

PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERVIEW AND EVALUATION

REVEREND JAMES BURNS D.O.B. - JUNE 15, 1933

Referred by: Very Rev. Liam Hoare, s.P., M.A.

Referral Question: Psychological Evaluation and Testing

Sources of Evaluation: Interview; Personal History Sheet;
Shipley Scales; Myers-Briggs Type
Indicator; Edwards Personal
Preference Schedule; Minnesota
Multiphasic Personality Inventory;
Incomplete Sentences Blank; and,
Measures of Psychosocial Development.

Place of Evaluation: Foundation House
Servants of the Paraclete
Jemez Springs, New Mexico 87025

Date of Evaluation: MARCH 7, 1990

Father Burns was referred for psychological evaluation, following a call that came in September, about a now grown man who claims that there was some sexual contact between himself and Father Burns when he (the grown man) was a teenager.

In general, Father Burns sees very much the necessity for dealing with his sexuality. He reports that he has been plagued by concerns about his sexuality, and that this has been primarily a secret throughout his life. In fact, as Father Burns talks about his sexuality and his sexual experiences, it is clear that, in this regard, Father Burns has led a most tortured life. He is extremely hard on himself concerning any sexual acting-out that has gone on and apparently has an extremely difficult time forgiving himself. Father Burns reports that he very much believes in the concept of forgiveness and has little trouble forgiving other people. However, he has had a great deal of difficulty in applying this concept to himself.

Father Burns reported some very real hesitation about coming for the evaluation. He is building a house in the parish where he has been working and is very much afraid of the possibility of being unable to return to that parish. He also expressed some concerns about the stigma attached to coming to the Program. He further mentioned difficulties he could imagine both talking in a group about his sexuality as well as talking to a therapist about personal matters.

Father Burns was very open about his concerns about coming for the evaluation, did not seem to be saying these things in a defensive manner, and, in general, did not seem to take a defensive attitude toward the evaluation procedure. He seemed to be merely expressing his fears and concerns.

It is Father Burns' understanding that the call from the young man was made to the Bishop stating essentially that the sexual activity from the past was currently bothering the young man and that he needed something done about that. Father Burns is unclear as to exactly what that means. Father Burns reports that the young man had been sexually active prior to Father Burns' involvement with him. Father Burns seemed to be stating that he was not responsible for introducing this person into the arena of sexuality, and that, to some extent, the sexual acting-out was at the instigation of the young man. However, Father Burns was far from absolving himself of responsibility for his involvement, and in fact expressing a tremendous amount of guilt and shame concerning this.

In describing his sexual behavior, it was clear that nurturance played a certain role in the sexual acting-out. There was a sense of taking care of the boy in the sexual involvement. He saw the boy as someone who was hurting and the intimacy and closeness derived from a feeling of wanting to help out the boy and be close to him.

During the evaluation, we spent a good portion of the time talking specifically about sexual experiences. It was my distinct impression that Father Burns was being most open and honest in describing his sexual experiences. In general, he seemed to take responsibility for his actions, and expressed very real concerns about his behavior.

Father Burns described his sexuality as being "a mangled mystery to me." This seems to very well describe how Father Burns feels about his sexuality and how he has dealt with it over the years. It is very clear that he has tortured himself with guilt as well as questions and concerns about his sexuality. Father Burns reports a vague recollection of something, perhaps, going on when he was in the age range of five to seven. He feels that there was some sexual involvement perhaps with a child older than himself. This, however, is not a clear memory to him. He reports that he dated in high school and that there was some kissing and minimal petting. However, he was already seriously considering the seminary and seemed not that terribly interested in the sexual activities with women at that time.

In the seminary, he reports, "I probably was in love with some seminarians." He reports that this was not a sexual type of love and that there was no sexual acting-out. However, he can imagine that "I may not have been adverse to some sexual activity," even though that did not go on.

He reports that one seminarian did make sexual overtures toward him and that he punched that seminarian in the face. He reports that he went on to get beat up by that person so that he would not talk about it.

Father Burns reports one sexual experience with a woman many years ago. However, his sexual feelings have by and large been confusing and unclear to him. He reports feeling attracted to the notion of having a family and that at some level he would still like that kind of thing. In general, however, he has found himself to be fairly scared of women. He tends to put up a wall around himself to prevent his getting too close to women.

Father Burns tends to characterize himself as being bisexual. He is not certain whether a lack of experimentation is the reason that his sexual object choice is not clear to him. He describes some anger at the Church for not helping him deal better with sexual material, as well as their general stance of not dealing particularly well with that. At the same time, however, he does not seem to be putting off responsibility for his sexual confusion completely on the Church. He describes himself as putting women on a pedestal. He reports that he sees teenagers as being more approachable, and that this may in part explain the reason for his involvement with the teenager. He reports no sexual experiences with adult males.

What is exceptionally clear is that Father Burns has truly struggled with the issue of sexuality throughout his life. He seemed to be taking the opportunity of the evaluation to really look at his sexual thoughts, feelings, and behaviors as an opportunity to get a number of questions answered. I was most impressed by the honesty with which he both looked inside himself and expressed himself. It seems that he has been very much afraid to ask these questions of himself and even more so of sharing these concerns with someone else. He sees the very real probability of his being referred for a program here, and sees this as a real opportunity to answer the questions that have truly tortured him over the years.

Father Burns was raised in Connecticut, and is the second oldest of seven children. There were two children born prior to his oldest brother, both of whom died in infancy. His father was a WPA worker, a factory worker, as well as a musician on the side. His mother stayed home to raise the children, until many of the children got older, at which time she began to work outside the home.

Father Burns reports having had rheumatic fever at approximately the age of seven or eight. He spent five months at home because of this disease and a certain portion of his childhood was restricted in terms of activities after that. He reports some heart problems as a result of that and some concerns about his heart as well.

He describes his father as a "sweet, passive sort of man." He reports that his father taught him well about responsibility and that there was a real closeness and gentleness about his father. His mother, on the hand, was a much more determined, driven, and volatile sort of person. She tended to be "the boss" in the family and was very much the disciplinarian. He reports that her discipline could become quite physical at times. However, he does not doubt the love that his mother felt for the children and indicated no particular resentments toward her.

When Father Burns was in high school, his parents separated. His mother had met someone at work and the two of them went off together for five years. A child was born, his younger sister, of that union. After that period of separation, his parents reunited and stayed together for nearly fifty years total. While they were separated, Father Burns stayed with his father. Some of the children moved with their mother to New Mexico. Father Burns started in the seminary in the East. However, he caught pneumonia and it was recommended that he spend some time in the Southwest. At that time he went to live with his mother and ultimately entered the seminary in Santa Fe.

In general, Father Burns describes his childhood as a positive one. He reports that it was a good house to grow up in and despite some very real problems within the family, both monetary and communicative, that his parents loved each other, as well as the children. He, particularly, was close to his mother, especially in her later years. He would spend considerable time with her when she was older and alone. When she died, she left her house to him and this has been a source of very real animosity within his family. Two of his sisters fought the will and a court battle ensued. Father Burns reports this as being an extremely painful event in his life, which is still difficult for him to think about. Some of the separation between himself and one sister in particular still exists to a very real degree. "Most of my life I felt the strong obligation to my mom and dad." This seems to describe him and his sense of responsibility very well.

Father Burns reports that he thought about the priesthood from a very early age. His father was fine with that; his mother had some problems with it. His mother was a Lutheran and did not convert to Catholicism until after Father Burns' ordination. In fact, some of her family had some fairly strong anti-Catholic feelings and this was a source of a certain amount of conflict.

Father Burns reports no problems with alcohol, either among his parents or with himself. He reports some health problems some years back concerning his heart. Ten years ago, he experienced a certain amount of angina and that was a very real concern to him. He describes himself as currently having a weight problem, but in general describes himself as being in good health.

In general, he summed himself up in terms of his relationships with other people as being "a nice guy with empathy for people and a dedicated worker... That's what I am supposed to be." It is easy to see that in his relationships with other people that is likely very much how he is perceived.

TEST RESULTS:

The Shipley is a screening instrument which assesses cognitive abilities in both abstraction and vocabulary. On this test, Father Burns scored in the superior range. There were no indications whatsoever of any problems in dealing with abstract concepts.

The results of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator were somewhat equivocal. On some of the scales, Father Burns' scores indicated a certain amount of confusion. In general, the implication of this is some very real questions for Father Burns about his own identity and, in general, who he is. The overall pattern that emerged was of an extroverted feeling type (ENFJ).

ENFJ's radiate sympathy and fellowship. They are very concerned with the people around them and place a very high value on harmonious human contacts. They are often described as friendly, tactful, sympathetic, persevering and conscientious. They tend to be people who are very much affected by the approval of others and they are very much sensitive to indifference. They derive much of their pleasure from the feelings of warmth and harmony in their relationships with others. In general, they tend to see the good qualities of other people focusing on those to the exclusion of negative qualities.

ENFJ's tend to be very good at seeing and appreciating value in other people's opinions. Even when there are conflicts, they tend to believe in harmony and the possibility of it being established as ways of resolving those conflicts. They tend to be very good at having foresight. They are able to see the possibilities in what is going on and are often able to use their intuition most effectively. They tend to be people who are very good at expressing themselves and are very comfortable in speaking to audiences.

In general, they do best in jobs that deal with other people and in situations where cooperation is called for. The ministry is a place where ENFJ's are often found.

The above description likely describes Father Burns very well in his dealings within the parish. What it tends to exclude is some of his feelings about himself. It is likely that he can be a great deal more negative when he begins the process of introspection. However, in his interpersonal relationships, it is likely that he is quite successful and well appreciated.

The Edwards Personal Preference Schedule is a percentile ranking of 16 areas of manifest needs, as reported by the testee. On this test, the highest need areas for Father Burns were for affiliation and succorance.

A person with a high need for affiliation tends to generally prefer to do things with other people rather than by himself. Such a person tends to form strong attachments, tends to keep up with those relationships very well and places a high value on them. Such a person is likely to try to make as many friends as possible, enjoying sharing things with other people, and in general likes to work in groups.

A person with a high need for succorance is someone who has a strong desire to seek the help of other people when things become difficult. Such a person is greatly influenced by the encouragement of other people and places a high value on being treated in a sympathetic and understanding fashion. In general, such a person has a high need for affection from other people and does much better when he is feeling that kind of support.

The lowest need area for Father Burns was for achievement. A person with a low need for achievement is someone who does not place particular value on being seen as a recognized authority. Accomplishments are not things that are generally savored by such a person, and it is not likely that he would be driven hard by any need to achieve.

In general, the above description seems to describe Father Burns relatively well. It also seems congruent with the description of the ENFJ. It seems likely that Father Burns values his relationships with other people to a very high degree and is quite dependent on the support and encouragement of other people. It is also likely that concrete achievements are not nearly as important to Father Burns.

Although the personality type described both by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule would indicate a person who would likely turn to other people in times of stress, it is clear that concerning the issue of sexuality this is not something that Father Burns has done. This would further demonstrate how difficult things have been for Father Burns in trying to deal with his sexuality. He has not felt free to utilize his strongest personality characteristics in dealing with this most difficult issue.

The Measures of Psychosocial Development (MPD) is a self-report inventory which assesses adult personality development. It delineates particular conflict areas which are normally experienced in adult development, specifying those which are particularly well worked out as well as those which are in need of further attention.

On this test, Father Burns seemed to indicate conflict areas in virtually every possible area. It is clear that Father Burns has a very negative opinion of himself, his overall development, and sees himself in a most unfavorable light when he looks inward. In terms of internal accomplishments, he seems to possess very little pride. This does not mean to imply that he is oblivious to his adjustment to the world or any positive accomplishments. However, in evaluating himself, simply for himself, he tends to be most negative in that evaluation.

The Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) is a lengthy true/false test which gives results in both validity and clinical scales. The results of the validity scales indicate that Father Burns took a relatively open and honest approach to this test. Many people coming for evaluation under Father Burns' circumstances would tend to be much more defensive in their approach to this test. It is clearly to Father Burns's credit that he did not take this attitude toward the test.

The clinical scales indicated a high degree of conflict in Father Burns' life. People with this overall pattern of responding tend, to a significant degree, to be sexually preoccupied. Many people with this pattern have very real fears concerning homosexuality. Such people tend to be strongly ambivalent with a high capacity for agitation and restlessness. Such a person can often be fairly short tempered. Depression also plays a major role in the make-up of such a person. In general, the depression is often experienced episodically, rather than at a constant level. Hypochondriacal concerns are often also present in such a personality pattern. It is also quite likely that Father Burns experiences anxiety to a very high degree and can, at times, be fairly overwhelmed by anxiety.

In general, this was a personality pattern of someone who is in a tremendous amount of turmoil with some very strong negative feelings. It is also a pattern which likely has persisted for quite a number of years at least at an internal level. It seems, as opposed to some of the other tests, that this test tended to be tapping the introspective portion of Father Burns' personality. The pattern that emerged is likely what Father Burns sees when he looks inside himself. The results on some of the other tests seemed to exemplify what other people see when looking at Father Burns from the outside.

The Incomplete Sentences Test tends to tap the most conscious concerns that a person is in touch with. In general, Father Burns seemed to indicate very strong feelings of unworthiness, specifically concerning his sexual acting-out. There was a very real sense of both fear and depression concerning his sexuality. Father Burns expressed on this test some concerns about the effect of his sexual behavior on his soul.

Summary and Recommendations

Father Burns has engaged in some behavior which has been a source of tremendous shame and guilt for him. He has likely struggled with sexual feelings since adolescence, sexual feelings that were both unacceptable to him as well as difficult to make sense out of. Those sexual feelings did lead to some behavior, on a limited basis, that has turned the questions and concerns into some fairly tortuous periods in Father Burns' life. By and large, he has not shared these concerns with other people, has not sought answers to the myriad of questions which have plagued him over the years, and as a result, has seen very negative things when he has looked inward. He has been unable to forgive himself or believe in higher forgiveness, and this has been a very real source of pain as well.

Father Burns' approach to the evaluation seemed most encouraging. He came in with a very open attitude, expressed his fears about the evaluation very frankly and, despite them, sought answers to the questions that he has been struggling with for years. I would see him as an excellent candidate for one of the programs at Jemez Springs. He is more than ripe to benefit from the opportunities to receive answers to some of these questions and to share some of these feelings with people who understand, empathize, identify, and share. He expressed a very real concern about being able to talk about some of these things in groups. However, I have no doubt that, despite his fears in this regard, he will force himself to do it and benefit greatly from it.

I would see the programs at Jemez Springs as offering the very real opportunity for Father Burns to attain a very real sense of peace, considerable clarity about the general issue of sexuality, and the ability to look within himself without experiencing the tremendous pain that has, in the past, accompanied that experience.

If I can be of any assistance in reference to the above evaluation, please do not hesitate to call on me.


Clinical Psychologist