

FORMATION IN THE SEMINARY

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THE FORMATION OF aspirants to the priesthood is the formation of the whole man and must never be allowed to become the development of one aspect only of the candidate's person. Nevertheless although it is one growth, it can conveniently be divided into three sections for the purpose of discussion: the intellectual development of the seminarist, his personality development and his spiritual development. These can be discussed under three distinct headings, although care should be taken that the formation be seen as a whole and not departmentalized in practice.

The formation of seminarists in the past has been in many ways admirable and has produced fine priests, for which it must be given credit. Nevertheless it could be criticized precisely for being too departmentalized, each area of formation being given devoted attention, but with too little advertence to what was simultaneously going on in other areas. This had the effect of lessening the effectiveness of each individual section of the seminarist's formation, quite apart from being extremely lacking in coordination. To begin with, the separation between the intellectual formation and the personality development of the seminarists meant that the intellectual training given was excessively abstract, because it was pursued with little regard for the kind of person it was being given to, resulting in the seminarists having an impressive corpus of academic knowledge but with little relevance for their lives in the present or the future. This separation of intellectual from personality formation resulted, too, in the production of priests who were apt to be babies in their emotional lives, without experience or ability in handling personal relationships, but at the same time academically expert and capable of intricate scholastic argumentation. Sometimes these brilliant children found their way back into the seminary as professors and handed on to the next generation the same mixture of abstract intelligence and emotional immaturity.

The separation, too, of the intellectual formation of the seminar-

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ists from their spiritual formation was unhappy in its effects. It meant that on the one hand the theological training of the candidates was dry and unconcerned about the personal response to salvation in Christ which is spirituality: that is, that students delved into the mystery of salvation in all its richness with scarcely any regard for the spiritual consequences of it all; while on the other hand the spirituality taught (where it was taught at all – too often in secular seminaries it was just allowed to develop) suffered immeasurably from being divorced from theology, and consequently was apt to become concerned with inessentials rather than the great truths of the christian mystery. As a result, seminaristic spirituality was frequently permeated with untheological sentiment, in the absence of any better motivation for spiritual development being offered. The spiritual director was not expected to know any theology: that was left to his academic colleagues. He tended to be an elderly man with devotion to ‘devotions’ and few theological interests.

Lastly, the separation of personality development from strictly spiritual development was also harmful. This could be said to exist in the sense that personality development hardly took place at all in the seminaries of yesterday. In its place was an insistence on the letter of the law, and a tendency to judge students externally by the simple criterion of whether they obeyed the rule (visibly) or not. On to this training in passive obedience was grafted the spiritual formation of the students. But characters trained in passive obedience only were not strong enough to take any lasting spiritual formation, with the result that the spiritual dimensions of the priestly life tended to collapse in the years after the priests had left the protective atmosphere of the seminary, and spiritual growth came to a halt amidst the bustle and pressure of the parish life. The strength of character needed to maintain it just wasn’t there.

All that I have said must be well known to you, and I apologize for boring you with repetition of more or less accepted truth. I have, however, dwelt at some length on the harm done by the separation of the various strands of development of the one man who is the seminarist, in order that this essential unity be kept in mind for the rest of my paper, when I am going to deal with each development separately. The separation is only for the purposes of discussion and is not meant to be real, as I hope to show.

Intellectual formation

I am not going to say much about this as it is outside the specific scope of this conference and well outside my own scope too. The relevant paragraphs in the decree on priestly formation¹ are, it seems to me, excellent. This does not mean that I regard the theological training of students for the priesthood as unimportant. On the contrary, I regard it as essential if our future priests are going to fulfil their ministry of the Word with competence in the modern world. The need for sound objective theology among priests has never been greater. The challenge of living with an emancipated laity in the open Church is, among other things, a challenge to priests to think and act theologically. There is also the pastoral consideration that without a thorough training in theology our priests will suffer a loss of nerve in the face of the clamant secular world (which is not over against the Church but intertwined with it); and merely being a good chap with high ideals will not be sufficient to save the situation. The only answer to this challenge is for priests to have been given the beginnings of a formation in theology which is on the one hand relevant to the present world, that is, operating from the centre of modern culture, and on the other hand rooted in the tradition of the Church. Students should have been given before they leave the seminary the wherewithal to think theologically about the world in which they are going to work, and to grow in that thinking. If this continuing theology is going to be helpful to the people they serve, it must of course be rooted in the tradition of the Church as well as meaningful to modern man. Hence the need for a thorough training in official theology as part of the formation of the modern priest.

If this training is going to be effective, there is a need for the professors and tutors of the seminarists to present a profound unity of doctrine and witness in their lives.² It is no good, and positively harmful, for a professor to have a theoretical grasp of the theology he teaches, if his life and practice is not a living witness to it. Teaching objectively sound christian doctrine but not trying to live it also is of very little use in the seminary. To begin with, it is pedagogically bad, because every student, and perhaps especially a seminarist, is quick to spot a divergence between what a man says and how he lives, and he will not learn much from a man who evidently has not

¹ *Optatam totius*, 13-18.

² *Ibid.*, 5.

himself experienced the mystery of what he teaches. Theology professors, then, who expound the mystery of God's love for men and of the christian response to it, must manifest that they have tried to grasp what this means in their own lives, if their teaching is going to take root. The point about christianity is that it is a way of life before it is a doctrine, and you cannot have the latter without the former. To expound christian theology without also living it is in fact not to expound *it* at all, but only an abstract copy which is a caricature. To teach students the christian way means more than an academic exercise. If it is presented only as an academic exercise, the presentation will not in fact be a presentation of christian theology. I am not suggesting that we should teach a severely practical theology in our seminaries without any abstract argument; I am only pointing out that all abstract argument in christian theology is eventually about concrete living, and that this is only effectively presented by an abstract arguer who is also a concrete liver.

Now, because christianity is a way of life which breaks down barriers and makes us one in Christ regardless of class, age and position, this means that the professors of christian theology must also be men who have a warm personal relationship with their students, sharing their lives and not holding aloof from them. To hold aloof is simply not christian, is simply denying in practice what in theory is being taught. I stress this because there is an understandable, but surely inexcusable, tendency for priests who teach in seminaries to live apart from their students, and to avoid any contact with them outside class other than ones of purely professional tutorage. When this is done you have the phenomenon of men who expound the christian way on the rostrum, but publicly avoid living it with their students when off the rostrum. This duplicity of life can be glaring, and is surely most harmful for the formation of the students who are subject to it.

It is, of course, understandable when professors stay apart from students, especially when they need all the time possible for keeping abreast of their subjects, and I do not think that there is ever a conscious decision to be un-Christ-like. I would, however, suggest that the nature of the doctrine theologians teach, whether 'dogma', 'moral' or 'scripture', demands that they do not hold aloof from their students, but on the contrary make sure that they are available to them in every way. I would suggest also that the time spent in forming and maintaining warm relationships with the students is not even academically wasted, both because it helps a teacher to know

personally the men he is teaching, and because the holy Spirit may well speak to a professor 'doctrinally' through the contacts he makes with his students, as well as through the books he reads. Too exclusive a devotion to his room and his books is not good for the professor of christian theology. I believe this is what is chiefly meant by Vatican II's insistence that everything taught in the seminary be pastorally orientated: not that some extra content be added to the course given, a kind of pastoral scholion to each theme, but that in the teaching of it the professors exercise a pastoral care over their charges alongside the academic exposition of the themes. In this way the missionary nature of christian doctrine will be made evident even in the midst of the technical points.

In this paper I avoid any discussion of whether it is a good thing or not that theology be taught in *seminaries* at all. I content myself with pointing out that, given that we have seminaries, they present a unique opportunity for the professors living among their students to form close relationships with them, and thus influence their formation in a more comprehensive way than would be possible if they did not share their life and worship with them. It is always a pity and a lost opportunity when seminary professors say that their job is only to teach, and then proceed to live apart from the students in some kind of ecclesiastical officers' mess.

Personality development

Our aim is to produce mature men as priests. Few words are so overworked at a gathering like this as 'maturity' and each person tends to have his own notion of what it means. To save any argument, and in order to pass quickly on to my theme, let us take the description offered in the decree:

By wisely planned training there should also be developed in seminarians a due degree of human maturity, attested to chiefly by a certain emotional stability, by an ability to make considered decisions, and by a right manner of passing judgment on events and people. They should be practised in an intelligent organization of their proper talents; they should be trained in what strengthens character.¹

Emotional stability, ability to make considered decisions, sound evaluation of events and people, strength of character: these are

¹ *Ibid.*, II.

indeed what we are trying to form in our seminarists. Clearly, close co-operation with the holy Spirit is called for, for we cannot hope by ourselves to achieve this, whatever the material given us.

To begin with, let us be clear that the attempt to produce mature men along these lines is not the same as producing men who will always please us or make us feel secure when we are with them. I mention this briefly because there is a tendency in us all to want to have around us reliable, docile men, good 'non-commissioned officers', who do what we suggest with efficiency and do not trouble us with ideas of their own which go contrary to ours. Having good sacristans and good men in charge of the tool shed is helpful in a seminary, but not, I think, very important. A man can be mature and have the makings of an excellent priest without manifesting that particular range of qualities. Efficiency has to be allied with deeper qualities in a priest, if it is going to be pastorally valuable and not repellent. It is not so much good non-commissioned officers we want, as good officers, if I may be allowed an unfashionable metaphor.

This means mature men who are living in the seminary with full co-operation, reacting to its opportunities with intelligent obedience, making their lives there authentic. Of course, few seminarists can be said to be fully mature even at the end of their course, but it should be possible to say of them at any time during their course that they are travelling towards maturity, because they are embracing the system in an adult way. It is important for the development of personality that the seminarist should react to the community formation in a personal, internally motivated way. It is no good merely conforming outwardly. What is done must be done with inner conviction. If they do this, the seminarists will present their own genuine personalities to the community and not be the sort of faceless characters who say what they think they are meant to say, think what they are meant to think, and act always in accordance with the approved pattern.

This sort of artificial 'alienated' form of living is, alas, not unknown in seminaries and convents. The tragedy is when it is imposed and embraced in the name of christian spirituality. I have come across seminarists who act out of an imposed way of being charitable in community which is manifestly not 'them', but merely a zealous conformity to the superior's version of what community living is. The results of this sort of universalized, impersonal, pattern living is too often that the seminarist, instead of growing, diminishes in charity as the months go by, because he is not allowing himself to think what

he ought to do in each successive situation. Instead, he is merely conforming to an increasingly unthinking pattern of acting. Then, when life presents him with a challenge which is not covered by the training, he fails to do anything, because he has long since ceased to think his own way through situations towards charity.

This is real alienated living, and the tragedy is that it is sometimes encouraged in novitiate training. The result is an unintegrated character, someone whose real self is not behind his actions. The actions are a mere pattern, a *persona*, while the real self underneath is dormant, even perhaps rebellious. Sometimes one comes across a religious sister who is outwardly a model of obedient reverence for the priest, full of the standard phrases and actions of the convent parlour, but who is simultaneously working her hardest to frustrate one's efforts to help the community in a way that she disapproves of. She is an opponent, but her whole demeanour is one of childlike obedience. The *persona* and the real self are completely different, and apparently she is unconscious of it.

I suggest that there is a danger that in our formation of future priests in community we may produce this lack of integration just because we are so anxious to see our seminaries become christian communities. If we do, then we may well produce an outwardly christian community, but it will be dead in each individual, because he is not being encouraged to think for himself how to be christian in each given situation, but is merely following the imposed pattern. Such a person will not yet have achieved *identity*, because he has been too busy following the established pattern of spirituality to think for himself and discover who he is. He has never done anything which is essentially 'him', and so he has not yet begun to be himself.

A man who is hidden behind a *persona* does not live his own life, he is determined from without, instead of living, he is lived. He does not make his own decisions and insofar as he does realise his own nature, he does not live from himself. He does not wholly exist, he is not existent, to use the terminology of the existentialists. He does not take hold of his own existence; he misses his own true nature.¹

It is, I know, exaggerated to say that this is a description of the average novice, but we ought to bear the description in mind in case there is some truth in it.

¹ Goldbrunner, J., *Cure of Mind and Cure of Soul* (London, 1958), p 52.

Allowing sufficient freedom to the seminarists for them to develop their own personalities is quite compatible with obedience to a regime. It is not a question of encouraging students to disobey, but of ensuring that their obedience, when it comes, is 'theirs' and not an outward conformity. Paradoxically, the outward imposition of a fixed pattern of christian living produces less obedience than the freer system where the students have to discover how to be obedient for themselves. The former type of obedience is not internalized, and so will not last beyond the confines of the seminary; and even in the seminary it is often only public. Genuine obedience is the result of a personal search for the christian solution to the problems of living in community; it does not depend on the presence or absence of an audience. There is of course a place for rules in every community. It is not the rules which I am suggesting we should avoid laying down, but the pattern of response to them. Each individual must work out for himself how he responds to rules and regimes. It is a mistake to be too explicit or descriptive in telling him how to do it.

This second way of character formation is much slower and more demanding on the spiritual guide than the 'external' way. But it is the way towards genuine personality development. I suggest that there is a threefold process involved in this. First, there is the imposition in the name of the community of a rule of life or particular spirituality. It is a mistake to omit this setting up of standards. Secondly, the student is left to work out his response to this imposition, care being taken not to lay down how he is to do so. This produces a certain amount of short term untidiness, but the wise guide will tolerate such cockle. Through a series of crises, great or small, the student will discover himself by the mistakes he makes and the successes he has. He will go through periods of doubt, love, hate, fear, revolt against the regime; but if he is wisely guided he should emerge at the end with a genuine adherence to it, this time because of personally held convictions about the need for its spirituality, and not because of passive conformity. And so, thirdly, he will begin to discover who he is and take his place in the community as a real, though quite individual, member of it. Of course it never works out as easily as that, but I think you will agree that that is the ideal.

This means that there are two movements in formation in the seminary. They are both, surely, movements in which the holy Spirit is to be found. The first is the movement from outside to inside, the second from inside to outside.

a) The movement from outside to inside is the movement whereby a set pattern is held up before the students from the outside, with the intention that they so react to it that it becomes for them a genuine internal value. Some people today think that this movement should be abolished, as it takes away from spontaneity and is inimical to authentic living. As I have indicated already, I think that it is a necessary beginning in the formation of character. A case can be made out for the pruning of much of these man-made traditions and their bringing up to date, but I think it would be a sad day for the Church if the wisdom of the past distilled by men like St Benedict or St Ignatius was discarded in the name of personal authenticity. The holy Spirit speaks through tradition as well as speaking through the existential situation. There is, therefore, a place for customs and traditions in the formation of our priests, and even for imposed rules from above. If there were no such given standards, our young men would have nothing to measure themselves against, and in the final event nothing to rebel against! The totally permissive society is a bleak and cheerless desert because there is nothing in it to cause a crisis. I am sure that among other things young men need the challenge of uncomfortable rules and seemingly meaningless impositions at times to bring the best out of them.

... and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,
Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion.¹

b) There is also, however, the movement from inside to outside. This is the movement, also inspired and guided by the holy Spirit, whereby a man from the depths of his own unique being discovers for himself the way that Christ wants him to live. It is difficult to say anything in general about this because by definition it means allowing each person free scope and laying down nothing. Unless our young men are given plenty of room to do this and are allowed to make mistakes and upset their elders, they will not develop to the full their unique potentialities. 'To thine own self be true' is what we must say, with courage, to each seminarist as he comes to us. We must continue to encourage him even when he is making his mistakes or annoying us by being brash and immature. Especially when he is asking to be treated like a sheep and running away from the responsibility of making mistakes and being blamed for it, must we

¹ Hopkins, Gerard Manley, 'The Windhover', in *Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London, 1930).

be firm and refuse to let him take shelter away from decision-making under our own more mature personalities. (Contrary to popular belief, many students do not *like* having responsibility given to them.) The student must be encouraged to make his mistakes in public and learn from them the hard way. If we do not allow scope for this movement from the inside outwards, we run the risk of producing priests whose personal dimension is not fully grown, and who therefore are ill-fitted to help others to grow. It means a certain amount of chaos and many mistakes, but I suggest we have to allow this, because in education cure is better than prevention, and if we preserve our students too anxiously from making mistakes and embracing errors, we will perhaps produce safe priests but not mature ones. Hence the need in seminaries for areas of liberty of regime with regard to, for instance, times for prayer and study. There should be provision for spontaneous liturgy as well as formal liturgy, and spontaneous decisions with regard to the community as well as for following customs. The two are not incompatible, and it is surely a question of both-and, not either-or. It requires patience and trust in the holy Spirit, as well as discernment, on the part of the authorities of the seminary, to allow scope to both these movements simultaneously. I am far from thinking I have the answer myself to all the problems involved.

Spiritual formation

So far I have described the development of a student's personality, as if it took place *in vacuo*. This is in fact far from the case. A man makes his mistakes, has his successes and achieves his identity in community with other people. It is by meeting them, bumping up against them, relating to them, that he discovers the truth about himself and forces himself to live in a genuine and not artificial manner. As Buber says, 'Through the thou a man becomes I'. Becoming an 'I' is not a process which takes place alone. Now, as soon as you advert to the fact of other people in the seminary, you have passed over from the question of character development to that of spiritual development, because Christ is in the other, whether singly or in groups; and therefore, in discussing how a student relates to other people, singly and in community, we have moved on to the question of how he relates to Christ. This is strictly the question of his spiritual development. As we said at the beginning, it is of course intimately bound up with character development; the two, for Christians, are separate facets of the same thing.

I think it is important for students for the priesthood to be en-

couraged to meet their fellow students in depth. In the past, for various reasons, seminarists were discouraged from this. The rules of the average seminary, which for instance forbade students to enter one another's rooms and to talk except at community recreation, encouraged a man to live his life in isolation. It therefore unwittingly canonized one of the biggest obstacles to the christian life and ministry in man, namely, the reluctance we all find to go out of ourselves to other people, and to conquer the deep urge to retire within ourselves and refuse to be committed to our neighbour. These seminary rules were drawn up for the best of motives, namely, to prepare students for the solitude and celibacy which was to be theirs for the rest of their lives. But it was surely a mistaken policy, because christian solitude and celibacy is not a question of withdrawing from people, but rather an invitation to go out to them in the midst of life, shorn of the restraints imposed by the particular attachments of marriage. The consecrated celibate should be more, not less, involved in people than the married man with family ties. We ought to be careful, then, to see that our students, especially the naturally shy ones among them, do not withdraw into themselves but go out to their fellow students and the wider community outside the seminary.

I am not, I hope, overlooking the dangers that are involved in such a policy. It may result in some students committing indiscretions or becoming emotionally involved in the wrong sort of way. But this, with wise guidance, is what one should be hoping for for our young men; for unless they learn, along with their theology, to handle the primitive emotions of love, hate, anger, envy, fear, despair in their lives, their knowledge of christianity will remain merely bookish and theoretical. Christianity is all about these human reactions, and it is valuable if a priest has learnt in practice to handle them in himself. By dealing creatively with these drives in himself, he will be put in an advantageous position to help others in the same way. It is a risky business, but I think it is one which we must undertake; otherwise our young men could rightly accuse us of preparing them badly for the priestly life. Once again, it is a question of recognizing that in education cure is better than prevention. A good education will make allowance for a certain amount of exposure to emotion, provided that there is a spiritual guide at hand to act as midwife to this birth of maturity.

The seminary authorities should, therefore, encourage the forming of personal friendships inside and outside the community, for it

is by this experience, perhaps more than any other, that a young man learns to relate to someone other than himself. A strong friendship liberates a youth from himself after the rather closed period of adolescence. At the same time, of course, the community sense should be sufficiently strong to prevent students becoming dependent and exclusive in their friendships with one another. If and when this does happen, it is important for the authorities not to be fussy. It is better to let it happen and deal with it gently after the event rather than prevent it, so that the person learns by his mistakes the difficult art of communication in a community of diverse types.

All that I have said could be summed up by saying that the first step in the spiritual formation of seminarists is to see that they learn to communicate with each other, so that the community they form (with the priests) is a genuine one, and not an uneasy gathering of people who do not relate well to each other. The man who has learnt to communicate with his fellow men horizontally is best able to communicate vertically with God. Before he has learnt that, the vertical communication tends to be an escape from christian living rather than the means towards it. Personally, I think that this encounter with his fellow students is more valuable for the training of a seminarist than any pastoral encounters he may have outside the seminary. There is a danger, in stressing the need for pastoral work for seminarists, as is being done at present, that we produce the sort of priest who readily communicates with people outside his circle but inside it is painfully inhibited and even aggressive. Such types are not uncommon among priests; they make life in parish houses difficult and coordinated work impossible. If we concentrate on outside work for seminarists, without first stressing the inside pastoral task of living in community, we may turn out inadequate pastors. The old adage that charity begins at home is relevant here. I am not arguing against pastoral activities for seminarists as part of their training; I agree with the arguments adduced for it. I am merely stressing the prior importance of community living as the seminarists' main formative influence.

In general there should be developed in seminarians the abilities most appropriate for the promotion of dialogue with men, such as a capacity to listen to other people and to open their hearts in a spirit of charity to the various circumstances of human need.¹

¹ *Optatam totius*, 19.

These abilities for promoting dialogue are best learnt in the day to day life of the seminary community, and thereafter applied to the wider pastoral task. The process does not easily happen the other way round.

The spiritual development of the seminarist must not stop short at communicating with men. That is not the only way to encounter Christ, nor is it the chief way. It is indeed true that we go out to meet Christ in our neighbour, and are formed in him by our community contacts; but that is meant to be accompanied by the direct encounter with Christ in prayer. It is the meaning of our life of grace in Christ, that we are raised to the inestimable privilege of being able to communicate directly with the Father, saying *Abba* to him through Christ in the Spirit. If that is so, then the christian who stops short at contacting God through his neighbour, and does not pray, is missing the supreme experience of grace and settling for a half truth. I believe that the central concern of our formation in the seminaries should be to introduce our students to the practice and experience of prayer. All that I have said so far is important, but it would be performing Hamlet without the prince to think that we could train our young men in the ways outlined above without forming them in prayer as well. The experience of prayer, the direct and ineffable relationship of I-Thou to God, is what unifies every other relationship a seminarist has, and makes sense of all the various encounters of his life. I do not think that any of the developments I spoke about above, with regard to emotional maturity and intellectual competence, will fall into place or 'stick' unless they are accompanied by a growth in prayer. Everything ought to be related personally to Christ.

The chronological order of a student's development is, I think, unimportant. My experience is that some men grow first horizontally to their fellow students and only then begin to develop in prayer, while others take to prayer early on and make surprising advances in it: which then helps them to go out to their fellow men in Christ. The important thing is first of all to be aware that each person will grow in his own unique way towards Christ, and so not to be dogmatic in one's direction; and secondly to be sure in one's own mind that fully integrated growth means growth in both ways. What we must not do is let a man think that he can neglect the particular growth which he finds uncongenial, as if some priests were called to specialize in prayer and not bother about men; and as if others were called to be active in the world without regard to

prayer. Those who think this are making the beginners' mistake of thinking that there are two growths; whereas there is only one growth in Christ which inspires a man in all the developments of life.

Our aim, then, should be to draw our men far into the realm of prayer. It is, I think, one of the main arguments for having the seminary community at all, that it provides an unrivalled opportunity for men to be led deep in prayer. During his training a student should have had the experience of personal communion with God, should have come up against the reality of God, face to face, in the naked meeting of prayer. Once he has experienced this, the rest of his developments fall into place, for he will have discovered a centre to his life outside himself, a centre which is supremely personal and caring. Discovering the Father, directly in the experience of prayer, will have the effect of centring his whole life in the Trinity; and he should then advance steadily in intellectual and emotional maturity, because his life will have meaning and be involved in God. So far from excluding other activities, prayer unifies them all and provides the motive power for growth in a way that mere humanism cannot do.

The spiritual training, then, of seminarists ought to include an ambitious formation in prayer. The spiritual guide should be convinced himself of the necessity of this, and be able to help the students develop in prayer, chiefly by example but also by being at hand with constant support and competent advice.

Spiritual formation should be closely linked with doctrinal and pastoral training. Especially with the help of the spiritual director, such formation should help seminarians to live in familiar and constant companionship with the Father, through Jesus Christ his Son, in the holy Spirit.¹

Perhaps we have neglected this task a bit in the past, because we have not been sufficiently convinced of the supreme importance of prayer in the process of christian growth. More seriously, perhaps we are in danger of neglecting it in the present reformation of seminary life, owing to a certain naivety about the nature of christian life in the secular world. If this were so, I believe it would be a disaster. It would not only be a tragic loss in itself, but also would have a harmful effect on all the other aspects of seminary training, which ought to find their crown and inspiration in the life of person-

¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

al communion with God in prayer, the 'familiar and constant companionship' which the decree emphasizes. If christian growth is not growth in personal communion with the Father, then it is not really christian growth at all. I suggest that we should be giving our primary attention to this need for growth in prayer in our houses of formation, and only secondarily be concerned about matters like the dress the students wear, or whether they have a coffee bar in the common room or not.

The seminary

In conclusion may I say a few words about the seminary itself?

Under their rector's lead, they (the directors and teachers) should create the strictest harmony in spirit and behaviour. Among themselves and with their students they should constitute the kind of family which answers the Lord's prayer 'that they may be one' (Jn 17, 1) and which intensifies in each student the joy of his calling.¹

This statement calls for a serious assessment of the sort of regimes we have in our seminaries. Can they be called 'the kind of family which answers the Lord's prayer that they may be one'? To answer fully would require another paper in itself; and all I can do here is to suggest that, in the light of what we have said about the threefold formation of our students in theology, personality and spirituality, the ideal setting for full development of our students is a regime which is a real family, *because it is quite simply one*. Could we not do away with all traces of the officers' mess, and while allowing the professors all the necessary privacy for study that they (like their students) need in room and library, abolish the public divisions and have one regime for living: one common room, no distinctions about eating and waiting at table, no privileged goings out and comings in for some which others cannot have, the same rule of life for prayer and worship for all, treating everyone the same as members of the one family from first year student to rector?

To religious this probably seems mere common sense. In this department the secular seminaries have much to learn from them. If such a family unity were introduced into our seminaries, both priests and students would, I think, gain much. It would not be easy at first for the priests to have to share their life with younger

¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

and often brash individuals, nor would those young and often brash individuals like to have to share life with their elders. Nevertheless I think the gain for both parties would immeasurably outweigh the losses on either side. It is, after all, the point of christian growth that we do not withdraw from others of any age or type, but meet them and welcome them into our lives as Christ. Professors would surely gain from the closer contact with their students which a unified regime would provide, and students would gain from having a share in a more adult way of life, especially in responsibility: thus, for instance, avoiding the peculiar student luxury of becoming left wing members of a right wing organization. It is true that familiarity breeds contempt; but I think it a healthy christian sort of contempt which helps all of us to be humble.

What is not always remembered is that mutual withdrawal and escape from each other, the us-them relationship, causes another and far less christian kind of contempt, because based on ignorance rather than knowledge. It would be idle to deny that this second kind of contempt is sometimes found in seminaries, a mutual suspicion and fear between staff and students, which derives directly from living in two regimes under one roof. It is an unhelpful kind of contempt, inimical to growth in maturity, and surely unfitting for a house of formation.

I hope I have not been too dogmatic in all that I have said. My suggestions are only tentative, and I am conscious that I have omitted much of what ought to have been said if we are to have a full picture of seminary formation. Also I have dwelt only briefly and superficially with the points I *have* raised. The more one thinks about priestly formation the more one realises how much depends upon the work of the holy Spirit and, in the last analysis, how little depends upon oneself. A comforting thought with which to end this paper.