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PRIESTLY FORMATION IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH THROUGH THE CENTURIES WITH SPECIAL FOCUS ON INDIA

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Abstract

Priestly formation is a major concern of the Catholic Church and efforts have been made to form well-qualified ministers of Christ. Schools of Alexandria, Antioch, Nisibis and Edessa were the earlier initiatives for the holistic training of the clergy. Charles the Great took keen interest in the training of the ministers of the Word of God. Episcopal and Cathedral Schools are attempts in the direction of better training for the clergy. Gregorian Reformation focussed more on liberating the clergy from the clutches of Feudal evils and to concentrate more on the salvation of the souls. Protestant Reformation awakened the need for proper training for the ministers of the Lord and the Seminary system was introduced in the Church by the Council of Trent in a more systematic way. Second Vatican Council through its teachings focussed more on the spiritual, intellectual, human and social formation of the future clergy. Post-Synodal teachings and the efforts of the Indian Church in contextualising the priestly formation is praiseworthy.

Keywords: Council of Trent, Gregorian Reformation, Indian Church, Priestly Formation, Post-Conciliar Priestly Formation, Protestant Reformation, Vatican Council II

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Introduction

The ministerial priesthood of the Christian religion is radically different from the cultic and ritualistic priesthood of many other world religions. The very terms ministerial priesthood and minister signify the dimensions of service and the altruistic character of the Catholic priesthood is unique in many ways. The ministers of the Church whether diocesan priests or religious men, are called to minister the Church with the spirit of service. They are not the executives of the Church; rather they are called to follow the servant model of Jesus Christ in their respective ministries. Long years of training aim at imparting this style of functioning. Huge amounts are being spent to produce a group of people who are at the service of the Church and humanity. I may not be able to do full justice to the topic as it is too vast. What I shall try to do is to focus more on the historical development of the topic under discussion with special reference to India. I may not make extra efforts to present the formation programmes of the religious orders and societies as they vary in their charismas and formation structures. However, one cannot deny the contributions of the religious orders and societies in the field of forming the diocesan clergy. In the changing scenario a radical reorientation and re-shaping of the formation programme of the priests and religious will enable the Church to proactively respond to the manifold challenges of the post-modern world.

1. Early Church until 692

Jesus Christ in order to continue His mission in the world chose a group of people and called them Apostles (Mt 10:1-4; Mk 3:13-19; Lk 6:12-16). He trained them through instructions, life examples and personal association with them. The Apostles trained their disciples through accompaniment and transferring the insights they gained in the company of Jesus and insisting on the contextual variations of the infant Church. This method of accompaniment, generally followed in the early Church, was continued long after the days of the Apostles. The idea and institution of a special priesthood, distinct from the body of the people of God, with the accompanying notion of sacrifice and altar, made the authorities to think seriously about the formation of this special class of people.¹

The early Church respected the public opinion of the community in selecting the ministers. As leaders of the Church of Christ St Paul

¹Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Michigan: Grand Rapids, 1989 (Reprint), Volume II, 123.

demanded that the candidates for clerical orders have certain moral, spiritual and mental qualifications. St Paul in his Epistles enumerates the qualities and virtues which the bishops and other ministers of God should possess. He says: "For a bishop, as God's steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or addicted to wine or violent or greedy for gain; but he must be hospitable, a lover of goodness, prudent, upright, devout, and self-controlled" (Titus 1:7-8). To become a bishop or a deacon the candidate must be a man of one wife; i.e. he must not have married more than once. The neophytes were excluded from the clerical order lest he be puffed up with pride. Further, those who had performed ecclesiastical penances, those who had been baptized in illness, and those who had castrated themselves were also disqualified.

Intellectually and spiritually competent people only were promoted to the high office of the ministers of the Word of God. Realising this fact well from the early centuries, the Fathers and Doctors of the Church have spared no pains in exhorting priests and other ministers of God to become examples of Christian piety, holiness and learning. Every priest is constituted a "Teacher in Israel" (Jn 3:10; Mt 13:52;) and has the mission to "go and teach all nations" (Mt 28:19; Mk 16:15-16), entrusted to him by Jesus Christ Himself. From the very beginning of Christianity there were famous centres of learning like, Antioch, Alexandria, Edessa, Nisibis where priests and candidates for priesthood could learn the doctrine and the teachings of the Church. In the Acts of the Apostles we read: "Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers" (Acts 13:1). St Paul writing to the Christians in Corinth, says: "And God has appointed in the Church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers" (1 Cor 12:28).

The distinction of orders in the ranks of the clergy was recognised at a very early date and clerics of a lower stage were prohibited from advancing to a higher order unless they had proved themselves competent in the one and qualified for the other. The catechetical schools in existence since the end of the second century were originally established to instruct the catechumens and to introduce them to the Christian faith before being baptized; they also served at times as training schools for the lower clergy. Towards the end of the third century there existed in Rome certain "*Schola lectorum*" for educating young Levites.

The basic theological knowledge obtained from the catechetical school was supplemented by private study, sometimes, perhaps, with a learned Christian teacher who taught the basic principles of the

Christian religion. Knowledge of liturgical function was provided by direct participation in the prayer and worship of his church. Different ministries existed in the early Church and the three ministries were diaconate, presbyterate and the episcopate. Bishop Cyprian (+258) may be called the proper father of the sacerdotal conception of the Christian ministry as a mediating agency between God and the people.² Every priest ought to be a doctor in the Church since he has the divine mission “to teach all nations.” Hence in the words of the fourth Council of Toledo in 663, “ignorance which is the mother of all errors should not be attributed to priests since they have the duty of teaching the people.”³

For the first three centuries there was no ecclesiastical legislation on clerical celibacy and still less an apostolic ordinance. If a married man entered the clerical state he was permitted to continue marital relations. But this privilege was allowed only to those who had married before ordination. A custom of long standing prohibited the higher clergy that is bishops, priests, and deacons from marriage after ordination under penalty of deposition. However, in the early Church celibacy was widely practiced by bishops. In the Western Latin Church the Council of Elvira about 306 commanded all clerics dedicated to the service of the altar to abstain from marital relations under pain of deposition.⁴ Again the same Council passed a legislation in which it is mentioned that among those who were to be excluded from ordination were heretics, apostates and recent converts, those who had not attained the age of thirty, those who had served in the army, those negligent in the recitation of the Psalter. In the East the definitive legislation for priestly celibacy came from the *Quinisext* Council of 692, which required of the married candidate for episcopacy separation from his wife and her entrance into a monastery, whereas it permitted priests and deacons the continuation of their marriage and demanded continence only on days on which they celebrated or concelebrated the liturgy.⁵

1.1. Edict of Milan (313)

The recognition of the Christian religion as the state religion of the Roman Empire with the Edict of Milan by Emperor Constantine in

²Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 126.

³Thomas Puthiakunnel, VC, *Syro-Malabar Clergy and their General Obligations*, Ernakulam: Vincentian Publishing Bureau, 1964, 60.

⁴Karl Bihlmeyer—Hermann Tuechle, ed. *Church History*, Vol. I: *Antiquity*, Westminster: The Newman Press, 1968, 110.

⁵Walker Williston, *A History of the Christian Church*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd., 1997 (4th edition), 183.

313 made easier the preparation for the clerical office as the Church had at her disposal all the resources, including schools and all infrastructural facilities. The doctrinal controversies and disputes also made the authorities to think seriously about the need of proper training for the clergy. A law of Emperor Justinian, of the year 541, established a period of probation in the East also. A decree of Pope Siricius (385) addressed to Himerius, bishop of Tarragona, states that a custom must be established of choosing candidates to the ministry of the altar from the parish schools where they should be systematically taught religion and other sciences.⁶ The Canon 24 of the fourth Council of Toledo in 633 seems to be the first official enactment for establishing a kind of seminary where the candidates for priesthood would stay permanently as in an “*internat*” and undergo a system of training and studies.⁷

In the East the theological Schools like Edessa, Nisibis, Antioch and Alexandria produced learned priests. In the West the monasteries played the role of the Schools in the East in the limited sense. These monastic training very often did not give them comprehensive knowledge of the world realities, which is necessary for a wide field of ministry. Gradually, in the West smaller diocesan seminaries were established for the training of the clergy. Eusebius of Vercelli in 304 and Augustine of Hippo in 394 introduced formal course in Scripture and theology into the training of clerical candidates. Augustine set a good example of this sort by establishing at Hippo a “*Monasterium Clericorum*” which sent forth many good presbyters and bishops for the various dioceses of North Africa. St Augustine, who was very much interested in the intellectual, moral and spiritual life of the clergy, started promoting community life among the clergy. In order to be ordained one had to undergo certain training and pass the necessary examinations.⁸

In Spain special institutions were established for the education of boys destined for clerical state. In Italy, priests in rural districts took young boys into their homes for day-by-day training in the duties of their state. This practice also gradually spread in different parts of Italy. Finally, many monasteries like Lerins, in southern France, became training centres for the clergy and many of the most prominent bishops of the period received their training from the

⁶Hubert Jedin, ed., *History of the Church*, Vol. II, London: Burns & Oates, 1980, 385.

⁷Cfr., Schaff, *History of the Church*, Volume III, Michigan: Grand Rapids, 1989, (Reprint), 234-238; De Melo Carlo Mercedes, *The Recruitment and Formation of the Native Clergy in India*, Lisbon, 1955, 122.

⁸Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. III, 236.

monks or at least had spent some time with them.⁹ Many bishops who had their training in Lerins followed this model in their own dioceses. *Schola cantorum* of Rome and *vita communis* of the clergy of the Church of Vercelli under Bishop Eusebius, the Antiochian School under Diodorus are some examples of the concerted efforts of the ecclesiastical authorities in imparting an integrated education to the future ministers of the Word of God.¹⁰

Several of the most learned and able fathers of the fourth century received their general and scientific education in heathen schools and then studied theology either in ascetic retirement or under some distinguished church teacher, or by the private reading of the Scripture and the earlier church literature. The examples include Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen in Athens, John Chrysostom in Antioch, Augustine in Carthage, Rome, Milan and Jerome in Rome. Their contribution to the church in the field of doctrines is the best example of the high value of classical education in a contextualised situation.¹¹

The central focus of the priestly formation was generally considered to be the knowledge and understanding of Scripture, which was strictly demanded by all for priests and bishops. The moral and physical fitness also was assessed in different stages of formation. The aspirants, who were interested in the ministry of the Church, slowly started living in the same residence of the bishop and started living a common life. This living together was a learning process and they acquired practical knowledge in the course of time. Great Popes like Leo I (440-461), Gelasius (492-496), Gregory I (590-604), etc. exhorted the bishops of the need of training the clergy. As a result some bishops entrusted the formation of the clergy to individual priests, who were models in the community and who were also learned priests. The Toledo Councils insisted on the need of proper training to the clergy and emphasised the need for community living. Thus the emergence of two trends can be noticed – one, formation centres attached to the monasteries and the other, centres attached to the bishops' houses.

2. Medieval Church (692-1517)

2.1. Cathedral, Episcopal and Monastic Schools

Cathedral Schools (schools attached to the cathedrals) were the result of the desire from the part of the bishops to give proper and

⁹ Bihlmeyer – Tuechle, ed., *Church History*, 302.

¹⁰ Jedin, ed., *History of the Church*, Vol. II, 275.

¹¹ Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. III, 238.

effective training to the clergy. Admission to Cathedral school was open to both clerical candidates and lay people. However, Episcopal schools, directly managed by bishops, were chiefly conducted for clerics. With the beginning of Cathedral Schools teaching of grammar and literature at all levels of formation were introduced. There was the system of common living among the clergy attached to the bishops' houses and they were also entrusted with the teaching of the candidates aspiring for priesthood. From the Cathedral Schools slowly developed the concept of the modern Universities in Europe. The Monastic Schools mainly trained the members of the monasteries although admissions were also open to the public.¹²

2.2. The Carolingian Era and Further Developments

Charles the Great who was the ruler of the so-called Holy Roman Empire of the German Nations from 768 to 814 took keen interest in the intellectual and spiritual training and updating of the clergy. From the reform synods convened by the Frankish kings, especially Charles the Great and Louis the Pious (814 -840), emanated many disciplinary norms for clergy which were sanctioned and confirmed by the Popes. Much attention was given to learning, moral discipline, liturgical performance and common life. To promote intellectual training Charles the Great ordered that schools should be attached to the Cathedrals and monasteries and thus the Cathedral schools became very popular in Europe. These schools aimed at the holistic training of the clergy, imparting knowledge in the areas of theology, morality, etc.

An ordinance of the Council of Tours (813) asked the bishops to take the necessary time to ascertain the suitability of candidates before promoting them to Orders. The Synod of Aachen (802) demanded that clerics should have basic knowledge of the Apostles Creed, the Athanasian Creed, Our Father together with their explanations.¹³

The Council of Chalcedon (451) had condemned the practice of conferring Orders merely for the celebration of the Eucharist. However, during the medieval period this practice was revived especially in the context of the increase of the proprietary churches and the ministry of preaching and the care of the faithful were neglected. The growth of religious orders and monasteries brought in

¹²Cfr., *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 3, Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 2003 (2nd edition), 262 -263.

¹³Karl Bihlmeyer – Hermann Tuechle, ed., *Church History*, Vol. II, *The Middle Ages*, Westminster: The Newman Press, 1967, 72.

its wake an army of ordained ministers rendering no pastoral service, creating thus the impression that the imposition of hands merely gave the power to celebrate the Eucharist. An echo of this would gradually be perceived in all the clergy: laxity in their ministries and pastoral lives, craving for wealth and power, decline in theological thought and inadequacy in the formation of candidates. During the Dark Age of Papacy (896-1046) no serious effort was made to check the quality of the clergy. During this period due to the influence of feudalism in the life of the Church, the worst affected section of the Christian community was the clergy. The lower clergy during this period were reduced to the status of proletariat or bonded labourers of the feudal lords and ignorance was the order of the day. The scholastic training was minimal. The priest must be able to read, must know something of the chant, of Holy Scripture and how to baptise.¹⁴

2.3. Gregorian Reformation

Pope Gregory VII (1073 -1085), the towering figure of the medieval Church, as part of his reform programme, initiated a new venture: suitable candidates were sent to Rome for higher ecclesiastical studies, and thereby ensured better training of the clergy. Serious attempts had been made by the Pope to reform the life of the clergy and he wanted to liberate the Church from the three evils of that time, i.e. simony, nicolaitism and lay investiture. The clergy lacked spiritual and intellectual formation and needed skills for pastoral ministry. Through the reform efforts Pope Gregory VII succeeded to some extent in bringing order in the life of the clergy. In 1179 the third Lateran Council Canon 3 laid down the general injunction that every Cathedral in the universal Church was to establish a benefice for the support of a schoolmaster who would be charged with teaching the clerics attached to the church and the Council authorised the bishops to select the candidate.¹⁵ In 1215 the fourth Lateran Council decreed that every metropolitan church must employ a theologian who would be entrusted with the instruction of priests in Sacred Scripture and pastoral theology.¹⁶ The Council insisted on examination before ordination and on appointment of competent professors to teach clerics all that concerns their life and ministry. Popes Honorius III (+ 1227) and Boniface VIII (+1303) took interest in

¹⁴Philip Hughes, *A History of the Church*, Vol. II, London: Sheed and Ward, 1985 (reprint), 90.

¹⁵Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, Vol. I, Washington DC: Sheed & Ward and Georgetown University Press, 1990, 212.

¹⁶Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, Vol. I, 240.

the topic and the latter established the University of Rome aiming to impart intellectual formation to the clergy. In the *Corpus Iuris Canonici, Dcretum Gratiani*, compiled by Gratian, about the year 1140 we find reported most of the laws that had been issued in the church.

However, the effects of these reform efforts were not very solid and lasting. The situation of the clergy during the pre-Reformation period was very deplorable. One could obtain ordination from a bishop, usually without any special examination. The cathedral *scholasticus*, and in the fifteenth century also a special cathedral preacher, had the charge of instructing clerics and of examining candidates for ordinations. Still, the candidates acquired only bare minimum knowledge. There was repeated insistence on prior enquiry, sufficiently long period of probation and careful examination of candidates to attest their suitability. In practice, almost all the instructions remained as dead letters.

With the emergence of the universities in Europe in the 13th and 14th centuries a selected few could receive systematic theological education and it is interesting to note that theology was one of the major branches of learning in all the universities.

3. Protestant Reformation and the Council of Trent (1517-1563)

The Catholic Church was slow in responding to the Protestant Reformation and the Council of Trent was the official response of the Catholic Church to the Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther (1483-1546) and other reformers questioned many of the existing Church practices and many followed the teachings of the reformers as the clergy was not in a position to satisfy the questions raised by the reformers. Ignorance among the clergy speeded up the Protestant reform ideas.

The basic source of these shortcomings was the inadequate education of priests, especially of the poorly paid vicars, by whom the frequently absentee holders of pastoral benefices had their functions performed. The dearth of a priestly spirit and of a pastoral sense of responsibility in the bishops had an especially unhealthy effect in this regard. It was left to the individual, after attending the Latin school in his town, to acquire the necessary knowledge from a pastor or in a monastery. Only a small percentage of clerics attended a university; they did not obtain a special preparation for the clerical office.¹⁷

Thus urgency was felt regarding the intellectual and spiritual formation of the clergy and stressed the pastoral care and salvation of the souls as the main duties of the clergy. The Council members

¹⁷Hubert Jedin, ed., *History of the Church*, Vol. IV, New York: Crossroad, 1982, 575.

understood the seriousness of the situation and in the fifth Session of the Council, on 5 April 1546, the matter of priestly training was raised in the Council. However, the Council was transferred to Bologna and the discussion continued in Bologna. Unfortunately, no serious decision was taken. In the course of time, two factors facilitated to think seriously about the seminary training; the founding of the German College in Rome in 1552 by the Society of Jesus and the seminary legislation of Cardinal Reginald Pole in England in 1556.

The Latin word *Seminarium* literally means a place where seedlings were prepared to be transplanted. Although the word seminary was first used by the Council of Trent to denote the place of priestly formation, the writings of St John Fisher, Cardinal Reginald Pole, both from England and St Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus, popularised this term among the Catholics.

Thus formal establishment of the seminary system as we have today, for training candidates for priesthood goes back to the Council of Trent. The Council in its twenty third Session of 15 July 1563, in its canons 14 and especially 18 gave a definite shape to the concept of seminary, defining its nature and structure, and obliging all dioceses to erect it for the formation of the candidates for the priesthood. In general terms canon 14 listed the qualities required of those aspiring to the priesthood, i.e. mature age, utility and necessity to the Church, knowledge of what was needed for salvation and for administration of sacrament, piety, good works and exemplary life. The extensive canon 18 speaks about the obligation of every bishop to found a seminary in his diocese or an inter-diocesan one for more than one diocese. Then it lays down the conditions for admission into the seminary: age not less than 12 years, legitimacy of birth, ability to read and write, inclination to the ecclesiastical state, and hope of perpetual dedication. The rest of the canon deals with the organization, structure and administration of the seminary.¹⁸ The aim of establishing the seminary was to revitalize the moral and spiritual life of the clergy and to provide deeper knowledge in theology. St Charles Borromeo (1538-1584), Archbishop of Milan, was the principal figure behind the Tridentine decree on the foundation of seminaries, and also the first bishop to carry it into effect with exceptional zeal and enthusiasm. The Council of Trent even denied ordination to those candidates who were not intellectually and morally prepared.

¹⁸Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, Vol. II, 750.

The Council entrusted the establishment and organisation of seminaries to the bishops and proper monitoring system was introduced to make sure that seminaries were established in each diocese. As a result of these measures, seminaries began to rise up in all parts of Christendom and the Church could count on many well trained and well educated clergymen who were real examples of piety and learning to the Christian faithful. Trent legalized the practice, already existing in the Church, of leaving in the hands of local bishops the formation of the local clergy.

After the Council of Trent there was a revival in the formation of the clergy and Pope Pius IV opened a seminary for the diocese of Rome. Archbishop Charles Borromeo established a seminary for his Archdiocese with the capacity of accommodating 150 students. He also established “*La Canonica*” for those students whose intellectual capacity was not enough to be admitted in the diocesan seminary. By the establishment of the seminary, the formation of the clergy, who should be cultured and learned, was assured. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, which was published immediately after the Council, also stressed the importance of theological training.

In England, in the context of the establishment of the Anglican Church under Queen Elizabeth I, Cardinal William Allen established a College at Douai in 1568 in response to the call of the Council of Trent. In 1579 Pope Gregory XIII founded the English College at Rome and in 1589 another College at Valladolid. Many after their studies secretly returned to England and became missionaries.¹⁹

3.1. Other Developments

Mention should be made about the establishment of Propaganda Fide in 1622 by Pope Gregory XV and the beginning of Propaganda College in 1627 by Pope Urban VIII. The latter aimed at training of native missionaries for the mission lands. The academic wing of this College later became the Urban University.

During the 17th century France witnessed a new phase in the seminary formation and it was proposed to form an organisation whose sole function was to impart integral and solid education to the clergy and to equip them for their ministry. In 1612 Adrien Bourdoise (1584-1665) formed a society for aspiring priests in Paris where he gave an education almost exclusively aimed at practical application. However, the intellectual formation was very limited and in 1643 he got final approval for his programme. During the period between

¹⁹Karl Bihlmeyer—Hermann Tuechle, ed., *Church History*, Vol. III, *Modern and Recent Times*, Paderborn, 1966, 181.

1622 and 1680 in many French cities societies have been established aiming to promote the education of the candidates aspiring for priesthood. However, these societies were short-lived. In 1611 Pierre Cardinal de Berulle founded the Oratory of Jesus for secular clergy without special vows. The members of the Oratory took over the various forms of parish apostleship, to which they added educational duties. The role and influence of the Oratory and the priestly spirituality promoted by Berulle and his successors, contributed significantly to improve the quality of the secular clergy.²⁰

The history of seminary education in France takes on a definite turn with illustrious men, such as Berulle, St Vincent de Paul, Jean Jacques Olier and Jean Eudes. In the same century, in Germany, the contributions of Venerable Bartholomew Holtzhauser are particularly significant and original. In Spain seminary reform is linked with the names of Francis Ferrer and Philip Bertran. And in Italy in the 18th century, we find another prominent figure in the person of St Alphonsus de Liguori to prepare the candidates in theological training.

3.2. Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903)

Pope Leo XIII took keen interest in the training of the indigenous clergy and the Congregation for the Propagation of Faith advocated strict severity in the selection of the candidates and special attention was given to their ethnic and primitive characteristics. By favouring the establishment of seminaries for indigenous clergy, he manifested his farsightedness and interest in the development of indigenous missions. As part of the reformative initiatives of Pope Leo XIII he reorganized the programme of studies and paid more attention to the discipline in the seminaries to ensure integrity of doctrine against the influence of Modernism that was prevalent then and sanctity of life. To promote indigenous clergy Pope Leo XIII established a Pontifical Seminary at Kandy in Sri Lanka in 1893 which was later shifted to Pune in 1955, the academic wing of which is the Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth of today. The *Codex Iuris Canonici* of 1917 also made efforts to reform the functioning of the seminary. Attempts for indigenous clergy and updating of seminary formation have been continued especially during the pontificates of Benedict XV, Pius XI and Pius XII.

4. Second Vatican Council

During the Pontificate of Pius XII priestly formation was still being spoken of in terms of a preparation to enter into the struggle against

²⁰Jedin, ed., *History of the Church*, Vol. VI, 20.

the errors and aberrations of the modern world. Priestly candidates were to be prepared for a life of servile obedience to their bishops and /or religious superiors. Serious problems were to arise on this very point, however, in the period prior to the Council. The superiors, in the broadest sense of the term, knew what was best for candidates for priesthood. Complaints were made on a regular basis with respect to the fact that the spirituality in the seminaries was considered to be too monastic with the additional implication that candidate for priesthood had too little contact thereby with real life situations.

Pope John XXIII who convened the Second Vatican Council was fully convinced of the urgent need of reforming the training programme of the clergy. The Church fully aware of the importance of the renewal of the clergy, was affirmed in several of the Council's documents, but in particular in the decree *Optatam Totius* (OT) of the training of the priests: "The Council is fully aware that the desired renewal of the whole Church depends in great part upon a priestly ministry animated by the spirit of Christ and it solemnly affirms the critical importance of priestly training" (OT, Introduction).

The Decree *Optatam Totius* consists of an introduction and seven segments of unequal length. In the foreword to OT it is stated that the desired renewal within the Church depends to a considerable degree on the priestly ministry, animated with the spirit of Christ. Those who put forward OT were convinced that the necessary renewal of the Church would only be possible if future priests were to live according to the Spirit of God. The document goes on to lay considerable emphasis on the decisive importance of priestly formation. The Council Fathers were fully convinced that the future priests should be fully qualified to equip themselves to enter into fruitful dialogue with the contemporary world and to share the joys and sorrows of the people around them.

OT is one of the most productive and important conciliar texts. In balanced instructions the way was pointed out to a reform of priestly formation and for the first time with clarity, the value of human maturity and the properties of character esteemed by people in prospective priests were stressed. In the discussions during the sessions it became clear that the demands for a reform of priestly education were very different in several continents and countries. The principal novelty of the Second Vatican Council was the decision of the Council to entrust the individual Episcopal Conferences the task of conducting the necessary researches and deciding on proposals for their own seminary training. They themselves were

asked to redact a *Ratio Institutionis* and a *Ratio Studiorum* suitable for their nations in the life situations. The Council, thus, laid the foundation for certain decentralization in the training of clergy. So the Council decided to entrust the responsibility with the Episcopal conferences. "Hence for individual peoples and rites a proper order of priestly formation" should be introduced. It is to be set up by the Episcopal conference, reviewed from time to time, and approved by the Apostolic See. In it the general law should be so adapted to the special local and temporal circumstances that the formation of priests may always correspond to the pastoral demands of the countries in which the priests have to exercise their ministry" (OT, 1).

OT intends to have priests trained for the ministry of the Word, for the ministry of worship and sanctification and to undertake the ministry of the Shepherd. In defining clearly what the purpose of the training in major seminaries is, namely, "to make them (the seminarians) true shepherds of souls after the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, teacher, priest and shepherd," the Council has individuated its option of the image of priest for our times – fundamentally it is only a reconfirmation of the Gospel-image of the same (OT, 4).

OT must be complemented by what are taught in the other documents of the Council, which carry direct or indirect consequences on the training of priests. Of particular significance is *Presbyterorum Ordinis* on the ministry and life of priests. Though it is addressed to those who are already priests, the image of the priest for the modern world that it draws up for a more meaningful priestly existence, have to be taken into consideration in the training of priests. Other documents include *Gaudium et Spes*, *Lumen Gentium* and *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.

5. Post-Conciliar Developments

Popes who succeeded Pope John XXIII also were keenly interested in the formation of the candidates for priesthood. As a follow up of the teachings of Vatican II and in an effort to implement the decrees of the Council, Pope Paul VI issued a number of Apostolic Letters and Encyclicals. The encyclical of Pope Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* in 1967 and the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* of 1970 are worth mentioning. The Synod of bishops of 1990 discussed the topic "The Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day."

The Canon Laws of the Eastern and Latin Churches, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the post-Synodal Exhortations, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* and *Vita Consecrata* give due importance to the priestly and

religious formation and ongoing formation of priests and religious. *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (PDV) is the continuation of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council on priestly formation and ongoing formation of the priests. In number 2 PDV stresses the importance of formation. The second paragraph of PDV number 51 underlines the importance of intellectual formation for the priests in the post-modern world. In a detailed manner PDV deals with the following topics: the challenges facing the priestly formation in the contemporary world; the nature and mission of the ministerial priesthood; the spiritual life of the priest; priestly vocation in the Church's pastoral work; the formation of candidates for the priesthood and the ongoing formation of priests. The special feature of this document is the special stress given to the human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation of the candidates aspiring for priesthood. While speaking about the human formation the document says: "The whole work of priestly formation should be deprived of its necessary foundation if it lacked a suitable human formation... Future priests should therefore cultivate a series of human qualities, not only out of proper concern for due growth and realization of self, but also with a view to the ministry" (PDV, 43). *The Charter of Priestly formation for India*²¹ says: "To be Christ-like the seminarian will strive to be fully human: a leader of people, gentle and kind, open and ready to listen, cheerful and patient, honest and true to his word; a man of self-respect, sincerity and courage, constantly concerned for truth and justice, unafraid to take decisions and persevering in carrying them out" (3.2.1.a). To develop these qualities the seminarians should have an in-depth insertion in the life of the community and the present seminary structures do not encourage such insertion.²²

Vita Consecrata is another milestone in the formation history of the religious. While stressing the unique role of the religious in the life of the Church, this document urges the religious of the need of renewal in religious life. Being faithful to the charisma of its founder or foundress, each community has to venture into new areas of apostolate. This document also stresses the importance of the ongoing formation.

The Congregation for Clergy on December 8, 2016 issued the new *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, entitled *The Gift of Priestly*

²¹Catholic Bishops Conference of India, Commission for Clergy and Religious, *Charter of Priestly Formation for India*, (date or place of publication is not given; most probably 1988).

²²Paul Parathazham, *Vocation and Formation of Priests and Religious in India*, *Jnanadeepa, Pune Journal of Religious Studies* 3, 2 (July 2000) 37.

Vocation. This document stresses the importance of the healthy relationship to be developed with men and women while speaking on the human dimension of formation. This Church teaching speaks about four dimensions of priestly formation: Human, Spiritual, Intellectual and Pastoral. Number 116 of the document speaks about the intellectual dimension of formation. The intellectual formation should enable the priest to reason out and understand the logic of contemporary world and be able to “uphold the truth of the faith by the light of reason.” The theological formation should help the Catholic ministers of the Lord to interpret the Catholic doctrines according to the changing scenario of the contemporary world and to explain the Catholic faith according to the needs of the faithful.

6. Priestly Formation in the Indian Church

Indian Church is having the history of 2000 years and the ancient Christian community is known as St Thomas Christians. Tradition holds that Apostle Thomas ordained bishops, priests and deacons for the Church he founded to continue the ministry. However, we do not have any contemporary document to substantiate the authenticity of this statement. From the writings of the Western missionaries and visitors, especially after the sixteenth century, we get the information that the traditional system of priestly formation among the St Thomas Christians was known as *Malpanate* system, a Malabarisation of the Syriac term *Malpan*, which means learned priest. It is very similar to the Indian Hindu *Gurukula* system, where teacher and students live together and the teacher together with his regular instructions, also imparts life values through his exemplary life. The traditional *Malpanate* system continued among the St Thomas Christians till the middle of the 19th century. To a great extent the *Malpanate* system did not succeed in imparting sufficient intellectual formation to the ministers of the Lord. The local priests till the Synod of Udayamperur in 1599 were generally married.

Two major attempts have been made by the Western missionaries to introduce Western style of priestly formation among the St Thomas Christians: the Franciscans under the leadership of Vincent Lagos in 1541 established a seminary at Kodungallur and the Jesuits in 1581 opened a seminary at Vaipicotta. The Dominican missionary Francis Donati founded a seminary in Kaduthuruthy in 1624 but it was discontinued with the death of the founder. The Carmelite missionaries started a seminary in Varapuzha in 1682 and in 1764 the Syrian seminarians and Latin seminarians were given training there. Dissatisfied with the joint effort, a seminary was started in Alangatt

exclusively for Syrian seminarians. In 1888 once again all the seminaries were put together and thus the Puthenpally seminary was begun. In 1932 Puthenpally seminary was transferred to Mangalapuzha where seminarians from all the three rites were accommodated. In 1997 the Mangalapuzha seminary was divided on the basis of Oriental and Latin Rites.

With the opening of the CMI monastery at Mannanam in 1831 a new era in the seminary formation was begun. A seminary attached to the Mannanam monastery was begun in 1833 to train both the candidates to become diocesan clergy and those aspiring to become religious priests. However, they had separate residences in the same building. Later, a few more seminaries were begun attached to the CMI monasteries. The Sacred Heart Study House at Chethipuzha, Kerala, which was established in 1918, was the common Study House of the CMI Congregation. Taking into account the future scope for North Indian mission and eventually global mission and to train these missionaries, the authorities thought of transferring the Study House at Chethipuzha to Bangalore in 1957 with the name Dharmaram College. In realising this dream the names of Fr. Maurus, Prior General, Bishop Jonas Thaliath, the visionary, Eugene Cardinal Tisserant, Prefect Congregation for the Oriental Churches and Fr Placid Podipara, Consultor for the same Congregation, are worth mentioning. Dharmaram College and Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram are the continuation of the legacy bequeathed by the Founding Fathers of the CMI Congregation in the field of ecclesiastical education where Indian elements have been absorbed in the formation programme as the very name indicates. At present there are four Synodal seminaries for the Syro-Malabar Church – St Joseph’s Pontifical Seminary, Aluva; St Thomas Apostolic Seminary, Vadavathoor; St Ephrem’s Seminary, Satna; and Good Shepherd Major Seminary, Kunnoth. There is one major seminary for the Syro-Malankara Church – St Mary’s Malankara Seminary. Of course there are a number of philosophates and theologates for religious communities and societies, even in mission territories, to meet the needs of the mission.

For the Latin Church in India the first known centre for the training of the clergy was the one founded in Goa in 1541. The Jesuits administered this seminary till 1759 under the name College of St Paul. Jesuits had a seminary at Rachol which later became the common seminary. A seminary was started in Pondichery under the direction of the Paris Foreign Missionaries (MEP) in 1778, which later was shifted to Bangalore, which is today’s St Peter’s Pontifical

Seminary. The Pondicherry Synod of 1844 and the instruction of Propaganda in 1845 stressed the importance of the promotion of the native clergy and the intellectual and spiritual training to be given to them.

At present the Indian Church is blessed with a good number of priestly and religious vocations. The large number of seminaries and the presence of well-qualified staff members give testimony to the greater vitality of the Indian Church. The pastoral, spiritual and intellectual training given in these centres of training equips the seminarian to take up challenges in the future missionary life. The regional theologates and mission theologates are efforts to contextualise theological training in the living ambience of the local mission. For an effective and contextualised formation many argue for small groups rather than the traditional larger groups or grand infrastructural facilities.

In the context of the conciliar and post-conciliar Church teachings and in the light of the Apostolic Visitation of all the formation houses from 1997 to 1999, the three individual churches in India have brought out separate “Charter of Priestly Formation” for the qualitative improvement of the priestly formation. The keen interest the Indian hierarchy shows in the formation of the future ministers of the Lord is evident from the fact that the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India (CBCI) at its General Body Meeting held in Shillong in 1989 discussed the topic “Priestly Formation.” However, the seminary formation in India needs a radical change to train effective ministers of the Word of God in the present Indian context of religious pluralism, religious fundamentalism, religious violence, cultural pluralism, poverty, etc. There should be a contextualised curriculum to serve the people around us in a more effective way. The regional theologates to some extent prepare the seminarians to become aware of the socio-cultural, religious and economic scenario of our country. Cultural diversity is a fact and one must understand the working of the cultures to take the Good News to the people of different cultures. Formation for intercultural living is very important for the effective proclamation of the Gospel in the Indian context.²³

Conclusion

While the importance of quality priestly formation has been constantly underlined down through the centuries, it has not always

²³Cf. S.M. Michael, *Formation for Intercultural Living and Mission in India*, *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 78, 6 (June 2014) 419-438.

been open to realisation. Church fathers, such as Augustine, Ambrose, etc. emphasised the importance of a well-trained clergy. Humanists like Erasmus Desiderius of Rotterdam ridiculed the lack of distinction achieved by priests and religious in their days. The Council of Trent proposed the establishment of seminaries as the most adequate way to form candidate to priesthood. Prophetic thinkers like Antonio Rosmini-Serbati referred to the lack of quality formation as one of the five wounds of the Church. He said this in the nineteenth century, roughly three hundred years after the Council of Trent. The lamentation of Rosmini may be relevant even today. The challenge before the Church today is the intellectually and spiritually mediocre clergy who pose a serious threat to the qualitative leadership in the Church, both spiritual and intellectual. It is high time to think seriously about the revamping of the traditional seminary training programme and explore at least on experimental basis alternative models of formation which provide candidates ample opportunities to deal with concrete life situations and problems. In the multi-religious and multi-cultural and economically backward context of India, the seminary formation given today in India is not realistic as the students hardly get any chance to share the religious, cultural and economic situations of the people around them. Big number of seminarians in a larger seminary negatively affect personal attention, proper accompaniment and mentoring. Formators also should be equipped adequately and the role of the formator as the mentor and accompanier has to be stressed. A radical and soul-searching reorientation of the formation of the priests and religious will enable the Church to proactively respond to the manifold challenges of the post-modern world.