

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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IV

The Tridentine Seminaries (XVI Century)

The lamentable condition of the clergy brought about by its deficient or totally missing formation in the system of *mixed priestly training*, clamored for the official and decisive intervention of the Supreme Magisterium of the Church as the fountainhead of Catholic reform. This was achieved by the XIX Ecumenical Council inaugurated in Trent on December 13, 1545. The Council Fathers discussed this burning issue in three sessions: V (June 17, 1546); XXII (September 17, 1562); and XXIII (July 15, 1563).

"The main purpose of the Council of Trent in putting up Seminaries was not, in general, to promote the literary education of clerics, which was sufficiently taken care of at that time, but to preserve them, *from youth*, from the dangers of the world to which they were exposed by their age and by their continuous *contact with laymen*; to train them well in the practice of virtue, and at the same time to help in the education of many young men who lacked material means to reach the priesthood."¹ For the acquisition of ecclesiastical culture there were in Eu-

¹ L. Gr G. García, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

rope before 1517 some 66 Universities, of which more than 20 were in Spain. In addition there were more than one hundred Colleges and Convent schools.

The Decree on Seminaries was unanimously approved ("*nemine fere discrepante*")² on July 14, 1563, and was solemnly promulgated the following day (Sess. XXIII, c. 18) in the cathedral of Trent. The text on Seminaries reads as follows:

"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; the holy Council decrees that all metropolitan cathedrals and major churches should *maintain, train in piety and instruct in ecclesiastical sciences*, according to the faculties and extension of the diocese, *certain number of boys* from the same city or diocese, or if there be none in the city, from the same province, **IN A COLLEGE** situated near the said churches, or in *another convenient place chosen by the Bishop*.

"Those who are received in *this College* must be at least *twelve years old*. They must be children of lawful wedlock. They must know how to read and write correctly, and by their good behavior and dispositions they must show that they will probably be able to commit themselves perpetually to the ministry of the Church.

"These boys shall be distributed in as many classes as may be deemed convenient, according to their number, age and academic progress. At the opportune time, the Bishop shall assign some of these young men *to the service of the churches*; others he shall retain for further instruction *in the College*. He shall replace with new boys those who after being educated properly have left. In this way **THIS COLLEGE** shall be a perennial **SEMINARY**, or seedbed and nursery of **MINISTERS OF GOD**."⁴

² Anacleto. Iur. Pont., VII, 164; cit. L. G. García, op. cit., p. 29, footnote 8.

³ S. C. de Sem., op. cit., pp. 97-102.

⁴ Some believe that this is the first document in which the word "Seminary"

From the very words of the Decree we can deduce clearly some basic elements in the structure of authentic Seminaries according to the Council of Trent: elements that today are strangely being questioned by many self-styled "innovators".

i—That *Seminaries are necessary*: absolutely necessary, with regards to *Major Seminaries*, as Vatican II expressly declares;⁵ relatively necessary at least, with regards to *Minor Seminaries*, for in some special circumstances "according to the conditions of certain places", they can be substituted, not by ordinary catholic schools, but by "*special Institutes which, (in keeping with local conditions) may fulfill the role and aims of Minor Seminaries*",⁶ in the words of Vatican II, interpreting the Tridentine phrase, "or in another convenient place chosen by the Bishop."

ii—That, not only the *communitarian life and habitual residence*, but also the *religious training and academic instruction* of the young candidates to the priesthood be IN the same SEMINARY, whose function has been summarized by Trent with these words: "*maintain, train in piety and instruct in ecclesiastical sciences.*"

iii—That the Seminary must train the young candidates to the priesthood, NOT for a monastic life separated from the world, but for pastoral service. They are to become, not monks, but pastors of souls. Hence, their training to be complete must be coupled with a "*gradual and prudent*" openness to the world (as formulated by Pius XII in MENTI NOSTRAE), in an environment adequate for those who are to work in the world, but "segregated" from the world. Thus, the Tridentine Decree demands that the Bishop, *at the opportune time*, assign the seminarians—*taking into account their age and progress in Church discipline*—"TO THE SERVICE OF THE CHURCHES".

These three points deserve some brief comments.

is used to mean a school or college. It may be however worth noticing that Charles V in the reform formula produced in the year 1530 at the Diet of Augsburg said: "Scholæ seminaria sunt... ministrorum Ecclesiae": cf. L. G. García, *op. cit.*, p. 28, footnote 6.

⁵ Vaticanum II, *op. cit.*, "Optatam Totius", n. 4: p. 363.

⁶ *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*, n. 3: p. 362.

First, the SEMINARIES or special Colleges *exclusively* destined for the training of those who aspire to become priests, ARE NECESSARY; necessary, not only for "the instruction in ecclesiastical sciences" (principally, the *Major Seminaries*), since this learning is obtainable also in the Ecclesiastical Faculties of Universities and Colleges, as has happened in the centuries prior to the Council of Trent: but also necessary for the *special* "religious training" required for commitment to a state of life like the Priesthood, which demands a holiness far superior to that of the common faithful⁷ (in view, for instance, of the standing law of clerical celibacy), and even higher than that of the religious state.⁸

Precisely because of this, the Council of Trent ordered that priestly education (quite different from, and far more delicate than, the ordinary Catholic education given to the common lay Catholics in pursuit of secular professions) should begin "from the earliest years of adolescence", not only to train them and form in them habits of piety and virtue "before vices come to enslave them", but also in order to discern on time the authentic vocations, and advise other courses to those who offer not enough guaranty of perseverance in the life-long total commitment demanded by the Priesthood.

From all this we should conclude that MINOR SEMINARIES *in one form or another*, according to local conditions, are, to a certain extent, necessary also, and undoubtedly of SUPREME AND PEREMP-TORY USEFULNESS for the nurturing of priestly vocations. If they happened not to be found in some regions of Christendom (Central Europe, England, Scotland, Ireland and some mission countries) the fact is easily explained by *peculiar* historical factors, cultural elements, or insuperable economical difficulties, etc.;⁹ but in no way should that fact be taken as a pattern or ideal to be followed everywhere, against the explicit teaching of the Church Magisterium based on long centuries of experience.

A new theory is being propagated in our days which denies the

⁷ C. I. C., can. 124.

⁸ S. Th. Aq., *Summa Theol.* 2. 2. q. 184, a. 8.

⁹ S. C. de Sem., *op. cit.*, p. 91, footnote 8.

existence of what in the traditional teaching of the Church was called "*seeds of vocation*" in the young. This terminology has been ratified by the Vatican II.¹⁰ And yet, according to certain masters of a "new theology", that is a myth: no one is, nor must be considered as a candidate to the priesthood. All must be educated simply as good Christians. Never present to them, nor talk to them about, the priesthood. Such theory spells the death of all vocations. It is **INADMISSIBLE AND CONTRARY TO THE AUTHORITATIVE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH.**¹¹

Besides, as Pope Paul VI remarks in his recent Apostolic Letter *SUMMI DEI VERBUM*,¹² in the times in which we live, when materialism and hedonism, secular and pagan ideals, the pursuit of pleasure, of ease and comfort, flood contemporary society and invade the sanctuary of christian families—which should be the first nursery of priestly vocations—the necessity of nurturing the "*seeds of vocation*" ("*divinae vocationis semer*"—reaffirms Paul VI) in special Institutes or *Minor Seminaries* is imperative more than ever before.

In that momentous document of November 4, 1963, published during the celebration of Vatican II, the Vicar of Christ points out that "precisely because the secular culture of our days stresses too much among the Christian people the esteem and pursuit of external goods, the esteem of many towards the lasting values that belong to the supernatural order diminishes. In the face of this, how can the youth, even those animated with the best intentions, resolve to follow the vocation to the sacred ministry, if in their own homes or in the schools where they attend, all that they hear only praises on the excellence and advantages of profane sciences?"

"Therefore, in order that the young and the adolescent acquire and foster in themselves a just esteem of the priestly life, and be encouraged to embrace with enthusiasm and generosity, it is **NECESSARY** that both in their own homes and in the schools where they pursue their *elementary studies*, they find an environment favorable for this purpose. Hence, the parents, the pastors, and all those who are entrusted with the educa-

¹⁰ Vaticanum II, "Optatam Totius", n. 3: p. 362.

¹¹ C. I. C., can. 1353.

¹² Ep. Ap. *SUMMI DEI VERBUM*, Typ. Pol. Vat., 1963, pp. 17-23.

tion of the children and the youth, should not only create conditions propitious to those who are called to the priesthood, but also exert *all effort and care* in order that those adolescents who show clearly *a sincere inclination towards the priesthood together with a fitness for such calling* ENTER AS SOON AS POSSIBLE THE SEMINARY OR A RELIGIOUS INSTITUTE. *Only thus*, by means of this timely measure, can be safeguarded in these youths far from the seductive fascination of the world, and can be cultivated in a most suitable nursery the SEED OF A DIVINE VOCATION, whose existence the Directors of the Seminary or Religious Institute shall have to discern with utmost care, and if found authentic they should help in making it grow into maturity. And all this great and difficult educational work *must* be carried out WITHIN THE SEMINARY in all that concerns the body, piety, behavior and talents of the adolescents, as expressed by Trent in those words that refer to the function of the Seminary: MAINTAIN, TRAIN IN PIETY and INSTRUCT IN ECCLESIASTICAL SCIENCES."

The above words prove that in the mind of Trent, as interpreted by Paul VI, it is WITHIN THE SEMINARY that seminarians *must* reside habitually and live segregated from the world. It is WITHIN THE SEMINARY that they *must* be educated intellectually and spiritually, with a way of life *oriented towards the priesthood*. It is for them EXCLUSIVELY that the Seminary is built and destined. And here we find the *second basic element* in the structure of Conciliar Seminaries.

It is true that the Council of Trent did not consider timely *then* to demand that *residence IN THE SEMINARY* be obligatory "for all" the candidates to the priesthood. Probably the Council Fathers foresaw the great difficulties which in fact arose right after the Council—and which were prolonged for some centuries—to overcome deep-rooted customs accepted for long centuries in the past. It was not easy to put an end to secular traditions that sanctioned *mixed priestly training*. So the Council chose to tolerate or permit the inveterate practice whereby some could reach the priesthood through other avenues of training "outside the Seminary." As a matter of fact, in the final draft of the Tridentine Decree, the Fathers did not include the clause of the first schema which said: "The Bishop shall see to it that, if possible,

ALL the priests-to-be SHOULD be trained and formed IN IT (i.e., IN THE SEMINARY)."¹³

The obligation was not made explicit, but the mind of the Council was clear: priestly training, *from the earliest years of adolescence, MUST be given, if possible, in special Colleges, i.e. IN SEMINARIES, destined exclusively to the selection and formation of prospective priests.* Still—we should admit—it is a regret that the alluded clause of the first schema was omitted.¹⁴ Its omission, as subsequent centuries attested, was one of the cause that made the Decree less effective, put off its implementation “without glosses” in the greater part of Christendom, and let along until the beginning of our XX century the baneful pest of *mixed priestly training*, in more or less radical or mild forms: precisely, forms quite similar or almost identical to what is proposed today by many as the newfound formula of Seminary renewal and “aggiornamento” envisioned by Vatican II (!).

We bring to a close this chapter with some interesting observations on the *third basic element* of the authentic Tridentine Seminaries. These are to be educational centers that train priests, not for a monastic life, but for pastoral service in the world. As priests they are to live in the world, but *they are not of the world.*¹⁵ They should be “set apart in the bosom of the People of God” but without being “separated from that People or from any person”.¹⁶ It behooves therefore that seminarians, in their formation, be “set apart or segregated from the world”, although with a “*gradual and prudent*” contact, always pastorally oriented, with that world which it shall be their mission to save and bring to God.

The evil that the Tridentine reform wanted to remedy in the clergy was the rampant immorality and worldliness of priests so immersed in social circles and so contaminated with the spirit of worldlings that they did not seem to be in any way “set apart” from the frivolous society where they lived. Their conduct was notoriously scandalous with

¹³ G. Cenacchi, *op. cit.*, p. 91, footnote 8.

¹⁴ *cf.* S. C. de Sem., *op. cit.*, p. 104.

¹⁵ Io. 15, 19; 17, 15-16.

¹⁶ Vaticanum II, *op. cit.*, “*Presbyterorum Ordinis*”, n. 3: p. 625.

regards to the law of celibacy. There is no doubt that the Council Fathers clearly understood that the root-cause of the evil must be looked for in the want of specialized training, above all in the critical years of adolescence: a training set apart from the license and seductions of the maddening world. The opening words of the Tridentine Decree point this out.

It is curious to note that already in that Council the question of *maturity* was taken up, about which so much is being said and written nowadays, as if it were something "new" (!). In the past,—let us make this clear—it was not ignored that emotional and moral maturity was certainly necessary in the youths who presented themselves to Holy Orders which demanded a commitment as serious as perfect and perpetual continence "observed for the Kingdom of Heaven", "a sign and a stimulus for pastoral charity and a special source of spiritual fecundity in the world."¹⁷

The Fathers of Trent were quite aware of the absolute need of acquiring a perfect knowledge of the sacrifices and renouncements implied in this most decisive step, and the maturity of judgment and liberty of will in deciding for such life-long commitment. The question of *maturity* required by Holy Orders is not therefore a "discovery" of our times. The Council of Trent decreed that boys below 12 years should not be received in the Seminary, and demanded the age of 22 for Subdiaconate, 23 for Diaconate, and 25 for Priesthood, as a minimum. And this, on condition that Ordination be granted "only to the worthy ones, whose life has given proofs of a quite adult maturity"¹⁸

And in relation with this "quite adult maturity" some Council Fathers suggested that Holy Orders be put off for an advanced age when passions would have calmed down. This suggestion seems to resemble another modern "discovery" boldly advocated these days, namely, that only those candidates should be ordained who in their youth *have hardened themselves* with personal experiences of intimate contact

¹⁷ Ibid., loc. cit., n. 16: p. 662.

¹⁸ Concilium Tridentinum, Sess. XXIII, can. 12: "quorum probata vita senectus sit": cf. S. C. de Sem., op. cit., pp. 104-105.

¹⁹ I Jo. 5, 19.

and deep social insertion in the world; that the seminarians, young and immature still, be given long periods of trial by interruption of their studies and Seminary life. Let them alone, in their youthful imprudence live out in the world, "though the whole world about us lies in the power of evil".¹⁹ Let them live exposed to all the seductions of the world, although they should "not bestow their love on the world, and what the world has to offer".²⁰ Let them be buffeted by all the winds of unruly passions and face what the world offers: "gratification of corrupt nature, gratification of the eye, the empty pomp of living."²¹ Such is the proposed modern way of growing in maturity, according to the new breed of certain Seminary reformers.

As we were saying, some Fathers in Trent proposed that only those *quite advanced in age* be allowed to receive priestly Ordination, those in whom the heat of passions has already subsided. The General of the Jesuits, Father Láinez, brilliant theologian of the Council, with good sense, vast experience and deep learning rejected forcefully the proposal. In his address at the final session for the discussion of the canons on Seminaries (June 16, 1563) he said: "It is not a question of changing canons, for there seems to be no new reasons for revising them. Human flesh is always the same. It is not necessary to wait for an advanced age. Incontinence of the clerics does not depend on age, but *on education*. LET US EDUCATE THE YOUNG IN CHASTITY, AND WE SHALL HAVE CHASTE PRIESTS."

And he went on with as much wisdom as compassion for the Church observing that it seemed "like an instigation of the devil to destroy the priesthood." For, if under the pretext of chastity, only those advanced in age should be ordained priests, a time would come when *no one would like to become a priest*. Nobody indeed would be willing to take upon themselves the burden of celibacy, if the decision were put off for an advanced age. The hardships that beset manhood might make many lose trust in themselves. On the contrary, the happy enthusiasm and generous ideals of youth—guided by natural and supernatural prudence—are the values that encourage a young seminarian to consecrate himself entirely to Jesus Christ and to the Church. Based on his own ex-

¹⁹ I Jo. 2, 15-17.

²¹ Ibid., loc. cit.

perience as a young man who has to undergo the crisis of adolescence, and in the light of the wise advices and guidance of his directors, the seminarian may well conjecture, imperfectly perhaps but with sufficient awareness, the sacrifices that a celibate priesthood entails. But trusting in God's grace and following the judgment of his spiritual counsellors in the Seminary, he may find himself able to embrace that kind of life, and find it worth-embracing. And in this decision he is inspired by the example of so many exemplary priests, past and present, who with God's help knew to remain unwaveringly faithful to the commitments they made when young.

In this way a young man from an early age steels and conditions himself to weaken, by fighting, the onslaught of the passions. Freely and willingly he embraces a state of combat until the end. For we must bear in mind that adolescence is not the only critical age in the matter of chastity. Modern psychology reaffirms this quite definitely. More violent crises take place in more advanced years. And so the young priest, duly trained and maturely educated, does not listen to the voice of discouragement or doubts about vocation. With the grace of his priestly character and with his "fidelity to use all the supernatural and natural aids available" following "the ascetical norms which have been proved by the experience of the Church and which are scarcely less necessary in the contemporary world",²² he will be able to overcome all sort of trials and difficulties in the midst of the world.²³

But for this, as the illustrious Fr. Láinez remarked, **IT IS NECESSARY TO EDUCATE THE YOUTH IN CHASTITY FROM THEIR EARLIEST YEARS: hence, the NEED OF A SEMINARY** (and a *Minor Seminary*, at that). On the other hand, at any rate—as Fr. Láinez added—"those young men who might feel that they are not fit or that they will hardly persevere in the priestly state, would leave the Seminary with the benefit of an excellent Christian education."²⁴

(To be Continued)

²² Vaticanum II, op. cit., "*Presbyterorum Ordinis*", n. 16: p. 665.

²³ *Id.* 16, 33.

²⁴ For the information on Fr. Láinez views presented to the Council of Trent on the matter, cf. G. Pellicia, op. cit., pp. 229-230.