SEMINARIES IN THE 'SIXTIES AND 'SEVENTIES

By JOHN DALRYMPLE

I WAS on the staff of a small diocesan major seminary from September 1960 to July 1970, and during that time was a witness from the inside of great changes in seminary life, surely the greatest changes experienced since seminaries were invented four hundred years ago by the Council of Trent. The first part of this article is in the nature of a report after the battle, a survey across the now peaceful smoking scene, for in the seminaries the battle for *aggiornamento* has been won. But we cannot afford in the Church to sit and complacently count our victories, so in the second half of this article I hope to outline some future developments which I think ought to happen in our seminaries in the 1970's.

This looking backwards to the conflicts of the 1960's is not a mere exercise in nostalgia, because I think that what happened in the seminaries in the 1960's will be happening soon in the parishes and dioceses. In our country, outside specialist places like seminaries, university chaplaincies, religious orders, the *aggiornamento* has scarcely taken place yet; sometimes new structures like priests' senates and parish councils have been set up, but by and large the new spirit needed to make these new structures 'work' is missing. Introducing this new spirit in the dioceses is the task ahead of the Church in the 1970's, a huge and daunting task even to think about. It might, therefore, be useful to glance back at the changes effected in the admittedly much more compact and containable world of the seminaries in the years just after the Vatican Council. If 'what Manchester thinks today London thinks tomorrow', then I guess the seminaries of this country are the Church's Manchesters. Looking at them may give a clue as to what is going to happen throughout the Church very soon. It is not a question of the seminaries going through a modernist phase from which they will one day recover with a swing back of the pendulum. They are the heralds of new ways of being catholic and christian which are here to stay, and can therefore give a clue as to what will soon become the norm in parishes. After all the seminaries' first products are already in parishes all over Great Britain, working to that effect.

Roughly speaking, between 1960 and 1965 in the seminaries the staff and students together asked 'How' questions, and between 1965 and 1970 we asked 'Whether' questions. 'How' questions presume a system and ask how best to make it work. 'Whether' questions go deeper, are more radical, and question the system itself. For instance, with regard to regime, in our own seminary we first set about making the regime we had inherited work well and reasonably, and asked 'How' questions about it: for instance over such matters as the grand silence, wearing cassocks, separate tables in the refectory for staff and students. After 1965 we questioned whether things like that which had been part of the regime for years were in fact worth having at all. In the same way, in the field of spirituality, our questions developed from asking questions like how to pray or be celibate to questions whether prayer was a valid christian act or whether secular priests should be celibate at all. Theological studies progressed from trying to make manual-theology work in the best possible way to deeper, radical, questioning as to the best way to do theology in a seminary, and manuals disappeared out of the window. It is, of course, easy to write it down in a few sentences, but over the ten years the transition from 'How' to 'Whether' was not a smooth one, and at the time we went through many doubts, hesitations, back-trackings, reappraisals as well as forward advances. In my own seminary we were more than fortunate to have a courageous and open rector throughout all that time, who led staff and students through this fruitful decade and kept us all together. In most seminaries the arrival of the *aggiornamento* was marked by a change in rector. With us it was the other way round. A new rector in 1960 prepared the way for changes all through the decade.

Regime

One of the ways of gauging what a community is like is to have a meal with them. Eating together is the great communal act of a family and by the way they do it they show what sort of relationships exist between them. The family meal is a manifestation of the family spirit. The visitor to the seminary refectory in 1960 would have found a very formalized meal going on. A top table, rector in the centre, the rest of the staff to his right and left in places of graded seniority; students, also in fixed places, at their own tables; everyone wearing cassock and gathering in silence; a long latin grace; public reading from the bible, serious book and roman martyrology for most of the meal. It was not a tense atmosphere — far from it. But it was a stylized, hierarchical occasion;

and there was no tenseness just because it was a true representation of the life lived in the seminary, which was also stylized and hierarchical.

The same visitor in 1970 would have found a very different meal in progress. He would first, probably, note the negative differences from the 1960 occasion: no top table, no staff-student distinctions, no fixed places, no silence, no readings, no latin grace, no cassocks. After that, he would perhaps note the positive things. A free and easy atmosphere with plenty of informality, plenty of visitors dropping in for a meal, and perhaps a week-end party of youths, or adults staying for a retreat. Another important difference would be that, if he were a woman, he/she would be there for the first time, because only men would have been admitted for a meal in 1960! Altogether the 1970 occasion would be much more open and informal and un-clerical: the family meal of a non-stylized community, open to its surroundings.

Behind these observable changes in the refectory lies a very considerable change in the regime of seminaries between 1960 and 1970. The best way to describe the change is to describe it in terms of relationships. It was a change from fixed, formalized and closed relationships to spontaneous, informal and open ones. Relations between seminarians, which had always tended to be open, in spite of the fact that the rules made this difficult, became open now with the encouragement of the regime. The rules forbidding seminarians to enter each others' rooms, to go for a walk with only one other, to talk at all after 9.30 p.m. were relaxed. Students could now meet in pairs and become intimate friends without being suspected of homosexuality. And so the natural student blossoming of the personality through uninhibited argument with equals (which takes place so largely at drinking sessions far into the night) was allowed to become part of the seminary scene. I do not say this did not happen in the pre-Vatican II seminary; but there is a considerable difference between the furtive schoolboys-breaking-the-rules atmosphere that used to prevail when this happened in the past and the openly serious way in which day and night discussions now take place. One obvious difference is that staff-members are now welcomed and play their part in these sorts of sessions. In fact relaxation of the stiff monastic regime in the seminary has brought with it an increased seriousness. Instead of endless 'escape' discussions on football or the foibles of lecturers, seminarians now engage in equally endless 'involvement' discussions on topics like the third world or the future structures of the Church. One good result of this breaking down of the formalized barriers in the seminary like the grand silence and the 'no two' company rule is that shy, inhibited

young men are drawn out of themselves and helped to become more at ease with their fellows. In the past, the rules tended not only to encourage adolescent inhibitions but to judge them saintly. The 'good seminarian' kept himself to himself and did not get involved in the lives and emotions of anyone — a sad preparation for the life of a parish priest; which surely explains the brusqueness and tendency to be aggressively insecure of many of us secular clergy when confronted by awkward social situations.

Together with the opening towards his fellow students, the modern seminarian now also finds few barriers between himself and the staff of the seminary. He is as likely as not to address them by their christian names because he shares with them an open community life. Staff members are now expected to earn respect by their own competence and to establish their own pattern of relationships with the students. They cannot fall back on their position. There is no antecedent mould into which all staff-student relationships fit. As in a family, each personality makes his own relationships and finds his own niche. Both students and staff have to do their own work and make their own decisions in this matter. The result is a much greater plurality in the community, with some staff being closer to the students than others, some being more convivial, some being deeper, each with his own contribution to make. The aim is to introduce tolerance into the community by encouraging the members to think in terms of individuals being *different* from each other, rather than better or worse. (This is not an easy transition to make for the older type of seminary priest, who liked everyone to be uniform and saw deviations from the norm in moral terms and far from dispassionately.)

Lastly, the modern seminarian finds few barriers between himself and people outside the seminary, of all ages and both sexes. They come into the seminary and he goes out to them. His training is no longer conceived along the lines of a geographical withdrawal from the world. The doors of the seminary are open wide to admit of all kinds of entrances and egresses. The seminary is no longer a *hortus conclusus* where young seedlings are nurtured in an unworldly atmosphere. It tries to be a special kind of community, with specialist functions, engaged in the world and open to it.

When all these changes were being made a frequent criticism was that the absence of rule and discipline coupled with the constant mixing with all kinds of exciting people and events would have a deteriorating effect on the young men. It would dissipate their energies instead of building them up. They would not learn to say no to themselves. They

would end up with a lot of varied experience of people and ideas but no will power to be effective as priests. If the seminary became a permissive society, how could the seminarians learn to deny themselves, study theology, learn to pray? These were helpful criticisms. (There were, of course, other less helpful, more emotional, reactions to the new seminary, as was to be expected.) Briefly the answer we used to give was that the absence of rule was not the same as the absence of discipline, but that by reducing the external rules to a minimum we hoped to build up, not pull down, the strength of will in each young man. We were for discipline, not against it: but we thought the only discipline worth acquiring for a priest was self-discipline. We hoped that by giving the seminarians ideals of prayer, study, community commitment, but not laying down when or how they were to fulfil these ideals, we would build up personal responsibility in each man. This was, clearly, a risk to take — the risk of creating a holiday camp community with theoretical ideals and no performance. What persuaded us to go ahead was looking round and being unimpressed by the old system with its fixed external discipline of prayer, study and recreation. It did not seem to have produced priests who went on praying and studying after they left the seminary. Somehow the external way of life imposed in the old seminary system largely failed to become internalized. In most priests it did not 'take'. Was it, therefore, really worth keeping?

More positively, the idea behind the new seminary regime was to create a community where relationships (to students, staff, outsiders) mattered and were central, and where law was secondary. To be open and friendly and available to people is the ideal of the new regimes in seminaries. This is a flexible, unpredictable programme, which cannot be antecedently laid down. It is demanding on everyone and asks for hard work and perseverance through failure. It is also an untidy programme, apt to upset tidy minds. But it is deeply christian, because it makes love the central theme and aims to build up a community which reflects the life of the Trinity on earth. It is a programme for casting out fear. The old system in the seminary tended to be governed by fear. Freedom was not allowed because freedom would be abused; friendship was suspect because of possible deviations; newspapers and radio were not allowed because they brought the world into the seminary. We were afraid of freedom, friendship and the world and so controlled these things by rules which reduced their presence to almost nothing. Rules were imposed for fear that a life without rules would become out of control. Keeping the rules was the central rubric under which all

development had to take place. With the best will in the world this could only produce tidy conformists and reject bohemians and rebels. The good seminarian of the past was essentially a rule-keeper (at least to the eyes of his masters). This tended to produce priests whose interpretation of christianity was in terms of keeping rules rather than trying to love, as many who sit under the pulpits of parish churches will testify to this day. The only way to stop this was to do away with the concentration on external rules in the seminary, and launch out into a rather unstructured regime with openness and availability (both extremely vague terms) as the ideal. The success or failure of this change of regime depended chiefly on the spiritual training given in the new seminary. By reducing the external discipline to a minimum, it raised the need for internal discipline and a generous christian heart to a maximum.

Spirituality

The spirituality promoted in the tridentine seminary was essentially a fixed and fomalized affair. Prayer time was as regulated as study time and lectures. Meditation and mass before breakfast, examination of conscience before lunch, visit to the blessed Sacrament after lunch and supper, extended visit after tea, night prayers: every day these were fixed occasions where attendance was obligatory. The seminarian's individual response was confined to making the best use of these obligatory occasions. The choice of attending them was not his. As to the use he made of these times of prayer, the prevailing programme was strictly ascetical and meditative. There was a strong bias in favour of the sort of spirituality associated with Rodriguez's *Practice of Christian Perfection,* if only because no suggestions in any other direction were made. Meditation manuals were encouraged. Mysticism and contemplation were discouraged.

Above all, the liturgy of those days was fixed and formalized. My memories of pre-Vatican II seminary liturgy are of tense occasions with everyone concentrating on performing the rubrics with exactitude, almost to the exclusion of worship. These occasions reached their climax when the bishop came to say mass, and what could have been a relaxed, family gathering with the chief pastor of the diocese was instead a very tense affair of mitres, croziers, rings, silver ewers, hot water and towels, and someone bound to commit some appalling error in the tight, nervous atmosphere. We did this because we thought (correctly) that seminaries should produce the best liturgy. We did not question 'whether' the best liturgy was an exact observance of the

prevailing rubrics, only 'how' to perform those rubrics exactly. The whole liturgical life and education of the seminary was, in fact, rubric-orientated. It was ideally suited to turning out what Martin Buber called 'employees of a worship-directorate', but it did not much feed the christian life of the community. It is only since Vatican II that liturgy has come to be seen as the living source of the spirituality of the community, rather than a holy observance to be performed correctly every day without changes.

Inevitably in the seminary, as the regime changed to a free and easy open family life, so the spirituality of the family changed too. There is a *lex vivendi, lex orandi*. After 1965, the liturgy of the seminary became more relaxed and more imaginative. It also became much more the worship of the whole community, as private masses dwindled and the whole staff joined in as concelebrants of the community mass. (This happened slowly.) The atmosphere beginning to prevail in the refectory at community meals began to prevail at community mass as well. The two occasions reacted on each other. At the same time, the principle of pluralism was recognized and small group liturgies played their part in the community life. This coincided with the setting up of more or less permanent small groups for study and living within the one community of the seminary. *Lex vivendi, lex orandi*.

Almost more important than the advances made in the liturgy was the provision of a personal spirituality suitable for the new kind of seminary training. I have already spoken of the disappearance of so many of the external props of the regime, and how the need was seen for greater emphasis on the personal interior life of each seminarian. As the external communal discipline disappeared, the internal self-discipline of each individual became more important. One result of this was an increase in importance of the personal guide of each man. From being relatively minor characters, personal spiritual directors became key-figures in the new seminary. The success of the new regime depended on them considerably. Counselling techniques were taken seriously, and there was a real attempt to build up helpful personal relationships between priests and students in this field. (At the same time, in the 'external forum' some seminaries developed their systems of discernment by employing a team of psychologists to assess their candidates on entry. At Drygrange, the same team comes every year to assess the first-year man, and students are free to go to them in subsequent years if they wish, and so can have a continuing relationship with the assessing team.)

But it was no use making provision for adequate spiritual direction without also recognizing that the content of spirituality was important.

There were two drawbacks to the spirituality of the old seminary system. Firstly it was too orientated towards things to do (that is, ascetical practices) and secondly it was too timid in its expectations. What was needed was to see that the gospel draws us away from concentrating on practices to opening out to people and to God. It was, after all, precisely this tendency to 'reify' spirituality into observance of the law which Jesus criticized so strongly in the pharisees. For him, and for St Paul, religion consisted in loving people and loving his Father: that is, in being possessed by the Spirit so that we have faith, hope and charity in an expansive way, and do not let ourselves be tied down to following predetermined observances and rubrics. In terms of the seminary this meant that the disappearance of the fixed time-table of prayer and observances was not intended as a falling away from former high standards, a concession to a soft generation who could not take what their predecessors took, but on the contrary was an opportunity to become more open and available to men and God, to be a more generous member of the community, with a deeper relationship to God. The new free regime of seminaries could lead to a merely superficial worldliness, and in some cases did. But it was also an invitation to go deeper and to become more deeply involved in the world and in God.

The freedom and openness of life in the seminary, when properly understood, contributed to a real launching out into the deep in prayer. As spiritual director of the seminary, I tried to encourage as many people as possible to go deep and far in prayer. One reason for this is the one already mentioned, that without this dimension the new freedom might quickly degenerate into a holiday-camp superficiality. But the most important reason was simply that God is God, our Maker and Father, to be adored and loved. To train men for the priesthood and not to introduce them to the possibility of contemplation would be some sort of treason. Implicit in our baptism is the call to be contemplatives, for we are incorporated into Christ and have the Spirit dwelling in our hearts saying Abba to the Father. The community of the baptized, of which a seminary is a significant cell, ought to be made up of contemplatives. This is the deepest and most important reason why the life of such a community should be open and free as opposed to fixed and formal. The worst 'reification' of all is not the reification of seminary life into prearranged patterns and rules, but the making of grace into a 'thing' which gives us strength to be good christians and which can be gained and lost like spiritual money. Grace is not like that. It is our relationship to God the Father and to his children. This means that it is a living adventure, an unpredictable 'friendship', which cannot

completely be tied down or tamed by an institutional framework. By promoting contemplative prayer, one aimed to help students to grow beyond dependence on books, times, practices, observances, and to launch into the unplannable depths of the prayer relationship with God. It was, once again, a rejection of the dominance of fear ('Mysticism is dangerous, Father') and a trusting in the primacy of love. As in the field of discipline, so in this field of spirituality, the post-Vatican II seminary was no place for people governed by timidity. Charles de Foucauld said 'The absence of risk is a sure sign of mediocrity'. We tried to educate seminarians to be more than mediocre and so we took risks. Since 1970 this opening in prayer has led to shared prayer and to openness to pentecostalism, which is in line with the previous development towards contemplation. In a nutshell, it has been a passage from dependence on religion to an adventure in faith. The modern seminary tries to be much more a community of faith than a training establishment in religion.

Theology

The changes outlined above in the life and prayer of the seminary did not take place without reference to theology. On the contrary, they were *caused* by theology. The new ideas which were abroad in seminaries in the 1960's did not come from nowhere. They came from the new theological thinking on the continent, which itself had been behind Pope John's Council. They are already so well known that it is not necessary to go into details here. Suffice to say that the last half of the 1960's saw a revolution in theology in the seminaries both in what was taught and in the manner of its teaching. If the life and the spirituality of the tridentine seminary was fixed and formalized, the theology taught there was even more so. Hence the changes which took place in theology were nothing short of revolutionary, changes which did away with the former scholastic, essentialist, thesis-centred manual theology and replaced it with a way of doing theology rather than a theology itself. This way of doing theology is existential; it is related to the life being lived here and now by the student; it is integrated with modern culture and so is world-centred rather than church-centred; it looks to the bible and modern knowledge (for example in sexuality) as its chief sources before it looks to Denzinger; it is radical in that it asks 'whether' questions; it is taught through reading, essays and tutorials rather than lectures and theses; it has within itself a pastoral dimension — the latter is not tagged on at the end as an afterthought. Above all, the new way of doing theology does not so much teach seminarians something

called theology with which to go into the priesthood; it aims at teaching the seminarians to theologize about their priestly life and the world they work in. This is another example of refusing to 'reify'. Theology is not a thing you learn about. It is a way of understanding that living relationship with God which we call our faith. It is something deeper than its formulas. Revealed truth and the language it is expressed in are not the same. Here the new theology matches up with contemplative prayer.

Integration

Regime, prayer, study in the seminary go together. They are three aspects of one life being lived by students to the priesthood. As the changes in the seminary got under way this was realized more and more. It became less and less easy to put the life of the seminary into compartments each looked after by a separate uncommunicating member of staff. We were forced into integration of all the elements. It began within the disciplines of teaching. The men teaching dogma began to link up with the men teaching scripture, and so on. Then the separate departments of the seminary began to impinge on one another and we began to have staff meetings to cross-fertilize our ideas and share decisions. Even that was not enough, because it left out the students; so the eventual outcome was house-meetings to discuss everything from liturgy and study to pastoral projects and the food. Some of these meetings were stormy and proved threatening to those members of staff who liked to keep their departments to themselves and make decisions on their own. They were the same members of staff who did not like being called by their christian names and sharing tables with students and visitors at meals. Taken all together, the years of change were years of sifting for us all, priests and students together. We had to sort out our relationships anew, both to the jobs we had been doing and to each other in the community. In doing so, I think, we also sorted out our relationships to God afresh. The outcome of all this integration and sharing in life, prayer and theology was a much more 'alive' community mass together. It also, at least for me, meant many deepening friendships and not a few hilarious times together. Recounting it all here has made it easier to see the battles and personal failures in perspective. I have chiefly done it, because I believe that a similar battle to make our parishes integrated christian communities is due to take place, and the seminary experience of the 60's perhaps gives a clue to what lies ahead in the Church of the 70's and 80's.

When one passes from looking back to looking forward into the future of seminaries, one is far less confident about the details. Changes in the Church are much easier to tabulate as past events than to foretell! About the only thing one *can* foretell is that changes will go on. The chief gain of the *aggiornamento* in the Church has not been this or that particular change, but the recovery of the biblical insight that we are henceforth to be changing all the time, never settling down comfortably to count our gains, but always looking to see where future change can best be made. As perpetual pilgrims lies our future lot. This is as true for seminaries as for anywhere else. What, then, are the most desirable changes in seminary life yet to come?

The enormous gains in openness achieved in the 60's ought to continue. I suggest that where the first revolution was one that established an openness within the system of the seminary itself — staff, students, visitors able to mix freely without taboos — the next revolution ought to be to establish an openness between the seminary and the rest of the world, especially the rest of the educational world. Great changes are taking place within the field of tertiary education. The barriers between universities, training colleges, polytechnics are coming down. There is a fusing of aims, standards and personnel in post-secondary education similar to that which went on in secondary education to produce the comprehensive school. Let us hope that seminaries will take part in this general confluence. They have much to offer and much to gain by doing so: far less to gain by remaining apart. Could seminaries not only become attached to universities (as Ushaw has to Durham) but also join in the world of training colleges by, for instance, admitting students (of both sexes) who want to obtain a qualification to teach religious education? The presence within the seminary of non-divines would be a valuable step towards building up a Church of the future free of that barrier between cleric and non-cleric which still exists. The expansion of the seminary to include courses other than those strictly geared to the priesthood seems to me a practical way of hastening the demise of the clergyman upon which so much depends in the future. The presence of future lay leaders alongside future priests and the fact of their being formed together (not necessarily uniformly) could have an excellent effect on the life of the seminary. The staff should also contain lay teachers of both sexes in this expansion.

In all this I remain convinced of the value of residential training for the priesthood. It seems to me that those churches which do not set up residential training for their ministers lose much thereby. It is only in a

living community that a man can learn the existential elements of his christian faith — lessons in community living, in self-knowledge, in spirituality (under residential guidance), in worship. It is also only in residential communities that adequate assessment and discernment can be exercized upon the candidates for the ministry. Those who train for the ministry outside residential communities are thrown so much upon themselves that the training they get is virtually a do-it-yourself one in every department except the theoretical. Too often their training is merely cerebral with no adequate development in personal spirituality or pastoral sensitivity.[1] So in all these speculations about the future expansion of seminaries, I argue strongly for the importance of community living. All my speculations are about building up the seminaries, not about abolishing them.

Finally, we need to think seriously about the place of seminaries in the intellectual apostolate of the Church. The seminary should be the place in the diocese where thinking goes on not only for the students studying there, but for the whole diocese. In order to see that, you have first to see that the bishops and priests of the diocese have a need to be thinking and rethinking all the time about their apostolate. The old idea that theology was something you learned in the seminary before being ordained and thereafter carried around with you in an unchanged condition till you died, is no longer tenable. As we saw above, one does not learn theology, but to theologize: that is, to subject one's experience in the world to constant analysis in the light of God's word and the Church's teaching. Theology, in other words, is not a static 'package', but an expertise for continual growth. Once that is understood it is easy to see how the diocesan seminary should not be merely for pre-ordination training, but should be for the constant on-going training of all in the diocese, bishop, priests and lay persons, who need to keep their theological analysis going for the sake of the Church's apostolate. This fact is being gradually recognized, and in-service refresher courses for priests are becoming part of the ecclesiastical scene in many dioceses. Thus the priesthood is rather belatedly following the suit of the lay professions who recognize the need to keep up-to-date in this era of rapid change. At last, the role of the seminary as the educator of all age

[1] If this article were longer I would argue at this point for taking prayer very seriously in the formation of future priests. The most effective way of preventing that confusing of means and ends which results in the 'reification' of christianity is by allowing a deep spirit of contemplative prayer to grow. Contemplation brings us directly to God without 'religious' intermediaries. It is one of the chief expressions of faith as well as being the medium through which the passage from religion to faith is made.

groups in the Church (not just the six years before ordination) is being developed.

For the above change to take place, a change is required not in seminary attitudes but in attitudes to seminaries. One of the burdens carried by those who worked in seminaries in the 1960's was the burden of suspicion from the rest of the diocese. This happened everywhere in the United Kingdom. Those who worked in seminaries were criticized for doing the very things they should have been doing: thinking thoughts that had not been thought before, introducing new ideas from the continent, wanting to change traditional ways, rocking the boat, filling the young men's minds with revolutionary ideas, creating unrest in the diocese. All these things are inseparable from the proper role of the seminary as 'Think-Tank' for the diocese. The suspicion and criticism came because it was not fully understood how important new ideas are in any age to leaven old ideas. Even bishops by and large shared in this suspicion of their changing seminaries, and in their busy lives were a bit uncomprehending of what was going on. They tended to react with anxious timidity when they heard what was being taught and done by the seminary staff. There was, perhaps, a failure to exercize discernment between responsible and irresponsible innovations, coupled with a disinclination for new ideas, which for the seminary staffs sometimes came over as resistance to thought itself. Instead of welcoming experiment, the bishops saw their role as that of providing initial suspicion. An expansion of the part played in the Church by the seminaries will depend much on a change in this attitude. If that change takes place, there will be a change in the understanding of the place of thinking and experiment in the life of the Church, and a pastoral expansion of prodigious proportion could well take place.