

Excerpt From Pastores Dabo Vobis - Saint Pope John Paul II
Human - Spiritual - Intellectual - Pastoral Formation

Human Formation, the Basis of All Priestly Formation

43. "The whole work of priestly formation would be deprived of its necessary foundation if it lacked a suitable human formation."(123) This statement by the synod fathers expresses not only a fact which reason brings to our consideration every day and which experience confirms, but a requirement which has a deeper and specific motivation in the very nature of the priest and his ministry. The priest, who is called to be a "living image" of Jesus Christ, head and shepherd of the Church, should seek to reflect in himself, as far as possible, the human perfection which shines forth in the incarnate Son of God and which is reflected with particular liveliness in his attitudes toward others as we see narrated in the Gospels. The ministry of the priest is, certainly, to proclaim the word, to celebrate the sacraments, to guide the Christian community in charity "in the name and in the person of Christ," but all this he does dealing always and only with individual human beings: "Every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God" (Heb. 5:1). So we see that the human formation of the priest shows its special importance when related to the receivers of the mission: In order that his ministry may be humanly as credible and acceptable as possible, it is important that the priest should mold his human personality in such a way that it becomes a bridge and not an obstacle for others in their meeting with Jesus Christ the Redeemer of humanity. It is necessary that, following the example of Jesus who "knew what was in humanity" (Jn. 2:25; cf. 8:3-11), the priest should be able to know the depths of the human heart, to perceive difficulties and problems, to make meeting and dialogue easy, to create trust and cooperation, to express serene and objective judgments.

Future priests should therefore cultivate a series of human qualities, not only out of proper and due growth and realization of self, but also with a view to the ministry. These qualities are needed for them to be balanced people, strong and free, capable of bearing the weight of pastoral responsibilities. They need to be educated to love the truth, to be loyal, to respect every person, to have a sense of justice, to be true to their word, to be genuinely compassionate, to be men of integrity and, especially, to be balanced in judgment and behavior.(124) A simple and demanding program for this human formation can be found in the words of the apostle Paul to the Philippians: "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Phil. 4:8). It is interesting to note that Paul, precisely in these profoundly human qualities, presents himself as a model to his faithful, for he goes on to say: "What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do" (Phil. 4:9).

Of special importance is the capacity to relate to others. This is truly fundamental for a person who is called to be responsible for a community and to be a "man of communion." This demands that the priest not be arrogant, or quarrelsome, but affable, hospitable, sincere in his words and heart, prudent and discreet, generous and ready to serve, capable of opening himself to clear and brotherly relationships and of encouraging the same in others, and quick to understand, forgive and console(125) (cf. 1 Tm. 3:1-5; Ti. 1:7-9). People today are often trapped in situations of standardization and loneliness, especially in large urban centers, and they become ever more appreciative of the value of communion. Today this is one of the most eloquent signs and one of the most effective ways of transmitting the Gospel message.

In this context affective maturity, which is the result of an education in true and responsible love, is a significant and decisive factor in the formation of candidates for the priesthood.

44. Affective maturity presupposes an awareness that love has a central role in human life. In fact, as I have written in the encyclical Redemptor Hominis, "Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself; his life is meaningless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it.(126)

We are speaking of a love that involves the entire person, in all his or her aspects - physical, psychic and spiritual - and which is expressed in the "nuptial meaning" of the human body, thanks to which a person gives

oneself to another and takes the other to oneself. A properly understood sexual education leads to understanding and realizing this "truth" about human love. We need to be aware that there is a widespread social and cultural atmosphere which "largely reduces human sexuality to the level of something commonplace, since it interprets and lives it in a reductive and impoverished way by linking it solely with the body and with selfish pleasure."(127) Sometimes the very family situations in which priestly vocations arise will display not a few weaknesses and at times even serious failings.

In such a context, an education for sexuality becomes more difficult but also more urgent. It should be truly and fully personal and therefore should present chastity in a manner that shows appreciation and love for it as a "virtue that develops a person's authentic maturity and makes him or her capable of respecting and fostering the 'nuptial meaning' of the body."(128)

Education for responsible love and the affective maturity of the person are totally necessary for those who, like the priest, are called to celibacy, that is, to offer with the grace of the Spirit and the free response of one's own will the whole of one's love and care to Jesus Christ and to his Church. In view of the commitment to celibacy, affective maturity should bring to human relationships of serene friendship and deep brotherliness a strong, lively and personal love for Jesus Christ. As the synod fathers have written, "A love for Christ, which overflows into a dedication to everyone, is of the greatest importance in developing affective maturity. Thus the candidate, who is called to celibacy, will find in affective maturity a firm support to live chastity in faithfulness and joy."(129)

Since the charism of celibacy, even when it is genuine and has proved itself, leaves one's affections and instinctive impulses intact, candidates to the priesthood need an affective maturity which is prudent, able to renounce anything that is a threat to it, vigilant over both body and spirit, and capable of esteem and respect in interpersonal relationships between men and women. A precious help can be given by a suitable education to true friendship, following the image of the bonds of fraternal affection which Christ himself lived on earth (cf. Jn. 11:5).

Human maturity, and in particular affective maturity, requires a clear and strong training in freedom, which expresses itself in convinced and heartfelt obedience to the "truth of one's own being, to the "meaning" of one's own existence, that is to the "sincere gift of self" as the way and fundamental content of the authentic realization of self.(130) Thus understood, freedom requires the person to be truly master of oneself, determined to fight and overcome the different forms of selfishness and individualism which threaten the life of each one, ready to open out to others, generous in dedication and service to one's neighbor. This is important for the response that will have to be given to the vocation, and in particular to the priestly vocation, and for faithfulness to it and to the commitments connected with it, even in times of difficulty. On this educational journey toward a mature, responsible freedom, the community life of the seminary can provide help.(131)

Intimately connected with formation to responsible freedom is education of the moral conscience. Such education calls from the depths of one's own "self" obedience to moral obligations and at the same time reveals the deep meaning of such obedience. It is a conscious and free response, and therefore a loving response, to God's demands, to God's love. "The human maturity of the priest - the synod fathers write - should include especially the formation of his conscience. In order that the candidate may faithfully meet his obligations with regard to God and the Church and wisely guide the consciences of the faithful he should become accustomed to listening to the voice of God, who speaks to him in his heart, and to adhere with love and constancy to his will."(132)

Spiritual Formation: In Communion with God and in Search of Christ

45. Human formation, when it is carried out in the context of an anthropology which is open to the full truth regarding the human person, **leads to and finds its completion in spiritual formation.** Every human being, as God's creature who has been redeemed by Christ's blood, is called to be reborn "of water and the Spirit" (Jn. 3:5) and to become a "son in the Son." **In this wonderful plan of God is to be found the basis of the essentially religious dimension of the human person, which moreover can be grasped and recognized by reason**

itself: The human individual is open to transcendence, to the absolute; he has a heart which is restless until it rests in the Lord.(133)

The educational process of a spiritual life, seen as a relationship and communion with God, derives and develops from this fundamental and irrepressible religious need. In the light of revelation and Christian experience, spiritual formation possesses the unmistakable originality which derives from evangelical "newness." Indeed, it "is the work of the Holy Spirit and engages a person in his totality. It introduces him to a deep communion with Jesus Christ, the good shepherd, and leads to the total submission of one's life to the Spirit, in a filial attitude toward the Father and a trustful attachment to the Church. Spiritual formation has its roots in the experience of the cross, which in deep communion leads to the totality of the paschal mystery."(134)

Spiritual formation, as we have just seen, is applicable to all the faithful. Nevertheless, it should be structured according to the meanings and connotations which derive from the identity of the priest and his ministry. And just as for all the faithful spiritual formation is central and unifies their being and living as Christians, that is, as new creatures in Christ who walk in the Spirit, so too for every priest his spiritual formation is the core which unifies and gives life to his being a priest and his acting as a priest. In this context, the synod fathers state that "without spiritual formation pastoral formation would be left without foundation"(135) and that spiritual formation is "an extremely important element of a priest's education."(136)

The essential content of spiritual formation specifically leading toward the priesthood is well expressed in the Council's decree Optatum Totius: "Spiritual formation...should be conducted in such a way that the students may learn to live in intimate and unceasing union with God the Father through his Son Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit. Those who are to take on the likeness of Christ the priest by sacred ordination should form the habit of drawing close to him as friends in every detail of their lives. They should live his paschal mystery in such a way that they will know how to initiate into it the people committed to their charge. They should be taught to seek Christ in faithful meditation on the word of God and in active participation in the sacred mysteries of the Church, especially the Eucharist and the Divine Office, to seek him in the bishop by whom they are sent and in the people to whom they are sent, especially the poor, little children, the weak, sinners and unbelievers. With the confidence of sons they should love and reverence the most blessed Virgin Mary, who was given as a mother to the disciple by Jesus Christ as he was dying on the cross."(137)

46. This text from the Council deserves our careful and loving meditation, out of which we will easily be able to outline some fundamental values and demands of the spiritual path trodden by the candidate for the priesthood.

First there is the value and demand of "**living intimately united**" to Jesus Christ. Our union with the Lord Jesus, which has its roots in baptism and is nourished with the Eucharist, has to express itself and be radically renewed each day. Intimate communion with the Blessed Trinity, that is, the new life of grace which makes us children of God, constitutes the "novelty" of the believer, a novelty which involves both his being and his acting. It constitutes the "mystery" of Christian existence which is under the influence of the Spirit: it should, as a result, constitute the ethos of Christian living. Jesus has taught us this marvelous reality of Christian living, which is also the heart of spiritual life, with his allegory of the vine and the branches: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser... Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn. 15:1, 4-5).

There are spiritual and religious values present in today's culture, and man, notwithstanding appearances to the contrary, cannot help but hunger and thirst for God. However, the Christian religion is often regarded as just one religion among many or reduced to nothing more than a social ethic at the service of man. As a result, its amazing novelty in human history is quite often not apparent. It is a "mystery," the event of the coming of the Son of God who becomes man and gives to those who welcome him the "power to become children of God" (Jn. 1:12). It is the proclamation, nay the gift, of a personal covenant of love and life between God and human

beings. Only if future priests, through a suitable spiritual formation, have become deeply aware and have increasingly experienced this "mystery" will they be able to communicate this amazing and blessed message to others (cf. 1 Jn. 1:1-4).

The Council text, while taking account of the absolute transcendence of the Christian mystery, describes the communion of future priests with Jesus in terms of friendship. And indeed it is not an absurdity for a person to aim at this, for it is the priceless gift of Christ, who said to his apostles, "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you" (Jn. 15:15).

The Council text then points out **a second great spiritual value: the search for Jesus. "They should be taught to seek Christ."** This, along with the *quaerere Deum* (the search for God), is a classical theme of Christian spirituality. It has a specific application in the context of the calling of the apostles. When John tells the story of the way the first two disciples followed Christ, he highlights this "search." It is Jesus himself who asks the question: "What do you seek?" And the two reply: "Rabbi, where are you staying?" The evangelist continues: "He said to them, 'Come and see.' They came and saw where he was staying; and they stayed with him that day" (Jn. 1:37-39). In a certain sense, the spiritual life of the person who is preparing for the priesthood is dominated by this search: by it and by the "finding" of the Master, to follow him, to be in communion with him. **So inexhaustible is the mystery of the imitation of Christ and the sharing in his life that this "seeking" will also have to continue throughout the priest's life and ministry. Likewise this "finding" the Master will have to continue in order to bring him to others, or rather in order to excite in others the desire to seek out the Master. But all this becomes possible if it is proposed to others as a living "experience," an experience that is worthwhile sharing. This was the path followed by Andrew to lead his brother Simon to Jesus. The evangelist John writes that Andrew "first found his brother Simon, and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which means Christ)" and brought him to Jesus (Jn. 1:41-42). And so Simon too will be called, as an apostle, to follow the Messiah: "Jesus looked at him and said, 'So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas' (which means Peter)" (Jn. 1:42).**

But what does to seek Christ signify in the spiritual life? And where is he to be found? "Rabbi, where are you staying?" The decree *Optatum Totius* would seem to indicate **a triple path to be covered: a faithful meditation on the word of God, active participation in the Church's holy mysteries and the service of charity to the "little ones."** These are three great values and demands which further define the content of the spiritual formation of the candidate to the priesthood.

47. **An essential element of spiritual formation is the prayerful and meditated reading of the word of God (lectio divina), a humble and loving listening of him who speaks. It is in fact by the light and with the strength of the word of God that one's own vocation can be discovered and understood, loved and followed, and one's own mission carried out. So true is this that the person's entire existence finds its unifying and radical meaning in being the terminus of God's word which calls man and the beginning of man's word which answers God. Familiarity with the word of God will make conversion easy, not only in the sense of detaching us from evil so as to adhere to the good, but also in the sense of nourishing our heart with the thoughts of God, so that the faith (as a response to the word) becomes our new basis for judging and evaluating persons and things, events and problems.**

Provided that we approach the word of God and listen to it as it really is, it brings us into contact with God himself, God speaking to us. It brings us into contact with Christ, the Word of God, the truth, who is at the same time both the way and the life (cf. Jn. 14:6). It is a matter of reading the "scriptures" by listening to the "words," "the word" of God, as the Council reminds us: "The sacred Scriptures contain the word of God, and because they are inspired, are truly the word of God."(138) The Council also states: "By this revelation, then, the invisible God (cf. Col. 1:15; 1 Tm. 1:7), from the fullness of his love, addresses people as his friends (cf. Ex. 33:11; Jn. 15:14-15), and moves among them (cf. Bar. 3:38), in order to invite and receive them into his own company.(139)

A loving knowledge of the word of God and a prayerful familiarity with it are specifically important for the prophetic ministry of the priest. They are a fundamental condition for such a ministry to be carried out suitably, especially if we bear in mind the "new evangelization" which the Church today is called to undertake. The Council tells us: "All clerics, particularly priests of Christ and others who, as deacons or catechists, are officially engaged in the ministry of the word, should immerse themselves in the Scriptures by constant sacred reading and diligent study. For it must not happen that anyone becomes 'an empty preacher of the word of God to others, not being a hearer of the word of God in his own heart' (St. Augustine, Sermon 179, 1: PL 8:966)."(140)

The first and fundamental manner of responding to the word is prayer, which is without any doubt a primary value and demand of spiritual formation. Prayer should lead candidates for the priesthood to get to know and have experience of the genuine meaning of Christian prayer, as a living and personal meeting with the Father through the only - begotten Son under the action of the Spirit, a dialogue that becomes a sharing in the filial conversation between Jesus and the Father. One aspect of the priest's mission, and certainly by no means a secondary aspect, is that he is to be a "teacher of prayer." However, the priest will only be able to train others in this school of Jesus at prayer if he himself has been trained in it and continues to receive its formation. This is what people ask of the priest: "The priest is The man of God, the one who belongs to God and makes people think about God. When the letter to the Hebrews speaks of Christ it presents him as 'merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God' (Heb. 2:17)... Christians expect to find in the priest not only a man who welcomes them, who listens to them gladly and shows a real interest in them, but also and above all a man who will help them to turn to God, to rise up to him. And so the priest needs to be trained to have a deep intimacy with God. Those who are preparing for the priesthood should realize that their whole priestly life will have value inasmuch as they are able to give themselves to Christ and through Christ to the Father."(141)

A necessary training in prayer in a context of noise and agitation like that of our society is an education in the deep human meaning and religious value of silence as the spiritual atmosphere vital for perceiving God's presence and for allowing oneself to be won over by it (cf. 1 Kgs. 19:11ff.).

48. The high point of Christian prayer is the Eucharist, which in its turn is to be seen as the "summit and source" of the sacraments and the Liturgy of the Hours. A totally necessary aspect of the formation of every Christian, and in particular of every priest, is liturgical formation, in the full sense of becoming inserted in a living way in the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ, who died and rose again, and is present and active in the Church's sacraments. Communion with God, which is the hinge on which the whole of the spiritual life turns, is the gift and fruit of the sacraments. At the same time it is a task and responsibility which the sacraments entrust to the freedom of the believer, so that one may live this same communion in the decisions, choices, attitudes and actions of daily existence. In this sense, the "grace" which "renews" Christian living is the grace of Jesus Christ, who died and rose again, and continues to pour out his holy and sanctifying Spirit in the sacraments. In the same way, the "new law" which should guide and govern the life of the Christian is written by the sacraments in the "new heart." And it is a law of charity toward God and humanity, as a response and prolonging of the charity of God toward humanity signified and communicated by the sacraments. It is thus possible to understand at once the value of a "full, conscious and active participation"(142) in sacramental celebrations for the gift and task of that "pastoral charity" which is the soul of the priestly ministry.

This applies above all to sharing in the Eucharist, the memorial of the sacrificial death of Christ and of his glorious resurrection, the "sacrament of piety, sign of unity, bond of charity", (143) the paschal banquet "in which Christ is received, the soul is filled with grace and we are given a pledge of the glory that is to be ours."(144) For priests, as ministers of sacred things, are first and foremost ministers of the sacrifice of the Mass:(145) The role is utterly irreplaceable, because without the priest there can be no eucharistic offering.

This explains the essential importance of the Eucharist for the priest's life and ministry and, as a result, in the spiritual formation of candidates for the priesthood. To be utterly frank and clear, I would like to say once again: "It is fitting that seminarians take part every day in the eucharistic celebration, in such a way that afterward they will take up as a rule of their priestly life this daily celebration. They should, moreover, be trained to consider the eucharistic celebration as the essential moment of their day, in which they will take an

active part and at which they will never be satisfied with a merely habitual attendance. Finally, candidates to the priesthood will be trained to share in the intimate dispositions which the Eucharist fosters: gratitude for heavenly benefits received, because the Eucharist is thanksgiving; an attitude of self-offering, which will impel them to unite the offering of themselves to the eucharistic offering of Christ; charity nourished by a sacrament which is a sign of unity and sharing; the yearning to contemplate and bow in adoration before Christ, who is really present under the eucharistic species."(146)

It is necessary and very urgent to rediscover within spiritual formation the beauty and joy of the sacrament of penance. In a culture which - through renewed and more subtle forms of self-justification - runs the fatal risk of losing the "sense of sin" and, as a result, the consoling joy of the plea for forgiveness (cf. Ps. 51:14) and of meeting God who is "rich in mercy" (Eph. 2:4), it is vital to educate future priests to have the virtue of penance, which the Church wisely nourishes in her celebrations and in the seasons of the liturgical year, and which finds its fullness in the sacrament of reconciliation. From it flow the sense of asceticism and interior discipline, a spirit of sacrifice and self-denial, the acceptance of hard work and of the cross. These are elements of the spiritual life which often prove to be particularly arduous for many candidates for the priesthood who have grown up in relatively comfortable and affluent circumstances and have been made less inclined and open to these very elements by the models of behavior and ideals transmitted by the mass media; but this also happens in countries where the conditions of life are poorer and young people live in more austere situations. For this reason, but above all in order to put into practice the "radical self-giving" proper to the priest following the example of Christ the good shepherd, the synod fathers wrote: "It is necessary to inculcate the meaning of the cross, which is at the heart of the paschal mystery. Through this identification with Christ crucified, as a slave, the world can rediscover the value of austerity, of suffering and also of martyrdom within the present culture, which is imbued with secularism, greed and hedonism."(147)

49. Spiritual formation also involves seeking Christ in people.

The spiritual life is, indeed, an interior life, a life of intimacy with God, a life of prayer and contemplation. But this very meeting with God and with his fatherly love for everyone brings us face to face with the need to meet our neighbor, to give ourselves to others, to serve in a humble and disinterested fashion, following the example which Jesus has proposed to everyone as a program of life when he washed the feet of the apostles: "I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you" (Jn. 13:15).

Formation which aims at giving oneself generously and freely, which is something helped also by the communal structure which preparation to the priesthood normally takes, is a necessary condition for one who is called to be a manifestation and image of the good shepherd, who gives life (cf. Jn. 10:11, 15). From this point of view, spiritual formation has and should develop its own inherent pastoral and charitable dimension, and can profitably make use of a proper devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, one that is both strong and tender. This is a point made by the synod fathers: "When we speak of forming future priests in the spirituality of the heart of the Lord, we mean they should lead lives that are a response to the love and affection of Christ the priest and good shepherd: to his love for the Father in the Holy Spirit, and to his love toward men that was so great as to lead him to give his life in sacrifice for them."(148)

The priest is, therefore, a man of charity and is called to educate others according to Christ's example and the new commandment of brotherly love (cf. Jn. 15:12). But this demands that he allow himself to be constantly trained by the Spirit in the charity of Christ. In this sense preparation for the priesthood must necessarily involve a proper training in charity and particularly in the preferential love for the "poor" in whom our faith discovers Jesus (cf. Mt. 25:40) and a merciful love for sinners.

In the general context of charity - which consists in the loving gift of oneself - is to be found, in the program of spiritual formation of the future priest, education in obedience, celibacy and poverty.(149) The Council offers this invitation: "Students must clearly understand that it is not their lot in life to lord it over others and enjoy honors, but to devote themselves completely to the service of God and the pastoral ministry. With special care they should be trained in priestly obedience, poverty and a spirit of self-denial, that they may accustom

themselves to living in conformity with the crucified Christ and to, give up willingly even those things which are lawful, but not expedient."(150)

50. The spiritual formation of one who is called to live celibacy should pay particular attention to preparing the future priest so that he may know, appreciate, love and live celibacy according to its true nature and according to its real purposes, that is, for evangelical, spiritual and pastoral motives. The virtue of chastity is a premise for this preparation and is its content. It colors all human relations and leads "to experiencing and showing...a sincere, human, fraternal and personal love, one that is capable of sacrifice, following Christ's example, a love for all and for each person."(151)

The celibacy of priests brings with it certain characteristics thanks to which they "renounce marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven (cf. Mt. 19:12) and hold fast to their Lord with that undivided love which is profoundly in harmony with the new covenant; they bear witness to the resurrection in a future life (cf. Lk. 20:36) and obtain the most useful assistance toward the constant exercise of that perfect charity by which they can become all things to all men in their priestly ministry."(152) And so priestly celibacy should not be considered just as a legal norm or as a totally external condition for admission to ordination, but rather as a value that is profoundly connected with ordination, whereby a man takes on the likeness of Jesus Christ, the good shepherd and spouse of the Church, and therefore as a choice of a greater and undivided love for Christ and his Church, as a full and joyful availability in his heart for the pastoral ministry. Celibacy is to be considered as a special grace, as a gift, for "not all men can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given" (Mt. 19:11). Certainly it is a grace which does not dispense with, but counts most definitely on, a conscious and free response on the part of the receiver. This charism of the Spirit also brings with it the grace for the receiver to remain faithful to it for all his life and be able to carry out generously and joyfully its concomitant commitments. Formation in priestly celibacy should also include helping people to be aware of the "precious gift of God,"(153) which will lead to prayer and to vigilance in guarding the gift from anything which could put it under threat.

Through his celibate life, the priest will be able to fulfill better his ministry on behalf of the People of God. In particular, as he witnesses to the evangelical value of virginity, he will be able to aid Christian spouses to live fully the "great sacrament" of the love of Christ the bridegroom for his spouse the Church, just as his own faithfulness to celibacy will help them to be faithful to each other as husband and wife.(154)

The importance of a careful preparation for priestly celibacy, especially in the social and cultural situations that we see today, led the synod fathers to make a series of requests which have a permanent value, as the wisdom of our mother the Church confirms. I authoritatively set them down again as criteria to be followed in formation for chastity in celibacy: "Let the bishops together with the rectors and spiritual directors of the seminaries establish principles, offer criteria and give assistance for discernment in this matter. Of the greatest importance for formation for chastity in celibacy are the bishop's concern and fraternal life among priests. In the seminary, that is, in the program of formation, celibacy should be presented clearly, without any ambiguities and in a positive fashion. The seminarian should have a sufficient degree of psychological and sexual maturity as well as an assiduous and authentic life of prayer, and he should put himself under the direction of a spiritual father. The spiritual director should help the seminarian so that he himself reaches a mature and free decision, which is built on esteem for priestly friendship and self - discipline, as well as on the acceptance of solitude and on a physically and psychologically sound personal state. Therefore, seminarians should have a good knowledge of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, of the encyclical *Sacerdotalis Coelibatus* and the Instruction for Formation in Priestly Celibacy published by the Congregation for Catholic Education in 1974. In order that the seminarian may be able to embrace priestly celibacy for the kingdom of heaven with a free decision, he needs to know the Christian and truly human nature and purpose of sexuality in marriage and in celibacy. It is necessary also to instruct and educate the lay faithful regarding the evangelical, spiritual and pastoral reasons proper to priestly celibacy so that they will help priests with their friendship, understanding and cooperation."(155)

Intellectual Formation: Understanding the Faith

51. Intellectual formation has its own characteristics, but it is also deeply connected with, and indeed can be seen as a necessary expression of, both human and spiritual formation: It is a fundamental demand of the human intelligence by which one "participates in the light of God's mind" and seeks to acquire a wisdom which in turn opens to and is directed toward knowing and adhering to God.(156)

The intellectual formation of candidates for the priesthood finds its specific justification in the very nature of the ordained ministry, and the challenge of the "new evangelization" to which our Lord is calling the Church on the threshold of the third millennium shows just how important this formation is. "If we expect every Christian," the synod fathers write, "to be prepared to make a defense of the faith and to account for the hope that is in us (cf. 1 Pt. 3:15), then all the more should candidates for the priesthood and priests have diligent care of the quality of their intellectual formation in their education and pastoral activity. For the salvation of their brothers and sisters they should seek an ever deeper knowledge of the divine mysteries."(157) The present situation is heavily marked by religious indifference, by a widespread mistrust regarding the real capacity of reason to reach objective and universal truth, and by fresh problems and questions brought up by scientific and technological discoveries. It strongly demands a high level of intellectual formation, such as will enable priests to proclaim, in a context like this, the changeless Gospel of Christ and to make it credible to the legitimate demands of human reason. Moreover, there is the present phenomenon of pluralism, which is very marked in the field not only of human society but also of the community of the Church herself. It demands special attention to critical discernment: It is a further reason showing the need for an extremely rigorous intellectual formation.

These "pastoral" reasons for intellectual formation reconfirm what has been said above concerning the unity of the educational process in its diverse aspects. The commitment to study, which takes up no small part of the time of those preparing for the priesthood, is not in fact an external and secondary dimension of their human, Christian, spiritual and vocational growth. In reality, through study, especially the study of theology, the future priest assents to the word of God, grows in his spiritual life and prepares himself to fulfill his pastoral ministry. This is the many sided and unifying scope of the theological study indicated by the Council (158) and repropounded by the synod's Instrumentum Laboris: "To be pastorally effective, intellectual formation is to be integrated with a spirituality marked by a personal experience of God. In this way a purely abstract approach to knowledge is overcome in favor of that intelligence of heart which knows how 'to look beyond,' and then is in a position to communicate the mystery of God to the people."(159)

52. A crucial stage of intellectual formation is the study of philosophy, which leads to a deeper understanding and interpretation of the person, and of the person's freedom and relationships with the world and with God. A proper philosophical training is vital, not only because of the links between the great philosophical questions and the mysteries of salvation which are studied in theology under the guidance of the higher light of faith,(160) but also vis - a - vis an extremely widespread cultural situation which emphasizes subjectivism as a criterion and measure of truth: Only a sound philosophy can help candidates for the priesthood to develop a reflective awareness of the fundamental relationship that exists between the human spirit and truth, that truth which is revealed to us fully in Jesus Christ. Nor must one underestimate the importance of philosophy as a guarantee of that "certainty of truth" which is the only firm basis for a total giving of oneself to Jesus and to the Church. It is not difficult to see that some very specific questions, such as that concerning the priest's identity and his apostolic and missionary commitment, are closely linked to the question about the nature of truth, which is anything but an abstract question: If we are not certain about the truth, how can we put our whole life on the line, how can we have the strength to challenge others' way of living?

Philosophy greatly helps the candidate to enrich his intellectual formation in the "cult of truth," namely, in a kind of loving veneration of the truth, which leads one to recognize that the truth is not created or measured by man but is given to man as a gift by the supreme truth, God; that, albeit in a limited way and often with difficulty, human reason can reach objective and universal truth, even that relating to God and the radical meaning of existence; and that faith itself cannot do without reason and the effort of "thinking through" its

contents, as that great mind Augustine bore witness: "I wished to see with my mind what I have believed, and I have argued and labored greatly."(161)

For a deeper understanding of man and the phenomena and lines of development of society, in relation to a pastoral ministry which is as "incarnate" as possible, the so - called "human sciences" can be of considerable use, sciences such as sociology, psychology, education, economics and politics, and the science of social communication. Also in the precise field of the positive or descriptive sciences, these can help the future priest prolong the living "contemporaneity" of Christ. As Paul VI once said, "Christ became the contemporary of some men and spoke their language. Our faithfulness to him demands that this contemporaneity should be maintained."(162)

53. The intellectual formation of the future priest is based and built above all on the study of sacred doctrine, of theology. The value and genuineness of this theological formation depend on maintaining a scrupulous respect for the nature of theology. The synod fathers summarized this as follows: "True theology proceeds from the faith and aims at leading to the faith."(163) This is the conception of theology which has always been put forward by the Church and, specifically, by her magisterium. This is the line followed by the great theologians who have enriched the Church's thinking down the ages. St. Thomas is extremely clear when he affirms that the faith is as it were the habitus of theology, that is, its permanent principle of operation,(164) and that the whole of theology is ordered to nourishing the faith.(165)

The theologian is therefore, first and foremost, a believer, a person of faith. But the theologian is a believer who asks himself questions about his own faith (fides quaerens intellectum), with the aim of reaching a deeper understanding of the faith itself. The two aspects (of faith and mature reflection) are intimately connected, intertwined: Their intimate coordination and interpenetration are what make for true theology and as a result decide the contents, modalities and spirit according to which the sacred doctrine (sacra doctrina) is elaborated and studied.

Moreover, since the faith, which is the point of departure and the point of arrival of theology, brings about a personal relationship between the believer and Jesus Christ in the Church, theology also has intrinsic Christological and ecclesial connotations, which the candidate to the priesthood should take up consciously, not only because of what they imply for his personal life but also inasmuch as they affect his pastoral ministry. If our faith truly welcomes the word of God, it will lead to a radical "yes" on the part of the believer to Jesus Christ, who is the full and definitive Word of God to the world (cf. Heb. 1:1ff.). As a result, theological reflection is centered on adherence to Jesus Christ, the wisdom of God: Mature reflection has to be described as a sharing in the "thinking" of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 2:16) in the human form of a science (scientia fidei): At the same time, faith inserts believers in the Church and makes them partake in the life of the Church as a community of faith. Hence theology has an ecclesial dimension, because it is a mature reflection on the faith of the Church by the theologian who is a member of the Church.(166)

These Christological and ecclesial dimensions which are connatural to theology, while they help candidates for the priesthood grow in scientific precision, will also help them develop a great and living love for Jesus Christ and for his Church. This love will both nourish their spiritual life and guide them to carry out their ministry with a generous spirit. This was what the Second Vatican Council had in mind when it called for a revision of ecclesiastical studies, with a view to "a more effective coordination of philosophy and theology so that they supplement one another in revealing to the minds of the students with ever - increasing clarity the mystery of Christ, which affects the whole course of human history, exercises an unceasing influence on the Church and operates mainly through the ministry of the priest."(167)

Intellectual formation in theology and formation in the spiritual life, in particular the life of prayer, meet and strengthen each other, without detracting in any way from the soundness of research or from the spiritual tenor of prayer. St. Bonaventure reminds us: "Let no one think that it is enough for him to read if he lacks devotion, or to engage in speculation without spiritual Joy, or to be active if he has no piety, or to have knowledge without charity, or intelligence without humility, or study without God's grace, or to expect to know himself if he is lacking the infused wisdom of God."(168)

54. Theological formation is both complex and demanding. It should lead the candidate for the priesthood to a complete and unified vision of the truths which God has revealed in Jesus Christ and of the Church's experience of faith. Hence the need both to know "all" the Christian truths, without arbitrarily selecting among them, and to know them in an orderly fashion. This means the candidate needs to be helped to build a synthesis which will be the result of the contributions of the different theological disciplines, the specific nature of which acquires genuine value only in their profound coordination.

In reflecting maturely upon the faith, theology moves in two directions. The first is that of the study of the word of God: the word set down in holy writ, celebrated and lived in the living tradition of the Church, and authoritatively interpreted by the Church's magisterium. Hence the importance of studying sacred Scripture "which should be the soul, as it were, of all theological (169) the Fathers of the Church, the liturgy, the history of the Church and the teachings of the magisterium. The second direction is that of the human person, who converses with God: the person who is called "to believe," "to live," "to communicate" to others the Christian faith and outlook. Hence the study of dogmatic and moral theology, of spiritual theology, of canon law and of pastoral theology.

Because of its relationship to the believer, theology is led to pay particular attention both to the fundamental and permanent question of the relationship between faith and reason and to a number of requirements more closely related to the social and cultural situation of today. In regard to the first we have the study of fundamental theology, whose object is the fact of Christian revelation and its transmission in the Church. In regard to the second we have disciplines which have been and are being developed as responses to problems strongly felt nowadays. This is true of the study of the Church's social doctrine which "belongs to the field...of theology and, in particular, of moral theology"(170) and is to be counted among the "essential components" of the "new evangelization," of which it is an instrument.(171) This is likewise true of the study of missiology, ecumenism, Judaism, Islam and other religions.

55. Theological formation nowadays should pay attention to certain problems which not infrequently raise difficulties, tensions and confusion within the life of the Church. One can think of the relationship between statements issued by the magisterium and theological discussion, a relationship which does not always take the shape it ought to have, that is, within a framework of cooperation. It is indeed true that the living magisterium of the Church and theology, while having different gifts and functions, ultimately have the same goal: preserving the People of God in the truth which sets free and thereby making them 'a light to the nations.' This service to the ecclesial community brings the theologian and the magisterium into a mutual relationship. The latter authentically teaches the doctrine of the apostles. And, befitting from the work of theologians, it refutes objections to and distortions of the faith, and promotes, with the authority received from Jesus Christ, new and deeper comprehension, clarification and application of revealed doctrine. Theology - for its part - gains, by way of reflection, an ever deeper understanding of the word of God found in the Scripture and handed on faithfully by the Church's living tradition under the guidance of the magisterium. Theology strives to clarify the teaching of revelation with regard to reason and gives it finally an organic and systematic form."(172) When, for a number of reasons, this cooperation is lacking, one needs to avoid misunderstandings and confusion, and to know how to distinguish carefully "the common teaching of the Church from the opinions of theologians and from tendencies which quickly pass (the so - called trends) There is no "parallel" magisterium, for the one magisterium is that of Peter and the apostles, the pope and the bishops.(171)

Another problem, which is experienced especially when seminary studies are entrusted to academic institutions, is that of the relationship between high scientific standards in theology and its pastoral aim. This raises the issue of the pastoral nature of theology. It is a question, really, of two characteristics of theology and how it is to be taught, which are not only not opposed to each other, but which work together, from different angles, in favor of a more complete "understanding of the faith." In fact the pastoral nature of theology does not mean that it should be less doctrinal or that it should be completely stripped of its scientific nature. It means, rather, that it enables future priests to proclaim the Gospel message through the cultural modes of their age and to direct pastoral action according to an authentic theological vision. Hence, on the one hand, a respectful study of the genuine scientific quality of the individual disciplines of theology will help provide a more complete and deeper training of the pastor of souls as a teacher of faith; and, on the other hand, an

appropriate awareness that there is a pastoral goal in view will help The serious and scientific study of theology be more formative for future priests.

A further problem that is strongly felt these days is the demand for the evangelization of cultures and the inculturation of the message of faith. An eminently pastoral problem, this should enter more broadly and carefully into the formation of the candidates to the priesthood: **In the present circumstances in which, in a number of regions of the world, the Christian religion is considered as something foreign to cultures (be they ancient or modern), it is very important that in the whole intellectual and human formation the dimension of inculturation be seen as necessary and essential.**"(175) **But this means we need a genuine theology, inspired by the Catholic principles on inculturation. These principles are linked with the mystery of the incarnation of the word of God and with Christian anthropology, and thus illumine the authentic meaning of inculturation.** In the face of all the different and at times contrasting cultures present in the various parts of the world, inculturation seeks to obey Christ's command to preach the Gospel to all nations even unto the ends of the earth. **Such obedience does not signify either syncretism or a simple adaptation of the announcement of the Gospel, but rather the fact that the Gospel penetrates the very life of cultures, becomes incarnate in them, overcoming those cultural elements that are incompatible with the faith and Christian living, and raising their values to the mystery of salvation which comes from Christ.**(176) **The problem of inculturation can have a particularly great interest when the candidates to the priesthood are themselves coming from indigenous cultures. In that case, they will need to find suitable ways of formation, both to overcome the danger of being less demanding and to strengthen their weaker education in human, Christian and priestly virtues, and also to make proper use of the good and genuine elements of their own cultures and traditions.**(177)

56. Following the teaching and the indications of the Second Vatican Council and their application in the Ratio Fundamentalibus Institutionis Sacerdotalis, the Church decided upon a vast updating of the teaching of the philosophical and especially theological disciplines in seminaries. This updating, which in some cases still needs amendments and developments, has on the whole helped to make the education available a more effective medium for intellectual formation. In this respect "the synod fathers have confirmed once again, frequently and clearly, the need - indeed the urgency - to put the basic study plan both the general one which applies to the Church worldwide, and those of the individual nations or episcopal conferences) into effect in seminaries and in houses of formation."(178)

It is necessary to oppose firmly the tendency to play down the seriousness of studies and the commitment to them. This tendency is showing itself in certain spheres of the Church, also as a consequence of the insufficient and defective basic education of students beginning the philosophical and theological curriculum. The very situation of the Church today demands increasingly that teachers be truly able to face the complexity of the times and that they be in a position to face competently, with clarity and deep reasoning, the questions about meaning which are put by the people of today, questions which can only receive full and definitive reply in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Pastoral Formation: Communion With the Charity of Jesus Christ the Good Shepherd

57. The whole formation imparted to candidates for the priesthood aims at preparing them to enter into communion with the charity of Christ the good shepherd. Hence their formation in its different aspects must have a fundamentally pastoral character. The Council's decree Optatum Totius states so clearly when speaking of major seminaries; "The whole training of the students should have as its object to make them true shepherds of souls after the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, teacher, priest and shepherd. **Hence, they should be trained for the ministry of the word so that they may gain an ever - increasing understanding of the revealed word of God, making it their own by meditation and giving it expression in their speech and in their lives.** They should be trained for the ministry of worship and sanctification so that by prayer and the celebration of the sacred liturgical functions they may carry on the work of salvation through the eucharistic sacrifice and the sacraments. They should be trained to undertake the ministry of the shepherd, that they may know how to represent Christ to humanity, Christ who 'did not come to have service done to him but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for the lives of many ' (Mk. 10:45; Jn. 1 3:12-17), and that they may win over many by becoming the servants of all (1 Cor. 9:19)."(179) **The Council text insists upon the**

coordination of the different aspects of human, spiritual and intellectual formation. At the same time it stresses that they are all directed to a specific pastoral end. This pastoral aim ensures that the human, spiritual and intellectual formation has certain precise content and characteristics; it also unifies and gives specificity to the whole formation of future priests.

Like all other branches of formation, pastoral formation develops by means of mature reflection and practical application, and it is rooted in a spirit, which is the hinge of all and the force which stimulates it and makes it develop.

It needs to be studied therefore as the true and genuine theological discipline that it is; pastoral or practical theology. It is a scientific reflection on the Church as she is built up daily, by the power of the Spirit, in history; on the Church as the "universal sacrament of salvation,"(180) as a living sign and instrument of the salvation wrought by Christ through the word, the sacraments and the service of charity. Pastoral theology is not just an art. Nor is it a set of exhortations, experiences and methods. It is theological in its own right, because it receives from the faith the principles and criteria for the pastoral action of the Church in history, a Church that each day "begets" the Church herself, to quote the felicitous expression of the Venerable Bede: "Nam et Ecclesia quotidie gignit Ecclesiam."(181) Among these principles and criteria, one that is specially important is that of the evangelical discernment of the socio - cultural and ecclesial situation in which the particular pastoral action has to be carried out.

The study of pastoral theology should throw light upon its practical application through involvement in certain pastoral services which the candidates to the priesthood should carry out, with a necessary progression and always in harmony with their other educational commitments. It is a question of pastoral "experiences," which can come together in a real program of "pastoral training," which can last a considerable amount of time and the usefulness of which will itself need to be checked in an orderly manner.

Pastoral study and action direct one to an inner source, which the work of formation will take care to guard and make good use of: This is the ever - deeper communion with the pastoral charity of Jesus, which - just as it was the principle and driving force of his salvific action - likewise, thanks to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the sacrament of orders, should constitute the principle driving force of the priestly ministry. It is a question of a type of formation meant not only to ensure scientific, pastoral competence and practical skill, but also and especially a way of being in communion with the very sentiments and behavior of Christ the good shepherd: "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5).

58. And so pastoral formation certainly cannot be reduced to a mere apprenticeship, aiming to make the candidate familiar with some pastoral techniques. The seminary which educates must seek really and truly to initiate the candidate into the sensitivity of being a shepherd, in the conscious and mature assumption of his responsibilities, in the interior habit of evaluating problems and establishing priorities and looking for solutions on the basis of honest motivations of faith and according to the theological demands inherent in pastoral work.

Thanks to an initial and gradual experience of ministry, future priests will be able to be inserted into the living pastoral tradition of their particular church. They will learn to open the horizon of their mind and heart to the missionary dimension of the Church's life. They will get practice in some initial forms of cooperation with one another and with the priests alongside whom they will be sent to work. These priests have a considerably important role, in union with the seminary program, in showing the candidates how they should go about pastoral work.

When it comes to choosing places and services in which candidates can obtain their pastoral experience, the parish should be given particular importance(182) for it is a living cell of local and specialized pastoral work in which they will find themselves faced with the kind of problems they will meet in their future ministry. The synod fathers have proposed a number of concrete examples such as visits to the sick; caring for immigrants, refugees and nomads; and various social works which can be expressions of charitable zeal. Specifically, they write: "The priest must be a witness of the charity of Christ himself who 'went about doing good' (Acts 10:38). He must also be a visible sign of the solicitude of the Church who is mother and teacher. And given that man

today is affected by so many hardships, especially those who are sunk in inhuman poverty, blind violence and unjust power, it is necessary that the man of God who is to be equipped for every good work (cf. 2 Tm. 3:17) should defend the rights and dignity of man. Nevertheless, he should be careful not to adopt false ideologies, nor should he forget, as he strives to promote its perfecting, that the only redemption of the world is that effected by the cross of Christ."(183)

These and other pastoral activities will teach the future priest to live out as a "service" his own mission of "authority" in the community, setting aside all attitudes of superiority or of exercising a power if it is not simply that which is justified by pastoral charity.

If the training is to be suitable, the different experiences which candidates for the priesthood have should assume a clear "ministerial" character and should be intimately linked with all the demands that befit preparation to the priesthood and (certainly not neglecting their studies) in relation to the services of the proclamation of the word, of worship and of leadership. These services can become a specific way of experiencing the ministries of lector, acolyte and deacon.

59. Since pastoral action is destined by its very nature to enliven the Church, which is essentially "mystery," "communion" and "mission," pastoral formation should be aware of and should live these ecclesial aspects in the exercise of the ministry.

Of fundamental importance is awareness that the Church is a "mystery," that is, a divine work, fruit of the Spirit of Christ, an effective sign of grace, the prescience of the Trinity in the Christian community. This awareness, while never lessening the pastor's genuine sense of responsibility, will convince him that the Church grows thanks to the gratuitous work of the Spirit and that his service - thanks to the very grace of God that is entrusted to the free responsibility of man - is the Gospel service of the "unworthy servant" (cf. Lk. 17:10).

Awareness of the Church as "communion" will prepare the candidate for the priesthood to carry out his pastoral work with a community spirit, in heartfelt cooperation with the different members of the Church: priests and bishop, diocesan and religious priests, priests and lay people. Such a cooperation presupposes a knowledge and appreciation of the different gifts and charisms, of the diverse vocations and responsibilities which the Spirit offers and entrusts to the members of Christ's body. It demands a living and precise consciousness of one's own identity in the Church and of the identity of others. It demands mutual trust, patience, gentleness and the capacity for understanding and expectation. It finds its roots above all in a love for the Church that is deeper than love for self and the group or groups one may belong to. It is particularly important to prepare future priests for cooperation with the laity. The Council says: "They should be willing to listen to lay people, give brotherly consideration to their wishes and recognize their experience and competence in the different fields of human activity. In this way they will be able to recognize with them the signs of the times."(184) The recent synod too has insisted upon pastoral solicitude for the laity: "The student should become capable of proposing and introducing the lay faithful, the young especially, to the different vocations (marriage, social services, apostolate, ministries and other responsibilities in pastoral activity, the consecrated life, involvement in political and social leadership, scientific research, teaching). Above all it is necessary that he be able to teach and support the laity in their vocation to be present in and to transform the world with the light of the Gospel, by recognizing this task of theirs and showing respect for it."(185)

Lastly, awareness of the Church as a "missionary" communion will help the candidate; for the priesthood to love and live the essential missionary dimension of the Church and her different pastoral activities. He should be open and available to all the possibilities offered today for the proclamation of the Gospel, not forgetting the valuable service which can and should be given by the media.(186) He should prepare himself for a ministry which may mean in practice that his readiness to follow the indications of the Holy Spirit and of his bishop will lead him to be sent to preach the Gospel even beyond the frontiers of his own country.(187)