HOW MUCH PHILOSOPHY FOR SEMINARIANS?

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(This memorandum was produced in July 1972 at the request of Fr. Austin Cooper OMI, but it seems to have been too late to influence the initial policy of Catholic Theological College. I consider it still quite relevant, especially in view of the recent distribution to the Australian Bishops of the letter of Cardinal Garrone mentioned in I.1 and V.7-9.
As much of the "Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis" (Basic Plan for Priestly Training) has been incorporated into Preparation for Priesthood, which was issued by the Australian Episcopal Conference and printed in July 1972, references to the former have been followed by references, preceded by "P.P", to the equivalent sections of the latter.
Section VIII.4 of this copy, though originally intended for the memorandum, was inadvertently omitted from the text prepared on 4th July 1972.)

I. Introduction

1) I have been asked for a memorandum giving my interpretation of recent documents of the Holy See (the "Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis" of 6th January 1970, and the letter of Cardinal Garrone to the Ordinaries of the world on 20th January 1972) concerning the amount of time that should be devoted to the study of philosophy by students for the priesthood.

2) It has been suggested that my interpretation of these documents was too strict, so that I would require seminarians to do more philosophy than the Church itself demands.

3) I will discuss this in terms of the Catholic College definition of a "unit" as "one term's work in a subject at tertiary level with ten teaching weeks per term", so that 3 units correspond to what is normally called a "subject", and 9 units would be the amount of work expected of the ordinary full-time student in one year. Thus the two years of philosophy spoken of in the "Ratio Fundamentalis" would consist

of 18 units, and there would be 36 units of theology in the four years prescribed for theology.

II. *What is the most obvious interpretation of these documents?*

1) Two full years must be devoted to the study of philosophy, just as four full years must be devoted to the study of theology.

2) The "related sciences" that may be studied during these two years must be complementary to philosophy and must occupy considerably less time than the study of philosophy itself.

III. *What applications can be made of this interpretation?*

1) The normal course for the priesthood would include at least 12 units of philosophy proper, and also 6 units of subjects such as psychology and sociology which can be of "real complementary value" to philosophy. Some of the 12 units in philosophy could be prescribed as core units, while the others could be chosen from a variety of units offered, but all would have to be truly philosophical in content and treatment.

2) The prescribed two years would not be satisfied by a course consisting of 6 units of philosophy, 6 units of history and 6 elective units which could be freely chosen in pastoral theology, biblical languages or liturgy instead of philosophy or related sciences.

3) Nor would a University Arts Degree be a substitute for these two years of philosophy, even if it included two subjects (6 units) of philosophy and was accompanied by some tutorials in the seminary.

IV. *Could "two years" mean just the equivalent of a minor sequence at the University?*

1) A minor sequence is one subject studied progressively for two years (e.g., Philosophy I and Philosophy II), while four or five other, quite independent, subjects are being studied (e.g., German I, German II, History I and Economics I). It would be equivalent to 6 units.

2) At the university, Philosophy I is considered to be a subject, not a course. A course in Philosophy (or an Arts course) would require much more than two such subjects. In the church documents Philosophy is clearly spoken of as a course, in the same way as Theology is.

3) According to the interpretation suggested in the question the whole "six years" of ecclesiastical studies would consist of 18 units and could be completed in two years. There is no hint in any of the church documents that would justify such a departure from the standard interpretation of them as requiring a full six years.

4) The relevant passages of the Ratio Fundamentalis are:

70. (P.P.79) Studies in Philosophy and kindred subjects — no matter how they may be distributed over the years (cf. n.60) (P.P.67) — must be equivalent to a two-year course.

61 (c). (P.P.69) The time devoted to studies of a particularly philosophical nature should be equivalent to at least two years (or, where certain countries use a system of computing the length of studies by hours per term, the equivalent number of such hours); the time devoted to theological studies should equal at least four years (or, the equivalent number of hours per term), so that the study of Philosophy and Theology should take no less than six years (or the equivalent number of hours normally requiring six years to cover).

Footnote 140, attached to n.61(c) (P.P.69), refers to the Code of Canon Law (Canon 1365) and to the motu proprio of Pope Paul VI, "De Episcoporum Muneribus". Canon 1365 commences as follows:

1. *In philosophiam rationalem cum affinibus disciplinis alumni per integrum saltem biennium incumbant.*
2. *Cursus theologicus saltem integro quadriennio contineatur.*

The relevant passage of "De Episcoporum Muneribus" (15 May 1966, AAS 58, p.470) reads:

IX. Salvis facultatibus Legatis Romani Pontificis et Ordinariis specialiter tributis, Nobis expresse reservamus dispensationes quae sequuntur: .....

7. A ratione studiorum cursus philosophiae rationalis et theologiae, tum ad legitimum temporis spatium, tum ad primarias disciplinas quod attinet.

V. *Could "philosophy" be meant in a wide sense, so that it is equivalent to "Arts" and includes not only philosophical subjects in the strict sense but also such subjects as English Literature, History, etc. ?*

This interpretation is excluded by the following considerations.

1) In the Ratio Fundamentalis the chapter (ch.11) on Philosophy and Related Sciences is preceded by a separate chapter dealing with Studies (ch.10) in the Arts and Sciences after matriculation. Since they are given explicit treatment in their own chapter it is hard to see how the chapter on philosophy could be thought of as including a hidden reference to them.

2) The chapter that precedes these two (ch.9, "Intellectual Formation in General"), lists three types of intellectual formation (n.59) (P.P.66), namely Education in the Arts and Sciences, Philosophical formation, and Theological formation. It says that philosophy may be studied for two years separately from the other two types of studies, that it may alternatively be studied concurrently with the Arts and Sciences, and that it may be studied concurrently with theology.

It then explicitly states (n.61 (P.P.69) — this is repeated in n.70 (P.P.79)) that in any of these three overall courses the amount of philosophy must be equivalent to the amount done in two full years of studies. Hence it makes it quite clear that the philosophy and related sciences that make up these two years are distinct on the one hand from Theology and on the other hand from the general education in the Arts and Sciences.

3) The chapter devoted directly to Philosophy and Related Sciences speaks first of systematic philosophy and says that it is of particular importance. This is concerned with first philosophical principles as handed down by the great Christian philosophers. After this it mentions "contemporary Philosophy", "schools of thought which exercise special influence in their own country", "recent scientific progress", "the history of philosophy" and finally "related sciences... insofar as they are related to Philosophy...(and with) a due sense of proportion" (n.71) (P.P.80).

Some readers might react against the term "systematic philosophy". It has possibly been used here precisely because no one would wish to suggest that English, or History or Latin or Psychology (as done at an Australian university) could be called "systematic philosophy". This term indicates a readiness to face up to a substantial number of the most basic issues and to consider them in a direct and orderly way.

I think it would be unfair to restrict the term to the sort of rigid pedagogical system that was implied fifty years ago in the "Twenty-four theses", but it would be even more unfair to turn aside almost completely from philosophy to an ordinary Arts Degree as if that were the only alternative to an unacceptably inflexible system.

It should be noted, too, that the "component parts" of systematic philosophy are mentioned ("cum omnibus suis partibus" n.71 (P.P.80)). While some variation could be understood, it seems to me that no genuine interpretation of the document could take these "parts" to be radically different from the subjects traditionally taught in the seminaries, outlined in their textbooks and named in comparable documents. (For instance, "Deus scientiarum Dominus" in 1931 listed them as Logic, Cosmology, Psychology, Critica, Ontology, Natural Theology, Ethics and Natural Law, in Article 27 of its Ordinationes).

4) Vatican II makes demands on the seminary philosophy course that clearly require specifically philosophical subjects: not just an introduction to questions concerning man, the world and God, but "a solid and coherent understanding" of them; assimilation of what is perennially valid in our philosophical heritage; something more than a superficial acquaintance with contemporary philosophical investigations; a grasp of the basic principles of the various systems of philosophy

that have been important in the past; an ability to detect the roots of errors in these systems; an ability to disprove these errors; an appreciation of the link between philosophy and the true problems of life (Optatam totius n.15); and a unified and substantial quality in all this (OT n.17).

One might argue that these demands are rather ambitious. But one could hardly argue that they are fulfilled in the even more than average Arts graduate, or that they would justify a lessening of our efforts at philosophical education.

5) The main recommendation of Vatican II regarding the revision of studies for the priesthood would be neglected if the examinable subjects occupying most of the student's time in the years assigned to "philosophy" were taught by a non-Catholic or lay university lecturer who had not devoted himself to the serious study of theology.

Vatican II decreed that "In the revision of ecclesiastical studies the first object in view must be a better integration of philosophy and theology" (OT n.14). A lay lecturer could not be expected to expound English or French or History in a way that facilitated integration of such a subject with theology. Even less could he make this his main aim. Nor could a seminarian be expected, even with help, to develop such integration while under the burden of passing exams in that subject and studying it in the way proposed by the university.

6) If the Bishops at Vatican II had thought of literature and other Arts subjects as included under the term "philosophy" the most obvious place to indicate this would have been in the section of "Gaudium et Spes" (n.62) which deals explicitly with the place of "literature and arts (as well as psychology and sociology)" in "the life of the Church". After commending those who work in these fields and expressing the hope that their contribution could be incorporated in the Liturgy, the Council makes an explicit reference to seminaries. But instead of saying that such subjects are, or should be, taught in the seminaries it recommends that the collaboration be on the part of "those who teach in seminaries, colleges and universities" with men in these other fields.

A further development of this is the recommendation of special courses in the Arts in the Seminaries (Ratio Fundamentalis nn.59-61 (P.P.66-69), 65-69 (74-78), but in courses distinct from the courses in philosophy and theology.

7) That the term "philosophy" has not been widened beyond the meaning ordinarily given to it in seminaries and in Australian universities is apparent in almost every line of the recent letter of Cardinal Garrone. This is seen in the names of some of the schools it contains — phenomenology, existentialism, neo-positivism, relativism, materialism, pantheism; in the long list of its themes; in the insistence on its transcendence, its approach to the most fundamental questions, its striving for synthesis and a coherent vision of reality, its function of evaluation of the choices implicit in the methods of the positive disciplines; even in the recorded criticisms of it as something abstract and complex, something that the positive sciences might claim to have absorbed, something distinct from history and philology. I find it almost impossible to conceive how anyone familiar with this letter as a whole could think of my interpretation as being too strict.

8) In discussing the necessity of philosophy for future priests, Cardinal Garrone explicitly mentions "the entire field of modern culture: literature (novels, essay, poetry, etc.), the theatre, the cinema, radio and television, and even song".

He treats all these as fields that are distinct from philosophy even though they have, today, largely been affected by philosophy:

> *There can be no doubt that the most fundamental problems of philosophy are found today more than ever at the centre of the anxieties of contemporary men, even to the extent of having invaded the entire field of modern culture: literature....and even song".*

And he goes on to say that the problems concerned can be solved only by applying a specifically philosophical approach:

> *Such questions as these pertain to the specific sphere of philosophy, which, transcending all merely exterior and partial aspects of phenomena, addresses itself to the whole of reality, seeking to comprehend and to explain it in the light of ultimate causes.*

9) When Cardinal Garrone does recommend some study of literature ("Also useful is the study of....works selected from literature to better comprehend the problems of today", Part III, section 2) he does it in a way that limits both the purpose and the extent of such study.

He gives this limited study of literature no more weight than a survey of the history of philosophy or of contemporary philosophy, and says that it must be subordinated to "a truly philosophical reflection in the light of secure metaphysical principles" as well as to assistance to "confront and examine the various solutions...to form proper convictions and to arrive at a coherent vision of reality".

10) My argument here may appear to be rather lengthy and an unnecessary insistance on the obvious. My excuse is that the argument given at the head of this section has in fact been used. In the absence of any relevant evidence to support it, I thought it best to go through the documents examining all the information that could affect the issue.

VI. Have the topics which seminary philosophy has traditionally studied been such as are confined, in Australian universities, to the Department of Philosophy, or have they extended to Literature, History, Political Science and Psychology?

1) One could as well ask whether the students themselves were traditionally confined to the seminary grounds throughout the term. They were not so confined but they did spend nearly all of their time there. The question at issue is not whether subjects like literature and experimental psychology were included at all in the traditional curriculum, but whether they were given so much attention that only a small fraction of the student's time was occupied with philosophy proper.

2) Not only were Metaphysics, Epistemology, Cosmology, Ethics, Rational Psychology and Natural Theology the sort of subjects that certainly do belong to a Philosophy Department, but it was insisted that these were the "principal subjects", while the other subjects done during the philosophy years were called "minors" or "auxiliary subjects".

3) The fact that such auxiliary subjects were studied (and were constantly seen in their Catholic setting and dimension) was not dreamt of as a reason for omitting the philosophical majors. So it provides no argument for omitting equivalent philosophical subjects today.

VII. Does the term "kindred subjects" in the "Ratio Fundamentalis" (n.70 (P.P.79) and title of Chapter XI) open the way to Arts subjects alongside the strictly philosophical ones?

1) No. This suggestion is in conflict with the explicit statement of the "Ratio Fundamentalis" as well as with the context of this statement.

2) The conflict with the context is indicated by points 1, 2, and 3 above in my answer to question V: the separate chapter devoted to a general education in Arts and Sciences; the division of three types of intellectual formation made in no.59 (P.P.66); the specification in Chapter XI of the whole content of "Philosophy and Related Sciences".

3) The direct conflict with the text of the "Ratio Fundamentalis" is somewhat hidden in the English translation, since this starts the chapter by saying that "Studies in Philosophy and kindred subjects...must be equivalent to a two-year course" (n.70) (P.P.79), and later says "Related sciences should also be taught" (n.73) (P.P.82), thus concealing the fact that the same terms are used in both cases. The Latin is:

70. *(P.P.79) Studia philosophiae et scientiarum affinium quae...integrum biennium aequare debent*

73. *(P.P.82) Scientiae affines quoque tradantur, quales sunt scientiae naturales et mathematica quoad quaestiones cum philosophia connexas, debita tamen proportione servata, ita ut disciplinis principalibus utile complementum praebeant, et vitetur encyclopaedica et superficialis eruditio.*

The so-called "kindred subjects" are exactly the same as the "related sciences" and so are subject to the restrictions placed on these in n.73 (P.P.82).

4) These "related sciences" are meant to be "of real complementary value to the principal subjects". While not philosophical in themselves they are studied in order to help the study of philosophy, especially by bringing up questions that have to be dealt with in philosophy.

5) Besides this, "a due sense of proportion should be observed". When we look at the tasks assigned to philosophy proper in n.71 (P.P.80), and to the history of philosophy in n.72 (P.P.81), we can hardly conceive of more than about 6 of the 18 units being assigned to the related sciences.

6) A similar proportion is indicated by some earlier passages. The chapter on intellectual formation in general (chapter IX) speaks simply of "philosophical formation" (n.59) (P.P.66), "the study of philosophy" (n.60) (P.P.67), and "Philosophy (n.61b) (P.P.69), without any reference to related sciences — though a reference could be expected if these sciences were not subordinate to the philosophy — and speaks of "studies of a particularly philosophical nature (studiis praecipue philosophicis)" in n.61c (P.P.69), when specifying the minimum of two years. It is clear that the bulk of the two-year course must consist of purely philosophical subjects.

VIII. Would tutorials back at the seminary convert an ordinary university course into a truly philosophical education?

1) I know of one seminary where this has been tried. In the circumstances it would hardly be pertinent for me to comment. We should note, however, that a staff-student ratio of one to four was involved. Would any comparable ratio be possible for the much larger number of diocesan students?

2) A number of other seminaries have had considerable experience of sending their students to the university. Their overwhelming experience

has been that the pressure of work is great enough to make it unwise to expect the students to engage in any serious intellectual activity apart from that demanded by the university.

3) During my three years as a university chaplain I conducted a number of groups of interested and zealous students meeting weekly. I also ran short courses of lectures in philosophy when requested. This enabled those students to integrate their studies with their faith in a way quite satisfactory for the layman, but it hardly put them in a position to help others in a way that one would expect of a priest. On the basis of this experience I do not see how tutorial assistance could transform university subjects into the sort of formation envisaged in Optatam Totius n.15 and in the Ratio Fundamentalis nn.70-74 (P.P. 79-83).

4) Very few, if any, university lecturers would be guided by the insistence in Vatican II that "in the revision of philosophical studies the first object in view must be a better integration of philosophy and theology" (O.T.14) than was likely to be found in seminaries at that time. We can hardly improve the situation without a careful selection of topics in philosophy that are relevant to current theology and to the overall pastoral aim of our studies. Nor should we leave the selection of topics to men who do not share our apostolic aim, who have not studied theology, or who have to cater for many other students whose interests are quite different.

IX. Don't you admit that a university degree would be valuable for a priest?

1) Lest I be misunderstood, I emphatically assert that I am not opposing sending seminarians to the university for a degree.

2) I can see a definite value in the study of Arts (or indeed of Social Science or Law or Science) by a seminarian who has sufficient ability to gain a Commonwealth Scholarship. And I think that the Church needs a number of priests who have done university courses.

3) What I am saying is that the priesthood will suffer seriously if students who do such studies are exempted from the prescribed course of ecclesiastical studies.

4) I am saying also that there is absolutely no ground for such exemption in any of the documents concerned with studies for the priesthood; and that any lessening in the two years devoted to the study of philosophy should be judged as opposed to the mind of the Church just as much as an equivalent lessening of the four years set aside for the study of theology.

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