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SOME ASPECTS OF THE NATURE AND PEDAGOGY OF ACADEMIC FORMATION

How Can Academic Formation be Useful for Apostolic Life and Pastoral Ministry?

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One can read on Ateneo's website this statement about the identity and mission of the University:

"The Ateneo is a mission we share in Christ who we believe sends us to change the world for the better. That includes reshaping our very selves to be always ready to offer our lives for others."

This dynamic highlights an incarnational spirituality which actually thrusts everyone out into the open, in dialogue with others, with respect for pluralism, and in recognition of the diverse autonomous spheres of human activity and reason.

Not even an Asian, but a European Jesuit, I feel very at ease with these words. I shall speak from an Ignatian point of view and I hope this will be helpful for all. In this presentation, I rely on a good number of interviews with European formators for the work of Fr. General's commission. I shall stay on the issue of intellectual formation, which nevertheless has to be articulated regarding spiritual and human formation. Such a multifaceted approach—human, spiritual and intellectual—to the formation of priests would require, as we know, demanding and fraternal articulation by the different persons involved in the formation process.

As an introduction, let me go back to the "first Jesuits," to the time of Saint Ignatius, for two notes; and then, I'll point out, also, some issues for today's intellectual formation.

The Fourth Part of the Constitutions has as a title "The Formation in the Letters and in the Other Means to Help the Neighbor." In other terms, formation for the ministry aims at the growth of the student in the letters and in the virtues. Not letters alone, without virtues, and not virtues alone, without letters.

Letters, at the time of Saint Ignatius, meant philosophy and theology. Both, in fact, are under the denomination of "letters." To study philosophy and theology was to be confronted with texts and writings. It was to be able to build a pertinent and fruitful reading of the texts so that one could communicate the statements and truth enclosed in them with a critical stand. The main exercise in "letters" was to read and to communicate one's reading. Virtues certainly include the professional skills useful for the pastoral ministry, but they are clearly not reduced to these skills in the spirit of the Constitutions. As a Latin term, virtues are the acquired capabilities of a person, for relations with neighbor and with all kinds of people. Studies help to develop these abilities, as well as experience dealing with many different persons.

Letters and virtues together, in order to form, as said Father Arrupe, "men for others."

Some years after the Constitutions, at the end of the 16th century, appeared, after a very great and long effort, what we know as the Ratio Studiorum. The Ratio is essentially a set of rules for every person involved in the process of intellectual formation, from the Rector to the professor, or to the simple tutor. There is a rule for everyone, that is to say a guide for what he has to do, and how he will have to do it. We know how Saint Ignatius was careful when establishing the details of a mission, to a point that we feel overburdened by the details! It also seems so for the rules of the Ratio. But we will not evade two characteristics worth keeping in mind. First, that such detailed prescriptions are motivated by the will to adapt as coherently as possible the "how to do it" of the aim envisaged. And second, that

Saint Ignatius always ends his prescriptions with the phrase "and you will do otherwise, if circumstances require it." Even precisely guided, a formator is called to exercise his responsibility, his initiative, and his inventiveness at the service of the students. Let us also remark how the Ratio supposes that the main occupation of the student is to exercise himself; the progression, with an order, a sequence carefully thought out and adapted to the student, aims at his well-ordered activity. How a student is directed—this is a major question for Saint Ignatius.

After these two brief notes from the time of Ignatius, what are the issues of intellectual formation today? Father Nicolas recently gave us some considerations.

Young people in formation are open-minded people, with a great generosity and disponibility. They are now more aware of their own responsibility for their formation, in dialogue with formators. They come with many gifts, and they have a great desire to serve the mission. Maybe they have some doubts about intellectual formation, and they would like to have more specialized studies. How could formation help them to reflect more profoundly, to enter a deepness of reflection, to grow intellectually? How could formation pay great attention to the integrative coherence of studies, especially when passing from one step to another, in order to develop useful attitudes for a permanent formation throughout the whole of apostolic life?

Issues have been described finely by Fr. Nebres. One challenge—we heard—is to well, and better, understand the world we live in, with its multiple and often contradictory aspects: cultural, historical, and social. And for one to understand our world a little better, how its realities affect us, with important consequences, a precise discernment is required. And so, the contents of formation, and the exercises proposed, will aim at elaborating a capacity for an in-depth search, for a critical evaluation of the questions; in short, a kind of philosophical attitude.

Another challenge is to grasp, to consider, the world around us, and the human living in it, from the point of view of God, or of faith, the point of view of the Gospel. We are invited to this point of view at the beginning of the second week of the Spiritual Exercises, when we

meditate on "the call of the temporal king." Into what kind of discourse and action are we engaged by the fact that God engaged himself into our humanity? How could we elaborate hope for ourselves and for our fellow human as it is hidden in our deep affects? Could we take into account this often quoted principle of Rahner, that "theology is first pastoral theology," in tension between the Reign of God and the mystery of the Cross?

So many and difficult questions! As the point is certainly not to elaborate a kind of synthesis, which I'm absolutely unable to propose, I choose to focus on two points only:

1. How and why could we integrate philosophy and theology together more today?
2. How could we develop and reinforce the qualities of our pedagogy?

Philosophy and Theology: A Useful Interaction

1. I do not return to the long history of the separation between philosophy and theology. Plato and Aristotle, even Kant and Hegel, recognized as great "philosophers," were also, no less, theologians! Our interrogations today about the gap between philosophy and theology, or, in terms of papal encyclicals, between faith and reason, may be interpreted as a search to rediscover the profound unity of the act of human knowledge.

I may suggest two points. First, hard separation or mutual ignorance between disciplines is not a help to the intellectual formation for apostolate and ministry. We can feel that teaching along and according to disciplines and their so numerous diversifications, the alignment of intellectual formation to the university model, is a kind of a trap for the formation of future priests. Being respectful towards the logic of the disciplines and at the same time looking for an articulation that can manifest the unity of the act of thinking would

be an issue. Second, very concretely: it could be important to have a good amount of time dedicated to patristic thought—maybe as well as other intellectually integrative thinking, such as Asian philosophies. The advantage of patristics is double: the student will find a hint to integrative thinking, while he acquires a kind of historical dimension of the tradition. Actually, when I can drive a student to some patristic familiarity, it always has fruitful results.

2. Now, how can we have a better articulation between philosophy and theology, in an integrative process that will prepare for apostolic mission and pastoral ministry?

a. With regard to lengthy traditional formation, which is psychologically, spiritually and intellectually difficult for a great number of young people, one thing seems clear: we can no more sustain the idea that a priest will be formed and intellectually equipped once and forever. Knowledge is changing in every domain, mostly in human and natural sciences, philosophy, religious sciences, and theology. So it would be more useful to enter into a process of permanent formation throughout the apostolic life. This is the first key-idea: envisage studies as a preparation for permanent formation. Consequently, studies are to be specifically a basic time of formation

- that will offer fundamental elements,
- that will open up the use of methods,
- and a first initiation into different domains.

This basic formation, in a first period, will not aim at total, encyclopedic, integral, and closed-in-on-itself knowledge. Rather, it will give the student the desire to go on in the research, and the means to progress without any fear of newness, and with critical thinking. It will give the student the opportunity to integrate, by himself, new approaches and confront new problematics. Such a basic formation would last four or five years, each year proposing to confront a question that is essential for human and Christian life:

- the question of knowledge or truth, through language and communication;

- the question of being human, his capabilities, his relation to God;
- the question of God himself according to the ways of philosophy and Christian revelation;
- the question of social and collective existence.

The point here is to unify a good period of study—one year—around a single question as a theme to deepen, go through; and to do that while being accustomed to approaches and methods which are not exclusive to grasping the theme. When one lets diverse approaches and disciplines tackle a great question, one learns to think not within a global and total system, but with a play and an adjustment of points of view which considerably enrich one's capabilities.

Such a basic formation, considered from the perspective of building an attitude of permanent formation, could be followed by a second period of studies, shorter (two years), with another, complementary, aim. Intellectual work would continue, but on the basis of strong apostolic or pastoral involvment. Such conditions would demand greater responsibility, in a less academic manner, and a more emphasized link to a situation, a population, especially with the poor, or with diverse cultures. This period would help to test the capacity for permanent formation, in a frame which still includes intellectual guidance.

b. The second key-idea comes from the fact that lengthy traditional formation lets the students enter theology very late, after a good number of years dedicated one part to philosophy and the other part to other specific formation. Starting theology therefore became difficult for students, sometimes quite impossible. More: philosophical formation and formation in sciences could have been perceived by the student as strongly motivating because it is a confrontation with "real" questions, and the search for appropriate and useful answers, while the usefulness of theology would not be so evident. So the idea is to introduce, as soon as possible, the student to the theological task. This seems necessary also because students today no longer inherit a Christian culture. Basic formation should elaborate an articulation of

the philosophical and theological problematics through which could be tested the relevance and the specificity of each. If we consider the questions we spoke of above for basic formation (knowledge and truth, human action, the question of God, life in society and Church), it is clear that philosophy and theology have something to say on these questions, each with its distinctive point of view. In such a dialogue between disciplines, a reciprocal fertilization could be expected. Of course, this key-idea requires precise consideration of the relation between philosophy and theology. But also requires a certain idea of Christian life which can no longer be ignorant of the diversity of understanding in the world. Rather, it is important to know how to play with this diversity, to form a spirit open to intellectual and social mobility, to be able to live in this very diversity a life according to the spirit of Christ.

If we think back for a moment to the time of St. Ignatius, what was the experience of a student who was studying continuously throughout philosophy and then theology? What kind was the continuity between philosophy and theology? I do not think that philosophy, as a so-called servant of theology, was a mere preparation for theology. The continuity was more. In fact, philosophy helped to build theology and was used during theology: an attitude of searching, questioning, elaborating provisory and tested answers, a desire for deepness, strong personal thinking and a capacity to communicate, as we can see in the numerous "exercises" that were proposed. This fundamental attitude is what we want today for our future priests. In a period where philosophy is separated from theology, with the sciences in the middle, it is all the more important to have these interact in a coherent and well-thought out manner.

3. At this point, I propose a short parenthesis around Bible studies. We have a problem today with the distance between Bible studies and dogmatics. We remember what Vatican II said: the reading of the Bible is the soul of theology. If I certainly have to be a Bible scholar in order to be a teacher of the Bible, I do not have to teach the Bible scholarly to the students. Rather, the point is that we could elaborate a reading of the Bible as a long transformative journey; it is not necessary to produce

scientific exegetical results in a Bible class, but a reading—a critical and rigorous one. For this critical and precise reading, narrative methods are useful when articulated with historical methods. Reading the Bible does not result in the acquisition of particular (scientific) knowledge, but it is to walk alongside people as Abraham on a pilgrimage. This point is a favorite of our Fr General …

4. There is finally a great interest in articulating philosophy, exegesis, and theology together, and as soon as possible. The main difficulty is to organize this articulation in such a way that each of the disciplines is certain to be respected in its logic and methods. That would be easier, and perhaps more natural, around a little set of well chosen fundamental questions, as I suggested.

This being said, the interdisciplinarity to be practiced should not be the responsibility of the student; he will profit from it, surely, but it is first the responsibility of the body of professors. As we, professors, are quite occupied with the preparation of our lectures, with the readings required to stay up-to-date in our discipline, with our research and writing—not to speak of the time dedicated to pedagogical or administrative tasks—, it will not be easy to find time for a gratuitous activity such as interdisciplinarity. Nevertheless, faculties often organize transversal and common groups of research, on topics that require a kind of interdisciplinarity: questions in the bioethics field require philosophical, scientific, and theological approaches, or in the field of economics, where anthropology is often concerned …. In such groups, interaction between the disciplines is necessary, and creates a kind of mutual knowledge with respect for the distinctive nature of each. We can often also experience the great fruitfulness of this research when one discipline, with its methods and its topics, agrees to engage in a demanding dialogue with others. Being aware of the requirements of this type of dialogue between disciplines, we, professors, will be much more at ease in the accompaniment of students, who enter also, at their own level, in interdisciplinarity.

This introduces us to pedagogy, to which I now turn in the second part of this presentation.

Pedagogy: What It Means to "Accompany" Students

The period of studies, conceived as basic formation leading to the capacity for a permanent formation, aims at a good understanding of the reality of our world, with a sensitivity to the ways it affects us; and aims at an understanding of this reality in the light of the Gospel and the Church's faith, while paying attention to the hope we can bring and share with our contemporaries. Studies thus constitute an intellectual experience as much as the novitiate has been a spiritual experience. From the novitiate to studies, the experience continues! The analogy between spiritual and intellectual experience invites us to imagine, for the time of studies, a pedagogy which will be fundamentally an accompaniment in its spirit, and in its methods. Practicing discernment specific to intellectual work, staying as long as necessary with methods and contents, and passing through fruitful transitions will characterize this accompaniment.

1. The Student's Active Responsibility

Taking into account the age of students, their past history, their professional or social abilities, and their intellectual cultures does not call for a uniform and once for all course of studies, but rather for a personalized itinerary. It is important to help each of the students find his proper way to enter studies. Pedagogy is required to give the student actual responsibility, in order that the time of studies be a time of appropriation rather than acquisition of much diverse knowledge.

Clear objectives are defined each year, in such a way that the student can appropriate them actively. His responsibility is not to follow a program; rather, it is to make this program fruitful for his own thinking. Henceforth, the modes of teaching would be, for the most part, active rather than passive; the use of time will be carefully organised, in order for the student to have sufficient personal time for study; it is part of his responsibility to organize his intellectual work himself.

The student exercises personal discernment in making his own the proposed course of studies. He needs to learn:

- how to let the movements and feelings within him be known, his preferences and resistances, in front of such author, or confronted by such question;
- how to decide which assignments and readings he will undertake;
- how to gradually recognize aspects of his own intellectual personality and discover and value his own abilities.

These are all features of the student's active responsibility during the period of studies.

On the whole, the period of studies should be an opportunity to acquire the ability and experience of writing, and speaking in public to various audiences, with a well-considered use of the media.

The strengthening of *sound personal judgment* is a condition for the freedom of speech that is characteristic of Christian witness.

2. Intellectual Accompaniment

The accompaniment of students during their studies is a point that requires considerable attention today. For the accompaniment, three main roles can be discerned.

The **Provincial** has to make helpful decisions on the duration and orientation of studies, for instance, whether it is appropriate to obtain a degree, and all this in accordance with other dimensions of formation (spiritual and apostolic).

The **prefect of studies** (this is the traditional Ignatian term we could maybe understand today in the role of director of studies; if possible, different from the dean) makes decisions with the student concerning his program of studies and the choice of subjects. In a way, he establishes a "contract" of clear objectives for a set period, a semester or a year. He will be attentive to the personal development of the student and will try to encourage him.

Let me focus more on the role of the **tutor**.

The tutor accompanies the student closely in his study efforts, and is attentive to how his intellectual experience unfolds over time.

In order to do this, the tutor meets the student regularly, at least monthly at the beginning of the course and thereafter not less than four times per semester. The student reviews his work: What have I done (lessons, readings, and assignments)? How have I done it? How has it affected me? What ought I to do? The tutor and the student decide together on readings, written assignments, and what needs to be emphasized or deepened during the next period of time.

The tutor is open to dialogue on issues that arise; he shows himself attentive to the way in which the student grows in personal expression. Overall, the tutor, like the director during the Spiritual Exercises, encourages the student in his intellectual experience, knowing how to find useful "exercises" at opportune moments. The tutor pays particular attention to the student's rhythm of work and the amount of time he spends on his personal work. The tutor participates in the evaluation at year-end.

Two more remarks. It is clear that tutoring a student requires time in a professor's agenda which is soon quite busy. In case the students are too many to practice personal accompaniment with, it is quite possible to perform such accompaniment collectively, for example with a group of students, as is the case in Vidyajyoti in Dehli.

The tutor may or may not be a lecturer. If he is a lecturer, it is necessary that he enters into an attitude of discernment and accompaniment, which takes into account the student's course of studies in its entirety, and not just one discipline. If the tutor is not a lecturer, he needs to have a good knowledge of the student's program and courses and to be familiar with his intellect.

Finally, even if it is not so easy to envisage such a personal, or collective, accompaniment, in terms of time required and in terms of relationship to engage in, it could nevertheless be experienced by the professor as a quite pleasant and propitious pedagogic complement to

the task of teaching in class. I'd guess that 50% of what a professor transmits to the student would be in tutoring, while 50% in classes.

This accompaniment is geared toward promoting active responsibility on the part of the student during his studies, with the levels of decision-making clearly demarcated. It is evident that this structure could not correspond always to that of institutions in which students pursue their studies.

3. An Active Pedagogy: Exercise

For the student, who is an adult, an active pedagogy during the period of studies is seen, at the outset, in the type of relations he has with other actors—lecturers, other students—and his personal effort in view of the goal of studies: learning, in-depth understanding, and personal expression. The approach to the intellectual experience may borrow two models: the "Socratic" model, a set/game of questions that employs dialogue, and the "Ignatian" model, giving an exercise and debriefing/performing a review.

Of course, there must be time for both "interactive activities" and personal study/reflection, as well as time for relaxation and rest.

At the beginning, priority can be given to exercises, learning, analysis and debates, mainly among groups of students.

With regard to the approach to fundamental questions, there ought to be a preference for seminars on authors' texts rather than lectures; a seminar has the great ability to help one learn to read texts seriously, to go deeper into the problematics of an author who is essential and whose development of thought is very formative; in a seminar, the students learn intellectual honesty, to stay close to the text without personal projections, they learn rigor in discovering the logic of thinking, and coherence; and the seminar is collective research, where one learns to respect common dialogue. Concomitantly, research or reading groups ought to be encouraged.

On the whole, the student should engage in the experience of reading in a challenging way: through collections of works that have

been read and background reading. At the same time, the ability to write would be promoted: not only in terms of quantity, but also in terms of various kinds of written work (summaries, presentations on a specific question, and essays). Finally, the ability to express oneself orally: reformulation of an argument, making a presentation on a theme, giving a conference.

The exercise of "repetition" is decidedly helpful and profitable, especially as a summary of a lecture or a debate; repetition here does not imply "scholasticism" or learning by rote, but assumes an active appropriation on the part of the student. The traditional exercise of "disputatio," in an adapted form and in a public setting, can also be an excellent teaching aid.

In all these activities, there should be a place for modern and technological resources, even if it means using them with regard to interrelations and the personal effort required in these relations.

For advanced students, exercises in relation to the coming ministerial responsibility would be proposed. They will aim to develop: the capacity for public speech, in form and in content (homilies, formations …); the ability to conduct animations (for Bible groups, apostolic movements …); the facility for celebrations, either of sacraments or of the Eucharist. These specific exercises are evidently more people-oriented in their service and edification. An equilibrium between those oriented to the theological and those oriented to the ministerial is to be found.

4. Evaluations

Evaluations would allow a student to gauge the quality of his work and give an account of his acquired personal thinking. There is therefore no need to make evaluations for each unit of the course (lessons, seminars, group work, disciplines); rather, evaluations could be made after a sufficiently long period, such as a semester or even a year. Evaluations will thus have a marked synthetic quality.

A semester's evaluation may aim at: confirming the acquisition and personal appropriation of knowledge; assessing acquired abilities

(reading, writing, public speaking); practicing a well-thought-out and well-constructed review of the course: what have I learned, what held more weight, what can I go into with more depth in the future?

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It is now time to resume some points that appeared along our reflection, in brief form. I choose those I consider of greater weight, and I am of course open to discussing the following.

- Formation to the ministry and apostolic life touches "letters" as well as "virtues" to build "men for others."
- Good means to understand, consciousness of being affected and discernment, effort to theologize, these are what require the realities of the world we engage in.
- A basic formation prepares for the necessary permanent formation, with an articulated use of the diversity of disciplines, an effort for integrative thinking, and for personal integration.
- For the body of professors, the practice of interdisciplinarity is a chance.
- Tutor, prefect of studies, and the religious responsible each has their proper role to play in intellectual accompaniment.
- Active learning is more fruitful, particularly in seminars, where texts are read and discussed; evaluations assess the acquired capabilities.

Let me have a last hint at the Ignatian tradition. I suggest an adaptation of the second annotation in the Spiritual Exercises, transforming its formulation somehow, to the point of view of the intellectual experience:

> The person who gives to another the way and order in which to go through the studies ought to relate and comment critically on the philosophical or theological texts, going over the points with only a short or summary explanation. For, if the person who is studying takes the true groundwork of the texts, and, discussing and considering for himself, finds something which makes the interpretation a little clearer

> or brings it a little more home to him—whether this comes through his own reasoning, or because his intellect is enlightened by the Divine grace—he will get more intellectual relish and fruit, than if he who is teaching had much explained and amplified the meaning of the texts. For it is not knowing much, but feeling and tasting things interiorly, that contents and satisfies the spirit.

I'd like to finally quote from a paper of our companions in London about the challenges of intellectual formation:

> Given the professionalization of so many contexts in which Jesuits exercise their ministry, apostolic availability is far more complex now than it was once. Our men are all the more likely to be available in various professional situations if in the course of their formation they have been required to become professional in one.
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> In a related way, we thought it important for the future health of our ministries that we develop leaders, men who can take responsibility and be accountable. In this regard, it is important that our students take responsibility for their own learning and for the places in which they live, their communities and different aspects of their life together. Leadership means learning to be accountable to others and community living needs to encourage this.
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> The challenge is always to help our younger men go deeper. One way to develop depth is integration. An important aspect of the study of theology should be demonstrating how different disciplines they have been exposed to illuminate from different standpoints the same theological themes. So how does a philosopher, a systematic theologian and a biblical scholar talk to each other about the "Resurrection"?