

**Encounters in Theory and History of Education**  
**Rencontres en Théorie et Histoire de l'Éducation**  
**Encuentros en Teoría e Historia de la Educación**



**Pre-Vatican II Roman Catholic Residential Seminaries as Unique Systems of Education: A Focus on Anglophone Ontario**

**Les séminaires résidentiels catholiques pré-Vatican II en tant que systèmes d'éducation uniques : l'accent sur l'Ontario anglophone**

**Los seminarios residenciales católicos romanos anteriores al Vaticano II como sistemas educativos únicos: un enfoque en el Ontario anglófono**

Michael Attridge 

Volume 24, 2023

Conceptions and Practices of Education in a "Longue Durée"  
Approach: Paths to a Critical Self-Reflexive History of Education

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1109118ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.24908/encounters.v24i0.17030>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Faculty of Education, Queen's University

ISSN

2560-8371 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Attridge, M. (2023). Pre-Vatican II Roman Catholic Residential Seminaries as Unique Systems of Education: A Focus on Anglophone Ontario. *Encounters in Theory and History of Education / Rencontres en Théorie et Histoire de l'Éducation / Encuentros en Teoría e Historia de la Educación*, 24, 22–40. <https://doi.org/10.24908/encounters.v24i0.17030>

Résumé de l'article

En ce qui concerne la question des conceptions et des pratiques éducatives, il faut reconnaître que la formation du clergé diocésain catholique possède un caractère unique. Cet article examine le développement historique des séminaires résidentiels catholiques depuis le Concile de Trente, en particulier en Amérique du Nord et, en dernier lieu, en Ontario anglophone au Canada. Il décrit l'effet de l'École française de spiritualité au XVIIe siècle et de l'ultramontanisme au XIXe siècle sur la formation sacerdotale. Dans ses dernières sections, l'article examine la création du séminaire Saint-Pierre à London, au Canada, le premier séminaire résidentiel catholique anglophone au pays. Il soutient qu'avant Vatican II, ce séminaire possédait les mêmes caractéristiques d'une soi-disant « culture cléricale » que d'autres séminaires résidentiels créés dans le style de l'École française et influencés plus tard par le programme ultramontain de Rome. Bien que Vatican II dans les années 1960 ait réformé certains éléments de la formation sacerdotale, il reste encore du travail à faire.

© Michael Attridge, 2023



Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

**é**rudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

<https://www.erudit.org/fr/>

# Pre-Vatican II Roman Catholic Residential Seminaries as Unique Systems of Education: A Focus on Anglophone Ontario

**Michael Attridge**

University of St. Michael's College

## **Abstract**

On the topic of conceptions and practices of education one would have to recognize the formation of Roman Catholic diocesan clergy as unique. This paper looks at the historical development of Catholic residential seminaries since the Council of Trent, focusing specifically on North America and finally on anglophone Ontario in Canada. It describes the effect of the French School of Spirituality in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and later ultramontanist in the 19<sup>th</sup> century on seminary formation. In the final sections, the paper looks at the creation of St. Peter's seminary in London, Canada – the first English-speaking, Roman Catholic residential seminary in the country. It argues that prior to Vatican II it had all the same characteristics of a so-called “clerical culture” as other residential seminaries created in the style of the French school and later impacted by Rome's ultramontane agenda. Although Vatican II in the 1960's reformed some element of seminary formation, the conclusion argues that there's still work to be done.

**Keywords:** Vatican II, seminary formation, Roman Catholic, ultramontanist, clericalism, anglophone Canada, Council of Trent

## **Los seminarios residenciales católicos romanos anteriores al Vaticano II como sistemas educativos únicos: un enfoque en el Ontario anglófono**

### **Resumen**

En cuanto al tema de las concepciones y prácticas de la educación, habría que reconocer que la formación del clero diocesano católico romano es única. Este artículo analiza el desarrollo histórico de los seminarios residenciales católicos desde el Concilio de Trento, enfocándose específicamente en América del Norte y finalmente en la anglófono Ontario, en Canadá. Describe el efecto en la formación del seminario de la Escuela Francesa de Espiritualidad en el siglo XVII y más tarde del ultramontanismo en el siglo XIX. En las secciones finales, el artículo analiza la creación del seminario de San Pedro en Londres, Canadá, el primer seminario residencial católico romano de habla inglesa en el país. El argumento del trabajo es que antes del Vaticano II este centro tenía las mismas características de la llamada “cultura clerical” que otros seminarios residenciales creados al estilo de la escuela francesa que luego tuvieron una influencia de la agenda ultramontana de Roma. Aunque el Vaticano II en la década de 1960 reformó algunos elementos de la formación en los seminarios, la conclusión sostiene que todavía queda trabajo por hacer.

**Palabras clave:** Vaticano II, formación en el seminario, católica romana, ultramontanismo, clericalismo, Canadá anglófono, Concilio de Trento

## **Les séminaires résidentiels catholiques pré-Vatican II en tant que systèmes d'éducation uniques : l'accent sur l'Ontario anglophone**

### **Résumé**

En ce qui concerne la question des conceptions et des pratiques éducatives, il faut reconnaître que la formation du clergé diocésain catholique possède un caractère unique. Cet article examine le développement historique des séminaires résidentiels catholiques depuis le Concile de Trente, en particulier en Amérique du Nord et, en dernier lieu, en Ontario anglophone au Canada. Il décrit l'effet de l'École française de spiritualité au XVIIe siècle et de l'ultramontanisme au XIXe siècle sur la formation sacerdotale. Dans ses dernières sections, l'article examine la création du séminaire Saint-Pierre à London, au Canada, le premier séminaire résidentiel catholique anglophone au pays. Il soutient qu'avant Vatican II, ce séminaire possédait les mêmes caractéristiques d'une soi-disant « culture cléricale » que d'autres

séminaires résidentiels créés dans le style de l'École française et influencés plus tard par le programme ultramontain de Rome. Bien que Vatican II dans les années 1960 ait réformé certains éléments de la formation sacerdotale, il reste encore du travail à faire.

**Mots-clés** : Vatican II, formation sacerdotale, catholique romain, ultramontanisme, cléricisme, Canada anglophone, Concile de Trente

## Introduction

On the theme of conceptions and practices of education one would have to recognize the formation of Roman Catholic diocesan clergy as unique. Young adult males live together for years in prayer and study, having most of their practical needs such as laundry, housekeeping and meals provided for them. They socialize and study together. The goal of their curriculum is not just academic, intellectual formation combined with training for the practice of ministry. It is also for the explicit purpose of personal spiritual growth as well as human wholeness. These four areas—intellectual, pastoral, spiritual and human development—are known as the four pillars of theological formation.<sup>1</sup> As young men, often in their early twenties, they are required to remain celibate for the rest of their lives. They are also required to have a confessor and are accountable to the leadership of the seminary, who can remove them at any time from the program. Ultimately, though, they are accountable to the bishop, who according to canon law exercises all three branches of governance in the diocese: executive, legislative, and judicial.<sup>2</sup> And finally, the outcome of this entire formation process is for them to serve in the church and to be an instrument of God's presence on earth through the public ministry of Jesus Christ. When all of this is taken together, it is not difficult to see that the educational system of Roman Catholic residential diocesan seminaries in comparison to other systems is *sui generis*. Studying them fully therefore requires attention not only to history and education, but also to culture and theology.

In this essay, I attend primarily to three of these four, namely history and historical development, education, and culture. I deal less with the development of the theology of priesthood and how it influenced seminary formation. Ultramontanism is an important consideration. Generally speaking, ultramontanism means “beyond

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), *Program for Priestly Formation (PPF)*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2022). Although the four pillars of formation have been operative to various degrees for centuries or even longer, they were made more explicit at the Second Vatican Council in its 1965 Decree on Priestly Training (*Optatam Totius*). Since then, documents like USCCB's PPF have served as guides for diocesan seminaries in preparing men for the ministerial priesthood.

<sup>2</sup> CIC 391, 1.

the mountains” and it took hold in North America in the mid- to late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> It emphasized the central role of the Pope and drew the eyes of Catholics—hierarchy and laity—to the authority of Rome. On the eve of Vatican II regarding education, the future Cardinal archbishop of Toronto, Emmett Carter wrote about the presence of ultramontanism in North America. He said that visitors from Europe are often surprised, expecting North American Catholics to have rejected the teachings of Rome and to be doing things their own way. Instead, they discover a “strict adherence to and observance of even the minutiae of Church discipline” that is likely the strongest in the world.<sup>4</sup> Seminary education and culture during this time was shaped in large part by the Council of Trent in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and also by 19<sup>th</sup> century Roman authority.

Also important is the phenomenon of “clericalism,” which is tied to culture. Clericalism was a particular problem in pre-Vatican II Catholicism. It emphasized the hierarchy, especially the priesthood and overlooked the laity, other than as a “simple accident, an appendix of the Church, at most necessary for its well-being.”<sup>5</sup> In the opening session of the Second Vatican Council in 1962, the bishop of Bruges, Belgium, Emil de Smedt described clericalism as one of the three sins infecting the Church.<sup>6</sup> It gives rise to a clerical culture that focuses almost exclusively on the clergy. Michael Papesh defines clerical culture as “precisely the constellation of relationships and the universe of ideas and material reality in which diocesan priests and bishops exercise their ministry and spend their lives.”<sup>7</sup> But it is not always easy to identify. Likening it to “fish in water” he says that “most bishops, priests, and laity take clerical culture unreflectively for granted.”<sup>8</sup> Given the presence of clericalism and of clerical culture in the pre-Vatican II Church and the description of the uniqueness of seminary education above, this essay will also take it into consideration.

The overall goal of this essay is to present some of the characteristics of Roman Catholic residential seminary formation in anglophone Canada as it was on the eve of Vatican II. While there are many studies on seminaries and seminary formation in the United States, there is surprisingly little research for anglophone Canada. Therefore, much of the data here takes the US context and applies it to the

---

<sup>3</sup> Terrence Murphy, “Introduction,” in *Creed and Culture: The Place of English-Speaking Catholics in Canadian Society 1750-1930*, eds. Terrence Murphy and Gerald Stortz (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1993), p. xxx.

<sup>4</sup> G. Emmett Carter, *The Modern Challenge to Religious Education: God’s Message and Our Response*, (New York: William H. Sadlier, Inc., 1961), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Yves Congar, *Jalons pour une Théologie du Laïcat* (Paris: Unam sanctam, 1954), 74, quoted in Charles Taylor, “Clericalism”, *Cross Currents* 10/4 (1960): 327.

<sup>6</sup> The other two were juridicism and triumphalism. Cf. Emil de Smedt, *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani Secundi*, Vol. 1, Par IV (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1971), 142-143.

<sup>7</sup> Michael L. Papesh, *Clerical Culture: Contradiction and Transformation. The Culture of the Diocesan Priests of the United States Catholic Church*, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 17.

<sup>8</sup> Papesh, *Clerical Culture*, 17.

Canadian. The essay proceeds in three parts: i) how seminary formation was shaped by the Council of Trent and beforehand in the 16<sup>th</sup> century; ii) the development of seminary formation from Trent to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century; and iii) seminary formation in the 20<sup>th</sup> century before Vatican II with an emphasis on the situation in Ontario. It finishes with some observations on the characteristics of seminary formation in the wake of Vatican II

## Clergy Formation and the Council of Trent

Katarina Schuth rightly notes that the formation of ministers in the Church can be traced back to the years that Jesus spent preaching and teaching his disciples to carry on his ministry. This could be called in some way the first “seminary program” complete with—*mutatis mutandis*—the “four pillars” described above: intellectual, pastoral, spiritual, and human formation.<sup>9</sup> For the next three centuries however, there is no evidence of any kind of formally established training of ministers. Instead, there were general expectations that candidates for ordination would know Scripture, be able to preach, understand the laws of the Church, and be of high moral character.<sup>10</sup>

Augustine of Hippo along with two other bishops appear to have established the first formal training programs for aspiring clerics, setting them up as “small communities of young men who lived and studied with their bishop.”<sup>11</sup> Likely relying on his own formation experience and possibly modelling his program after the post-Easter community of apostles, Augustine’s school in Hippo “resembled a circle of friendship, stimulating conversation, and both formal and informal education.”<sup>12</sup> Although this approach was more like an apprenticeship program, according to one scholar, this was “really the first seminary for priests.”<sup>13</sup>

From the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> century a variety of approaches emerged. The Third Lateran Council was vague on the qualifications of those who would teach theology, instead simply requiring that every cathedral church have someone assigned for the purpose of instructing the clerics of that church as well as “the poor scholars.”<sup>14</sup> Several decades later, the Fourth Lateran Council added to this, expanding the

---

<sup>9</sup> Katarina Schuth, *Seminary Formation: Recent History, Current Circumstances, New Directions*, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016), p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> Christopher M. Bellitto, “Revisiting Ancient Practices: Priestly Training Before Trent,” in *Medieval Education*, ed. Ronald B. Begley and Joseph W. Koterski (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), p. 36.

<sup>11</sup> The other two were Eusebius of Vercelli and Isidore of Seville. Cf. Bellitto, “Revisiting Ancient Practices,” 37.

<sup>12</sup> Bellitto, “Revisiting Ancient Practices,” 37

<sup>13</sup> Frederick Van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop: Religion and Society at the Dawn of the Middle Ages*, trans. Brian Battershaw and G.R. Lamb (London: Sheed and Ward, 1961), p. 234, quoted in Bellitto, “Revisiting Ancient Practices,” 37.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Canon 18 of Lateran III, quoted in Bellitto, “Revisiting Ancient Practices,” 39.

formation program requirements beyond the cathedral church to other churches that could afford it. It also clarified the curriculum, specifying that scripture and the care of souls were to be taught. Those who were “ignorant and unformed” were not to be ordained.<sup>15</sup> Universities also played a role in clerical education during this time, although not so much as places where future priests were formed but more for the materials they provided for their education. In fact, according to one scholar, priests were rarely sent to universities except by bishops who themselves had been trained at them. He wrote: “The vast majority of parish priests throughout the late medieval period had no university training in theology.”<sup>16</sup> The more common practice were apprenticeships.

By the late 14<sup>th</sup> to the early 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, greater emphasis was placed on the qualifications of instructors and on the areas of the curriculum they were to teach. Pierre d’Ailly, chancellor at Paris in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century for example was concerned on the one hand that formators live a faithful life and on other that church libraries have books in canon law, moral theology, and decrees of councils available for consultation.<sup>17</sup> The Council of Constance several years later addressed instructor qualifications recommending that teachers possess a license in canon or civil law or a baccalaureate in theology, that they be properly compensated, and that they remain celibate.<sup>18</sup> In the early 15<sup>th</sup> century, the then-chancellor at Paris Jean Gerson recommended a separate theological school in each diocese to train priests, a recommendation that expanded Lateran IV and was later picked up by Pope Paul III before the opening of the Council of Trent.<sup>19</sup> Summing up this period of history, James O’Donohoe says that “clerical formation in general lacked a solid and well-balanced intellectual and moral foundation and a practical preparation for ministry.”<sup>20</sup>

The Council of Trent in the 16<sup>th</sup> century was the event that created the idea for seminaries as we know them today. According to Christopher Bellitto, a Jesuit named Claude Jay complained shortly after the opening of Trent that priestly training was inadequate. Although he was not the first one to do so, the timing and the audience appears to have been right. His plan was that there be “separate, practical places—

---

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Norman P. Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2 Vols, (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), Vol. I, pp. 220, 240, 248, quoted in Bellitto, “Revisiting Ancient Practices,” 39.

<sup>16</sup> William J. Courtenay, “The Institutionalization of Theology,” in *Learning Institutionalized: Teaching in the Medieval University*, ed. John Van Engen (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), p. 254, quoted in Bellitto, *Revisiting Ancient Practices*, 41.

<sup>17</sup> Francis Oakley, *The Political Thought of Pierre d’Ailly: The Voluntarist Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), pp. 334-335, 337-339, quoted in Bellitto, *Revisiting Ancient Practices*, 42-43.

<sup>18</sup> Bellitto, *Revisiting Ancient Practices*, 43.

<sup>19</sup> Bellitto, *Revisiting Ancient Practices*, 43.

<sup>20</sup> James A. O’Donohoe, *Tridentine Seminary Legislation: Its Sources and Its Formation* (Louvain: Publications Universitaires de Louvain, 1957), p. 15. The quote is from Maryanne Confoy, *Religious Life and Priesthood: Perfectae Caritatis, Optatam Totius, Presbyterorum Ordinis* (New York: Paulist Press, 2008), 79.

in essence, trade or technical schools or colleges—for priestly training. The schools would not necessarily be as academically rigorous as a university and would emphasize a candidate's spiritual life and enough learning to permit his practice as a pastor."<sup>21</sup> Although Jay's death preceded Trent's consideration of the matter by about a decade, his proposal was taken up by delegates at the Council who recommended "that colleges be established solely for priestly training."<sup>22</sup>

The proposal for Catholic seminaries took place on 15 July 1563 during the twenty-third session of the Council of Trent. As Joseph White describes it, while Trent provided the idea for the modern seminary, it did not create it in the form we know it today. Instead, what it did was to assign "responsibility to the bishop to train diocesan priests within an existing institution, the cathedral" with its central urban location, its governance structure, and its liturgical life.<sup>23</sup> In other words, Trent reformed "the diverse and inconsistent types of formation for ordination that had prevailed globally for centuries" by assigning responsibility for priestly training to one person, the local bishop.<sup>24</sup> However, because bishops decided how priests were to be formed "different forms of clerical training resulted from diocese to diocese."<sup>25</sup> The conciliar decree laid out the requirement for boys who had reached at least the age of twelve that they were to begin with an arts curriculum before proceeding to the study of scripture, preaching, administration of the sacraments, the hearing of confessions and liturgy. It was not a program for the wealthy (they had other paths to the priesthood); it was for the poor. In this way, as White notes, Trent didn't create a single path to the diocesan priesthood. But it did take an important step forward in the training of clergy by making "the bishop the central figure in the formation of priests."<sup>26</sup> This approach would remain in place right up until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Trent did not cover everything. For example, it did not lay out a training program for priests in religious communities; its decree only pertained to diocesan clergy. Nor did it lay out the model for an ideal priest, although it did indicate that the priest should have "good morals and behaviour."<sup>27</sup> In another section, it defined what takes place during the sacrament of orders, namely that "a character is imprinted that can neither be effaced nor taken away."<sup>28</sup> As Schuth notes, the approach of Trent was that "the theological and ascetical training for diocesan priests was based on the

---

<sup>21</sup> Kathleen M. Comerford, "Italian Tridentine Seminaries: A Historiographical Study," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 29 (1998): 1009; and Herbert Jedin, *Geschichte des Konzils von Trient*, vol. 4 (Freiberg: Herder, 1975), 50-75, quoted in Bellitto, "Revisiting Ancient Practices," 45.

<sup>22</sup> Bellitto, "Revisiting Ancient Practices," 45.

<sup>23</sup> Joseph M. White, "A. How the Seminary Developed," in Katarina Schuth, *Reason for the Hope: The Future of Roman Catholic Theologates*, pp. 11-28, (Wilmington DE: Michael Glazier Inc., 1989), p. 11.

<sup>24</sup> Confoy, *Religious Life*, 79.

<sup>25</sup> Schuth, *Seminary Formation*, 12.

<sup>26</sup> White, "How the Seminary Developed," 12.

<sup>27</sup> White, "How the Seminary Developed," 12.

<sup>28</sup> White, "How the Seminary Developed," 12.



model of the risen Christ as priest and victim.”<sup>29</sup> This meant that his formation was less focused on serving the community and more on “an inner call to life in Christ.”<sup>30</sup> In these two ways, Trent made clear a theological, including an ontological distinction between a priest and a layperson that laid the conditions of possibility going forward for that which bishop de Smedt referred to as clericalism. The theology of priesthood of the Council of Trent would influence the Catholic church’s teaching for the next four hundred years. As Kenan Osborne notes, “All the manuals of theology used in seminaries were strongly dependent on tridentine material.”<sup>31</sup>

## Clergy Formation from Trent to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

Even though Trent laid out the requirement for seminaries in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it was still several hundred years before every diocese in Europe had one. In Canada, the first seminary was founded in Quebec City in 1663 and the second almost 200 years later in Montreal in 1840. In anglophone Canada, the first Roman Catholic residential diocesan seminary was founded in London Ontario in 1912 and the second in Toronto in 1913, although some diocesan clergy had had been formed at the Oblate of Mary Immaculate institution, St. Joseph College in Bytown as early as the 1840s.<sup>32</sup> According to Joseph White there were three French thinkers who influenced the formation of diocesan priests from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards: Pierre de Bérulle, Jean Jacques Olier, and St. Vincent de Paul. They were known as the French School of Spirituality and Bérulle was foundational.<sup>33</sup> His approach focused on the priest or seminarian associating themselves with “the risen Christ as eternal priest and victim.”<sup>34</sup> As such, they communicate grace through the sacraments. Seminarians were to adopt “an attitude of self-abnegation, or even self-annihilation, so that Christ would live in him.”<sup>35</sup>

Jean Jacques Olier and St. Vincent de Paul based their approach on that of Bérulle. The former was the founder of the Society of St. Sulpice (known as the Sulpicians) and the latter was the founder of the Congregation of the Mission (known as the Vincentians). In 1642, Olier started a seminary at St. Sulpice in Paris and quickly developed a reputation for forming candidates of high quality who lived in community, studied at universities, taught in parishes, and assisted in liturgy. As White notes, those formed by Olier and St. Vincent de Paul “were gradually invited

---

<sup>29</sup> Confoy, *Religious Life*, 80.

<sup>30</sup> Confoy, *Religious Life*, 80.

<sup>31</sup> Kenan B. Osborne, *Priesthood: A History of the Ordained Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church* (New York: Paulist, 1988), p. 276.

<sup>32</sup> Laurence K. Shook, *Catholic Post-Secondary Education in English-Speaking Canada: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), pp. 242-251, esp. 248.

<sup>33</sup> In this section, I follow closely the argument of White, pp. 12-24. Cf. White, “How the Seminary Developed,” 12.

<sup>34</sup> White, “How the Seminary Developed,” 12.

<sup>35</sup> White, “How the Seminary Developed,” 12.

by bishops throughout France to train diocesan clergy at local seminaries in cathedral towns where the format varied.”<sup>36</sup> Within a hundred years, many of the dioceses in France had Vincentians or Sulpicians doing formation for them.<sup>37</sup>

The goal of the French School’s approach was focused on the type of priest it would produce. It emphasized spiritual training and spiritual dispositions, what the French called *esprit ecclésiastique*. White notes that today, we might call these dispositions the “clerical spirit” or even perhaps a “clerical culture.” Reminiscent of Trent, the priest was to conform himself to the inner life of Christ “by manifesting a personal spirituality and a code of clerical behaviour that set him apart from the unordained.”<sup>38</sup>

In the United States, the first seminary was St. Mary’s in Baltimore in 1791 with four Sulpician priests and five seminarians. In the next sixty years, dioceses throughout the US were created with cathedrals, residences housing seminarians, and schools. These small schools allowed the bishop to keep an eye on the progress of his seminarians at minimal cost since he did not have to send them away for training. It also followed the Council of Trent’s vision of having bishops oversee priestly formation in their churches. They became so popular that by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there were twenty-two of them, with an average of thirteen students in each. Most of them soon ended, though for a various reasons: a shortage of local youth interested in the priesthood, not enough seminarians coming from other places in the world, a lack of clerics to teach in them, and not enough funding.<sup>39</sup>

In the next thirty years the model changed. Forty new dioceses in the US were created. But rather than establishing small schools and residences in each diocese attached to the cathedral, archdioceses and ecclesiastical provinces were formed with a seminary in each. The surrounding dioceses would then send their candidates for ordination to these larger places for formation. Lay people were excluded, so there was no need to teach seminarians alongside others who might be following a non-theological curriculum. As White writes, these “freestanding seminaries were what social historians of the nineteenth-century life label ‘total institutions’, whose internal life is ordered for one specific purpose, in this case the training of priests.”<sup>40</sup>

For a short period of time in the late-nineteenth century, the US church enjoyed a degree of freedom in designing its own formation programs for clergy that were responsive to contemporary society. After all, Trent had said more about the ontology of ordination, the spiritual disposition of the priest and the responsibility of the bishop, and less about the curriculum itself. In 1884, the Third Plenary Council of

---

<sup>36</sup> White, “How the Seminary Developed,” 13.

<sup>37</sup> In 1565, Pius IV established the Roman College, attached to the Roman Seminary, as a Tridentine model. In 1563, Charles Borromeo of Milan established three seminaries; one for younger boys, one for adolescents, and one for older men. This system was later modified by the French in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Confoy, *Religious Life*, 79.

<sup>38</sup> White, “How the Seminary Developed,” 13.

<sup>39</sup> White, “How the Seminary Developed,” 16.

<sup>40</sup> White, “How the Seminary Developed,” 17.

bishops was convened in Baltimore. The hierarchy used it as an opportunity to update the course of study. In response to concerns, the council required six years of study for minor and major seminaries. Students in minor seminaries would study humanities, classical languages and the basics of clerical spirituality and culture. The major seminary curriculum expanded its offerings to give attention to things that were normally less central like scripture, preaching and church history.<sup>41</sup> Some of the bishops who spoke took a more progressive approach. As White describes it, they were concerned about a “narrowly schooled priest whose mind was exclusively on the supernatural, whose asceticism and unexercised body rendered him sickly and useless.”<sup>42</sup> Those coming from Europe they argued were out-of-touch with the needs of the church in America and unequipped to minister in that context. Instead, they advocated for “a liberally educated, theologically well-trained clergy capable of being articulate spokespersons for Catholicism in a pluralistic society where ideas were openly discussed.”<sup>43</sup> It was an ambitious vision and a reaction against the model that had come from Trent. All of this, though, was soon to end as the centralized, ultramontane agenda of Rome took hold.

## Seminaries in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century before Vatican II

In the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Catholic Church became more centralized around the person of the pope as the figure of authority.<sup>44</sup> The term used was “ultramontanism.”<sup>45</sup> Historically, ultramontanism was a reaction against movements such as Gallicanism and Febronianism that assigned rights to the local churches and local bishops, against papal absolutism. In the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century though, the term was broadened in order to draw the entire church under papal control.<sup>46</sup> The Protestant Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the growing number of churches that emerged continued to cast doubt on the Catholic Church as the only Church in the West. The French Revolution in the 18<sup>th</sup> century that effectively ended the alliance between Church and State weakened the power of Rome in civil matters. Finally, the Enlightenment in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries saw the birth of new philosophies and schools of thought that were not only not under the control of the magisterium, but they were also contrary to its teachings, advancing ideas such as the use of reason

---

<sup>41</sup> White, “How the Seminary Developed,” 20.

<sup>42</sup> White, “How the Seminary Developed,” 21

<sup>43</sup> White, “How the Seminary Developed,” 21.

<sup>44</sup> For an excellent overview of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, see: John W. O’Malley, “The Long 19<sup>th</sup> Century,” in *What Happened at Vatican II* (Harvard University Press, 2008), 53-92.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Ian A. McFarland, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology*, s.v. “Ultramontanism”, (Cambridge University Press, 2011): 524-525.

<sup>46</sup> See, Michael Attridge, “From Objectivity to Subjectivity: Changes in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries and Their Impact on Post-Vatican II Theological Education,” in *Catholic Education in the Wake of Vatican II*, ed. Rosa Bruno-Jofre and Jon Igelmo Zaldivar, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 21-41

and the authority of the human subject. One of the first artifacts of this centralization was Pope Pius IX's *Syllabus of Errors* in 1864 in which he pronounced condemnation on those "false beliefs" related to the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the separation of Church and State.<sup>47</sup> Another indicator of papal centrality were the statements of the First Vatican Council, held from 1869 to 1870 defining papal primacy and papal infallibility and declaring the pope to have "full and supreme power of jurisdiction over the whole church not only in matters of faith and morals, but also in ... the discipline and government of the church dispersed throughout the world"<sup>48</sup>.

Along these same lines, the Vatican issued a number of documents during this period that would impact seminary studies. First among them was Pope Leo XIII's encyclical in 1879 entitled *Aeterni Patris*. In response to 19<sup>th</sup> century Catholic theologians who had been incorporating thinkers such as Rene Descartes and Immanuel Kant and such schools of thought such as Traditionalism, Semi-Rationalism, and Ontologism, *Aeterni Patris* recentred Catholic philosophy on the work of Thomas Aquinas. The burgeoning of philosophies had created fragmentation and doubt within the intellectual framework of the Church. The best remedy was "to return to the sound philosophy and theology common to the Scholastic Doctors whose finest exponent was St. Thomas."<sup>49</sup> The pope's encyclical mandated the use of Thomas' work for Catholic philosophical and theological studies, including seminary studies.

During this same period of time, a crisis arose in the Church. Some Catholic biblical scholars, theologians, and philosophers in Europe began to explore and ask questions with a sense of historical awareness and an appreciation of human subjectivity. As White describes it, they "saw a clear need to re-examine Catholic theology and to reconcile it with the new scholarship."<sup>50</sup> Among them were such names as Alfred Loisy, George Tyrrell, Maurice Blondel, and Maude Petre. The crisis started with the publication of Loisy's first book in the early 1890s in which he used historical critical tools to critique scripture and to reinterpret the magisterium's teachings. Over the next fifteen or so years, this crisis intensified. In 1907, the magisterium responded severely to these so-called "Modernists" with a document entitled *Lamentabili sane exitu* issued by the Vatican's Holy Office, condemning the "errors" of Modernism. It was quickly followed months later with an encyclical entitled *Pascendi Dominici gregis* in which Pius X dramatically concluded that Modernism

---

<sup>47</sup> Pope Pius IX, *Quanta cura* (December 8, 1864), <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius09/p9quanta.htm>.

<sup>48</sup> Pope Pius IX, *Decrees of the First Vatican Council, Session 4, Chapter 3* (July 18, 1870), <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils/ecum20.htm>.

<sup>49</sup> Gerard McCool, *From Unity to Pluralism: The Internal Evolution of Thomism*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989), p. 8.

<sup>50</sup> White, "How the Seminary Developed," 23.

was not just another heresy in the Church, it was the “synthesis of all heresies.”<sup>51</sup> The Vatican was so committed to eradicating the modernization of its teachings that it finally issued three years later, in 1910, a *motu proprio* entitled *Sacrorum antistitum*. The document required all teachers of theology, including seminary instructors to take an annual oath against Modernism. It further “forbade seminarians to read periodicals and contained remarkable words about the importance of controlling the enthusiasm for learning.”<sup>52</sup> In places such as the US, where bishops had been trying to develop a context-specific formation program so that clergy might become “articulate spokespersons for Catholicism in a pluralistic society,” “the crusade against Modernism effectively prevented it from developing for a generation.”<sup>53</sup> The oath against Modernism was only lifted in 1967, two years after the close of Vatican II.

Together with Leo XIII’s singular focus on Aquinas’ philosophy and the condemnation of modern scholarship by Pius X, the next move towards centralization came in 1917 with the publication of the Pio-Benedictine Code of Canon Law, the first comprehensive collection of canon law in the history of the Latin Church. It was the first time in the 350 years since Trent that the magisterium issued general legislation relating to seminary formation. The Code required that all candidates for diocesan priesthood do their formation in a seminary. Philosophical and theological training would have to follow the scholastic approach of Thomas Aquinas as per *Aeterni Patris*. In this way, any use of historical-critical methods were forbidden. As White writes, the Code “greatly enlarged the powers of the Holy See’s Sacred Congregation of Seminaries and Universities, which in the following years issued regulations, dispensed permissions, and received triennial reports on matters pertaining to seminaries.”<sup>54</sup> This was a significant change from Trent, which had placed the bishop in charge of priestly formation. Now, in keeping with the broader ultramontane agenda, the power shifted from the dioceses to the Roman curia, effectively making the bishop “an agent of Roman authorities in executing decrees that he had had no part in making.”<sup>55</sup> As White explains, one of the reasons that this more centralized approach was successful was because many of the anglophone bishops in North America had been trained in Rome.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, the idea of Roman centralization was quite normal for them.

In terms of the seminary curriculum and textbooks, they too became quite standardized. The 1910 *motu proprio* left little room for seminarians and seminary instructors to explore theology more creatively. The curriculum was dominated by

---

<sup>51</sup> Pope Pius X, *Pascendi dominici gregis* (September 8, 1907) 39, [https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-x/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-x\\_enc\\_19070908\\_pascendi-dominici-gregis.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-x/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_19070908_pascendi-dominici-gregis.html).

<sup>52</sup> White, “How the Seminary Developed,” 23.

<sup>53</sup> White, “How the Seminary Developed,” 23.

<sup>54</sup> White, “How the Seminary Developed,” 23.

<sup>55</sup> White, “How the Seminary Developed,” 23.

<sup>56</sup> White, “How the Seminary Developed,” 24.

dogmatic and moral theology, taught using the so-called Roman manuals that were written in Latin.<sup>57</sup> According to Rome, since Latin was a universal language there was no need to worry about any misunderstandings that might arise in translations. Although there were a variety of manuals in existence, “a consensus formed around the works of the French Sulpician Adolph Tanquerey, whose dogmatic manuals written in clear and simple Latin achieved an extraordinary influence in American seminaries during the first half of the twentieth century.”<sup>58</sup> The manuals laid out the theological arguments in a deductive and propositional style that presented the truth as ahistorical and objective. The propositions were normally followed by the most common arguments against them, which were then followed by proof-texts from Scripture, the early Christian literature, magisterial teachings, and writings of Catholic theologians.<sup>59</sup> As Gabriele Daly describes it, “the condemnation of modernism had the effect of reinforcing this uniformity spectacularly. The manuals mapped out with precise and inflexible lines the terrain within which Catholic theology and philosophy were to be studied and taught.”<sup>60</sup> Examinations usually tested the extent to which seminarians could memorize and repeat the propositions. After all the most important thing was “mastery of the official teaching.”<sup>61</sup> Scripture was taught but was less important than dogma and moral theology. Church history consisted of important dates and events. There was no sense of historical awareness or that the church’s teachings might be subject to development.

With the centralized philosophical, theological, and juridical agenda firmly in place, the influence of Trent and the French School on priestly identity continued in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century through the papacies of Pius X, Pius XI, and Pius XII. Their encyclicals and apostolic exhortations on priesthood demonstrated the influence of Bérulle, Olier, and St. Vincent de Paul. As White writes, “they reinforced the church’s adherence to this Baroque tradition by emphasizing the loftiness of the priest to the point of conferring near magical powers on him, and by binding clerics to a spirituality different from that prescribed for the unordained.”<sup>62</sup> The Sulpician influence on seminary formation entered North America through Montreal in 1684. Its “entire system of devotion, study and worship sought to transform the priest’s character according to the various states and lively mysteries of Christ, identified by Bérulle ... that formed “interior state” of the priest.”<sup>63</sup> The Sulpician approach “was designed to sanctify the humanity of the priest as the vessel of Christ’s eternal

---

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Theodore Heck, “The Curriculum of the Major Seminary in Relation to Contemporary Conditions” (PhD diss., The Catholic University of America, 1935), pg. 44, 46.

<sup>58</sup> White, “How the Seminary Developed,” 25.

<sup>59</sup> White, “How the Seminary Developed,” 25.

<sup>60</sup> Gabriele Daly, *Transcendence and Immanence*, (Clarendon Press, 1980), 12.

<sup>61</sup> Daly, *Transcendence*, 12-13.

<sup>62</sup> White, “How the Seminary Developed,” 24.

<sup>63</sup> Larry Abbott Goleman, *Clergy Education in America: Religious Leadership and American Public Life* (Oxford University Press, 2021), 88.

sacrifice.”<sup>64</sup> It turned them into “little Christs,” a pattern of formation “that continued through most of the twentieth century.”<sup>65</sup> The freestanding seminaries in which they lived that were formed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, previously described as “total institutions,” separated the world of the seminarian from the one in which the lay person lived. Living in these institutions apart from the world, remaining celibate, using Latin, and being trained with a specialized curriculum and the Roman manuals further distinguished the clergy from the faithful and gave them in the eyes of many a fascinating air of awe and mystery.

Further solidifying this clerical culture was life in the seminary, which was highly regularized and followed something called “The Rule.” As Larry Abbott Goleman describes it the daily rule was created by the Sulpicians “to form the obedience, self-examination and self-denial required of a Christly life.”<sup>66</sup> A typical rule might involve rising at 5 a.m., and spending time in prayer.<sup>67</sup> Mass was at 6 a.m. followed by study. Breakfast was at 8 a.m. with some recreation afterwards. From 9 a.m. to just before noon the seminarian would attend lectures, followed by scripture readings and an examination of conscience. Lunch would be at noon, during which time there would be spiritual reading. Before heading off to lectures at 1:30 p.m., the seminarian would have a period of recreation followed by the rosary. At 6:30 p.m. there would be further scriptural readings. Dinner was 7 p.m., during which time scripture again would be read, followed by recreation and the rosary. At 8:30 p.m., there was study-time and another examination of conscience. Bedtime was at 10 p.m.. Each of these periods was marked by the ringing of bells throughout the seminary that indicated the progress of the day, from class time to study time to lunch, to personal time, supper, evening prayer, recreation, to bedtime. They governed “every hour and aspect of seminary formation.”<sup>68</sup> Robert Anello points to a 1931 canon law report that justified the rule arguing it offered “a balanced structure of ‘work and prayer, recreation, and study.’”<sup>69</sup> Obedience to it prepared the seminarian for obedience and docility to “the seminary rector, spiritual director, and other members of the formation staff.”<sup>70</sup> After ordination, it prepared them for the discipline and solitude of priestly life. For example, “as preparation for celibate, sexual continence” the rule regulated cigarette smoking.<sup>71</sup> As preparation for a life away from family, “the rule limited

---

<sup>64</sup> Goleman, *Clergy Education*, 89.

<sup>65</sup> Goleman, *Clergy Education*, 89.

<sup>66</sup> Goleman, *Clergy Education*, 90.

<sup>67</sup> Goleman, *Clergy Education*, 90.

<sup>68</sup> Robert L. Anello, “In the Beginning Were the Bells: The Development of Human Formation for Priests,” *Seminary Journal* 19/3 (Winter 2013): 45.

<sup>69</sup> Joseph Cox, *The Administration of Seminaries; Historical Synopsis and Commentary*, CUA Canon Law Studies, No. 67 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1931), p. 68, referenced in Anello, *In the Beginning*, 45.

<sup>70</sup> Anello, “In the Beginning,” 46.

<sup>71</sup> Anello, “In the Beginning,” 46.

visiting hours and imposed the “grand silence” prohibiting conversation, usually from the conclusion of night prayers until after breakfast.”<sup>72</sup> Seminarians were taught that “if you keep the rule, it will keep you.” It was considered to be “the expression of God’s signified will for the seminarian.”<sup>73</sup>

Turning specifically to the local context in Ontario, Canada is St. Peter’s Seminary in London, approximately 200 kilometers southwest of Toronto. St. Peter’s was the first Roman Catholic residential diocesan seminary in anglophone Canada.<sup>74</sup> It was founded in 1912, two years after Pius XII’s *motu proprio Sacrorum Antistitum*. It was during the time in which ultramontanism was transforming the entire Church in North America including in Ontario, including regulating the religious education curriculum of secondary schools.<sup>75</sup> In addition to its focus on the papacy, ultramontane reform in Ontario created such things as parish missions, popular devotional practices, and Catholic societies. They helped give rise to a distinctive Catholic culture by which “a separatist mentality developed that reflected not only growing self-reliance, but also a suspicious, even hostile attitude towards the outside world.”<sup>76</sup> As Mark McGowan describes it, in the century leading up to Vatican II, Canadian Catholics “would be marked by a reverence for ecclesiastical authority, membership in a parallel Catholic social and symbolic universe, and the regular practice of personal piety marked by the saying of the rosary, praying novenas, and marking the rhythms of one’s life by the distinctive calendar of feasts, saints’ days, and holy days of obligation to attend the Mass.”<sup>77</sup> Formation in St. Peter’s was almost identical to the one described above. The emphasis was on dogmatic and moral theology. The core text used was the Roman manual written by the French Sulpician Adolphe Tanqueray, which was based on the philosophy and theology of Thomas Aquinas.<sup>78</sup> The life of a seminarian at St. Peter’s was also governed by “The Rule” formulated by the Sulpicians<sup>79</sup> and by the ringing of the bells. The Introduction of the rule stated clearly that “a seminary exists for the purpose of moulding

---

<sup>72</sup> Anello, “In the Beginning,” 46.

<sup>73</sup> Anello, “In the Beginning,” 45.

<sup>74</sup> For a history of St. Peter’s, see: Jennifer Granger, Hilary Bates Nealy, and Michael Prieur, eds. *Shepherds According to My Heart: A History of St. Peter’s Seminary*, (London: St. Peter’s Seminary Foundation, 2012).

<sup>75</sup> Joe Stafford, “Strict Neo-Thomism in the Catholic High Schools of the Archdiocese of Toronto, 1940-1960,” *CCHA Historical Studies* 83 (2016): 47-65.

<sup>76</sup> Terrence Murphy, “The English-Speaking Colonies to 1854,” in *A Concise History of Christianity in Canada*, ed. Terrence Murphy and Roberto Perin (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1996), 170.

<sup>77</sup> Mark G. McGowan, “Roman Catholics (Anglophone and Allophone),” in *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada*, eds. Paul Bramadat and David Seljak (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 65.

<sup>78</sup> Dan Brock, “The Fallon Years: 1912-1930,” in *Shepherds According to My Heart: A History of St. Peter’s Seminary*, ed. Jennifer Granger, Hilary Bates Nealy, and Michael Prieur (London: St. Peter’s Seminary Foundation, 2012), 46.

<sup>79</sup> Brock, “Fallon Years,” 42.



candidates for the Priesthood into the likeness of Christ ...”<sup>80</sup> The rule was to be received with “self-denial and humble obedience” ... with the firm conviction that the seminarian is “the manifestation of God’s holy will” [p. 3]. Newspapers, magazines, or other publications not approved by the Rector were forbidden, as were radios [p. 9]. Use of the telephone was also only by permission [p. 10]. Seminarians could only visit home for serious reasons such as a grave illness or the death of an immediate family member [p. 10]. Smoking was permitted only during recreation [p. 9]. Packages, letters, and telegrams could be inspected at any time by the rector [p. 11]. Finally, the rule structured the seminarians’ days in a way much the same as described above with activities to occur at specific hours. Indeed, it was a “total institution,” closed off from the world. Its purpose was to mould young men to become “little Christs” to serve the Church in the Catholic world of anglophone Ontario, which itself was separated from society.

## Conclusion

The essay began with an assertion that on the theme of conceptions and practices of education, the system of Roman Catholic residential diocesan seminaries is unlike any other. In the pre-Vatican II period the seminary system was shaped in large part by the Council of Trent in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and priestly formation was guided by the 17<sup>th</sup> century French School of Spirituality and especially by the Sulpicians founded by Olier. Trent placed the local bishop in charge of formation and defined the sacrament of orders as imprinting a character that cannot be erased or taken away. It was a permanent, ontological change that set the clergy apart from the laity. The Sulpicians later developed a program of formation based on Trent that emphasized spiritual training and the spiritual dispositions of clergy. Those in formation were to follow the life of Christ, to die to their former selves, so that they could live as the risen Christ, eternal priest, and victim. In order to do this, young men would enter a closed environment for years and through a highly regulated, structured program of rote study, prayer, and recreation they would learn obedience and discipline under the eye of their rectors. In this way the system was indeed unlike any other in its structure and purpose. However, ultramontanism made it even more unique. It drew the authority of seminary systems away from local bishops and centralized them under the power of the pope. Philosophy and theology was consolidated primarily around one thinker, Thomas Aquinas. Reading outside of the curriculum was forbidden. Pedagogical method was universalized through the use of Roman manuals written in Latin. Seminary instructors were to swear an oath of fidelity to the magisterium. And seminaries were placed under the centralized control of the

---

<sup>80</sup> St. Peter’s Seminary, The Rule of St. Peter’s Seminary, London Canada, [No Date], St. Peter’s Seminary Archives, Fr. Michael Prieur Collection, p. 3. Although there is no publication date, the rule quotes Pope Pius XI’s 1935 encyclical *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii*. Therefore, it was likely published between then and 1950 when Pope Pius XII issued an apostolic exhortation *Menti nostrae* on priestly holiness.

Vatican dicastery for seminaries and universities. In this way, ultramontanism added a chain-of-command layer to seminary formation not unlike that of the military, from pope to Roman Congregation, to bishop, to seminary leaders, to seminarians themselves.

Within this system, the problem of clericalism and a clerical culture arose. Thomas Doyle describes clericalism as the belief “that clerics constitute an elite group, and because of their powers as sacramental ministers, they are superior to the laity.”<sup>81</sup> Trent’s definition of the sacrament of orders as transforming the priest ontologically and the Sulpician program that followed, certainly solidified this position. And the closed system of accountability and lengthy separation from the world further enhanced it. Susan Ross points out that the sacrality attached to the priest was not only expressed at the level of theology, but it was also lived out at a personal level. She writes “many recall being taught that a priest’s hands were especially sacred ... raising him above the laity.”<sup>82</sup> He represented God on earth and “lay people were socialized in obedience to the representative.”<sup>83</sup> The Second Vatican Council in the mid-1960s was to reform this system. Although it is beyond the scope of this essay to do a thorough study of what Vatican II was able to achieve and not, it is worth mentioning three points by way of conclusion.

First, Vatican II’s “Decree on Priestly Training” (*Optatam Totius*) reformed seminary training in several important areas.<sup>84</sup> It was able to create a “reasonable balance between respect for tradition and adaptation to a new and changing context for priestly ministry and life.”<sup>85</sup> In this way, it recognized that the cultural and social context is an important consideration for the way in which the seminarian is formed. It also recognized the value of studies outside of philosophy and theology, in particular the human sciences as important for formation. The Council embraced the impulse of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century movement known as the *Nouvelle théologie*, recognizing the biblical, liturgical, and patristic foundations of theology, and supported greater flexibility in seminary training programs. However, at the same time, support for change was not universal. For example, in response to some seminaries using English in their liturgies, a year after the Council closed, the Vatican “published a decree requiring the use of Latin as a liturgical language in all seminaries of the Latin rite.”<sup>86</sup> There were also concerns about lay men and women working as faculty in seminaries. Maryanne Confoy notes that “Cardinal Ottaviani, secretary to the Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office, is reported to

---

<sup>81</sup> Thomas Doyle, “Clericalism: Enabler of Clergy Sexual Abuse,” *Pastoral Psychology* Vol. 54/3 (January 2006): 190.

<sup>82</sup> Susan Ross, “Feminist Theology and Clergy Sexual Abuse Crisis,” *Theological Studies* Vol. 80/3 (2019): 637.

<sup>83</sup> Ross, *Feminist Theology*, 638.

<sup>84</sup> Confoy, *Religious Life*, 124.

<sup>85</sup> Confoy, *Religious Life*, 124.

<sup>86</sup> Confoy, *Religious Life*, 125.

have said in an interview with a curial official that he ‘was concerned about the overboldness on the part of the laity’ and he expressed the opinion that ‘some of them might overreach themselves and try to dominate the clergy’.<sup>87</sup> In other words, tensions concerning the reform of seminary training started immediately after Vatican II.

Second, one of the major accomplishments of Vatican II was its theology of the local Church and of the local bishop as holding a balanced relationship of power with respect to the pope. This renewed understanding that arises out of the theology of the Council’s “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church” (*Lumen Gentium*) carried over into *Optatam Totius*. Through it, bishops were once again able to adapt priestly formation for their own diocesan context, a change that was seen by most Council members as the greatest accomplishment of the decree. It was also seen as an end of ultramontanism, centralization, and papal absolutism. However, some have not been so convinced.<sup>88</sup> Despite Vatican II redressing a balance of power among the bishops and the pope, the authority of the papacy remains, albeit in a more nuanced way. The first example that Vatican I remained in effect was Pope Paul VI’s encyclical on birth control, *Humanae vitae* issued in 1968 three years after the end of Vatican II. In it, Paul VI rejected the advice of a commission that he allow for the possibility of artificial birth control. His rejection led Hans Küng to comment on the lingering effect of the First Vatican Council as follows “the teaching of Vatican I really amounts to this: if he wants the pope can do everything, even without the Church.”<sup>89</sup> Summarizing the view of Jean-Marie Tillard, William Portier writes: “ultramontanism continues to haunt Catholic imaginations. The tension remains between the primate whose ‘corporate personality’ can represent the entire college and the college itself.”<sup>90</sup> Therefore the balance between Rome’s authority and that of the local ordinary continue to impact the Church.

Last, and most significantly the Council went far in developing a theology of the laity to address the concerns of clericalism. Nevertheless, it continues to be a problem in the Church both in seminaries and beyond. Susan Ross writes that “the sacred status of the priest was somewhat attenuated after Vatican II with a renewed emphasis on the laity’s share in the priesthood of Christ” however ordination still “emphasizes the priest as the ‘icon’ of Christ who alone can administer the sacraments.”<sup>91</sup> Responding to a comment made by a seminary professor who said that the presence of women on seminary campuses is ‘a challenge to human formation’ Ross says that the “toxic culture of misogyny in seminaries, where it

---

<sup>87</sup> Confoy, *Religious Life*, 125.

<sup>88</sup> William L. Portier, “Unintended Ultramontanism,” *Theological Studies* Vol. 83/1 (March 2022): 54-69.

<sup>89</sup> Hans Küng, *Infallible? An Inquiry*, trans. Edward Quinn (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1972), 94.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. J.M.R. Tillard, *The Bishop of Rome*, trans. John de Satgé (Wilmington DE: Michael Glazier, 1983), 165; referenced in Portier, “Unintended Ultramontanism,” 62.

<sup>91</sup> Ross, “Feminist Theology,” 638.

exists, must be challenged and uprooted.”<sup>92</sup> She adds that “the presence of laity, especially women ... is not a threat to the identity of the priest; rather it encourages seminarians to develop healthy and realistic relationships with those with and among whom they will minister.”<sup>93</sup> Massimo Faggioli argues that while the curriculum at seminaries has changed since Trent, the basic model has not. Today’s seminary “still reflects the premodern idea that the faithful have no rights before the hierarchy.”<sup>94</sup> The same is true of seminarians such that the seminary can “easily become ... an institution exercising a kind of totalitarian power over their lives. Their quasi-monastic isolation from the rest of society and the mediocrity of many programs of formation have become more of a problem today than they were four or five centuries ago.”<sup>95</sup> Finally, turning to the most pressing and serious issue facing the Church today, Thomas Doyle notes the causal relationship between continued clericalism and the sexual abuse crisis in the Church, acknowledged by the National Review Board appointed by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops among others.<sup>96</sup> According to Doyle, the impact is felt on six levels: the victim, the damage, the parents and family, church authorities, the Catholic laity, and secular authorities. He writes that “the present scandal is not defined solely as a problem with sexually dysfunctional and emotionally disturbed clerics. First and foremost, it is a problem of profound abuse of ecclesiastical power ... the way the institutional church has reacted to it reveals a deep flaw in the role of organized religion in contemporary society.”<sup>97</sup>

There is no doubt that discussions need to continue on seminary reform today.

---

<sup>92</sup> Ross, “Feminist Theology,” 650-651.

<sup>93</sup> Ross, “Feminist Theology,” 650.

<sup>94</sup> Massimo Faggioli, “Trent’s Long Shadow: The Abuse Crisis and Seminaries, Dioceses, and the Laity,” *Commonweal* (August 23, 2018).

<sup>95</sup> Faggioli, Trent’s Long Shadow, np.

<sup>96</sup> Doyle, Clericalism, 190-191.

<sup>97</sup> Doyle, Clericalism, 191.