

PRINCIPLES OF THE NEW PPF

The Program of Priestly Formation, Sixth Edition



KNOWLEDGE OF THE DIVINE MYSTERIES

Scripture Reflection: Mark 12:28-34

Intellectual formation in the seminary centers on **theology** as a search for “an ever-deeper knowledge of the divine mysteries” (*Pastores dabo vobis*, no. 51). This kind of theological study, which far exceeds a purely technical approach to religious phenomena, cannot be detached from human knowledge. In fact, it is to be integrated with other elements of human understanding, especially philosophy and the human sciences.

However, the study of theology in seminary intellectual formation is truly to be *fides quaerens intellectum*, faith seeking understanding. This direction is not the same as the approach of religious studies or the history of religions. The seminary study of theology begins in faith and ends in faith, as should all true theological inquiry and study, and must **flow from prayer** and lead to prayer. In a particular way, the theology studied in preparation for priestly ministry must find integration and focus in the liturgy, the celebration of the Mystery of Christ, and in personal meditation and contemplation.

In a seminary or priestly formation context, the study of theology is oriented to one’s own faith and to the faith of others. In other words, the study of theology is **apostolically motivated**. At the same time, this study of theology enriches and expands the personal faith of the seminarian studying it.

Because theology studied in light of priestly mission and ministry must be directed to a practical wisdom, it must offer a complete and unified vision of the truths of faith. This wisdom and unified vision, then, can be conveyed in the priest’s preaching and teaching, and allow him to bring the Word of God and Tradition into dialogue with the contemporary human situation, in matters related to Christian

KEY WORDS

Study of Theology

Flow from Prayer

Apostolically Motivated

Lifelong Study

anthropology, morality, social teaching, in other words, all aspects of the human experience.

Because theology is rooted in the Church's faith and serves the faith of the Church, it must be studied in complete and faithful communion with the Magisterium and must necessarily be concerned about restoring Christian unity. The ecumenical imperative that flows from the prayer of Christ for his flock and the renewed vision of the Second Vatican Council demand this focus.

Finally, theology's theoretical and practical dimensions in priestly mission and ministry mean that it must be rigorous in its orientation, both academically and pastorally, and be an initiation into a **lifelong study** of the truths of faith. If the priest is to be a teacher, he must first be a student who continuously pursues an understanding of the faith to which he commits himself and invites his people.

It is expected that by the end of the Configuration Stage the seminarian demonstrates a well-established habit and desire to explore the Word of God and theological Tradition. He should also demonstrate the ability to uphold the truths of faith by the light of reason; the ability to integrate academic development with the spiritual and pastoral dimensions (e.g., the growth in knowledge about Jesus Christ deepens his friendship with Christ, his understanding of Christian anthropology influences his approaches to pastoral ministry); fidelity to the Magisterium in his speech and actions; and, the ability to exercise the Ministry of the Word by proclaiming, explaining, and defending the Catholic faith.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How does formation in liturgical preaching serve to integrate the study of theology with pastoral practice?
2. How can the seminary prepare future priests for ongoing formation (beyond saying that it is important)?

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What should the study of Theology look like during the Discipleship Stage?

Theology courses in the Discipleship Stage should study the themes contained in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, including courses on Catholic doctrine, liturgy and the sacraments, Catholic morality, Christian

prayer, and Sacred Scripture. All seminarians should be thoroughly acquainted with the *Catechism* and all its contents as a source for a full, complete exposition of Catholic doctrine.