Attachment to God: Its Impact on the Psychological Wellbeing of Persons with Religious Vocation

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ATTACHMENT TO GOD: ITS IMPACT ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING OF PERSONS WITH RELIGIOUS VOCATION

BY

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Seton Hall University

2010
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ABSTRACT
This study focused on the expansion of attachment theory to the spiritual perspective of
God as an attachment figure. It examined how attachment to God could be associated
with psychological wellbeing in a sample of 47 male students in Roman Catholic
seminaries preparing to become priests or religious. Attachment to God was examined
under two dimensions of the Attachment to God Inventory (AGI; Beck & McDonald,
2004)—namely, the avoidance of an intimate relationship with God and anxiety over
being abandoned by God. The two dimensions were further dichotomized into four styles
of attachment to God: secure, preoccupied, dismissing, and fearful. Psychological
wellbeing was measured with the Ryff Psychological Wellbeing Scale (PWBS; Ryff,
1989; Ryff & Keys, 1995) under six dimensions: autonomy, self-acceptance, positive
relations to others, environmental mastery, personal growth, and purpose in life. The
findings of this research study showed a strong association between attachment to God
and psychological wellbeing. The results also showed that the secure attachment style
was the best predictor of attachment to God, as predicted. However, the findings did not
support the hypothesis that there is a relationship between attachment to God (measured
by the AGI) and adult attachment relationship (measured by the Relationship Scale
Questionnaire; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994).
DEDICATION

To the family of Edward and Elizabeth Okozi as well as to all those who affirm their faith in God no matter their life circumstance
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The Catholic Church is faced with a decline in the number of young adults who commit themselves to the vocation to the priesthood or religious life (McKittrick, 2008). The factors to which this decline has been attributed include a reduction in family size, the secularization of American society (with emphasis on the values of freedom, individuality, and personal choice), and the clergy child sexual abuse crisis (McKittrick, 2008). The lack of religious involvement of caregivers and young adults also accounts for the lack of interest in religious activities, leading to many empty churches. Due to the decline in the number of priests, male religious, and practicing Catholics, many imposing former churches, convents, and monasteries have been sold and transformed into modern apartments or restaurants.

It is worth noting that part of the reason for the decline in the number of priests and religious or for their departure from the Catholic Church is a desire for romantic relationships (Arraj, 2008; Cordaro, 2003; Kippley, 2008; Severson, 2002). This implies that those priests and religious who left probably experienced not only an attachment to God, but also an attachment to another adult with whom they wanted to build an intimate relationship.

Some of the priests and male religious who left the priesthood reported that their psychological wellbeing was affected before and a few months after they left (Kippley, 2008). The experiences of these priests and religious who left seem to suggest that conflictual psychological needs for attachment, if not resolved, affect these men’s psychological development and wellbeing, and ultimately affect their vocation to the
priesthood or religious life. If attachment to God were better understood and properly nurtured, then the priesthood and religious life might be more attractive to young people.

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of attachment to God on the psychological wellbeing of persons with vocation to the priesthood or the religious life. There are different models of attachment relationship, but what was specifically measured in this study was the quad model of attachment relationships (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). The quad model of attachment to God mirrors developmental attachment theory and includes the secure, preoccupied, fearful, and dismissing attachment styles.

The goal of this study was to examine how attachment to God is related to the attachment relationship between caregiver and child as well as to identify the style of attachment to God that may contribute to the psychological wellbeing of persons who have chosen the vocation to the priesthood or the religious life.

Background of the Problem

Bowlby’s (1969) attachment theory on the child–caregiver relational bond has generated a large body of literature on attachment relationships over the last three decades. Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980) propounded that early child–caregiver attachment bonds, developed and repeated through daily experiences, serve as the model of all other social relationships throughout a person’s life. Ainsworth (1985) expanded on attachment theory and provided a systemic view of attachment based on familial security. For Ainsworth, attachment relationships are visible in behaviors toward the attachment figure, such as maintaining proximity with the attachment figure, who serves as a secure
foundation for explorative behavior and provides a haven of safety; the child experiences anxiety when separated from the caregiver. Bowlby (1989) agreed with Ainsworth and asserted that a healthy dependence on a reliably sensitive and responsive attachment figure is important for optimal functioning and wellbeing from cradle to grave. Hence, attachment figures promote healthy functioning by providing a safe haven that permits the relationship partner to seek comfort, support, reassurance, assistance, and protection, as well as the impetus to explore the world and strive to meet her or his full potential (Bowlby, 1989). Bowlby also noted that psychological wellbeing can be attributed to either the development of attachment behavior or to a general lack of its development (1989).

Fraley (2004) argued that the research on adult attachment is guided by the assumption that the same motivational system that gives rise to the close emotional bond between caregivers and their children is responsible for the bond that develops between adults in emotionally intimate relationships. Examples of other areas of research that have been based on attachment theory include relationship development among premarital couples (Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994), attachment styles among young adults (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991), the role of attachment in predicting spiritual coping with a loved one in surgery (Belavich & Pargament, 2002), and romantic love as an attachment process (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Antonucci, Akiyama, and Takahashi (2004) observed that attachment research has shown that early formed relationships are long lasting and fundamentally influential in an individual’s experience of later attachments and other social relationships. Antonucci and
co-workers (2004) focused on attachment as an aspect of close relations that should be understood within the broader context of other relationships.

Some scholars have extended the scope of attachment theory to include the relationship with God, where God is considered as an attachment figure for believers in Christianity (and other monotheistic religions) and the exhibited behaviors with respect to God can be viewed as attachment behaviors (Granqvist & Hagekull, 1999, 2000; Kirkpatrick, 1998, 1999; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990; McDonald, Beck, Allison, & Norsworthy, 2005; Pargament, 1997). According to Kirkpatrick (1999), believers in Christianity maintain a personal, interactive relationship with a powerful, wise, and loving God, and such a relationship fulfills the criteria for an attachment relationship.

Although there is a growing body of literature on the attachment to God in relation to different populations, there is a lack of research and literature on how the attachment relationship to God impacts the psychological wellbeing of persons who have chosen the vocation to the priesthood or the religious life.

Statement of the Problem

In the Catholic Church, candidates for the priesthood or religious life are required to undergo a psychological evaluation at least once at the beginning of or during their training to determine the fitness of their mental health before engaging in training to become priests or religious. According to the Catholic Church's Canon Law,

The diocesan bishop is to admit to the major seminary only those who are judged capable of dedicating themselves permanently to the sacred ministries in light of their human, moral, spiritual and intellectual characteristics, their physical and psychological health and their proper motivation. (The Canon Law Society of America (CLSA), 1977, Canon 241, §1)
In the above citation, motivation or right intention could be defined as a firm desire to dedicate oneself fully to the service of God. Canon 241 places the responsibility on the local bishop to state the content of the effective admissions procedure. In seminaries in some English-speaking parts of the world, including the United States, the effective admissions procedure includes a psychological evaluation report and physical examination. The above Canon paragraph implies that a candidate’s eligibility for the priesthood would be determined based on different aspects of the candidate’s physical and spiritual health and behavior. The service of God involves performing different functions relating to pastoral ministry in situations involving interpersonal relationships with others.

After admission to the seminary or novitiate, candidates engage in a discernment process throughout the duration of seminary training until ordination to the priesthood or throughout novitiate training until the taking of the final religious vows. The discernment process consists of evaluating the candidate’s readiness to commit to the priestly or religious vocation for life. The evaluation is carried out jointly by the candidate and those in charge of his training, whose responsibility includes making the final recommendation for ordination or religious profession. Currently, however, seminary and religious training programs lack a curriculum on human development that will enable their candidates for the priesthood or religious life to understand themselves better as well as their personal characteristics. Thus, there is not an opportunity for candidates and those guiding them to better understand how their attachment experiences from childhood through adulthood affect their attachment to God, as well as how their beliefs and behaviors impact their psychological wellbeing.
In my experience, in the seminary or novitiate training and discernment process, one of the ways that attachment to God is conceptualized is in terms of the candidate’s God-image, especially in the area of spiritual formation. However, focusing on the candidate’s image of God is limited in that it does not directly connect to how the candidate will relate to his trainers (formation staff or novice master), colleagues, and the people whom he will serve later. An exploration of different attachment styles involves examining whether a candidate’s style of attachment relationship to God is secure, preoccupied, fearful, or dismissing.

A secure attachment style facilitates a healthy relationship to God and promotes a healthy life commitment to one’s vocation (Bishop, 2006; DeJong & Donovan, 1988). An insecure attachment style leads to an unhealthy relationship; for example, a candidate with an insecure attachment style might develop such total dependence on his training director that he experiences difficulty in making informed decisions or taking personal initiative in the absence of the director.

Significance of the Study

The 2007 edition of the Pontifical Yearbook (Hemrick, 2007) reported a relative increase in the number of Catholics, clergy and religious, and seminarians at the end of 2005, which is reflective of the general population around the world except Europe, which continues to experience a decrease. For example, in 2005, 32% of seminarians worldwide were Americans, 26% were Asians, 21% were Africans, and 20% were Europeans.
Some of the traditionally Catholic nations noted a significant decrease in the number of practicing Catholics, priests, religious, and candidates for these vocations since Vatican II, due in part to some provocative and unresolved issues among clergy and religious such as celibacy, homosexuality, and clergy sexual abuse (Cozzens, 2000). As Pope Benedict XVI (2007) emphasized, young people now find it challenging to commit themselves to the priestly vocation, given the disappointing and frustrating experience of the clergy crises.

Sege (2006) noted that an estimated 25,000 priests in the United States have left the priesthood since Vatican II, most to marry and raise families, while some clerics who have children they do not publicly acknowledge are involved in priestly ministry. Some of the priests and religious who left reported that what compelled most of them to leave was not the ministry but the inability and lack of freedom to live their personal lives in a manner to which they felt called by God; they were pushed out by the inability to make important choices about their personal lives, or pulled out by the love of another person with whom they wished to pursue a relationship in the light outside the shadows of mandatory celibacy (Kippley, 2008). Additionally, they reported experiencing a deep yearning within, not simply for sex, but for the union of two hearts and souls lived in the sacred mystery of love and companionship for the rest of their lives (Kippley, 2008). Arraj (2008) argued that the strict segregation of men and women religious gave way to flirtation and romantic relationships. This implies that the priests and religious obeyed the dictates of their conscience by leaving the priesthood or religious life. It would seem that these priests who left the priesthood experienced a strong romantic love as an attachment process. However, what is not clear is whether the priests experienced a secure or
insecure attachment to God prior to ordination and post ordination and at the time of leaving the priesthood or religious life.

In a recent Vatican press conference discussing psychological evaluation guidelines from the *Congregation for Catholic Education*, Archbishop Brugues (2008) noted how the Church in the last 30 years had seen a greater need to evaluate the psychological profiles of candidates to the priesthood. He also said that “the psychologist should have a theoretical understanding and an approach for taking the transcendent dimension of the person with his dynamism and qualities that should mature in the person” (Brugues, 2008, as cited in Vatican, 2008).

The psychological evaluation guidelines show that the Roman Catholic Church recognizes the importance of psychology as a means of facilitating a better understanding of human behavior, including the behavior of the Church’s ministers. Hence, given the importance of attachment as part of a developmental process, this study might contribute to the efforts made by the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church to promote and ensure the psychological wellbeing and human development of its future agents, including during seminary training as well as during pastoral ministry in different pastoral settings.

Research Questions

The questions that were explored in this study were as follows:

a. Is there a relationship between the attachment to God and the psychological wellbeing of persons with vocation to the priesthood or religious life?

b. Is there a correspondence between the attachment relationship to God and the adult attachment relationship?
c. If the response to question "a" is affirmative, which attachment styles have the most effect on the psychological wellbeing of persons with vocation to the priesthood or religious life?

Research Hypotheses

a. Attachment to God will be associated with the psychological wellbeing of persons with vocation to the priesthood or religious life. Attachment to God was measured by scores on the Attachment to God Inventory (AGI; Beck & McDonald, 2004), and psychological wellbeing was measured by scores on Ryff's Psychological Wellbeing Scale (PWBS; Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

b. There is a strong relationship between attachment to God and adult attachment. Attachment to God was measured by scores on the Attachment to God Inventory (AGI; Beck & McDonald, 2004), while adult attachment was measured by scores on the Relationship Scales Questionnaire (RSQ; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994).

c. Individuals with a secure style of attachment to God will experience greater psychological wellbeing than those with all other styles of attachment to God, as measured by scores on the Attachment to God Inventory (AGI; Beck & McDonald, 2004).
Definition of Terms

Attachment. For the purpose of this study, attachment is described from the standpoint of Ainsworth (1985) as an "affectional bond" formed in the course of childhood, adolescence, or adulthood to a unique individual not wholly replaceable by another (p. 799). This affectional bond is characterized by maintaining proximity with the attachment figure, seeking to find comfort and security in the attachment figure, considering the attachment figure as providing protection or a haven of safety, and experiencing anxiety when separated from the attachment figure (Ainsworth, 1985).

Styles of attachment. For the purpose of this study, styles of attachment or dimensions of attachment refer to the extent to which an individual feels secure (comfortable with intimacy and autonomy), preoccupied (preoccupied with relationships), fearful (fearful of intimacy; social avoidance), and dismissing (dismissing or avoidant of intimacy; counterdependent) in close relationships (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994).

The concept of "God." "God" refers to the supernatural, divine, supreme Being who is perceived both as Creator of the world and as actively involved in the world. For the purpose of this study, the Roman Catholic understanding of God was used, that is, God as the Blessed Trinity (Three Persons in One God: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit), who is also perceived as exhibiting relational qualities, including maternal, paternal, and fraternal qualities (United States Catholic Conference, 1994). In other words, in Roman Catholic understanding, God does interact with humans and nature and does hold personal relationships with humans (Kirkpatrick, 1997; United States Catholic Conference, 1994).
Attachment to God. For the purpose of this study, *attachment to God* refers to the affectional bond that exists between a person and God as the attachment figure. The strength of the style of attachment to God was operationally defined as the scores on the Attachment to God Inventory (Beck & McDonald, 2004).

Persons with vocation to the priesthood or religious life. For the purpose of this study, the term *persons with vocation to the priesthood* refers to men who are in training to become priests in the Roman Catholic Church. They are also called *Seminarians.* Similarly, the term *persons with vocation to the religious life* refers to men who belong to Roman Catholic religious orders or institutes of consecrated life, having made their religious profession (religious vows or commitment) to commit their whole life to live in community and work for God. The term *male religious* is often used in the Catholic Church to refer to the members of male religious orders; the term *men religious* could also be used. In this study, the words *male religious* and *men religious* were used interchangeably.

The term *novice* or *religious novice* refers to a person who has not made a religious profession and is being trained according to the rule of life of the particular institute of consecrated life of which the person wishes to become a member. The term *novitiate* refers to the training period immediately preceding the first religious profession/vow. There is a precise canonical difference between the terms *brother* and *monk.* The term *brother* is applied to a man who belongs to an "active religious community" such as teaching or health care communities but whose work is carried on outside the convent (home for “brothers”). The word *monk* traditionally applied to a man who was a contemplative, living in a monastery or abbey. However, there are some male
religious who have been ordained as priests to serve their religious communities. They are also referred to as *brother* by their community members. In this study, the words *male religious* refer to either a “brother” or a “monk.” Both convents and monasteries have an enclosure called a *cloister*, which is a section that is not accessible to the public, except with the permission of the Abbot.

*Psychological wellbeing.* For the purpose of this study, *psychological wellbeing* is operationally defined as the scores on the Ryff psychological wellbeing scale covering six dimensions, namely self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth (PWBS; Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

**Limitations of the Study**

Several factors limit the generalization of the findings from this study to the general population represented in the sample. The measures used in the study were self-report measures, which were subjective and vulnerable to inaccuracies because of the effects of social desirability, or the possibility of participants portraying themselves in a positive light. The study was limited to seminarians and religious novices being trained in the United States (New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Washington, DC) for priesthood or for religious life. Furthermore, participants in the study were individuals who were at various stages of their formation process, which is different from attachment relationships of priests and religious who have many years of experience in their vocation.

The findings of this study may not generalize to every seminarian and religious novice or to priests and religious in or outside the United States, as the experience of
attachment to God is a personal experience. Additionally, seminarians or religious novices live in their seminary communities or religious convents, which are different environments that might be protective of them in comparison to priests and religious who live in a more exposed environment, with the exception of monks who live in their monasteries.

The participants who completed the research measures did not include former candidates to the priesthood or religious life who were no longer in training because they no longer desired to become priests or religious or because they had been dismissed. Furthermore, it is not clear whether former candidates experienced a conflict between their attachment to God and other attachment processes, and what might have triggered the conflict.

This study was limited to the examination of different attachment styles and the impact of attachment to God on the psychological wellbeing of the participants. However, the study did not address additional issues that might be the result of an insecure attachment style, such as attrition, alcohol abuse, or attachment disorders, which could be considered in a future study.

This study sampled seminarians and male religious in the Roman Catholic Church and examined their experiences. Thus, the results of this study cannot be generalized to female religious (nuns and female novices). It should be acknowledged that the male participants in this study, despite society’s definitions of masculinity and femininity (Bem, 1981), shared responsibility for house tasks that were traditionally assigned to the female gender. For example, they did their own laundry, washed and cleaned their dishes, and decorated the chapel and the living area of the seminary. However, in this study,
neither gender nor gender role differences were addressed; these factors could be addressed in future research.
CHAPTER 2
Review of Literature

The focus of this study was to examine which style of attachment relationship to God accounts for positive psychological wellbeing of candidates in training to become priests or religious, so that such candidates can make informed choices regarding their life commitment to their vocation.

A review of relevant literature in this chapter will enhance understanding of some of the theoretical and empirical rationale for this study as well as summarize the research findings related to the variables of interest in this study. The chapter consists of the following seven sections: (a) attachment theory, (b) models of attachment relationships, (c) God as an attachment figure, (d) attachment to God and dependency, (e) attachment to God and person variables, (f) cultural perspectives on attachment, and (g) attachment to God and spiritual coping.

Attachment Theory

Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980) was credited with the introduction of attachment theory and its application to the social and emotional development of an infant. Bowlby’s (1969) attachment theory was built on the evolutionary or biological perspective that humans and other primates possess an organized cognitive, emotional, and behavioral system designed by natural selection to maintain proximity between helpless infants and their primary caregivers. Thus, natural selection facilitated attachment behaviors whereby infants, when alarmed or distressed, emit various social signals or behaviors in order to reestablish proximity to their caregivers, who provide them with protection from predators and other dangers (Cassidy, 1999; Kirkpatrick, 1997). According to Bowlby
(1969), “the child’s tie to his mother is a product of the activity of a number of behavioral systems that have proximity to the mother as a predictable outcome” (p. 179). The two variables that can trigger attachment behaviors are the needs of the child and the condition of the environment surrounding the child (perceived as threat). Bowlby (1973) noted that the presence or absence of the caregiver can impact the level of fear felt by the child. Hence, the child who perceives the caregiver as a reliable safe haven in times of distress or perceived threat will form a secure attachment to that caregiver (Kirkpatrick, 1992). A secure attachment is evinced by exploration of the environment in the absence of danger and by seeking closeness to the caregiver in the presence of danger. However, Cassidy (1999) argued that some children form attachments to abusive and insensitive parents. Here, one might argue that such an attachment may be temporary and fearful rather than secure, especially if that child does not have an alternative way of escaping such a caregiver, as in the case of a child who lives with abusive caregivers.

Proponents of object-relations theory such as Winnicott explained the process through which the child-caregiver relationship occurs. Object-relations theorists view the child who is beginning to explore his or her environment as encountering different “objects,” and these include the presence and activities of the child’s caregiver. Then, as the child’s cognitive and emotional development occurs, the child creates “object representations” (Winnicott, 1986), which are internal schemas that help the child make sense of his or her unfolding world. The object-relations schemas also help the child determine how relationships with his or her caregiver and other people will be managed and negotiated (Beck, 2006). Hence, the child may see himself or herself as a relational person and form either positive or negative representations of self or others as “objects.”
For example, the child may run away from strangers or cry when the child perceives a threat or distress situation, especially when the child is not in close proximity to the primary caregiver.

Shaver, Hazan, and Bradshaw (1988) applied attachment theory to romantic relationships, which they argued function in large part as an adult manifestation of the attachment system (in addition to sex and caregiving systems). Hazan and Shaver (1987), in their study, found that relationships of secure individuals tend to be happy and healthy in a variety of ways, including high levels of trust, comfort with intimacy, and relationship satisfaction, while insecure-anxious/ambivalent partners tend to experience emotional highs and lows, jealousy, preoccupation with the romantic partner’s responsiveness, fear of rejection or abandonment, and falling in and out of love easily. Additionally, the relationships of avoidant partners tend to be marked by a variety of intimacy-avoiding behavior patterns and low levels of commitment (Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney & Nolley, 1990).

Cicirelli (1983, 2004), in a study of attachment to God among older adults, reported that an aspect of an adult child’s secure lifespan attachment is the desire to protect the existence of an elderly mother by providing physical care to preserve this unique attachment figure. This implies that the internal working model of attachment is inversed as the attachment figure may no longer be able to function as a strong and wise individual. The adult child now provides security and safe haven for the attachment figure to prolong the lifespan of the attachment figure and maintain the relationship a little longer. Cicirelli (2004) also applied this idea to God as the attachment figure whom believers have the desire to protect by defending or justifying their belief when
challenged by outsiders. Furthermore, for those elders who no longer have an attachment figure or anyone who could serve as an attachment figure, God may serve as an ultimate attachment figure (Cicirelli, 2004).

O'Connor and Zeanah (2003) challenged the findings of Ainsworth et al. (1978) on the observational assessment of the quality of attachment relationship between a child and caregiver, arguing that the Strange Situation of Ainsworth et al. was designed to study individual differences in the quality of attachment with an a priori assumption that there is a selective attachment. For O'Connor and Zeanah, “the Strange Situation is not used to determine if there is an attachment relationship” (p. 230). However, they noted that the Strange Situation of Ainsworth et al. has been useful in the research study of children known to exhibit attachment disorder behavior (O'Connor et al., 2003).

O'Connor and Zeanah (2003) placed the spectrum of attachment disorders on a continuum of attachment as follows: secure attachment on one end, disordered selective attachment in the middle, and disorders of nonattachment at the other end. The current description of attachment disorder in the DSM relates to nonattachment (Lieberman & Zeanah, 1995). Greenberg (1999) pointed out that the spectrum of attachment expands the concept of attachment disorder and addresses the fact that insecure attachments, and especially disorganized attachment, are considered definite risk factors for the development of psychopathology (Cicchetti, Toth, & Lynch, 1995). Similarly, aggression, dissociation, and affect and/or behavioral dysregulation are examples of features of a more intense and pervasive disorganized attachment (Lyons-Ruth & Jacobvitz, 1999). Hughes (2003) noted that questions of trauma and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) overlap with questions of attachment disorder.
In their study of the role of religious resources in long-term adjustment to breast cancer, Gall, Miguez de Renart, and Boonstra (2000) found that the relationship with God and the image of God could be associated with the wellbeing of the cancer survivors. Those women with a personal relationship with God reported greater levels of optimism. These women seemed to have considered God as their haven of safety; they spoke of God as being an ever-present support, constant companion, and confidante who helped them gain a sense of personal control throughout their illness (Gall & Cornblat, 2002). These women had access to spiritual/religious support as well as support from their loved ones, with whom they also had an affectional bond or attachment. Hence, these women not only turned to God for comfort and healing, but also sought God’s help to be able to cope with their illness and their daily challenges (Spilka, Hood, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 2003).

Models of Attachment

Bowlby (1989) identified the presence of three models of attachment during the early years of childhood: secure attachment, anxious resistant attachment, and anxious avoidant attachment. Secure attachment style is consistent with healthy development in which the individual is confident that the attachment figure will be available, responsive, and helpful, especially in a threatening situation. Bowlby (1989) also claimed that a secure attachment style is enhanced by the caregiver’s availability and sensitivity to the child’s need for protection, comfort, and assistance. Both the anxious resistant and the anxious avoidant attachment styles are dimensions of insecure attachment.

The anxious resistant attachment style is characterized by uncertainty about a caregiver’s availability, responsiveness, or helpfulness toward the child (Bowlby, 1989).
This attachment style is maintained by a caregiver’s inconsistent availability and helpfulness, separations, and threats of abandonment used as a means of control (Bowlby, 1988). People with an anxious resistant attachment style are preoccupied with a negative view of self and view their attachment figure as supportive. Such people view themselves as not worthy of love and lack self-confidence. They also live in constant worry of being rejected by others.

The anxious avoidant attachment style is characterized by the lack of confidence in a caregiver’s ability to be available, responsive, or helpful to a child when needed. Such an individual often experiences deprivation of love and support system. This attachment style is promoted by constant rebuffing, repeated rejection, and ill treatment of the child by the caregiver, especially when the child needs comfort and protection. Bowlby (1989) asserted that this attachment style also results from and can lead to a variety of personality disorders and behavioral problems. People with an anxious avoidant attachment style seem to have a positive view of themselves while treating their attachment figure as a “nobody.” These people protect themselves against disappointments and hurt in relationships by avoiding forming intimate relationships with others. They do not want to appear vulnerable, and they value their independence very much.

Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978) examined individual differences in the attachment relationship between child and caregiver. They found that children with a secure attachment style perceive their attachment figure as providing a secure base and safe haven, while those with an insecure-avoidant attachment style do not share a similar experience of their attachment figure. Additionally, children with an insecure-anxious (or
resistant) attachment style are highly preoccupied with their attachment figure’s whereabouts and display ambivalent behaviors toward her (Ainsworth et al., 1978).

Consedine and Magai (2003), in a study of attachment in a large sample of older adults, identified three attachment styles, namely the secure, dismissing, and fearful avoidant attachment styles.

Marvin, Cooper, Hoffman, and Powell (2002) identified four distinct dyadic attachment styles: (a) the secure (child)-autonomous (parent) style, where the interaction provides a haven of safety and secure base for the child’s further exploration and is relatively free of anxiety; (b) the insecure, avoidant-dismissing style, which leads to the development of other “distracting” interactions through a defensive focus on exploration and leads to the miscue that the child is really interested in playing, for example; (c) the insecure, ambivalent-preoccupied style, in which the child engages in independent exploration and focuses instead on the attachment-caregiving interactions and the child’s overdependence on the parent; and (d) the insecure, “disordered” (disorganized) style, in which the caregiver’s heightened fear of and/or anger toward the child’s attachment behavior leads to disorganization of the caregiving role. This often leads to a role-reversal relationship by the middle of the preschool years, when the child assumes the role of organizing highly emotional, attachment-caregiving interactions (Cassidy & Marvin, 1992; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985). Both partners exhibit combinations of avoidant and ambivalent attachment styles, intimidation, and compulsive compliance or reciprocal disengagement patterns, which damage the child’s perceived security base (Marvin et al., 2002).
The model of attachment relationship specifically measured in this study is the quad model of attachment relationships, which has been adapted with permission from Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) and Griffin and Bartholomew (1994) and applied to the concept of attachment to God by replacing the words “Model of Other” on the left with the words “Model of God.” The quad model includes the secure, preoccupied, fearful, and dismissing attachment styles, as shown in Figure 1. For both dimensions (self and other), low scores indicate positive models and high scores indicate negative models.

![Figure 1. Model of Attachment to God. Adapted by permission from Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) and Griffin and Bartholomew (1994).](image)

The attachment styles in Figure 1 can be conceptualized as follows:

a) Secure attachment (a healthy view of self and a healthy view of God). People with secure style of attachment to God do not worry about being abandoned by God. They see God as trustworthy and dependable. They seek to have an intimate/close relationship with God.
b) Preoccupied attachment (a negative view of self and a positive view of God). People with a preoccupied attachment style often have a heightened sense of guilt and shame. They worry a great deal about being abandoned or rejected by God. Although they crave an intimate relationship with God, they feel that they are not good enough, and so they are plagued by jealousy and resentment and they complain often.

c) Fearful attachment (a negative view of self and of God). People with a fearful attachment style live in constant fear of being abandoned by God, yet they reject developing an intimate relationship with God. These people can have a pessimistic view on life in general and about things around them.

d) Dismissing attachment (a positive view of self and a negative view of God). People with a dismissing attachment style rely more on themselves and their ability to accomplish things on their own and less on God. They feel that they cannot rely on God because God is “unpredictable.” These people also tend to be less involved in religious activities, for example, and would not bother with frequent attendance at prayer meetings or Church services. Such people may attend Church, for example, about once a year, and tend to avoid making any religious commitment.

God as an Attachment Figure

Kirkpatrick (1999) theorized that believers in Christianity maintain a personal, interactive relationship with a powerful, wise, and loving God, and that such a relationship fulfills the criteria for an attachment relationship. Using the four criteria delineated by Ainsworth (1985) on attachment bonds, Kirkpatrick drew parallels between
the common experiences that believers have about God. For example, Kirkpatrick noted that for the believer, God can serve as a secure base for explorative behavior, as well as a haven of safety in times of distress or threat; the believer could feel anxiety when separated or distanced from God.

The desire for proximity and contact is satisfied through communication with God in the form of prayers and involvement in religious services and activities (Kirkpatrick, 1999). Hence, God is viewed as omnipresent, omniscient, almighty, benevolent, and always available to provide security and comfort. For example, a believer who receives the news about the death or loss of a loved one turns to God as a safe haven to regain a sense of security and comfort.

Confronted with the question of how an individual can form an attachment to a nonobservable and abstract deity, given that the prototype child-caregiver attachment involves physical interaction with another human being, Bretherton (1987) argued that older children can form and maintain attachments through visual and verbal contact with the mother and eventually can depend upon the knowledge of the mother’s possible location. Weiss (1986) also argued that attachment to the caregiver declines as the child develops through the adolescent stage and strives for independence, although some adults still retain a certain attachment to their caregiver, which basically continues throughout the life span. Thus, adults who are geographically separated from their caregiver for a long period of time tend to use a “fetish” (symbolic object or image) to maintain the attachment relationship even when the caregiver is no longer alive (Weiss, 1986). This symbolic attachment represents the individual’s ability to maintain closeness to the caregiver, who is unobserved for long periods of time. Kirkpatrick (1998, 1999) argued
that this idea of symbolic attachment explains the greater similarity between attachment to God and attachment to the caregiver.

Attachment to God can occur in two different ways, namely through the compensation and correspondence models (Kirkpatrick, 1999). The compensation hypothesis states that the relationship to God can compensate for deficient caregiver and/or adult romantic bonds. This does not necessarily lead to an unhealthy attachment to God, but neither does it preclude the development of an unhealthy attachment to God. The compensation hypothesis provides a framework for understanding some aspects of religious belief, such as resiliency and increase in spirituality in times of distress or loss of a loved one. The correspondence hypothesis states that the attachment style experienced by an individual would be consistent across different types of bonds—for example, in relation to caregivers, romantic partners, and God.

In longitudinal studies, Kirkpatrick (1997, 1998) found that adults who were insecurely attached to their mothers in childhood were more likely to later report a conversion experience. Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1990) examined the relationship between retrospective reports of childhood attachment relationships with parents and a variety of religion variables. The sample included 180 females and 33 males who responded to a newspaper survey to participate in the study. Kirkpatrick and Shaver found evidence for the compensation hypothesis in individuals raised in nonreligious homes. They discovered that among respondents with nonreligious mothers, avoidant parental attachments were associated with higher levels of religiousness while the respondents with secure attachments showed lower levels of religiousness (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990). Furthermore, for those raised in religious homes, attachment style was unrelated to
adult religiousness. Granqvist (1998), in a similar study, found that respondents who reported insecure attachment bonds to their parents showed a greater increase in religiousness than those with secure attachment with caregivers.

In a study to investigate the relationships between secure attachment styles and their collective influence on spiritual maturity, TenElshof and Furrow (2000) surveyed a sample of 216 students (77 females and 139 males) of a nondenominational conservative Evangelical Christian seminary, consisting of Caucasians (n = 105), Asians (n = 81), African Americans (n = 10), Latinos (n = 7), and other seminarians (n = 13). The participants in the study had been Christian for a duration ranging from 2 to 50 years, and 108 of them were married. TenElshof and Furrow found that secure attachment styles were correlated with faith maturity, thereby showing greater evidence for the correspondence hypothesis. They argued that the students’ adult relationships can impact their spiritual lives and that those students without secure adult relationships will find corresponding limitations in their spiritual maturity (TenElshof & Furrow, 2000).

Granqvist and Hagekull (2000) found evidence for both the compensation and correspondence hypotheses. For the correspondence hypothesis, they found a positive relationship between adult attachment style and a personal relationship with God. In the same study, they found that individuals who were single in comparison to those with romantic partners were more religiously active, more likely to perceive a personal relationship with God, and more likely to make changes in behavior indicative of increased importance of religious beliefs (Granqvist & Hagekull, 2000).

Beck and McDonald (2004) explored the correspondence between attachment styles in adult relationships and attachment to God, using an adulthood love relationship
inventory that assesses general attachment style. They found that individuals with insecure attachment styles may be more likely to build an attachment relationship to God through conversion experience and religious involvement (compensation hypothesis), while the working models exert their influence on the duration of the relationship with God (correspondence hypothesis). Brokaw and Edwards (1994) suggested that parental bonds may have a closer parallel to religious attachment than romantic attachment style.

Images of God the Father and God as loving and protective are common in Christianity. For example, Dickie et al. (1997), in a study of two samples of children ages 4 through 11, found that children who perceive their parents as nurturing and powerful also perceived God as nurturing and powerful. In one study, all of the 49 participants (22 girls and 27 boys) recruited from a local mainline Protestant church were Caucasians from middle- to upper-middle class intact families. The second sample, 47 girls and 47 boys from lower- to middle-class Christian families, included Caucasians (44.7%), Hispanic Americans (41.5%), and African Americans, Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, and people of mixed heritage (10.6% combined). In this second study, Dickie et al. (1997) found that the children reported that God and their mothers were more nurturing than their fathers, and God was perceived as more powerful when compared with their fathers than with their mothers. Justice and Lambert (1986), in a study conducted among 162 patients admitted to a Baptist hospital during a one-month period, found a correlation between the images adults used to describe their fathers and images of God, such that those adults who had the most negative views of their parents also had the most negative views of God.
In their study of the relationship between parental spirituality and attachment to God among 101 college students (76 females and 23 males), most of whom belonged to the Church of Christ (60.4%) and nondenominational churches (14.9%), and most of whom were Caucasian (77.6%), McDonald, Beck, Allison, and Norsworthy (2005) found that families who engaged in more religious activities such as church attendance, scripture reading, and praying reported later reliance on God. Additionally, students from homes where parents had a less personal relationship with God were more likely to experience difficulty in their relationship with God (McDonald et al., 2005). Comparisons between parental variables and attachment to God appear to support a correspondence hypothesis (McDonald et al., 2005).

Kirkpatrick (1997), in his longitudinal study of changes in religious belief and behavior as a function of individual differences in adult attachment style, found that a person’s internal working model of attachment relationships at a given point in time is reflected in both his or her interpersonal relationships and perceived relationships with God. Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1990) and Ullman’s (1989) data seem to suggest that children with particularly insecure-avoidant childhood attachments may find a relationship with an ideally adequate, responsive God in their search for substitute attachments. On the contrary, children treated in a consistently sensitive manner grow up experiencing the world as good and responsive, and the self as deserving such consideration (Weinfield, Sroufe, Egeland, & Carlson, 1999).

Kirkpatrick (1999) observed that the idea of God as a parental figure has produced mixed results in research that investigated whether God-images resemble maternal versus paternal images. Whether God is viewed as an attachment figure or in
terms of a paternal–maternal figure depends on a person’s concept of God—for example, the view of God as a “punishing father” or a loving parent (Kaufman, 1981; Wong–McDonald & Gorsuch, 2004).

In his application of the attachment theory to the attachment relationship to God, Kirkpatrick (1999) drew parallels between commonly reported experiences with God and the four attachment criteria. For example, he noted that believers are often motivated to be “close” or “near” to God: a clear indication of proximity maintenance. He also stated that in times of distress or perceived threat, God is sought after as a secure base or haven of safety, and perceived separation or distancing from God often lead to emotional distress or anxiety (Kirkpatrick, 1994, 1999). In some cases, insecure-avoidant attachments with God do ultimately lead to agnosticism (Beck & McDonald, 2004; Kirkpatrick, 1999).

Miner (2007) appraised attachment theory as integrating findings from ethology, biology, psychodynamic, and cognitive–affective theories into psychology. She also observed that contemporary theories of attachment to God lack a clear and coherent theological basis, thereby weakening attachment theory as applied to the God-relationship on three grounds: (a) cognitive social models easily slip into reductionism; (b) these attachment models fail to consider fully the attributes of God as the attachment figure; and (c) the models overlook that relationships with God and humans can include intersubjectivity (Miner, 2007).

According to Miner (2007), “the cognitive and relational theories of attachment to God refer to a clearly articulated theological framework” (p. 112). She argued that a theological framework is particularly necessary if psychology is to interact with any
confessional theology. Additionally, she stated that models of attachment to God based on Trinitarian theology can provide a coherent account of the origins of the human relationship to God and of human intersubjectivity (Miner, 2007). She also viewed the compensation motivation in attachment to God as offering a developmental model of spiritual maturity. However, Miner (2007) cautioned against adopting the relational model of attachment to God proposed by Hall (2004), which proposed that the motivation for religious attachment is a need for felt security and that the internal working models are unconscious and implicit representations of relationships. Thus, the relational model of attachment to God leads to reductionism by presenting implicit or explicit representations of human attachments that underpin, or mediate, representations of attachment to God as a projection of human qualities on God (Miner, 2007).

Using Gunton’s (2002) Trinitarian theology to explain the origins of the attachment relationship to God, Miner (2007) stated that “we relate to others because we are capable of relating to God by being made in the image of God: we do not just develop an ability to relate to God because we relate to humanity, or to carers” (p. 119). For her, the human longing for God is a result of an innate, God-given capacity to pursue relationships. Her argument supports the correspondence model of attachment in that the “secure attachment to a caregiver is associated with the secure attachment to God” (Miner, p. 120). The cognitive–affective structures that mark attachment with a caregiver serve to provide filters and expectations concerning future relationships with people who are sought as providers of safety and security, such as other family members, romantic partners, close friends, and counselors (Hall, 2004).
In Catholic religious understanding, God the Father is sought as a haven of safety and a secure base, and the attachment relationship with God the Father is mediated by God the Spirit. Hence, as the person develops in his spiritual maturity and security of attachment with God the Father, he may experience more of a relationship of friendship with God the Son. Miner (2007) stated that “the attachment relationship would still have qualities of approaching God as a safe haven and moving into the world from God as a secure base, but would be marked by greater reciprocity of attachment behaviors” (p. 120).

Storr (1988), reflecting on the significance of the individual, stated that

For the deeply religious and especially for those whose vocation demands celibacy, attachment to God takes precedence over attachment to persons. Although such people may succeed in loving their neighbours [sic] as themselves, the injunction “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” is truly “the first and great commandment.” (p. 82)

Storr (1988) also observed that some candidates with vocation to the priesthood or religious life might have chosen the vocation for the “wrong” reasons, such as failed relationships, unwillingness to take responsibility for their lives, or “flight from the world,” but this fact does not imply that those who experience intimate adult attachment relationships are living an incomplete or inferior life. Additionally, he argued against the position that assumes that all those who have put their relation with God before their relations with their fellows are abnormal or neurotic.

It is important to point out here that although Kirkpatrick and other theorists of attachment to God may not have provided a solid and plausible theological understanding of God, they seem to be in agreement with Miner on the view that adults are capable of forming attachment relationships to God. However, they differ in their view of whether
the attachment to God has its origin in the child-caregiver attachment relationship or whether the former precedes the latter. Furthermore, Miner's (2007) study stimulated a dialogue between theologians and psychologists in relation to how attachment to God might operate. She provided the intersubjective model of attachment to God as well as the theological reasons why people should be drawn to God as an attachment figure and how that relationship of attachment to God might develop or lead to people choosing a vocation to the priesthood or the religious life (Miner, 2007).

Miner's (2007) arguments on attachment to God seem more plausible and consistent with the Roman Catholic understanding of the Trinitarian God in relationship within the Godhead. Similarly, Storr's (1988) arguments capture the view that persons with vocation to the priesthood or the religious life strive to develop an attachment relationship with God that will inform their interpersonal relationship with others. In Roman Catholic theology, the human heart has an innate capacity to know God, and Scripture is regarded as the revelation and primary source of knowledge of God (United States Catholic Conference, 1994). In the Trinitarian theology, God is presented as a Supreme Being or reality, who can be known through creation and the human person, and who is capable of interacting with humans, as well as One who takes on the male or female gender role depending on the needs of his creatures or “people” (United States Catholic Conference, 1994). For example, God sometimes acts like parents who provide for their children but also care for their offspring: as noted in the Bible, God said, “Does a woman forget her baby at the breast, or fail to cherish the son of her womb? Yet, even if these forget, I will never forget you” (Is 49:15). Also in Roman Catholic theology, God
is fully revealed in the person of Jesus Christ, with whom, according to Catholic theology, people may have a personal and intimate relationship.

The Second Testament scriptural passages consist of various accounts of Jesus’ secure attachment relationship to the Father as a prototype of the attachment relationship expected of his Christians and God. Hence, Jesus told his followers not only to love God with all their heart, mind, and soul (Deuteronomy 11:13; Luke 10:27; Mark 12:30; Matthew 22:37), but to love others as He loves them: “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and remain in his love. This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:9-10 & 12). This injunction of Jesus extends to the love of one’s enemies: “But I say to you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Luke 6:35; Matthew 5:44).

God is sometimes presented as taking a companion of humans: “This is what the LORD requires of thee: only this, to act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with your God.” (Micah 6:8). In another passage of the scripture, Jesus is reported as telling his disciples that their relationship with God should be given first priority in their lives (Luke 14:26). Hence, the proposition of Jesus above seems to demand a greater relationship with God than would be required in other relationships in which the disciple is involved. In other words, the disciple or believer is expected to be animated by the attachment relationship with God and becomes in turn a dispenser of the benefits of that relationship with others, especially those who have not yet experienced it. This is one of the objectives of evangelization, and it sums up the Christian vocational identity.
Jung (1923) believed that perceived relationships with God are central to the religious belief of many people, and that beliefs about God tend to parallel the characteristics of secure attachment figures. In the Jungian relativity of God, there is a reciprocal relationship between God and man, such that man is a function of God and God is a psychological function of man (Jung, 1923). For example, on lower human levels, God takes on various characters that are needful for life and the well-being of individuals, so much that the emotional bond experienced in this relationship is a form of love akin to the infant–mother relationship. For Jung, this relationship allows inspiration, action, and achievement to come about that perhaps would never have been.

Attachment to God and Dependency

In the United States and other Western cultures, dependence on others is viewed as a sign of weakness and as something to be discouraged (Feeney, 2007). In a study of the dependency paradox in close relationships, Feeney (2007) offered an alternative view of dependence on others based on attachment theory and emphasized on the importance of forming and maintaining close affective relationships with particular individuals across the lifespan.

Prior to Feeney, Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980) asserted that healthy dependence on a reliably sensitive and responsive attachment figure is important for optimal functioning and wellbeing of an individual from the cradle to the grave. This leads to the view that attachment behavior in certain situations should be accepted as an intrinsic part of human nature and acknowledged for the role it plays in promoting positive human behavior (Feeney, 2007). Feeney stated that “an attachment figure who is accepting of and responsive to dependency needs serves a protective function with regard to any number
of threats that the individual may encounter" (Feeney, p. 269). The desire for comfort and support in adversity should not be regarded as unhealthy or childish, unlike what may be implied by the word dependency (Bowlby, 1988).

Feeney (2007) examined the idea of a close relationship where a partner’s acceptance of dependence when needed is associated with less dependence, more autonomous functioning, and more self-sufficiency on the part of the supported individual. He found that an acceptance of dependency needs by one relationship partner is linked to higher levels of autonomous functioning by the other relationship partner (Feeney, 2007). Although Feeney’s study relates to romantic partners, it could also be applied to individuals with vocation to the priesthood or religious life. Male religious live in convents or monasteries under a religious Superior or Abbot and are bound by the vow of obedience to the religious Superior. The religious Superior is responsible for the spiritual and material needs of the religious brothers under his jurisdiction. Hence, there is a relationship of dependence that develops between the Superior and his religious community members.

Sometimes, this relationship of dependency may take unhealthy turns, especially when the religious member strips himself of the desire to make personal decisions or take initiatives in the community and solely subjects himself to the control of the Superior. For example, in the situation where a religious novice holds a different point of view from the Superior, he is supposed to view and obey the decision of the Superior as a way of obeying the will of God (Arraj, 2008). Although the focus of this study is not directly linked to dependence on others, it would be interesting to observe the level of
dependence on others as measured by scores on the dependency subscale of the RSQ (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994).

Attachment to God and Person Variables

Certain person variables such as age, gender roles, and religious roles can have an impact on a person’s attachment relationship to God. Although gender differences in relation to attachment styles will not be addressed in this study, gender roles can still be an issue for people with vocation to the priesthood or religious life, because men do play both male and female gender roles, and because seminarians and novices might fall into the temptation of observing traditional male gender roles.

In a theoretical discussion of attachment and relationship quality, Cancian (1985) alluded to traditional gender role patterns that acknowledged women as relationship specialists, arguing that there is little evidence of recent change in that belief. This implies that men need to strive more to maintain their relationships over time.

Brennan, Shaver, and Tobey (1991) as well as Hazan and Shaver (1987) pointed out that the distribution of attachment styles, measured by the Hazan–Shaver instrument, appears independent of gender; however, the relationship between attachment styles and other variables seems to be conditioned by gender role patterns.

Both age and gender differences in the adaptation resources and wellbeing of older adults residing in Catholic monasteries were reviewed by Bishop (2006), who found that social engagement may explain the differential coping patterns among older women and men religious. For example, stress, loneliness, religious doubt, social pressure to marry, and dissatisfaction with life were viewed as negative factors in the adaptation and wellbeing of younger men serving in religious vocations (DeJong &
Donovan, 1988; Hoge, Shields, & Griffin, 1995). However, older men religious
experienced less doubt toward the religious life, lower levels of loneliness, and higher life
satisfaction (DeJong & Donovan, 1988; Hoge, Shield, & Griffin, 1995). Disengagement
from religious roles seems to contribute to less stress and demands from church leaders
and lay people (Hoge et al., 1995; Knox, Virginia, & Lombardo, 2002; Virginia, 1998),
leading to older men religious having to adapt to new roles by reestablishing a spiritual
identity (DeJong & Donovan, 1988); therefore, “older men in religious life seem less
committed toward social relationships and more concerned with spiritual growth”
(Bishop, p. 113).

However, the older male religious typically found that they could not effectively
retire from engaging in pastoral activity, especially in regards to persons who seek their
spiritual advice and daily guidance (Hoge et al., 1995; Knox et al., 2002; Virginia, 1998). They often turned to God for comfort and reassurance instead of turning to others,
probably because they perceived God as being available to them, especially during times
of stress (Bishop, 2006). Also, older men residing in contemplative religious settings had
higher levels of depression, were less satisfied with life, and had a lower sense of
personal growth than did younger men (Bishop, 2006). Roman Catholic clergy, such as
diocesan or parish priests, usually experience higher levels of depression than the general
population (Knox et al., 2002; Virginia, 1998). It is also interesting to note that
interpersonal support from religious Superiors and colleagues as well as the physical
living environment tend to be secondary factors of depression among secular Catholic
clergy (Knox et al., 2002). Bishop pointed out that whether this remains true for older
men within the contemplative religious life is yet to be determined.
The results of Bishop’s (2006) study showed that the older male religious generally perceived aging in terms of loss—for example, in terms of a decrease in valued social roles and loss of friends (Steverink, Westerhof, Bode, & Dittmann-Kohli, 2001). However, the younger old men religious reported more friendship, coping behaviors, and personal growth. A question that arises here is the following: To what extent does the seminary formation or training provide seminarians and male religious novices with adequate knowledge and understanding of the challenges posed by person variables? Does their conceptual understanding of personal growth include the experience of growth, maturity, and change (Bishop, 2006)?

Cultural Perspective on Attachment

Subjective experiences of God vary considerably and are influenced by situational and cultural factors (Hood, 1995). People from a collective cultural background seem to experience attachment in a more complex way in comparison to those from an individualistic cultural background. In a collective culture, the quote “it takes a village to bring up a child” seems to suggest the notion of attachment to multiple caregivers, although it does not militate against the child’s capacity to develop attachment to the primary caregiver, and consequently to God. Sim and Loh (2003) pointed out that despite the obvious religious differences between Jewish, Christian and Muslim understandings of God, for example, the arguments on attachment to God, mostly based on research within Christian cultures, are presumably applicable across all the monotheistic religions, including those religions that view God as impersonal and distant. In this study, care is taken to avoid generalizing the results of the study to other religious traditions.
Attachment to God and Spiritual Coping

In a study of the role of attachment in predicting spiritual coping with a loved one in surgery, Belavich and Pargament (2002) discussed how attachment to God can be used in making predictions of the coping style and activities that an individual will employ when faced with stressful events. For example, a securely attached individual may choose to employ spiritual coping, which emphasizes the individual's experience, trusting in God's love, deriving strength from God, and looking to God for guidance (Belavich & Pargament, 2002). The individual might also choose to employ religious support coping, which involves comfort and help from clergy and other congregation members (Pargament et al., 1990). On the other hand, avoidantly attached individuals believe that God is distant and has little or no interest in their personal lives (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1992). These individuals believe that they can solve their own problems on their own without the help of God (Belavich & Pargament, 2002).

Individuals with an anxious attachment style view God as inconsistent in reactions to them. Such individuals are more likely to adopt a deferring coping style and may become wholly dependent on God for solving their problems and thus cling to God for security at all times rather than only when in distress (Belavich & Pargament, 2002). Individuals with a religious avoidant coping style distract themselves from their problems through religious activity, which provides them with contact with God and aids them in taking their mind off the problem they are coping with (Belavich & Pargament, 2002). In their study, Belavich and Pargament found that individuals with a highly secure attachment style also reported using more spiritual coping and a more collaborative coping style and reported lower levels of religious discontent, whereas individuals with
higher levels of avoidant attachment tended to emphasize the responsibility to solve a problem without the aid of God (Belavich & Pargament, 2002).

The empirical study of attachment to God is a developing research area that strives to apply attachment theory in the spiritual/religious domain, although the manner in which the attachment to God operates needs to be explored further. Hence, in order to extend previous work and further knowledge in this area, I propose to study whether attachment to God is associated with the psychological wellbeing of men who have chosen a vocation to the priesthood or to the religious life.
CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Method and Procedure

The initial sample in this study was composed of about 85 male adults who were at least 18 years old and were candidates with vocation to the priesthood or the religious life. The participants were solicited from Roman Catholic seminaries in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Washington, DC. A letter of solicitation was sent to the rectors of the Roman Catholic seminaries requesting permission to conduct the research at their sites by sending the research survey packages to their candidates for completion and return in a self-addressed envelope. The rectors of the seminaries were informed that no disaggregated data would be shared with them, that the final summaries and conclusions would be based only on combined data from all participants, and that the participants’ anonymous responses on the self-report surveys would be kept confidential and used only for the purposes of this research project. The response rate to the surveys by the participants was poor. Out of a total of 247 mailed survey packets, 47 completed surveys were returned (19%), despite the expansion of data collection to participants in two other seminaries (in Washington, DC and in PA).

Measures

The participants were asked to complete a brief demographic scale (Appendix A) to obtain information about the participant’s age, race/ethnicity, number of years spent in the seminary or novitiate, level of education completed, vocation of choice, location, whether the participant was a candidate for priesthood or religious life (religious affiliation), and previous employment status. The participants also completed the
Relationship Scale Questionnaire (RSQ; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994), the Attachment to God Inventory (AGI; Beck & McDonald, 2004), and the Ryff Psychological Wellbeing Scale (PWBS; Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

The Relationship Scale Questionnaire (RSQ; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). The RSQ is a 30-item measure developed from Hazan and Shaver’s (1987) Adult Attachment Questionnaire, Bartholomew and Horowitz’s (1991) Relationship Questionnaire, and Collins and Read’s (1990) Adult Attachment Scale. The RSQ consists of items measuring the secure (5 items), dismissing (5 items), fearful (4 items), and preoccupied (4 items) attachment styles, and two other additional attachment subscales (Adult Attachment Scales: Collins & Read, 1990; and Avoidant and Anxiety Attachment styles: Simpson, Rholes, & Nelligan, 1992). Each participant rated on a 5-point Likert scale (where 1 = not at all like me and 5 = very much like me) the extent to which he believed each item of the RSQ described his feelings about close relationships. Items 6, 9, and 28 were reverse scored.

The scores for each attachment style were derived by computing the mean score on each subscale: Secure (items 3, 9-reverse, 10, 15, and 28-reverse); Fearful (items 1, 5, 12, and 24); Preoccupied (items 6-reverse, 8, 16, and 25); and Dismissing (2, 6, 19, 22, and 26; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). Griffin and Bartholomew reported Cronbach’s alphas (average over partners) for Hazan and Shaver’s secure scale (.50), anxious scale (.73), and avoidant scale (.73), as well as alphas ranging from .73 to .78 for Collins and Read’s dependency, anxiety, and closeness scales. The RSQ was designed as a continuous measure of adult attachment, and not as a categorical measure of attachment (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). The RSQ demonstrated over an 8-month period a test-
retest reliability of $r = .49$ (for men) and $r = .53$ (for women; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). It also demonstrated internal consistencies ranging from $r = .41$ to $r = .70$ (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). The Cronbach’s coefficient alpha of the RSQ in the current study included 0.31 (secure adult attachment), 0.32 (preoccupied adult attachment), 0.58 (dismissing adult attachment) and 0.62 (fearful adult attachment).

*The Attachment to God Inventory (AGI; Beck & McDonald, 2004).* The AGI is a 28-item inventory based on the Experiences in Close Relationships scale (ECR: Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998), and it assesses the attachment dimensions of anxiety about abandonment and avoidance of intimacy in relationship with God. The ECR assesses for the same attachment dimensions in adult romantic relationships. The AGI consists of the anxiety subscale (14 items) and the avoidance subscale (14 items). Beck and McDonald, using a sample of 117 undergraduate students (58 females and 59 males), reported Cronbach’s alphas of .85 (for the anxiety subscale) and .88 (for the avoidance subscale). Examples of the anxiety items include “I often worry about whether God is pleased with me” and “I fear God does not accept me when I do wrong.” Examples of avoidance items include “I prefer not to depend too much on God” and “I just don’t feel a deep need to be close to God.” The AGI has also been validated with a sample of 109 community adults (66 females and 43 males) recruited from adult education programs from three churches in Abilene, TX, where 38% were members of a Church of Christ congregation, 31% were Roman Catholic members, and 31% were members of a Non-Denominational Charismatic congregation. The mean age of the participants was 38.82 years ($SD = 13.00$). Of the sample, 79.8% was Caucasian, 11% was Hispanic, 2.8% was African American, and 2.8% was Asian American, and approximately 82% of the sample was
married at the time of the survey. The AGI demonstrated good factor structure and construct validity in a multiple-sample study. The AGI subscale again generated good internal consistency coefficients (Avoidance = .86, Anxiety = .87).

The two dimensions of the AGI could be dichotomized into four attachment styles, namely secure (low anxiety–low avoidance), preoccupied (high anxiety–low avoidance), dismissing (low anxiety–high avoidance) and fearful (high anxiety–high avoidance; Beck, 2006). The AGI is rated on a 7-point Likert scale (where 1 = disagree strongly; 4 = neutral/mixed; and 7 = agree strongly). The AGI correlated highly with the religious wellbeing subscale of the Spiritual Wellbeing Scale (Paloutzian & Ellison, 1982)—that is, $r = -.61$ (for the anxiety subscale) and $r = -.62$ (for the avoidance subscale). One would expect that increased ratings on the anxiety and avoidance subscales were related to lesser psychological wellbeing.

The score on the avoidance subscale is the sum of the even-numbered items, while the score on the anxiety subscale is the sum of the odd-numbered items. Items 4, 13, 18, 22, 26, and 28 were reverse coded. Researchers are free to either drop or include items 14 and 16, which were originally selected as part of the avoidance subscale but had higher loadings on the anxiety subscale (Beck & McDonald, 2004). In this study, I decided to include both items because they did not appear to affect the overall factor structure of the AGI in the replication study by Beck and McDonald (2004).

The Ryff Psychological Wellbeing Scale (PWBS; Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). There are different forms of the PWBS, namely the 120-item (original parent form), 84-item (long form), 54-item (medium form), and 18-item (short form). The short form is statistically unreliable and should not be used for assessment (Ryff & Keyes,
1995). The medium form is used in longitudinal studies. The 84-item scale was used in this study. The PWBS consists of six subscales, each measuring a different aspect of psychological wellbeing such as autonomy (14 items), environmental mastery (14 items), personal growth (14 items), positive relations with others (14 items), purpose in life (14 items), and self-acceptance (14 items). Examples of items include “In my view, people of every age are able to continue growing and developing” (personal growth), “I like most aspects of my personality” (self-acceptance), “Maintaining close relationships has been difficult and frustrating for me” (positive relations with others), “In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live” (environmental mastery), “Some people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them” (purpose in life), and “I have confidence in my options, even if they are contrary to the general consensus” (autonomy).

The PBWS has been validated on a nationally representative sample of adults who are at least 25 years of age. For example, the PBWS was initially validated with a sample of 321 individuals divided among young adults (n = 133, mean age = 19.53, SD = 1.57), middle-aged adults (n = 108, mean age = 49.85, SD = 9.35), and older adults (n = 80, mean age = 74.96, SD = 7.11). Also, most of the sample was Catholic or protestant. The young adults were in an educational institution; 60% of the middle-aged adults had completed 4 years of college, while almost a third had completed graduate school; 47% of the older adults had completed 4 years of college; and an additional 30% had done some graduate work. The participants were asked to rate statements on a 6-point Likert scale (where 1 = strongly disagree and 6 = strongly agree). The responses were computed for each subscale (about half of the responses are reverse scored). A high score indicates that the respondent has a mastery of that area of his life, while a low score
implies that the respondent seems to be facing challenges in that area of his life and may need help to improve in that area.

The internal consistencies are as follows: .83 (autonomy), .86 (environmental mastery), .85 (personal growth), .88 (positive relations with others), .88 (purpose in life), and .91 (self-acceptance). Also, the correlation of each 14-item subscale with the 20-item parent scale is as follows: .97 (autonomy), .98 (environmental mastery), .97 (personal growth), .98 (positive relations with others), .98 (purpose in life), and .99 (self-acceptance).

Statistical Design and Analyses

Descriptive analysis of the collected data was computed to gather demographic information (Appendix A) regarding the age, race/ethnicity, location of the seminary or novitiate (state), vocation of choice, number of years spent in the seminary/novitiate, highest level of education completed before entering the seminary/novitiate, and previous employment status before entering the seminary/novitiate.

Descriptive statistics for each variable were calculated, and correlation analyses were conducted to investigate the relationship among the different variables of attachment to God, psychological wellbeing, and demographic variables.

Hypothesis Tests

The following are the variables that were used in the tests of the hypotheses for this study.

Continuous predictor variable. The predictor variable is attachment to God, which consists of anxiety and avoidance levels and could be dichotomized into the following attachment styles: secure attachment style (low anxiety–low avoidance), preoccupied
attachment style (high anxiety–low avoidance), fearful attachment style (high anxiety–high avoidance), and dismissing attachment style (low anxiety–high avoidance). The secure, preoccupied, fearful, and dismissing attachment styles are operationally defined by scores on the corresponding subscale of the AGI (Beck & McDonald, 2004).

Continuous criterion variable. The criterion variable of psychological wellbeing is operationally defined as score on the Ryff PWBS (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995), which is the combined score of its six subscales.

The first hypothesis, that attachment to God is associated with the psychological wellbeing of persons with religious vocation, was tested using a multiple regression where attachment to God was measured with the anxiety and avoidance subscales of the Attachment to God Inventory (AGI: Beck & McDonald, 2004), while psychological wellbeing was measured by scores on the Ryff Psychological Wellbeing Scale (PWBS; Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

The hypothesis that individuals with a secure style of attachment to God will experience greater psychological wellbeing than those with all other styles of attachment to God was tested using univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA). Attachment to God was measured by scores on the Attachment to God Inventory (AGI; Beck & McDonald, 2004). The predictor variables were secure, fearful, preoccupied, and dismissive attachment styles, while the criterion variable was attachment to God. The proportion of variance shared by the individual predictor variables was determined.

The second hypothesis, which proposes that there is a relationship between attachment to God and adult attachment relationship, was tested by bivariate correlation. Attachment to God was measured with the anxiety and avoidance subscales of the
Attachment to God Inventory (AGI: Beck & McDonald, 2004), while adult attachment was measured by scores on the secure, preoccupied, dismissing, and fearful attachment styles of the Relationship Scales Questionnaire (RSQ; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994).

**Power Analysis**

To determine the appropriate sample size for this study and to have meaningful outcomes, a power analysis was conducted using the computer program G*Power (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007) and Cohen’s (1988) criteria for effect size.

The power analysis for a multiple regression model uses the predicted effect size, sample size, and number of predicting variables in the model. For the most complex analysis in this study, which tested four predictor variables with a medium effect size of .15 and a power of .80, at $\alpha = 0.05$, the required sample size was 85 participants. This implies that the appropriate number of participants for this study was 85. Given a sample size of $N = 85$ and $\alpha = 0.05$, the power to detect a small effect was 0.14 and 1.00 for a large effect size.
CHAPTER 4

Results

The results displayed in this chapter include demographic information on the study sample, a description of preliminary data screening procedures, descriptive statistics for the primary variables, and statistical findings for each hypothesis.

Demographic Characteristics

The sample was made up of 47 participants from four different seminaries. The demographic statistics of the participants are presented in Table 1. The age of the participants ranged from 20 to 51 years ($M = 28.98$, $SD = 5.60$), and the number of years they spent in the seminary/novitiate ranged from 1 month to 9 years, 6 months. Among the participants, 72.3% were Diocesan Seminarians and 27.7% were Religious Seminarians/Brothers. The racial/ethnic distribution of the participants was as follows: African American/Black (23.4%), Asian American/Asian (10.6%), Caucasian/White (61.7%), and Hispanic/Latino (4.3%). Among participants, 51.1% stated that they had full-time employment prior to entering the seminary, and 25.5% stated that they had part-time employment.
Table 1

Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Frequency %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NJ</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>27.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>51.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Highest level of education completed (before entering the seminary/novitiate)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>56.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American/Black</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American/Asian</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian/White</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>61.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Previous employment (before entering the seminary/novitiate)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed full time</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>51.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed part time</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not employed</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Screening**

Before the data analysis began, all variables were screened for data entry errors, distribution problems, missing values, univariate and multivariate outliers, and statistical assumption violations.

The data were screened for missing values on 13 continuous variables (Age, AGI-Avoidance, AGI-Anxiety, RSQ-Secure, RSQ-Fearful, RSQ-Preoccupied, RSQ-Dismissing, PWBS-Rel, PWBS-Aut, PWBS-Env, PWBS-Gro, PWBS-Pur, and PWBS-Sel).
No data entry errors were detected. The frequencies statistical table shows that “Age” was the only continuous variable with missing data. One participant did not report his age. Tabachnick and Fidell (2001) suggested that for each variable, the missing data on 5% or fewer of the cases can be ignored. Therefore, the mean age was inserted for the missing value in this one case.

A visual examination of the age variable box plot shows two outliers as possible candidates for deletion. However, these univariate outliers represent two seminarians with late vocation who were at least 44 years old. Their ages alone would not preclude them from being included in the study.

Eleven univariate outliers (2 for Age, 2 for RSQ-Secure, 1 for RSQ-Fearful, 3 for RSQ-Dismissing, 1 for PWBS-Positive Relation to others, and 2 for PWBS-Personal growth) were detected, none of which were also multivariate outliers. Due to its positive skewness, age was transformed with a base-10 logarithm. After transformation, skewness was reduced from 1.645 to .839, and the kurtosis was reduced to a reasonable limit.

Multivariate outliers were screened after transformation of the age variable, “lage,” by computing Mahalanobis distance for each case on the 13 continuous variables. Therefore, all variables were used in the data analysis.

Descriptive Statistics for Primary Variables

The descriptive statistics of all the measures used in the study are presented in Table 2.
Table 2

Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>α</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AGI-Avoidance</td>
<td>38.40</td>
<td>10.81</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGI-Anxiety</td>
<td>38.64</td>
<td>13.47</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGI</td>
<td>77.04</td>
<td>18.77</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSQ-Secure</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSQ-Fearful</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSQ-Preoccupied</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSQ-Dismissing</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSQ</td>
<td>51.09</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWBS-Positive relations with others</td>
<td>68.23</td>
<td>9.61</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWBS-Autonomy</td>
<td>62.66</td>
<td>7.68</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWBS-Environmental mastery</td>
<td>65.23</td>
<td>9.69</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWBS-Personal growth</td>
<td>69.23</td>
<td>9.44</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWBS-Purpose in life</td>
<td>70.00</td>
<td>8.24</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWBS-Self-acceptance</td>
<td>68.36</td>
<td>7.72</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWBS</td>
<td>404.20</td>
<td>41.95</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The result of the Pearson correlation coefficients, calculated among all the measures used in this study, is presented in Table 3. The Pearson correlation matrix shows that the correlation between AGI and RSQ was not statistically significant. Hence, there appears to be no relationship between attachment to God and adult attachment relationship. However, there is an inverse correlation between AGI-Anxiety and RSQ-Secure ($r = -0.44, p < .01$) as well as a positive correlation between AGI-Anxiety and RSQ-Fearful ($r = 0.48, p < .01$). The correlations of AGI-Anxiety with RSQ-Preoccupied and RSQ-Dismissing were not statistically significant. Similarly, the correlations of AGI-Avoidance with the four RSQ subscales were not statistically significant.
| Measure | 1   | 2   | 3   | 4   | 5   | 6   | 7   | 8   | 9   | 10  | 11  | 12  | 13  | 14  | 15  | 16  | 17  | 18  | 19  | 20  |
|---------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| AGI     | .19 |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Anxiety |     | .71 |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| AGI     |     |     | .82 |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| RSQ     | -.27| -.44| -.48|    |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Fearful | .63 | .46 | .36 | .70 |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| RSQ     | .14 | .26 | .27 | .24 | .40 |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| RSQ     | .02 | .28 | .21 | -.48 | .45 | .08 |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| RSQ     | -.03| .40 | .27 | -.37 | .70 | .62 | .00 |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| PWBS    | -.35| -.48 | .55 | .57 | .10 | -.30 | -.28 |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Positive| -.17| -.51 | -.46 | .43 | -.32 | -.18 | .13 | .52 |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Anxiety | -.11| .46 | .41 | .52 | .26 | .46 | .67 |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| PWBS    | -.31| -.55 | -.57 | .51 | .42 | .20 | .10 | .57 | .50 | .61 |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Purpose | -.04| -.32 | -.26 | .47 | -.34 | -.12 | -.39 | -.29 | .39 | .49 | .71 | .52 |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| PWBS    | -.23| .57 | .54 | .65 | .45 | .38 | .24 | .31 | .45 | .66 | .56 | .57 | .51 |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Purpose | -.26| -.51 | -.53 | .72 | -.52 | -.17 | -.35 | -.26 | .77 | .80 | .85 | .82 | .77 | .80 |     |     |     |     |     |
| Age     | -.02| .17 | .13 | .38 | .01 | .04 | .10 | .13 | .24 | .29 | .26 | .08 | .06 | .15 | .23 |     |     |     |     |
| Years    | .06 | .05 | .07 | .21 | .14 | .04 | .03 | .02 | .04 | .08 | .14 | .17 | .19 | .16 | .04 |     |     |     |     |
| Status  | .14 | .03 | .10 | -.02 | -.06 | -.06 | -.12 | -.07 | -.07 | -.13 | .16 | .08 | .10 | .03 | -.38 | .09 | .07 |     |     |
| Education| -.14| .03 | .10 | -.02 | -.06 | -.06 | -.12 | -.07 | -.07 | -.13 | .16 | .08 | .10 | .03 | -.38 | .09 | .07 |     |     |
| Highest  | -.14| .03 | .10 | -.02 | -.06 | -.06 | -.12 | -.07 | -.07 | -.13 | .16 | .08 | .10 | .03 | -.38 | .09 | .07 |     |     |
| Level    | .11 | .23 | .22 | .10 | .04 | .06 | -.18 | -.00 | -.17 | -.09 | -.03 | .02 | .05 | .05 | .06 | .08 | -.37 | .42 | -.70 | .21 |
| Previous | .19 | .20 | .25 | -.26 | .09 | -.19 | .17 | -.08 | .37 | -.30 | .30 | .33 | .15 | .13 | .36 | .42 | .22 | .15 | .13 | .11 |

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*** Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed).
The Pearson correlation matrix also shows that attachment to God (AGI) is inversely correlated ($r = -0.59$ at $p < .001$) with psychological wellbeing (PWBS). In other words, scores for psychological wellbeing increase as the scores on attachment to God decrease. Additionally, the correlation matrix shows inverse correlations of AGI-Anxiety with each subscale of psychological wellbeing, and an inverse correlation of AGI-Avoidance with PWBS-Positive relations with others and with PWBS-Personal growth. Hence, increase in psychological wellbeing is associated with decrease in level of anxiety about abandonment, while increase in positive relations with others and personal growth is associated with decrease in avoidance of intimate relationship with God. The correlations of AGI-Avoidance with the other four subscales of psychological wellbeing were not statistically significant.

The correlations of the subscales of AGI and the covariates of log of age, number of years spent in seminary/novitiate, religious vocation status, race/ethnicity and highest level of education, and previous employment were not statistically significant. This indicates that the covariates seem not to affect the relationship between attachment to God and psychological wellbeing.

*Tests of Hypotheses*

The statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS Predictive Analytic Software (PASW) 17.0 for Windows (2008).

The first hypothesis, that attachment to God would be associated with the psychological wellbeing of persons with religious vocation, was tested using a multiple regression, where attachment to God was measured by scores on the avoidant (AGI-Avoidance) and anxiety (AGI-Anxiety) subscales of the Attachment to God Inventory
(AGI; Beck & McDonald, 2004) and psychological wellbeing was measured by scores on the Ryff Psychological Wellbeing Scale (PWBS; Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). The result of the analysis is shown in Table 4.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Psychological wellbeing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$B$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>495.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total score [AGI-Anxiety]</td>
<td>-1.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total score [AGI-Avoidance]</td>
<td>-0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F$</td>
<td>14.34***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The result of the multiple regression shows that the overall model is statistically significant, $F(2, 44) = 14.34, p < .001$. The sample multiple correlation coefficient was $R = .63$, which implies that approximately 40% of the variance of the psychological wellbeing in the sample can be accounted for by the linear combination of the set of attachment to God variables. The result also showed that anxiety about abandonment contributed significantly to the prediction of psychological wellbeing, $\beta = -.58$, $t(47) = -4.87, p < .001$, while avoidance of intimate relationship to God did not contribute significantly to the regression. The adjusted $R$ square (.367) shows that the anxiety dimension of attachment to God alone accounts for about 37% of the variability in psychological wellbeing.
The second hypothesis, which proposed that there is a relationship between attachment to God and adult attachment relationship, was measured by bivariate correlation. Attachment to God was measured by scores on the anxiety and avoidance subscales of the Attachment to God Inventory (AGI; Beck & McDonald, 2004), while adult attachment was measured by scores on the secure, preoccupied, dismissing, and fearful attachment dimensions of the Relationship Scales Questionnaire (RSQ; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994).

The result of the Pearson correlation coefficients, calculated among all the measures used in this study, is presented in Table 3. The Pearson correlation matrix shows that the correlation between AGI and RSQ was not statistically significant. Hence, there appears to be no relationship between attachment to God and adult attachment relationship. However, the result also shows an inverse correlation between AGI-Anxiety and RSQ-Secure \((r = -0.44, p < 0.01)\), as well as a positive correlation between AGI-Anxiety and RSQ-Fearful \((r = 0.48, p < 0.01)\). The correlations of AGI-Anxiety with RSQ-Preoccupied and RSQ-Dismissing were not statistically significant. Similarly, the correlations of AGI-Avoidance with the four RSQ subscales were not statistically significant.

The Pearson correlation matrix also shows that attachment to God (AGI) is inversely correlated \((r = -0.59 \text{ at } p < 0.001)\) with psychological wellbeing (PWBS). In other words, the scores on psychological wellbeing increase as the scores on attachment to God decrease. Additionally, the correlation matrix shows inverse correlations of AGI-Anxiety with each subscale of psychological wellbeing, and an inverse correlation of AGI-Avoidance with PWBS-Positive relations with others and with PWBS-Personal growth.
Hence, increase in psychological wellbeing is associated with decrease in level of anxiety about abandonment, while increase in positive relations with others and personal growth is associated with decrease in avoidance of intimate relationship with God. The correlations of AGI-Avoidance with the other four subscales of psychological wellbeing were not statistically significant.

The correlations of the subscales of AGI and the covariates of log of age, number of years spent in seminary/novitiate, religious vocation status, race/ethnicity and highest level of education, and previous employment were not statistically significant. This indicates that the covariates seem not to make any difference in the relationship between attachment to God and psychological wellbeing.

The third hypothesis, that individuals with a secure style of attachment to God will experience greater psychological wellbeing than those with all other styles of attachment to God, was tested using univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA). Attachment to God was measured by scores on the Attachment to God Inventory (AGI; Beck & McDonald, 2004). The two subscales of Attachment to God (avoidance and anxiety) were dichotomized using a median split to produce the secure, preoccupied, dismissive, and fearful attachment styles (Beck, 2006a, 2006b). The participants were divided into each of the four attachment styles, as follows: Individuals with a secure attachment style scored low on both the avoidant and anxiety scales; those with a preoccupied attachment style scored low on the avoidant and high on the anxiety scales; those with a dismissing attachment style scored high on the avoidant and low on the anxiety scales; and those with a fearful attachment style scored high on both the avoidant and anxiety scales (Brennan et al., 1998; Cooper, Bruce, Harman, & Boccaccini, 2009).
To create the four groups of attachment styles, low and high avoidance scores were defined as below and above the median of 39, respectively, while low and high anxiety scores were defined as below and above the median of 38, respectively. The number of participants in each of the four attachment styles was as follows: 14 (secure attachment style), 11 (preoccupied attachment style), 10 (dismissing attachment style), and 12 (fearful attachment style).

Attachment style was the independent variable, and attachment to God was the dependent variable. The results of the ANOVA showed a significant difference between the four attachment styles on the Attachment to God scale, $F(3, 43) = 27.50, p < .001$, Partial $\eta^2 = .66$. This means that about 66% of the variance of attachment to God can be accounted for by the attachment styles. A post-hoc test was performed on the differences using Tukey’s HSD, which revealed that the secure attachment style was significantly lower ($M = 57.57, SD = 10.88$) on the AGI scale than the preoccupied ($M = 80.09, SD = 10.62$), dismissing ($M = 75.90, SD = 8.29$), and fearful ($M = 97.92, SD = 14.36$) groups. The results of the post-hoc tests are provided in Table 5.
Furthermore, a univariate ANOVA was conducted with psychological wellbeing as the dependent variable and attachment style as the independent variable. The overall model comparing psychological wellbeing for the four attachment styles was statistically significant, $F(3,43) = 4.24, p < .05$, Partial $\eta^2 = .23$. This means that the attachment styles accounted for about 23% of the variance of psychological wellbeing. The Tukey’s HSD post-hoc test (Table 6) revealed that the mean psychological wellbeing score for those with a secure attachment style was significantly higher than for the fearful attachment style, while the mean for those with a dismissing attachment style was significantly higher than the mean for those with the fearful attachment style.
### Table 6

**Tukey HSD Comparison for Attachment Style Prediction of Psychological Wellbeing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(I) AGI styles</th>
<th>(J) AGI styles</th>
<th>Mean difference (I-J)</th>
<th>Std. error</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AGI-Secure</td>
<td>AGI-Preoccupied</td>
<td>32.36</td>
<td>15.233</td>
<td>[-8.35, 73.07]</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>[-42.38, 41.29]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AGI-Fearful</td>
<td>43.77</td>
<td>14.873</td>
<td>[4.03, 83.52]</td>
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<tr>
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<td>AGI-Secure</td>
<td>-32.36</td>
<td>15.233</td>
<td>[-73.07, 8.35]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AGI-Dissociating</td>
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<td>16.519</td>
<td>[-77.05, 11.25]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AGI-Fearful</td>
<td>11.42</td>
<td>15.781</td>
<td>[-30.76, 53.59]</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AGI-Fearful</td>
<td>44.32</td>
<td>16.188</td>
<td>[1.06, 87.58]</td>
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<tr>
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<td>AGI-Secure</td>
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<td>14.873</td>
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<tr>
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<td>AGI-Dissociating</td>
<td>-44.32</td>
<td>16.188</td>
<td>[-87.58, -1.06]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05.
The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between attachment to God (AGI) and psychological wellbeing (PWBS) of persons with religious vocation (seminarians/novices). The secondary purpose of this study, assuming such a relationship was found, was to determine which attachment style is the best predictor of attachment to God and whether there is a correspondence between attachment to God (AGI) and the adult human attachment relationship (RSQ). In this chapter, I will discuss the implications of the findings and limitations of this study and will conclude with some recommendations for future study.

**Implications of the Findings**

The results of this study showed an overall strong relationship between attachment to God and psychological wellbeing. This means that the first hypothesis was supported as predicted. Hence, a decrease in the negative dimensions of attachment to God (anxiety about abandonment and avoidance of intimacy) is associated with an increase in psychological wellbeing and vice versa. In other words, there is a positive relationship between a secure attachment style (low anxiety and low avoidance levels) and psychological wellbeing. A closer look at the correlation between anxiety about abandonment by God and all six dimensions of psychological wellbeing (Table 3) showed that a reduction in anxiety was associated with moderate to greater levels of psychological wellbeing. In other words, the reduction in the level of anxiety (AGI-Anxiety) of the seminarians was associated with an improvement in their positive regard for the welfare of others and their trusting relationship with others (PWBS-Positive
Relation with Others), in their ability to resist social pressures to behave in a certain way that might be perceived as morally incorrect (PWBS-Autonomy), and in their ability to adapt to different environments and manage their daily life activities (PWBS-Environmental Mastery). A reduction in anxiety about abandonment by God was also associated with improvement in the participants’ desire for continued personal growth in different contexts of their lives (PWBS-Personal Growth), their sense of directedness and conviction that they chose the right vocation (PWBS-Purpose in Life), as well as their positive attitude toward self-acceptance through recognizing and integrating their strengths and weaknesses (PWBS-Self-Acceptance). Similarly, the reduction in the level of avoidance of intimacy with God (AGI-Avoidance) was associated with two dimensions of psychological wellbeing, namely positive relation with others (PWBS-Positive relation with others) and personal growth (PWBS-Personal Growth). This seems to suggest that the more the participants reduced their tendency to avoid an intimate relationship with God, the greater their ability was to develop positive relationships with other people, and the greater their personal growth and development were. Hence, their deeper and closer relationship with God could be associated with their psychological wellbeing.

The finding in relation to the first hypothesis of this study was consistent with the previous research finding of Beck and McDonald (2004), namely that increased ratings on the AGI-Anxiety and AGI-Avoidance subscales were uniformly related to lower religious wellbeing as well as with lower existential wellbeing. The finding was also consistent with Miner’s (2007) view that “we relate to others because we are capable of
relating to God by being made in the image of God: we do not just develop an ability to relate to God because we relate to humanity” (p. 119).

The hypothesis that individuals with a secure attachment style will experience greater psychological wellbeing than those with all other attachment styles was also supported by this study. The results of this study were consistent with those of Tenelshof and Furrow (2000), who found that secure adult attachment among students at a conservative seminary was the strongest predictor of a healthy representational model of attachment. Cooper and colleagues (2009) also found the secure attachment style to be the strongest predictor of attachment to God.

The findings of the present study suggest that attachment to God can be associated with the psychological wellbeing of persons with religious vocation, and that of the different attachment styles, the secure attachment style appears to be the best predictor of attachment relationship to God. Although this study showed a relationship between four styles of attachment to God at the time of the study, the cross-sectional study design did not allow an exploration of possible changes in these styles over time. The possibility of attachment styles changing over time could be the subject of a future study. Further, the categorical method of assigning participants to attachment styles did not allow the present study to explore the possibility of overlap among the styles.

The second hypothesis, that there is a relationship between attachment to God (AGI) and the adult attachment relationship (RSQ), was not supported. Overall, there seems to be no relationship between attachment to God (AGI) and the adult human attachment relationship (RSQ). This finding seems to be contrary to Beck’s (2006c) views about attachment to God, as he emphasized how much some people view their
relationship with God as a human love relationship. Despite the lack of full support for this hypothesis, the correlations between styles of attachment of both variables (attachment to God and adult attachment) seem to suggest that there is some relationship between individual styles of attachment to God and both the overall and individual styles of adult human attachment. For example, AGI-Anxiety correlated positively \( (r = .40, p < .01) \) with the overall adult attachment relationship (measured by the sum of the mean scores of RSQ-Secure, RSQ-Preoccupied, RSQ-Dismissing, and RSQ-Fearful). The AGI-Anxiety scale also correlated positively \( (r = .48, p < .01) \) with the fearful style of adult attachment (RSQ-Fearful) and negatively \( (r = -.44, p < .01) \) with the secure adult attachment style (RSQ-Secure). It is not clear what was responsible for the discrepancy between the correlation results of the overall attachment to God and adult attachment relationship and the correlation results of the styles of attachment to God and the dimensions of adult attachment relationship. One of the implications of this result is that there was a correspondence between a participant’s experienced anxiety over being abandoned by God in certain contexts and the participant’s positive experience of an adult attachment relationship as well as with the participant’s fear of rejection by others or difficulty in developing intimate relationships with others. Specifically, an increase in a participant’s anxiety over being abandoned by God was associated with a corresponding improvement in the participant’s adult attachment relationship with other people as well as with an increase in the participant’s fears about being abandoned by others. However, a reduction in the level of the participant’s anxiety about being abandoned by God (AGI-Anxiety) could be associated with a corresponding increase in the participant’s secure adult attachment relationship.
A closer look at scores on some of the items on the RSQ showed that participants often viewed their relationship with God as different from their human love relationships. For example, while about 83% of the participants disagreed with the statement “I am jealous at how God seems to care more for others than for me” (AGI), only 27.7% disagreed with the corresponding statement “I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like” (RSQ). Also, about 48.9% disagreed with the statement “I crave reassurance from God that God loves me” (AGI), while about 25.5% did not identify with the statement “I worry that others don’t value me as much as I value them” (RSQ). Some participants seemed to express more negative views toward their experiences with human attachment relationships. About 95.7% agreed with the statement “I am comfortable without close emotional relationships” (RSQ), and only 42.6% of the participants disagreed with the statement “I prefer not to have others depend on me” (RSQ). The finding of no correlation between the overall AGI and RSQ was consistent with the results of Cooper, Bruce, Harman, and Boccaccini (2009), who found that the styles of attachment to God appear to be different when compared with adult attachment relationships, partly because the object of attachment is different. For example, Cooper and colleagues (2009) argued that the object of attachment in human relationships is more concrete and less symbolic, whereas in the relationship with God, the object of the attachment appears to be much more abstract. The finding of the present study, namely that there is no relationship between the AGI and the RSQ, was also consistent with the study by Cassibba, Granqvist, Costantini, and Gatto (2008), who did not find predicted relationships between secular attachment and attachment to God despite the mixed quantitative and qualitative methods used in measuring each set of variables. The
differences in conceptual framework of some of the items of both the RSQ and AGI raise the question of identifying the differences between human love or affection on one hand and divine love or charity on the other. In some Catholic theology, the love relationship with God is viewed as different and at a higher level (experienced through contemplative prayer) than the human love relationship. However, this distinction does not negate or diminish human love relationships in comparison to divine charity. Additionally, prayer is seen as a means of communicating with God as well as a means of experiencing God’s love. This position of the Catholic Church was echoed by Miner (2007) in her statement that “Yearning for God can be seen as evidence of an ‘inbuilt’ awareness of the possibility of relationship…. Human longing for God is a result of an innate, God-given capacity to pursue relationships” (p. 119). Miner’s statement also confirms that the adult attachment relationship is based on a human trait with a divine component. Hence, some Catholic mystics who expressed their romantic love experience with God, such as Saint Teresa of Avila and Saint John of the Cross, shared their experience in explicit human terms. For example, Saint Teresa reported that her experiences of God gave her peace, inspiration, and encouragement (Matz, 1996-2000). According to St. Teresa, "Contemplative prayer [oración mental] in my opinion is nothing else than a close sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with him [God] who we know loves us" (Kavanagh & Rodriguez, 1976, p. 67). St. John of the Cross referred to contemplative prayer as “silent love” (Kavanagh & Rodriguez, 1979, p. 678). These examples demonstrate that to the believer, God is an authentic attachment figure.

Beck’s criticism of attachment theory is that it pathologizes the deepest struggles with God, described under the preoccupied, dismissing, and fearful attachment styles,
even if they are not necessarily unhealthy (2006b). This is true for the participants in this study, where 29.8% of the participants were in the securely attached group, leaving 70.2% in the preoccupied, dismissing, and fearfully attached groups. Does this mean that the 70.2% of the participants are not securely attached to God? Does it also mean that they will have difficulty committing themselves totally to their religious duties and prayer life? As these were seminarians, it is possible that a more secure form of attachment could develop later in their formation. This study does not make such claims, nor did it explore such a possibility, but it showed some of its limitations and the need to gather more information relating to the other interpersonal and spiritual activities of the participants in the study. It would be interesting for a future study to focus on the attachment styles of these seminarians a few years after completion of their seminary training while they are involved in their active ministry as priests.

Hence, the evaluation of the styles of attachment to God of the seminarians could be beneficial in helping them discern aspects of their lives or relationship with God and with others that need further development. While agreeing with Beck on the seemingly pessimistic view of an aspect of attachment theory, I would also add that another limitation of this study is that the Attachment to God Inventory does not capture well spiritual experiences such as the theological dimension in a person’s relationship with God. On the contrary, its tendency is to reduce such a relationship to the negation of two common human emotional and behavioral experiences, anxiety and avoidance. Beck (2006b) later developed two new dimensions of attachment, namely “Communion” (the extent to which a believer experienced engagement with God) and “Complaint” (which captures the emotions of complaint and lament expressed in some of the Psalms, the
Book of Job, and the Prophetic texts), thereby resolving the aspect of pathologizing nonsecure attachment relationships with God. He found that the “Communion” dimension correlated negatively with AGI-Avoidance, while the “Complaint” dimension correlated positively with the AGI-Anxiety subscale (Beck, 2006a). Beck’s new attachment dimensions introduced a paradigm shift in the way that attachment theory could be applied to God as an attachment figure. However, there are some aspects of the Attachment to God Inventory that differ from the dimensions of Communion and Complaint, such as the complete abandonment in God (total dependence), which occurs in contemplative prayer.

Beck (2006a) suggested that future research fully capture the complexity of the attachment relationship to God in mutation over time. While this might improve future research, I doubt whether it is possible to ever fully capture the complexity of the attachment to God relationship. This is because of the complex differences between the implicit and explicit realities of the faith experience and spiritual expressions, and the myriad ways in which these relationships are conceptualized even by theologians. However, future research study could consider developing, through both quantitative and qualitative methods, a measure that would articulate the dimensions of the attachment relationship to God for persons who have a greater commitment to their religious vocation than those with less religious commitment. In the context of adult attachment relationships, such a dependent relationship is consistent with the finding that the acceptance of dependency needs may promote autonomous functioning if it incorporates the human need for connection with others (Bornstein, 2005; Bornstein & Languirand, 2003; Feeney, 2007).
Limitations of the Present Study

One of the limitations of this study is the relatively small sample size and the fact that the sample was a convenience sample, thereby limiting the generalizability of the results. Also, the sample did not include a sufficient number of religious brothers in comparison to the diocesan seminarians. The measures used in the study were self-report measures, one of which was relatively long (the 84-item Psychological Wellbeing Scale). The Attachment to God Inventory was made up of two dimensions that were later dichotomized into four groups of attachment styles to evaluate the third hypothesis using a median-split method, thereby reducing the variability with the primary variable. The measures were administered within a church setting, and the participants did not have direct contact with me as the researcher, which may have contributed to the low response rate. Although the results showed no correlation between the different religious groups (diocesan seminarians and religious brothers), the evidence in everyday life is that different religious groups are trained differently and may demonstrate differences in relation to their attachment relationship with God. For example, the religious brothers are better trained to live in communities. Additionally, the level of attachment to God prior to beginning seminary training was not determined. The single gender of the sample is another limitation. Therefore, future research could involve a longitudinal study of how the attachment relationship to God could be associated with the wellbeing of female religious, using both quantitative and qualitative assessment tools.

Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study demonstrated that there was a strong relationship between attachment to God and psychological wellbeing in a sample of 47
seminarians/religious brothers studying for the priesthood or religious life. Although the findings did not show an overall relationship between the attachment to God and adult attachment relationship, they showed some relationships between some of the styles or dimensions of attachment. The lack of overall relationship between attachment to God and adult attachment relationship in this study could be attributed to the constructs used to measure both variables. Adult attachment relationship was measured with the Relationship Scale Questionnaire (RSQ), initially designed to measure adult romantic relationships, while attachment to God was measured with the Attachment to God Inventory (AGI), adapted from the Experiences in Close Relationships scale (ECR; Brennan et al., 1998), which correlated with the RSQ. The findings of this study also demonstrated that the secure attachment style was the best predictor of attachment to God. This implies that the other three attachment styles (preoccupied, dismissing, and fearful) in this study appeared to be weaker or lesser predictors of attachment to God. On the other hand, the findings of this study did not inform us on whether those participants with nonsecure attachment styles experienced problematic relationships with God or with others or whether the attachment styles correlate with attachment disorders. Father Carlo Bresciani (Vatican, 2008) noted that some pathological psychic ineptitudes do manifest themselves only after priestly formation and that discovering them on time is preferable. A question one might ask in relation to attachment relationship to God is this: What noticeable signs about different attachment styles could be identified as pathological? This could be the focus of a future research study.

In his presentation on “Guidelines for the Use of Psychology in the Admission and Formation of Candidates for the Priesthood” for the Congregation for Catholic
Education, Cardinal Zenon Grocholewski described how the role of psychologists could be included in the Church’s responsibility toward the vocational discernment of candidates preparing for priestly ministry (Vatican, 2008). He also expressed some concerns about psychological assistance for the candidates to the priesthood, namely concerns about those psychologists or psychiatrists who tend to take the place of a spiritual director and concerns about those formators (training directors) who think that psychological help is not necessary for the vocational maturity of aspirants to the priesthood (Vatican, 2008). Cardinal Grocholewski’s assertions open the way for psychologists with special interest in religion/spirituality to be more involved in aiding Catholic Church authorities in the vocational discernment of their candidates. Further, Father Bresciani (Vatican, 2008), himself a psychologist, warned that it is not just any psychologist who can be of help to the Church, but the psychologist who has a theoretical understanding and an approach for taking the transcendent dimension of the person with his dynamism and qualities that should mature in the person. One of these qualities may be attachment, and disrupted attachment may lead to difficulties in faith formation for seminarians.

A seminarian who might be displaying a behavior regarded as unacceptable could be administered the AGI to see if the seminarian’s behavior could be identified with a nonsecure attachment style described in this study. The scoring of the AGI and its interpretation require professional training. Hence, a formator (training director) might prefer to refer the seminarian to a mental health professional to help him understand the underlying assumptions, feelings, and problems that impede his behavior as well as help him work on developing better coping skills and improving his interpersonal
relationships. While a full understanding of the relationship between the attachment to God and behavior of seminarians will require additional research, some aspects of this relationship can be proposed based on theory. For example, a seminarian with a dismissing attachment style may have a positive view of himself and a negative perception of God. Such a seminarian may tend to be overly self-confident and self-reliant and may be less willing to seek help, even from his directors, to solve his problems. He may view himself as better than most people and may tend to act independently and autonomously without proper consideration for others. He may be less willing to trust or depend on God to fulfill his needs. He may also view God as unpredictable or approving of his independent behavior, even if his behavior adversely affects those around him. A seminarian with a fearful attachment style may tend to have a negative view of self and of God. He may be self-loathing and very critical of himself, and he may think that he is unlovable by God yet fear being abandoned by God. For example, he may think of himself as not good enough and may be negative and less trusting toward others, and he may experience anxiety over building close relationships with others.

Administering the Attachment to God Inventory (AGI) to seminarians/religious brothers may be beneficial in increasing the seminarians’ self-knowledge in relation to their attachment relationship to God. However, as noted above, additional study with measure(s) specifically adapted to this population might be required to identify behavioral indicators relating to the preoccupied, dismissing, and fearful styles of attachment to God. Further, the items of the avoidant subscale of attachment to God seem less sensitive to tap into the unique aspects of avoidance of intimacy with God, especially
for persons preparing to commit themselves to working for God their entire life. Hence, more studies are needed to examine the salient elements of avoidance of intimacy with God, which differentiate the subscale from the anxious subscale of attachment to God.

As a way of providing help to those coping with life stress, Cooper, Bruce, Harman, and Boccaccini (2009) suggested that training directors be more reassuring to those students with behaviors indicative of the fearful attachment style and acknowledge the independence and initiative-taking of those with behaviors indicative of the dismissing attachment style. Training directors may also provide increased opportunity to those seminarians with behaviors indicative of both the secure and preoccupied attachment styles in order to find support in their religious and spiritual beliefs (Cooper, Bruce, Harman, & Boccaccini, 2009). It is worth noting that those with either the secure or preoccupied attachment styles are more likely to seek emotional social support on their own than those with the dismissing and fearful attachment styles (Hawkins, Howard, & Oyebode, 2007). These seminarians may experience some difficulty in initially adapting to the demands of seminary life as well as some difficulty in seeking help in building more secure attachment styles. Before making any recommendation for practice, it is pertinent to examine how training directors and psychologists might work together to help seminarians better achieve better self-knowledge as well as identify their attachment style. Although the attachment to God subscales (avoidance of intimacy with God and anxiety over being abandoned by God) were dichotomized into mutually exclusive attachment styles in this study, it is difficult to fathom that people in real life exhibit only one attachment style for a longer period of time. As a result of this study, another area of research could be to identify and examine the different implicit motives for which
persons seek to go to the seminary, given that the explicit motive is to engage in priestly ministry after successful seminary formation. This is an area that training directors do pay attention to, although some candidates still fall through the cracks. While the focus of this study has been on the attachment styles of seminarians, a future study could examine the attachment styles of persons engaged in priestly ministry over a period of time. Another area of future study could be an examination of the styles of attachment to God of persons involved in other helping professions, including both male and female psychologists, teachers, nurses, and doctors, particularly when those individuals believe they have been called to this work. Another area for future study could focus on replicating this study with women with vocation to the religious life (nuns).

The child sexual abuse issue that has shaken the Catholic Church in the last few years may be attributed at least in part to psychological problems of the perpetrators, and different theories have been propagated in an attempt to find the root causes of the problem. There is not enough literature support for the view that the problem is related to an attachment problem, and this paper does not pretend to address the problem. However, future research could examine whether there could be a link between child sexual abuse and unhealthy attachment.

In a replication study with students in a conservative seminary, Staton, Sorenson, and Vande-Kemp (1998) found that the students were able to partially integrate psychology and religious faith through secure attachments with their professors as their adult attachment figures. Hence, training directors are encouraged to model healthy secure attachment figures by mentoring and nurturing seminarians in order to enhance the seminarians' development of a secure attachment relationship to God and to others.
(Tenelshof & Furrow, 2000). The present study provides an initial direction for this integration of faith and psychology in the formation of those with religious vocations.

A final area for future research may be the nature of attachment to God in religions other than Roman Catholicism. This study could relate to other religions with Abrahamic traditions, although this study should be validated with direct study of this relationship in Judaism, Islam, and other Christian denominations. Future research could also explore how this study could relate to other major religions without Abrahamic traditions, such as Buddhism or Hinduism, for example, by examining how attachment relationships to multiple divine beings in those religions could be associated with adult attachment relationships. Future research study may also explore the association between attachment relationships to the angels/saints and adult attachment relationships for the Roman Catholic faithful.
References


APPENDIX A

Demographic Information
**Demographic Information**

Please provide the following information.

**Age:** ____ Years

**Number of Years in the Seminary/Novitiate:** ____ Year(s) ____ months

**Location (State) of Seminary/Novitiate:**

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</tr>
</thead>
</table>


APPENDIX B

Attachment to God Inventory
The Attachment to God Inventory – Beck and McDonald (2004)

The following statements concern how you feel about your relationship with God. We are interested in how you generally experience your relationship with God, not just in what is happening in that relationship currently. Respond to each statement by indicating how much you agree or disagree with it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Circle the number that best describes your present agreement or disagreement with each statement.</th>
<th>Disagree Strongly</th>
<th>Neutral / Mixed</th>
<th>Agree Strongly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I worry a lot about my relationship with God.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I just don’t feel a deep need to be close to God.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. If I can’t see God working in my life, I get upset or angry.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. I am totally dependent upon God for everything in my life.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. I am jealous at how God seems to care more for others than for me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. It is uncommon for me to cry when sharing with God.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Sometimes I feel that God loves others more than me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. My experiences with God are very intimate and emotional.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I am jealous at how close some people are to God.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I prefer not to depend too much on God.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. I often worry about whether God is pleased with me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. I am uncomfortable being emotional in my communication with God.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Even if I fail, I never question that God is pleased with me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. My prayers to God are often matter-of-fact and not very personal.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circle the number that best describes your present agreement or disagreement with each statement.</td>
<td>Disagree Strongly</td>
<td>Neutral/Mixed</td>
<td>Agree Strongly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Almost daily I feel that my relationship with God goes back and forth from “hot” to “cold.”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>16. I am uncomfortable with emotional displays of affection to God.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>17. I fear God does not accept me when I do wrong.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>18. Without God I couldn’t function at all.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>19. I often feel angry with God for not responding to me when I want.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>20. I believe people should not depend on God for things they should do for themselves.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. I crave reassurance from God that God loves me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>22. Daily I discuss all of my problems and concerns with God.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>23. I am jealous when others feel God’s presence when I cannot.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. I am uncomfortable allowing God to control every aspect of my life.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>25. I worry a lot about damaging my relationship with God.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>26. My prayers to God are very emotional.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. I get upset when I feel God helps others, but forgets about me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. I let God make most of the decisions in my life.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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