

THE INTELLECTUAL APOSTOLATE OF THE PRIEST

Outline

I—WHY THIS TOPIC WAS CHOSEN

A—The problem: There is a startling contrast between what the Church expects of her priests by way of intellectual interests and what interests the general run of priests have.

i—Expectations of the Church: These are well expressed by Pius XI: "The priest, even among the absorbing tasks of his charge, and ever with a view to it, should continue his theological studies with unremitting zeal." (Ad Cath. Sacer. fastigium, *AAS*, XXVIII, 1936, 34; cf. C.I.C., Can. 129)

ii—The reality: It is a fact that many priests lose all intellectual interests in the Sacred Sciences shortly after ordination. (cf. observations of Bishop Eustace of Camden, N.C.E.A. Bulletin, Vol. XLI, 1940, p. 442 et seq.)

B—How solve the problem? To overcome this admitted deficiency
i—can students be trained *in the seminary* in such a way that they will continue to develop their theological interests after ordination?

ii—what can the seminary do for its *ordained alumni* to foster and advance their interests? The real question of this seminar seems to be: "On developing and fostering intellectual interests before and after ordination."

II—WHY THE WORD "APOSTOLATE" IS USED IN THE TOPIC

I presume the word "apostolate" was used to emphasize the fact that any discussion of the intellectual training in a seminary must be carried on within the broader framework of its ultimate purpose. This latter is beautifully expressed in Micheletti, "De Regimine Ecclesiastico Religiosorum necnon Seminariorum," "De Ratione

Studiorum," p. 8, "Seminariorum clericalium finis in eo est ut boni strenuque operarii ad curationem animarum . . . instituantur."

The aim of the intellectual training in the seminary must therefore be subordinated to the apostolate. Its purposes cannot be learning for its own sake (cf. "Menti Nostrae," NCWC edition, par. 92). The aim of the seminary is not to turn out scholars or research men, discoverers or explorers in theological fields. This is the purpose of the graduate school of a university. The seminary wants to produce good parish priests, good preachers, good confessors, etc., equipped with competent and sound knowledge.

A—All priests, by the very nature of their priesthood, have a share in the intellectual apostolate. Given the very unequal mental caliber of seminarians and priests, not all, of course, can share equally. (Cf. "Ad Cath. Sacer. fastigium," St. Meinrad edition of *Popes and Priesthood*, pp. 46, 47, 60, 61; C.I.C. Can. 1364, § 3; "Deus Scient. Dom.," *AAS*, Vol. XXIII, N. 7, p. 246; cf. also the excellent chapter on "Intellectual Ability and Training" in Bishop Stockum's *Vocation to the Priesthood*.)

B—The intellectual apostolate is to all men, to Catholics and non-Catholics, to the learned and unlearned. (Cf. Rom. i. 14.) Should it be primarily to the Catholic? (cf. Father Walter Farrell's very interesting thesis, "Twentieth Century Apostle," *Thomist*, Vol. X, No. 2, April, 1947, pp. 133-158).

III—WHAT CAN THE SEMINARY DO FOR ITS SEMINARIANS?

A—For *all* the seminarians:

i—*Within the curriculum itself:*

(a) Aim of the course of studies: While the ultimate aim of the seminary is pragmatic, to produce apostles, the immediate aim of the courses in theology must not be pragmatic; these must aim at the formation of the intellectual habits and the teaching of the theological disciplines. "The whole deposit of faith, sacred in truth to us, and presented in an orderly and scientific manner, is what must be taught students who frequent the theological

courses of the seminary." (Recommendations of the S. C. of Studies, Jan. 24, 1928; cf. Bouscaren, *Canon Law Digest*, Vol. 1, p. 653.)

The fundamental aim of the professor must be the profound teaching of his science, of theological concepts, precise definitions, and strong theological proofs. I believe the discipline of theology would suffer and even be neglected if the professor's approach in Dogma or Sacred Scripture were primarily devotional, if in Moral it were to follow the so-called "kerygmatic" method. Professors of theology must be wary of the pressure of practicality. (Mr. Robert Hutchins bewailed the fact that too many professors of law were practitioners, who taught, not the principles of law, but casuistry; *mutatis mutandis*, the same danger obtains among professors of theology.) A sound grasp of philosophical and theological concepts will lead to many more correct practical applications than if the professor himself attempts too many practical applications in class. (Cf. "*Humani Generis*" and "*Menti Nostrae*," esp. in the latter, pars. 89, 90 of NCWC edition.)

The courses in Ascetics and Liturgy, Homiletics and Catechetics, and the spiritual conferences and direction serve to bridge the gap between the speculative and the practical in the formation of an apostolic priest.

(b) The problem of developing *permanent* interests in theological studies is fundamentally a pedagogical one: how to thrust the responsibility of learning on the students themselves; how to get them to work personally, and at the same time how to cover the enormous amount of matter in the tracts of Theology.

ii—*Extra-curricular studies*: Even a mediocre student can sometimes be led to an interest in one point of Dogma, Moral, History, etc., and can make himself expert in that one point.

B—For the *more intelligent* seminarians.

To get the academy of the "first-third" to go deeply by reading, reflecting, discussing, following the proper methods of the science; to give them the feel of the larger books, way of han-

dling the tools, personal work in collecting, sifting, and composing a bit of professional work.

i—*Within the curriculum:*

(a) Degree courses in those seminaries which have the power to grant theological degrees by Pontifical Charter, or the Master's degree by civil charter.

(b) The "speculative course" in some seminaries.

ii—*Extra curricular studies:*

Seminars, discussion groups, etc., on particular questions in philosophy or theology, and their allied subjects. However, I believe these groups should be controlled and directed by a faculty member. Young men by temperament rush headlong into novelties, and are upset by the latest catchwords, especially in what concerns the ministry. Students need the elements before they get the advanced courses. They lack the balance which the general survey of theology will give. The professor's direction will forestall the danger of desultory reading and the scattering of interests, the end result of which is the dilettante.

IV—WHAT CAN THE SEMINARY DO FOR ITS ORDAINED ALUMNI?

Bishop Eustace believes it is quite useless to outline courses of study for young men to follow after ordination. "If they have a love for study and reading, they will find out for themselves what to study and read." (Cf. *op. cit.*, p. 449.) Suggested readings, bibliographies, etc., would certainly be quite useless if the young priest has not already developed intellectual interests in the seminary. However, given the presence of interests, what has been done by seminaries to sustain the interests of their priest-alumni?

(a) Suggested bibliographies; bulletins; book reviews, etc.

(b) Discussion groups among young priests.

(c) Junior clergy examinations.

(d) An example—the work of Father Francis J. Gilgan, of St. Paul's Seminary, in sustaining the interest in Catholic Social Teaching after ordination (cf. N.C.E.A. Bulletin, Vol. XLI, No. 1, 1944, pp. 464 et seq.).

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Summation of Discussion

The seminar conducted by the Very Rev. Lyman A. Fenn, S.S., had as its topic: "The Intellectual Apostolate of the Priest." Though the topic was admittedly a broad one, it was designedly left so to leave room for the introduction of special difficulties connected with the basic problem. The basic problem was this: how to account for the startling contrast which exists between what the Church expects of her priests in the way of intellectual interests, and the factual lack of such interests on the part of a great number of priests.

What the Church Expects:

From the official pronouncements of the Popes, Father Fenn clearly brought out the fact that the Church evidently expects her priests to have such a deep interest in intellectual pursuits that they will continue, even in the midst of an active ministry, to pursue their theological studies "with unremitting zeal."

The Reality:

Factually, most priests seem to drop their theological studies shortly after ordination. They feel that at long last the tedious work of study is over and they can now get into the "real work" of the priesthood in earnest—administering the sacraments, visiting the sick and so forth.

After the scope of the problem had been outlined, the members of the seminar immediately entered into a discussion of the *causes* and *possible solutions* of the problem.

Most of the discussion centered on the following points:

1. Was there some sort of *objective standard* seminary professors could use as a guage of whether or not seminarians were meeting the intellectual requirements the Church demands of her priests?
2. What was the *cause or causes of the attitude* of seminarians who often seem to look on theological studies as a hurdle to be leaped on their way to the priesthood and, once cleared, to be forever forgotten?
3. What could be done in the matter of *pedagogical techniques* to change this pragmatic attitude?

Discussion of the Preceding Three Points:

1. In discussing what might be taken as an *objective standard* of measurement for the intellectual acumen demanded of seminarians, some suggested that the mental caliber of students in medical or law schools ought to be a fair measure of the ability the Church demands of students for the priesthood, since theological studies, no less than Medicine or Law, are *postgraduate*. Others disagreed—they thought such a standard perhaps too high.

2. *As to the cause of the seminarians' pragmatic attitude* toward theological studies, various explanations were offered:

- a. *that older priests perhaps induced it* in them by half-joking remarks about speculative subjects studied in the seminary which would find no practical outlet in the parish ministry.
- b. that seminarians were *not given sufficient orientation* to the aims and methods of theology as a whole; failing to grasp clearly the purpose of their theological studies, they went at them half-heartedly.
- c. that a failure to require *personal projects* on the part of seminarians induced a *passive* attitude toward their studies.
- d. that *the disdain of the secular world for theology* and its emphasis on the importance of sciences like physics, chemistry, and medicine, had taken away the golden aura which had surrounded the "queen of the sciences" in the Middle Ages.

3. *As for changing this pragmatic attitude* on the part of seminarians, a number of *pedagogical techniques* were suggested, no one of which was, of course, to be considered a panacea:

- a. some suggested more use of the *historical technique in dogma*: v.g., giving the historical setting of Arianism or Lutheranism in some detail to bring home in a more vivid manner what might otherwise appear to be simply a bald, lifeless thesis in a manual.
- b. others suggested the use of *contemporary material* from contemporary magazines, or books, to bring home to the student the fact that major theological problems keep repeating themselves throughout the centuries and are still alive even

though disguised under different terms than those found in theological manuals. This technique was thought to be especially useful in *Apologetics and Moral*.

- c. Some suggested that the individual professor do more in each individual tract to keep before the student's mind how this tract was *integrally related* to many other tracts in theology.
- d. finally, there was some lively discussion as to *what level the teacher should direct his teaching*: to the top of the class, to the middle third, or to the bottom. Some thought the teacher should aim at the middle of the class, thus providing some work for the top of the class without overwhelming the lowest third. Others thought that in theory this was good, but that in practice it actually resulted in the teacher's concentrating on the lowest third and hence made loafers of the brighter students. Others disagreed.

Time ran out before the seminar could even touch upon the problem of trying to stimulate intellectual interest on the part of those already ordained.

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