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WINNOWING FAN

The Spiritual Life according to the Fathers and Saints of the Catholic Church in preparation for Christ's Second Coming.

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Year of the PRIEST

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YEAR OF THE PRIEST - Meditation 6 - Manner of studying theology

The teachings of the Catholic Church are said to be truths in the supernatural level. It cannot be studied the way Zoology or Physics are studied. Natural things can be studied by man's natural abilities. It is impossible for man's natural ability to study supernatural truths.

The way to study supernatural truths is for the natural man to rise up from the natural sphere to the supernatural sphere. And there the soul will effortlessly receive the truths of the Catholic Faith. These Catholic truths are given to the soul together with the graces and accompanying theological virtues.

In the seminary we must not teach the truths of the Catholic Faith. We teach seminarians how to rise up from the natural level to the supernatural level where graces—with their accompanying theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity—are received from God. These supernatural truths are taught by God by infusion and not learned from teachers in the seminary.....though God could use a holy professor as an instrument to infuse these truths. But it will be evident that it was God, and not the professor, who had given the knowledge.

Multi-Part Year of the PRIEST SERIES

The seminarians had been studying their theology in the wrong way. While remaining in the natural level they try to study a subject that is over and above their heads in the supernatural level. So they learn nothing, understand nothing and end up without wisdom, which is needed to fully imbibe the truths.

Ignorance of the theology of grace is the root of this problem. To know the truths of Christ they must first live fully the life of repentance (which unfortunately many do not know how) after which they would receive graces with its accompanying theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity. It is in receiving Faith that they receive the infused knowledge of the teachings of Christ as proposed by the Church.

Many seminarians enter the seminary without knowing that they have lost the grace they have received at Baptism and do not have the capability to know any Catholic Truth. This is the reason Pope Benedict declared the Year of the Priest whose theme is Faithfulness of Christ. He was encouraging the Priest to reach at least Faith, and not even Hope and Charity. And he reminded all that 'the gift of divine grace precedes every possible human response and pastoral accomplishment..' He was saying that you cannot become a priest or even begin your seminary training without knowing and putting into practice the theology of grace. And the problem is that most seminarians do not even know if they are in the state of grace or not when they begin their seminary training.

The Holy Father repeats: You must have "a clear and unmistaken judgment about the absolute primacy of divine grace, recalling what St.Thomas Aquinas wrote..." In short, we cannot learn the simplest Catholic truth without grace. And yet we have no idea if we have grace or not.

Then the Pope reminds us of his "Deus Caritas Est" actually saying: If you cannot reach the theological virtue of Charity, at least reach Faith. Then he encourages all to help the poor priest 'to reach spiritual perfection'.....that is Charity, i.e. being perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect.

The state of the seminaries is this: we have seminarians who were baptized when they were babies and who during their lives in the world have lost that sacramental grace, probably without realizing it. Then they enter the seminary not knowing they do not have the grace to learn the supernatural truths. Presuming they are in the state of grace they study theology without knowing and understanding anything.

The *Winnowing Fan* hopes "...to do what little it could do solve the evils that beset the Church."
St. Teresa of Avila

The result: priestly souls who are total slaves of their fallen nature.

Let us see how they did it in the early times when we could find holy priests in every corner. The seminarians should be taught to use their natural abilities to learn how to rise from the natural to the supernatural level. They must, then, know that entering the supernatural level is a work of grace, a completely free act of God. When God raises them up to the supernatural level, God will give them the theological virtue of Faith with a little dosage of Hope and Charity that will enable them to effortlessly know the teachings of the Catholic Church. They will not need the entire seminary in the process. They only need, as Christ said, to enter their room and lock the door.

YEAR OF THE PRIEST - Meditation 7 - The Modern Seminary

The modern seminary is an awesome sight.....compared to my monastic seminary 60 years ago. One would get the impression that these seminaries are producing top of the line priests. The buildings are beautiful, surrounded by well-trimmed gardens of varied flowering plants. The refectories are veritable banquet halls. The libraries would put the library of Alexandria to shame. The classrooms are air-conditioned. The private rooms are spacious and equipped with radios and the line-up of their professors are impressive. What else can we ask? Well, we can ask where are the good priests?

Some seminaries seem to have everything except.....signs of the presence of Grace, the Theological virtues, the Gifts of the Holy Spirit and lots of humility... where every human act is motivated by the glory of God? That is if we based our musings on the chapters on Vices and Virtues according to the Summa of St. Thomas.

The Holy Father, Pope John Paul II once came to a bishop's conference in Asia and exhorted them to improve the formation program in their seminaries. (This was after the post Vatican Bishop's Synod held in Rome that framed a general outline of formation for all sectors.) The Bishop in-charge of the Commission on Seminaries (made up of three bishops) organized 'practicums' made up of seminary heads to make a program of formation for seminaries. They gave themselves 10 years to make one. A week before the dead line, there was still no proposal. So inquiries were made from other seminaries around the world and from the Congregation for Catholic Education and for the clergy. And the surprising response from a Cardinal was: 'We are still making one."

So what program was the Catholic Church using all these 2000 years? We certainly had a good program seeing the countless holy priests the Church had. St. Philip Neri, St. Vincent the Paul and the seminary of St. Sulpice (that has influenced St. John Vianney) had very good programs. What happened? We cannot blame Vatican II because this malaise had happened much earlier. Maybe around the beginnings of the 14th century and more noticeably in the 1800s. Heresy!!! Heresy entered into the curriculum of the seminaries.

Heresies are errors that have entered the mind. Since it is only an act of the mind it is easy to erase errors. So why isn't it easily removed? What else is lacking? As St. Paul would answer: 'a preacher sent by God' who will teach the truth and expose the error. But the Pope is always such a preacher. So what else could be wrong? We can pinpoint what is wrong with the seminarians.....they do not listen to all the teachings of the Popes. And if they do, some do not obey. Orthodoxy means our beliefs must conform not only to the writings of the Old and New Testaments and the writings of the Fathers of the Church. It must conform to the Magisterium of which the Holy Father is the spokesman. In the definition of Faith in the Catholic Church the element of Papal authority is essential. Since the Apostles and Fathers of the Church are gone God will only explain the truths to those living today, year 2010, through the Pope. That is why each Pope had to explain the entire teaching of the Church during their reign for the people that existed during their reign. Pope Benedict has already explained the entire teaching of Christ for us today through his three encyclicals. He just has to go into details.

In the Year of the Priest, the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI is hinting that we should undergo our seminary training again. Maybe in a more humble manner, like studying in the secrecy of a quiet room or better still kneeling down in front of the Blessed Sacrament where we can 'contemplate' the truths rather than just study them in the classroom. He said: 'more prayer'.....he did not say 'less lecture' but if you pray more shouldn't there be less lectures? I remember St. Francis of Assisi saying something like : sanctify souls and once in a while give lectures ...or something to that effect.

There is only one thing to be feared... only one trial and that is sin. I have told you this over and over again. All the rest is beside the point, whether you talk of plots, feuds, betrayals, slanders, abuses, confiscations of property, exile, swords, open sea or universal war. Whatever they may be, they ae all fugitive and perishable. They touch the mortal body but wreak no harm on the watchful soul.

St. John Chrysostom

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