# CRISES OF CATHOLIC SEMINARIANS

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Abstract: Preparation for priestly vocation in the Catholic Church in Slovak seminaries is unusual in that it is in direct contrast to today's trend of liberalization. It is very strict and based on traditional values, which have survived for two thousand years. This training causes many problems and issues that manifest themselves in crises of seminarians. The research problem – how Greek Catholic and Latin Catholic theologians managed to solve crises during university studies and their stay in the seminary – has been studied using qualitative research methods, in-depth interviews, which is the main research method of phenomenological analysis. The research offers findings on what personal crises theologians identified during university, how they solved them and how they evaluate these crises. The research includes indirect a slowly-emerging facts that brought depth examination of the research problem – different atmosphere and a different relationship between the Greek Catholic and Latin Catholic theologians. At the end of article the author provides a comparison of research results from both examined groups.

Keywords: Catholic seminarians. Crisis of priestly vocation. Crisis of celibacy.

## 1 Introduction

Despite the considerable openness of today's society, the life of seminarians is veiled in mystery and not only for the general public. In the Slovak literature it is as if this group does not exist. This is partly due to the still continuing class antagonism, which we have unfortunately inherited from the socialist era. However, it appears that the substantial reason for their being no examination of the life of seminarians is the considerable seclusion of the environment in which seminarians prepare for the priestly vocation. So for researchers from the outside (secular) environment, it is difficult to get to this small and specific group of university students.

The result of this state is that the Slovak professional literature addresses the issues of seminarians only marginally (and we could say the same about the neighbouring Czech Republic). It particularly stands out that this subject is only of marginal concern even at theological faculties. One exception is Škurla's monograph (2013), *The Human Formation of Future Priests*. In addition, titles appear sporadically focusing on the psychology of religion and the influence of religiosity on an individual's personality (Sríženec, 2011).

Conversely, this is a richly represented subject in foreign literature. The formation of seminarians is the topic of the American *Seminary Journal*. Professional publications focused on the subject of seminary education can be divided into several groups: 1. Priestly formation – preparation for the role of a spiritual leader (Guindon, 1993; Sperry, 2003; Coleman, 2006; Fischer, 2010; Marsh, 2010; Cencini, 2011). 2. Intellectual formation – how priestly seminaries prepare seminarians for their roles as teachers in parish Catholic schools (Boyle and Dosen, 2017), how the seminarians themselves perceive their role in Catholic schools (Simonds et al., 2017). 3. Updating the preparation of future priests for changed social conditions – the challenges of priestly formation in relation to the present life of Catholics in the United States have been defined by McCarthy (2013), and Scholtus (2013) has studied the same subject in the context of European conditions. 4. Various aspects affecting the quality of preparation of seminarians – the relationship between the determination to persevere in the vocation and the wellbeing of Catholic seminarians has been studied by Sunardi (2014), the influence of racism and prejudices on the formation of seminarians has been assessed by Ortiz (2012), the development of intercultural competences has been studied by Deck (2012).

Foreign literature does not avoid even the most difficult topics by associated with the preparation of priests. Weber (2012) and Reinert (2012) investigated how addiction to pornography is reflected in formation at seminaries, Gregoire and Jungers (2004) defined effective methods of preventing sexual abuse by the spiritual faculty members during their formation in the seminary.

In the article we compare two groups of seminarians – Latin Catholic[1] and Greek Catholic theologians trained for priestly vocation in various seminaries that have different organizations of ritual and tradition within these legal differences. The most perceived difference of the two rites is voluntary celibacy in the Greek Catholic rite, while the Latin Catholic rite retains compulsory celibacy.

## 2 Crisis

Although seminarians are preparing for the priesthood, which is perceived by people as a profession that helps other people to overcome the crises, they themselves do not avoid crises, quite the opposite. They are part of the preparation for the priestly vocation and they do not avoid them even when they become priests.

Crisis is a notorious and repeating concept in social sciences (Eastham, Coates and Allodi, 2010). It is important for the purposes of this work that we explain what crises we are considering, because the term crisis is used with varying meanings. It is the lack of something or a fall (Šaling, Šalingová and Maníková, 2008). In the medical sciences, this term refers to a sudden reversal in the course of a disease; in political life it refers to the fall of a government and is caused by an extraordinary situation; in economics it refers to a disruption of the balance between supply and demand, and in literary texts, a crisis signifies the culmination of the plot of a drama or a novel. In addition, we can talk about the personal crisis and a crisis in an organization or society (Sisco, 2010).

In the personal life of an individual, a crisis is a period of uncertainty and confusion, in which the meaning of a person's identity becomes uncertain. It is usually caused by changes in a person's expectations or new tasks brought by society (Říčan, 2005). A crisis is an emotional and physical reaction to events which disturb our normal everyday functioning. Everyone experiences crises and addressing them is how we grow and develop. According to current concepts of psychological crisis is a temporary state of internal imbalance caused by critical events or life events that require a fundamental change and a solution.

Knowledge of crises can be summarized as in these points:

1. The individual, during his life, is exposed to periods which are characterized by increasing internal and external tensions, which disturb his state of equilibrium with the surrounding environment.
2. This state disturbs the emotional balance of personality and at the same time starts an adaptation formula for the automatic solution to the problem. If the problem is not resolved, the tension causes anxiety and discomfort and may reach a culmination point.
3. At this point, adaptation mechanisms cease functioning and the individual finds himself in a state of acute crisis, which is manifested in disorganization and the development of psychiatric symptoms. This is followed by a period of gradual reorganization until a state of equilibrium is achieved.
4. Stress events associated with crisis can be seen by the individual as a threat to their basic needs, their own sovereignty or well-being.

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[1] Translators note: the main Roman Catholic rite in the West and worldwide.

5. Experiencing of these conditions causes the characteristic emotional reactions – worry, sadness, grief.
6. A crisis is not a disease or a pathological phenomenon. It reflects the attempt of the individual to cope with a difficult situation.
7. The duration of the crisis – from the initial complaint to the resolution of the crisis – may vary a lot in different individuals. It depends on the severity of the threatening events and reactions of the individual, his social situation.
8. Each specific example of the crisis may have predictable stages which are expressed with a certain emotional experience and specific behaviour. (Špatenková, 2002).

For the needs of the article an important term is Erikson's identity crisis relating to an active process of self-determination. Erikson, by this term, meant doubts about oneself, which are an integral part of healthy psychosocial development (Atkinson and Atkinson, 1995). Ideally an identity crisis should be solved in a person's early or mid twenties. And this is precisely the period studied in our participants. Their crisis concerns specifically the priestly vocation and that which is inextricably linked to it – firstly the issue of celibacy. When the process of solving the identity crisis has been successfully resolved, we say that the person has gained their own identity. This means that they have chosen or accepted, in our case, their professional focus. This involves a consistent feeling about oneself and a set of internal criteria for evaluating self-worth.

In the article we have focussed on the crises of seminarians relating to their priestly vocation and celibacy.

**3 Research Methodology**

This study presents the results of empirical research, in which we are using a qualitative approach to examine the beginning, progress, solution and assessment of crises in Latin Catholic and Greek Catholic seminarians. The basic research question was: How did Greek Catholic and Latin Catholic seminarians cope with crises during their studies at university and the seminary? Our basic research question is reflected in the specific research questions:

1. What crises did participants experience in the environment of university and the seminary?
2. How did these crises progress?
3. How did the participants solve these crises?
4. How did participants assess these crises?

We chose a qualitative approach because it offers research strategies respecting the fact that man is a being acting and following certain intentions, that man is a being forming an understanding of meaning (Plichtova, 2002).

The aim of research – describing and interpreting crises, which occurred during university in our participants, thus documenting the world from their perspective (Silverman, 2005), is part of the philosophical position of interpretivism used in qualitative methodology. Among all the branches offering qualitative design we decided for phenomenological analysis. Its essence lies in the fact that the researcher is trying to enter the inner world of the individual to understand the importance that he attaches to the examined phenomenon (Hendl, 2005). It seeks to reveal the experience – feelings, thoughts, and self-awareness (Gavora, 2009) of the world of a selected group of people. In this world we choose a phenomenon that affects all participants – the perception of crisis.

The research sample consists of two groups of participants – 7 Latin Catholic seminarians in their fifth year and 7 Greek Catholic seminarians in their sixth year. Our aim was to investigate participants in their final years of study. These students could most comprehensively assess how, under the influence of university and the seminary, they had coped with crises.

To collect research material we used in-depth semi-structured interview, which is the main research method in phenomenological analysis (Kerlinger, 1972). Interviews with students took place at the premises of the faculties in which participants studied.

*Data processing*
In total we recorded and transcribed 14 interviews. Another step in processing the recorded material was coding. We used open coding, which was developed in the framework of analytical tools of grounded theory. Due to its simplicity and efficiency it is useful in a wide range of qualitative projects. It's a simple, yet quite laborious technique, but the initial effort of the researcher leads to detailed and in-depth work with the text and will later be rewarded by uncovering meanings that may not be obvious superficially (Švaříček and Šeďová, 2007). This is an inductive technique. Concepts and categories are created based on the collected material. What emerge as new during open coding are ideas, categories and concepts, which are then grouped by similarity. This creates the basis for their future "networking", defining the relationships and dependencies between them.

First, we deconstructed the transcribed interview – divided it into units, not formally, based on paragraphs or lines, but according to meanings. The units in our case were the words, parts of sentences, whole sentences, compound sentences or paragraphs. In this way there emerged data extracts, which in the second part, the coding stage (conceptualization) (Strauss and Corbinova, 1999), we assigned some code. We gave them a name (a word or short phrase), that was an indication that somehow evokes a certain type and distinguishes it from the others. For each data item, we asked ourselves what is it? What does it represent? Gradually, we compared the individual data items so that similar phenomena were assigned the same name. Otherwise, after analyzing, we would have many names, which would confuse us.

The third step was to organize the codes into categories according to how they were related or unrelated they were to each other. This categorization could be described as a process of grouping together concepts that belong to the same phenomenon. The phenomenon represented a certain category is designated by the term, but the concept includes more abstract concepts such as identifying codes that belong to the category.

After coding interviews, we compared the data fragments from all interviews falling into one code to find out whether there were any that belonged under another code, or if we had not used different codes for the same data content. In the second stage of coding (recoding) some different codes were merged into one, because under the different labels, we had discovered the same content.

*Analysis of data*
For data processing, which we got to using open coding, we used the technique of "showing cards" (Švaříček and Šeďová, 2007). This adequately meets our intention to describe and then compare the experience of crisis in Latin Catholic and Greek Catholic seminarians.

Quotations from interviews in this work are distinguished using italics. The quoted text has not undergone grammar/language correction and also shown with drafting errors and non-literary terms, as it was transcribed from an audio recording. For each citation in brackets, there is an identification code that we have created for the purposes of this work. We decided not to even use fictitious names, so that there is no association between the quotes and the names of our research participants. Quotations of Greek Catholic seminarians are identified by the abbreviation GK with LK for Latin Catholic seminarians. Moreover, every code includes two numbers. The first number means the page of the interview from which the excerpt is quoted; the second is the serial number of the interview.

## 4 Crisis of Creek Catholic Seminarians

Data items relating to the crisis of vocation were divided into three codes: the presence of the crisis, the solution of the crisis and the assessment of the crisis. Participants spoke very openly and in detail, which meant that the category of *Crisis* was richly filled.

### 4.1 Presence of crisis

The occurrence of a crisis was most commonly associated with the pastoral year. It came just before the start, during or after its completion. There is an explanation for this. The pastoral year is timed in the middle of studies, after the third year. It ends part of the study, which is dominated by non-theological subjects – philosophy, languages, and church history. During the pastoral year, the seminarian spends the whole year in another environment, in a parish, pastoral or educational facility. Apart from trying life in a different environment and learning how his practical and spiritual abilities apply in practice, it is a time for reflection on whether he wants to continue along the path to priesthood. After the pastoral year, there dominates theological study in subjects that herald the coming priesthood. But a time of crisis is not only associated with the pastoral year. It may appear with different degrees of intensity throughout studies. *But as for the priesthood, there have been crises with me since the first year.* (3GK3) *Things do not always go according to plan as they should, so... I think that even now I am at a crossroads. I'm at such a point that how and what to grasp for and I have experience that it depends to the extent to which I will be honest to myself, to God.* (6GK4) Or crisis engages the entire being of the seminarian just before the end of the study. *Just this past year and winter semester – last 5 – 6 months has been such that I wondered if it really worthwhile being a priest.* (4GK6) For some people at the end of studies a crisis may still be being solved. *I have just gone though quite a serious crisis, let's say that it hasn't been brought to an end. I had quite an attitude against it, not against the priesthood, but that the priesthood is not for me.* (3GK3)

Crises concern two main issues. The first is to be or not to be a priest. If so, will I be a good priest? Second, what is the meaning of the priesthood? Not all participants talked about these issues in relation to crisis; some expressed themselves as having strong doubts about these issues. Nevertheless, the word crisis has its firm place in the dictionary of seminarians. *In my life I've had two kinds of crises. The first was whether I am able to be a priest, and if I will be a good priest and so forth. ( ) In the seminary I more experienced why be a priest, why be a priest, when in my life I could be a lawyer, IT worker, politician, it does not matter what and it would be better for me and I would have more money, I would not have worries.* (3GK7)

These issues suggest that the aforementioned crises relate to the establishment of priestly identity. The strongest state of identity, according to Marcia (Atkinson and Atkinson, 1995) is achieved identity[2]. It is typical that a person is aware of a problem in some areas and uses a crisis to resolve it. It is therefore something of his own, not taken from parents, relatives or from the surroundings. This is the value of obtained identity.

### 4.2 Solving crisis

All participants in the group of Greek theologians admitted that the above-mentioned issues are a problem for them. We were interested to learn, therefore, not only whether the problem had been solved, but also how they had arrived at solution.

Confiding in someone that one is experiencing a crisis requires a lot of confidence. This is an internal matter that is beyond the limit of spiritual intimacy. It is not surprising that participants stated that part of their solution was a more intense spiritual life. In this sense, the answer: *The chapel,* (2GK5) to the question

where you seek help in a crisis is very authentic. It is an expression of faith that God can help one get out of a crisis. *I go into repentance and listen to his voice. I believe that He has the ability to take care of me, to break me away from each crisis.* (6GK4) He who realizes that he is called by God, wants to solve the problem of the profession with God.

It is possible to understand in the same way the desire to work towards solving the crisis with the help of a confessor or spiritual leader, who are bound to secrecy. *It is going well with my spiritual father. I had quite an attitude against it, not against the priesthood, but that the priesthood is not for me, but my spiritual father does not see it that way. I'm trying to explore, he recommended I deepen my personal prayer, which I am also trying to do now, and it gave me calm in my life.* (3GK3) *Mainly I prayed what to do next.* (4GK2)

It is surprising that a significant role in solving crises was played by classmates from the same year. *My brothers in the year group helped me, visited me, encouraged me, we are here with you.* (7GK1) Cohesion in the year is apparent from the statements of all participants in the group of Greek seminarians. It is expressed in mutual trust and willingness to help.

An important way to solve the crisis appears to be reminding oneself of the original decision to join the priesthood. As if one of the causes of the crisis was gradually forgetting the primary motive for being a priest. (During the crisis) *I very intensively reminded myself of why I wanted to go into the priesthood, that it was God's invitation, to whom I said yes, and that in retrospect I see that God fulfils, but the circumstances are sometimes such that that we hesitate. ( ) But when it was really difficult, then I went back to my decision when I gave God a definitive yes.* (3GK7)

In solving progress of a crisis, the mentioned aspects interact. Out of four (classmates in grade, spiritual leader/confessor, prayer, reminding oneself of the initial decision for the priesthood), usually three factors can occur in one seminarian and in various combinations. This is most aptly described by these data items. *It was mainly through prayer, it was the word of God through the contemplation, which often fell in such a way that I was left in awe. But it was also through the words of people. And it was also through certain situations. Also, through the priests.* (5GK2) *Mainly I prayed what to do. The lord helped me in this... and I shared with some brothers, and one priest.* (4GK2) Here there interact prayer, help of classmates and priests.

Passing through a crisis of vocation still has a significant effect. In the case of two seminarians who consider themselves introverts, there was a change of attitude in solving problems. *I'm more of an introvert, so I solve many things itself – I and the Lord God and I don't much let other people into it. Not that just me, but me and God and we sort it out, but then there came a change of attitude that God can speak through people into my situation and I recognized it was like that.* (4GK2) Help from classmates helps overcome the crisis, but it also creates a strong trust in which the seminarian feels safe that he opens up to solving the problem in the community. *My brothers in the year group helped me, visited me, encouraged me, we are here with you. They helped from such emphatic, sometimes individual thinking and approach to the problem, to a thought-out a common solution to the problem. ( ) That was the turning point. When I was a first-year, a second-year, I was a bit of a loner. I didn't pull away from the community, it's not that if someone came to me that I would send him away, but rather I tried to solve any problems myself. And then the third-year on, I was more open to the community. Even when they told me that I was like this or like that, I took it in the sense that they want what's good from me.* (7GK1) This case shows the positive side of socialization. Willingness to help classmates from the year-group creates a relationship of trust, which dissolves the unwillingness to open up to others. It is a typical example of where community acceptance of individuals helps the individual to solve their crisis.

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[2]Apart from achieved identity, Marcia lists foreclosure, moratorium and identity diffusion (Atkinson and Atkinson, 1995).

From interviews with participants in the group of Greek seminarians, it emerges that the crisis starts with some problem in the life of seminarians. This is connected with major inner turmoil and personal suffering. Contrastingly, the conclusion – resolution of the crisis is accompanied by establishing inner peace, inner balance and the end of suffering. *I search in that decision for such peace, probably about the fact that I decide to do something and in it there is peace. I feel that peace is in it, even though there may still be some things to come, some problems, but I'm going after that journey, I have decided and I go after it.* (6GK3)

From the expressions of the seminarians at what stage their own solutions to the crisis are, we find two types of identity – achieved identity[3] (seminarian is aware of the problem and has solved it) and moratorium identity[4] (seminarian in the midst of crisis is actively working to resolve the issue, but it has still not been resolved).

In solving crisis among the participants in the group of Greek seminarians, a significant role was played by:

- classmates in the year,
- spiritual leader/confessor,
- prayer,
- reminding oneself of the initial decision for the priesthood.

**4.3 Assessing the crisis**

As occurrence of a crisis is a rare unifying element of all participants of this group, they all assessed the impact of the crisis on their lives positively. *The crisis for me is not a catastrophe, but a state when I have to decide. Whether I want to or not.* (5GK2)

The transition from year to year gradually changes the view of seminarians of the priesthood and of his own person and abilities. The result of this awareness is the question of whether the seminarian is well prepared for their profession and whether they even want the priesthood, with which they have gradually become acquainted. *I think every crisis is good in that it is an offer to stop and revise the current status or way of thinking and choose how I want to continue. If I am doing well, to affirm it, and when I am doing something wrong, to return quickly.* (6GK4) *There were moments when I fell into doubt and I thought about it, but I think it was a good process where God gave me the opportunity to re-make decisions, whether I still want or do not want.* (4GK6)

The significance of crisis lies in the fact that the seminarian recognizes the value of his profession more strongly. If you invest a lot of energy in something, we value it more. Of course, this also applies in reverse. *I think it is a necessity, because when a person does not need to fight for something, then he cannot appreciate it.* (4GK6). With the effort that must be made to cope with crises is associated an awareness of ones own share of vocation. The Catholic tradition stresses that one is called into priestly ministry by God. In this understanding, a person can feel like a passive recipient. Conversely, an effortful overcoming of a crisis creates an awareness of co-participation in the priestly vocation. *I know that my vocation that I receive from God, is not just something that God has given me, but it's also something which I am able to put my hand in, which I could fight for a bit.* (4GK6) Here is shown a strong element of Christian faith in

joining their own activity and capabilities with that which God gives. This symbiosis is a sign of a mature Christian attitude, a sign of a mature Christian faith. At the same time this approach to vocation builds personal dignity. A seminarian is not just a passive recipient of vocation; he is an active co-creator of his life. On this basis, one can build a healthy human and Christian confidence.

According to participants, a crisis is a difficult but necessary condition of spiritual and personal growth, which over some time resolves basic issues, but at the moment there appear more, it comes again, so that it takes away that which is unnecessary and helps to accept the necessary. *It's necessary, but no one enters it with love and joy. I take it as a natural necessity for development, which is still to come. I know that one needs to fight, that it will help me.* (10GK1)

At the same time, crisis is perceived by seminarians as an indicator of a problem. *Many times, a crisis stops a man in his life and directs him to a problem.* (6GK2). Although active progression through a crisis – the search for solutions and help from others, solves the current problem, seminarians' experiences are that the current situation is not definitive and more crises that will arise to be addressed. *I am prepared for there being more crises; there have already been smaller ones. I do not take it as a definitive state, which will be one hundred blissful years, because I would stay in one place and get nowhere and not move on.* (5GK2)

According to participants are the main benefits brought by passing through a crisis are:

- the opportunity to revise the current way of life and decide again;
- appreciating what a person has received;
- having a share in the priestly vocation;
- building personal dignity.

**5 Crisis of Latin Catholic Seminarians**
Achieved identity is marked by two basic signs. A person with this kind of identity has undergone an identity crisis and has resolved it. In the case of participants in the group Latin Catholic seminarians we were interested in the crisis in the context of their priestly vocation. We were interested to know whether the participants in this group ever admitted doubting questions about their priestly vocation,[5] either from other people or themselves. Based on their responses to the crisis of priestly vocation we will try to answer the question of what kind of priestly identity these seminarians have at the end of priestly formation.

**5.1 Presence of crisis**

The priestly vocation is specific in that it is accepted as a lifetime commitment. If the priest does not fulfil that commitment and leaves the priestly ministry, this is to be understood as a failure. A specificity of the priestly vocation in the Latin Catholic Church is emphasized as mandatory celibacy. A milestone in the life of seminarians who are preparing for the priesthood is entrance into the clerical state, which happens on accepting diaconal ordination at the end of the fifth year of theological studies. In a short period of time after the diaconal ordination, usually after the sixth year, there follows priestly ordination.

In the group of Latin Catholic seminarians we identified the presence of dual crises:

- crisis of priestly vocation,
- crisis of celibacy.

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[3] People with achieved identity have undergone an identity crisis and actively asked questions for self-determination. They hold ideological positions, which they themselves have worked out. They reconsider the religious and political positions of their families and rejected those that can not be reconciled with their identity. Achieved identity is something like intellectual property, which a person has worked for through their own efforts. This contains great value and at the same time is a source of relative permanence (Atkinson and Atkinson, 1995).
[4] Moratorium identity status is typical for young people in the middle of an identity crisis. They tend to actively seek answers to their questions, but have still not resolved the conflict between the expectations of parents and their own plans. They ardently express political and religious beliefs to leave them at the next moment. A short duration of a moratorium may be acceptable and even constructive for the future, because it allows young people to explore the possibilities which come into their consideration (Vagnerova, 2010).

[5] Under the term *priestly vocation* we do not mean merely "employment as a priest" but vocation in this sense of being in some way called into priestly service. This is a specific kind of religious identity, which is very closely connected to the knowledge that the decision to be a priest is not merely the decision of a private individual for a particular type of activity and lifestyle, but it is the answer of a person to God's calling.

These two types of crises are part of the four-level model of the crisis (Table 1), which we have compiled on the basis of the testimonies of participants of this studied group.

The first stage of crisis of priestly vocation is found in the first year. It is due to idealistic notions of seminarians – future priests, which beginning seminarians have brought into the seminary. *In the first year I had two* (crises). *First, what am I doing here in the seminary? This was a disappointment that this beautiful romantic monastery was a residence full of all kinds of people and not saints, but people with their faults.* (9RK6)

Table 1 *Four stage model of crisis of Latin Catholic seminarians*

| | Type of crisis | Question | Period of beginning | Cause of crisis |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1.stage | crisis of priestly vocation | Should the seminarian be a priest? | beginning of first year | disappointment from faults of older seminarians |
| 2. stage | crisis of priestly vocation | Should the seminarian be a priest? | first – second year | realisation of own faults |
| 3. stage | crisis of priestly vocation | Should the seminarian be a priest? | first half of studies | more realistic knowledge of priestly service |
| 4. stage | crisis of celibacy | Should the seminarian accept celibacy? | pastoral year or second half of studies | personal realisation of the burden of lifelong celibacy |

The crisis caused by optimistic expectations has its continuation in the awareness of seminarians that even they do not meet the criteria they put on the others. Knowing their own fault in a period of idealistic notions of priesthood is a source of strong doubt as to whether a person is worthy of the priestly vocation. *The second was disappointment in myself that I'm going to the priesthood and whether I am worthy.* (9RK6) The third stage of the crisis has its origins in a more realistic knowledge of the nature of priestly ministry. Coming to the seminary is consulting "behind the scenes" of the priesthood. And there one can also see the difficult and unpleasant part of priestly life. Abandonment of idealistic notions of the priesthood is painful. *I do not know whether it was in the first or second year, but I realized that my desires and imaginations do not match with how a priest is. It is often about something completely different than any romance or beauty.* (9RK6) The fourth stage of the crisis begins with awakening to a state in which a seminarian more strongly and more personally realizes the burden of mandatory celibacy. *So there remained whether to be a diocesan priest, or to raise a family and go in a completely different direction. And one time this came to the surface and another time the other.* (11RK1) The beginning of this stage of the crisis is usually linked to the *pastoral year, where I was confronted with girls. I was in a centre for young people and the vast majority of visitors there were girls, with whom I spoke, and we discussed all these things with regard to the church. It was a different view of a woman and relationship with her. And here too we are still confronted, as we study with the laity and the girls, we went out for a beer, a coffee, sit, talk. And so I began to realize that you probably can't rationally defend that celibacy is a good thing.* (4RK2)

**5.2 Solving the crisis**

Latin Catholic seminarians did not resolve their crises with fellow students. Neither with classmates from their year-group nor with students from other years. *So I went to priests, I did not address spiritual life issues much with the seminarians. But either it was a confessor or the spiritual director here.* (2RK7) It was not in all cases a refusal of classmates to help, on the contrary, the seminarian expected interest from classmates, but it did not come. *Probably because* (not solving it with classmates)*, I kept waiting for one to speak up that they were interested in a person and it didn't happen. I struggled with the fact such people come here... so I did not try to play some form that I was*

*overly sad or whatever, but I think it was evident that I was fighting something and no such question came. Not that I blame them, but I was expecting support or willingness that someone asks what's wrong. I myself did not dare talk about it.* (12RK1)

In no interview in this group did we record that a seminarian asked other seminarians for help in resolving a crisis. Only in one case did a seminarian admit that he would be willing to talk about his problems with other seminarians. We found a similarly reserved and distrustful attitude in relation to the board of the seminary. *The first* (crisis) *I did not really talk about, especially not with the board, because toward the spiritual director I did not have complete confidence that I could poured out my heart.* (8RK2) Among those who would have access to resolving the crises of Latin Catholic seminarians, there did not appear their parents. The most apt justification is this quote: *They would probably be very worried; I think they would be very much burdened. I have an open relationship with their parents, but about some things it would be difficult for me to talk about what I am experiencing spiritually.* (12RK1)

In addition, an important role in solving a crisis is played by personal prayer and effort to solve the problem through personal contact with God. *I spoke with the spiritual leader, the confessor; I tried to pray, rather, to retain prayer.* (12RK1) In the case of smaller crises, seminarian tried to tackle them on his own.

**5.3 Assessment of crisis**

Latin Catholic seminarians assess crises clearly. They speak of them as difficult, but indispensable for personal growth and maturation.

A crisis overcome brings self-identification with the road embarked upon and certainty. *Yes, when a person overcomes a crisis then he knows why he is doing a thing. During the crisis he stands as if at a crossroads and when he overcomes the crisis, when there is some certainty, not from the outside, which springs out of the man, the man continues in the same direction and no longer stagnates, he progresses and does things out of conviction.* (12RK1) This condition induces psychological relief as well as a powerful incentive on the way to the objective. *Then I self-identified with the fact that I wanted to be a priest and I gained such confidence.* (12RK1) Awareness of the difficulties of crisis is indisputable, but the fruits are worth it. *They are necessary because even in Scripture it is written that gold is purified in fire, and when we let ourselves be scorched through a crisis, sometimes it burns us well, but we move forward.* (7RK1) In the terms of Latin Catholic seminarians, it is clear that without overcoming a crisis their priestly vocation *would be more superficial.* (9RK4) It also contributes to getting rid of unrealistic ideas and doubtful thoughts regarding the priestly vocation. *Participant (P):* (Crisis) *is not an obstacle on the road of formation for the priesthood. It* (the crisis) *rather drew my attention to it being a condition, a river, across which one must pass in order to wash and cleanse oneself of all that, whether doubtful thoughts, or too idealistic ideas. Researcher (R): That means you don't see a crisis as something difficult? P: No, more as something creative.* (7RK5)

Greater identification with the priestly vocation and internalisation of beliefs is associated with the spiritual growth of seminarians. *I see crisis as a climb up a mountain. I'm going up Kriváň* (a high mountain in Slovakia) *if I want to get higher, I have to take a step up the hill, and that step is hard work. If I stayed in one place, I would never get up the hill. Thus I perceive a crisis like a difficult match, which if I win, I get from the quarter-finals to...* (9RK6)

A crisis overcome provides recognition of limits. It is important that the recognized limits be recognized and respected. Sometimes a strong factor in the beginning of the crisis is disregard for known limits. At the moment when these limits are exceeded, a person finds firsthand what they bring into his life. At that moment, awareness or knowledge changes into own

experience, which is a higher degree in the hierarchy of psychological "ownership" than knowledge and understanding. *For example, also a relationship with a girl. My opinion, before I liked a girl, was that for the pure everything is pure. That I can interact with the girls on all levels and now I see that it is not the case, that there is a certain limit, over which I must not go. I can joke, I can wish them a nice day, I can just be polite, but it is enough. There are things that not only may I not do, but that would be another burn for me.* (9RK2)

All the above-mentioned positive effects of a crisis overcome significantly contribute to clarifying the meaning of the priestly vocation and the overall meaning of their own lives. *The crisis is a necessary, indispensable part of spiritual growth and purification, the total internalised belief that it makes sense to do it. It is a search for meaning in who I am, why I am here, where I am headed.* (12RK1)

We consider the most significant contribution of crisis to be the rebirth of traditional belief as lived (experienced) – the internalisation of faith. This involves changes of the foreclosed religious identity into achieved religious identity. Our participants were led to believe by their parents from childhood, but conscious, lived and living faith needs a personal decision that is arises or ends during a time of personal crisis. In this sense we could sense the change in participants in the group of Latin Catholic seminarians of a shift from a position of "I believe because I was brought up like that" to a position of "I believe because I have decided like that." Precisely the confirmation of the decision to be a priest after overcoming a crisis changes the foreclosed religious identity to an achieved one.

From observations of participants in the group of Latin Catholic seminarians, there follows that overcoming a crisis brings the following positive effects into their lives:

- stronger identification with vocation;
- internalisation of beliefs;
- spiritual growth;
- knowledge of the limits which must be respected in order for the seminarian to preserve the identity of his vocation;
- help in finding meaning of vocation.

## 6 Conclusion

The content of crises in Latin Catholic and Greek Catholic seminarians were partly identical. In both groups, crises concerned the question of whether a seminarian should become a priest. In addition, part of the crisis of the Greek seminarians was the search for the meaning of the priesthood, as if they needed a strong motive to become priests. Latin Catholic seminarians, especially in the second half of their studies, had difficult struggles with personal justification for the acceptance of lifelong celibacy.

For solving crises in both groups we identified three consistent elements that help cope with crisis – a spiritual leader, confessor and intense spiritual life. The most important difference in this part was the fact that the Greek Catholic seminarians also solved crises intensively with their classmates in the year. This was facilitated by the cohesive relationships between classmates. Even seminarians who in the first half of studies avoided the community gradually built a strong relationship of trust towards their classmates and were able to speak without fear about serious crises. In contrast, the Latin Catholic seminarians resolved their crises more intimately and discreetly than the Greek Catholics. They confided their problems either in the seminary spiritual director, spiritual leader, or another priest whom they trusted. All these persons have an obligation under their office to maintain secrecy in regard to third parties about these things. The Latin Catholic seminarians did not solve their crisis with anyone who is not bound by confidentiality obligations arising from their office. We did not see even a hint of efforts to address their crises with classmates.

Both groups of participants clearly positively assessed the meaning of a crisis overcome, but did not completely agree on the positives. Greek Catholic seminarians more appreciated the opportunity to participate in the priestly vocation and again remind oneself of the initial decision for the priesthood, while Latin Catholics perceived value in the crisis, especially in the possibility of internalising their decision for the priesthood and to identify with it more.

Table 2 *Comparison of progress of crises of Greek and Latin Catholic seminarians*

|  | **Greek Catholic Seminarians** | **Latin Catholic Seminarians** |
|---|---|---|
| **What does the crisis relate to?** | Should the seminarian become a priest? What is the meaning of the priestly vocation? | Should the seminarian become a priest? Should the seminarian accept celibacy? |
| **Solving the crisis** | With spiritual leader. With confessor. Through more intensive prayer. With classmates in year-group. Reminding oneself of the original decision for the priesthood. | With spiritual leader. With confessor. Through more intensive prayer. |
| **Assessing the crisis** | Clearly positive | Clearly positive |
| **What seminarians value about the crisis** | Possibility of revising style of lift thus far and newly deciding. Appreciating what a person has received. Having a share in the priestly vocation. Building personal dignity. | Stronger identification with vocation. Internalising beliefs. Spiritual growth. Recognition of limits which must be respected for the seminarian to maintain the identity of his vocation. Help in finding the meaning of vocation. |

From comparing the interviews in the groups of Greek Catholic and Latin Catholic seminarians, there emerge that the differences in the content, solutions and evaluation of crises in these groups are caused by different atmosphere among seminarians. Among the Greek Catholics the year-group has greater cohesion, trust and solidarity. This causes openness to classmates and willingness to accept help. Relationships with elders do not exhibit excessive superiority or rejection. There is an accepting, supportive atmosphere. Among Latin Catholic seminarians there is less cohesion in the year-group and relationships with peers were strongly influenced by patronization of older to younger members. A role was also played by the great distrust of seminarians towards the board of the seminary. A non-negligible role is also played by the different traditions of the Greek Catholic and Latin Catholic church, which translate into a different organization of life in the seminary and emphasis on different priorities.

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