

The 13th Theological Interdisciplinary Session was held in 2011 at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA) to mark 50 years of the foundation of AMECEA (1961-2011), the regional body of Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa. The thrust of this Session was a critical assessment and sharing of experiences related to major areas of Church life in this period. This volume presents some of the papers delivered. They touch on the consolidation of Small Christian Communities, the political influence on the growth of the Church in Eastern Africa, the use of local languages in the Liturgy and in the biblical apostolate, interreligious dialogue, the formation of priests and new strategies for holistic development and self-reliance. It is hoped that the lessons and insights shared in this collection will benefit the Church and Society in this diverse region – EDITOR.



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The Faculty of Theology of CUEA Celebrates the Golden Jubilee of AMECEA



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FORMATION AND TRAINING OF PRIESTS ACCORDING TO *PASTORES DABO VOBIS* IN AMECEA REGION: AN EVALUATION AND WAY FORWARD

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Introduction

In November 2008, a month's course was called in Rome, Italy for Major Seminary Spiritual Directors from English speaking countries all over the world. Some of the participants came from the Philippines, Canada, Ghana and Korea. Spiritual Directors who came from the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) countries were from Ethiopia, Uganda, Sudan, Tanzania and Zambia. I particularly paid attention to the sharing of these colleagues as we were from the same background because it so happened that I was the Zambia Theological National Major Seminary Spiritual Director that time, and so I had also been invited to attend the course.

During the course, we had a good number of facilitators coming to talk to us on different topics relevant to the formation of future priests. Some of the speakers we had were experienced people like the Rector and Spiritual Director of the Urbanian International Major Seminary situated in the premises of the Urbanian Pontifical University, a priest in-charge of the Congregation for the Clergy and some officials from the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, including the cardinal prefect himself, who came to join us on the last evening of the course. We also got some remote instructions from Pope Benedict XVI as we were also taken for one of the Wednesday audiences with him at St. Peter's Square.

During that intensive course, we had a lot of sharing among ourselves as participants for the feed-backs to the lectures we were

Formation and Training of Priests According to Pastores Dabo Vobis in AMECEA Region

being given by those competent resource persons. Actually, the topics we were being coached in did not only concern the work of a spiritual director, but rather it incorporated the whole noble task of the formation and training of priests; it was rather the general work of a formator.

As I present this paper on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA), I shall pay attention to the concerns of the content matter of the program of formation and training of priests that I heard being shared by those spiritual directors who came from the same environment with me, namely, the AMECEA region. It was clear that some worthwhile programs for the formation and training of priests had been put in place in the seminaries/formation houses around the AMECEA countries. But we are saying that these activities still have some room for improvement, and so in a way, we are going to give an evaluation of these training and formation processes already in existence, and then taking into consideration our local situations,¹ propose the way forward according to the document: *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II). Of paramount interest to us are the following areas: Human Formation, Spiritual Formation, Intellectual Formation and Pastoral Formation.

A. Human Formation

1. *The ideal as presented by the document Pastores Dabo Vobis*

According to the document: *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Human formation is the basis of all priestly formation.² This is because every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God (Cf. Hebrews 5:1). Therefore, future priests need to cultivate a line of human qualities with a view of their future ministry. These qualities will make them balanced, strong, free, and capable of bearing the weight of pastoral responsibilities. They need to be educated to love the truth, to be loyal, to respect every person, to have a sense of justice, to be true to their word, to

be genuinely compassionate, to be men of integrity and, especially, to be balanced in judgment and behavior.³

It is paramount for a future priest to be able to relate with others as he is a person called to be responsible for a community and to be a 'man of communion.' This entails the future priest not to be arrogant, or quarrelsome, but hospitable, sincere in his words and heart, prudent and discreet, generous and ready to serve, capable of opening himself to clear and brotherly relationships and of encouraging the same in others, and quick to understand, forgive and console (Cf. 1 Timothy 3: 1-5; Titus 1:7-9). As a result, affective maturity, which is the result of an education in true and responsible love, is a significant and decisive factor in the formation of candidates for the priesthood.⁴

Affective maturity presupposes an awareness that love has a central role in human life. In view of the commitment to celibacy, affective maturity brings to human relationships of serene friendship and deep brotherliness a strong, lively and personal love for Jesus Christ. So, a candidate who is called to celibacy will find in affective maturity a firm support to live chastity in faithfulness and joy.⁵

Human maturity requires a clear and strong training in freedom which expresses itself in convinced and heartfelt obedience to the truth of one's own being, to the meaning of one's own existence, that is to the sincere gift of self as the way and fundamental content of the authentic realization of self.

Closely connected with formation of responsible freedom is education of moral conscience. This is a conscious and free response, and therefore, a loving response, to God's demands, to God's love.⁶

2. An Evaluation of Human Formation in the Major Seminaries of AMECEA Countries and the Way Forward

During our sharing in the spiritual directors' intensive course of November 2008 in Rome, it was obvious that the AMECEA Major Seminaries had put in place some acceptable formation and training programs for candidates for the priesthood going by the proposed ideals of the document *Pastores Dabo Vobis*. But, because in this area

of human formation, it entails a candidate coming to grips with himself, we feel that a deliberate program of some psychological vocational growth sessions and group dynamics⁷ should be incorporated in the regular schedule of our seminaries in order to ensure the proper self-knowledge of the candidates. In this regard, a candidate would be helped to discover his personal vocation at the center of his heart, the heart not as an organ, but as the center of the candidate's personality. The candidate will also grow in his freedom for God and his brothers and sisters because he is going to be free from some obstacles that would have been preventing him from becoming truly himself.

Apart from the self-knowledge that could be attained through these vocational growth sessions, the candidate would reach the level of self-acceptance which is so much desired for a mature person. Basically, this requires the presence of a trained counselor who could as well be a trained spiritual director or psychologist. Unfortunately, many of our Major Seminaries do not have such specialized people. It will be important to equip all our formation houses with such important personnel. In fact, these well-trained personnel would educate candidates to the priesthood in their affectivity, a fact which would cut down on some sexual disorders, alcoholism and other inconsistencies.

We are also proposing that a psychological procedure be made compulsory at different levels of formation and training in all AMECEA Major Seminaries.

B. Spiritual Formation

1. The ideal as presented by the document *Pastores Dabo Vobis*

When human formation is done properly, it finds its completion in spiritual formation. Every human being who has been redeemed by Christ's blood, is called to be reborn 'of water and the Spirit' (John 3:5) and to become a 'son in the Son.' Moreover, like St. Augustine said, a person has a heart which is restless until it rests in the Lord. Basically, spiritual formation is the work of the Holy Spirit and engages a person in his totality; it introduces him to a

deep communion with Jesus Christ, and leads to the total submission of one's life to the Spirit.⁸ For every candidate to the priesthood, spiritual formation is the core which unifies and gives life to his being. In this context, without spiritual formation, pastoral formation would be left without foundation. Spiritual formation should therefore, be conducted in such a way that the students may learn to live in intimate and unceasing union with God the Father through His Son Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit.

Candidates to the priesthood should seek Christ in faithful meditation on the word of God⁹ and in active participation in the sacred mysteries of the Church, especially the Eucharist and the Divine Office, to seek him in the bishop¹⁰ by whom they are sent and in the people to whom they would later be assigned, especially the poor, little children, the weak, sinners and unbelievers. They should love and respect the most Blessed Virgin Mary, who was given to us as our mother by Jesus Christ as he was dying on the cross.¹¹

An essential element of spiritual formation is the prayerful and meditated reading of the word of God (*Lectio Divina*), a humble and loving listening of him who speaks. It is actually by the light and with the strength of the word of God that one's own vocation can be discovered and understood, loved and followed, and one's own mission carried out.¹²

The candidate for priesthood must understand that the highest point of Christian prayer is the Eucharist.¹³ Similarly, it is urgent and necessary for the candidate for the priesthood to discover the beauty and joy of the Sacrament of Penance and of meeting God who is rich in mercy (Cf. Ephesians 2:4). From this flows the sense of asceticism and interior discipline, a spirit of sacrifice and self-denial, the acceptance of hard work and of the cross.

The future priest must be educated in obedience, celibacy and poverty in order to devote themselves completely to the service of God and the pastoral ministry.¹⁴

Formation and Training of Priests According to Pastores Dabo Vobis in AMECEA Region

2. *An Evaluation of Spiritual Formation in the Major Seminaries of AMECEA countries and the Way Forward*

Our observation is that a good spiritual formation of candidates to the priesthood depends very much on the good example and capability of the spiritual director. In most of the AMECEA Major Seminaries, some inexperienced priests have been appointed as spiritual directors; these have lacked sufficient human experience which is not the best way to go. This has resulted in the putting up of some defective spiritual formation programs in some of our Major Seminaries. Therefore, a careful consideration should be made in the nomination of spiritual directors. Those who should be appointed spiritual directors should have been sent for further studies in the appropriate field; they should therefore be knowledgeable in both human and spiritual experience. In addition, spiritual directors need to love the task they are charged with so that they may always be available in the execution of this noble task.¹⁵

It has to be made clear that the most important requirement in the formation of a future priest is a deep life of prayer centered on the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. Mass should be the centre of the seminary way of life which should be coupled with the practice of some public and private prayers as a way of preparation and continuation of the life deep rooted in Jesus Christ. In this line, all Masses on Saturday should be dedicated to our Lady, Mary, the mother of our Lord Jesus Christ. "Mary, Mother of the Word of God, is the model par excellence for the life of witness expected of Christ's disciples in Africa."¹⁶

Every seminarian must choose a personal spiritual director.¹⁷ But the general spiritual director should also make sure that he meets each one of the students for a sharing once a month. Whilst it has many advantages to continue with the same spiritual director during the whole period of formation in the seminary, it is not impossible for a good reason to change, either from the side of the seminarian or as recommended by the spiritual director himself.

Spiritual Conferences should be given on weekly basis by the general spiritual director, other staff members or invited speakers. These should hold a primary place in the seminary schedule.

An opportunity for private confession should be given monthly during days of recollections. Of course, priests in the formation house should be available at any time for the administration of this Sacrament of Reconciliation. Monthly days of recollections and annual retreats should likewise be considered as means of great importance in the seminarian's spiritual growth.

C. Intellectual Formation

1. *The ideal as presented by the document Pastores Dabo Vobis*

According to the Document *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, intellectual formation is a necessary expression of both human and spiritual formation, but it is meant for the understanding of the faith.¹⁸ A crucial stage of intellectual formation is the study of philosophy, which leads to a deeper understanding and interpretation of the person, and of the person's freedom and relationships with the world and with God.¹⁹ Only a sound philosophy can help candidates for the priesthood to develop a reflective awareness of the fundamental relationship that exists between the human spirit and truth, that truth which is revealed to us fully in Jesus Christ.²⁰

The intellectual formation of the future priest is also based and built on the study of the sacred doctrine, of theology, and true theology proceeds from the faith and aims at leading to the faith. The theologian is therefore a believer; a person of faith. But the theologian is a believer who asks himself questions about his own faith with the aim of reaching a deeper understanding of the faith itself. Theological reflection is centered on adherence to Jesus Christ, the wisdom of God, and a mature reflection has to be described as a sharing in the thinking of Christ (Cf. 1 Corinthians 2:16) in the human form of a science. On the other hand, theology helps candidates for the priesthood to develop a great and living love for Jesus Christ and His Church.²¹

Theological formation is both complex and demanding. The candidate needs to be helped to build a synthesis which will be the result of the contributions of the different theological disciplines,²² the specific nature of which acquires genuine value only in their

Formation and Training of Priests According to Pastores Dabo Vobis in AMECEA Region
profound coordination. However, sacred scripture is the soul of all theology.²³

2. *An Evaluation of Intellectual Formation in the Major Seminaries of AMECEA Countries and the Way Forward*

In order to achieve a well balanced intellectual formation, the Church leaders in the AMECEA region have done all that it takes to train lecturers in both philosophy and theology related courses. They have also tried to always appoint a member of staff who can co-ordinate well all the academic activities with a few exceptional cases. However, care must be taken in assigning the position of Dean of Studies. We propose that such a one be a person of knowledge,²⁴ human experience, spiritual experience, but not necessarily a priest.

Basically, all our major seminaries have enough qualified lecturers in theology, but there is need to train more lecturers for philosophy who are not so many.

Some of our major seminaries tend to under value the academic part of their formation and training program that is wrong because intellectual formation enables a candidate to know how to think, feel, and open up much more to charity and the direction of the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately, there have been some cases where candidates to the priesthood have learnt some logic in Philosophy and thereafter, they have become big-headed; they have tended to look down on some apparent ignorant people. Students in our philosophical institutions should be led into the humility of a true Christian even after they have learnt some logic; they should become more generous in helping others who need to know how to perceive their lives.

In our major seminaries, every student should have a pass mark in all subjects studied. A basic knowledge of philosophy, theology and the teaching of the Church are necessary for a candidate for the priesthood. If a student displays a pattern of failing courses over several times, he should be asked to leave the seminary for academic reasons. Consistent poor results must call to question a seminarian's suitability for the priestly ministry. A priest cannot

fulfill his task as teacher without a sound and adequate grasp of the Christian Doctrine.²⁵ Failure to see the relevance of biblical and theological studies, lack of interest and effort to grasp them in depth would be an indication of a lack of vocation.

Each student, in consultation with his spiritual director, must determine his own pattern of study, prayer and breaks. Likewise, it should not be considered abnormal by seminarians to use part of their free days during the semester for study. An awareness of the serious demands of one's vocation and concern for fellow students suppose that seminarians will take every care to avoid disturbing others during lectures and study periods by unnecessary and disturbing noise or by unnecessary visits to one another's rooms.

D. Pastoral Formation

1. *The ideal as presented by the document Pastores Dabo Vobis*

Pastoral formation develops by means of mature reflection and practical application, and it is rooted in a spirit, which is the hinge of all and the force which stimulates it and makes it develop. It needs to be studied therefore as a true and genuine theological discipline that it is: pastoral or practical theology.²⁶ Pastoral theology is theological in its own right because it receives from the faith the principles and criteria for the pastoral action of the Church in history.

The study of pastoral theology should throw some light upon its practical application through involvement in certain pastoral services which the candidates to the priesthood should carry out, with a necessary progression and always in harmony with their other educational commitments. It is a question of pastoral experiences which come together in a real program of 'pastoral training'.²⁷

The seminary must seek to initiate the candidate into the sensitivity of being a shepherd, in the conscious and mature assumption of his responsibilities, in the interior habit of evaluating problems and establishing priorities and looking for solutions on the basis of honest motivations of faith and according to the theological demands inherent in pastoral work.²⁸

Formation and Training of Priests According to Pastores Dabo Vobis in AMECEA Region

When it comes to choosing places and services in which candidates can obtain their pastoral experience, the parish should be given particular importance for it is a living cell of local and specialized pastoral work in which they will find themselves faced with the kind of problems they will meet in their future ministry. Seminarians should be given chance to visit the sick; care for immigrants, refugees and nomads, and various social works, which can be expressions of charitable zeal. These and other pastoral activities will teach the future priest to live out and offer service to his own mission of authority in the community, setting aside all attitudes of superiority or of exercising power if it is not simply that which is justified by pastoral charity.²⁹

The different experiences which candidates for the priesthood have should assume a clear ministerial character and should be intimately linked with all the demands that befit preparation to the priesthood and not neglecting their studies, in relation to the services of the proclamation of the word, of worship and of leadership.³⁰ These services can become a specific way of experiencing the ministries of lector, acolyte and deacon.³¹

Awareness of the Church as 'communion' will prepare the candidate for the priesthood to carry out his pastoral work with a community spirit, in cooperation with the different members of the Church.³²

2. *An Evaluation of Pastoral Formation in the Major Seminaries of AMECEA Countries and the Way Forward*

Some pastoral coordinators have been appointed in the AMECEA major seminaries to supervise some pastoral formation and training programs, and they have really done well. These pastoral activities have provided opportunities for the seminarians to practice the various studies they have under-taken. However, some areas in this regard have been badly done because of lack of appropriate knowledge by some of the appointed pastoral coordinators. Some of them have even lacked some proper human and spiritual experience.

Under pastoral formation, we need to stress the fact that seminarians need to learn the art of exercising the apostolate not

only in theory, but in practice.³³ Hence, even during their course of studies, and also during holidays, they should be introduced into pastoral practice.³⁴ In consultation with some local pastors, seminarians should be given the opportunity to be involved in some form of pastoral work.

The seminarians' dress, conversation, conduct, zeal, and their sharing in the prayer of the parish community should reflect the ideal of the vocation to which they are called.

Seminarians should also give talks on the priestly vocation in secondary schools and colleges if the school authorities agree to this. They can also assist the chaplain of a near-by hospital. Some seminarians could also make some contributions to some religious programs on radio and television.

Conclusion

By our formation houses' much more closely adapting to the document *Pastores Dabo Vobis*' proposed guidelines, we shall provide an atmosphere that fosters and ensures a process of authentic formation and training, so that the person who is called to the priesthood may become a living image of Jesus Christ.

Consequently, the success of the formation and training of candidates to the priesthood firstly, depends on a good human formation. It is human formation that helps the person under formation to become an active recipient of spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation. Despite how good the content matter of the different types of formations, if the person being trained is not integrated, everything will just be falling on rocky ground and there will be no positive response from the person. Through human formation, the candidate to the priesthood is brought to his self-knowledge, self acceptance and self-opening to the Holy Spirit. Consequently, the candidate is free to love his brothers and sisters in his pastoral work. He also becomes a fertile ground for the retention of the so much needed intellectual formation.

Human formation provides an education into the affectivity of the candidate right at the center of his personality which is the heart, where the candidate is truly himself. We are using the word

Formation and Training of Priests According to *Pastores Dabo Vobis* in AMECEA Region

'heart' in the biblical sense, and not merely the physical organ, but the 'heart' as the center of the human personality; where the being is profoundly itself; where the being is capable of giving itself or refusing itself; where people make their fundamental basic options of life for or against God. This is so because no transformation takes place unless the truth reaches the heart, and the truth does not reach the heart except by slow assimilation, that is what even justifies the many years we give to the formation and training of our priestly candidates. The candidate gets balanced in his Christian life with the education of his human affectivity which is the core of his being. With the education of his affectivity the candidate concentrates on only one thing becomes single minded and discovers his personal vocation and adheres to it.³⁵

Finally, we must say that the people who are put in-charge of the organization of the formation and training processes play a paramount role. Therefore, they should have the required knowledge, human experience and spiritual experience.

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Endnotes

- ¹ Cf. *Vatican II Documents, Optatam Totius*, Number 1.
- ² Cf. *Pastores Dabo vobis*, Number 43, paragraph 1, 84.
- ³ Cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Number 43, paragraph 2, 85.
- ⁴ Cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Number 43, paragraph 3, 85.
- ⁵ Cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Number 44, paragraph 4, 86.
- ⁶ Cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Number 44, paragraph 7, 87.
- ⁷ Cf. *Optatam Totius*, Number 7: "In large seminaries, the students should be suitably organized in smaller groups, to enable more personal attention

Formation and Training of Priests According to Pastores Dabo Vobis in AMECEA Region

to be given to each student, while retaining unity of discipline and scientific training."

- ⁸ Cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Number 45, paragraph 2, 88.
- ⁹ Cf. *Optatam Totius*, Number 4.
- ¹⁰ Cf. *Optatam Totius*, Number 4.
- ¹¹ Cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Number 45, paragraph 4, 89.
- ¹² Cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Number 47, paragraph 1, 92.
- ¹³ Cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Number 48, paragraph 3, 95.
- ¹⁴ Cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Number 49, paragraph 4, 97.
- ¹⁵ Cf. *Optatam Totius*, Number 8.
- ¹⁶ *Instrumentum Laboris, The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace* (Paulines Publications Africa, Nairobi, 2009), 50.
- ¹⁷ Cf. *Guidelines for Priestly Formation in Zambia* (Ndola: Mission Press, 2000), 48.
- ¹⁸ Cf. *Optatam Totius*, Number 14.
- ¹⁹ Cf. Canon 251.
- ²⁰ Cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Number 52, paragraph 1, 101.
- ²¹ Cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Number 53, paragraph 3, 103.
- ²² Cf. Canon 252, paragraph 3.
- ²³ Cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Number 54, paragraph 1, 104.
- ²⁴ Cf. Canon 253, paragraph 1.
- ²⁵ Cf. *Optatam Totius*, Number 6.
- ²⁶ Cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Number 57, paragraph 2, 109.
- ²⁷ Cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Number 57, paragraph 4, 110.
- ²⁸ Cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Number 58, paragraph 1, 110.
- ²⁹ Cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Number 58, paragraph 3, 111.
- ³⁰ Cf. *Instrumentum Laboris, The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace*, 49.
- ³¹ Cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Number 59, paragraph 4, 112.
- ³² Cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Number 59, paragraph 3, 112.
- ³³ Cf. *Guidelines for Priestly Formation in Zambia*, 42.
- ³⁴ Cf. *Optatam Totius*, Number 21.
- ³⁵ Cf. *The Church in Africa, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of the Holy father John Paul II* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2009), number 95, 73.