

## ARTICLE THREE

### INTELLECTUAL FORMATION

#### I. THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM OF THE SEMINARY

##### A. FOUNDATION: THE TEACHING ROLE OF PRIESTS

333. A priest is ordained to serve as a teacher representing the person of Christ, head and pastor of the Church.<sup>151</sup> Proclaiming and teaching the Word of God are fundamental priestly activities required for the life of the Church. Consequently, academic studies represent a critical component in the pastoral preparation of candidates for priestly ministry. As seminarians study divine revelation in the light of faith and under the guidance of the Church's magisterium, they should grow personally into ever more committed disciples by virtue of what they learn. Only in this way will they be able to proclaim, expound, and guard the faith persuasively for the welfare of the faithful. Ultimately, intellectual formation should teach seminarians to regard themselves as part of the tradition of authorized teachers and living witnesses by which the Gospel of Jesus Christ is handed down from one generation to the next.<sup>152</sup>

334. The theological formation of candidates for the ministerial priesthood is based on faith, animated by the Holy Spirit, guided by the Word of God and faithful to tradition and the magisterium of the Church. In a significant way, intellectual formation for priesthood means a theological education in which a thorough and comprehensive grounding in the Catholic faith is conveyed.

335. "The commitment to study, which takes up no small part of the time of those preparing for the priesthood, is not in fact an external and secondary dimension of their human, Christian, spiritual, and vocational growth."<sup>153</sup> The goal of intellectual formation is the conversion of mind and heart, which is the only sure foundation for a lifetime of teaching and preaching. Academic formation can achieve this objective only by imparting a sure knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of the words and deeds, indeed the person, of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the revelation of God to all men and women.

336. Basic instruction in the theological disciplines is provided in the years of academic preparation in the seminary theologate. Such a

foundation is irreplaceable. For most seminarians, the years of theology represent the single most sustained, concentrated period they will devote to study in their lives.

337. Such learning will not come easily or automatically. Rather it is the result of effort and hard work. But given the depth and breadth of the theological sciences, nothing less than a thorough education will suffice to supply a sure foundation for fruitful leadership for the years ahead.<sup>154</sup> If the foundation is faulty, the exercise of priestly ministry after ordination will lack substance, and effective continuing education seriously will be hampered. Ultimately, academic formation should establish attitudes and habits that will continue after ordination. Such factors underscore "the need for an extremely rigorous intellectual formation."<sup>155</sup>

338. The lack of traditional preparation on the part of entering candidates may tempt the seminary to lower its standards. It also may lead students themselves to underestimate the value of intellectual formation.<sup>156</sup> But the higher level of education on the part of Catholics requires more than ever a thorough theological education on the part of the priest. Effective preaching and teaching also require skills in communication, but they first demand a sound and thoughtful theological foundation. Therefore, "it is necessary to oppose firmly the tendency to play down the seriousness of studies and the commitment to them."<sup>157</sup>

#### **B. THE BASIC GOAL OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION**

339. A sure theological foundation is comprised of various elements.<sup>158</sup> Each represents a value in its own right. Together, they comprise a unified whole and possess a single goal: the education of a priest who is theologically informed and solidly grounded in the wisdom of the Church. "It simply is not possible to develop an 'intelligentia fidei' (an understanding of the faith), if the content of the 'fides' is not known."<sup>159</sup> The elements of a complete education might be summarized in these terms: A theological education should be comprehensive and extensive, covering the range of Christian doctrine. It should witness to the unity of the faith — according to tradition and the magisterium — and its authentic diversity of theological expressions. Such an education should be pastorally oriented, ecumenically sensitive, and personally appropriated by the individual seminarian. It should also be relevant to the world in which the Gospel is preached.

**340.** A theological education should be comprehensive. It should include an in-depth understanding and appreciation of the biblical, historical, and dogmatic origins of the faith, as well as the contemporary relevance of the faith to the individual and to society.

**341.** A theological education should be extensive. It should include the essential ecclesiastical disciplines: sacred Scripture, dogmatic and moral theology, liturgy, church history, patristics, spirituality, ecumenism, homiletics, and canon law as well as pastoral theology. A foundation that is comprehensive and extensive is necessary so that a priest can be a sure and effective witness to the Church's authentic teaching and able to act as an official teacher and preacher of the Gospel.

**342.** A sound theological education recognizes the unity intrinsic to the Christian faith and the Word of God whose interpretation "has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ."<sup>160</sup> A sound theological education also recognizes an authentic diversity of theological expressions through which the one faith of the Church has been articulated.

**343.** The teaching of theology must always be aware of the future pastoral mission of seminarians. The preparation of seminarians to be teachers, preachers, and evangelists is the major purpose of intellectual formation.<sup>161</sup>

**344.** To preach effectively, seminarians must understand the world in which the message of Christ is preached. The academic program should help them develop skill in reading the signs of the time in relation to the Gospel and the teachings of the Church. In this regard, a knowledge of history and the human sciences is invaluable.

**345.** The academic formation of seminarians should also lead them to study in detail the social teaching of the Church in order to understand from an informed theological perspective the Church's role in the struggle for justice, peace, and the integrity of human life. Such study should mold seminarians into articulate spokesmen for and interpreters of Catholic social teaching in today's circumstances.

**346.** Academic preparation for contemporary priestly ministry should take place in an atmosphere of ecumenical and interfaith cooperation. Seminarians should learn the teachings of their own Church on ecumenical and interfaith matters and understand as well how to evaluate teachings of other churches and other religions critically and fairly. Seminarians

should learn to understand and appreciate the distinguishing beliefs of other churches and other religions in a positive light. They should be able to perceive God's truth in other Christian churches, ecclesial bodies, in the faith of Judaism, and in other world religions.

347. Theological learning takes place within the life of faith. Through theological and scriptural studies, future priests assent to the Word of God, grow in the spiritual life, and prepare themselves as pastoral ministers.<sup>162</sup> Consequently, a sound theological education is essentially incomplete without personal appropriation by seminarians. With such appropriation, as faith and knowledge penetrate interior understanding, intellectual conversion should follow. The study of theology and growth in the spiritual life should develop together harmoniously.

348. In this way, a secure basis is given to seminarians for teaching and preaching which is both authentic and convincing. Such a theological foundation blends fidelity to the Church with imagination and creativity.

### **C. COMPONENTS OF THE PROGRAM**

#### **1. Balance**

349. The main task of seminary education is the systematic study of the theological sciences. Good academic preparation for priestly ministry is achieved in a balanced program of theological formation. Such a balanced program also requires that seminarians have taken the necessary prerequisite courses before the actual study of theology commences.

350. A balanced program should introduce students in gradual steps to more complex and specialized areas of theology. Hence introductory courses should be followed by more specific or complex areas of concentration. A thoughtful pedagogical strategy for the entire curriculum is especially important given the learning needs of many students.

351. Because of the growth of specialization in the ecclesiastical sciences, the synthetic moment takes on greater importance in the academic formation of future priests, whose task is to preach the Gospel in its integrity to the next generation of Catholics.<sup>163</sup> For such a mission, theological synthesis is indispensable but cannot depend on the talent and ability of the individual student. Rather, the sacred sciences must themselves be taught as parts of a larger undertaking in which the whole — the Gospel — precedes and encompasses the parts. Such instruction calls for effective unity and a common perspective on the part of the faculty, which must be cultivated by the academic dean and

the rector. Only in this way will courses within a department and between departments be formed into a unified, internally coherent curriculum. The shape of the curriculum as a whole makes a significant statement and is itself a teaching device.<sup>164</sup>

352. Curriculum planning should strive for a middle ground between an overly ambitious program and one that does not sufficiently challenge students, especially gifted students. The latter should be encouraged and assisted to enrich their regular coursework through private and directed study, attendance at colloquia, and enrollment in courses at neighboring academic institutions.

353. A complete and balanced academic preparation for priesthood requires eight full academic semesters or the equivalent in trimesters or quarters at the theologate level. It presupposes four previous semesters of philosophy or their equivalent.<sup>165</sup> Seminarians require a sustained period of time not simply to absorb information but to learn and become accustomed to theological methodologies, which are complex and vary within the ecclesiastical disciplines. It is therefore a disservice to students to ask them to absorb, integrate, and appropriate the content and methods of the theological curriculum in a brief period of time.

## **2. Core and Elective Courses**

354. A seminary curriculum is composed of core and elective courses with an eye to coherence and overall unity. The core courses comprise those parts of theology which are necessary for seminarians in order to understand the ecclesial tradition and to function as official teachers of the Church.

355. The elective courses are devoted to those topics which expand, elaborate, or study in greater detail various aspects of theology. A seminary curriculum should seek some balance between core and elective courses although it is clear, given the responsibilities of priestly ministry, that the number of core courses will be substantial. Care should be taken that non-theological courses do not weaken the core curriculum.

## **3. Methodology**

### **Theological Methodology**

356. It is important that the various theological methodologies be explained carefully. Students should be introduced to the approved approaches to

Scripture and theology and be acquainted with the appropriate statements of the magisterium on the role and function of theology in the Church.

### **Teaching Methodology**

357. Theological faculties must maintain rigorous academic standards while exploring various methods of teaching. In particular, methods developed for adult learners may prove beneficial for the growing number of older candidates who may encounter difficulties returning to studies. Consideration and attention should be given to the special learning needs of students from diverse cultural backgrounds.

### **4. Role of the Magisterium**

358. The teaching office of the Church is charged with the authentic interpretation of the Word of God "in its written form or in the form of tradition."<sup>166</sup> With and under their bishop, priests are inheritors of the Church's tradition and have a sacred responsibility to live it, teach it, and hand it on in its entirety to the next generation of believers.

359. Therefore sound theological training teaches seminarians to value the special role of the magisterium in Catholic theology as the authoritative teacher, interpreter, and guarantor of the rule of faith for the sake of the Church's unity. Students should correctly understand the magisterium's authority to judge how theological research and opinion, as well as human experience, conform to revelation. A careful presentation of the role of the magisterium, valid for all theological disciplines, should therefore constitute an essential part of the seminary curriculum.

360. Such a presentation will introduce students to the *fora*, ordinary and extraordinary, in which the magisterium teaches and the various ways in which it can teach in each forum. In learning to distinguish theological opinion from magisterial teaching, students should learn to assess accurately the authoritative character of magisterial statements, "which becomes clear from the nature of the documents, the insistence with which a teaching is repeated and the very way in which it is expressed."<sup>167</sup> An introduction to the function of "theological notes" may prove helpful.

### **5. Academic Nomenclature**

361. Department and course titles should be consistent within the curriculum. They should be clear and connected in a straightforward way to the content of the course. Annually updated academic course syllabuses should be kept on file in the academic office.

## **6. Library**

**362.** The provision of an adequate library of books and periodicals is an essential part of a sound theological program. A comprehensive library will encourage students to do deeper reading and reflection beyond the bare requirements of class assignments.

## **7. Tempo of Learning**

**363.** Theology is classically described as faith seeking understanding. In the course of theological studies, students may find their personal faith challenged. Personal faith should become richer and deeper through the struggle to understand. Only faith brought to the level of theological understanding can stand as a sure foundation for the kind of sound and effective preaching and teaching which is necessary in priestly ministry. Such learning requires time and has its own tempo. In planning the overall curriculum, the seminary faculty should consider the tempo of theological learning, that is, the time it takes the average student to learn, absorb, and appropriate the rich treasury of the Church's theological wisdom. The faculty should assist seminarians to integrate theological understanding and personal spirituality.

## **II. NORMS**

**364.** Graduate theological studies require an appropriate and sound philosophical formation. Those requirements are stated in this document in the section on admissions.

**365.** The academic curriculum as a whole should have a discernible and coherent unity.

**366.** The curriculum must reflect the specialized nature of priestly formation and assist seminarians to develop a clear understanding of the ministerial priesthood.

**367.** Within all parts of the curriculum, clear reference should be made to the pastoral orientation of the seminary.

**368.** Courses addressing the basic or foundational aspects of the theological disciplines should be required.

**369.** In Scripture, the core should include Introduction to Old and New Testaments, Johannine Literature and the Synoptic Gospels, Pauline Epistles, Pentateuch, Psalms, Prophets, and Wisdom Literature.

370. In dogmatic theology, the core should include Fundamental Theology,<sup>168</sup> Theology of God, One and Three, Christology, Creation, the Fall and the Nature of Sin, Redemption, Grace and the Human Person, Ecclesiology, Sacraments, Eschatology, Mariology,<sup>169</sup> Missiology,<sup>170</sup> and the Theology of Priesthood.

371. In moral theology, the core should include Fundamental Moral Theology, Medical-Moral Ethics, Sexuality, and Social Ethics. The social teaching of the Church should be presented in its entirety with appropriate principles of reflection, criteria for judgment, and norms for action. The systematic study of the social encyclicals of the popes is especially recommended.<sup>171</sup> The sacrament of penance should be treated from the point of view of both moral and systematic theology.

372. In historical studies, the core should include Patristics,<sup>172</sup> Early, Medieval, Modern, and Contemporary Church History; and American Church History. American Church History should be taught in a way that reflects the multicultural origins of the Church in the United States. Among historical studies, the study of patristics is of special importance.

373. In canon law, the core should include a general introduction to canon law and the canon law of individual sacraments, especially marriage.<sup>173</sup>

374. In spirituality, the core should include an Introduction to Spirituality, a selection of classic spiritual writers, and an Introduction to Spiritual Direction.

375. In liturgy, the core should include an Introduction to Liturgy and studies in the historical, spiritual, and juridical aspects of liturgy.<sup>174</sup>

376. Liturgical practica should include the celebration of the Eucharist and the sacraments. Particular attention should be given to the sacrament of penance. Seminarians should be introduced to music and its role in liturgical celebration.

377. Homiletics should occupy a prominent place in the core curriculum and be integrated into the entire course of studies. In addition to the principles of biblical interpretation, catechesis, and communications theory, seminarians also should learn those practical skills needed to communicate the Gospel in an effective and appropriate manner.

378. During their study of ecumenism, seminarians should become well acquainted with the ecumenical teachings of the Church, especially *Lumen*

*Gentium, Unitatis Redintegratio, Nostra Aetate*, as well as *The Ecumenical Directory* and its guidelines. They should also be aware of the ecumenical and interfaith dialogues in which the Church participates, worldwide and in the United States.

379. Pastoral studies should include pastoral counseling and provide an introduction to initiation rites for adults and children.

380. A diversity of theologies is recognized within the Catholic tradition, yet in accord with Church teaching, the significance of St. Thomas Aquinas as the model and guide for study and research in theology should be recognized.<sup>175</sup>

381. Throughout the academic curriculum, questions of theological methodology should be emphasized so that students learn to evaluate the strengths and limitations of various theological viewpoints.

382. All methodologies employed should be clear on the distinction and relation between truths revealed by God and contained in the deposit of faith, and their theological mode of expression.<sup>176</sup>

383. The normative function of the magisterium should be presented as a vital, integral, and essential component of the theological enterprise.

384. In the various theological disciplines, attention should be given to the ecumenical and interfaith dimension of each area of study. A knowledge of the history and theology of other churches and religious bodies prominent in the region where the seminarians will serve as priests is particularly helpful.

385. Courses in all areas of study, especially in theology, history, and liturgy, should highlight the role and contribution of the Eastern churches.<sup>177</sup>

386. Courses in the theology of other churches or religions may be profitably taught by members of those churches or religions.

387. Theological formation in seminaries should clearly respect traditional doctrinal formulations of the faith while exploring contemporary modes of theological expression and explanation. Undue attachments to older theological currents or hasty assimilation of new ones should be avoided.

388. Theological education for the priesthood should resist any tendency to reduce theology to a merely historical, sociological investigation or a study of comparative religions.

389. The entire academic program should make seminarians aware that they have a responsibility to continue their theological and pastoral education after ordination.

390. The theological curriculum, both in its planning and its execution, should address the unique needs of a multicultural society. The study of the Spanish language and Hispanic culture as well as other pastorally appropriate languages and cultures is essential for many dioceses. Methods of theologizing that reflect a multicultural perspective may be profitably pursued.

391. Throughout the curriculum the biblical, theological, ethical, and historical foundations for the Church's teaching on social justice should be highlighted.

392. Seminaries and study centers are encouraged to offer the bachelor of theology degree (S.T.B.) and the licentiate in theology degree (S.T.L.) either by affiliating with an ecclesiastical faculty or university or by special arrangement with the Congregation for Catholic Education. In some cases, candidates should be encouraged to pursue a licentiate in theology (S.T.L.) as a component of priestly formation.

393. Seminaries should have degree programs certified by appropriate accrediting agencies. Students should not be excused from pursuing such degrees except for very serious reasons.

394. As an essential resource for seminarians' life of study and reflection, the library collection of books and periodicals should be carefully maintained and appropriately expanded.

395. Contemporary techniques of instruction, the use of audiovisual materials, television, and computers, for example, should be encouraged.

396. Diocesan bishops and religious ordinaries should be encouraged to designate students who complete their basic program with honors for further study after sufficient pastoral experience.