

INTELLECTUAL FORMATION IN THE SEMINARIES: THE PHILOSOPHICAL COMPONENT

J. K. A. Aniagwu

Introduction:

The Second Vatican Council laid down the principle that

... the entire training of the students (in Major Seminaries) should be oriented to the formation of true shepherds of souls after the model of our Lord Jesus Christ, teacher, priest and shepherd.¹

As teachers, they are to be prepared for the ministry of the word: "that they might understand ever more perfectly the revealed word of God; that meditating on it they might possess it more firmly, and that they might express it in words and in example". As priests, they are to be prepared for the ministry of worship and sanctification: "that through their prayers and their carrying out of sacred liturgical celebrations they might perfect the work of salvation through the Eucharistic sacrifice and the sacraments". Finally, as shepherds, they are to be prepared for the ministry of the parish:

that they might know how to make Christ present to men, Him who did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk. 1:45; cf. Jn. 13:12-17), and that having become the servants of all, they might win over all the more. (cf. 1 Cor. 9:19)²

It is recognised that the programme of priestly formation involves various components. There is, first of all, the aspect of Spiritual Formation, including the Liturgical dimension. There is the aspect of Intellectual or Doctrinal Formation. There is also a dimension of Pastoral Formation. There can be no question that each of these aspects must be attended to and given its proper due, if the objective of priestly formation earlier enunciated is to be achieved; namely, if true and authentic teachers, priests and shepherds, after the model of our Lord Jesus Christ, are to emerge from the seminaries.

It also goes without saying that every effort should be made to integrate the various aspects of priestly formation, so that they interpenetrate one another, and the essential nexus between them is both clearly seen and preserved. Every effort should, therefore, be made to avoid the ever present danger of compartmentalization of the various components of priestly formation. If one may adduce a single example: there is a growing practice to establish "Spiritual Year" Programmes in various seminaries. This "Spiritual Year" cannot be done in utter exclusion of intellectual or doctrinal formation or a modicum of pastoral formation as well. This is without prejudice to whether the "Spiritual Year" takes place before the commencement or in the middle of the Major Seminary programme.

The present article proposes to dwell on the Intellectual or Doctrinal aspect of Priestly Formation and, more specifically, on the component of Philosophy in the programme of Intellectual or Doctrinal Formation. It will draw extensively from the documents of the Holy See on the subject.

Intellectual Formation in General

Vatican II was concerned that philosophy and theology be better integrated in the academic programmes of seminaries.³ One is perhaps entitled to assume that the Council had observed a tendency to separate, maybe even oppose these two disciplines to each other. Such a tendency was more likely to have occurred in those seminaries programmes which taught philosophy first, and then theology. It was more likely still to have arisen where — as is increasingly the case now — there was a distinct campus for philosophy students from that for theology students.

The entire programme of philosophical and theological studies was to be so ordered that these subjects.

... work together harmoniously to unfold ever increasingly to the minds of the seminarians the mystery of Christ, that mystery which affects the whole history of the human race, influences the Church continuously, and is mainly exercised by the priestly ministry.⁴

The common basis for unity and integration of the two components of philosophy and theology was to be provided by the *mystery of Christ*. An introductory course on that mystery and the history of salvation was to be given even at the beginning of the philosophical and theological studies.⁵ Presumably, the ideal place to give it would be during the "Spiritual Year" programme, where such a programme exists. The course should be so given:

that students may be able to see the sense, the order and the apostolic aim of ecclesiastical studies, while, at the same time, they are helped towards establishing their own faith as well as more prudently embracing the priestly vocation.⁶

It is perhaps a matter of some consternation that voices have been raised in some quarters against the emphasis that is placed on intellectual formation in the seminaries. The seminaries "have been roundly accused of placing academics before every aspect of priestly formation, and being intent on turning out a breed of priest-professors"⁷ The critics' first target is the minimum academic entry requirement for the Major Seminary. They argue that this is often beyond the reach of many young people who genuinely desire to be priests, and who would make excellent priests if allowed to enter the seminary.

The first point to be made in answer to this argument is that no seminary can afford to operate without setting minimum academic entry requirements, unless it is not going to teach anything at Major Seminary level, which is that

of tertiary education. That being the case, most seminaries have simply followed the directive of Vatican II, to the effect that

*Before seminarians take up these sacred studies which are properly ecclesiastical, they should be equipped with the humanistic and scientific training which in their own countries enables young people to undertake higher studies.*⁸

The need for a sound intellectual formation in the seminary is dictated by, among other things, the aim that such formation is expected to achieve, as also by the circumstances of our time, with its very high demand for excellence in every field of human endeavour. Our age, it must be admitted, will not settle for mediocrity in a field probably as innocuous as sports, let alone that of intellectual formation.

Where the aim of intellectual formation in the seminary is concerned, the Code of Canon Law has legislated that

*The doctrinal formation is to be so directed that the students may acquire a wide and solid teaching in the sacred sciences, together with a general culture which is appropriate to the needs of the place and time. As a result, with their own faith founded and nourished by this teaching, they ought to be able properly to proclaim the Gospel to the people of their own time, in a fashion suited to the manner of the people's thinking.*⁹

It is hard to see how such an aim as has just been enunciated can be achieved via a half-hearted programme of intellectual formation in the seminaries.

The Study of Philosophy

If, as has just been said, there have been objections to the programme of intellectual formation in the seminaries, the objections to including philosophy within the programme have even been more persistent and pervasive. Briefly stated, the very relevance of philosophy in the programme of priestly formation has been called into question.

The assault on philosophy has been made largely on two fronts, one scientific, the other theological.

Many scientists have questioned the usefulness of any philosophy that would be distinct from the positive sciences. "What it is asked, 'does such a philosophy do? What are its practical uses?'" This has given rise to the popular *dictum* that "Philosophy does not bake bread!"

This attitude to philosophy is probably understandable in the light of the astounding successes of the natural sciences in the fields as varied as medicine, space exploration and computer technology. Philosophy, it must be admitted, has never been able to boast of such palpable, tangible results.

It can, of course, be argued that scientific and technological advances are

themselves based on philosophical presuppositions, such that they would never have been made in the first place in the absence of those presuppositions. But the opponents of philosophy will roundly and hotly contend that.

What is even more surprising is that even some theologians should contest the relevance of philosophy to priestly formation. "These theologians maintain that the purity of the gospel message was compromised in the course of history by the introduction of Greek speculation into the sacred sciences."¹⁰

It is perhaps as a result of these objections that some seminaries no longer prescribe a philosophy course, properly so called, for their students. They rather settle for a generic preparation in the humanities, with perhaps a nodding reference to philosophy, or none at all.

Against the said objections, the Church's Magisterium has been emphatic in defending the relevance, even the necessity of philosophy for priestly formation. There is, first of all, the fact that theology and the theologians need philosophy to lift them clear of the realm of "blind faith" and "a fideism lacking rational motivation".

And

*... the speculative theologian must also have recourse in a special way to the help of a sound philosophy so that it can make its contribution to the reflection on the presuppositions and on the conclusions of the knowledge furnished by the positive disciplines (of theology, like exegesis, history, etc.).*¹¹

The necessity of philosophy is also dictated by the fact that the seminarian must be formed to be able to enter into meaningful dialogue with non-believers. There is thus a clear pastoral value to the study of philosophy in the seminaries.¹²

Objectives of Philosophical Teaching

The objectives of philosophical teaching in the seminaries are, quite naturally, varied. Basically, it should seek to lead the students to acquire a solid knowledge of man, the world and God.¹³ It should seek to perfect the human formation of the students by sharpening in them the spirit of intellectual inquiry as well as offering them a rich fare of the wisdom, both ancient and modern, with which the human race has been enriched during the course of the ages.¹⁴

It is often said that the programme of studies in philosophy must teach students to think, that is, to *philosophize*. That is true. But it must not stop there. It should also present them with something of what to think, namely, "valid philosophical principles which the students can attentively consider, seek to weigh and assimilate"¹⁵. Ideally, it should lead students to form proper convictions about various solutions to the problems posed by philosophy and arrive at a coherent vision of reality.

It has always been held in official circles that philosophy is an excellent

preparation for the study of theology. While one would be reluctant to still label philosophy with the tag of *ancilla theologiae*, the point has already been made and argued that theology and the theologians need philosophy in order to carry out their mission.¹⁶

Philosophical teaching in the seminaries can also serve the purpose of enabling the student to penetrate more deeply into his own faith and live it in a way that is more human, more convincing.¹⁷

Finally, a pastoral objective that the teaching of philosophy in seminaries has been urged to work towards is, as has been adverted to, to equip the students to engage in dialogue with the men and women of their age, in particular, those who do not share the Christian faith with them.

To achieve these varied objectives, the teaching of philosophy will take due account of "a philosophical patrimony which is perennially valid".¹⁸ It will then delve into the philosophical investigations of later ages, particularly those that have exerted or still exert greater influence in the students' own nations. It should, finally, go on to take stock of the more recent findings in the sciences, both the natural and the humane ones.¹⁹

Philosophy and Theology (Faith, Revelation)

Understood in the sense so far outlined, philosophical studies in the seminaries are not only not alien to theology, faith and revelation, but are rather in excellent accord with these later. For it has to be clear enough that there can be no contradiction between the naturally knowable truths of philosophy and the revealed truths of faith. Truth, after all, if it is to have any claim and title to that name, must be one, indivisible.²⁰

With this in view, one is in a position to appreciate the Church's attitude to philosophy in general and, consequently, philosophical studies in the seminaries.

The Church recognises the prevalent climate of philosophical pluralism, given the varied circumstances of men in different ages and cultural expressions. She has, in fact, expressed herself to be open to every new and old philosophy. But her preference has been, quite understandably, clearly on the side of a philosophy whose fundamental tenets accord with Christian Revelation. She will not accept any philosophy that is irreconcilable with the Christian faith. She will, thus, not carry her recognition and openness to philosophical pluralism to an extent which would compromise the fundamental content of Revelation.²¹

The Question of Inculturation

The *Magisterium* has directed that priestly formation make provision for a healthy contact between seminarians and their own particular national ways of thinking and acting. Vatican II, for instance, made the following statement:

*... let the minds of the students be kept open and attuned to an acquaintance and an appreciation of their own nation's culture. In their philosophical and theological studies, let them consider the points of contact which mediate between the traditions and religion of their homeland on the one hand and the Christian religion on the other.*²²

Later on, the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* would take up the same theme and further elucidate it to the effect that

*In the entire doctrinal formation, its careful adaptation to the diverse cultures should be carefully attended to, so that students may be able to understand and express the message of Christ in a language ("forma") proper to each culture and then adapt the Christian life to the genius and character of every culture.*²³

While having these statements of the *Magisterium* in view, the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples found it necessary to sound a note of caution, when it said that

*... with regard to doctrinal activity, the use of inculturation requires time, prudent discernment and methodological work, promoted with creativity and, at the same time, with fidelity to revealed doctrine.*²⁴

The same Dicastery went on to provide an understanding of the meaning of inculturation:

*It is a question of living the mystery of the incarnation of the faith in diverse cultures, integrating all the positive values and promoting an exchange between the Church and cultures, always maintaining and preserving compatibility with revealed data and communion with the universal Church.*²⁵

Where does that leave one with the teaching of Philosophy in the Major Seminaries of Africa? One would reply simply that that teaching should pay due attention and regard to the philosophical heritage of Africa.

The question as to whether or not there is such a thing as an "African Philosophy" has long agitated philosophers, both Africans and non-Africans. Widely divergent views have been expressed and held. This is hardly the forum to engage the debate all over again. It is hardly debatable that there is such a thing as traditional African thought. Some scholars have seen fit to label it as "collective philosophy", "spontaneous philosophy", the "accumulated wisdom of the African peoples", or simply "African traditional philosophy" and "philosophy in the broad sense."²⁶ This "philosophy" is not neatly and clearly differentiated into spheres and areas and subject matters. It is holistic in nature, the sum-total of the explanations which Africans give to phenomena in the various domains of reality, of man, and of morality.

But there is in Africa today another kind of philosophy, critical, scientific,

rigorous and argumentative; that is, philosophy in the narrow sense of the great systems that make up Western Philosophy, for instance. This philosophy is still in the making. It is African in the sense that it is being done in Africa and by Africans and its focus is on the problems and concrete life situations in Africa. Part of its task is that it probes the traditional "philosophical" heritage of Africa ("philosophy in the broad sense") and subject it to severe criticism in order to expunge from it whatever is shown clearly to contradict sound reasoning and the valid findings of science. There can be no doubt that the African traditional heritage bristles with many such irrational elements. Africa and Africans have no more use of them than the human body has of harmful bacteria.

Therefore, the programme of philosophical teaching in the seminaries of Africa ought to incorporate two distinct courses: one in African Traditional Thought (or "Philosophy"), the other in Contemporary African Philosophy. Understandably, the details of those courses cannot be laid out here. But an insight into their broad outlines can be got from what had been said about the nature of the two types of "philosophy". The benefits that will accrue to the students from such courses are precisely the ones that even the *Magisterium* itself has recognised, as has earlier been shown in this paper.

Conclusion

One may here recall a conversation with the Provost of an Anglican Cathedral more than a decade ago. He remarked that the Catholic Church placed high premium on the intellectual formation of her priests, and that he admired the Church* for that. That was something one should be justifiably proud of, coming from a highly placed official of a sister Christian communion. That is how others see the programme of formation in the Catholic Seminaries.

As this paper has, hopefully, been able to show, that too happens to be the Church's vision for her priests — in training. It is a very high expectation. The resources to achieve it, in terms of personnel and materials, have to be adequate in number and calibre. The *Magisterium* has variously directed that no effort be spared in providing them. One may here recall, for instance, the wise counsel of Pope Pius XI to Bishops in these words:

*Give your very best priests to your seminaries and do not be afraid to take them from other positions which cannot be compared with the indispensable work of the Seminary. Look for them even outside your own Diocese, anywhere you can find men really fitted for this notable work.*²⁷

Intellectual Formation may not be the most important aspect of priestly training — Spiritual Formation is. But as is the case with the other aspects — Spiritual and Pastoral — only the best in the Intellectual Formation of future priests will meet the demands and expectations of the Church and the world in our time.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. *Optatam totius*, 4.
2. *Ibidem*; cf. Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, Rome, 19th March 1985, 20. Translation mine.
3. *Optatam Totius*, 4.
4. *Optatam Totius*, 14; cf. *Ad Gentes*, 16; Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Theological Formation of Future Priests*, Rome, 22nd February 1976, 17; Conference of Bishops of the Lagos Ecclesiastical Province, *Guidelines for Priestly Formation in the Lagos Ecclesiastical Province*, Lagos, 1984, IV.
5. See *Ratio Fundamentalis*, 62.
6. *Ibidem*.
7. John K. A. Aniagwu, "Challenge of Priestly Formation in Nigeria Today", *Shalom* (1988), vol. VI, no. 1, p. 7.
8. *Optatam Totius*, 13.
9. C. I. C. 248. Emphasis Mine. See *Ratio Fundamentalis*, 59.
10. Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Study of Philosophy in Seminaries*, Rome, 20th January 1972, p. 5.
11. Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Study of Philosophy in Seminaries*, pp. 8–9. Parenthesis mine. See *Idem*, *The Theological Formation of Future Priests*, 33.
12. *The Study of Philosophy in Seminaries*, p. 10.
13. See *Optatam Totius*, 15.
14. See *Ratio Fundamentalis*, 70.
15. *The Study of Philosophy in Seminaries*, p. 12.
16. See C.I.C. 251; *Ratio fundamentalis*, 70; *Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples*, "Some Guidelines on formation in the Seminaries", Rome, 25 the April 1987, p. 9.
17. *Ratio Fundamentalis*, 70.
18. Presumably, this should be construed to mean the Philosophical heritage of the Thomistic — Scholastic tradition.
19. *Optatam Totius*, 15; C.I.C. 251.
20. See *Ratio Fundamentalis*, footnote no. 168; *The Study of Philosophy in Seminaries*, p. 13; *Theological Formation of Future Priests*, 51.
21. See *The Theological Formation of Future Priests*, 51 & 52.
22. *Ad Gentes*, 16.
23. *Ratio Fundamentalis*, 64.
24. "Some Guidelines on Formation in Major Seminaries", p. 9.
25. *Ibidem*, pp. 9–10.
26. See J. E. Wiredu, "On An African Orientation in Philosophy", *Second Order* (July 1972), vol. 1, no. 2, p. 9. Also A. U. Iwara and E. Mveng, eds., *Report of Working Group III, "Black Civilization and Philosophy"*, *Colloquium on Black Civilization and Education*, at the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture, Lagos, 17th–31st January 1977, published by the Federal Military Government of Nigeria, 1977, p. 141.

27. Pius XI, *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii*, Rome, December 1938. See *Optatam Totius*, 5; *The Theological Formation of Future Priests*, 118, 119.

Rev. Dr. J. K. A. Aniagwu is the Rector and a Lecturer at the SS. Peter & Paul Seminary, Ibadan, Nigeria.

GREEK INDEBTEDNESS TO THE AFRICAN PHILOSOPHICAL HERITAGE REVISITED

I. Udoidem

"The history of Black Africa will remain suspended in air and cannot be written correctly until African historians dare to connect it with the history of Egypt . . . For us the return to Egypt in every domain is the necessary condition to reconcile African civilization with history, to build a body" of modern human sciences and to be able to renew African culture . . . Egypt will play the same role in the rethinking and renewing of African culture that ancient Greece and Rome plays in the culture of the West . . ." Cheikh Anta Diop.

The need to familiarize contemporary African intellectuals with ancient African contribution to knowledge is of crucial importance. In recent times, some concerned Africans like Yosef ben-zochannan, Cheikh Diop, Lancana Keita, Henry Odele and other Africans in the Diaspora like G.M. James, Ivan van Sertima (the executive editor, *Journal of African Civilization* — which is devoted to the documentation of African heritage) have done commendable researches in the area of African contribution to knowledge and science.¹ The critics of these works have argued that the claims are not only unfounded generalizations but that they lack documentary evidence. As a contribution to the efforts of these pioneering Africans, this essay undertakes a documentary and an organizational programme on the issue of Greek indebtedness to the African philosophical heritage. Attempt will be made to use what the Ancient Greek philosophers themselves have said about their indebtedness to justify the claim that Greek philosophers were indebted to Ancient African wisdom.

On the Origin of Philosophy

Philosophy in a very broad sense of the search for knowledge began with human consciousness, when man first raised the questions: 'what', 'why' and 'how'. The human mind was challenged to provide explanations for what it experienced. The human mind wondered about the immediate objects of experience that were bewildering. These included objects like the moon, sun, mountains, rivers, man himself and, of course, the origin of the universe. This state of wonder was followed by speculations and reflective reasoning. Philosophy at this stage took the form of a systematic search for the nature of things or explanation of what was experienced. Its main characteristic was *speculative*. Definitely not all speculations were sufficient explanations. Thus, when the various speculations were subjected to *critical analysis* to test the