The Programme of Studies in the Faculty of Theology enforced by the Magisterial Chirograph of 1771

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After completing successfully a course in Literature and Philosophy and obtaining the Mastership in Arts, the student of the newly-founded University could join any of the three Academical Courses of Theology, Law and Medicine.

The studies in the Faculty of Theology, at least as regards the subjects studied, were the same as they are today, after the reform carried out lately in accordance with the Pontifical Constitution “Deus Scientiarum Dominus”.

The second part of the Statutes enforced by Grand Master Pinto in 1771 (1), deals with the syllabus, so to call it, of the studies to be followed throughout the Theological Course, which lasted five years. Successful candidates obtained the degree of Bachelor after the second year, the degree of Licentiate at the end of the fourth year and that of Doctor (Laurea) at the end of the fifth year (2).

The programme of studies included Holy Scripture, Speculative Theology, Moral Theology, Canon Law and Church History (3). Holy Scripture (4) was considered as the noblest among the several branches of theological studies, because the Bible is the source of the Divine Science, and because it is “the book of everlasting life.” This supernatural life is acquired by him who complies with the precepts therein contained and who shapes his life in imitation of that of Christ and of the Saints of both the Old and the New Testament.

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(1) A.O.M. (Archive of the Order—Malta): MS 575, Liber Bullarum, ff. 479v.—482.
(2) Ibid., Tit. XXVII., ff. 492v.—493.
(3) This is the order of the subjects as mentioned in the Constitution, but in other places Church History is mentioned before Canon Law (cfr. f. 497v, 498v).
(4) Ibid., Tit. XIII., f. 479v.—480.
The Professor of Holy Scripture had to start his lectures with an introduction on the importance of the study of this subject. Then he had to deal with the texts and versions of the Bible and to explain the methods by which the books could be recognized as Canonical. Next, he had to explain in detail the Holy Books, dictating now and again, the more important rules that help to give a right interpretation of the Scriptures.

The Professor had to deal also with incidental questions and to solve doubts about the apparent antilogies and thwarted applications of some expressions. On account of the sore need of the knowledge of the Greek and Hebrew languages for the right interpretation of the Divine Books, the Professor of Holy Scripture had the task to teach these two languages.

Dogmatic Theology (5) was deemed as "the true and perfect knowledge." The Professor of this subject had to speak of the nobility of dogmatic studies, and it was his duty to enlighten the minds and to kindle the hearts of his students with this knowledge. He had to lecture on such matters as the sources of this branch of theological studies, the authenticity of the Canonical Books, the legality of Catholic Tradition and Papal supremacy and Infallibility. Controversial points arising from the study of Comparative religions were to be raised and objections were to be solved in class, so as to make the students feel a keen interest in, and appreciate the more Catholic belief.

Besides these fundamental treatises, other topics had to be dealt with according to the programme for each year (6). In the solution of controversies the Professor was to adhere religiously to the doctrine and principles of St. Augustine and of his faithful interpreter, St Thomas Aquinas. The scholastic form was excluded from the method of teaching "because of its useless subtleties and sophisms." The Professor had to touch lightly on certain scholastic questions but he was expected to dwell at greater length on the exposition of dogma and on the confuta-

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(5) Ibid., Tit. XIV., ff. 480, 480v.

Speculative Theology was taught by two Professors. It might be that Fundamental Theology was distinct from Dogmatic Theology. (Cfr. Diploma given to the Cleric Paschal Grim in 1741).

(6) This programme or syllabus was called "rotulo" (Cfr. Tit. XIX, f. 484).
tion of dogmatic errors. Students were shown, with the help of examples, which were the true and reliable sources of Catholic doctrine, the errors which the Church had to face throughout her life and the decisions she had deemed fit to take in order to safeguard the Divine Truths.

Moral Theology (7) was the next thoroughly taught subject in the Course of Theology, because this branch was held to be "necessary for the acquaintance of the right rules of Christian life, in accordance with the spirit of the Gospel and of Ecclesiastical Canons."

There seems to have been in some Catholic Universities of those times Profesors of Moral Theology who gave notes on this subject that were at variance with the teaching of the Church. The use of any written text was prohibited by the Constitution and the prescribed textbook was the "Theologia Moralis" by the Jesuit Father Paolo Gabriele Antoine, reprinted at Rome in 1757 by order of the learned Pope Benedict XIV (8). In order to train the students in making good sacramental confessions and to become good confessors in their future priestly career, every week a "casus conscientiae" was proposed by the Professor for the students to discuss. This was a very wise measure because casuistry is merely the reasoned application of the law to concrete cases and it determines with all possible exactitude the limitations of law or the bearings of the law in particular cases.

As a help to Moral Theology in its purpose of leading man to everlasting life, the study of Canon Law was prescribed by the Statutes (9). At the time there was no Code of Canon Law as we know it today. Canonical studies were carried on the

(7) Ibid., Tit. XV., ff. 480v-481.
(8) This textbook of Moral Theology had a second reprint in 1764, and it was annotated by a Conventual Friar Minor. It contained 6 Tomes distributed into 2 volumes.
(9) Ibid., Tit. XVI., ff. 481.
various collections of canons and of decrees which were compiled from time to time (10).

The Professor of Canon Law had to lecture on the "Institutiones" (11), to compare the various collections, both of the East and West and to show the degree of their authority. He had consequently "to explain the five books, inserting in their proper place the titles of the sixth, the Extravagantes, the Decree of Gratian and what had been later on decreed by the Councils and by the Roman Pontiffs and particularly by the Council of Trent."

The study of Church History was prescribed (12) with the purpose of showing "the divinity of the Founder of the Church through her wonderful origin and miraculous development, thanks to the labours of Christ and of His Apostles, and of proving the veracity and the holiness of the same Church through the victories she gained over her enemies in persecutions and in heresies." The aims of the study of this subject were to inculcate in the hearts of the faithful a deep gratitude for their being members of the Church and to make them cherish her salutary teachings.

The Professor of this subject dealt with the life and work of Christ and of the Apostles, with the early persecutions of the Church, with heretics and their erroneous doctrines, with the Councils that condemned these errors and with the life and work of the Popes. To him was also entrusted the task of lecturing on Patrology (or better Patristics) and on Liturgy.

(10) The first official, though not thoroughly authentic collection was that of Gratian (1140-1150), known by the name "Decretum Gratiani". Later on this Collection was supplemented by other five collections. Pope Gregory IX in 1234 compiled all the canons and decrees contained in these collections in one comprehensive work divided in five books—the "Quinque Decretalium Libri". Pope Boniface VIII in 1298 added a sixth book known as the "Sevto". In 1317 Pope John XXII published the Constitutions of his Predecessor Clement V under the name of "Clementinae". Later on, other Papal Decretals were published under the title of "Extravagantes" because they were outside the abovementioned Collections approved by the Popes. The Acts of the Council of Trent (1545-63) could be reckoned as a most outstanding collection of canons regarding faith and morals.

(11) The "Institutiones" were treatises dealing with the principles and general elements of law.

(12) Ibid., Tit. XVII, ff. 481v-482.
This is clearly shown in art. VI of the paragraph dealing with Church History, which runs as follows: "And lastly, after acquainting (his students) with the Holy Fathers and their works, and the other famous writers of the Church, (the Professor) will conclude with a treatise on Holy Liturgy, by teaching the young students a particular way how to partake of the spirit of the Holy Rites prescribed by the Church."

From other documents preserved in the same "Liber Bulinarum", we know that lectures were delivered, most likely to theological students, on the history of the Order (Istoria Gerosolimitana). As a matter of fact a list of appointments of Professors and Lecturers of the University speaks of a Lecturer in Ecclesiastical History who had to teach temporarily the "Istoria Gerosolimitana" (13). In a paylist of salaries given to Professors mention is made of a Professor of Ecclesiastical History and of the History of the Order (14).

In the first section of the Statute, several details about the delivering of lectures in the Course of Theology are given; however, the information afforded is not exhaustive. We learn from it that lectures in theology began on the 3rd of November and ended by the feastday of St John the Baptist. Examinations were held in the period dating from this feast to the middle of July. Throughout the academic year lectures were delivered daily excepting Thursdays, Sundays and other Public Holidays. Saturdays were reserved for practical exercises ("exercitationes") which were held in the lecture halls (15).

Practical exercises were repeated every month in a semi-official way, before a limited audience. Every year however, a public and thoroughly official exercise was held by one or two candidates (16).

Holy Scripture was taught from 8 to 9 a.m.; Speculative Theology from 9 to 10 a.m.; Moral Theology from 2 to 3 p.m.; Ecclesiastical History from 10 to 11 a.m. and from 3 to 4 p.m.; Canon Law from 8 to 10 a.m. and Hebrew and Greek in the

(13) Ibid., f. 498v.
(14) Ibid., f. 501.
(15) Ibid., Tit. XVIII., ff. 482-483. Mass was said both at the opening and at the closing of the academic year (f. 482v).
(16) Ibid., l.c.
afternoon (17). From the overlapping of hours such as those for Canon Law and Dogmatic Theology it can be deduced that either lectures were not held daily on each subject or that lectures on certain subjects were held in one year and those on other subjects in another year. The syllabus and the time-table for each year were drawn by the Rector and were made known to each Professor by means of the "rotulo" drawn up by the Secretary of the University (18).

(17) Ibid., ff. 497-497v. The afternoon time-table was postponed by one hour during the months of March and April, and by two hours during those of May and June.
(18) Ibid., Tit. XXI", f. 488v.