

NOTES AND COMMENTS

MIXED PRIESTLY TRAINING

IN THE LIGHT OF HISTORY AND THE MAGISTERIUM

An appraisal of certain disastrous reforms in Seminary education which boast of "inventing" today experiences that have failed yesterday.

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I

INTRODUCTION

Vatican II in one of its major documents solemnly affirms the "supreme importance of priestly formation" in order to bring about "the desired renewal of the whole Church".¹ In the said document the Council lays down "certain fundamental principles, wherein laws already tested by the experience of centuries are reaffirmed, and new regulations are introduced in harmony with the Constitutions and Decrees of the Sacred Council and the changed conditions of the times."² And it is curious to note that both in the Decree on Priestly Training³ and in that on the Ministry and Life of the Priests,⁴ Vatican II refers to the masterly documents of the last Popes, St. Pius X, Pius XI, Pius XII, John XXIII, and specifically, insofar as Seminaries are concerned, to SUMMI DEI VERBUM of Paul VI.⁵

¹ Sacrosanctum Oecumenicum Concilium Vaticanum II, *Constitutiones, Decreta, Declarationes*, Libr. Editr. Vatic., 1966, "*Optatam Totius*" Prooemium: pp. 357-358.

² *Ibid.*, l.c.

³ *Ibid.*, l.c., nota 1.

⁴ Vaticanum II, *op. cit.*, "*Presbyterorum Ordinis*", n. 12, nota 7; p. 654.

⁵ S. Pius X, *Exhort. ad Clerum*, HAERENT ANIMO, 4 aug. 1908: S. Pii X Acta IV, pp. 237-264; Pius XI, *Litt. Encycl.*, AD CATHOLICI SA-

It is not therefore in the mind of Vatican II to reject or contradict in its basic principles the traditional teaching of the Church down the ages, concerning the purpose, nature and essential marks of the Seminaries. This legacy of the Council of Trent, which by itself alone would have justified its gigantic work of reform,⁹ has been transmitted to us in the span of four centuries, not as a dead letter, but as a living form, improving itself slowly and gradually with the experience of facts, perfecting itself in its details, and moving forward with prudent innovations in all levels, as demanded or permitted by the times. To continue this work of "renewal"—and not of "demolition"—is the aim of Vatican II. This is clear from the words quoted above.

The educational value of the Tridentine Seminaries has been tested and has been found effective in producing an excellent and exemplary clergy. It is true that our Seminaries, like any other human institution, need up-dating, need reforms in all their accidental structures in order to be relevant and responsive to the times in which we live. But such reforms must not mean a step backwards, a return to methods which have failed in the past. Let us not turn back the clock of history.

Unfortunately the desire to "invent" profane novelties is spreading. And it is dragging many well-meaning but short-sighted reformers who boldly advocate, not an authentic and legitimate Seminary renewal, but an outdated and outmoded *deformation* of its most basic and essential marks.

The idea is becoming more current that our Seminaries are outdated; that they are no longer adequate for our times; that in our days, by a sort of hocus-pocus, all people, including the youth in the process of formation, have reached the "age of maturity"; so that what formerly we used to call "discipline, character formation, spiritual direction, scholastic rigor, priestly spirit, *segregation* (which indeed does not mean

CERDOTII, 20 dec. 1935, AAS 28 (1936), p. 5 ss; Pius XII, Adhort. Apost., MENTI NOSTRAE, 23 sept. 1950, AAS. 42 (1950), pp. 657-702; Ioannes XXIII, Litt. Encycl., SACERDOTII NOSTRI PRIMORDIA, 1 aug. 1959, AAS. 51 (1959), pp. 545-579; Paulus VI, Epist. Apost., SUMMI DEI VERBUM, 4 nov. 1963, AAS. 55 (1963), pp. 979-995.

⁹ Cf. P. Sforza Pallavicino, *Istoria del Concilio di Trento*, ed. di A. M. Zaccaria, Tom. IV, Roma 1833, p. 344.

separation from, and much less *disregard of the world*)” are useless and harmful to the growth of human personality, the spirit of initiative and self-determination. All this, they say, smells of Trent. And Trent is outdated (!). And so our Tridentine Seminaries are on the way out. But what proposal do they offer to replace them?

And here comes the big proposal! A new “discovery”, yea, but of an antique. A magic formula, yes; but which has been tried in the past and has been found wanting. Under the guise of psychology in depth, the new breed of Seminary educators disregard the time-tested teaching of the Church and the clear lessons of history, and propose experimentations in priestly training which existed hundred of years before and after Trent...; experimentation that brought distress upon the priesthood and disaster upon the Church.

The much talked-of refers to which we refer can be summarized as follows. The Tridentine Seminaries until now had been “close gardens” of “monastic” type, where future diocesan priests were formed in an “abnormal” environment, under a “gregarious” discipline, destructive of all personal initiative, and harmful to the acquisition of full maturity and a sense of responsibility so necessary for the prospective ministers of the Church. And root-cause of this—it is alleged—is in training seminarians separated from the world, unaware of the burning problems of the social milieu in which they will be called upon to work and of the men whom they will have to serve.

Hence the reform—true, necessary, urgent, radical—must consist in “openness to the world”, “insertion into the world”; train the seminarians in the midst of the world, in constant and close contact with society. Let them study together with laymen who do not aspire to the priesthood. Let them freely mingle with laymen in social and family circles. In this way the seminarians shall be formed without inhibitions and clerical complexes. By personal experience they will know the world they are to save and the problems they are to meet in their priestly ministry.

We admit that in this diagnosis about the present condition of our Seminaries there is a grain of truth, but on a heap of exaggeration. And a half-truth is worse than a glaring error. That is why in no way

can we admit the proposed solution, above all in its boldest forms, of a "mixed" training of seminarians and lay students, on equal footing, habitually together in school and social activities.

And we reject renewal along lines of *excessive* "openness to the world", "insertion into the world" consequent upon a *mixed priestly training*. We reject it, firstly, because the history of many centuries has proved that such a system of Seminary education, specially in its most advanced forms, has given to the Church a corrupt, vicious and scandalous clergy; and even in its more moderate forms (Seminary-Colleges, College-Seminaries, etc.) it fell short of the ideal Seminary as envisioned by the Council of Trent. And in either way it has ended in lowering down the number and quality of priestly vocations.

Above all we reject *mixed priestly training* because it is openly against the repeated and explicit teachings of the Magisterium of the Church. At all times, even until the days of Vatican II,⁷ the Church, faithful to the Gospel,⁸ has always proposed *segregation* (which, we repeat, does not mean separation or estrangement) from the world, as a necessary condition for all priests, and consequently, still more, for all those who aspire to the priesthood. The Supreme Magisterium of the Church has firmly disapproved and proscribed "mixed" Seminaries. It is true that in some countries she allows, because of special circumstances, that seminarians attend classes outside the Seminary proper (in Colleges or Universities); but this is done always with the guaranty of a solid spiritual and ecclesiastical discipline imparted to the candidates for the priesthood in order to neutralize the negative factors involved in such a system.

In subsequent articles we shall speak of the testimony of history and the clean-out teachings of the Magisterium. The proofs abound, and it is opportune to bring them to the attention of those who might not be aware of them. The topic burns with actuality. Under the guise of "new experiments", certain practices are gaining ground in many countries. They are experiments that have failed a hundred times in the past, and today are presented as the authentic *renewal* demanded by

⁷ Vaticanum II, op. cit., "*Presbyterorum Ordinis*", n. 3; pp. 625-626.

⁸ Mt. 19, 27; Jo. 15, 19; 17, 14-16; Acts 13, 2; Rom. 1, 1.

Vatican II: "openness to the world", "insertion into the world" of our young seminarians, by means of a *mixed* or, for want of a better term, a *secularized* priestly training.

For the sake of precision, may I be allowed here a clarification. Vatican II does not even mention such solution. Long before Vatican II, Pope Pius XII in MENTI NOSTRAE⁹ of September 23, 1950 said NOT IN FAVOR OF A MIXED OR SECULARIZED PRIESTLY TRAINING, nor of throwing the seminarians into the world, nor of bringing the world into the Seminary, but of "decreasing gradually and prudently the separation between the people and the future priest", avoiding "an environment *too withdrawn* from the world." This certainly is quite different from the rash and bold reforms that are being advocated today.

Unfortunately in some countries or dioceses fatal experiments have been introduced and are being introduced at all cost. In the near future their negative and bitter results will confirm once again—although too late then to repair the harm done to the Church—that as Leo XIII said, and with him Pius XII and recently Paul VI repeated: "the fate of the Church depends mainly on the condition of the Seminaries."¹⁰

If experiments are wanted, let there be . . . , but with rats and rabbits *when those experiments most probably may fail and prove fatal*; but never with young seminarians who are the hope of the Church. It seems to me that some experiments which nowadays are proposed and tried in favor of Seminary renewal are irresponsible attempts against the very heart of the Church. Vatican II,¹¹ with the same words of Pope Benedict XV,¹² declared: "the Seminary is the heart of the Diocese."

⁹ Cf. AAS. 42 (1950), pp. 686-687.

¹⁰ Leo XIII, Epist. PATERNAE PROVIDAEQUE, Acta Leonis XIII (1899), p. 194; cf. Pius XII, Epist. ad Ep. Poloniae, PER HOS POSTREMOS ANNOS, ASS. 37 (1945), p. 207; Paulus VI, Epist. Apost. SUMMI DEI VERBUM, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1963, p. 16.

¹¹ Vaticanum II, op. cit., "Optatam Totius", n. 5; p. 365.

¹² Benedictus XV, Epist. SAEPE NOBIS, 30 nov. 1921, where he affirms that the Seminary "est . . . Dioecesis cor, unde in omnes Ecclesiae venas spiritualis vitae diffunditur" (cf. S. C. de Seminariis, *Seminaria Ecclesiae Catholicae*, Typ. Pol. Vat., 1963, p. 246).

II

Pre-tridentine Seminaries: episcopal schools
(I-IX Centuries)

The advocates of "openness to the world", "insertion into the world" for our youths who aspire to the priesthood, want to bring this about by means of a *mixed priestly training*, in constant and close contact with laymen. They ought to know, however, that in spite of their nice theories, historical facts argue:

- a) that they are not inventing something new, for that kind of priestly formation, outside the Seminary, in the midst of the world, is — as we shall see later — so old that it is traceable to the Middle Ages, and in one way or other has been practiced for more than ten centuries, almost up to our days: certainly, at least until the beginning of the 20th century;
- b) that the experience of all these centuries has demonstrated that such kind of training has produced ordinarily the most disastrous results.

It was precisely the sad experience of the failure of that system in the priestly training that moved the true reformers of the XVI century to work out the Tridentine Decree which ordered the establishment of colleges exclusively destined to promote and discern ecclesiastical vocations, in a "special" — not "abnormal", as some say today— environment, different from the ordinary, and characterized, among other things, by *segregating* the seminarians from other young people who aim to pursue civic or secular careers.

The history of the institutions for priestly training through twenty centuries will provide us in the present and following chapters with very interesting facts to help us realize the lasting value of Tridentine Seminaries, and at the same time to evaluate properly the deformation that mixed priestly training implies.

During the first three centuries of Christianity which were centuries of bloody persecution, it was not possible to think of putting up schools exclusively for the formation of the clergy. Following the example of the Apostles, the Bishops of those times, personally or by their vicars, taught and trained in their own homes those whom they considered fit to become future helpers in the priestly ministry.¹ The catechetical schools which were founded in Rome, Alexandria, Carthage, Antioch, and Cesarea of Palestine, contributed in some way to a more solid doctrinal formation of the candidates for the priesthood. But those schools were not *exclusively* intended for priestly training, hence, they can not be considered as the pattern of Seminaries.

In the infant Church of those days with her small communities of christians, the number of priests was necessarily few. These few however were formed personally under the supervision of the Bishop or his vicar in an environment of sincere piety and heroic sanctity. And thus they remained true to their high calling.² Two things we should note here:

- a) If we do not find Seminaries or schools exclusive for the training of the clergy in the first centuries of the Church, it is because the circumstances of those times of persecution did not allow it, nor the small number of the faithful in the new christian communities demanded it;
- b) Because of the special formation that the candidates to the priesthood received under the personal supervision of the Bishop or his vicar, those first few priests were worthy of the era of martyrs and catacombs.

Then came the peace of Constantine (a. 313). With the freedom of the Church so favorable to the spread of Christianity, priestly vocations increased in such number that the episcopal residences became too small to receive all those who aspired for the Holy Orders. Many of

¹ Dr. Laurentino García García, *El Aspirante al Sacerdocio y su Formación*, Ed. "Sigueme", Salamanca 1947, 3 vols., II, pp. 9-10.

² S. C. de Sem., *Seminaria Ecclesiae Catholicae*, Typ. Pol. Vat., 1963, pp. 29-32.

them were forced to attend the *public* schools in order to receive the necessary cultural education. These schools were open to all young men—whatever their call of life could have been—and not only christians but also pagans. There were again pagans even among the teachers. On the other hand, the diocesan administration became more complex and the Bishop or his vicar could no longer supervise the training of candidates for the ministry as closely and as effectively as before. Both factors caused great evils to the clergy. Heresies, false doctrines, immorality began to creep into the ranks of the priesthood. The many Church laws promulgated at that time were impotent to check the evil. *Mixed priestly training* began to bear bad fruits. It was felt imperative that the clergy be given a “special” education. St. Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo, was the first to discover a formula which could be considered as the first blueprint of the Seminaries of Church.³

St. Augustine by personal experience knew the deleterious influence of a *mixed* education received in close contact with the frivolous youth of his time.⁴ This explains why as soon as he was consecrated Bishop, he put up in his own residence what he called “monastery of clerics”, to distinguish it from a “monastery” in the strict sense, i.e. for monks who lead a cenobitic life. In this institution which the Saint, with more propriety calls also “Bishop’s House” or “House of the Church”, the aim was not to train priests in the “monastic” mould, solitary and totally separated from the world. St. Augustine knew full well that the life of a Bishop is not to be alone in solitude, but to be at the service of the people: so too, in his mind, should the life of priests be: not solitary nor monastic, but within the context of a community, following a set of rules and regulations, which is quite different from the austere solitude of monks and hermits.⁵

St. Augustine wanted to form clerics in a type of *communitarian* life, very much like the way the first christians lived, as described in

³ L. G. Garcia, *op cit.*, p. 10, footnote 4; S. C. de Sem., *op. cit.*, p. 37, footnote 80.

⁴ S. C. de Sem., *op. cit.*, p. 32, footnote 47.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

the Acts of the Apostles. He introduced furthermore some ascetical practices adopted from monasteries he knew in Rome and Milan. And the whole atmosphere was one of recollection and community work for the purpose of acquiring the science and virtue necessary to the ministers of the Gospel.

It is therefore worth-noting that in this first Seminary created around the year 396, the great African Doctor of the Church laid out already the basic rules for the formation of the clergy, namely, recollection, silence, discipline of community life and work, and *segregation* from the world similar to that of the monasteries, but different from these, because a needed and timely "openness to the world" was allowed as something convenient for those who were called to be the "salt of the earth".

"Openness to the world" is therefore not a new discovery of our age. If taken as it should be, according to the spirit of the Gospel and the formula of Vatican II: "not separation, much less estrangement from the world, but segregation from it": in that way it was already understood and practiced by St. Augustine in the 4th century.

In this first "episcopal school" founded by the Bishop of Hippo not only did clerics desirous of keeping the augustinian rule live in community, but youths also were received who were brought up according to the said rule duly adapted to their condition. Under the direction of the holy Founder discipline flourished and soon clerics were ordained and from among them Bishops were chosen who edified with their virtues the regions they governed, most specially in Christian Africa.⁶

The example of this College exclusively intended for the formation of saintly and cultured priests, and the excellent fruits that it produced, aroused in many prelates the idea of imitating it. This can be seen in the legislation of Popes and Councils of those times.⁷ And so in the episcopal cities there appeared *episcopal schools*, forerunners of the future

⁶ L. G. García, op. cit., p. 11.

⁷ S. C. de Sem., op. cit., pp. 34-35, footnotes 61, 62, 63, 64, 65; L. G. García op. cit., p. 16, footnote 24.

Tridentine Seminaries. Those schools were training centers for clerics, segregated though not separated from the world, under the supervision of the Bishop. Later on, with the structuration of parishes, *parochial schools* were established under the supervision of the parish priests. This set-up actually produced excellent fruits for the good of the Church and of souls.⁸

After the barbarian invasion the Church tried to continue her cultural work, at least in the schools which were preserved in churches and monasteries. But in many parts these schools lost their *exclusively* clerical scope, and by force of the prevailing circumstances they were opened to both clerics and laymen. This mixed education, revived over again, could not but influence unfavorably the priestly formation.⁹ With the conversion of the barbarians and the pacification of Europe, there followed fortunately the revival of the episcopal and parochial schools which reassumed the augustinian tradition, preserving their nature special educational centers exclusively training future pastors of souls.¹⁰

The episcopal schools begun by St. Augustine found their way into Church legislation, most explicitly in the II and IV Councils of Toledo (Spain), in the year 527 and 633 respectively, where reference was made to an ecclesiastical training which should begin, as far as possible, from the first years of boyhood or adolescence, within a community life *segregated* from the world, and under the supervision of experienced superiors: "that they may spend the years of youth or critical age, not in lust, but in Church discipline... (because) adolescence is inclined to evil, and there is nothing so unstable as the life of the youth."¹¹ It must be noted that the reason alleged by the IV Provincial Council of Toledo (a.633) was repeated almost textually by the Council of Trent some *ten centuries later*¹² It is astounding that in

⁸ S. C. de Sem., op. cit., pp. 43-44.

⁹ Ibid., p. 42

¹⁰ The so-called "*Patriarquo*" or "episcopal school" of St. John at the Lateran in Rome became famous for its antiquity and well-deserved prestige: cf. L.G. Garcia, op. cit., pp. 13-14.

¹¹ cf. L.G. Garcia, op. cit., p. 17, footnote 27.

¹² cf. S.C. de Sem., op. cit., pp. 49 and 97.

our days, *four centuries* only after Trent, a sophisticated literature should strive to convince us that the introductory words of the cardinal Tridentine Decree of July 15, 1563 are no longer valid: "Since youth is inclined to worldly pleasures, unless it is rightly guided; and inasmuch as it can hardly persevere in the perfect observance of ecclesiastical discipline, without an extraordinary and singular help of God, unless it be educated in piety and religion from its most tender years and before vicious habits come to dominate it completely..."¹³

Aside from the "episcopal" and "parochial" schools, there existed in those centuries that precluded the Middle Ages, other schools that contributed also in some way to the education of the young candidates for the priesthood: the schools founded in the monasteries. In them (as, up to a certain extent, in the episcopal schools also) together with life with laymen, to the extreme however of preventing even a moderate a community life segregated from the world, the boys who aspired to the priesthood were subjected to rules and regulations which indeed were different from, but most often very similar to those that are strictly monastic.¹⁴ This was indeed a mistake which could create some undesirable effects in the formation of the secular clergy. Sometimes it went so far as to confuse the necessary "segregation" from the world which clerics have to profess, with the total "separation" from the world which characterizes monastic life.

But let us not raise our eyebrows, nor cry to high heavens in protest, when he discover defects in an institution that was still in its initial stage. No human enterprise is perfect and accomplished from the very start. However, the mistake just mentioned was not so serious as to darken or devaluate the excellence of that solid specialized training which was given *exclusively* to clerics by avoiding, *as it should*, communitarian and necessary contact with the world, *as it should have done*. And the best proof that the defect was not so serious as it is being presented today, is that it has passed on, so to speak, under cover for centuries. Its disadvantages, in some way counterbalanced by the many advantages

¹³ Concilium Tridentinum, Sess. XXIII, can. 18: "*Cum adolescentium aetas . . .*" (Full text, ap. S.C. de Sem., op. cit., p. 97).

¹⁴ cf. L.G. Garcia, op. cit., p. 23; S.C. de Sem., op. cit., p. 37, footnote 80.

of the classic traditional priestly training, have remained unchallenged until in our time Pope Pius XII brought them out into the open and ordered that the defect be remedied by a "GRADUAL and PRUDENT" contact of seminarians with the world.¹⁵

To educate candidates for the diocesan priesthood in an atmosphere of "segregation" from the world, as our Seminaries require, has been attacked as "abnormal". That this attack is groundless and fallacious can be easily deduced from what we have thus far said and from what we shall see more clearly in the course of this study. Priestly vocation implies "segregation" from the world. This is undeniable. Said "segregation" is extraordinary for the rest of the faithful, and certainly difficult for human nature. It seems therefore natural (or "normal") to educate the candidates to the priesthood from their earliest years, in a *special* way (not "abnormal", as some foundlessly say), different from the rest. They should be trained and moulded in the special manner of life that they are to embrace. They must know on time whether they are fit for the renuncements and exigencies that the Lord demands from those who are to commit themselves unreservedly to His service in the ministry of salvation in the midst of the world.¹⁶

It is true that by this "segregation" at an early age, the youths are taken out of the family circle where *normally* they grow and are brought up. This certainly can hinder the growth of psychic maturity in the affective life of the young. But such inconvenience is easily remedied by creating in the Seminary a family atmosphere of joy and love, of mutual trust and understanding, of peace and serenity in the cheerful companionship and habitual relations among the members of the community. This is true even in the Houses of formation in monasteries and religious convents. Their separation from the world and the family, is much more demanding. And yet the young novices or scholastics are not being brought up "abnormally". Soon most of them succeed in attaining emotional and spiritual maturity and in developing strength

¹⁵ cf. AAS. 42 (1950), pp. 686-687. At the end of the XIX century the famous Micheletti in his lectures given upon orders of Pope Leo XIII spoke already on this matter: cf. A. M. Micheletti, *De Regimine Ecclesiastico Religiosorum necnon Seminariorum*, Romae 1909, pp. 126-127.

¹⁶ Mt. 8,19-22; 10,34-39; 16-24-26; 19,16-30.

of character which the youths that are educated in the din and strife of the world hardly achieve.

After these parenthetic remarks which we consider important for the rest of our study, we bring to a close this article on "episcopal schools" with the observation that such forerunners of our Seminaries flourished with excellent fruits for the formation of the clergy until the IX century, when decadence began because of historical circumstances; a decadence "which continued on account of those turbulent times, specially in the X and following centuries. Community life was lost, and with it, the love of study and piety, causing thus a great harm to Church discipline."¹⁷

Again, may we be allowed to observe that the decline of the primitive Seminaries coincides with the loss of community life among the candidate for the priesthood, and with the increasing contact and *mixed* education of those candidates with the laymen. Already in the year 845 the *Concilium Meldense* prescribed that no cleric should be ordained unless he lived at least FOR ONE YEAR (too short, is it not?) among clerics or religious, or at least in a place where his moral and doctrinal fitness could be tried and tested.¹⁸

Obviously, the decadence of the primitive Seminaries (episcopal schools) coincided with a misunderstood "openness to the world", very much like that which is strongly advocated in some sectors of the Church today.

III

Seminarians replaced by mixed education (IX-XVI Centuries)

The episcopal schools or pre-tridentine Seminaries, as we have already said, flourished from the VII to the IX century. In some way they continued to prosper even until the XII century. But from the IX century a new avenue was opened step forward insofar as intellectual form-

¹⁷ L. G. Garcia, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

¹⁸ S. C. de Sem., *op. cit.*, p. 54.

ation was concerned. The public schools established in the time of Charlemagne for the promotion of arts and sciences offered, with the study of Grammar and Dialectic, a scientific basis for the study of Theology.

"The III Lateran Ecumenical Council (a. 1179), in order that the sons of poor families could be easily admitted to the priesthood, prescribed that in each cathedral and in other churches and monasteries there should be a teacher of Grammar who should instruct free of charge the clerics and the poor students. The programs was as follows: first, the TRIVIUM, a kind of Secondary Course (or High School) which included Grammar, Rhetoric and Dialect next, the QUATRIVIUM, a sort of College Course which included Arithmetic, Music, Geometry and Astronomy. Then, the ecclesiastical course proper (Philosophy and Theology)."¹

It appears that the study of the TRIVIUM and QUATRIVIUM was necessary for the general culture of all the youths, whether they would aspire to the clerical state, or pursue secular professions. In this set-up an undesirable habitual contact of candidates for the priesthood with the laymen was inevitable. Segregation from the world, which characterized the priestly training of the episcopal schools in the preceding centuries, ceased to be the norm. The period of decadence began.

"These schools and those that were established beside them gave birth later to the celebrated Universities of the Middle Ages"² which became so famous that they gradually replaced the old episcopal schools insofar as the training of the clergy was concerned. These Universities (or *General Studies*, as at times they were called) became the training centers of clerics and candidates to the priesthood, who lived in the midst of the world, mingled freely with laymen, without receiving any formal priestly discipline.

The oldest Universities trace their origin back to the XII century. With the gradual vanishing of episcopal schools, the decadence of the clergy became more and more noticeable. It was evidently due to a lack

¹ L. G. García, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-25.

² *Ibid.*, p. 25.

³ S. C. de Sem., *op. cit.*, p. 66; L. G. García, *op. cit.*, p. 25, footnote 55

of adequate special training.⁴ And when priestly training began to consist merely in attending classes in the Universities, an acute crisis in priestly vocations and an alarming decline in clerical life was felt.⁵ In the XIII century most of the episcopal schools were closed down; "the Universities rapidly spread, and to them the clerical students flocked for their Theology and Canon Law, together with the youths who were taking also University courses to pursue secular professions; youths who were not always paragons of virtue and morality.

"These centers as a whole taught all the sciences, ecclesiastical as well as civic. It is true they dispelled the ignorance of the clergy (at least partially, since as a matter of fact not all clerics did attend University classes —C.); but it is also true that they failed to come up to the expectations of the Popes with regards to moral formation, since, right after their foundation, these Universities gave preference to, and put emphasis on, intellectual works. They did not show much concern with the piety and moral character of their students. They outpaced the episcopal schools in arts and sciences, but lagged behind in morality and good manners.

"The laxity of ecclesiastical discipline was accelerated by the *constant and close communication of clerics with laymen*. In order to check the evil, Major Colleges (residences or houses for ecclesiastics, with some sort of clerical discipline —C.) were founded within or near the University campus. But many of the Theology students did not like to live within under any kind of restraints.⁶ They preferred to stay out in complete freedom, free to do as they wished, and free to create scandals by their gluttony and drunkenness, their frivolous and lascivious behavior, profligate speech, etc., to such an extent that a contemporary author wrote: "The clerics of our time attend the school of Anti-Christ rather than that of Christ."⁷

⁴ S. C. de Sem., op. cit., p. 56.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 68-69, footnotes 197-198.

⁶ L. G. García, op. cit., p. 26.

⁷ S. C. de Sem., op. cit., p. 69, footnote 198; Giuseppe Cenacchi, *La Pedagogia Seminaristica nei Documenti del Magistero Ecclesiastico*, Casa Editrice Istituto Padano di Arti Grafiche, Rovigo 1966, p. 85; in this scholarly work may be found quoted the eloquent texts of the Council of Salisburg (a. 1291) and of Alanus de Insulis in his *Summa de arte praedicatoria*, c. 36.

The episcopal schools had been closed. The candidates to the priesthood were enjoying complete freedom in the midst of the world. Intellectual formation in the University was not obligatory. Residence subject to discipline in a Major College was not required. Result? Very often persons, poor in virtue but rich in vices dared to present themselves for ordination. And not rarely priests were ordained who were shamelessly ignorant of the rudiments of grammar and of Church discipline. The practice of simoniacal ordinations became rampant, and thus a good number of vicious and ignorant priests rocked the Church with shame and ignominy. They were the rotten fruits of a *mixed priestly training*, or of an absolute lack of training, for if some were instructed in the cathedral or parish churches, and others in the Universities, still there were many more who had no education at all: and all, as a general rule, lived in organic insertion into the world and were contaminated—save a few providential exceptions—by the spirit of the world.

The Council of Palencia (in Valladolid, Spain, a. 1321) observes that the ignorance of the clerics is great that the Popes and Councils were concerned with raising the cultural standards of the clergy in the Middle Ages," by providing the College-Seminaries and the Universities with professors and academic programs. The trouble was in the failure to diagnose the real cause of the evil: the lack of strict priestly formation and the disastrous habitual mingling of clerics with worldly laymen. The depraved condition of the clergy even in XVI century, on the eve of Trent, was painfully alarming.¹⁰

Even in Rome, the "Studium Urbis" or "Sapientia Romana"—that began in the year 1265, — was not actually a real Seminary, but just another University, the majority of whose students were candidates to the priesthood, but where laymen without any priestly vocation were also admitted. The "Colegio Capranica" of Rome was an attempt to revive the old Seminaries exclusively designed for clerics; but the discipline prevailing therein was quite deficient, and its students were attending

⁸ G. Cenacchi, *op cit.*, p. 85.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 82-84.

¹⁰ G. Pellicia, *La Preparazione ed ammissione dei chierici ai santi ordini nella Roma del secolo XVI*, Roma 1946, *passim*.

classes in the University "Studium Urbis". The "Collegio Capranica" was considered "rather as a residence or lodging house, than a cenacle of community life for the purpose of priestly formation."¹¹ The students quite often in their own rooms held social gatherings with lay people. Among themselves they squandered time by playing cards with money. They introduced into rooms relatives and friends without any permission from the Rector. Laundrywomen, not in any way selected, and sometimes young ladies of all reputation, were admitted into the rooms of the students. The "Collegio Nardini", also in Rome, was similar to the "Capranica". Originally founded only for candidates to the priesthood, soon it admitted youths who had not even the least intention or thought to taking Holy Orders.

In the face of this deplorable condition of the medieval clergy, a historical conclusion is imperative. If the priests were not conspicuous for their spirituality, culture, priestly formation had been radically defective or even null. In fact many candidates for ordination tried to shake off all forms of priestly discipline, and almost no one believed any longer in a life segregated from the world, characteristic of a true Seminary, as the best and most adequate form of priestly training.¹² With the paganizing influence of the Renaissance, the evil became more and more devastating. Not a few holy and illustrious men realized that the root of the evil was in the *mixed priestly training* then in vogue. The absence of virtue and ecclesiastical discipline was due to the fact that, even the clerics scientifically trained in Colleges and Universities, living as they did immersed in the world, could hardly remain unaffected and untarnished by the frivolity and worldliness that surrounded them.

For this reason the authentic pioneers of the most urgently needed reform on priestly training, made efforts in putting up schools exclusively destined to the formation of the clergy, similar to the old episcopal schools, prelude and dawn of the Tridentine Seminaries. Among these farsighted pioneers we should recall the names of John Standonck (1453-1504), Blessed John of Avila (1500-1569), St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-

¹¹ G. Pellicia, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

¹² G. Cenacchi, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

1556), St. Cajetan (1480-1547), and specially Cardinal Reginald Pole (1500-1558) in the Council of London (a. 1556).¹³

But the evil that undermined authentic priestly training was already very deeply entrenched. The harm done by the scandals of the clergy in general ignited in the XVI century the explosion of the Protestant reform. The Church was impelled to countermove: and true Catholic reform was elaborated in the Council of Trent, mainly with through the famous Decree on the Seminaries.

To be continued

¹³ Ibid., loc. cit.