

TRAINING FOR THE PRIESTHOOD
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DECREE ON THE TRAINING FOR
THE PRIESTHOOD

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Training for the Priesthood

“IT is 400 years since the Council of Trent decreed the establishment of seminaries in which candidates for the priesthood were to be trained for the priestly life and ministry.¹ Cardinal Pallavicini called this the most important reform enacted by the Council; and more recently Professor Jedin, the latest historian of the Council of Trent, declared that this decree was “a great step forward, so great indeed that by itself it provided a sufficient justification for calling the Council.”

There can be no doubt that the decree of Trent has brought incalculable blessings to the Church: the new seminaries were perhaps the main factor in bringing about the much needed reform of the whole Church, head and members. But today we are living in a world very different from that of the Counter-reformation, and in recent times, especially since the second world-war, our seminaries have become the target of severe and wide-spread criticism. Some at least of these criticisms are fully justified. The conditions of the priestly life and ministry in the world of today call for a serious reform and adaptation of the training given in our seminaries.

The need was realized by those who planned the programme of the Second Vatican Council. Before the opening of the Council the preparatory commission for Studies and Seminaries had drawn up a project on seminary training (cf C.M. 1962, 299). It was redrafted, between the first and second sessions, by the conciliar commission for Seminaries, Studies and Catholic Education (cf C.M. 1963, 310). This schema, called *De sacrorum alumnis formandis*, was distributed to the Council fathers, but before it came up for discussion it was again redrafted, between the second and third sessions, and reduced to a series of 22 propositions (cf C.M. 1964, 271). The discussion of this schema, now called *De institutione sacerdotali*, occupied four general congregations of the third session (cf C.M. 1965, 49). The text received more praise and fewer criticisms than most of the other schemas of this Council. It was approved on November 17, 1964, by a strong majority and with a relatively small number of ‘modi’. In the light of these modi the text was revised once more, between the third and fourth sessions, and was definitively approved on October 13, 1965, by 2196 ‘placet’ against 15 ‘non placet’.² The decree was promulgated at the public session of October 28, after a final approval by 2318 ‘placet’ against 3 persistent ‘non placet’.

1. Cf. CLERGY MONTHLY 1964, 146-50.

2. On the previous days (October 11 & 12) when votes were taken on individual sections, there had been 95 negative votes for n. 3, 88 for n. 4, 58 for n. 15, the other sections being accepted almost unanimously.

VII. FINAL TRAINING AFTER THE COURSE OF STUDIES

22. Even after the seminary course of studies has been completed it is necessary to continue and perfect the priestly training, especially because of the conditions prevailing in modern society.⁴⁸ It will be the responsibility of the episcopal conferences in each country to find effective means to this end. Such would be, for instance, pastoral institutes working in association with suitably chosen parishes, conferences meeting at stated times, and appropriate practical work whereby the younger clergy would be gradually introduced into the priestly life and apostolic activity, in their spiritual, intellectual and pastoral aspects, and learn to renew and develop them ever more effectively.

CONCLUSION

The Fathers of this sacred Synod have pursued the work begun by the Council of Trent. While they confidently entrust to the seminary superiors and professors the task of forming the future priests of Christ in the spirit of renewal promoted by this sacred Synod, they earnestly exhort those who are preparing for the priestly ministry to realize that the hope of the Church and the salvation of souls is committed to them. May they willingly accept the directions of this Decree and thus bring forth in great abundance fruit that will remain forever.

48. Recent documents of the Holy See stress the need of taking special care of the young priests. See PIUS XII. Motu proprio *Quandoquidem*, 2 April 1949: *AAS* 41 (1949), pp. 165-167; Apost. exhortation *Menti Nostrae*, l.c.; Apost. Constit. *Sedes Sapientiae* and the General Statutes annexed to it; address to priests of the 'convictus Barcinonensis', 14 June 1957: *Discorsi e Radiomessaggi*, XIX, pp. 271-73.—PAUL VI, address to priests of the institute 'Gian Matteo Giberti, of the Verona diocese, 11 March 1964: *Osservatore Romano* 13 March 1964.



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