

A Warning Against Psychological Testing For Church Screening Purposes

We understand certain criteria and standards of incardination or those of college age petitioning for seminary training and ordination. A psychological evaluation and numerous reference letters cannot apply to just anyone, lest one would adhere to a one-size-fits-all mentality. Additionally, it is common that data be collected at the discretion and expense of the respective ecclesial or employment entity, not that of the candidate. – As an example, when petitioning for incardination by an older, well-credentialed, experienced and highly qualified clergy person, with a well vetted employment record, being then required to undergo a psychological evaluation could be perceived rather as an insult, to say the least.

While we realize that such evaluations have now entered the fashionable arena of some church circles, they render themselves ultimately as useless, since they can be easily manipulated and quickly become outdated, as so many cases have shown. Supplying “reference letters” may sound traditional, but they are a mere collection of favorites by buddies covering for a good friend.

We understand and support the reasons for wanting to screen possible new candidates, ministries and congregations. We equally realize that quality must supersede quantity in any credible jurisdiction or setting. However, we hold that “psychological evaluations” and “reference letters”, due to their flawed nature, are not the answer, since they can do more harm than good – or at least not yield the results one may hope for.

The screening of candidates is indeed a meticulous task, but it must be based on real, tangible criteria, not that of dubious testing and campaign letter collection. Additionally and most importantly, there is a demonic side to mixing psychology with theology. While psychological testing is valid for mental patients in order to determine their most beneficial treatment, it has no place in the church, whatsoever.