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THE SACRED CONGREGATION
FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION

THE
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FORMATION
OF FUTURE
PRIESTS

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UNITED STATES CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

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FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION

**THE THEOLOGICAL
FORMATION
OF FUTURE PRIESTS**

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INTRODUCTION

1. Deep cultural and theological changes are among the most conspicuous signs of our time. This ferment involves the whole Church but more especially the theological formation of future priests. Here, as in all branches of education, new fields of research, new methods, new interests and changes of emphasis are evident. In recent years numerous problems have arisen that demand attention and consideration of all responsible.

Theology
and cultural
changes

2. For this reason the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education feels compelled to address Bishops and their collaborators in priestly formation with the following document on the theological formation of candidates for the priesthood. For many reasons, the matter must be treated seriously and at some length. Some of these reasons are intrinsic to theological formation itself; others, such as the changed circumstances of the times we live in, the conditions of life and of priestly ministry, problems of evangelization, and the general needs of the Church, are extrinsic. At the present time theological teaching holds a position of paramount importance and there is much hope for its fruitful renewal. Now a good theological formation of candidates seems one of the surest means of infusing our seminaries with strength and offering an ever firmer basis for the spiritual renewal of the clergy and their pastoral ministry.

Importance
of the subject

3. To put things clearly and in due order, it is worthwhile here:

Division
of the subject

I) to explain certain aspects of the present situation;

II) to recall certain demands of theological teaching derived from the very nature of the proper function of theology;

III) to formulate some lines for the teaching of theology in general and its particular disciplines;

IV) to establish practical norms to be observed in all institutes to which have been entrusted the formation of future priests.

I. Aspects of the present situation

I. NEW REQUIREMENTS OF THE PASTORAL MINISTRY

Greater pastoral responsibilities

4. 1) The first reason for devoting special care to the deepening of theological preparation arises from the changed conditions in which priests will have to work. As their numbers decrease owing to the decline in vocations, they will be obliged to undertake greater responsibilities in a pastoral context where certain ministries will be shared with deacons and the faithful.

By virtue of their special character priests will be called upon to share more intimately in the cares of their Bishops, undertaking more complex and general pastoral tasks and at the same time far greater initiatives both within their respective dioceses and outside. Such a great increase of pastoral responsibility demands outstanding competence in theology and sound doctrine.

Changes in Church and world

5. 2) Furthermore, priests will exercise their ministry in a Church moving and seeking to adapt herself to the new needs that are emerging both within herself and in the world. In such circumstances sound theological doctrine constitutes an indispensable pre-requisite both for correctly interpreting the signs of the times and for facing new situations, avoiding on the one hand stagnation and on the other dubious adventures and experiments.

A more demanding pastoral situation

6. 3) Priests of tomorrow will also have to exercise their ministry among people who are more adult, more critical, and better informed, immersed in a world of ideological pluralism where Christianity is exposed to many interpretations and suspicions common to a culture becoming ever more alien to the faith. It will be impossible for priests to serve the faith and the ecclesial community effectively without sound theological formation begun in the seminary and carried on beyond. Nor must it be forgotten that many of the laity have more extensive theological knowledge. Many of them study in schools and faculties of theology. This demands that the clergy must have a high level of theological preparation.

Greater dangers for the faith

7. 4) It must be borne in mind that the very faith of the priests of tomorrow will be exposed to greater dangers than before. In fact, experience has already shown the difficulty

that some priests find in overcoming the prevailing atmosphere of unbelief and the skepticism of the world in which they live. Formation of priests must take account of this difficult situation. How can they stand firm in their faith and strengthen their brothers in it without a theological preparation able to meet this situation?

8. 5) These considerations clearly show that a priest cannot be content with a formation which is predominantly practical and culturally mediocre. Although not every priest is called to be a specialist in theology, there does exist an affinity between pastoral ministry and theological competence. Priests are expected to exercise a true theological ministry in the Christian community, without it being necessary for them to be professional theologians. Priests and Bishops, being pastors, are in fact responsible for official preaching in the Church.

The "theological" ministry of the priest

II. NEW TASKS OF THEOLOGY

9. Theological formation, the importance of which we have tried to underline, must, therefore, face new situations and problems. Experience and different needs induce emphasis on some of the dimensions of theological research and teaching which seem to be especially urgent in view of the many tasks to be fulfilled today.

10. 1) In the past, theology developed in a world whose culture accommodated it easily, because the faith of the Church inspired culture and customs. Today, on the contrary, society is secular and often indifferent to religious problems and no longer in sympathy with either the faith or the teaching of the Church. It is, therefore, most necessary to work to make the Gospel understood by our contemporaries; so we must find a language adapted to them. But, such a task is too delicate and too serious to be left to improvisation and the initiative of individuals. It is rightly the task of theology to provide a contribution of sound scholarship and clear doctrine.

Adapting theological language to modern culture

11. 2) Today ecumenical dialogue weighs heavily on theology, at the same time it encourages new research into the history and sources of our doctrine, eliciting a new climate both in theology and in the whole Church. Above all, it imposes the task of rediscovering the ecumenical dimension of theology and formulating the truths of the faith "more profoundly and pre-

Theological demands of ecumenism

cisely, in ways and in terminology which our separated brethren too can really understand".¹

Theological questions on the life of the Church

12. 3) Heavy demands also are made on theology today by the life of the Church, which raises new questions when faced with new practices which need to be analyzed and, if possible, integrated in the faith. Here we can see the importance of pastoral activity, which provokes theological reflection and stimulates teaching so that it becomes more alive and up-to-date without losing authenticity. This function of theology is necessary for the service of the people of God.

on society in the world

13. 4) Furthermore, there are grave problems in the modern world which call upon theology for solution with ever greater insistence. The Constitution *Gaudium et spes* demonstrates the interest which the Church takes in the whole human family. Recent theology has shown itself more sensitive to the economic, social, and political problems of humanity seen in the light of the Gospel. A great awareness of the social implications and consequences of dogma has caused ferment not only on the level of action but also on the level of theological reflection. This cannot be ignored in the formation of the clergy.

Problems arising from the human sciences

14. 5) To fulfill its mission of serving the Church today, theology must come to terms with the human sciences. Certainly, these sciences are no longer ignored by theology; on the contrary, some of their findings have been as it were "canonized" to the extent of having been incorporated in the historical formulations of the faith.

But theology, while convinced that it can derive ever greater advantages from the human sciences, cannot be blind to certain drawbacks which such an encounter might have at the present moment. The greater penetration of the human sciences in today's culture sometimes shows the inadequacies of a certain kind of theological language; further, the enormous prestige that these sciences enjoy today has such an influence in some theological circles that the sacred science is disfigured by them, losing its specific character. What is called theology is often only history, sociology, and the like. It is well to be aware of these difficulties and to bear in mind the urgent need accurately to define the epistemological terrain of theology in relation to other sciences.

— from theological pluralism

15. 6) Another phenomenon that is characteristic of our present situation is the loss of that unity which the teaching of

¹ Decr. *Unitatis redintegratio*, n. 11.

theology once had. Theological disciplines are now open to new problems, new philosophies, and new contributions of science. In consequence of this, religious questions are becoming ever more complex and subject to different interpretations. Thus the way is open to a certain pluralism. It is one of the tasks of contemporary theology to define the legitimate and necessary limits of such a pluralism. This emphasizes the need for a renewal of theological teaching.

16. 7) Finally, in teaching theology today there is ever greater difficulty in reconciling the lack of time available with the enormous development of the particular theological disciplines. It is evident that in such a situation an encyclopedic teaching that offers complete answers to all the questions in dispute is quite impossible. For this reason a new arrangement of all theological teaching is necessary to allow it to give the seminarist a cohesive, global vision of the Christian mystery.

— from the development of the theological disciplines

II. The demands of theological teaching

I. THE FUNDAMENTAL DEMANDS

17. Anyone who is engaged in teaching theology cannot possibly ignore the complicated situation described above. Teaching of theology has certain fundamental demands, which derive from the nature of theology itself, and from its function.

1. *The nature of theology*

18. 1) It is of paramount importance to bear in mind the nature of theology. If theology is to be renewed and adapted to the needs of our times, it must not lose touch with tradition, and it must always be true to itself as *the science of Christian Revelation. Fides quaerens intellectum*, that is, faith, that searches for and develops its self-understanding, reaches its goal in a higher and more systematic form through theology. The object with which theology is concerned is *not the truth acquired by human reason but the truth revealed by God and known by faith*.

Science of faith

The context of faith is essential to theology, and theology can make no progress if it is confused with sciences outside the perspective of faith.

19. 2) Within the ambit of faith, theology responds to what comes from the dynamism of faith itself—“cum assensu cogitare”—, or to the demands of culture, to integrate the faith

facing many questions

within the contemporary psychological and social context, in the midst of the fundamental questions and worries of modern man.

Not to be
confused with
other sciences

20. 3) As a science born from faith and developing within the ambit of faith and in the service of faith, theology uses rational reflection and the data of culture for better understanding of its own object.

Because of this, theology enjoys a special position in the articulation of the various sciences, also religious ones, but, it must not be confused with them nor reduced to their methods.

Related to
— the religious
sciences

a) In particular, theology cannot be confused with or reduced to the level of the history of religions or of dogma, to religious psychology or to the sociology of the Church. It must always remain faithful to its own nature and to its specific function, also in the epistemological context of disciplines concerned with religion.

— natural and
human sciences

b) In the social and cultural conditions that have been determined by the development of the human and natural sciences, theology adopts the assured conclusions of these sciences, always taking into account the mentality and spirit which they engender amongst men and the interpretation that man gives of himself in every generation.

For this, theology can and, indeed, must develop a dialogue that is well informed, pertinent, and accessible, above all, on points of dogma and morals, regarding the origins, constitution, behavior, development, conditions, and destiny of man, all the time being very careful not to lose sight of the certain and unchangeable data of the word of God.¹

"Catholic";
linked to
the Church

21. 4) Catholic theology cannot prescind from the doctrine and experience which come from the life of the Church,² within which the Magisterium guards and authentically interprets the deposit of faith contained in Sacred Scripture and Tradition. For this reason the Catholic theologian, in the field of exegesis and in his other scientific work, cannot unconditionally follow methods or accept the results of theologies opposed or extraneous to the Church. An uncritical conformism to such theologies neither responds to the specific character of Catholic theology nor is it in the best interests of ecumenism.³

¹ Cf. PAUL VI, Homily *Hodie concilium*, in the last session of the Conc. Vat. II, Dec. 7, 1965: AAS 58, 1966, pp. 55 ss.; Alloc. *L'Homme existe-t-il?* at the International Thomistic Congress, Sept. 12, 1970: AAS 62, 1970, pp. 602 ss.

² PAUL VI, Exhort. Apost. *Quinque iam anni*, five-years after the Vat. Conc. II, to the whole episcopate, Dec. 8, 1970: AAS 63, 1971, pp. 102-103.

³ Cf. Decr. *Unitatis redintegratio*, n. 11.

22. 5) Since theology has for its object truths which are principles of life and personal commitment,¹ both for the individual and the community of which he is part, it has a spiritual dimension and, therefore, the theologian cannot be purely intellectual in his research and study, but must always follow the requirements of faith, always deepening his existential union with God and his lively participation in the Church.

By its nature, theology has a vital character, which gives it a unique place in the epistemological framework of science.

2. The function of theology

23. As the *science of Christian Revelation*, theology has a specific function in the broad sphere of the activities and ministries of the Church—the community of faith and love to which God has entrusted Christian Revelation and the work of salvation accomplished by Christ.

24. 1) Theology investigates Revelation and studies it in depth; it describes its limits and plays its part in homogeneous development according to the needs of faith² and the signs of the times, in which it sees the signs of God.³ This essential function of theology cannot be put aside or passed over in any contingent situation, especially at the present moment.

Theology serves
— the data
of Revelation

25. 2) In developing this function, theology has a very relevant influence on the spiritual life because it clarifies and deepens a sense of the laws of salvation and the way of spiritual progress that Revelation offers to Christian life. This is particularly true in the formation of future priests in an enlightened and solid piety founded upon an understanding of their ministry and an exact appreciation of what the Church asks of them.⁴

— the
spiritual life

26. 3) Here also arises the part theology has to play in the Christian apostolate and especially in the pastoral ministry;

— the pastoral
ministry

¹ " 'The obedience of faith' (Rom. 16, 26; cf. Rom. 1, 5; 2 Cor. 10, 5-6) must be given to God who reveals, an obedience by which man entrusts his whole self freely to God, offering 'the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals' " (Const. *Dei verbum*, n. 5).

² Cf. Const. *Dei verbum*, n. 8

³ Cf. Const. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 4.

⁴ This aspect of theology must be given special prominence in the introductory course in which "the mystery of salvation is put forward in a way that the students can understand the significance of ecclesiastical studies, their structure and their pastoral goal while at the same time being helped to make the faith the foundation and spirit of their whole life and become strengthened in their embrace of their vocation with a complete personal dedication and joy" (Decr. *Optatam totius*, n. 14).

it shows their place in the economy of salvation and helps their completion with the resources of doctrine and the practical indications it gives. Hence, the necessity for a first class theological formation for future pastors of souls.¹

— the building
up of the Body
of Christ

27. 4) For the building up of the "Body of Christ which is the Church" (Col. 1, 14), theology is called upon to be constructive in its service to the Magisterium either by elaborating the data of faith and morals provided by Revelation and to be applied to present-day problems, or by a scientific treatment of problems that concern the life and thought of the Church, or, finally, by singling out, clarifying, and solving difficult points which arise on a doctrinal or practical level.²

— the mission

In particular, theology must be able to interpret, encourage, and serve the impetus of the Church's new missionary awareness. It is necessary to establish conditions for dialogue with non-Christian religions and cultures which will lead to new forms of evangelization as people grow closer together.³

— ecumenism

Within the Christian world, theology should take into account new ecumenical needs, either by the study of sources held in common, or by deeper knowledge of the thought of various churches and Christian communions on controversial points, by the development of the ecumenical dimension of ecclesiology and other areas of theology closely related to the problem of Christian unity.⁴

— human and
earthly values

28. 5) Confronted with the problems of Christians in the world, theology must pick out the human and evangelical elements which they often contain and try to clarify the points where they touch on the Gospel message without attempting to hide differences. Theology should make sure that the solutions today sought for these problems benefit from the superior power of Christianity to clarify and construct.⁵ Within the same context, there are problems of the new solidarity between social classes and peoples, the liberation of man from exploitation and alienation, sharing in the life of the state and of international society, the conquest of hunger, disease, and illiteracy, elimination of war as a means of solving quarrels between

— social
progress

¹ Cf. *Optatum totius*, n. 18; *Decr. Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 19; *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis*, nn. 82-85.

² Cf. *Const. Gaudium et spes*, nn. 46 ss.

³ Cf. *Declar. Nostra aetate, passim*; *Decr. Ad gentes* nn. 11, 22.

⁴ Cf. *Decr. Unitatis redintegratio*, n. 11; Cf. as well SECRETARIAT FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY, *Ecumenical Directory*, Part II: On ecumenical matters in higher education: AAS 62, 1970, pp. 705 ss.

⁵ *Const. Gaudium et spes*, nn. 46 ss.

peoples, and the creation of more effective means of preserving peace.¹

In this sense, theology has a “political” function that is original and unique, because it throws light on problems and directs action in man’s various occupations, according to the indications and precepts of God’s word.

II. THE COMPONENTS OF THEOLOGY

29. By its very nature and function, theology is a unifying science nourished by Revelation, laying bare the data it receives from it *ad lumen fidei*, either by the process of positive investigation or by speculative development. Consequently, theology is both positive and systematic. In fact, the basis of theology is the study of the sources of Revelation for the purpose of establishing what God has revealed. Such a scientific study of the *auditus fidei*, gives rise to *positive theology*. The results of positive theology are the object of further scientific development by means of systematic theology, which according to the demands of the *intellectus fidei* seeks to penetrate the meaning of revealed truths and discover how they are related, thus coordinating the whole in an organic and unifying manner.² These two components of theology—historical research and rational reflection—cannot be ever completely separated, because they have a continual reciprocal interaction and their functions are complementary. It is necessary that they remain in continual equilibrium without one dominating the other.

Twofold task:

— positive and historical

— systematic and speculative

1. *The historical dimension of theology*

With regard to historical research, which is predominant in the positive part of theology, the directives to be followed are threefold:

30. 1) It must be developed by methods that are in accordance with its own nature. This implies a legitimate freedom of research based upon valid documentation but it does not permit theology to be reduced to mere philology or historical criticism. To stay exclusively on such a level would be to risk positive theology becoming sterile and betraying its proper mission.

The Methods proper to historical and positive science

¹ Const. *Gaudium et spes*, nn. 63 ss; JOHN XXIII, Enc. Lett. *Mater et Magistra*; *Pacem in terris*; PAUL VI, Enc. Lett. *Populorum progressio*; Apost. Lett. *Octogesima adveniens*.

² Cf. CONC. VAT. I, Sess. III, Const. *De fide cath.*, cap. 4; DENZ-SCHÖNM., n. 3016.

"Ad lumen
fidei"

31. In fact, positive theology must recognize, as a matter of primary importance, the supernatural character of its object and the divine origin of the Church. Its development cannot be guided only by human reason without the light of faith nor can it dispense with the Magisterium of the Church. It is founded on the theology of Revelation, inspiration, and on the Church. It belongs to the Church to keep faithfully and interpret authentically the Word of God.¹

Philosophico-
theological
reflection

32. 2) Since there is an historical dimension of Revelation, of its transmission, and of the Magisterium, which preserves and interprets it, positive theology must have recourse, over and above its traditional methods of research (philology, history, historical criticism) to philosophical and philosophico-theological reflection. Such reflection should be concerned with the nature of the evidence at the disposal of the historian, the relationship that exists between the facts narrated and their interpretation, and also the nature of this relationship, and the relationship between eye-witnesses and the community of believers. Furthermore, the particular character of the times in which the history of our salvation took place should be considered, as well as the historical character of the narratives and of the events narrated.²

Modern
hermeneutics

33. 3) Moreover the need for positive theology to have recourse to philosophy is a consequence of developments of modern hermeneutics which are due to the particular sensitivity of today's culture to historical fact. It is this that attracts the attention of theologians to the historical conditioning of thought in its various expressions and, consequently, to the difference between the way modern man thinks and expresses himself, and what is found in the Bible and in the traditional formulations of faith. It follows that theology should undertake the task of expounding and re-interpreting the content of faith to express it in concepts more readily understood by modern man and separating it from forms of expression which belong to the past and may not be completely accessible today.

The problem
of language

Philosophical
principles

In this regard it is worth noting that the substance of the ancient doctrine in the deposit of faith is one thing and its formulation is another.³ It is important that only its formulation

¹ Cf. Const. *Dei verbum*, n. 10.

² Cf. PONT. BIBLICAL COMMISSION, Instruction *Sancta Mater*, on the historical truth of the Gospels, April 21, 1964: AAS 56, 1964, pp. 712 f.

³ JOHN XXIII, Alloc. *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia* on the occasion of the opening of the Vatican Council II, Oct. 11, 1962: AAS 54, 1962, p. 792.

should be conditioned by history, change, and adaptation, leaving the substance unchanged and firm. It is, therefore, essential that the theologian should know how to avoid the hazards of mere positivism and historicism which likes to explain the phenomena of thought and morality solely by historical causes¹ to the point where all permanent and objective truth is reduced to the relativity of historical contingency. Therefore, the theologian, in order to fulfill successfully his grave responsibilities, must allow himself to be guided not only by the Magisterium² and the rules of exegesis³ but also by sound philosophical principles concerning the objective values of human knowledge.⁴

2. Systematic Dimension

34. A characteristic of the present situation is a certain disaffection for philosophy; hence, the importance of giving prominence to the nature as well as to the necessity of theological speculation prescribed by the Council. The Decree *Optatam totius* requires that for "making the mysteries of salvation known as thoroughly as they can be, students should learn to penetrate them more deeply with the help of speculative reason exercised under the tutelage of St. Thomas".⁵

The need for speculation

35. 1) Systematic theological reflection (*intellectus fidei*) is the natural and necessary continuation of the positive method, of which it constitutes in a certain manner the fulfillment and climax. It is true that some reflection is present in every phase of the theological process, even in the positive; but this reflection, be it in exegesis to determine the meaning of every fact and concept in Scripture or be it in *Biblical theology* to formulate fundamental themes, is not of itself sufficient to give an adequate and properly theological understanding of revealed facts or to give them an organic and complete systematization.

Various levels of theological reflection

¹ Cr. PAUL VI, Apost. Exhort. *Petrum et Paulum*, Feb. 22, 1967; AAS 59, 1967, p. 198.

² Cf. Const. *Dei verbum*, n. 10.

³ Cf. Const. *Dei verbum*, n. 12.

⁴ S. C. FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, Circular letter on the Teaching of Philosophy in Seminaries, Jan. 20, 1972, Part II, n. 3b: "From the fact that the methods themselves of positive science (exegesis, history, etc.) start their work from various given preliminaries, which implicitly are results of a philosophical choice (today this is especially necessary, for instance, regarding the exegetical method of Rudolf Bultmann), without, however, assuming an absolute, critical function in the face of divine revelation . . .".

⁵ Decr. *Optatam totius*, n. 16.

Philosophical reflection is intrinsically necessary

36 2) Only a more profound and scientifically methodical reflection is capable, with the help of philosophy, of penetrating in any great degree revealed truth so as to set in order various facts and formulate a mature judgement.¹ Such a recourse to speculative reflection is not simply a characteristic of Medieval scholasticism; it satisfies a theological and intellectual need that always tries to understand more and to understand better.

reference to the Word of God

37 3) Naturally, systematic theological reflection does not pursue "speculation for speculation's sake" but it keeps in living contact with the sources of Revelation and tends to a more organic understanding of the Word of God which is the permanent internal factor of such speculation.

"Ad lumen fidei"

At this stage of theological study, philosophy is called upon to play the role more of an instrument than a master. We are not dealing with purely intellectual activity but with a process that, while being strictly logical according to philosophical principles, is conducted *ad lumen fidei*. In fact, it is this constant reference to the faith that makes it possible to discover the order and the deeper significance of Revelation.

The personal spiritual aspect

38 4) Revelation, the object of all theological speculation, is not merely a sum of truths fed to the intellect but also and above all the means by which God has communicated Himself to man.² Therefore, every authentic theological reflection should induce an attitude of sympathy and personal commitment towards the object of study as well as a spiritual affinity with revealed truth. Philosophical reflection, if properly conducted, far from suppressing the spiritual dimension of theology, presupposes and needs it.

"Theology of the Word"

39. 5) Reason should never cease to be applied to Revelation. It corresponds to fundamental questions of what faith means and of its dialogue with science and human culture. Reasoned reflection makes possible a *theology of the Word* which cannot be substituted by a "theology of practice" which prescind from all metaphysical commitment and reduces theology to a mere science of man, leading back in consequence to a pure phenomenologism and pragmatism.

Sound and coherent theology

40. 6) Today there is a very common tendency to underestimate the contribution of philosophy to theology and, in fact, an aversion to any systematic thought. Nevertheless, it is necessary to insist on the value of speculation in dogmatic and

¹ Cf. LEO XIII, Enc. Lett. *Aeterni Patris*, Aug. 4, 1879, DENZ-SCHÖNM. n. 3137.

² Cf. Const. *Dei verbum*, nn. 2-6.

moral theology in order to assure its solidity and cohesion. In fact, well-understood speculation does not make the study of theology dry or divorced from life but confers on it a whole hearted seriousness that is truly vital and personal.

41. 7) Today it is especially desirable to construct and develop a systematic and organic theology that comprises within its scope the data of faith, as the results of historical research and of what the Church proposes; a rational reflection on it in the light of the faith, the interpretation of the results obtained in a more compact synthesis of its fundamental elements; its application and its response to the individual and collective demands of modern life and thought.

Aspects of
rational
reflection

42. It is evident, then, that what distinguishes Catholic theology as a science is its constant reference to the faith. The strictly scientific nature of the process, be it positive or systematic, does not exclude but demands the continual presence of the *sensus fidei* which guides and directs theology from within, in the fields of exegesis, patristics, liturgy, canon law, history and systematic and pastoral theology. It is faith which, in agreement with the Magisterium, guides theology and gives it, together with its specific identity, its full meaning and certainty.

Faith is
central

III. SOME OF THE CONDITIONS OF THEOLOGICAL WORK

43. The present situation of theology and the teaching of theology is characterized on the one hand by an intense application to developing Biblical themes and on the other hand by a new attention to modern currents in philosophy, sociology, and psychology. Some believe that they can take from these not only the result of research, analysis, and experiments, but also categories and criteria of thought. This openness to the natural and human sciences and to the problems of the present time, creates in some people a certain estrangement from the Magisterium of the Church and from traditional Christian theology and philosophy. Thus there is a risk of creating a theology without a solid basis which is outside the area of faith. It is, therefore, fitting to make quite clear the conditions of sound theological work. This is related to the Magisterium, to the theological and philosophical patrimony received from ancient times, to philosophy, science, and finally to the problems and values of this world which are of such great interest today. This is to treat once again of a clarification of the epistemological status of theology as the science of Christian Revelation with

Characteristics
of the present
situation

Five main
problems

regard to principles which are enduring and to historical conditions which change.

1. Theology and the Magisterium

The unity of
revelation and
Magisterium

44. 1) The faith which theology seeks to understand and examine in depth is the faith of the Church, the faith professed by the body of the Church (*sensus fidelium*), watched over and authentically interpreted by the ordinary and extraordinary Magisterium entrusted to the Apostles and their Successors by Jesus Christ. Both Revelation and the Magisterium form a natural and inseparable union. According to Vatican Council II "It is clear that the Holy Tradition of the Church and the Holy Scriptures, and the Magisterium of the Church are, by a most wise disposition of God, so united and joined together as to be unable to exist apart".¹ Hence in Catholic theology the ecclesial character of the faith should be made concrete by constant reference to the Magisterium.

Magisterium as
— service

45. 2) The Magisterium can be considered both as authority and as service. It is "not superior to the Word of God but serves it, teaching only what it has received and, by divine command, listens to it attentively, reverently keeps and faithfully expounds it, and out of this deposit of faith, it obtains all it proposes for belief as the revealed Word of God."²

— an intrinsic
part of theology

Because of this, the Magisterium must not be thought of as extraneous to the Church, something that oppresses it. On the contrary, it should be thought of as having a role, a function as a charismatic service in the community and for the community. It follows that the Magisterium is not something external to and outside of theology, but rather an internal inspiration, completely natural to it, not a limitation, but an indispensable help, a *conditio sine qua non* of Catholic theology.

Functions
of the
Magisterium

46. 3) The Magisterium can and, indeed, must be presented and considered as:

a) the bearer, interpreter, and guarantor of the *rule of faith* for the sake of the unity of the community of believers;

b) the active proponent of a synthesis of assured and common values which emerge from various opinions and experiences;

c) the power to judge the conformity of the results of research, theological reflection, and the spiritual experience

¹ Const. *Dei verbum*, n. 10.

² *Ibidem*.

of individuals and groups, and Revelation which has been handed down through the ages by tradition; this the Magisterium looks after, authentically interprets, and proposes to the faithful.

47. 4) The Church has the right and the duty to demand of theologians a loyalty to the Magisterium that, so far from prejudicing legitimate research, guarantees that it will promote an authentic building-up of the Body of Christ which is the Church. In fact the *munus docendi* belongs to the Bishops united in collegiality with the Supreme Pontiff, in the line of apostolic succession;¹ the episcopal Magisterium in theology, as in all forms of catechesis and preaching, cannot be replaced by individual thought, which has the limited function only of investigating, illustrating, and developing objective data which comes from God; this is guarded and proclaimed by the Church.

The
Magisterium
and the
theologians

Theologians have the task of research and critical reflection. They can receive from the Magisterium a share in its *munus docendi* (*missio canonica docendi*). However, the Magisterium must maintain its authority to judge the relation of theological speculation to the Word of God. In particular, the task of professors of theology in seminaries, which is to prepare suitable and good ministers of God, future teachers of the faith,² requires the greatest loyalty to the Magisterium, both ordinary and extraordinary.

The theologian's
mission

2. *Theology and the theological and philosophical patrimony of Christianity*

48. 1) In the same context of the Magisterium of the Church, the perennially valid³ patrimony of Christian thought, and especially of St. Thomas, referred to by the Council,⁴ must always be borne in mind, not only for the employment of philosophy in theology, but also for the assessment of the intrinsic dynamism of this, inasmuch as doctrinal patrimony is the expression of the continuity of the life of faith in the Church in particularly intense moments.

The value of
theological
tradition

In fact beyond the recognized authority of the individual

¹ Const. *Lumen gentium*, n. 25; PAUL VI, Alloc. *Libentissimo sane*, to the international Congress on the Theology of Vat. II, Sept. 1, 1966: AAS 58, 1966, pp. 890 ff.

² Cf. Decr. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 4.

³ Cf. Decr. *Optatam totius*, n. 15.

⁴ Cf. Decr. *Optatam totius*, n. 16; Declar. *Gravissimum educationis*, n. 10.

Fathers or Doctors of the Church, the work of these Fathers and Doctors is part of the Church's living tradition, to which providentially they have brought a contribution of lasting value at times which were quite favorable to a synthesis of reason and faith.

Tradition
and progress

49. 2) It is under the impulse of that tradition and in the light of the teaching of St. Thomas that theology can and should progress and its teaching be conducted. Close contact with the dynamism of tradition is a protection against exaggerated individualism and an assurance of that objectivity of thought which the Church particularly holds.

3. *Relations between theology and philosophy*

Two premises:

50. 1) With reference to the complex problem of the connection, not only extrinsic, but also intrinsic, between philosophy and theology, we should bear in mind two premises:

— theology's
radical
independence

a) Theology is radically independent of any philosophical system. Its term of reference is, in fact, the reality of faith; every other reference is merely instrumental. It follows from this that theology is free to accept or reject various philosophical theories in the fulfillment of its own research and reflection. It may adopt the contributions of common sense—in so far as they help its rational development—availing itself of all they have to give but without identifying itself with any one of them.

— open to
philosophical
criticism

b) It is necessary for theology to take up the critical challenges which any philosophy may present, not only to theology but also to faith. Theology cannot avoid such confrontations without the danger of being undefended and misunderstood by the various philosophies of today. But, it must not blindly close itself to their suggestions and proposals.

The attitude
of the Church:

51. 2) Given this point of view, it is not difficult to understand the soundness of the Church's attitude on these matters, which is twofold:

— openness

a) While remaining open to every new and old philosophy, she will not accept any that cannot be reconciled with Christian belief.

— preference

b) Her preference is for a philosophy whose fundamental tenets are in harmony with Revelation, because it is not possible for there to be any contradiction between the natural truths of philosophy and the supernatural truths of faith.

52. 3) Obviously, the Church cannot accept a philosophy whose tenets are in contradiction with Revelation. In certain circumstances the Church can accept a healthy philosophical pluralism¹ arising from different regions, different cultures, and mentalities, and expressed perhaps in different ways, since the same truth can be reached in different ways, and can be presented and expounded in different ways. On the other hand, it is not at all possible for her to accept a philosophical pluralism which compromises the fundamental truths connected with Revelation such as is apt to occur in certain philosophies influenced by historical relativism or materialistic or idealistic immanentism.

Defects of theirs explain why today it is not so easy to realize a philosophical synthesis with these philosophies as St. Thomas did with the philosophical thought of ancient thinkers.

53. 4) For this reason the Council was justified in the emphasis it put on St. Thomas when, in the decree *Optatam totius*, (n. 16), it speaks of speculative theology. His philosophy clearly explains and harmonizes the first principles of natural truth with Revelation, not in any static form but with the dynamism that is peculiar to St. Thomas and which renders possible a continual and renewed synthesis of the valid conclusions of traditional thought and the advances made by modern thought.²

The value of
St. Thomas
Aquinas today

4. *The contribution of the human and natural sciences*

54. 1) After philosophy, theology acknowledges the valuable help given by the natural sciences, history, and anthropology. In fact the *man-God* relationship lies at the very center of the economy of salvation, in which Revelation, and hence, theology, are for the sake of mankind. Therefore, each of the sciences, in its own way, offers theology a valuable aid to a better knowledge of man one of the terms of this relationship, at the same time they stimulate it to determine more precisely the meaning of revealed truth that refers to man.

Their usefulness

Furthermore, the contact of theology with science enriches it thematically and prevents it becoming culturally isolated in a world such as ours in which science flourishes and arouses universal interest.

¹ Cf. S. C. FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, Lett. Circ. on the teaching of philosophy in seminaries, Jan. 20, 1972, Part III, n. 2.

² PAUL VI, Lett. *Lumen Ecclesiae*, on the occasion of the 7th centenary of the death of St. Thomas, Nov. 20, 1974, n. 17: AAS 66, 1974, pp. 690-691; cf. also alloc. *Nous sommes*, VIth International Thomistic Congress, Sept. 10, 1965: AAS 57, 1965, pp. 790 ff.

Due autonomy
of theology
and other
sciences

55. 2) But the two fields of theology and the natural sciences must be kept very distinct, each respecting the autonomy of the other. In fact, they have different ends. Hence, just as the sciences should not be subject to theological *a priori* affirmations, so theology cannot solve its problems on the basis of scientific hypotheses and results. Theological studies are concerned with things far beyond the province of the research of the sciences: the mystery of the revealed Word of God. But, should a theological problem touch upon a subject that concerns one of the sciences (e.g., the problem of the origin of man and the world, questions of moral and pastoral order) it cannot ignore what the sciences say with certainty on the matter.

What theology
can offer the
other sciences

56. 3) Theology without interfering in any way with the sciences can yet help them because theology itself has a more complete understanding of man, and of the world, and because of its hierarchy of values which always reminds scientists to direct their life and thought towards the light of divine truth. Substantially it is a contribution of *wisdom*. According to Vatican Council II, "our era needs such wisdom more than bygone ages if the discoveries made by man are to be further humanized".¹

The mediation
of philosophy

57. 4) The contributions of the sciences to theology generally (but not necessarily) come to it through the mediation of philosophy, which today, besides other tasks, has also to evaluate and sift the complex problems set by science and by the solutions proposed so as to pick out what has permanent value with regard to human reason and its connection with Revelation. On the basis of this, theology can better evaluate the real contributions of science.

Advantages
for theology

58. 5) From a methodological point of view theology, while remaining faithful to the demands of its *deductive-inductive* method, cannot ignore the *scientific spirit*, so widely diffused in the human natural sciences. It should follow, even in its own work, as far as possible, the laws of positive research, of control of sources, and of the verification of facts, which are common to the sciences.² But, so that it may appreciate and use such a method, theology must remain fully aware of its own epistemological status and avoid confusing itself with the other sciences, even on the level of procedure.

confusion to
be avoided

¹ Const. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 15.

² With regard to the employment of human sciences, cf. PAUL VI, Apost. Lett. *Octogesima adveniens*, May 24, 1971, nn. 38-41; AAS 63, 1971, pp. 427 ff.; cf. PAUL VI, Apost. Exhort. *Quinque iam anni*, five years after the conclusion of Vat. C. II, Nov. 8, 1970; AAS 63, 1971, p. 102.

5. *Application of theology to earthly reality and integration of human values*

59. 1) Among the tasks of theology, there is also that mentioned in the decree *Optatam totius* (n. 16) which invites theologians to employ theological method when applying eternal truths to the unsettled conditions of our time, so that students "may learn to search for a solution of human problems in the light of Revelation; and apply eternal truth to the unsettled conditions of this world and communicate it in the appropriate manner to their contemporaries". Furthermore, the same Council, in the Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, has often invited theologians to give more attention to the problems of contemporary culture and science, so as to renew their way of thinking and contribute "ad compositionem culturae cum christiana institutione" (n. 62).

New tasks put forward by Vatican II

60. 2) It is as if theologians must write a new chapter in theological and pastoral epistemology, beginning—methodologically—with the facts and questions of the present day, rather than the ideas and problems of the past.

New areas in epistemology and methodology

The complex cultural and social reality of our times and the changed attitude toward theology and the Church makes this work difficult, but it is a commitment to evangelization which theologians cannot ignore.

Difficulties to be overcome

61. 3) Theological endeavor in this field leads to the concrete task:

concrete tasks:

a) of integrating into Christian doctrine and morals all that experience finds of value in earthly reality and the development of human values;¹

— to integrate

b) of illuminating earthly reality and human values—without altering their identity—in relation to the kingdom of God;

— to illuminate

c) of promoting and inspiring such values even on the level of their natural identity, which is better formed if referred to transcendental reality and values;²

— to promote and inspire

d) of contributing towards freeing earthly values and realities from the secular and worldly over-valuation that often accompanies them and thus saving their identity.

— to purify

¹ Cf. PAUL VI, *Encycl. Lett. Ecclesiam Suam*, Aug. 4th, 1964 AAS 56, 1964, pp. 627-628.

² Cf. Const. *Gaudium et spes*, nn. 35-36, 41-43.

— Towards
Christian
humanism

— Against
false Anthro-
pocentrism

All this belongs to the ambit of that "Christian or integral humanism"³ which hinges on the principle of *gratia supponens et perficiens (sanans) naturam*.⁴

62. 4) Working in this field does not mean that theology becomes so anthropological or anthropocentric that it ceases to be the science of God and divine things. It is, on the contrary, a matter of giving greater relevance to the problems of mankind by bringing theology more up-to-date without, however, changing the man-God relationship on the metaphysical,gnoseological, or ethical level. This relationship, in fact, lies at the very center of theology and is always resolved in a definite reference to God.

III. Guidelines for the teaching of theology

I. GENERAL GUIDELINES

Theological
research and
teaching today

63. From a consideration of theology and of the theological teaching in seminaries, today some characteristic facts emerge. Among those, to which particular attention should be given, is a plurality of tendencies, opinions, and interests with a relative lack of unity; the narrow scope of some fields of research, of study, of themes, even notions of theology, and of its connection with philosophy and the sciences, outside an organic and constructive synthesis. A correct concern to find an attentive partner in theological dialogue and to find a type of discourse which interests him, not without a tendency to adaptation, could, if pushed beyond certain limits, mean a break with tradition and a distortion of theology.

In this climate, certain methodological requirements for teaching arise which involve the nature and function of theology.

1. Plurality and unity

The function
of "schools"
of theology

64. 1) The plurality, so common today, in the theological expression of faith is nothing new. We find it in the early centuries of the Church in the great theological currents of the West and the East. This tendency grew and manifested itself in the variety of theological schools which later developed, each

¹ PAUL VI, Encycl. Lett. *Populorum progressio*, Mar. 26, 1967, nn. 16, 20, 42 and passim: AAS 59, 1967, pp. 265, 267, 278.

² S. THOMAS AQ. *Summa theol.*, 1, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2.

taking its departure from different organizational principles and different fundamental concerns. Each of these "schools" represents an approach to the Christian mystery, an attempt to interpret the reality of Revelation. None of them can identify with the other except on the level of revealed truth which all are trying to understand on the level of the Church which recognizes them.

65. 2) But, theological pluralism today differs from that of the past in that its scope is so wide and so deep that it could be described as radical. From the quantitative point of view, this is due to the enormous amount of material accumulated by each discipline which theology takes into consideration and utilizes by means of a complex articulation of organizational processes. From the point of view of the arrangement and spirit of theology, today's pluralism is due to the diversity of methods employed, the variety of philosophies followed, the different terminologies used, and basic outlooks adopted. These and other characteristics ensure that the new forms of pluralism, which especially have appeared after the Second Vatican Council, can be seen as even qualitatively distinct from earlier forms of pluralism.

Characteristics
of theological
pluralism today

66. 3) In the past the Church not only tolerated but also encouraged a pluralism of theological tendencies because they were an indication of attempts to provide new and better explanations of certain themes and problems which were addressed under different aspects. The Church today has not changed. She encourages and favors a certain pluralism for kerygmatic, pastoral, and missionary reasons, provided always that such pluralism is a further enrichment of a doctrine of faith already well and clearly determined and in constant reference to it.¹

Advantages
of pluralism

Dangers and
disadvantages

The Church, however, must deplore arbitrary and chaotic pluralism which uses philosophies far removed from faith, and

¹ Cf. Decr. *Ad gentes*, nn. 10, 16, 22; *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis*, n. 64;

Const. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 44: "Thanks to the experience of past ages, the progress of the sciences, and the treasures hidden in the various forms of human culture, the nature of man himself is more clearly revealed and new roads to truth are open. These benefits profit the Church, too. For, from the beginning of her history, she has learned to express the message of Christ with the help of ideas and terminology of various peoples, and has tried to clarify it with the wisdom of philosophers, too. Her purpose has been to adapt the Gospel to the grasp of all as well as to the needs of the learned, in so far as such was appropriate. Indeed, this accommodated preaching of the revealed Word ought to remain the law of all evangelization".

very disparate terminology thus making understanding between theologians ever more difficult, if not impossible. Such a situation can only lead to confusion of language and concepts and a break with the theological tradition of the past. It cannot be considered as favorable for the formation of future priests and so may not be tolerated in theological teaching.¹

The classic
Masters of
the Church

67. 4) It is absolutely essential that candidates for the priesthood—as beginners in learning theology—should, above all, acquire a sound *forma mentis* from the great Masters of the Church. From them they can learn the true science of theology and the true Christian doctrine. Besides, this principle is true of learning and formation in any field of knowledge and culture.

Basic rules
of teaching

68. 5) For the theological formation of students at any level the following principles concerning pluralism must be applied:

Unity of faith

a) The unity of the faith must be safeguarded. For this purpose it is, above all, necessary to distinguish what is a matter of faith, to which everyone is obliged to adhere, and what is the level where the faith permits a choice of opinions.

A nucleus of
unquestionable
truths

b) In the area of theological opinion, the common doctrine of the Church and the *sensus fidelium* must be respected. In theology there is a nucleus of affirmations that are certain, common, and which cannot be given up, constituting the basis of all Catholic dogmatic teaching.

These cannot be questioned but only clarified, studied in depth, and better explained in their historical and theological context.

The value of
different
theological
systems

c) With regard to various theological systems, their unequal value should be borne in mind. Above all, it is necessary to see whether they are guided only by restricted interests, limited to some particular aspect of revealed truth, or whether they embrace the whole Christian mystery, systematizing and integrating a great quantity of data in the light of simple principles and of a value bordering on the universal. In any case, a system shall only be judged valid if it ignores none of the

¹ With regard to the just limits of theological pluralism, cf. the "proposizioni" of the Pont. International Theological Commission on "The Unity of Faith and Theological Pluralism" in *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 124, 1973, vol. II, pp. 367-369.

PAUL VI, Alloc. We have come, to the Bishops of Oceania, Dec. 1, 1970, *Noi non usciremo*, at the general audience of Aug. 28, 1974; *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, vol. XII, p. 764 ff., Città del Vaticano 1975.

essential aspects of reality and is demonstrably capable of assimilating new points of view in an organic and harmonious synthesis. Under this aspect, the thomistic synthesis retains its full value.

Following these principles and criteria the teacher of theology can move safely among the hazards of modern pluralism.

2. Prospects of a synthesis

69. 1) The theology of today in its search for new arrangement and new formulae is marked by a transitory and provisional character. Always in search of a new synthesis, it is like a huge construction-site in which the building is only partly completed, while within there is an accumulation of material which must be used in the building.

The need for a synthesis today

Consequently the teaching of theology has in many cases lost its unity and compactness, and presents an incomplete fragmentary aspect so that it is often said that theological knowledge has become "atomized". When order and completeness are lacking, the central truths of the faith are easily lost to sight. Therefore, it is not at all to be wondered at, if, in such a climate, various fashionable "theologies", which are in great part one sided, partial, and sometimes unfounded, gain ground.

Central and peripheral truths

70. 2) These difficulties, inherent in the novelty of many of the problems with which theologians are called upon to deal, and in the vastness of their scientific interests as well as in the general climate of opinion, cannot leave indifferent those who are responsible for the teaching of theology, even in the basic courses. The ideal of unity and synthesis, although it seems difficult, should interest both professors and students. It is a matter of the greatest importance on whose solution depend in great part the efficiency, vitality, and practical utility of their studies. It involves:

The ideal of unity and synthesis

a) A synthesis of the various doctrines.

b) A synthesis of the different levels of the theological studies, e.g., systematic theology, exegesis.

c) A synthesis of sciences and religious experiences in relation to pastoral activity, etc.

Principal aspects of synthesis

71. 3) Among the indispensable means to achieve this end are the following:

a) At the beginning of the studies, it is necessary "to organize very well the different theological and philosophical

The Mystery of Christ

disciplines so that they may converge in harmony towards a progressive opening of the mind of the student to the mystery of Christ, which penetrates the whole history of the human race, working always in the Church, and operating chiefly through the priestly ministry".¹ In a special introductory course, "the mystery of salvation should be proposed in a way that students can understand the point of ecclesiastical studies, their structure, and their pastoral aim".²

The history
of salvation

b) It is necessary to have a detailed and co-ordinated program of studies that guarantees the integrity and internal cohesion of the whole theological course, the completeness of the material to be studied, as well as a solid foundation and co-ordination of each particular discipline.³

Program
of studies

c) The personal commitment of the professors is indispensable. They should have a complete understanding of the ideal of unity and of synthesis, and they should be able to embody single parts and fragmentary data in an organic unity which they already possess and to which they can refer partial considerations.

The
indispensable
role of
professors

d) From this, the importance of lectures by a master should be evident. They should be sufficient in number and well prepared. The work of the students in groups and "seminars" should aim to give them a better grasp of the synthesis and an introduction to the method of scientific work. In any case, these groups and seminars are no substitute for lectures, and cannot give students a complete and synthetic vision of the material to be studied.⁴

The role of
magisterial
lectures

e) In view of completeness of the teaching and of a desirable theological synthesis, it is necessary to establish a fixed canon of principal disciplines and the fundamental and central themes of the faith which it is obligatory to study. The principle of free choice on the level of the basic courses must be limited to certain auxiliary and special matters only, which must be carefully worked out.⁵

Fixed canon
of disciplines

f) The pivot of the effort necessary to obtain a greater completeness and synthesis is constituted by the program of studies and by the effective unity of the teaching staff. It

Effective unity
of the teaching
body

¹ Decr. *Optatam totius*, n. 14.

² *Ibid.*; cf. *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis*, nn. 62.

³ Cf. *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis*, n. 77 ff.; 80, 81, 90; cf. nn. 60-61.

⁴ *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis*, nn. 91a.

⁵ *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis*, nn. 78-80; 82-84.

imposes, above all, an interdisciplinary co-ordination and collaboration which must be in some way institutionalized, especially in the drawing up of the programs and in the subdivision of the various tasks.¹

g) It is necessary to recognize and respect the extremely important role of the prefect of studies, who must be complete master of his job and truly efficient.² He should try to keep alive in the teachers a concern for completeness and synthesis, exerting himself together with the teachers to avoid at any cost fragmentary teaching, polarized on certain questions of the day, or limited to incomplete modern theologies (e.g., the theology of development, the theology of liberation, etc.).

Role of the
prefect of
studies

3. *Vitality and transmission of theological knowledge*

72. 1) Perhaps never more than today has theology been so aware of its duty to pass on the Christian message. This awareness was notably accentuated by Vatican Council II, at which Pope John XXIII urged "ut haec doctrina certa et immutabilis, cui fidele obsequium est praestandum, ea ratione pervestigetur et exponatur, quam tempora postulant nostra".³ On their part, the students themselves like theological teaching to be alive, spiritually effective, pastoral, and social.

The kerygmatic
problem

73. 2) By its very nature, theology leads to personal contact with God, stimulating those who teach or study it to prayer and contemplation. Spirituality born from a life of faith is a kind of internal dimension of theology to which it imparts supernatural flavor. On the other hand, to have a more intense spiritual life and an adequate pastoral preparation, serious scientific education is also necessary; without it, any adaptation in the ascetic and pastoral life is of no value.

Life-giving
energy:
Spirituality

74. 3) The vitality of theology in relation to prayer and contemplation, according to the teaching of Vatican Council II, is to be found in the Word of God, manifest and working in the history of salvation, which finds the center of its life and its synthesis in the mystery of Christ.⁴ The truths of the faith become ever more alive as we see in them their profound unity in Christ, encountered in a particular manner in the Fathers and liturgy. For this reason a greater familiarity both with the

Salvation
history

Christocentrism
of the Fathers
and in the
liturgy

¹ *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis*, n. 90.

² *Ibid.*

³ Inaugural Alloc. *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*, Oct. 11, 1962: AAS 54, 1962, p. 792.

⁴ Cf. Const. *Dei verbum*, n. 24; *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 16; Decr. *Optatam totius* nn. 14, 16; *Ad gentes*, n. 16.

Holy Scriptures and with the Fathers of the Church and the liturgy can be considered the most effective means of discovering the vital force of a theological formation. For this end, it is clear that all the efforts and means already mentioned in connection with giving theological teaching unity and cohesion will also help to achieve this other result.

Contact with
daily life

75. 4) Spirituality is one of the principal components of pastoral adaptation but of itself it is not enough. In fact, a greater contact with life is also necessary. With this end in view, the professors should have useful contacts with pastoral situations, with priests having the care of souls, with the faithful, and especially with believing and cultured professional men.¹ In this way the teachers can become more aware of the real problems that daily life and scientific progress set out for the faith, and thus should be able to present courses in such a manner "ut alumni hodiernae aetatis indole recte perspecta, ad colloquium cum hominibus accommodate praeparentur".²

"Anthropocen-
tric" method

76. 5) In order to communicate the faith to the man of today, theology certainly supposes and demands an analysis of man's dispositions and perceptive capacities in relation to the truth that must be proposed to him.³ Therefore, it must formulate the truth in relation to the *forma mentis* of man, so that it can acquire for him a real meaning and a vital relevance, even in connection with the social, political, and cultural problems that most interest the modern world.

Hazards to
be avoided

In this work the sense of transcendence of the Christian message must not be lost, nor must theology be reduced to a kind of philology or sociology of religion elaborated by a theologian; nor must it abandon the classical tradition of theology nor neglect the true object of theology which is God.

Renewal of
language

77. 6) This task, mentioned above, obviously presents theologians with a problem of language which is felt today even by the interest taken in modern hermeneutics. Theology should be very sensitive to the language of the modern world if it wishes to be rooted in modern culture and to communicate with modern man.⁴ Pope Paul VI *á propos* of this said: "We must look ahead so as to confirm the integrity of the whole of our doctrine—without any instability due to passing fashions—in

¹ *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis*, nn. 36, 37.

² *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis*, n. 71.

³ PAUL VI, Alloc. *Nous sommes heureux*, to the International Theological Commission, Oct. 11, 1972: AAS 64, 1972, p. 683.

⁴ Cf. Const. *Gaudium et spes*, nn. 44, 62.

the forms of new language, which must not be precluded except for reasons of absolute loyalty to Revelation and the infallible Magisterium of the Church, with respect for the *sensus fidelium* and for edification in charity".¹

II. PARTICULAR GUIDELINES FOR THE VARIOUS THEOLOGICAL DISCIPLINES

78. Having mentioned certain orientations of a general nature and of special importance for the teaching of theology, it is now opportune to define certain methodological orientations with special reference to the theological disciplines which are today at the center of scientific interest and are called upon to confront special problems and difficulties.

Need for a more detailed orientation

Up to now much thought has been given to safeguarding the specific nature of theology, of faithfully respecting its special methodological procedure, of making good use of philosophical reflection, of natural and human sciences, of seeking a greater internal cohesion, of assuring the vitality and practical utility of theological knowledge, in closer contact with the sources of Revelation and with life. All that has a much stronger and more concrete resonance when it is a matter of applying it within disciplines such as exegesis, dogmatic theology, moral theology, patristics, pastoral and fundamental theology, which will be dealt with later. All these disciplines—because of the direct contact they have either with the sources, or with the central nucleus of the Christian mystery, or with life—are today particularly questioned due to conciliar directives and to the general present-day situation.

Disciplines which are particularly involved

79. 1. *Holy Scripture*

1) The first thing which must be taken into account in the teaching of theology is that Holy Scripture is the point of departure, an *enduring foundation* and the life giving principle and soul of all theology.²

Its primary role

It is, therefore, necessary that professors of Biblical studies should develop their teaching with that competence and scientific completeness which the importance of their discipline demands. So as to be faithful to their task, they must work on

¹ Alloc. *Siamo assai grati*, to the College of Cardinals, June 22, 1973: AAS 65, 1973, p. 384.

² Const. *Dei verbum*, n. 24.

the level of texts, on the level of the facts contained in it, on the level of the tradition which the text communicates and interprets. The professors of this subject must have recourse to textual, literary, and historical analysis. But, they must also maintain in the souls of the students a sense of the unity of the mystery and of the plan of God. The Scriptures have been handed down by the Church and in part they were born in the Church and, therefore, they must be read and understood in the ecclesial tradition.¹

Theology in
the service
of Scripture

80. 2) Such is the principal role occupied by Scripture that it cannot but determine the nature of the connections which exist between itself and theology with its diverse disciplines. This being the case, it cannot be considered one-sidedly in the service of the said disciplines (as a source of *loci probantes*), but the whole of theology is called upon to make its contribution to a better and ever more profound understanding of the sacred texts, that is, of the dogmatic and moral truths that they contain.

It follows from this that the teaching of Sacred Scripture, having dealt with all the introductory matter, should culminate in a Biblical theology presenting a united vision of the Christian mystery.

The specific
character of
Biblical
theology

81. 3) Biblical theology, to serve truly a better understanding of Holy Scripture, must have its own subject matter, elaborated by a specific methodology, and with a certain autonomy, that is to say with a certain exclusive attention to the character and integrity of Biblical teaching. Such a relative autonomy does not at all mean an independence or antagonism towards systematic theology, which today does sometimes unfortunately happen.

In harmony
with systematic
theology

Between the positive and systematic parts of theology—while maintaining the specificity of their respective methods—there should be, on the contrary, a fruitful and continual collaboration. Properly speaking, in theology there are not two phases of work, inasmuch as the speculative part is already present in the positive; the positive is the speculative “*in fieri*” and the speculative is the positive carried through to its completion.

Co-operation
between
disciplines

82. 4) To achieve such an end as this, there must be effective co-operation and co-ordination between the teachers of the

¹ Cf. PONT. BIBLICAL COMMISSION, Instruction *Sancta Mater*, on the historical truth of the Gospels, April 21, 1964: AAS 56, 1964, pp. 713 ff.

disciplines chiefly involved: that is to say exegesis, fundamental theology, dogmatic and moral theology, so as to arrive at a suitable division of tasks, and also at a more perfect harmony and structure of the matter being taught.

One expects from professors of Holy Scripture a correct openness towards and an understanding of the problems of other theological disciplines, keeping always present the requirements of the integrity and internal coherence of the faith, expressed in the principle of the *analogy of the faith*.¹

Constructive
work of
exegesis

The importance justly given today to the Biblical sciences, while it increases the responsibility of Biblical scholars "vis á vis" those involved in the other disciplines, does not justify an independent and superior attitude. Biblical scholars should be, above all, the servants of the Word of God, bearing well in mind the delicacy of many exegetical problems that, especially in a seminary course, must be treated with the greatest prudence and moderation, also because of the influence they can have on catechesis and preaching.²

Responsible
'position

83. 5) The professor of Sacred Scripture should be aware, above all, of the task that his teaching fulfills for dogmatic, moral and fundamental theology, the pastoral ministry and the spiritual life of future priests. Here it should be enough to call to mind that:

Special tasks
regarding:

a) with a view toward systematic theology, exegesis should tend toward a true and proper Biblical theology;

— systematic
theology

b) in fundamental theology, Biblical science requires a scientific "aggiornamento" united to a mentality that is constructive in using sure scientific information to serve faith;

— fundamental
theology

c) in pastoral ministry, it is necessary to offer a vision of Sacred Scripture which is as complete as possible, not overlooking the more serious problems,³ to guide the students to a wise use of properly interpreted texts;

— pastoral
ministry

d) in the spiritual life, the students must be encouraged to respect and love Sacred Scripture⁴ and to be trained to profit from the Bible in the liturgy, and in priestly piety and asceticism.

— spiritual life

¹ Cf. Const. *Dei verbum*, n. 12.

² Cf. PONTIFICAL BIBLICAL COMMISSION, Instruction *Sancta Mater*, on the historical truth of the Gospels, April 21, 1964, n. 4: AAS 56, 1964, pp. 717-718.

³ Cf. *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis*, n. 78.

⁴ Cf. Const. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 24.

Centrality of the "Credo"

84. 6) To give a formative value to the teaching that begins with Biblical themes, a professor of Holy Scripture must try to co-ordinate them in one theological-ecclesial synthesis, inspired by the *Profession of the Catholic Faith* that summarizes the understanding that the Church has of Revelation. In this, theology will be linked to the fundamental articles of the Christian faith.

2. Patristics

Methodological requirements

85. 1) One could say something similar for patristics, although it is clear that what has been said about the Sacred Scriptures cannot be applied wholly to patristics, because of the evident objective differences between the two disciplines.

But in patristics as in the Biblical sciences it is equally necessary:

Historical method

a) to respect the special character of the method of historical research;

Unity

b) to aim at unity in theological teaching, even if this unity must be done by means of partial and gradual syntheses.

Respect for historical fact

86. 2) One of the principal objects in teaching patristics is to outline the picture of theology and the Christian life in the time of the Fathers in its historical reality. To assign to it other objectives runs the risk of fragmenting it and making it sterile.

87. 3) Furthermore, the teaching of patristics should tend to give a sense of the continuity of theology, which corresponds to fundamental data, and of its relative nature, which corresponds to its particular aspects and applications. In this way, it can help theology in a global sense to remain within the faith interpreted and guarded by the consensus of the Fathers.

Link with Church history

88. 4) For this reason also, it will be opportune to strengthen the ties that exist between the teaching of patristics and the teaching of Church history, in order that they may contribute to a systematic understanding of the problems, events, experiences, and doctrinal, spiritual, pastoral, and social developments in the Church at various times.¹

¹ Cf. Decr. *Optatam totius*, n. 16; and also S. C. FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, Circ. *Synodi Episcopalis*, May 22, 1968, in which, for an adequate theological formation of priests, there is sought, amongst other things, "a united structure of teaching; a very precise idea of what theological work is and of its sources; a *solid historical formation*".

3. Dogmatic theology

89. 1) The genetic method laid down for dogmatic theology by Vatican Council II ¹ consists of five stages: Sacred Scripture, the patristic tradition, history, speculation, the liturgical life, and the life of the Church with an application to the problems of today. This guarantees teaching founded on revealed data, unified in the history of salvation, ordered and integrated in a complete vision of the faith, enlivened by a contact with the liturgy and the life of the Church, and open to pastoral needs, thanks to the attention given to the needs of our time.

Advantages
of the genetic
method

90. 2) To realize all the possibilities of such a method, as well as to overcome any difficulties it presents, the first condition is to respect and apply the principle of the *continuity of the faith*, while bearing in mind the need for future generations to understand it ever more deeply and in a way ever better adapted to the needs of the world.

The principle of
the continuity
of faith

For the sake of this continuity the following points should be considered:

a) the need for a constant reference to Revelation, inasmuch as it is the inexhaustible and objective principle of the faith begetting both dogma and the different expressions of the Christian life, particularly *theology*;

The relationship
of theology and
revelation

b) the intervention of the ecclesiastical Magisterium to fix and define the permanent requirements of faith;

Function of the
Magisterium

c) the necessity and also the relative nature of theology, which discovers and brings forth the depths of faith;

Real value
of theology

d) the need of a contemporary understanding of faith, received and professed in its wholeness, in reference to the new cultural situation, and, therefore, to the special task of theology.

Theology's
proper task

91. 3) A good application of the aforesaid method also requires a good relationship between dogmatic theology and Biblical science, a matter which has already been touched upon.

The genetic
method and
what it requires

A direct contact with Sacred Scripture makes it possible to have a greater thematic richness and a teaching more active and creative but consequently a much more demanding work for both professors and students.

¹ Decr. *Optatam totius*, n. 16.

Specific tasks of the professor

92. 4) From what has been said, there emerge certain specific tasks for the teacher of dogmatic theology, especially with regard to the positive part of the teaching under a Biblical and a historical-patristic aspect:

The right use of Sacred Scripture

a) under the Biblical aspect he must always remember that Holy Scripture does not only serve to supply proofs to support a thesis, but it is also and above all a point of departure and a source of inspiration for all theological teaching;

The data of patristics and history

b) under the patristic-historical aspect dogmatic theology should be able to acquire promising results from the examination and study of the great masters of Christian tradition, to be used not only in the historical part of theology, but also as a guide in Christian reflection and systematic organization.

The right balance between positive and systematic theology

93. 5) One must always keep in mind the need of a close coordination of disciplines and of an effective co-operation of teachers between the positive and speculative parts of theology, which should be based on two principles:

a) the breadth and the importance of the positive part of the genetic historical method should not lessen in the least the weight that speculative development must have in the teaching of theology;

b) the integrity of the genetic historical method admits of a certain flexibility in consideration of the nature of the themes taught: some in a more positive way (e.g., penance) and others in a more speculative way (e.g., grace and freedom or the internal consciousness of Christ).

Integrity of the theme and the material

94. 6) In the teaching of dogma, besides the substantial integrity of the genetic method, the material integrity of the discipline must be assured so that all the truths of the faith are treated as they should be. Obviously, a judicious choice is taken for granted. In making this, the essential must be distinguished from the unessential. In fact, there exists a "hierarchy veritatum doctrinae catholicae, cum diversus sit earum nexus cum fundamento fidei christianae".¹ But it is evident that in dogma as in all the other principal disciplines of the seminary course all options and premature specialization must be excluded.

4. Moral theology

Efforts being made at renewal

95. 1) The renewal of moral theology desired by Vatican Council II is a part of the effort that the Church is making to

¹ Decr. *Unitatis redintegratio*, n. 11.

understand better the man of today and to go out to meet his needs in a world that is in the process of profound change.

It is a matter of putting the yeast of the Gospel teaching "into the circulation of the thought, expression, culture, customs, and tendencies of humanity as it lives and moves about on the face of the earth today".¹

The teaching of moral theology contributes most effectively to this task of the Church, and, therefore, it must be renewed and brought to perfection in accordance with these needs.

96. 2) To overcome onesidedness and fill in the omissions of which moral theology has at times given evidence in the past, due in great part to a certain legalism and individualism, as well as to a certain separation from the sources of Revelation, it becomes necessary to clarify its *epistemological status*.

Epistemological status

It remains, therefore, to determine the way in which it must be built up always in close contact with Holy Scripture, Tradition, (received through faith and interpreted by the Magisterium) and in reference to the natural law (known by means of reason).

On this basis, a revision and a reevaluation of moral theology should be possible, and the same is true of its spiritual, pastoral, and "political" application. In this way it will have a place as authentic theology. Placing it in this position should be of primary concern, so that theology can meet the demands of what is known as "orthopraxis".

A level that is truly theological

97. 3) With this aim in view, it is necessary, above all, to have a lively awareness of the link between moral and dogmatic theology, so that moral questions can be treated as a true and fitting theological discipline, in conformity with all the fundamental epistemological and methodological rules that are valid for all of theology. With regard to this it would be as well to refer to St. Thomas Aquinas, who, like other great masters, never separated moral from dogmatic theology, but, instead, inserted it in a unified scheme of systematic theology, as a part that concerns the process by which man, created in the likeness of God and redeemed by the grace of Christ, tends towards his full realization, according to the demands of his divine calling, in the context of the economy of salvation historically realized in the Church.

Link with dogma

¹ PAUL VI, Encycl. Lett. *Ecclesiam Suam*, Aug. 4, 1964: AAS 56, 1964, pp. 640-641.

Positive and systematic aspect

98. 4) By virtue of the strict link between moral and dogmatic theology, the specific procedure of theology should be adopted also in morals, developing properly both the positive and the speculative aspect, drawing widely on Revelation and developing every discourse in harmony with the thought and mind of the Church.

It is much to be desired that there should be the same concern for the material completeness of the teaching of this subject as is demanded by dogmatic theology.

Contribution of the natural and human sciences

99. 5) For moral theology, even more than the other theological disciplines, it is necessary to bear in mind the results of the natural and human sciences, and also of human experience; while these cannot ever find or absolutely create the rules of morality,¹ nevertheless, they can throw much light on the situation and on the behavior of man, encouraging research, revision, the profound understanding of doctrine which lies between the sure and certain principles of reason and faith, and their application to the concrete facts of life.

The mediation between moral theology and the human and natural sciences will be accomplished by profound philosophical reflection, stimulated by Christian Tradition which has never failed to consider the problem of man, with particular reference to his nature, his destiny, and his whole development on his way to God.

The idea of the Christian vocation

100. 6) It is also necessary to introduce into moral theology the dynamic aspect which will provoke the reply that a man must give to the divine call that comes in the process of his growth in love, in the bosom of a community of salvation. In such a way, moral theology will acquire an inner spiritual dimension in response to the demand for fully developing the *Imago Dei* which is in man, and the laws of spiritual development described by Christian ascetics and mysticism. For precisely this reason, moral theology must keep in strict contact with Biblical and dogmatic theology, always bearing in mind the pastoral tasks that future priests must fulfill in directing souls and administering the Sacrament of Penance.

The inner spiritual dimension

The spiritual direction

The sacrament of penance

Contacts with pastoral theology

101. 7) In a particular way, the teaching of moral theology to students who are preparing for the priestly ministry brings with it the need for a close contact and relation with pastoral theology, which will encourage it to study the problems posed

¹ Cf. S. C. FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, Declar. *Persona humana*, n. 9, Dec. 29, 1975; *L'Osservatore Romano*, Jan. 16, 1976, p. 1.

by the experience of life, and will provide plans of action inspired by the needs of the Word of God and theologically well-grounded and developed. This is the way of renewal indicated by Vatican Council II: "Sub luce evangelii et humanae experientiae".¹

5. Pastoral theology

102. 1) Particular attention must be given to the teaching of pastoral theology, both as a part of all the theological disciplines² and also as a science that interprets and stimulates the genuine needs of the pastoral ministry and guides their fulfillment in contemporary circumstances according to the demands of faith, in the light of Revelation.³

The need
for it

103. 2) Pastoral theology keeps in touch with reality, that is to say, with the problems of the ministry and the solutions which have been given to them at various times, especially today, but it is bound to the rest of theology and draws on it in two fundamental ways:

Its position
in theology

a) it appeals to and stimulates the other theological disciplines (especially moral theology) by putting before them problems that they cannot hope to solve in a purely empirical and autonomous way, because they must be seen in the light of faith;

It poses
problems
to be solved

b) it studies the practical application of theological solutions, always bearing in mind the concrete situation and respecting the plurality of possible choices, when there is room for different opinions.

It receives
solution
to be applied

104. 3) Following these criteria, the teaching of pastoral theology can give an authentic formation and prepare the ground for well defined action, avoiding on the one hand timidity and frustration and on the other imprudent and rash initiatives, whose defects would be shown up by a sound theology.

Its practical
value

105. 4) It will depend on all professors of theology in the basic courses to make the teaching of pastoral theology harmonious, coherent, and formative both as an aspect of the other theological disciplines and as a specific development of matters regarding the ministry. An adequate place should be given to this material in the structure of the course. Encouragement

Co-ordination
and co-operation
between
professors

¹ Const. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 46.

² Cf. *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis*, n. 94.

³ Cf. *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis*, n. 79.

should be given to developing a year's pastoral course, at the end of the institutional course;¹ however, such teaching should not be excluded earlier in the course when local requirements and possibilities will determine the best form for it to take.

Obligatory
but not a
predominant
discipline

106. 5) In any case it should be kept in mind that teaching of pastoral theology must not be omitted, nor can the whole of theology be reduced to it.

6. *Fundamental theology*

Its primary
role

107. 1) Fundamental theology is the basis of the rational procedure of all theology. The object of its study is the fact of Christian Revelation and its transmission in the Church, themes which are at the center of all discussion of the relationship between reason and faith.

Understood as
an introductory
discipline

108. 2) Fundamental theology is to be studied as an introduction to dogmatic theology and also as a preparation, reflection, and development of the act of faith (the "Credo" of the credal Symbols) in the context of the requirements of reason and of the relationship between faith, culture and the great human religions. Moreover, it is also a permanent dimension of all theology, which must try to answer the contemporary problems presented by the students and by the world in which they live and in which they will one day have to conduct their ministry.

and as a
dimension of
all theology

Its essential
task

109. 3) The essential task of fundamental theology is the rational reflection which a theologian, together with the Church and starting from faith, makes on the truth of Christianity as a work of God Who has revealed Himself and made Himself present in Christ, and on the Church herself as the institution willed by Christ to carry on His work in the world.

Theology of
dialogue

Besides confronting faith with reason in abstract terms, it is conceived as a theology of dialogue on the borderline with the historical religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam), with the expression of modern atheism (especially of Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche), with religious indifference in a secular world dominated by technology, industrialism, and economic values, and finally, with the demands of believers, who today face new doubts and difficulties, and ask new questions of theology and

¹ Cf. *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis*, n. 84 b; *Normae quaedam ad Constitutionem Apostolicam "Deus scientiarum Dominus" de studiis academicis ecclesiasticis recognoscendam*, n. 33.

catechesis. To answer the needs and experiences emerging from these varied groups, fundamental theology seeks to define the meaning which Christ and His message and His Church have in such a situation, and to arouse and secure the assent of faith as a way to God.

A way of
obtaining assent
to faith

110. 4) These general lines of fundamental theology involve the study and explanation of the relationship of Christianity to history, language, other religious experiences, mysticism, philosophy, science, and the human condition. But, its specific task is to show by reasonable arguments that are valid for believers and non-believers alike how the mystery of Christ present in the Church, not only enlightens but also completes human existence, by uplifting it through the relationship with God which perfects and saves it.

Its relevance
in anthropology

111. 5) Far from fundamental theology being reduced to anthropology, it will have its full meaning inasmuch as it is an introduction to the total mystery of Christ and so to theology.

An introduction
to the mystery
of Christ and
to theology

This introductory function means among other things that the professor also has the task of clearly bringing out the basic elements of theological epistemology in order to give the students an exact idea of the sacred science.¹

The importance
of theological
epistemology

112. 6) It is opportune to add that, in the teacher and student alike, fundamental theology, set forth according to its full dimension, helps to develop a mature personality in the continual confrontation between faith and reason, achieving a superior harmony between them, as may be seen in so many great masters of the Christian tradition. It helps both the theologian and the pastor of souls to overcome all sense of inferiority in the face of the data of culture and more especially of science, which they use as expressions of rational truth but without becoming enslaved to it, according to the methodological criteria used by fundamental theology. Finally, this fundamental theology serves to stimulate in everyone the courage of the faith, without which neither Christian life nor good theology is possible.

It forms
the student's
personality

It inspires
courage in
faith

113. 7) For these reasons, fundamental theology is to be considered necessary for theological and pastoral formation, and, consequently, its teaching should hold a place in the program of studies that corresponds to its importance.

An obligatory
discipline

¹ Cf. *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis*, n. 79.

7. Other theological disciplines

Their contribution to theological formation

114. Naturally a complete theological formation of future priests goes together with other disciplines of great importance, for example liturgy, canon law, church history, and the ancillary subjects: spiritual theology, the social teaching of the Church, ecumenism, missionary theology, sacred art, sacred music, etc. These either go side by side with the principal disciplines or (as in the case of catechetics and homiletics) belong to the realm of pastoral theology.

Directives general

115. Regarding these, there are directives given partly in the documents of Vatican Council II (Const. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Decr. *Optatum totius*, *Ad gentes*, *Unitatis redintegratio*, *Orientalium*, *Ecclesiarum*, *Inter mirifica*, etc.), and partly in *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis*, and in various other special documents.¹

special

Every one of these disciplines, while carefully attending to its own problems and specific objects, can derive great advantage from this document, above all, insofar as it is concerned with a more lively awareness of present tasks as well as the need to enter constructively into theological discourse, according to the spirit of the faith.

IV. Practical norms

The duties of those involved

116. To conclude the preceding considerations it seems right to formulate certain norms specifying the duties of authorities set over seminaries, of professors and students.

I. THE DUTIES OF THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR THEOLOGICAL FORMATION

1. The authorities set over seminaries: Bishops and Episcopal Conferences, Rectors

¹ Cf. the documents published: The SECRETARIAT FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY, Directorium, Pars altera (see above all n. 75: De oecumenismo ut peculiari disciplina); S. C. FOR THE EVANGELIZATION OF THE PEOPLES, Lett. circ. on the missionary dimension of priestly formation, Pentecost 1970; SECRETARIAT FOR NON-BELIEVERS, the note on the study of atheism, July 10, 1970; S. C. FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, Lett. circ. on the teaching of philosophy in seminaries, Jan. 20, 1972; Lett. circ. on the study of Canon Law, March 1st, 1975. The same Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, in these recent years, has been publishing in the review "SEMINARIUM" series of articles giving an orientation toward the promotion of the conciliar renewal of the various disciplines in the philosophico-theological curriculum.

117. 1) The authorities set over seminaries have the responsibility of testifying that the candidates for the priesthood possess, besides other requisites, a theological preparation that will enable them to carry out their duty of teaching the faith and acting as spiritual guides of the faithful.

Presentation
for Holy orders

118. 2) The preparation of future priests cannot be adequate without an efficient and qualified body of teachers. It follows that Bishops and Rectors of seminaries should not hesitate to allow candidates capable of higher studies the time necessary to obtain academic degrees recognized by the Church.

Duties for the
teaching
bodies

They should make available to them adequate instruments of work (libraries, books, periodicals) and willingly allow them periods for renewal.¹

119. 3) The formation of future priests should be considered as one of the most important ministries in a diocese and, in some ways, the most demanding. In fact, the work of teaching unites the professor very closely to the work of Our Lord and Master, who prepared His Apostles to be witnesses of the Gospel and dispensers of the mysteries of God.

The importance
of teaching

120. 4) These norms will be effective only if they are accompanied by strict vigilance on the part of all those responsible.

The need for
vigilance

2. *The professors*

121. 1) The role of the professor is particularly important in the seminary course. It is, in fact, he who demonstrates the continuity of faith, tradition, and the life of the Church. It is he who assures, in the present pluralistic climate, lasting assent to fundamental truths as well as critical judgment, and a balanced assessment of a situation.

The
indispensable
role of the
professor

He is the unifying element indispensable for giving a solid basic formation. Therefore, it is necessary to reassess the function of the professor, for whom the Church, quite aware of the difficulty of his mission, wishes to express appreciation and recognition.

The need for its
reassessment

122. 2) As the servant of the Word of God, the professor of theology is bound to Christ and to the Church. His teaching should be carried out in the horizon of faith in the Word of our

Loyalty to
Christ and to
the Magisterium

¹ Cf. *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis*, nn. 32-38.

Lord and Saviour, and with an outlook of loyalty to the Church and her Magisterium.¹

Theological pluralism

123. 3) The plurality of schools of thought in the Church is a common phenomenon and in some ways can be considered beneficial. It was Vatican Council II that recognized its legitimacy and fruitfulness.²

Necessary limits

Nevertheless such plurality must not become a pluralism of systems that undermine the unity of faith which must always remain intact. It would be lamentable if theological pluralism were to be confused with pluralism of faiths.

Renewal of scientific research

124. 4) In his teaching, the professor must show himself abreast of the most recent contributions of theological research, and capable of expounding and evaluating them.

A sense of proportion

He must guard against that kind of *a priori* thinking which could induce a mentality that holds new ideas and theories as certain simply because they are new, and older ideas as out of date simply because they are less recent.³

Collaboration between disciplines

125. 5) Theology today has become very much aware of the necessity of a collaboration between the disciplines. In theology, just as in the field of profane science, teams of professors dedicate themselves to finding a deeper knowledge of faith. It is greatly to be desired that seminary teachers intensify amongst themselves those exchanges that help interdisciplinary work on the level of both teaching and research.⁴

Text books

126. 6) In the interests of a more effective formation and especially of a more systematic theological preparation, which is complete and doctrinally sound, up-to-date textbooks for each of the disciplines are highly to be recommended as the basis of both lectures and private study.⁵

The pastoral goal of teaching

127. 7) Since theological teaching in seminaries has for its principal object the formation of priests for the pastoral ministry, professors must keep this in mind, and, to understand better the needs of the pastoral life, they should keep in touch with parish priests and those who work in the areas of their students' future ministry.⁶

¹ Cf. *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis*, n. 87.

² *Decr. Unitatis redintegratio*, n. 17.

³ Cf. *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis*, n. 88.

⁴ Cf. *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis*, n. 90.

⁵ Cf. *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis*, n. 88.

⁶ Cf. *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis*, n. 94.

3. The students

128. 1) Students should feel co-responsible for their own theological formation. In fact, today they should take a more active part in the area of doctrine as in other areas of their formation. This is in conformity with the best traditions of teaching, which today are being given their full value.¹

Active participation

129. 2) Before students are introduced to theology, they should have the necessary literary² and philosophical preparation, unless the philosophical course is integrated with the theological one. Their philosophical formation should not comprise only the history of philosophy but also systematic reflection on the world and on man culminating in the affirmation of a personal Absolute. The philosophical course, according to the norms prescribed, should last at least two years.³

Preparatory studies

Two years of philosophy

130. 3) Students of theology should be ready to approach the sources of theological reflection (in a special way the New Testament, the documents of the Magisterium, the works of the Fathers of the Church and of the great Scholastics), by means of an adequate knowledge of Latin⁴ and the Biblical languages⁵ and by the use of works of contemporary research (translations and commentaries).

Latin and the Biblical languages

131. 4) Students of the theological course should take pains to attend lectures regularly. In fact it is a case not merely of imparting knowledge but of giving a tradition of faith. In this matter of Christian tradition, contact with the master is indispensable, since he is also bearing witness to the faith which has illuminated and transformed his life.

Attending lectures

His teaching thus becomes the discourse of a believing and praying theologian in whom there coincide an understanding of the mystery and intimate joining of it to his life. Theology cannot be taught and studied as if it were a secular subject before which one can remain neutral.

¹ Cf. Decr. *Optatam totius*, n. 17, *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis*, nn. 35, 91.

² Decr. *Optatam totius*, n. 13; *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotis*, nn. 65 ff.; cf. *ibid.*, nn. 59, 60.

³ Cf. *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis*, nn. 60, 61; 70, 75; and also S. C. FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, Lett. Circ. on the teaching of philosophy in seminaries, Jan. 20, 1972, Part III, nn. 1, 2.

⁴ Decr. *Optatam totius*, n. 13; *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis*, n. 66.

⁵ Decr. *Optatam totius*, n. 13; *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis*, n. 80.

Personal contact between the professors and the students in lectures, written work, seminars, and personal direction is very important.¹

II. THE ARRANGEMENT OF THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

Four years
theology

132. 1) In all seminaries the basic formation necessary to prepare a man for the priesthood should take at the very least four years of theology, or its equivalent in systems that integrate philosophy and theology.² The same applies to religious scholasticates.³

Essential
tracts and
themes

133. 2) A seminary course in theology should aim to give a systematic vision of the Christian mystery, including the study of the essential themes of faith and the Christian life. Without such a formation assuring, as it does, the solidity and fruitfulness of every later specialization, the priestly vocation would run the risk of collapsing. It would not be possible even to speak of a solid basic formation, if one or other of the following themes were to be omitted or treated hastily and superficially: Revelation and its transmission by means of Tradition and the Holy Scriptures, the affirmation of one God in Three Persons; of God as the Creator, of the Incarnation of the Son of God and of the Redemption of man (the paschal mystery), the Church and the Sacraments; Christian anthropology (grace and the life of God); eschatology; Christian morals (fundamental and special); the whole of the Sacred Scriptures (the law and the prophets, the synoptics, John and Paul).

Equally important in this vision of the Christian mystery are the studies of fundamental theology, theological epistemology, liturgy, Church history, canon law, pastoral theology, the social teaching of the Church, ecumenism, missionary theology.

The impact of
the human
sciences

134. 3) Without being confused with the human sciences so that it becomes psychology, sociology, or anthropology, contemporary theology, even in a seminary course, cannot overlook the problems posed to the man of today by the development of the human sciences. In fact, theology should be not only an understanding of the Word of God but also the understanding of mankind to whom the Word of God is addressed, and of the conditions under which this Word is heard. It must speak of the Christian mysteries in such a way that it reaches an understanding of what they are in themselves and what they are for us.

¹ Cf. *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis*, nn. 35, 38, 91.

² Cf. *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis*, n. 61.

³ Cf. *fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis*, n. 2.

135. 4) In teaching the various theological disciplines, the guidelines indicated in the third part of this document (some affirmations of which have been here deliberately repeated and emphasized) should be kept constantly in mind, in such a way as to assure students, whether or not they are candidates for Holy Orders, of a sound and complete formation.

Conclusion

The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education entrusts this document to the Bishops and to all others responsible for the theological formation of candidates for the priesthood to help them in the serious tasks that they must carry out in today's situation.

An attempt has been made to set forth the true nature and specific mission of the teaching of theology—set in the new outlook initiated by Vatican Council II and by the successive documents of the Supreme Pontiff and the Holy See—to assure the future “masters of the faith” of a doctrinal formation fit for our times. In this way they will be able to *cognoscere quod agunt et imitari quod tractant*.

It is to be hoped that the assimilation of the Word of God and of its saving value will be translated by them into a life in conformity with it, sustaining an authentic priestly spirituality, which will bring the truth into harmony with the needs of pastoral charity, directed to the transmission of the faith of the Church.

Rome, given at the Offices of the Sacred Congregations, February 22, 1976, the feast of Saint Peter's Chair.

GABRIEL-MARIE CARDINAL GARRONE, *Prefect*

✚ Joseph Schröffer
Tit. Archbishop of Volturnum
Secretary

