

# Forming Seminarians for Ministry to Marriage and Family

*"In order to confront the enormous difficulties which they meet today, families need expert spiritual guides and sound doctrine." But "when priests leave the seminary nowadays, are they adequately prepared to satisfy" the pastoral needs related to marriage and the family?" The Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education posed that question in its "Directives on the Formation of Seminarians Concerning Problems Related to Marriage and the Family" released June 6. "Preparation in the seminaries for pastoral work with families will achieve its true ends only when all, whether the formators or those being formed, are convinced of its essential and undeniable importance," the directives say. The text says that "the multiplication of special courses and subjects must be avoided as far as possible," and calls instead for interdisciplinary cooperation among already-existing subjects "and the organization of all teaching in such a way that the topic of the family would become an internal dimension of pastoral and intellectual formation." In its discussion of intellectual formation, the directives stress that "the quality of married spirituality and the pastoral action of the priest" depends on "teaching which is doctrinally secure, which adheres to the church's magisterium." In the area of moral theology, the text suggests, the social dimension of marriage and family problems ranges from divorce to unemployment, from contraception to the rights of women and children in the work force, from abortion to changing roles in the family. The primary scope of the priest's spiritual assistance is to help "spouses to develop their family more and more into the 'domestic church,'" say the directives. In the area of spiritual formation, the directives urge that fami-*

*lies be considered "not only as the object but also as the acting subject of apostolic endeavor." In the area of pastoral formation, the directives urge that future priests develop "a very realistic 'pastoral vision' of the present-day crisis in families." Mixed marriages, ministry to the divorced, premarital catechesis, responsible fatherhood and motherhood, the effects of mass media on the home and numerous other points are discussed. The Vatican's English text of the directives follows.*

## Introduction

1. The celebration in the church of the Year of the Family, which has just ended, has offered this congregation an opportunity to direct the attention of the episcopal conferences to the particular importance which must be given to problems of marriage and family life in the formation of priests. Although this topic is present in formation programs and therefore figures in both practical education and studies, there is still need for new doctrinal, moral, spiritual and pastoral developments and new emphases responding to the reality and urgency of the present situation. In fact, according to Pope John Paul II, today the family and life must be placed "at the center of the new evangelization," and they must become "the object of serious and systematic study and reflection in seminaries, in houses of formation and in institutions" (address to presidents of Latin American episcopal commissions for the family, March 18, 1993).

2. As can be seen from many official documents of the church and from different congresses and discussions which have taken place recently on this subject, the tasks awaiting future priests in this field of ministry are, with respect

to the past, much more delicate, more demanding and above all more complex. This means on the one hand proclaiming the newness and the beauty of the "divine truth about the family" (cf. John Paul II, "Letter to Families," 18, 23) and accompanying the Christian family toward the perfection of charity, and on the other, confronting situations of crisis and the spreading of doctrines, conceptions of life and customs which are contrary to the Gospel and the true good of the human person. In short, the spiritual and material needs of Christian families today are notably increasing and therefore need the assistance of pastors who are not only sensitive to such problems, but are also experts in the realities of life and doctrinally sound.

It is with reference to this state of affairs that we can here ask two questions: When priests leave the seminary nowadays, are they adequately prepared to satisfy these pastoral needs? And, if not, what must we do to ensure that that preparation be improved and become ever more efficient and complete?

## I. Present State of Formation

3. Given the great diversity of situations found throughout the world, the answer to the first two questions cannot help but be different in every case. In order to formulate its judgment on the actual state of formation, this congregation took as a basis the results of a special survey previously carried out through the episcopal conferences, information furnished by the apostolic visitation to the seminaries and the *ad limina* visits of the bishops, direct contacts with local bodies, the consultation of experts and the opinion of diocesan and parish communities: This last being an excellent measure of the quality of the



formation being given in the seminaries and of the relative hopes and wishes of Christian married couples.

We can say that this multiplicity of data, considered as a whole, allows us to formulate some conclusions of a general character which show up various needs and common tendencies in the work of formation.

4. At first glance, the topic of matrimony and the family is not overlooked in ecclesiastical studies. It is usually integrated into the teaching of dogmatic theology (treatise on creation), sacramental theology (sacrament of matrimony), moral theology (problems of married life: relations between the partners, between parents and children, education), pastoral theology (chapter on the pastoral care of families), canon law (conditions for the valid celebration of the sacrament of marriage) and liturgy (the rite of the sacrament of marriage). Here we are speaking of disciplines and topics which are fundamental and in a certain sense "traditional" and which are present more or less in all seminaries even if the method of teaching them differs from one place to another according to the structural and organizational arrangements of the individual institutions.

5. Nevertheless, what matters more today in this regard is not so much the material organization of the teaching but rather its quality and effectiveness. To judge from the experiences gathered as well as from various criticisms and from the feeling of dissatisfaction which is being shown here and there from the pedagogical, doctrinal and practical-pastoral points of view, we must conclude that this subject matter is not being treated with that accuracy and fullness which is necessary in order to provide the church with pastors who are well prepared for this field of the apostolate; who are capable of "setting forth without ambiguity the church's teaching on marriage" (Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, 28), of enlightening and forming consciences, of promoting a competent and stimulating collaboration with apostolically active families and of providing a new thrust to the profound renewal of the whole field of pastoral care of families.

6. With regard to the more properly doctrinal, dogmatic, moral, spiritual and liturgical aspect, there is a widespread impression that on the one hand teaching is not balanced enough, especially in moral theology, and on the other that there is lacking a clear perception of its objectives and of the principles of an authentic theological research. On the subject of the family and married life, in fact, objections to the magisterium of the church are not rare nor are

tendencies to an exaggerated emphasis on psychology and sociology and a certain one-sidedness which restricts the treatment of the whole subject to some partial aspects, leading to a lack of completeness and integrity. At the same time it is frequently noted that some important tasks proposed by the Second Vatican Council and the subsequent official documents of the church are neglected; for example, a more accurate philosophical and biblical foundation for the anthropology which underpins marriage, a more profound study of the natural methods of family planning and, above all, a more complete and deeper theological exposition of the truth regarding the family and of the spirituality of marriage which is indispensable for ensuring that families continue to progress in the apostolic spirit and become motivating forces in the spiritual renewal of Christian communities and of civil society.

7. The gravity and the complexity of the serious ethical, medical, juridical and economic problems in the present-day situation of the family reveal increasingly how future priests' preparation for the apostolate in this field depends to a great extent on the quality of the intellectual formation which they receive in the seminaries. Ecclesiastical studies are not everywhere at the required level, however. In the first place the study of philosophy creates serious problems; philosophy nowadays is called upon more and more to contribute to the solution of fundamental anthropological problems as well as to the interpretation and application of scientific data. This leads us to understand that a solid preparation for pastoral care of families must offer a very accurate and complete intellectual formation, both philosophical and theological, which can only be guaranteed by seminaries which are well-organized and efficient in the academic field.

---

"Problems of a particular nature arise in the preparation of future priests for the ministry of reconciliation, for spiritual direction and for the formation of the consciences of the faithful."

---

8. Problems of a particular nature arise in the preparation of future priests for the ministry of reconciliation, for spiritual direction and for the formation of the consciences of the faithful. In this regard the expectations and requests of Christian spouses are often heard; but in many cases they do not receive an adequate response. They are looking for confessors and spiritual directors with

strong moral criteria and expertise in the ways of evangelical perfection, but they say that they experience some difficulty in finding them.

At times they meet priests who seem little interested in this ministry or who are not well prepared. According to the apostolic exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, "Every priest must be trained for the ministry of sacramental penance from his years in the seminary, not only through the study of dogmatic, moral, spiritual and pastoral theology (which are simply parts of a whole), but also through the study of the human sciences, training in dialogue and especially in how to deal with people in the pastoral context" (No. 29).

This strong reminder has been followed in more recent times by many others. However, as can be gathered from a variety of signs, the general crisis in sacramental confession and spiritual direction has not yet been overcome, notwithstanding the fact that here and there a greater need for them has again been noticed. This raises the question of whether this state of affairs is not due, at least in part, to deficiencies in formation and to the lifestyle in the seminaries.

9. In recent times the specifically pastoral formation, both theoretical and practical, for family ministry has benefited from some notable advantages: first of all from the orientations given by the papal magisterium, from the apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, from the Pontifical Council for the Family and from national and diocesan pastoral plans. So, too, from the fact that within pastoral ministry as a whole, alongside the various elements of the community and the different states of life (men, women, young people, the elderly, etc.), the family has acquired its own specific profile, which makes it possible to identify and confront its true problems. As a consequence, the preparation of those aspiring to the priesthood for pastoral work in this field has become richer and more realistic than in the past.

10. On the other hand, however, these promising developments come up against certain obstacles: There is a shortage of teachers skilled in this subject matter; not all of the professors have enjoyed sufficient pastoral experience; study programs are already overloaded and do not allow for the treatment of problems concerning marriage and the family with the needed fullness and depth. Moreover, the practical fruit of this teaching is at times diminished due to doctrinal uncertainty and instability and to an insufficient coordination of the various disciplines.

11. The seminarians' practical pas-



toral experiences, perceived as increasingly necessary, are more successful in dioceses which are rich in initiatives on behalf of families (counselors, groups and movements); initiatives which allow for a more exact vision of reality and give, above all, the possibility of testing and refining the capacity for communication and authentic human relationships. Such pastoral exercises, however, have so far achieved little success, either because in many seminaries the formators do not provide accompaniment, supervision and evaluation of them or because the young men are considered immature for this kind of apostolate and often do not feel themselves particularly attracted to it. In addition, the students' going out in the evening or nighttime to take part in meetings of family groups often disturbs the discipline of the seminary.

12. Besides the omissions and difficulties already mentioned, it must also be remembered that new possibilities and new perspectives are emerging in this area of formation. New impetus comes not only from above, but also, so to speak, from "below": from the parishes and from associations which bring the seminaries into contact with families and their problems. Therefore, an increasing number of refresher courses and courses of instruction for formators and seminarians are being organized, usually with the help of those working in the pastoral care of families and of various apostolic groups, drawing attention to the help which is expected from the priestly ministry in this field.

---

"Besides the omissions and difficulties already mentioned, it must also be remembered that new possibilities and new perspectives are emerging in this area of formation. New impetus comes not only from above, but also, so to speak, from 'below': from the parishes and from associations which bring the seminaries into contact with families and their problems."

---

From such interventions, until now rather sporadic and occasional, we must move toward the fulfillment of more systematic and more demanding programs, devised with the necessary competence and breadth of vision, which would take sufficient account of the main doctrinal, spiritual and pastoral problems discussed today. However, preparation in the seminaries for pastoral work with families

will achieve its true ends only when all, whether the formators or those being formed, are convinced of its essential and undeniable importance and effectively make the family "the first and the most important" way of their ministry (cf. "Letter to Families," 2).

In this context, therefore, our second question about how to improve the situation appears even more opportune.

## II. What Can Be Done to Render This Formation More Complete and More Effective?

13. In order to deal adequately with the many and delicate problems related to marriage and the family in the world today, priests need an authentic pastoral spirit and true competence. It follows that this aspect of the formation program must be accurately revised and, if necessary, qualitatively improved.

14. Each step which is undertaken in this direction must be guided by a clear vision of the scope and the aims of this field of the sacred ministry: The family apostolate is a task which does not belong only to the few priests who are or who will be entrusted with it, but is today an essential and, one might say, omnipresent dimension of the Christian apostolate, which all priests are called to carry out in different ways and levels of commitment. It is a question, therefore, of providing those who are preparing themselves for the priesthood with the tools of formation which will enable them effectively to fulfill this important and difficult apostolate.

15. The multiplicity of formative topics and tasks in this field demands a careful coordination between the initial formation of the seminary and continuing formation. It must be clearly decided what has to be treated in the seminary courses and what should be left until after priestly ordination. In choosing the topics, account should be taken, among other things, of the students' level of maturity. In fact, certain matters concerning married life can only receive the necessary breadth and precision of treatment in the context of actual pastoral practice. But even during the first years of the sacred ministry we must proceed with a proper gradualness in responsibilities, ensuring that the new priests are supported by more mature and more expert pastors.

16. In further developing and deepening the topic of the family, the multiplication of special courses and subjects must be avoided as far as possible. Rather, in this regard, interdisciplinary cooperation is recommended between the subjects already existing and the organization of all teaching in such a way

that the topic of the family would become an internal dimension of pastoral and intellectual formation. Such a thorough coordination of teaching, which is foreseen, moreover, by the decree *Optatam Totius* (No. 17) and by the *Ratio Fundamentalis* (Nos. 80, 90), will only be achieved, however, with the help and supervision of a true specialist in family and marriage problems. In such a way the topic of the family and marriage will be duly emphasized, and attempts to create a specific course to deal with all relative aspects, as has been suggested here and there, will be seen as less advisable.

17. Particular organizational problems arise in faculties of theology where a good number of seminarians pursue their studies. First cycle academic courses are usually overloaded and concern primarily the scientific study of the main theological subjects. Their foremost task, therefore, will be that of presenting the students with a more developed exposition, both from the speculative and positive point of view, of the doctrinal and moral principles concerning marriage and the family, so that they will be capable of sustaining and defending their validity and of applying them to the reality of life.

At the same time efforts will have to be made to insert into the programs certain indispensable auxiliary pastoral subjects and seminars, notwithstanding the obvious restrictions of space and time. If, in spite of good intentions, shortcomings were to be identified, they would have to be made up for in the second cycle (possibly in the "pastoral year" foreseen by Article 74.2 of the apostolic constitution *Sapientia Christiana*) or with supplementary lessons organized in the seminaries or colleges.

18. Provision must also be made so that with a certain frequency students choose topics concerning marriage and the family for their specialization and their dissertations in the second cycle and for their doctoral theses in the third cycle.

19. The choices of subjects to be introduced, renewed or developed in the programs will depend on prevailing local pastoral and cultural conditions. Helpful guidelines can be provided by the episcopal conferences and in a concrete way by national and diocesan family pastoral plans.

After these problems of a more general nature, let us turn now to some particular tasks to be addressed in intellectual, spiritual and pastoral formation.

### A. Intellectual Formation

20. First to be underlined is the teachers' responsibility to present the full and authentic



truth on man, particularly on the two fundamental vocations of the Christian life: the vocation to virginity and the vocation to marriage, and their reciprocal relationship, and on the "two dimensions of conjugal union, the unitive and the procreative," which "cannot be artificially separated without damaging the deepest truth of the conjugal act itself" ("Letter to Families," 12). As the Holy Father explicitly affirms with reference to the encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, "only if the truth about the freedom and the communion of persons in marriage and in the family can regain its splendor will the building of the civilization of love truly begin and will it then be possible to speak concretely — as the council did — about 'promoting the dignity of marriage and the family'" (ibid., 13). Thus, on teaching which is doctrinally secure, which adheres to the church's magisterium and is developed under both the positive and the speculative aspects depends also the quality of married spirituality and the pastoral action of the priest.

"A profound and well thought out knowledge of the truth about marriage and the family presupposes a serious philosophical reflection inspired by sound principles."

21. A profound and well thought out knowledge of the truth about marriage and the family presupposes a serious philosophical reflection inspired by sound principles. It must highlight the basic concepts of anthropology, for example the person, his fulfillment in intersubjectivity, his destiny, his inalienable rights, his "nuptial character" as one of the primary elements which is expressive of human nature and constitutive of society. It is recommended that the necessary attention be dedicated to these topics in the philosophy courses, thus providing a sound metaphysical basis for the whole teaching on the family and sexuality.

22. In the teaching of philosophy, which is completed with data from history, sociology and ethnography, one seeks to explain how the present crisis of marriage and the institution of the family is rooted in currents of thought from the past and is nothing other than a clear manifestation of the profound crisis of spiritual, ethical and cultural values which today permeates the whole of humanity. Seen in such a context, the pastoral duties for which the young men in the seminary are preparing themselves will acquire their true dimension, appearing among other things as a

serious and intelligent service to the truth and to the construction of a new civilization more worthy of man.

23. The choice of subjects of a philosophical and scientific nature in bioethics should be made with reference to the demands of moral theology, which needs accurately evaluated scientific data for the competent treatment of the foremost problems of married life and the family. Different questions of this kind can eventually be referred to pastoral medicine in order to benefit from the contributions of medical science.

24. In fact, for moral theology, "even more than the other theological disciplines, it is necessary to bear in mind the results of the natural and human sciences, and also of human experience; while these cannot ever find or absolutely create the rules of morality, nevertheless they can throw much light on the situation and on the behavior of man" (Congregation for Catholic Education, "The Theological Formation of Future Priests," 99, Feb. 22, 1976; cf. 54-58).

25. Many elements for an appropriate thematic renewal of the various disciplines in this field (dogmatic, sacramental, moral and pastoral theology and canon law) are contained, in great part, in the documents of the papal magisterium: the encyclicals *Humanae Vitae* and *Veritatis Splendor*, the apostolic exhortations *Familiaris Consortio* and *Christifideles Laici*, the apostolic letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, the "Letter to Families" *Gratissimam Sanam* and in many other declarations of the Holy Father and of the dicasteries of the Holy See (cf. in particular the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's declaration *Persona Humana*, instruction *Donum Vitae* and letter to the bishops of the Catholic Church on the pastoral care of homosexuals). A truly imposing doctrinal and pastoral corpus which, considered as a whole, must be integrated into the various disciplines — according to the nature of the individual topics — in order to clarify and develop different theological concepts: to illustrate the genuine nature and identity of the family, to enrich the theology of the family/domestic church, as well as to offer pertinent and well thought out responses to various current problems: vocation to evangelical perfection, inviolability of the marriage bond, defense of life.

26. In order to make the preparation of future priests for family ministry more consistent and more effective, the teaching of dogmatic and sacramental theology must cast the light of faith upon the object and the ends of that preparation. Seminarians must be guided to become ever more familiar with the true Christian and supernatural dignity of marriage and the family, seeing it in the context of the work of creation, of re-

demption and of the mystery of the church. Indeed, in this way the essential role of Christian spouses in the whole economy of salvation will shine out, with all its implications of an intense sacramental life and of the vocation to holiness. This newness of the life in Christ sprung from the paschal mystery as a share in the love of the Trinitarian life, which reveals to spouses themselves and also to future pastors of souls the great enrichment and perfection of natural human life which derive from it, indicates at the same time the true and ultimate ends toward which every apostolate in this field must tend.

27. The teaching of moral theology, which is strictly related to the teaching of dogma, is primarily responsible for the formation in the future priests of fundamental convictions and attitudes regarding the family apostolate. It must be scientifically serious and doctrinally secure so that it may refine their pastoral capabilities and nourish their apostolic enthusiasm. While it seems to illustrate the objective norms of matrimonial morality, it will be concerned also with "particular circumstances" (cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, 77ff) and difficult cases, offering to the future pastors of souls pastoral orientations and responses, together with directions for the prudent use of the human sciences. Fidelity to the magisterium will allow them "to make every effort to be united in their judgments in order to avoid troubling the consciences of the faithful" (ibid., 73).

28. Canon law, which applies the principles of the faith and of morality to the concrete circumstances of life, constitutes an important component of family ministry, with its body of legislation relative to the conditions for the valid celebration of the sacrament of marriage and for the defense of the matrimonial bond. A conscientious study of canon law, properly open to the problems raised by modern life and by the progress of the human, biological and medical sciences, must provide future priests with the necessary help to enable them to accompany and assist those about to be married, those already married and those whose marriage is in danger. Therefore it is also necessary to give them some knowledge of the processes of nullity of marriage and of the practice of marriage tribunals as well as the civil laws which directly or indirectly relate to the family. Therefore, an attentive study of the Holy See's "Charter of the Rights of the Family" is to be recommended.

29. The social dimension of marriage and family problems, especially of those which are indicative of situations of crisis, come within the scope of the social doctrine of the church. To the questions treated in moral theology from the point of view of personal ethics such



as divorce, contraception, abortion, artificial insemination, etc., many others of an economic or sociocultural character can be here added (such as unemployment, family wage, rights of the family, women and children in the work force, new models of marital cohabitation, changing "roles" in the family, the position of women in society, schooling, family housing, drugs, handicaps, migration, free time, etc.). All of these to be studied in the light of permanent principles and values, of criteria of judgment and of directions for action. The study of the social doctrine of the church has many points of contact with pastoral theology (in particular with "social ministry") and for this reason demands a good interdisciplinary coordination.

30. For its investigations it makes use of contributions from the human and positive sciences (biology, medicine, psychology, economics, ethnology), as well as the results of various sociological and demographic analyses and inquiries. In using such data, "the danger must be avoided of falling into the snares of ideologies that manipulate the interpretation of data or into positivism, which overevaluates empirical data to the detriment of an overall understanding of man and the world" (Congregation for Catholic Education, "Guidelines for the Study and Teaching of the Church's Social Doctrine in the Formation of Priests," 68; cf. 10).

### B. Spiritual Formation

31. The first and necessary presupposition for providing spiritual assistance to Christian spouses and their families is the human and Christian maturity of the pastor. On this account, both of these aspects of the future priest's personality should be closely monitored and attended to from the first years of seminary life. It is necessary, above all, that the newness and the beauty of the relationship between the call to virginity and the call to marriage should shine forth before them as two dimensions of the one vocation to holiness; this always being considered in the light of the constant tradition and magisterium of the church (cf. Pius XII, encyclical *Sacra Virginitas*, March 25, 1954).

32. As future confessors and spiritual directors, the students must be formed in such a way that, more and more, they discover the beauty and the importance of the sacrament of penance and of spiritual direction, in order to be the first to have frequent recourse to them. In fact, according to the apostolic exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, priests cannot worthily and fruitfully exercise this ministry without being first beneficiaries of it: "If a priest were no longer to go to confession or properly confess his sins, his priestly being and his

priestly action would feel its effects very soon, and this would also be noticed by the community of which he was the pastor" (No. 31, VI).

"Based on actual experiences, it has been shown that the human attitudes of future priests toward family ministry are often disturbed by the irregular situation of their own families."

33. Based on actual experiences, it has been shown that the human attitudes of future priests toward family ministry are often disturbed by the irregular situation of their own families. In such cases various psychological factors make difficult the seminarians' involvement in this field of activity. Therefore it is necessary to offer them appropriate help in order to overcome these difficulties by means of sensitive educational interventions. An effective remedy for them later on will be the experience of community found in the diocesan presbyterate, in which they will be able to find a new spiritual family and therefore also the possibility of perfecting their capacities for relationships and contacts with the Christian families entrusted to them. Indeed, their own past experiences can make them more fit to respond with true human tact to various difficult pastoral situations.

34. Preparation for the spiritual care of families cannot and must not be unilaterally reduced to problems of a sexual nature. However, because of their importance and complexity, these require of the future priest, over and above sound knowledge, some essential human qualities: "Above all, those who are entrusted with sex education have to be themselves persons who are sexually mature and balanced. Even more than a knowledge of method and subject matter, in sex education it is the personality of the educator that really counts. It is the way he practices what he preaches and the style of life he adopts and lives that matter. Knowledge, correct advice and solicitude for the student are important in the teacher, but even more important is the educator's own personal conduct" (Congregation for Catholic Education, "A Guide to Formation in Priestly Celibacy," 39).

35. The primary scope of the priest's spiritual assistance is that of helping the spouses to develop their family more and more into the "domestic church," the "first community of evangelization" (cf. Santo Domingo document, 64), "the basic cell of society," "the primary place of humanization for the person and society" (cf. *Christifideles Laici*,

40). And so the future priest must be formed to accompany and to stimulate families in their apostolic involvement, above all in their help to each other on the way of evangelical perfection and sanctification. The internal building up of so many families demands that the future priest learn to be, above all, a master of prayer, concerned that families pray, teach how to pray, practice works of charity, participate in the eucharistic sacrifice with holy communion, approach the sacrament of penance and take initiatives for teaching their children catechism and for preparing them for the first reception of the sacraments of penance and the eucharist. In addition, it is necessary to create and cultivate in families a sensitivity toward a priestly, missionary or religious vocation in the children.

36. In the spiritual formation of families today the necessity of considering them not only as the object but also as the acting subject of apostolic endeavor is becoming more and more apparent: "It is above all the lay faithful's duty in the apostolate to make the family aware of its identity as the primary social nucleus and its basic role in society so that it might itself become always a more active and responsible place for proper growth and participation in social life" (*Christifideles Laici*, 40). Contacts with various family groups and movements and information on their life and activity will provide the seminarians with useful guidelines about the implementation of such spiritual objectives, which will be of help for the preparation of their future priestly ministry.

37. An effective spiritual assistance to families presupposes a good knowledge of their situation and related problems. In this regard the future priests must be well instructed, above all, on the difficulties and the urgency of the educational tasks: how to overcome tensions between authority, the demands of obedience and a legitimate freedom; how to bring about relationships of mutual trust and giving between parents and children; the demands of a prudent and gradual sex education, of a responsible use of television and the other means of mass media (cinema, the press, etc.); questions of an appropriate and free choice of one's state in life. According to the Holy Father, it is necessary to pray and to strive "so that families will persevere in their task of education with courage, trust and hope" ("Letter to Families," 16), helping them so that they may form "strong convictions," which often constitute the only defense to be had against the inevitable difficulties of life.

### C. Pastoral Formation

38. From what has been said above, it is clear that the



topic of marriage and the family must occupy a primary and truly central place in theoretical and practical pastoral formation.

39. Pastoral theology, which is deeply rooted in dogma and sound moral principles, will study the practical applications of theological solutions, taking account of concrete situations. Its task will be that of laying foundations for a well-formulated plan of action which avoids timidity on the one hand and inopportune or misguided steps on the other. Therefore, in laying down a secure path for family ministry, pastoral theology will seek, at the same time, to correct various pastoral attitudes not in conformity with the magisterium which are found here and there.

40. In drawing up the program of instruction, account must be taken of the material and formal object of pastoral theology in order to define its field in relation to the other theological disciplines concerned with marriage and the family under different aspects.

41. To ensure the usefulness and practical effectiveness of instruction it is of great importance to have a very realistic "pastoral vision" of the present-day crisis in families; a vision which takes account of some of its most typical traits, for example: religious ignorance, lack of education, breakup of the state education system, moral disorientation which leads to proceeding in life "by trial and error," predominant influence of the mass media, progressive growth of "trial" marriages, of free unions, relational difficulties in marriage, separation from traditional forms and spontaneous invention of new models of life, conditioning which in certain cultural zones derives from old tribal and ancestral customs, situations of extreme material poverty, etc.

42. Future priests must be familiar with the pastoral implications of these realities so that they can help the faithful to form themselves and make their choices within a strong normative context, capable of influencing their lives.

43. With regard to the questions to be treated in teaching, preferably those should be chosen which in general are of greater concern to families today and therefore demand special attention from the pastor of souls. For example:

44. The religious practice of children: how to encourage them to pray with their parents freely, according to a gradual plan, so as to avoid "rejection" when they become grown-up and more autonomous. The same problem is found regarding attendance at Mass and the sacraments.

45. The position of the Catholic school and the commitment to its defense and promotion.

46. A critical and respon-

sible use of the means of social communication. Nowadays, this topic is of great importance for the moral well-being of families insofar as a large part of the formation actually possessed by parents and children, and priests too, is strongly conditioned by cultural and behavioral patterns proposed by the media (cf. Congregation for Catholic Education, "Guide to the Training of Future Priests Concerning the Instruments of Social Communication," March 19, 1986).

47. The gravity of certain economic and social situations and the efforts to overcome them.

48. Careful coordination, in favor of the family, among those people whose professional, political, social, economic, etc., activity has some relation to the family and its conditions of life and development (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 52). Such an important ministry demands much time and generosity and a particular preparation of the priest in order to carry it out effectively. Here the teaching of pastoral theology will meet that of the social doctrine of the church.

49. The pastoral treatment of the problem of responsible fatherhood and motherhood and the regulation of births: how to ward off contraception, the practice of abortion, how to assess the activity of family advice centers (the need for correct information and sound discernment); information about centers for the diffusion of natural methods of regulation of births, about their activity and the relative results: trust in the possibility of positive solutions to the problem.

---

"Pastoral ministry to the divorced, especially to those who have remarried in civil ceremonies: their position in the parish community. 'It is necessary to instruct these faithful so that they do not think their participation in the life of the church is reduced exclusively to the question of the reception of the eucharist.'"

---

50. The future priests must be instructed with particular care about the preparation and celebration of the sacrament of marriage: premarriage catechesis on the requirements, the human and spiritual needs and the nature of Christian marriage; instruction of the engaged couple concerning the duties and the rights of married people; post-marriage catechesis; the liturgical rite of the celebration of marriage; the often decisive importance of these pastoral interventions for the entire subsequent religious life of the couple and their family.

51. Pastoral and canonical aspects of mixed marriages: the form of the celebration; rights and duties of the Catholic partner, above all as regards the baptism and religious education of the children; the problem of pastoral care (cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, 78).

52. Pastoral ministry to the divorced, especially to those who have remarried in civil ceremonies: their position in the parish community. "It is necessary to instruct these faithful so that they do not think their participation in the life of the church is reduced exclusively to the question of the reception of the eucharist. The faithful are to be helped to deepen their understanding of the value of sharing in the sacrifice of Christ in the Mass, of spiritual communion, of prayer, of meditation on the word of God, and of works of charity and justice" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, letter to bishops, "Concerning the Reception of Holy Communion by Divorced and Remarried Members of the Faithful, 6, Sept. 14, 1994; cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, 84).

53. Pastoral care of families in difficult situations: drugs, handicaps, AIDS and other terminal illnesses; economic difficulties; single elderly spouses without children or abandoned by their children, etc. (cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, 71). These are questions which demand, among other things, the knowledge of some fundamental elements of pastoral medicine and pastoral psychology.

54. Notwithstanding the various difficulties, the practical pastoral formation of those who will be pastors of souls in this important field must be suitably strengthened and enriched by new help and impetus. The one who is especially charged with pastoral activities in the seminary, in conjunction with the teacher of pastoral theology, will choose experiences and fields of apostolate which are appropriate to the maturity of the students, directing them preferably toward those areas which can better contribute to the improvement of their pastoral capabilities: guided contacts with family movements and associations; visits to diocesan tribunals, to family advice centers and other centers of family ministry; invitations to the seminary of people involved in the family apostolate and married couples involved in the apostolate in order to find out about their experiences; common reflection on various pastorally significant cases and their analysis in the light of the documents of the Holy See and of the local churches. Much attention must also be devoted to the problem of appropriate language and communication.

### III. Practical Recommendations

In order that seminaries and other institutions for priestly formation may provide that contribution to the spiritual renewal of families demanded by



present-day circumstances, which have been illustrated with a wealth of detail by the Holy Father, it is necessary:

55. To reserve an important place for this subject in the *rationes institutionis sacerdotalis* and in the related programs of study, and to draw up, according to circumstances, particular educational guidelines for different aspects of formation which would be adapted to the situation of the particular diocese or region.

56. To render the topic of marriage and the family more conspicuous in the various disciplines and to ensure an effective interdisciplinary cooperation for it, each seminary must have a specialist in this field formed in an institute of special studies such as the Institute for the Study of Marriage and the Family of the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome.

57. Where candidates for the priesthood attend faculties of theology, it is necessary to provide for an appropriate coordination of pastoral formation between these and the seminaries.

---

"The desired renewal of a moral order more in conformity with Christian requirements can only be brought about by the cooperation of authentic pastors of souls, who are sensitive toward human weaknesses and also seriously concerned for the respect due to the inviolable divine laws."

---

58. It will be necessary to strengthen the entire formational effectiveness of the seminaries and, in particular, the organization of studies. The professors of the individual philosophical and theological disciplines must be outstanding not only for their scientific competence, but also for their attachment to

the church's magisterium and for their strong sense of church. Under the guidance of the episcopal commissions for seminaries and for the doctrine of the faith, courses of methodological and scientific renewal should be organized for them.

59. In addition, episcopal conferences and diocesan bishops must remind teachers of their duty to be faithful to the solemn and ordinary magisterium (*Lumen Gentium*, 25), calling to their attention that any failings in this regard are incompatible with the *munus docendi* in institutions of priestly formation. The professors must become ever more aware that unity of judgment and of criteria in matrimonial morality is the *sine qua non* for a pastorally valid formation of future priests and for tranquility of conscience for Christian married people.

60. Ongoing formation is an essential and irreplaceable component of formation for the family apostolate and must therefore be systematic, truly efficient and coordinated with the seminary program of studies.

61. The libraries of seminaries and theological faculties must be provided with books, reviews and various scientific publications concerning this subject so that the teachers and the seminarians may be kept informed of developments in the scientific and pastoral field.

62. In every seminary the systematic study of the official documents of the church must be promoted, giving particular attention to the guidelines of the Pontifical Council for the Family and the national and diocesan commissions for the family.

63. Each local ordinary, within a reasonable lapse of time, is requested to report to the Congregation for Catholic Education on the measures which he has taken or which he intends to take in order to implement these formation guidelines.

#### Conclusion

64. In formulating the present call

for a radical renewal of the preparation of future priests for the family apostolate, this congregation is well aware that it is echoing the wishes of the Holy Father and the bishops as well as many families. In order to confront the enormous difficulties which they meet today, families need expert spiritual guides and sound doctrine. Undoubtedly, the desired renewal of a moral order more in conformity with Christian requirements can only be brought about by the cooperation of authentic pastors of souls, who are sensitive toward human weaknesses and also seriously concerned for the respect due to the inviolable divine laws. The gravity of the present-day situation, so often underlined by the Holy Father, involves everyone, particularly those responsible for priestly formation. It is not so much an invitation to review certain individual aspects of the seminary life as much as to look again at the entire work of formation in its intellectual, spiritual and pastoral aspects.

65. In this document we have sought to highlight only some of the most urgent educational needs, entrusting to the pastoral care of the bishops the task of deepening and adapting these guidelines in reference to their specific local circumstances. In substance, it is a question of ensuring for the subject of family ministry that central position in the whole system of formation which will enable it to launch the desired spiritual and moral renewal of the church and consequently of the entire human family. And this task is demanded not only in order to safeguard the spiritual good of the faithful, but also to provide the essential basis for a secure social progress and a better future for humanity.

Rome, given at the offices of the congregation, March 19, 1995, solemnity of St. Joseph. ✠

Cardinal Pio Laghi  
Prefect

Archbishop Jose Saraiva Martins  
Secretary