

REPORT ON THE PHILIPPINE PROGRAM ON PRIESTLY VOCATION*

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Bishop Frondosa asked me to come and speak to you about the new Philippine Program of Priestly Formation. Actually I come as the chairman of the Commission on Seminaries; so I come as a "seminary" man, to give whatever help I can to your very important work. Of course we seminary men are very interested in what you do. Our very life depends on you. And I don't have to point out to you the need for recruiting more vocations to the priesthood. You know as well as I do that although the number of seminarians has not decreased in the Philippines (and I hope it will not decrease, as the sociologists predict it will), still we do not have enough seminarians even to keep up our very unsatisfactory ratio of priests to laity in this country. There is only one priest for every 5,900 Catholics here; as compared to one for every 800 Catholics in the United States. Worse still, there is only one secular priest for every 12,000 Catholics. And simply to keep up this poor ratio, we need 150 new priests every year, just to provide for our increase in population — and already supposing that no more priests will leave the ministry in the next ten years. Actually we are ordaining an average of only one hundred new priests a year. So the picture is bleak for the next ten years the number of priests will keep decreasing in proportion to our population growth. So that whatever you can do to help us will certainly be an easing of a desperate situation.

But then we're not supposed to be here to cry on each other's shoulders. Our big question is: what do we do now? Yours is to figure out ways of recruiting young men for the priesthood. In this context, what would you want from us.

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seminary men? I guess the best thing we can give you is the reassurance that the boys you recruit will not be misled or mis-educated by us. I guess you would want to know: what are the seminaries doing to make seminary training more effective for the modern apostolate of priests?

So allow me to tell our story: As early as 1963 the administrators and spiritual directors of seminaries throughout the Philippines have been meeting and discussing common problems. At first, these meetings were merely a sharing of experiences and techniques. The only results of these meetings were the new insights gained by the participants themselves, the mutual encouragement given during the meetings, and a few mimeographed notes passed around for the participants' use. Nothing was left in print for future reference. However, in 1966 the first Proceedings of the CEAP Seminaries Convention was published, recording not only the ten papers presented at the convention but also the discussions that followed them. This first publication of the CEAP Seminaries Department is now a good source for suggestions on seminary formation as applicable to the Philippines.

The same was done for the 1969 CEAP Seminaries Convention. The 1969 Proceedings also published the Norms for Seminaries prepared by the Episcopal Commission on Seminaries under the chairmanship of Archbishop Juan Sison, approved by the CBCP, and finally approved by the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education. These Norms for Seminaries have become our first official program of priestly formation in the Philippines.

In the same year Rome promulgated the first draft of the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* or Basic Norms for Priestly Formation. And we Bishops were asked to study it and propose amendments. The Bishops of the Philippines in turn asked the seminary Rectors to discuss the document and send in their suggestions — these suggestions were forwarded to Rome. In January 1970, the final draft of the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* was sent to us, and we were asked to adapt it to the Philippines. This has been our main task these past two years. I had been recently appointed chairman of the Commission on Seminaries, and at the advice of Bishop Gaviola, I formed the Committee of Consultants for the Commission on Seminaries. The majority are seminary men from all over the Philippines; but there are also parish

priests, laymen, seminarians, a Sister, and a woman lay-teacher among the consultants. These consultants are the advisers of the Bishops, so that we, the Bishops, can take proper action on the resolutions handed in to us, for example by the CEAP Seminaries Department, or by the seminary Rectors. The consultants also help us to frame our own guidelines for the proper running of seminaries. For two years now the main task of this committee of consultants has been to **prepare the Philippine adaptation of the Ratio Fundamentalis**. They have been sounding out the seminaries in the Philippines, the administrators, the professors, the seminarians; they have gathered suggestions from the entire Philippine church; attended all the conventions on seminaries. Finally in October and November eight selected consultants gathered for a marathon session of five weeks in San Jose Seminary on Loyola Heights, to write out the first draft of the Philippine Program of Priestly Formation. This is the Philippine Program of Priestly Formation. We shall present this program to the Bishops for approval on the 24th of this month; and then we shall send it on to Rome together with all the corrections proposed by the Bishops, as well as those proposed by the seminarians, the seminaries, and by you.

It has been hard work, but well worth it. The consultants had to spend for their own transportation to and from meetings. (One exception was the October-November marathon, when I reimbursed the transportation expenses of those who came from Visayas and Mindanao.) I have tried to help as much as I could. I financed their meetings and provided materials. This has cost me almost P8,000 these past two years (I hope the Board of Economy of the Jaro Dioceses does not accuse me of malversation of funds!). But then we can never pay for the tremendous labor these good men have contributed! This is really a small price to pay for what needs to be done. The United States has spent \$500,000 so far for their Program of Priestly Formation.

This, in short, is what we have been doing to update the Seminary structures. But the actual results will have to come from the seminaries themselves. Actually, the ideas we have incorporated into the Philippine Program have come from the seminaries too; from their experiences and their suggestions.

The second portion of my report is a quick rundown on some important points brought out in the Philippine Program. Actually there are many important points discussed in the Pro-

gram: such as the establishment of regional seminaries, the professional training of seminary personnel, the use of entrance tests, the special period of ascetical training for diocesan seminarians, and integration of philosophy and theology, the social concern of Filipino youth today, the type of leadership expected of the modern priest, the greater participation of seminarians in their own training. But I feel I must limit myself to only two ideas because of lack of time. So I shall speak only of two items: first, the modern streamlining of the seminary structure itself; secondly, organizations for recruiting vocations.

On the first point, the streamlining of the seminary structures: At present we have major and minor seminaries. The minor seminaries start from first year high school and go on to include the first year of college. Then the major seminary takes over from second year of college and brings the seminarian on to ordination. The proposal of the **Philippine Program** is to divide seminaries into (1) high school seminaries, (2) college seminaries (which include first year college and the entire A.B. program), and (3) the theologate, which may be four or five years, depending on the seminary. Each stage will have its own aims and structures.

Only the theologate will be considered the major seminary: the place for strictly priestly training. At the beginning of the theologate the seminarian will receive the sotana from his bishop as a sign of his embracing the clerical state of life. And the commitment demanded of seminarians at this point is rather strong. No. 20 of the Philippine Program, following the words of the CEAP resolution of 1969, states: "Entrance into the theologate... should be made only after the candidate has demonstrated that, together with the necessary qualifications, he has an adequate grasp of the meaning of his priestly vocation, and with such knowledge fully commits himself to it for life. This commitment is at least subjective on the part of the seminarian: his personal resolution is firm although he realizes that, for one reason or another, he might actually not reach his chosen goal." And no. 44 of the Program states that "the formation in the theologate is strictly paschal, aimed at forming 'shepherds after the model of our Lord Jesus Christ'".

The college seminary has a very special aim. "It helps the seminarian form and confirm the commitment that will be demanded of him upon entrance into the theologate. For this

purpose the college seminarian must have the sincere desire to dedicate himself to the priestly ministry and the deliberate decision to try his best to live according to this one life alternative. The college seminary is not the place for trying out all life alternatives."

We are merely being realistic. Psychologists tell us that an adolescent, especially before third year of college, is usually incapable of forming a real life commitment to an unselfish, priestly apostolate. If he is a normal boy, his adolescent emotions will effectively prevent him from making such a commitment. On the other hand, a commitment like this does not come like a bolt of lightning. It has to be formed and acquired. A seminarian cannot arrive at this decision by simply staying in the seminary where he can secure a good A.B. education, and hope that the influence of the others will somehow convince him to go on for the priesthood. And it certainly won't be acquired by the seminarian who tests his vocation by trying to experience and taste the life of the ordinary college student, for example by dancing and even making love to a girl, "to find out how it feels." The commitment to a priestly apostolate is so distinct from the ordinary natural commitment that one cannot simply arrive at it by following his natural instincts. This commitment has to be deliberately formed, "educated", and guided. The college seminarian should test himself through four years by actually trying to rule his life according to his idealistic convictions (i.e. according to a priestly dedication to service) even against the rebellious cravings of his own emotions. If he is not willing to accept this challenge, or if he feels too weak to try it, then he should leave the seminary at least for a time, and live college life, until he finds himself mature enough and strong enough to try his best to live according to the life alternative of the priest.

Finally, the high school seminary should be kept strictly high school. First year college students should not be held back and trained like high school boys. We realize this change will create difficulties for the college seminaries which begin with what is now called "first year philosophy". But I think it is time for us to realize that Philippine education is structured differently from the European, and our seminarians should not be differentiated from their peers more than is necessary for proper priestly formation.

On the second point, the organization for recruiting vocations: the Ratio Fundamentalís from Rome devotes an entire

chapter to "The pastoral care of vocations." It states very clearly that this endeavor is the serious duty of the entire Christian community under the leadership of the Bishop. When the seminary Rectors met in Baguio on February 17, 1971, the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Carmine Rocco, asked them to discuss two questions at length: (1) the recruitment of vocations, and (2) the training of seminary personnel. After a whole day's discussion, the Rectors proposed a resolution concerning the Diocesan Commission on Vocations were later proposed to the CBCP and approved by them. We have incorporated these resolutions into the Philippine Program, and they will be resubmitted to the Bishops on January 24 for reconfirmation.

I had reprints of the pertinent passages run off for you, so that you can study these proposals at your leisure. Remember, although these resolutions have been discussed for a whole day by the Rectors, and approved by the CBCP, you are the experts in this field; and in the final analysis you will have to implement the whole program. So please study it carefully and correct it according to your own insights, and especially according to the principle laid down by the Ratio Fundamentalis itself: namely, "this activity should observe the laws of sound psychology and pedagogy."

In my own humble opinion, these resolutions will be a great help to Bishop Frondosa in his lonely fight for vocations. It may help to give him expert co-workers and in the end benefit all of us through an increase in the number and allow me to express my prayer that this convention may start a new year of vocations to the priesthood in the Philippines.

"Depending on the age of each seminarian and his state of progress, careful inquiry should be made concerning the rightness of his intention and the freedom of his choice, his spiritual, moral, and intellectual fitness, the suitability of his bodily and mental health, and any tendencies he might have inherited from his family. His ability to bear priestly burdens and exercise pastoral duties must also be weighed." (Decree of Priestly Formation, no. 6)