The third pillar in the Program for Priestly Formation issued for seminarians by the USCCB is the intellectual life. The necessity of intellectual formation is not only necessary for the life of priests but is also necessary with appropriate applications to the life of religious. This is because faith is the source of our religious vocation and though perfect living faith entails charity, one cannot love what one does not know. The bishops express this well for priests: “The first task of intellectual formation is to acquire a personal knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the fullness and completion of God’s revelation and the one Teacher,” (PPF, 137). Though for priests this is essential for apostolic ministry and entails many years of study, religious follow Christ perfectly and so need the same personal knowledge.

The Importance of Philosophy

The first study essential to religious formation is a basic study of philosophy. This, of course, for religious would be based on their ability and the time constraints of formation. The contemporary world is wrought with a denial of objective truth which Pope Benedict characterized as "the dictatorship of relativism" and religious come from that milieu, live community life in its context and must speak apostolically to people formed in it. Even the very idea of an objective truth is highly suspect in contemporary culture.

One can normally presume a high school education today for those entering religious life. One should ensure that this includes a rudimentary understanding of what have traditionally been called the liberal arts. Though young people today are well educated in specific areas of study or computer media, they often lack any sense of history, people or of the philosophical limitations of the general culture. This is further compounded by a culture which follows a philosophy of nature and of the human person which is directly contrary to both sound philosophy and Catholic doctrine. Even in the past, many problems in living the vows, especially of chastity and obedience have been caused by a lack of authentic ethical philosophy. For this reason, those in initial and continuing formation must be encouraged to develop at least a basic understanding of logic, the nature of objective truth and some metaphysical sense. The Program for Priestly Formation recommends among other things that those in formation should learn to "see that human knowledge is capable of gathering from contingent reality objective and necessary truths" (no. 156). Some knowledge of metaphysics is necessary be-
cause as Pope St. John Paul II observes in *Fides et Ratio*: “A philosophy which shuns metaphysics would be radically unsuited to the task of mediation in the understanding of revelation” (no. 83).

The Critical Role of Moral Education

Proper moral education is also necessary in order for religious to appreciate the traditions which are encapsulated in their constitutions in seeking charity and making the vows a means and not an end to holiness. The correct understanding of friendship, obedience, authority and law also depend on a true philosophy of the human person.

Every institute results from an inspiration of a religious founder whose charism is recognized by the Church, leading to the perfection of charity for those who embrace it. For this reason initial formation must include a study of the constitutions of the Order. This study must be clear and concisely presented so that each member can profess their vows with an informed mature consent. However, this must not just be limited to the time of initial formation. Love for the holy rule and the constitutions is essential and so one must view them in the light of the general context of the great panoply of intellectual wisdom contained in Catholic doctrine. In the past, some religious institutes used to ensure this by reading the rule once a week and the constitutions once a year in refectory.

Studying the Catechism of the Catholic Church

Since the vows must be seen in the larger picture of Catholic doctrine, formation must include a thorough study of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Those embracing the religious state must have a complete picture of the foundations of their religion. Today this is sorely lacking and basic catechesis is hardly taught by either parents or the Catholic school. As a result, this lacuna usually must be filled by the religious institute in both initial and ongoing formation. Renewal programs are wonderful for examining certain issues in community life. But they must also include a deeper encounter with Catholic truth taught in a formal sense. Some problems in community life can be more easily resolved if based on the sound principles of Catholic moral theology.

The Church is clear for priests that both the study of perennial philosophy and sound Catholic theology must be based on the study of the ideas of Thomas Aquinas. As the *Program for Priestly Formation* puts it: “Although various theological schools exists within the Catholic tradition, in accord with Church teaching, the significance of St. Thomas Aquinas as the model and guide for study and research in theology should be recognized” (no. 219).

Formal Study of Spiritual Theology

Of course it is also important to formally study spiritual theology. One new religious institute had many problems which led to serious divisions among the members. At a certain point in time, they formally studied spiritual theology and were astonished. They observed that everything they were doing in their community life was wrong. They did this with the best of intentions. Not everything which sounds pious and detached is so in truth. In fact, the Catholic idea of detachment, for example, is quite astonishing for people who study it. It is very sad to find religious who are often experts and even geniuses in what they teach in a school or their practice of medicine or whatever apostolate they embrace who have very little understanding of both the doctrinal and moral teaching of the Catholic Church.

In former times, many religious sisters often said the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary which was invariable and quite short. In the post-Vatican II world many have rightly embraced the recitation of at least...
the major hours of the Divine Office and attempted to introduce a greater solemnity into their participation in the sacrifice of the Mass. Some form of liturgical education is necessary which includes the theology of the Psalms, the Church year and the ceremonies of the Mass. Learning to sing the Liturgy is also important in at least a simplified form. New books and pew missals are now available for both the office and Mass which permit a simplified singing of the Liturgy in more accessible Gregorian chant.

**Lifelong Commitment to Formation**

There is often a tendency in religious life for many reasons to limit intellectual formation to the postulancy and perhaps the novitiate. It is assumed that what was taught there will suffice for a lifetime of struggle and ministry. Also, time and financial constraints make it attractive to limit intellectual formation to this period. Any teacher will be clear that students often retain very little of what they hear for the first time. This must be constantly reinforced and deepened. For this reason, it would be desirable, for example, for each convent or religious house to have a library which includes good reading matter. This reading matter should not just include popular religious books but some formal books of theology. Today DVD and CD lectures are widely available to supplement theological and spiritual learning and could also form a part of this library.

Though *lectio divina* is an ancient and laudable practice, study should not be limited merely to spiritual reading. Spiritual reading has an important place in every religious context but it is different though not completely unrelated to study. Perhaps the major superior or the council could recommend certain books to be included in the library.

In the past, especially among religious women, reading formal theology was discouraged and still in convents there is often little time left for this. But if one wonders why there are so many difficulties in religious life, some can be traced to a lack of high-mindedness which the study of the Catholic religion must enhance. St. Elizabeth of the Trinity used to say: “Get beyond the secondary causes.” The assiduous study of sacred truth is necessary for that.

---

**Informative and Insightful Audio Resources**

**The Fields Are Ripe for the Harvest: Spiritual Reflections on the Promotion of Priestly & Religious Vocations**

by Rev. Thomas Nelson, O.Praem.

To understand the correlation between consecrated life and the New Evangelization this MP3 audio CD is a must! Five vocation talks address the New Millennium, Myths & Misconceptions, the Consecrated Life, Priestly Vocations, and Contemplative Life. (1 MP3 CD) $10.00 (+ S&H)

---

**The Effects of the New Media on Priestly and Religious Vocations**

by Sr. Marysia Weber, R.S.M.

In this audio series, Sr. Marysia, who is a physician certified by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology, discusses the positive and negative effects of the new media on individuals and on priestly and religious vocations. The new technologies’ impact on the work of catechesis and evangelization is also closely examined. (set of 3 CDs) $19.95 (+ S&H); (1 MP3 CD) $10.00 (+ S&H)

---

**Glorify God in Your Body: The Theology of the Body for Priests, Religious & Other Consecrated Persons**

by Rev. Brian Mullady, O.P.

John Paul II gave the Church a great gift in the Theology of the Body. Fr. Mullady shows how the Pontif’s teaching on human sexuality provides the spiritual insight to deepen one’s commitment to live with “an undivided heart” and to serve as an eschatological witness of the Kingdom. 64 pp. $8.95 (+S&H); (set of 3 CDs) $19.95 (+S&H); (1 MP3 CD) $10.00 (+S&H)

---

To order using credit card call 847-573-8975 or order online at ReligiousLife.com

By mail, send check/money order payable to:

INSTITUTE ON RELIGIOUS LIFE | P.O. Box 7500, Libertyville, IL 60048-7500