



Curriculum Theologiae

Theology Formation of Candidates to Priesthood in an International Congregation: Emerging Challenges

Perspectives from the Claretian Congregation

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Claretians and their formation scenario

Claretian congregation (CMF) is founded by St. Anthony Mary Claret in Vic, Spain, in 1849. It is a relatively small institute of consecrated life in the Church missioning in 64 countries around the globe. Here is a quick view:

Claretians in the world	3000
Formation centers	84
Philosophy institutes managed by CMF	4
Theology institutes managed by CMF	2
Institutes of Theology of Consecrated Life	4
Total candidates and formees	1502
Students of theology	317 in 25 centers
Students of philosophy	443 in 27 centers

The institutes of theology and philosophy managed by the congregation are open to the students of other congregations or dioceses. But most of our students study theology and philosophy in faculties or institutes run by episcopal conferences or other religious congregations.

The formation program

In most institutes that our students frequent, theology studies are separate from philosophy studies, though in three places, the formation is combined in an integrated program of philosophy and theology. In duration philosophy studies vary from 2 to 4 years and theology studies is generally a program of 4 years at the bachelor level. Generally, a young man who starts his formative itinerary in the congregation takes 8 to 12 years for his initial formation. For our candidates to priesthood, the study of theology is the final phase of their initial formation and it is by far, the longest period of academic preparation.

Almost all the formation houses are intercultural in their nature as students from various cultural and linguistic groups form the community. In Asia and Africa the medium of language is one of the European languages. The intercultural context is found to favor greater personal growth and broader vision in the students.

I like to situate the study of theology within the larger frame of formation because the formation concerns the whole person who is called to conform to Christ in order to serve the people of God

and to serve the Church. Study of theology has a privileged place in the formative itinerary to help the students to make sense of their faith in order to accompany the people of God in their faith journey.

I. Formation of students

1. Some observations on the current state of formation of seminarians

- Availability of institutes with well established structures (library, class rooms, specialized staff) equivalent to secular academic studies.
- A total of 8-12 years of initial formation.
- During the study of philosophy, a wide variety of topics are offered in most institutes . For example a philosophy institute in Africa offers 69 different topics including 6 languages during a four year bachelor course. A university in Asia where our students study offers 25 philosophical topics for a three year bachelor degree in philosophy apart from conferences, seminars and workshops. Apart from academic studies students receive spiritual conferences and formative inputs in their respective study houses.
- Generally highly content oriented academic courses are received during the course of four years of theology. For example , a renowned theological faculty in Asia offers about 72 topics including seminars and elective subjects which requires 2700 class hours or 140 credits. A theology institute in East Africa offers 60 topics that have lessons and seminars having 147 credits.
- Almost all centers impart philosophy and theology in western thought patterns, though there are always topics dealing with African or Asian philosophy in the respective centers of philosophical studies. In theology there is greater caution in theologizing in the thought patterns of the respective cultures.
- Some seminaries have begun to implement more practical ways of learning theology with more exposures and student participation in theologizing.

2. Some concerns regarding the formation of seminarians

- Although the seminarians study of more than 100 topics in philosophy and theology, they do not show a proportionate level of personal integrity and capacity for spiritual animation of the people of God after about 10 years of formation.
- In spite of revolutionary changes in education and learning that has significantly enriched training of personnel for most helping professions in the society, seminary training has not changed much in most centers during the last several decades.
- In most seminaries of Asia and Africa formation fosters adaptive learning which requires the student only to fulfill some study requirements and not much attention is paid to what happens in the student through his study. The focus on “consumption” of what is served in the class rather than “theologizing” results in meager original contribution from the wealth of Asian and African religious experience to catholic theology.

- Very little attention is given to engage the student in the process of his own formation and study. Students remain mostly passive recipients of information. Rational approach to the study of theology is still predominant.
- Emphasis on academic and intellectual performance tend to sideline faith formation, personal maturity and gospel-based involvement in socio-cultural dimensions.
- In some contexts emphasis on the cultic aspect of royal priesthood without adequate exposure to the lot of the poor and the elite life style of clergy in the society undermine the servant dimension of ministerial priesthood. Priesthood then could be easily perceived as the easiest leap to climb the social ladder.
- Often seminaries are the breeding grounds of ethnic, caste and tribal tensions that undermine the credibility of Christian faith in the local churches. The divorce between theology and life is clearly evident in this aspect.
- The various scandals and abuses of clergy and religious which beset the church today give us enough reasons to be concerned about the effect of formative programs on the formees . We need also to assure that our students get the most important requisites of a spiritual minister today which cannot be limited to mere conceptual knowledge of dogmas and theological treatises.

3. Proposals

- We need a paradigm shift in the way formation is perceived, a shift of focus from the content to the process of learning. It is not enough to offer a wide range of topics, but attention is to be given to what happens in a student through his learning. This shift is from a predominantly conceptual learning to a transformative learning which involves all the dimensions the student's life with the student as the protagonist of his own learning.
- The curriculum of seminary formation needs to be more integral with a balance of theological subjects and other training programs that enhance personal growth and pastoral effectiveness such as team work, leadership, participator governance, administration etc.
- The current insights about learning and formation from the secular world is to be integrated into the methods of learning and training. The principles of both pedagogy and andragogy are to be employed to suit the intellectual level of the students.
- Theological reflection and praxis based on concrete realities call for exposures of students to the struggles of fellow humans in their context and give due place for the prophetic dimension in ministry.
- In the context of tribal, caste and cultural conflicts that undermine the credibility of Christian faith, studies as well as training in intercultural communication in seminaries will prepare priests who are also peace makers in the society.
- Learning methods need to aim both at whole person learning and learning to be a whole person.

II. Formation of formators and professors

1. Some observations

- Availability of academically qualified professors in most institutes of theology and philosophy.
- Specialization of professors in universities abroad has helped them to widen their perspectives and broaden their vision.
- The integration of local culture and contextualization of theology depends more on the integrity and maturity of the formator and professor. Hence selection and the holistic formation of the formator are equally important as his academic qualification.
- Generally professors are not trained in methods of imparting theology and therefore they tend to promote adaptive learning.
- Professors who are exposed to the cultural and social realities of people are in a better condition to contextualize theology and make it relevant to life.
- There exists a too rational approach and preoccupation with conformity with rules than promoting search for truth and personalization of the faith of the Church in the young men in formation.

2. Proposals

- Option for a holistic approach to the preparation of professors and formators. Academic qualification in a particular discipline should be only one among the several requirements of a formator or professor. Apart from personal integrity and natural grace for empowerment of others, training in formative accompaniment and spiritual direction, and a reasonable period of ministry outside institutional context should be part of this requirement.
- To have a universal perspective of the church, it is important to have exposure to a wider reality of the Church and the world. Studies abroad at some period of one's specialization is highly beneficial.
- Ongoing formation of formators and professors is required to expose them to the contribution of other sciences towards formative growth and equip them on methods of adult learning.
- Promote an integral approach to formation where theology could be presented as life related and experiential which supports personal transformation and pastoral commitment.

Conclusion

We have all the reasons to be thankful to God for the many vocations in Asia and Africa and most of these young men are generous with their lives to serve the Church. Certainly there are many socio-political factors that play a significant role both positively and negatively in the process of their formation. Many of these men will also eventually serve in other parts of the world. We need

to promote a holistic formative program which facilitates personal transformation in the students by assimilating their seminary studies with a view of building the Kingdom of God in their respective geographical areas. The need of the hour is a paradigm shift in the way studies are envisaged in the seminaries. Most professions in the secular world have made great progress in the way they train their personnel to be effective in the area of their specialization and contribution in the world. Training of Church personnel needs to take care of the formation of the whole person who communicates the values of the Gospel. This requires a shift of focus from content to the process of formation geared to the essence of formation: conformity with Christ. The role of formators and professors too requires a similar shift from being teachers to facilitators who accompany the young men in the process of personalizing the treasures of the Church so that they can give it out credibly.