

# TRANSMISSION OF THE CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING IN GAUDIUM ET SPES: THE ROLE OF SEMINARIES IN PREPARING KNOWLEDGEABLE PRIESTS

By Sister Katarina Schuth, O.S.F.  
University of St. Thomas (MN)  
[kmschuth@stthomas.edu](mailto:kmschuth@stthomas.edu)

## Introduction

Seminary formation programs are crucial venues for the transmission of the Catholic social teaching since these centers of advanced theological education are the major sources of future church leaders. The forty-five or so institutions in the United States (plus Rome and Louvain) known collectively as “theologates,” enroll approximately 6,000 students, equally divided between seminarians who are preparing for priesthood and lay students who are preparing for other ecclesial ministry leadership roles. The seminarians studying in these schools become the pastors of parishes throughout the country and lay students take on a variety of leadership roles in parishes and other Catholic institutions. They all have enormous potential to influence the future direction and shape of the faith life of Catholics. Thus, their interest in and ability to transmit the Catholic social tradition is essential if this dimension of the church’s teachings is to remain vital and significant in the life of Church.

The foundation of the Catholic social teaching derives from many sources—certainly the long tradition and practice of Christians is powerful, but even more important is Sacred Scripture. The Gospel especially conveys the centrality of compassionate care for others, engendered by treating all with respect and dignity, fairness and justice. Jesus said, “I came so that they might have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). This verse from the passage on the Good Shepherd suggests that all are to have life in abundance, but the gift is not incontrovertibly available to all. For everyone to have abundant life, those with power and resources are required “to act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with their God” (Micah 6:8). This message is basic to *Gaudium et spes*, indeed to all of the Church’s doctrine, particularly its social teaching.

In light of this powerful directive to follow Christ’s teachings, seminary programs are designed with a keen awareness of the necessity of emphasizing the Catholic social tradition. This paper will focus on programs intended for those preparing for priesthood. First, I will identify how guiding documents for seminary formation address the call to incorporate the content of the social teaching of the Church; second, I will review what seminaries are currently doing to implement the directives contained in the documents; finally, I will assess the outcomes of the church’s directives and formulate suggestions for improving the present situation regarding Catholic social teaching; in particular I will explore the impact of *Gaudium et spes*<sup>1</sup> (hereafter *GS*) on the entire formation program for seminarians.

## GUIDING DOCUMENTS

In the past fifteen years, church officials have published several important documents to guide the work of seminaries. Among the most essential are Pope John Paul II's *Pastores Dabo Vobis*<sup>2</sup> ("I Will Give You Shepherds"), published in 1992; another is from the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Program of Priestly Formation*,<sup>3</sup> published in 1993; and from the Congregation for Education comes a 1989 document, *Guidelines for the Study and Teaching of the Church's Social Doctrine in the Formation of Priests*.<sup>4</sup> Each of these addresses the topic of justice in greater or lesser detail, but all three set a supportive tone for teaching this critical area of Catholic doctrine.

**A. The first document, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*** (hereafter *PDV*), addresses in a general way the circumstances of the present day that should guide the formation of priests. The Pope describes four broad areas of formation: human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral, a framework I will use later in the paper to explain how these programs transmit doctrines and practices relevant to social teaching. Each of these four areas, he insists, must deal with the Catholic social tradition in depth. All of *PDV* communicates the urgency of being aware of the social, psychological, political, and cultural conditions in which the priest exercises his ministry. It calls for the Church to be immersed in the modern world, paying special attention to the problems and concerns brought on by the culture. To develop this cultural awareness, theological formation programs need to be cognizant of the intellectual tradition and pastoral approaches of the Church regarding issues of justice and peace. Furthermore, the personal and spiritual life of seminarians must be directed toward the imitation of Christ in their identification with those who are poor, powerless, and suffering.

In the area of **human formation**, akin to personal development, *PDV* describes the quality of person who will thrive in the priesthood: he "should be able to know the depths of the human heart, to perceive difficulties and problems, to make meeting and dialogue easy, to create trust and cooperation, to express serene and objective judgments" (*PDV 43, par. 1*). The priest should be appreciative of the value of communion, ready to overcome forms of selfishness and individualism, and of clear moral conscience. The document insists that if seminarians are to share in the Church's social mission, "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" (*PDV 43, par. 2*). These qualities are essential to one who will promote the common good, "which is the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily" (*GS 26*).

The requirements of **spiritual formation** are both personal and communal. The first provides the foundation, a place where the hunger and thirst for God develops in the individual and then overflows to the second, embracing the people of God in a pastoral and charitable dimension. "The priest is, therefore, a man of charity and is called to educate others according to Christ's example and the new commandment of brotherly love" (*PDV 49, par. 3*). This means seminarians must put into practice the "radical self-giving" proper to the priest following the example of Christ. Through this sharing with Christ in the suffering of the world, seminarians are to grow in awareness of the "martyrdom within the present culture, which is imbued with secularism, greed and hedonism" (*PDV 48, par. 4*). This reflective stance grows in candidates

for the priesthood as they engage the spiritual discipline of the seminary and learn to read the signs of the times, the condition of humanity in the world today (*GS 4*).

**Intellectual formation** is a necessary prerequisite for the development of an understanding of the social and cultural situation. *PDV* states that the Church's social doctrine "belongs to the field...of theology and, in particular, of moral theology and is to be counted among the essential components of the new evangelization, of which it is an instrument" (*PDV 54, par. 3*). The demand for the evangelization of cultures and the inculturation of the message of the faith requires that the Gospel message be appropriately adapted to the circumstances. Candidates for priesthood must learn to interpret their local situations so that "the Gospel penetrates the very life of cultures, becomes incarnate in them, overcoming those cultural elements that are incompatible with the faith and Christian living, and raising their values to the mystery of salvation which comes from Christ" (*PDV 55, par. 3*). The complexity of these times requires a commitment to serious academic studies so that priests may "be in a position to face competently, with clarity and deep reasoning," questions concerning respect for life, justice and peace, and other issues that arise out of the cultural context (*PDV 56, par.2*).

All of formation is to be directed toward a **pastoral** end, since it is in the exercise of ministry that the principles and values of the Gospel are made tangible. Through pastoral experiences the unity of the educational process becomes more evident. As ministry is exercised, the Gospel comes to life as Catholic social teaching sets the course for action. *PDV* names concrete places where seminarians are to obtain pastoral experience, such as visiting the sick, caring for immigrants, refugees and nomads, and engaging in various other social works (*PDV 43, par. 2*). Specifically, "The priest must be a witness of the charity of Christ himself who 'went about doing good' (Acts 10:38). He must also be a visible sign of the solicitude of the church who is mother and teacher" (*PDV 58, par. 3*). Since so many people today are affected by devastating hardships, inhuman poverty, blind violence, and unjust power, it is necessary that the priest be equipped for every good work (cf. 2 Tm. 3:17), so he can defend the rights and dignity of all.

**B. The second document, *The Program of Priestly Formation* (hereafter *PPF*),** was issued by the Bishops of the United States in 1993, and provides more specific directives concerning the Catholic social tradition, which is to be included in all aspects of formation. Emphasizing the importance of these teachings, the *PPF* designates this area as one of the four major themes of the entire program. "The statements of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops on peace, on the economy, and on the integrity of human life from conception to death have focused attention on the significance of peace, justice, and respect for life in our society. In a world that seeks to privatize religious commitment, seminary education should appropriately emphasize the social dimension of the Gospel, its concern for human life, for justice in the marketplace, and for peace in the world. This edition seeks to integrate these emphases into all dimensions of preparation for priesthood. A major resource in meeting this essential challenge is the *Guidelines for the Study and Teaching of the Church's Social Doctrine in the Formation of Priests*, from the Congregation for Catholic Education" (*PPF 20*).

Referring to all aspects of formation in social doctrine, the *PPF* states: "Throughout the curriculum the biblical, theological, ethical, and historical foundations for the Church's teaching

on social justice should be highlighted” (*PPF 391*). “Seminarians must be knowledgeable about issues of social justice, peace, and respect for life. During formation, seminarians not only should study such issues on a formal basis, they should also engage in works of justice and peace and issues of life insofar as the program of the seminary permits. Spiritual formation also should treat these topics and their intrinsic connection to Christian piety and priestly living” (*PPF 302*).

The overall purpose of the study of the Catholic social tradition is cited, “The academic formation of seminarians should also lead them to study in detail the social teaching of the Church in order to understand from an informed theological perspective the Church’s role in the struggle for justice, peace, and the integrity of human life. Such study should mold seminarians into articulate spokesmen for and interpreters of Catholic social teaching in today’s circumstances” (*PPF 345*). More specifically, the *PPF* details dimensions of the Church’s social teaching that should be included in the curriculum. The norms in the area of moral theology are as follows: “(T)he core should include Fundamental Moral Theology, Medical-Moral Ethics, Sexuality, and Social Ethics. The social teaching of the Church should be presented in its entirety with appropriate principles of reflection, criteria for judgment, and norms for action. The systematic study of the social encyclicals of the popes is especially recommended. The sacrament of penance should be treated from the point of view of both moral and systematic theology” (*PPF, 371*).

The bishops insist that intellectual formation is to be enhanced with practical pastoral experience. Furthermore, these areas are to be integrated with the personal and spiritual dimensions of formation. “As seminarians perceive how theology and the tradition of the Church shed light on contemporary pastoral situations, they also acquire important practical skills. Through prayer and theological reflection, pastoral experience is integrated with personal life and academic education. Authentic pastoral formation is ecumenically and multiculturally sensitive, alert to questions of social justice and collaborative in nature. Finally, it helps seminarians appropriate their role as spiritual leaders and public persons in the Church. Theological field education needs to be studied therefore as the true and genuine theological discipline that it is: pastoral or practical theology” (*PPF 398*).

Pastoral experiences provide concrete knowledge of groups who deserve special attention in light of the church’s social teaching, as well as learning to recognize ministries where social justice concerns need to be infused. “Theological field education can engender a sensitivity for justice, peace, and the integrity of human life. Social ministry offers opportunities for work in disadvantaged areas with marginalized groups: immigrants, migrants, refugees, the sick, the aged, and the poor. The study of social legislation concerning civil rights, health, education, and welfare provides additional opportunities. This aspect of priestly formation should encourage and facilitate seminarians’ service of and concern for the poor and vulnerable, an essential dimension of Catholic faith and priestly ministry” (*PPF 407*). The types of ministry that are especially conducive to incorporating social justice values are named in the document: “Evangelization; Catholic schools; catechetics; religious education; youth ministry; social justice; rural ministry; ecumenism; the care of the sick, elderly, and dying; as well as ministry in varied cultural settings indicate the breadth of experiences to which seminarians may be exposed in the course of their field-education program” (*PPF 409*).

Faculty involvement in pastoral field education is encouraged and faculty are expected to demonstrate an understanding of social doctrine. “In order to inculcate in seminarians a sensitivity for issues of social justice, the seminary faculty must first themselves possess an awareness of the significance of questions of peace, justice, and respect for life” (*PPF 494*). “The director of field education may invite members of the academic faculty, according to their respective disciplines as well as their personal gifts and interests, to become involved in the pastoral program, for example in theological reflection or in addressing social justice concerns” (*PPF 417*).

Toward the end of the document, a list of characteristics to be used in assessing the readiness of seminarians for priesthood is provided. It states that the outcome of education in the social teaching of the Church should be candidates for holy orders who possess a sense of the ministerial priesthood that is ecclesial—a vocation in the Church—as manifested by an “ability to work in a multicultural setting with people of different ethnic and racial backgrounds; commitment to justice, peace, and human life as well as to the universal mission of the Church; pastoral skill and sensitivity in proclaiming God’s Word and leading divine worship” (*PPF 544*). The level of commitment of the bishops to incorporate the social teaching of the Church in seminary formation programs is unequivocal.

**C. The third document, *Guidelines for the Study and Teaching of the Church’s Social Doctrine in the Formation of Priests*** (hereafter *Guidelines*), is the most comprehensive in its scope. The *Guidelines* state that space is to be reserved for the teaching of social doctrine within the program of studies in centers for ecclesiastical formation. “It is absolutely necessary for knowledge about the major social encyclicals to be ensured during formation. These encyclicals must be the subject of special courses and represent required reading material for the students” (*Guidelines 73*). *Gaudium et spes* permeates and influences the content of these *Guidelines*, with over a fifth of all its references to *GS*. Several of the themes in *GS* emphasize especially the formation of priests.

To begin with, *Guidelines* establishes the Church’s **right and obligation to teach social doctrine**, while reminding its readers of the great history of social teaching (*Guidelines 13, 14; GS 63, 74, 76*). The teaching role of the Church is underscored in *GS*, “At all times and in all places the church should have true freedom to preach the faith, to proclaim its teaching about society, to carry out its task...without hindrance” (*GS 76*). We are reminded of the urgent need for social action that takes advantage of the “rich and complex heritage” that is the social doctrine of the Church. The purpose in promulgating this teaching is “to bring about, through Christian social action, the church’s presence in history that will reflect Christ’s presence” (*Guidelines 14*). When human hearts are transformed by the message of the Gospel, human actions that have the power to transform unjust structures will ensue. The Church recognizes that it cannot solve all the problems of humanity, but it can be of **service** by providing the principles and guidelines that come from the Gospel (*Guidelines 2, 32; GS 3, 41*). The Church continues to **make the teachings concrete** “by proposing principles for reflection and permanent values, criteria for judgment and directives for action” (*Guidelines 28, GS 91*).

Following the lead of *GS*, *Guidelines* describes **the condition of humanity** in the world today and reiterates the importance of scrutinizing the “signs of the times” and interpreting “reality in the light of the evangelical message” (*Guidelines* 8; *GS* 4). The goal is to understand the human condition so that by making appropriate choices it may be possible to “eliminate injustices and favor the political, economic and cultural transformations needed in individual cases” (*Guidelines* 8). It points out the imbalances and inequalities brought about by rapid change in the modern world, which result in injustice that leads to conflict (*Guidelines* 34, 49; *GS* 4, 8). It is clear in *Guidelines* how difficult it is to understand the different aspects of social life today because of “rapid and profound changes” that are taking place in all fields (*Guidelines* 34). The goal is to educate priests in a way that will help them be more attentive to the needs of human society and thus be able to encourage the laity to engage in social action.

Having elucidated some of the problems of society, both documents speak about the **dignity of human persons** (*Guidelines* 5, 31, 32, 40; *GS* 9, 12ff., 17, 68). “The dignity of the person is based on the fact that he or she is created in the image and likeness of God and elevated to a supernatural destiny transcending earthly life.” As “an intelligent and free being, subject of rights and of duties,” the person is “the heart and soul of the social teaching of the church” (*Guidelines* 31). Human dignity implies **human freedom** exercised by a rightly formed **conscience** for the sake of the common good. “Through loyalty to conscience, Christians are joined to others in the search for truth and for the right solution to so many moral problems which arise both in the life of individuals and from social relationships” (*GS* 16). One of the primary pastoral obligations is to assist individuals in the formation of their consciences according to the teachings of the Church, with the social teaching holding a central place.

A rightly formed conscience will lead Christians to **participate** in making changes in society for real human progress. By engaging in socio-economic, political, and cultural life all persons can join together in **solidarity** for the improvement of the human condition, thus counteracting the individualistic morality of the times (*Guidelines* 30-32, 41, 58; *GS* 26, 43, 73, 76). Both documents stress the responsibility of Christians to live out their faith in daily life by concrete actions in the temporal world (*Guidelines* 63; *GS* 75, 76). Developing an awareness of how to relate faith and daily life is a serious **responsibility of pastoral leaders**. The local church will become the focal point for instruction and action if formation is thorough. Pastors must know and teach well social doctrine and be sensitive to ways of implementing it; therefore, seminarians must be taught how to invite their parishioners into the saving mission of the Church (*Guidelines* 58, *GS* 43).

In summary, taken together these three foundational documents pertaining to the formation of priests are infused with the essential nature of the Church’s social teaching. Each of them accentuates the importance of incorporating dimensions of this teaching in all four areas of formation. On a **human level**, seminarians are to mold their person after the example of Christ in his care for the poor, the oppressed, and the forgotten. They are challenged to become attentive to the structure of society and caring about the lot of their sisters and brothers. **Spiritually**, candidates for the priesthood need to develop the virtues related to respect for human life such as justice, compassion, and integrity. By developing their spiritual gifts, they will be able to respond generously to the demands of the Catholic social tradition.

**Intellectual formation** is essential to the implementation of the principles and practices of the social teaching since it assists future priests in becoming acquainted with the complexity of the structures that shape our society today. Basic understanding of the economic and political structures that determine so much of human existence must be brought into the realm of the Gospel message. Finally, **pastoral formation** becomes the unifying vehicle for the four areas of formation. In carrying out the saving mission of Christ, the priest puts into practice all that he has become and all that he knows for the sake of the people of God. All three documents in their own way and with their own emphases, serve as catalysts to encourage seminary leaders to make the social teaching of the Church a foundational commitment. The real challenge lies in motivating students to respond.

### Framework for Presenting the Catholic Social Tradition

Typically, four broad categories with sub-themes are chosen as the framework for presenting the vast array of documents, statements, and letters that constitute the Catholic social tradition. As suggested above, *Gaudium et spes* is one of the basic sources for the development of these categories. The first of them is “**Care for the Human Person**,” with emphasis on reverence for the dignity of human life at all stages. Flowing from that God-given dignity are rights and responsibilities that encourage Catholics to do all they can to protect life.

Second, “**Concern for Family and Work**” encompasses support for the family, the basic unit of society where one first learns values and behaviors. In turn, the family has the responsibility to participate in the efforts of the larger community to help it grow and achieve its purposes, including the Church and the State. The dignity of work and the rights of workers entitle people to decent working conditions with fair wages, as well as the right to organize and join unions. Further, workers have the right to private property and an economy that promotes the well being of all people.

Third, the category of “**Economic Organization and Political Participation**” requires that economic systems meet the needs of all their members, with particular attention given to the poor and the vulnerable. John Paul II refers to “structures of sin” that create inhumane and unjust societies, where the thirst for power and profit supersede care for the whole of society. The Catholic social tradition also deplores the deepening divisions between rich and poor, often resulting from inequitable systems. A basic moral test of fairness is to examine how the most vulnerable members of a society are faring.

Finally, “**Developing a Culture of Peace and Solidarity**” is sorely needed at this time. Striving for world peace and caring for God’s creation are two interlinked concepts associated with this theme. The world community is inextricably linked by modern technology, including instant communication and speedy travel. Being in solidarity with our brothers and sisters means that it is incumbent on us to strive for peace and global development, international human rights, and a world free of destructive forces. In recent years environmental issues have soared to the forefront as economic development has absorbed nearly every corner of the earth. Built on the

foundation of the sacredness of human life, the other principles suggest some measures for determining policies and constructing institutions that promote social justice. This brief synopsis outlines the basic principles of the complex Catholic social tradition elucidated in *GS* and amplified in the guiding documents for priestly formation.

## Transmission of Catholic Social Teaching

Let us turn now to the second focus of this presentation, that is, to examine ways in which Catholic social teaching is transmitted in seminary programs. *Gaudium et spes* served as an important impetus for incorporating required elements of this teaching in priestly formation, exemplified in the key documents described above. Programs are structured around four areas as directed in *PDV*: intellectual and pastoral formation, and human and spiritual formation. The first two provide the most extensive content and the second two relate to the way of life of the future priest. The range of subject matter actually covered in theological programs is primary among the strengths to be recognized. A second strength is associated with the methods of teaching adopted by faculty that are especially creative, among them case studies, field immersion experiences, and the use of technology.

### A. Intellectual Formation in the Catholic Social Tradition

At many of the seminaries awarding theological degrees to future priests, the academic programs give considerable attention to the social teaching of the Church. On average seminarians are required to earn eleven semester credits, usually amounting to four courses in Moral Theology/Christian Ethics. Typically the courses are: Fundamental Moral Theology, Human Sexuality/Sexual Ethics, Medical Ethics, and Social Ethics. Strictly speaking, only Social Ethics is concerned solely with the social tradition of the Church, but, in fact, all of the courses relate to this subject matter. Additionally, courses outside the area of moral theology often include elements of the social tradition, for example, a homiletics course may have as its focus “preaching the just Word,” or pastoral theology might include sections on working with the disadvantaged, or applying social analysis in parish settings, or liturgy courses may raise the awareness of seminarians about the vast array of social concerns that should enter into the worship life of the Church. This sample is merely suggestive of the many applications of social justice teachings in the curriculum.

**Fundamental Moral Theology** is usually studied from the perspectives of both historical and contemporary concerns. The course provides an introduction to the traditions of Catholic moral theology, helping the student develop competence in understanding theological method in the treatment of moral questions. Primary questions examined in the courses involve moral norms, moral responsibility, authority, freedom, natural law, sin, virtue, the nature of conscience, conversion, grace, and character. The place of Scripture, tradition, and natural reason is studied in light of moral decision making. The courses show how moral principles are applied in a variety of circumstances and situations. It is obvious that the grounding provided in the basic course is essential to the study of the whole social tradition of the Church.<sup>5</sup>



**Courses in human sexuality/sexual ethics**, often taught in conjunction with marriage and family, and biomedical ethics have a close relationship to and are informed by the Church's social teaching as well. As outlined in the four major categories above, these courses touch deeply into concerns about care for the human person and the family. The fundamental rights of individuals to life itself, to adequate health care, especially for the poor and vulnerable, are treated directly in these courses. The study of human sexuality/sexual ethics, for example, considers the praxis of fostering communities of love and concern for the human person. They examine questions of how one expresses sexual and personal commitment as a celibate, single, or married person, from a moral perspective. They study topics such as contraception, homosexuality, chastity, celibacy, non-marital sexuality, abortion, responsible parenthood, divorce, and the relationship of men and women and their corresponding responsibilities, among others. The courses offer the insights from personal, interpersonal, and Christian contexts as provided by the tradition of the Church, modern psychology, and contemporary moralists.<sup>6</sup>

**Courses in biomedical ethics** have taken on a new urgency with the onset of major technological breakthroughs that have created new moral dilemmas. About half the schools require a separate course in this area, while another fourth combine the subject matter with sexual ethics. The courses aim at identifying relevant issues in health care in order to come to a publicly defensible and pastorally appropriate position on those issues. Scientifically aware and culturally inclusive perspectives are sought around topics such as reproductive technologies, surrogate parenthood, genetic intervention, sterilization, abortion, and the use of fetal tissue for therapy or experimentation. Other topics include physician-patient relationships, informed consent, ethics in psychotherapy, organ transplantation, foregoing treatment, euthanasia, suicide, allocation of scarce medical resources, and equitable models of health care. Suffering and death in the Christian perspective are often part of the course content as well. One of the goals of biomedical ethics courses is to gain an ability to evaluate and make prudential moral decisions about complex medical situations and to assist others who are faced with these decisions. Another goal relates to preparing ministers to speak to the mainly social and public issues of health care relating to availability and distribution of resources, especially where goods are in conflict. Obviously, this subject matter embraces many dimensions of the Church's social concerns.<sup>7</sup>

**Courses specifically dedicated to Catholic social teaching** are usually identified under the rubric of "Social Ethics" or "Catholic Social Teaching." More than three-fourths of the schools require such a course and most of the rest include at least some of the subject matter under different titles. The development of Catholic social ethics is considered in response to changing social conditions and theories. The principles, values, criteria for judgment, and directives for action are studied as well. Case studies often are employed to provide realistic scenarios involving the general theories. Reflection on the complex realities of human existence in American society and in the international community takes place in light of faith and of the Church's tradition. Also pertaining directly to social ethics is the fairly recent revival of courses in virtue ethics.<sup>8</sup> Some courses are interdisciplinary and combine social doctrine with other fields of study such as preaching, liturgy, spirituality, or political theory.<sup>9</sup> The goal of all these courses is to help students understand the underlying vision of social ethics and the good of the

human person in relation to society and the common good. Emphasis is placed on the integral connection between social justice and its moral foundations in Scripture and the tradition.<sup>10</sup>

These courses in social ethics typically encompass the major Church documents on social teaching from at least *Rerum Novarum* in 1891 to *Centesimus Annus* in 1991, including importantly *Gaudium et spes*. Treatment of the U.S. bishops' pastoral letters on war and peace and the economy, social ethics in parishes, and church governance and structure may also be part of the program. The courses provide the theory for the praxis of social justice, using the Gospel as a means to discern the social demands for our time. The major themes incorporated into most of these courses can be located in one of the four broad categories identified earlier. The particular topics covered in each are as follows:

**“Care for the Human Person”** includes topics such as the demands of a covenant relationship with God, reflection on the significance of human dignity, the common good, the right to life, capital punishment, and the correlation of rights and duties. Some give expression to the Church's prophetic word of sacramental and real solidarity with the poor, the oppressed, the marginalized, and victims of our world.

**“Concern for Work and Family”** includes topics that are associated with concern for human dignity, such as world hunger, labor unions, and the right to work. Racism and sexism, racial equality, ethnocentrism, and the rights of women are also treated in some courses.

**“Economic Organization and Political Participation”** includes topics such as an understanding of the fundamental components of the social order, resistance to unjust government, and international social order. It also considers the moral dimensions of the economy, economic systems and order, political responsibility and order, economic justice, and poverty.

**“Developing a Culture of Peace and Solidarity”** includes topics that embrace the broad goal of establishing a just and peaceful world, just war theories in a nuclear age, terrorism, and revolution, as well as religious liberty, liberation theology, and human rights. Development of social policy and the environmental crisis are also taken up under this rubric.

## B. Pastoral Formation on the Catholic Social Tradition

Pastoral formation flows from intellectual formation, and concerns itself with the practical application of the social teaching. Many courses present an approach to moral theology that concentrate on the development of an integrated and pastorally oriented method. Students are taught to offer pastoral guidance on topics of morality in areas of marriage and family, health care ethics, and issues related to commutative and distributive justice. Opportunities for applied social teaching may come in the form of pastoral counseling and spiritual direction, as well as through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Some schools also have a practicum experience as a requirement, which places students in a variety of social justice ministries. In these situations they are taught to use the tools of social analysis of justice issues, taking into account the social and cultural conditions in which they find themselves.

Another major forum for the practical application of social justice principles is through liturgical celebrations, especially through preaching with an awareness of how the Gospel speaks to the Church's social teaching. Both liturgy and homiletics courses provide opportunities to make the connection. In *Liturgy and Social Justice*, Diane Bergant writes: "Liturgy not only proclaims and celebrates what has been accomplished but is also announces and anticipates what has not yet been fully realized. . . . In this sense, justice issues are more than merely themes introduced in prayers, songs, or readings during ritual performance. Justice issues are constitutive of the liturgical act itself."<sup>11</sup> In schools where this understanding of liturgy is promoted, students are consistently made conscious of the centrality of justice in the life of the Church. Some homiletics courses also are designed for the purpose of teaching students models for preaching justice by helping them discover specific social justice themes in the Sunday Lectionary. Walter Burkhardt's *Preaching the Just Word* is a primary source for such models.<sup>12</sup> He provides numerous examples, using a variety of approaches in proclaiming the Scriptural message in relation to contemporary social issues.

### C. Spiritual and Human Formation on the Catholic Social Tradition

Spiritual and human formation are closely linked in the process of preparation for ministry. Among other topics, spiritual development calls for the individual to examine virtue, sin, conversion, vocation, character, and discernment. For priests, adopting a stance of simplicity of life is important to their spirituality and is clearly related to the social tradition of the Church. This stance requires a humble lifestyle, a spirit of self-denial, and an attitude of service that is grounded in prayer. It calls for a preferential option for the poor and demands pastoral availability, thus modeling one's life and ministry after that of Christ.

Human formation focuses on psychological and emotional development that promotes a stance toward others that is inclusive and humble. It requires seminarians to be aware of dimensions of moral development and moral goodness. In the process, they are expected to grow in an understanding of the meaning of love, friendship, and self-giving. Justice requires a fidelity to the responsibilities of all relationships in one's life. Among the goals of human formation, *Pastores dabo vobis* specifies several for this phase of development: it should lead students "to respect every person, to have a sense of justice, to be true to their word, to be genuinely compassionate." Essentially, human formation sets the stage for a life of awareness and attentiveness to all people, especially those who are most in need.

A report from the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Everyday Christianity: To Hunger and Thirst for Justice"<sup>13</sup> summarizes effectively the object of formation for ministry that attends to the social tradition of the Church: "Catholics are called by God to protect human life, to promote human dignity, to defend the poor and to seek the common good. This social mission of the church belongs to all of us. It is an essential part of what it is to be a believer." Leaders who can encourage others to practice their faith in this manner will go a long way in promoting a just world.

## ASSESSMENT AND CONCLUSION

Throughout the paper, I have raised up ways in which seminary formation programs are attentive to communicating an understanding of the Catholic social tradition to future priests. Taken in the aggregate, one can point to a rich array of offerings from intellectual and pastoral dimensions, to human and spiritual dimensions. Yet, the 1998 report of the United States Catholic Conference (of Bishops), *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions*, points out that some seminaries require courses on Catholic social teaching and others do not. The report states that the results of their survey “suggest that while there are many good examples of courses on Catholic social teaching, there is a serious need to ensure that all seminaries include in their curricula required courses on this topic. The minimum expectation should be implementation of the Vatican’s *Guidelines for the Study and Teaching of the Church’s Social Doctrine in the Formation of Priests*.”<sup>14</sup>

About three-fourths of the seminaries develop their programs with an awareness of the centrality of the social teaching of the Church. They require students to participate in field education experiences that move them beyond conventional middle class parishes to parishes that struggle with the poverty of their members and of their social location. They place students in centers where the poor are fed and clothed, where the sick are tended to even when they do not have the means to pay for their care. They also focus on providing knowledge about the social structures that lead to deprivation; students may work with political action groups or participate in lobbying efforts that touch on the Catholic social tradition. In terms of spiritual development, prayer experiences and opportunities for fasting for the sake of a particular cause may be offered, preferably initiated by students and prepared by them. Liturgies and homilies focusing attention on the needs of the world keep before the community the importance of praying for and preaching about these concerns. Virtually every seminary provides some of these opportunities, but perhaps fewer than half are deeply invested in a comprehensive program.

In conclusion, I offer two major critiques of seminary formation programs relative to the direction made indispensable in *GS*. First, the uneven application of the significant norms set out in the guiding documents is regrettable. As bishops and vocation directors evaluate their choice of seminaries for their future priests, if they were to call for improvement in the presentation of the social teaching of the Church, seminaries would respond. Some already do have adequate programs, but again, it is the inconsistency among programs that is problematic. The relatively brief time dedicated to Catholic social teaching in a few schools is a major shortcoming, even to the extreme that several do not require a course in social ethics at all. Exacerbating the problem throughout the system is the fallout from the recent sexual abuse scandals. The draft currently in preparation of a new *PPF* turns attention more than ever to matters of internal discipline—obviously needed—but resulting in a diminished emphasis on the Church in the world, especially in matters of social concern.

Second, a critique can be made of seminarians enrolled in theologates. Faculty and administrators who work in these schools suggest that the majority of students do only what is required; they have little passion for social justice. Some may even resist the related requirements. A few also may focus on a particular issue to the exclusion of all others, so their lives are not directed toward a broader view of the Church’s social teaching. Fortunately, at least

a relatively small proportion of seminarians become deeply involved in every dimension of their education that relates to social justice. They take more courses than required, they spend their pastoral time in settings that are focused on social concerns, and they develop their personal and spiritual lives in ways that take into account the social tradition of the Church. Their influence and enthusiasm is the foundation for the hope that participation in and love for this ministry will spread.

The impact of *Gaudium et spes* on the mission of the Church relates in an essential way to the formation of priests. If future priests are drawn into thoughtful consideration of how to implement in their parishes the concepts established through the Catholic social tradition, and especially as articulated in *Gaudium et spes*, great gains will be made in promoting justice in real-world situations in which their parishioners live. The vocational call of Christians to be leaven in the world will be enhanced with proper education and encouragement to act on these life issues. Seminaries have immense responsibility to uphold the concepts and principles articulated in the guiding documents. Faculties must insist on student participation in all aspects of formation that deal with these church teachings.

Pope John Paul II and many bishops have been tireless in their call for a response to the suffering in the world, to poverty, and to the profound need for peace. They seek a greater response to the cause of justice from the faithful who are called upon to fulfill their vocation in the world, so that all “might have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). They recognize that the leadership of priests is essential in moving forward this agenda through a passionate commitment to Catholic social teaching. By promoting these directives vigorously in their writings and incorporating them in the documents that determine the content of formation programs for future priests, church leaders have set the stage for increasing the significance of this great tradition. Their strong emphasis has the potential to reach the hearts and minds of future priests as they prepare for ministry. Such dedicated priests will ultimately encourage the faithful to fulfill this dimension of the Church’s mission in the world.

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<sup>1</sup> Quotes from *Gaudium et spes* are from the translation of Austin Flannery, O.P., General Editor, *Vatican Council II Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations* (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, Inc., 1996).

<sup>2</sup> John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day*, *Origins* 21 (April 16, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Program of Priestly Formation*, Fourth Edition, (Washington, DC, United States Catholic Conference, Inc., 1993).

<sup>4</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education, *Guidelines for the Study and Teaching of the Church’s Social Doctrine in the Formation of Priests*, *Origins* 19 (August 3, 1989).

<sup>5</sup> Following are examples of typical course descriptions in fundamental or foundational moral theology.

**Fundamental Moral Theology.** An investigation of the elements of Catholic moral teaching in the magisterial documents of the Church, particularly in the documents of the Second Vatican Council, in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and in the Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*. Envisioned outcomes: an understanding of the influence of Scripture, especially the Pauline letters and the Sermon on the Mount, on Christian ethics; an understanding of the moral teaching of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, particularly on the relationship between virtues, grace, and law; an understanding of the influence of nominalism on contemporary moral theology; and an understanding of the relationship between freedom, conscience, and truth. Format: lecture and discussion. (3 credits) [2002-03 catalog] Kenrick-Glennon Seminary (St. Louis, MO).

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**Foundations of Moral Theology.** This course considers basic moral themes such as sin, conversion, moral development, Scripture and ethics, fidelity to the magisterium, natural law, conscience, discernment, character and vocation. It sets a foundation for personal and social ethics. Study of *Veritatis Splendor* is a key course component. (3 credits) [2002-05 catalog] St. Mary's Seminary and University (Baltimore, MD)

<sup>6</sup> Following is an example of a typical course description that combines sexuality and marriage.

**Sexuality and Marriage in Catholic Teachings.** This course demonstrates the sacred gift of human sexuality and the truth, goodness, and beauty of the conjugal act within the covenant of marriage. After an in-depth study of the philosophical and theological sources of the Church's teaching on human sexuality with an emphasis on the theology of the body, there follows a consideration of specific issues such as responsible parenthood, natural family planning, chastity, contraception, pre-marital sex, homosexuality, masturbation, adultery, lust, pornography, and reproductive technological interventions. (3 credits) [2000-03 catalog] Saint Charles Borromeo Seminary (Wynnewood, PA).

<sup>7</sup> Following are examples of typical course descriptions for medical moral theology, theological bioethics, and bioethics combined with sexual ethics.

**Medical Moral Theology.** After an overview of the moral framework that guides Roman Catholic medical ethics, this course will continue with moral analysis of such issues as hospital ethics committees, abortion, tube feeding, treatment of defective newborns, reproductive technologies, human embryo research, homosexuality, euthanasia, problems of stem cell research and cloning human beings. (3 credits) [2004-2005 catalog] Dominican House of Studies, (Washington, DC).

**Theological Bioethics.** An introduction to issues in contemporary medical care and the Church's response. Life, corporeality, health, suffering, and death in Christian perspective. General principles relating to human life, its value and integrity. Particular emphasis - pastoral, sacramental, and legal, as well as medico-moral - on issues at the beginning and end of life. (3 credits) [2002-04 catalog] Notre Dame Seminary (New Orleans, LA)

**Sexual and Biomedical Ethics.** Examines the human good from the standpoint of sexual ethics and bioethics within the context of the Roman Catholic tradition. Addresses foundational issues such as the nature and dignity of the person as embodied and relational. In its treatment of sexual and medical ethics the course examines current pastoral issues where human goods are often in conflict (pre-marital sex, contraception, homosexualities, abortion, reproductive technology, withdrawal of artificial nutrition and hydration, euthanasia). There is a pastoral consideration of these challenges guided by the authoritative norms of the pastoral magisterium and insights from the theological community. (3 credits) [2001-03 catalog] Washington Theological Union (Washington, DC)

<sup>8</sup> Following is an example of typical course description dealing with virtue ethics.

**Theological and Moral Virtues.** A study of the person and the moral life that examines the interaction of grace and human desire. The freely bestowed gifts of faith, hope and love provide the basis for those human habits and qualities that dispose the moral agent to God and the good. This course will endeavor to show how the cardinal moral virtues flow from the theological virtues. By linking actions with the agent, a virtue-based perspective can illuminate practical aspects of the life of faith for every believer. (3 credits) [2000-03 catalog] Saint Charles Borromeo (Wynnewood, PA).

<sup>9</sup> Following are examples of course descriptions that employ and interdisciplinary approach.

**Catholic Social Teaching/Preaching Practicum.** Examines the breadth of the Church's social teaching with emphasis on issues of contemporary significance such as war and peace, terrorism, economic justice, and human rights. The course introduces models for preaching justice in the Church and provides opportunities to prepare homilies using social themes. (3 credits) [2004-06 catalog] The Saint Paul Seminary School of Divinity (St. Paul, MN).

**Spirituality, Liturgy, and the Quest for Justice.** An examination of how classic and contemporary spiritualities incorporate justice into their framework. The Ignation Exercises and feminist and ecological forms of spirituality are analyzed along with key figures such as Thomas Merton. Considers authentic ways in which justice can be incorporated into liturgical celebration. (3 credits) [2004-06 catalog] Catholic Theological Union at Chicago (Chicago, IL).

**Christian Political Thought.** An historical and textual examination of Catholic and Protestant approaches to life in political society. Themes include love and power, loyalty and universalism, equality and hierarchy, reason and revelation, law and authority, sovereignty and justice. We will read short selections from numerous figures, including: Patristic figures, Augustine, Aquinas, Suarez, Machiavelli, Luther, Calvin, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Burke, Wesley, Mill, Weber, John Ryan, Social Gospel, Maritain, Reinhold Niebuhr, John Courtney Murray,

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Liberation Theology, Teilhard de Chardin. (3 credits) [2003-04 catalog] Weston Jesuit School of Theology (Cambridge, MA).

<sup>10</sup> Following are examples of typical descriptions for courses on the breadth of the social teaching of the Church.

**Social Ethics.** An historical and theological examination of fundamental themes in Christian social reflection (e.g., power, justice, and their relevance of faith to social living). This course studies in-depth the social thought contained in the major papal social encyclicals of the last century. Attention is also given to the pastoral letters on social concerns developed by the American bishops. Current developments in key social issues and movements (e.g., racism, violence in society, sexism, environmental justice, health-care restructuring) are addressed. The course also considers practical strategies of justice education and implementing social justice ministry in parish settings. (3 credits) [2002-04 catalog] Saint Francis Seminary (St. Francis, WI).

**Justice and Catholic Social Teaching.** This course is a study and analysis of the papal encyclicals and other Church documents that have come to be known as Catholic Social Teaching. Particular emphasis is placed on the meaning of justice in the Catholic tradition. Specific issues addressed include war and peace, economic justice and the right to work, capital punishment, human rights, and the common good. (3 credits) [2002-05 catalog] Aquinas Institute of Theology (St. Louis, MO).

<sup>11</sup> Diane Bergant, *Liturgy and Social Justice* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1988) 14.

<sup>12</sup> Walter Burkhardt, *Preaching the Just Word* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996).

<sup>13</sup> National Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Everyday Christianity: To Hunger and Thirst for Justice" *Origins* 28 (November 26, 1998).

<sup>14</sup> Committee on Education, the Committee on Domestic Policy, and the Committee on International Policy of the United States Catholic Conference, *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, Inc., 1998) 16.