, in: J.E. Davidson, R.J. Sternberg, *The Psychology of Problem Solving*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2003.

<sup>24</sup> Por. C.W. Taylor, D. Sacks, *Facilitating lifetime creative processes – a think piece*, *Gifted Child Quarterly* 25(1981), p. 116-118.

<sup>25</sup> Por. A. Alenikov, *The future of creativity*, Scholastic Testing Press, Bensenville 2002.

<sup>26</sup> Por. R. Dunn, K. Dunn, D.J. Treffinger, *Bringing out the giftedness in your child*, Wiley, New York 1992.

<sup>27</sup> Por. G. Cox, C. Dufault, W. Hopkins, *50 activities on creativity and problem solving*, Human Resource Development Pr., England 1991.

<sup>28</sup> Por. A. Ellis, *Feeling better, getting better, staying better: Profound self-help therapy for your*

Every day, each person experiences a variety of feelings, tensions, and emotions. Emotions remain a great challenge for today's educators, formation personnel, parents, and people who seek well-being. The problem lies in the fact that many are out of touch their own cognitions and emotions, and may lose opportunities to utilize them creatively. Therefore, there is a great need for programs of formation involving the rich and important world of human emotion.

Although the overall APPRO model is based on positive psychology, it also benefits from other theories and practical approaches developed in psychology: problem solving, mindfulness, cognitive psychology, time management, etc. In the fourth dimension of the program titled "Emotions", individuals will have the opportunity to recognize their own emotions – their content, intensity, quality, and direction. Contact with emotions will bring awareness and can help one to re-affirm their philosophy of life and belief system. APPRO uses: *Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy* (REBT)<sup>29</sup>; *Emotional Intelligence*<sup>30</sup>, and the *Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotion*<sup>31</sup>.

In APPRO's "emotions" column, participants identify their negative and positive emotions, but also enter into a creative and full contact with them. Moreover, they will explore the dynamic processes between cognitions and emotions and the environments in which they arise. REBT is helpful in this regard<sup>32</sup>. REBT emphasizes that every individual has the capacity to largely change self-defeating emotions by changing thoughts. The ABC model is based on three components: Activating Events; Beliefs; and Emotional/Behavioral Consequences.

The first way in which APPRO uses the ABC model is in accordance with the vision of Albert Ellis, to change maladaptive behavior and emotions such as frustration and anger. Second, it is used more broadly to emphasize positive experiences that are not "problematic", but "productive". By adopting the ABCDE philosophy, we will examine the relationships between P(A) P(B) P(C). This can help individuals to appreciate the power of thinking positively instead of negatively.

*emotions*, Impact Publishers, Atascadero 2001.

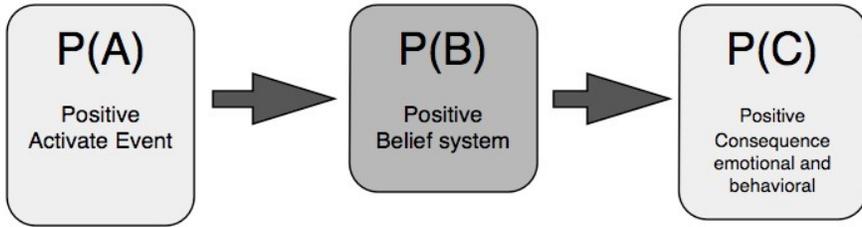
<sup>29</sup> Por. A. Ellis, *How to make yourself happy and remarkably less disturbable*, Impact Publishers, Atascadero 1999.

<sup>30</sup> Por. J.D. Mayer, C.D. Cobb, *Educational Policy on Emotional Intelligence: Does It Make Sense?*, *Educational Psychology Review* 12(2000), p. 163-183; J.D. Mayer, P. Salovey, *What is emotional intelligence?*, in: P. Salovey, D.J. Sluyter, *Emotional Development and Emotional Intelligence: Educational Implications*, Basic Books, New York 1997, p. 3-31; J.D. Mayer, P. Salovey, D.R. Caruso, *Models of emotional intelligence*, in: *Handbook of Intelligence*, ed. R. J. Sternberg, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2000, p. 396-420.

<sup>31</sup> Por. B.L. Fredrickson, *The Role of Positive Emotions in Positive Psychology: The Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions*, *American Psychologist* 56(2001), p. 218-226; B.L. Fredrickson, *The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions*, in: *The Science of Well-Being*, ed. F.A. Huppert, N. Baylis, B. Keverne, Oxford University Press, New York 2005, p. 217-238.

<sup>32</sup> A. Ellis, *Rational emotive behavior therapy: It works for me – It can work for you*, Prometheus Books, Amherst 2004; A. Ellis, W. Dryden, *The practice of rational emotive behavior therapy*, Springer Publishing Company, New York 1997.

Figure: Application of the ABC Model in the context of APPRO



Source: Personal elaboration.

## 6. CULTIVATING THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION: CONTEMPLATION AND MINDFULNESS IN A CATHOLIC CONTEXT

Last but not least is APPRO's spiritual dimension, which is important throughout life. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, each person is "Capax Dei", in that they have capacity for personal contact with God<sup>33</sup>. Positive psychology, while it is not a religion or an explicitly religious field, has recognized the great human need for a relationship with a Higher Power<sup>34</sup>, a "sacred dimension"<sup>35</sup>, and using one's signature strengths and virtues to serve "something bigger"<sup>36</sup>. Martin Seligman wrote, "Positive psychology must be tethered from below to a positive biology, and from above to a positive philosophy, even perhaps a positive theology"<sup>37</sup>.

In order to develop "spirituality", humans have used many different strategies throughout history. APPRO is a program for the formation of Catholic priests and religious, and the path proposed by APPRO is one of Christian mindfulness and contemplation that adds to pre-existing daily prayer life and sacramental practice. Christian mindfulness can be an effective tool for a deeper self-knowledge and contact with the outside world. The inspiration to cultivate mindfulness and contemplation in a Christian context is reflected in the writings of Hungarian Jesuit Franz Jalics.

Mindfulness is difficult to define, due to disagreements in the spiritual and psychotherapeutic literature<sup>38</sup>. Usually it is associated with Eastern contemplative traditions,

<sup>33</sup> Por. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Revised in Accordance with the Official Latin Text Promulgated by Pope John Paul II, Vatican City, Libreria Editrice Vaticana 1997, n. 27.

<sup>34</sup> Por. C. Peterson, C., M.E.P. Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification*, Oxford University Press, New York 2004, p. 599-622.

<sup>35</sup> K.I. Pargament, *Spiritually Integrated Psychotherapy. Understanding and Addressing the Sacred*, The Guilford Press, New York 2007; K.I. Pargament, *Spirituality*, in: *The Encyclopedia of Positive Psychology*, ed. S.J. Lopez, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford 2009, p. 928-932.

<sup>36</sup> Por. M.E.P. Seligman, *Authentic happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment*, Atria Books, New York 2002, p. 263.

<sup>37</sup> Por. Ibidem, p. 251.

<sup>38</sup> Por. S.R. Bishop, M. Lau, S. Shapiro, L. Carlson, N.D. Anderson, J. Carmody, *Mindfulness: A proposed operational definition*, *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice* 11(2004), p. 230-241.

especially Buddhism<sup>39</sup>, and not Christianity, but in reality Christian traditions, especially the East (e.g., Eastern Catholic Churches, Orthodox Christians) have had a flourishing tradition of mindfulness and contemplation, for thousands of years, in which practitioners become self-disciplined, empty themselves of selfishness, and become closer and closer to God through successive levels of prayer<sup>40</sup>. Christian Saints, both known and unknown, (e.g., St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa of Avila) have even achieved Union<sup>41</sup>.

For APPRO's purposes, mindfulness refers to, "attending closely to what is occurring in the mind and body"<sup>42</sup> and "awareness, attention, and remembering"<sup>43</sup> that helps individuals to focus on the present moment.

In Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Therapy (MBSR), mindfulness involves non-judgmental awareness of the present moment that, "nurtures greater awareness, clarity, and acceptance of present-moment reality. It wakes us up to the fact that our lives unfold only in moments. If we are not fully present for many of those moments, we may not only miss what is most valuable in our lives but also fail to realize the richness and the depth of our possibilities for growth, and transformation"<sup>44</sup>. Mindfulness provides many opportunities to cultivate intimacy with one in mind, body, and environment and helps to develop deep interior resources<sup>45</sup>.

It is worth noting that mindfulness in this context is not linked to any specific religious tradition or belief system, but rather refers to a style of awareness and does not replace or conflict with the Catholic faith. Carefully applied, it does not expose people to the danger of syncretism (mixing different belief systems or theological approaches). After a person becomes very aware of the present moment and free from distraction through mindfulness, it is possible that they could have better results with Christian vocal or mental prayer, and it could facilitate "contemplation", which is the second construct in this final APPRO domain.

In APPRO, "contemplation" proceeds from its use by Father Franz Jalics, SJ. His method has rendered contemplative prayer accessible in daily life as a, "simple way characterized by immediacy in the relationship with God"<sup>46</sup>. Contemplation shares much in common with mindfulness, as seen in the book *Contemplative Retreat* and includes an

<sup>39</sup> Por. J. Kabat-Zinn, *Mindfulness-based interventions in context: Past, present, and future*, Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice 10/2(2003), p. 144-156; S.L. Shapiro, L.E. Carlson, J.A. Astin, B. Freedman, *Mechanisms of mindfulness*, Journal of Clinical Psychology 62(2006), p. 373-386.

<sup>40</sup> Por. K.C. Markides, *The Mountain of Silence: A Search for Orthodox Spirituality*, Image Books, New York 2002; *The Way of a Pilgrim and The Pilgrim Continues his Way*, ed. O. Savin, T. Hopko, Image Books, New York 2001.

<sup>41</sup> Por. R. Martin, *The Fulfillment of all Desire*, Emmaus Road Publishing, Steubenville 2006.

<sup>42</sup> Por. B.A. Wallace, *Minding closely: the four applications of mindfulness*, Snow Lion, Ithaca 2011, p. 56.

<sup>43</sup> Por. C.K. Germer, *Mindfulness: What is it? What does it matter?*, in: *Mindfulness and Psychotherapy*, ed. C.K. Germer, R.D. Siegel, P.R. Fulton, The Guilford Press, New York 2005, p. 5.

<sup>44</sup> Por. J. Kabat-Zinn, *Wherever You Go There You Are*, Hyperion, New York 1994, p. 4.

<sup>45</sup> Por. J. Kabat-Zinn, *Mindfulness for Beginners. Reclaiming the Present Moment – and Your Life*, Sounds True, Boulder 2012, p. 4.

<sup>46</sup> Por. F. Jalics, *Contemplative Retreat. An Introduction to the Contemplative Way to Life and to the Jesus Prayer*, Xulon Press, Longwood/Florida 2003, p. 3.

ability to be aware and open and live in the present moment. However, there are also fundamental differences. For instance, contemplation goes beyond the “self”. The human person, the “I” is invited to enter into relationship with the “Thou”, who is God. Christian mindfulness serves to increase one’s awareness of God’s all encompassing presence at each moment in our daily lives. In the introduction to his book, Jalics reminds us that there are three classical stages in spiritual life<sup>47</sup>: the way of purification, the way of illumination, and the way of union. In other words, the spiritual life can be viewed as progression from pre-contemplative prayer towards profound contemplative prayer and union.

Jalics believes that the state of contemplation can be given by God as an infused Grace, but it also can be “conquered” through the preparation of active contemplation. “Sometimes this state is simply given by God. The usual way, however, is by consciously preparing ourselves to hold fast to God, to let go of all logical thinking and to focus on our own psychological progress. This transitional phase is also called active contemplation, because we still do actively fix our attention”<sup>48</sup>.

This is useful for candidates preparing for the priesthood or religious life, as it involves cultivating mindfulness as they grow in observational skills while living in the present moment with fuller attention. All of these are important for active contemplation. Surely, there are many paths to contemplation, but one of them stems from mindfulness. Contemplative prayer thus involves a specific form of “activity” (watching, looking, seeing). The Latin word *contemplari* means seeing, looking<sup>49</sup>. But in reality, contemplation describes a way of being and occurs during-but is not limited to- moments of prayer and silence.

APPRO’s mindfulness-contemplation dimension focuses on helping participants to grow in their ability to “look and see”, without observing, concentrating, or analyzing, since these mental processes involve cognitive effort. Indeed, looking or seeing without any judgment<sup>50</sup> leads to awareness that helps individuals to stay in the present. Therefore, the final column of APPRO is not about thinking, feeling, or even acting, but growing in attentiveness to reality. “The contemplative attitude leads us to an astonishing serenity. Everything that is, is allowed to be. We do not need to change anything. We leave everything as it stands. We seek no knowledge and do not observe. We just look. What is the difference between observing and looking? Observation seeks something for itself, looking is selfless. We know the difference very well. We would never ask God to observe us. But we are happy when He looks at us kindly. In eternal life we shall not be observing God, but shall live in the vision of God”<sup>51</sup>.

Recently, the medical community has recognized an important relationship between mindfulness, emotional well-being, and mental health<sup>52</sup>. This is another rea-

<sup>47</sup> Por. Ibidem, p. 4-6.

<sup>48</sup> Por. Ibidem.

<sup>49</sup> Por. Ibidem, p. 24.

<sup>50</sup> Note: The authors are not suggesting here that participants suspend their moral judgment.

<sup>51</sup> Por. F. Jalics, *Contemplative ...*, p. 26.

<sup>52</sup> Por. Z.V. Segal, J.D. Teasdale, J.M. Williams, *Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy: Theoretical rationale and empirical status*, in: *Mindfulness and Acceptance*, ed. S.C. Hayes, V.M. Follette,

son to introduce Christian mindfulness into seminars and formation. Mindfulness, although quite simple and accessible to everyone, is often not easy. It requires great effort, discipline, and practice<sup>53</sup>. In this way, it builds character. Mindfulness and contemplation can be cultivated: The first way relates to certain periods of time that are to be dedicated to meditation, i.e., to the time spent in the practice of “being” and “seeing” and, to places in which a person feels comfortable meditating. The second way is less formal and is refers to spontaneous moments in life in which the person experiences contact with the other or himself and attempts to just stay and “capture” the present moment, and this is particularly useful during emotional distress<sup>54</sup>.

In APPRO, mindfulness exercises rely on the planned and spontaneous situations during the day where participants learn to become aware of their emotions, senses, and thought processes. Jalics (2003) offers a useful strategy that involves a gradual process of awareness from the external world towards the internal world of the mind, emotions, and spiritual awareness. This is included in APPRO: from vocal and mental prayer and basic mindfulness (awareness of oneself in the external and internal contexts) to contemplation (awareness of oneself in relationship to God).

Jalics states, “contemplative prayer in contrast is not making, but allowing things to happen”<sup>55</sup>. The next important step is the transition from focusing upon oneself (mindfulness) to God-centeredness (contemplation), which reflects metanoia (gr. μετανοια) and leads to contemplative prayer: focusing totally on God. “Contemplative prayer is surrender, service, and praise of God with our whole being, i.e., to be there, to exist for God”<sup>56</sup>. The strategy to open one’s heart, mind, and soul to God is learning to entrust oneself step by step to Him – one’s time, situations, feelings, desires, in short all that is in the here and now. It is difficult to entrust something if it is out of one’s awareness. Therefore, self-awareness is a key to active contemplation.

In the beginning, mindfulness helps participants to “focus” on their bodies, or environment but the final goal shifts the focus to God. This gives Him more space and opportunities to act. “If we aim at fighting self-centeredness, we shall find ourselves immediately in a vicious circle. We’ll remain with ourselves. But if our heart and attention are with Him, we’re oriented toward Him. Your self-centeredness is His problem”<sup>57</sup>. APPRO suggests that participants use vocal prayer (Our Father, Hail

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M.M. Linehan, *The Guilford Press*, New York 2004, p. 45-65; Z.V. Segal, J.M.G. Williams, J.D. Teasdale, *Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy for depression: A new approach to preventing relapse*, The Guilford Press, New York 2002; M. Williams, J. Teasdale, Z. Segal, J. Kabat-Zinn, *The mindful way through depression: Freeing yourself from chronic unhappiness*, The Guilford Press, New York 2007; L.E. Carlson, K. Brown, *Validation of the mindful attention awareness scale in a cancer population*, *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* 58/1(2005), p. 29-33; J. Kabat-Zinn, L. Lipworth, R. Burney, *The clinical use of mindfulness meditation for the self-regulation of chronic pain*, *Journal of Behavioral Medicine* 8/2(1985), p. 163-190.

<sup>53</sup> Por. J. Kabat-Zinn, *Wherever ...*, p. 8.

<sup>54</sup> Por. J. Kabat-Zinn, *Mindfulness...*, p. 2.

<sup>55</sup> Por. F. Jalics, *Contemplative ...*, p. 69.

<sup>56</sup> Por. *Ibidem*, p. 79.

<sup>57</sup> Por. *Ibidem*, p. 100.

Mary and so forth), reflective/mental prayer (meditation), and active contemplative prayer (resting in God's presence).

In general, mindfulness includes two groups of activities. The first is based on exercises such as walking, physical exercises, eating, undertaking routine household/domestic chores, doing outdoor tasks e.g. gardening, clearing land, or raising crops. The second consists of observational exercises e.g., breathing, body awareness and deep relaxation, sitting meditation, mindful silence, mindful listening. Both types of exercises might be undertaken in groups or alone.

Other examples of exercises in APPRO are those that connect with the spiritual dimension and positive aspects of life.

Positive Spiritual Practice #1 - "Good News – Gospel"

This exercise consists of reading and meditating on the Gospel as "Good News". In participants' daily meeting with the Word of God (Bible) at Mass or in private, participants ask themselves: What kind "positive message"<sup>58</sup> has God given me today (Good News)? How can I apply it today, to myself and others?

Positive Spiritual Practice #2 - "Holy Mass - Gratitude"

The term Eucharist (gr. εὐχαριστία) means "giving thanks"<sup>59</sup>. In the context of vocation, these exercises encourage participants to approach every Mass with gratitude and thanksgiving. For example, they should ask themselves: "What am I particularly grateful for today and how do I express it?"

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

All five dimensions of APPRO are interrelated, integrated, and self-reinforcing. They concern the human dimension and seek to strengthen that which is positive and good in participants. APPRO is integrative in that it helps to connect the "human" and spiritual/religious dimensions of a participant's life (i.e., personal needs, time management, vocation, ministry, and the mission of the Church). For example, mindfulness, prayer, and contemplation impact participants and what is occurring in their lives. This impacts quality of life and well-being and effectiveness in ministry.

Although APPRO alone is certainly not enough to cover the entire human formation of participants and needs to be combined with solid Catholic education and individual spiritual direction, it is important. In addition, APPRO needs to be implemented in a practical way, and studies of participants' experiences in APPRO, with refinement of the model, are essential before widespread implementation.

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<sup>58</sup> The term "positive message" is understood very broadly. It is not just something "good and positive" but rather a conduit to deep and authentic goodness, transformation, and intimacy with God and other human beings. In short, it leads to true happiness and is not a mere source of cheap mood reinforcement. Healing --not only comforting (Personal elaboration).

<sup>59</sup> Por. J.L. González, *Essential theological terms*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville 2005, p. 56.

THE FIVE DIMENSIONS OF THE APPRO PROGRAM:  
EXPLANATION AND SPECIFICATION

## Summary

This article discusses the five fundamental dimensions of the “Activity Program Positive Personal Development” (APPRO) formation program. It is addressed not only to the environment of the Church, seminarians, priests, and male and female religious, but also to anyone who wishes to grow in well-being within a Catholic context. APPRO is a positive psychological approach. The five dimensions relevant to human formation of candidates to the priesthood and religious life include: gratitude, time management, accepting challenges, emotions, and spirituality. All those elements are integral to human flourishing and indirectly bound with the quality of vocation and the mission of the Church.

**Keywords:** APPRO, positive psychology, human formation, program

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## PIIĘĆ WYMIARÓW PROGRAMU APPRO: OBJAŚNIENIA I SPECYFIKACJA

## Abstrakt

Artykuł omawia pięć fundamentalnych wymiarów programu formacyjnego zwanego „Aktywny Program Pozytywnego Rozwoju Osobistego” (APPRO). Adresowany jest on nie tylko do środowiska kościelnego, ale również do każdego, kto chciałby wzrastać w dobrostanie ludzkim. APPRO wykorzystuje wiedzę współczesnych nurtów psychologicznych, w których znaczące miejsce zajmuje psychologia pozytywna. Pośród pięciu wymiarów istotnych w formacji ludzkiej kandydatów do kapłaństwa i życia zakonnego są: wdzięczność, zarządzanie czasem, przyjmowanie wyzwań, uczucia oraz duchowość. Wszystkie te elementy są integralnie związane z ludzkim dobrostanem, a pośrednio z jakością powołania i przeżywaniem misji w Kościele.

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**Słowa kluczowe:** APPRO, psychologia pozytywna, ludzka formacja, program

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