

# **Priestly and Religious Formation in the Catholic Church: From a Historical Perspective**

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## *Abstract*

The Priestly and Religious formation in the Catholic Church has a long and interesting history to trace back. It took not just centuries but millennia to evolve and improve its basic, rudimentary form illustrated by Jesus, to its present day status. It is quite interesting to trace back the evolution hitherto of the priestly and religious formation. It was the problems she encountered that made the Church improve and streamline her formative methods and practices. Though a lot has been achieved down through the centuries, there are a lot more to be done in the field of priestly and religious formation on account of the new and diverse challenges we come upon today's world.

## **Introduction:**

It is beyond the scope of an article to encapsulate the priestly and the religious formation since it covers an area far too extensive. The attempt made here is to concentrate and elucidate the historical development of the subject under consideration. Therefore no effort is taken to appraise the formation programme of the religious orders and societies as they vary significantly in their charismas and formation structures. However, it is quite obvious that those formative structures have immensely influenced the formative prospectus of the diocesan clergy.

**Early Church:**

Christ formed His Apostles through direct personal association with them; and the Apostles too followed the same method to train their disciples. This form of training, generally followed in the initial periods, continued in the Church long after the days of the Apostles. The idea and institution of a special priesthood, distinct from the body of the people, with the accompanying notion of sacrifice and altar, made the authorities to think seriously about the formation of this special class of people (Schaff, 1989). The Judaizers, i.e. the converts from Jewish religion to the Christian religion, adhered tenaciously to the Mosaic Law and failed to understand the freedom proclaimed by St. Paul and soon moved away from the infant Christian religion.

In the early Church although the Apostles and the disciples played a key role in the admission to the ranks of the clergy, they respected the sentiments of the community. Since it is the duty of the clergy to govern the Church of God, St Paul demanded that the candidate for orders have certain moral 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. Those chosen for episcopacy were to be 50 years of age and for priesthood at least 30 years.

Only learned and holy people are fit to be 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. Commenting on Psalm 15, 5, "The Lord is portion of my inheritance and my cup; it is Thou that will restore my inheritance to me" St Jerome says: "The cleric is admonished as he is the portion of the Lord or has the Lord for his portion, so he should show himself as possessing the Lord or being possessed by the Lord". Every priest is constituted a "Teacher in Israel" (Jn.3, 10) and has the mission to "go and teach all nations" (Mt, 28, 19), entrusted to him by Jesus Christ himself.

From the very beginning of Christianity there were famous centres of learning where priests and candidates for priesthood could learn the doctrine and the teachings of the Church. Thus the schools of Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Edessa, Nisibis, etc. were among the most important centres of learning which gave to the early Church Fathers and Doctors whose literary contributions are priceless treasures of the Christian world. 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 one unless they had proved themselves competent in the one and qualified for the other. This arrangement lent itself admirably to proper training in their duties. The catechetical schools in existence since the end of the second century were originally established to instruct converts, but 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. From the writings of the early Church authors we understand that great importance was given to the formation of the ministers. However, the great centres of learning became more and more aware of the limitations of the training given to the ministers.

In the early Church the clerics obtained their theological knowledge first of all in the lessons of the catechumenate and further by private study, sometimes, perhaps, with a learned Christian teacher, who after the model of the philosophers of ancient days, taught the basic principles of the philosophy of the Christian religion. Knowledge of liturgical function was provided by direct participation in the prayer and worship of his church. The growing variety of ecclesiastical orders provided the possibility of being tested in a lower grade, and of gradually acquiring deeper religious knowledge and increasing familiarity with the tasks of a high office. Different ministries existed in the early Church and the three orders were diaconate, presbyterate and the episcopate. 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 (Schaff, 1989). Every priest ought to be a doctor in the Church since he has the divine mission "to teach all nations". Hence the fourth Council of Toledo in 663 instructs, "Ignorance which is the mother of all errors should not be attributed to priests since they have the duty of teaching the people" (Puthiakunnel, 1964).

In the first centuries celibacy was not imposed on the clergy. For the first three centuries there was no ecclesiastical legislation on this matter 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. Slowly a custom prohibiting the higher clergy, that is, bishops, priests, and deacons from marrying after ordination emerged under penalty of deposition. Celibacy was widely practiced by bishops as the way of life and a prerogative of the office they held. 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. 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. As positive requirements, candidates were expected to have due knowledge of the Christian faith, to have exercised other ministries, and to have given proof of their suitability.

### **Edict of Milan (313):**

The elevation of the Church to the position of the state religion of the Roman Empire with the Edict of Milan by Emperor Constantine in 313 made easier the preparation for the clerical office since 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. The law of Justinian, of the year 541, established a period of probation in the East also. From the fourth century onwards, we find canons and teachings of the Church and of the Fathers by which a kind of system of education was established for training the candidates to priesthood. 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 (Jedin, 1980). In Africa the Councils of Hippo in 393 and Carthage in 397 laid down that the candidates for priesthood be well instructed in Sacred Scriptures and the regulations of the Councils. 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 (Schaff, 1989).

The theological schools like Edessa, Nisibis, Antioch and Alexandria produced learned priests. In the West there were no schools as such, but supplied from cloisters and private schools of bishops. These monastic training very often did not give them comprehensive knowledge of the world and men, which is necessary for a wide field of labour. Gradually, in the West there were smaller diocesan seminaries, under the direction of the bishops, who trained their own clergy, both in theory and in practice, as they passed through the subordinate class of reader, sub-deacon and deacon. 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. He started living with them aiming to promote a type of communion. In order to be ordained one has to undergo certain training and pass the necessary examinations. However, this practice of Augustine was not widely acclaimed (Schaff, 1989).

Other bishops, especially, Caesar of Arles, adopted the same plan. 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 step by step training in the duties of their state. This practice also gradually spread in different parts of Italy. At the Synod of Vaison in 529, Bishop Caesar of Arles prescribed it for the entire province. Finally, many monasteries like Lerins, in southern France, became training schools for the clergy and many of the most prominent bishops of the period received their training from the monks or at least had spent some time with them (Bihlmeyer, 1968). St Patrick, the Apostle of the Irish Church, had his training from the monastery of Lerins. 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 (Jein, 1980).

Several of the most learned and able fathers of the fourth century received their general 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 (Schaff, 1989).

Ecclesiastical legislation of the period in general required for admission to the individual orders a maturity corresponding to their importance, but in determining the age for ordination it was still fluctuating and not uniform. Ecclesiastical authorities stressed the physical and moral fitness for ordination. But more important for the Church was the fitness in moral character for the ecclesiastical state, and the testing of this was demanded with increasing urgency. That the clergy had to have at his disposal an extensive pastoral and theological knowledge because of his duty of proclaiming the faith and caring for souls was stressed by many authors and bishops of the time and as well as by the Popes of the fourth and fifth centuries.

The heart of the priestly education was generally considered to be the knowledge and understanding of Scripture, which was strictly demanded by all for priests and bishops. Also there were number of restrictions on the admission of candidates to priesthood. In the course of time the training of clergy became more personal and practical. 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. Later developments show that the clergy were identified with certain factors which made them a separate class of their own.

Great Popes like Gelasius, Leo I, Gregory I, et al., exhorted the bishops 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.*

The system and practice of private chapels built and owned by private individuals or landlords put a serious threat to the development of clerical training and discipline. Very often the owner of the chapel kept the revenues and the priests were appointed according to his choice. These rural clergy were poorly trained. The Council of Vaison in 529 stressed the importance of the proper training of the clergy and instructed that the authorities should have some control over the life of the clergy. The scholastic training was minimal. The priest must be able to read, must know something of the chant of the Holy Scripture and how to baptise (Hughes, 1985).

### **Medieval Church:**

This period covers from the Council of *Quinisext* (692) till the Council of Trent. The main features of this period include the origin of the Papal State (754), alliance between Papacy and the Frankish kingdom, the coronation of Charles the Great, the feudalism and its grip on the Church, the Dark Age of Papacy, the Eastern Schism, the Gregorian Reformation, the religious revival with Cluny, Cistercians, Carthusians, Trinitarians, Franciscans, Dominicans, Carmelites, Crusades, Scholasticism, origin of the Universities, Renaissance and Humanism, Avignon Papacy, Western Schism, Conciliarism, the cry for a radical reform in the Church, the Protestant Reformation, Catholic Reformation with the Council of Trent, new religious orders and societies and new branches from old ones, etc. All these events had their positive and negative impacts in the priestly training also. Although efforts have been made during the period of Charles the Great (768 – 814) to improve the quality of the intellectual and spiritual life of the clergy, it was completely forgotten during the Dark Age of Papacy. Again there was a revival in the qualitative life of the clergy during the time of Gregorian reformation (1073-1303). However, proper attention was not given to the training of clergy by the ecclesiastical authorities during the Western Schism, pre-Reformation and Reformation periods.

### **Cathedral, Episcopal and Monastic Schools:**

Cathedral Schools are the result of the desire from the part of the bishops to give proper and effective training to the clergy. Admission to Cathedral school was open to both clerical candidates and lay people. However, Episcopal schools were chiefly conducted for clerics directly managed by bishops. In the early Church, especially in the West, the clerical candidates attended the pagan schools for their regular education. Then they were selected by a bishop who taught by action the functions of a Church's minister, imparted a minimum of sacred

divine doctrine and guided the youth's moral formation. With the beginning of Cathedral Schools there was the teaching of grammar and literature at all levels of formation. Then there was the system of common living among the clergy and attached to the bishops houses and they were also entrusted with the teaching of the candidates aspiring for priesthood. From the Cathedral Schools developed the Universities in Europe. The Monastic Schools mainly trained the members of the monasteries and admissions were also open to the public (New Catholic Encyclopaedia, 2003).

### **The Carolingian Era and Further Developments:**

It was a period of great significance for the reform of the clergy and consequently also for priestly training. The Capitulars of the Frankish kings, especially Charles the Great (768-814) 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. Charles the Great was a great promoter of the intellectual formation of the clergy and ordered that schools should be attached to the Cathedrals and thus the Cathedral schools have become very popular in Europe.

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 Council of Aachen (816) explained the moral requirements in candidates according to the teachings of St Paul, (1Tim. 3:1-12). Great attention continued to be paid to the intellectual preparation of clerics.

During the medieval period the practice continued of conferring Orders merely for the celebration of the Eucharist, while the ministry of preaching and the care of the faithful were neglected; already in the fifth century, a similar state of affairs had been condemned at the Council of Chalcedon. The growth of religious orders and monasteries resulted in the generation of an army of ordained ministers rendering no pastoral service, creating an impression that the imposition of hands merely gave them 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 after the suppression of heresies and victory over schisms, and inadequacy in the formation candidates. During the Dark Age of Papacy (896-1073) no serious effort was made to ensure the quality of the clergy. During this period due to the influence of feudalism in the life of the Church, the worst affected people were the clergy. The clergy



during this Dark Age became proletariat or bonded labourers of the feudal lords and ignorance was the order of the day. The establishment of the proprietary churches made the situation worse and learned priests were rare exceptions.

### **Gregorian Reformation:**

Pope Gregory VII (1073-1085) initiated a new venture: suitable persons were to be sent to Rome for higher ecclesiastical studies, and thereby ensure 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. Even the appointment of the bishops and abbots were done by lay people. The clergy lacked spiritual formation and needed skills for pastoral ministry. Through the reform efforts Pope Gregory succeeded to some extent in bringing order in the life of the clergy. In 1179 the third Lateran Council 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. In 1215 the fourth Lateran Council taught that every metropolitan church must employ a theologian who would be entrusted with the instruction of priests in Sacred Scripture and pastoral theology. Popes Honorius III (+1183) and Boniface VIII (+1303) took interest in the topic and the latter established the University of Rome aiming to impart intellectual formation to the clergy.

The third Lateran Council (1179) authorised the bishops to select the candidate and the fourth Lateran Council (1215) insisted on examination before ordination and on appointment of competent professors to teach clerics all that concerns their life and ministry. The same Council in canon 11 demanded that every Metropolitan Cathedral should appoint a theologian who would instruct the clergy in the Holy Scripture and prepare them for pastoral ministry.

Under the influence of Scholastic revival and enthusiasm, much importance and emphasis was laid on doctrinal knowledge and cultural preparation. The Council of Tarragona (1329) established the prohibition that the candidates were not promoted to Sacred Orders unless they were persons who knew grammar or could speak well in Latin. The Council of Toledo (1473) prescribed that two competent persons under pain of excommunication were to examine carefully and faithfully every candidate for Orders. In the *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, *Dcretum Gratiani*, compiled by Grazian, 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. The situation of the clergy during the pre-Reformation period may be depicted in the following words: The individuals who attended the Latin school in his town acquired practical training from a pastor or in a monastery. 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. However, 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. The examination prescribed by Emperor Charles the Great was to verify the intellectual preparedness of the candidate and his ability to render his cultic service. The Synod of Waldimira in 1274, under Pope Gregory X, insisted on certifying about the life of the candidates and his habits and how he was conducting his life in the world.

### **The Council of Trent (1545-1563):**

The Council of Trent was the Catholic response to the Protestant reformation. Martin Luther and other reformers questioned the existing Church practices and many followed their teachings 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" (Jedin, 1982).

Thus urgency was felt regarding the reform of the intellectual and spiritual formation of the clergy. It was also in the context of the greater emphasis given to the pastoral care and salvation of the souls as the main duties of the clergy. There was also a strong feeling that a better supervision was needed before one is being ordained. 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 helped in

the line of thinking 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.

We are familiar with term seminary, which derives from the Latin word *Seminarium*, 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 Cardinal Reginald Pole, St John Fisher, both from England and St Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus, popularised this term among the Catholics.

One of the outstanding achievements of the Council of Trent was the foundation of the seminary for priestly formation. The formal establishment of the seminary system as we have today, for training candidates for priesthood goes back to the Council of Trent. In the Council of Trent in the twenty-fourth Session there was the decree on the erection of diocesan seminaries for the education and training of clerics from early youth. The twenty third Session of 15 July 1563, which was the last Session, 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. The aim was to revitalize the moral and spiritual life of the clergy. 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.

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. 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 faithful.

The special merit of the Council of Trent lies in having taken a position that was never before so clear, detailed, precise and of universal value with respect to the obligatoriness of the foundation of the seminary and the personal responsibility of the bishop to see to its functioning. Trent also legalized the practice, already existing in the Church, of leaving in the hands of local bishops the formation of the local clergy. It is to this Council and to the religious movements immediately following it, that we owe the image of the modern priest: a priest formed in the seminary, protected in his morality, trained to ecclesiastical dignity and office, to become the dispenser of divine treasures and director of the consciences.

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 seminary formation.

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 1575 he founded the English College in Rome and in 1589 a further College at Valladolid. In the spirit of the Council of Trent these colleges produced future Catholic missionaries.

### **Calvinian Academy:**

John Calvin, the protestant reformer, aiming to impart an integrated education to the ministers of his reformed church, established an Academy in 1559 in Geneva, Switzerland. The scholasticate system was having a private school where elementary Greek, Latin and Philosophy were taught. In the public school or Academy where Latin, Greek, liberal arts were taught of a University level along with theology, i.e. exegesis and dogmatic. This Academy became the European seminary for the Calvinists. Thus Calvin became the Patriarch of a new form of Christianity which would form not only the Christian, but also the integral man. This new generation is faithful to the law, hostile to sins, and always work for the glory of God. This new generation people showed the aristocracy of a truly religious man. This concept of the

Academy of Calvin influenced the Catholics in preparing the syllabus for the training of clergy, of course with Catholic perspectives.

### **Other Developments:**

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

In the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century in France 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 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 (Jedin, 1981).

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 18<sup>th</sup> century, we find another prominent figure in the person of St Alphonsus de Liguori.

### **Pope Leo XIII (1878–1903):**

In conjunction with the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, while advocating the training of indigenous clergy, especially in the mission territories, he enjoined strict severity in their selection and particular attention to their ethnic and primitive characteristics. By favouring the establishment of seminaries for indigenous clergy, he manifested his farsightedness and interest in the missions. The reformatory initiative of the Pope Leo XIII are seen especially in the

reorganization of the programme of studies and the discipline in the seminaries to ensure integrity of doctrine against the influence of Modernism that was prevalent then and sanctity of life. His personal interests and solicitude are clear also from his frequent interventions in favour of the seminaries in the city of Rome itself and from the establishment of regional seminaries in Italy. Attempts have been made for native clergy, especially during the pontificates of Leo XIII, Benedict XV and Pius XI. The *Codex Iuris Canonici* of 1917 also made efforts to reform the seminary functioning. During the pontificates of Pius XI and Pius XII serious attempts were made to update the seminary formation.

### **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 the errors and aberrations of the day. 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 idea of fitting oneself in to a general framework based on a sort of “blind obedience” was called into question, among other things because practice had shown that obedience, completely defensible on spiritual grounds, had been seriously misused on authoritarian grounds. The superiors, in the broadest sense of the term, knew what was best for candidate priests.

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 priest-candidates had too little contact thereby with real life.

Pope John XXIII who convened the 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* (*O.T.*) 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” (*O.T.* Introduction).

The final Decree consisted of an introduction and seven segments of unequal length. In the foreword to *O.T.* 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 envisioned *O.T.* 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. Good quality seminary formation could be expected to produce people motivated by a love of Christ and His Church and at the same time gifted with the intellectual qualities necessary to as priests into dialogue with culture in an open and competent fashion.

The concern for the reorganisation of the seminary education of priests and of theological studies had already occupied the Second Vatican Council. The Decree *O.T.* on the formation of priests, 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 discussion 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. And 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" (*O.T.* No.1).

*Optatam Totius* intended 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 (No. 4).

A divine vocation to this state of life and the willingness to follow Christ with generous souls and pure hearts are undeniably fundamental

requisites (Nos. 2&3). Future priests would have to live their vocation according to the standards of the Gospel, out of strong conviction, and not out of mere religious commitment (No. 8). They would have to be thoroughly penetrated with the mystery of the Church (No. 9). They must have acquired that degree of emotional maturity to have perfect mastery of mind and body (No. 10); likewise also “proper degree of human maturity” and “solid maturity of personality” (No. 11).

*O.T.* needs to be complemented by what were 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*.

### **Post-Conciliar Period:**

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 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 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* (*P.D.V.*) is the continuation of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council on priestly formation and ongoing formation of the priests. In a detailed manner *P.D.V.* 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. This document also underlines the importance of the ongoing formation of the priests.

*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 reminds 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 stressed the importance of the ongoing formation.

### **Indian Church and Priestly Formation:**

Now let us briefly consider the priestly formation in the Indian Church. Tradition holds that Apostle Thomas ordained bishops, priests and deacons for the Church he founded. However, we do not have any historical document to substantiate this statement. The traditional system of priestly formation among the St Thomas Christians was known as *Malpanate* system, a localization of the Syriac term *Malpan*, which means learned or doctor. It is very similar to the Indian *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 19<sup>th</sup> century.

With the arrival of the Western missionaries, we witnessed two major attempts to introduce the Latin style of priestly formation among the St Thomas Christians. Franciscans in 1541 established a seminary at Kodungallur and the Jesuits in 1581 opened a seminary at Vaipincotta. 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 and a few more seminaries were begun attached to the CMI monasteries. 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.

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. Jesuits had a seminary at Rachol which later became the common seminary. A Propaganda seminary was started in 1764 in Varapuzha and another one was started at Pondichery under the direction of the Paris Foreign Missionaries (M.E.P.) in 1778, which later was shifted to Bangalore, which is today's St. Peter's Pontifical Seminary. A Papal seminary was established in Kandy in 1893, the continuation of which is the present day Papal Seminary at Pune.

At present the Indian Church is blessed with enough 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 any challenges in their future ministry. 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 at Shillong in 1989 had its main 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.

### **Conclusion:**

Though the importance of excellence in priestly formation has been constantly underlined down through the centuries, it was not always realized. Church fathers, such as Augustine, Ambrose, etc. emphasised the importance of a well-trained clergy. Humanists like Erasmus of Rotterdam ridiculed the worthless 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 pointed out the dearth of proper 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 anguish of the Church today is the intellectually and spiritually mediocre clergy. They pose a serious threat to the leadership in the Church, both spiritual and intellectual.

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