



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC LETTER
ISSUED *MOTU PROPRIO*

MINISTRORUM INSTITUTIO

WHEREBY THE APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTION PASTOR BONUS
IS MODIFIED AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR SEMINARIES IS TRANSFERRED
FROM THE CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION
TO THE CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY

BENEDICTUS PP. XVI

The training of sacred ministers was one of the chief concerns of the Fathers of the [Second Vatican Ecumenical Council](#), who stated: “The Council is fully aware that the desired renewal of the whole Church depends in great part upon a priestly ministry animated by the spirit of Christ, and it solemnly affirms the critical importance of priestly training” (Decree on the Training of Priests *Optatam Totius*, n. 1). In this context, canon 232 of the Code of Canon Law claims for the Church “the proper and exclusive right” to train those destined for the sacred ministries, a training which ordinarily takes place in seminaries. These are institutions called for by the Council of Trent, which decreed that a *seminarium perpetuum* be set up in all dioceses (Session XXIII [15 July 1563], can. XVIII), so that the bishop might “*alere et religiose educare et ecclesiasticis disciplinis instituere*” candidates for the priesthood.

The first institute of a universal character charged with providing for the establishment, governance and administration of seminaries, “to which the destiny of the Church is closely bound” (Leo XIII, Ep. *Paternae Providaeque* [18 September 1899]: ASS 32 [1899-1900], 214), was the *Congregatio Seminariorum* established by Benedict XIII with the Constitution *Credita Nobis* (9 May 1725: *Bullarium Romanum* XI, 2, pp. 409-412). With the passage of time this ceased to exist, yet seminaries continued to be the object of particular concern on the part of the Holy See through the Sacred Congregation of the Council (now the Congregation for the Clergy) and the Sacred

Congregation for Bishops and Regulars, and, after 1906, through the latter alone. [Saint Pius X](#), with the Apostolic Constitution *Sapienti Consilio* (29 June 1908: AAS 1 [1909], 7-19), reserved jurisdiction over seminaries to the Sacred Consistorial Congregation, in which a specific office was established (cf. AAS 1 [1909] 9-10, 2°, 3).

[Benedict XV](#), with the Motu Proprio *Seminaria Clericorum* (4 November 1915: AAS 7 [1915], 493-495), combined the office for seminaries at the Sacred Consistorial Congregation with the Sacred Congregation for Studies in order to create a new dicastery called *Sacra Congregatio de Seminariis et Studiorum Universitatibus*. As a reason for his decision, the Holy Father mentioned his concern for the increasing number of matters to be dealt with and the importance of the office itself: “*Verum cum apud hanc Sacram Congregationem negotiorum moles praeter modum excreverit, et Seminariorum cum maiorem in dies operam postulet, visum est Nobis ad omnem eorum disciplinam moderandam novum aliquod consilium inire*” (AAS 7 [1915], 494).

The new dicastery, namely, the *Sacra Congregatio de Seminariis et Studiorum Universitatibus*, was included in the 1917 *Codex Iuris Canonici* under canon 256 and the formation of clerics was inserted in the same Code under Title XXI, *De Seminariis*, in Part IV, *De Magisterio Ecclesiastico*, of Book III, *De Rebus*.

It is noteworthy that at the time of the preparation of the new Code there was some question about the appropriateness of maintaining this same arrangement. In the end, however, it seemed more suitable to put the entire body of norms at the beginning of the section dealing with clerics. Consequently the norms and directives on seminaries were inserted in Book II, Part I, Title III, Chapter i, with the appropriate title “The Formation of Clerics” (cf. cann. 232-264 CIC). The new arrangement is clearly significant and its title (*De Clericorum Institutione*) is particularly fitting because it now embraces the complete training to be imparted to future ministers of the Lord: a training meant not to be simply doctrinal but also human, spiritual, ascetic, liturgical and pastoral.

The [Second Vatican Ecumenical Council](#) also states that “major seminaries are necessary for priestly training” (Decree on the Training of Priests [Optatam Totius](#), n. 4) and that the formation imparted in the major seminary is specifically priestly, that is, ordered spiritually and pastorally to the sacred ministry: “the whole training of the students should have as its object to make them true shepherds of souls after the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, Teacher, Priest and Shepherd” (*ibid.*).

Specifically: “young men who intend to enter the priesthood are to be provided with a suitable spiritual formation and prepared for their proper duties in a major seminary throughout the entire time of formation or, if in the judgment of the diocesan bishop circumstances demand it, for at least four years” (can. 235, §1 CIC).

According to the [Second Vatican Ecumenical Council](#) and the 1983 Code of Canon Law, then,

seminaries are included in the context of “the formation of clerics”. If this formation is to be truly effective, it must link ongoing formation to seminary training, since “ongoing formation is a continuation of the formation received in the seminary”, as my venerable Predecessor Blessed John Paul II affirmed in his Apostolic Exhortation Pastores Dabo Vobis (25 March 1992): “The ongoing formation of priests... is the natural and absolutely necessary continuation of the process of building priestly personality which began and developed in the seminary... with the training program which aimed at ordination. It is particularly important to be aware of and to respect the intrinsic link between formation before ordination to the priesthood and formation after ordination. Should there be a break in continuity, or worse, a complete difference between these two phases of formation, there would be serious and immediate repercussions on pastoral work and fraternal communion among priests, especially those in different age groups. Ongoing formation is not a repetition of the formation acquired in the seminary, simply reviewed or expanded with new and practical suggestions. Ongoing formation involves relatively new content and especially methods; it develops as a harmonious and vital process which — rooted in the formation received in the seminary — calls for adaptations, updating and modifications, but without sharp breaks in continuity. On the other hand, long-term preparation for ongoing formation should take place in the major seminary, where encouragement needs to be given to future priests to look forward to it, seeing its necessity, its advantages and the spirit in which it should be undertaken, and appropriate conditions for its realization need to be ensured” (No. 71: AAS 84 [1992], 782-783).

I therefore consider it fitting to assign to the Congregation for the Clergy the promotion and governance of all that concerns the training, life and ministry of priests and deacons: from the pastoral care of vocations and the selection of candidates for Holy Orders, including their human, spiritual, doctrinal and pastoral training in seminaries and in special centres for permanent deacons (cf. can. 236, §1° CIC), to their continuing formation, including their living conditions and ways of exercising the ministry, as well as their insurance and social assistance.

In the light of the above, after carefully examining all these matters and having sought the opinion of experts, I establish and decree the following:

Art. 1

The *Congregatio de Institutione Catholica (de Seminariis atque Studiorum Institutis)* takes the name of *Congregatio de Institutione Catholica (de Studiorum Institutis)*.

Art. 2

Art. 112 of the Apostolic Constitution Pastor Bonus is replaced by the following text: “*The Congregation gives practical expression to the concern of the Apostolic See for the promotion and organization of Catholic education*”.

Art. 3

Art. 113 of the Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus* is abrogated.

Art. 4

Art. 93 of the Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus* is replaced by the following text:

“§ 1. Without prejudice to the rights of bishops and their conferences, the Congregation examines matters concerning priests and deacons of the secular clergy with regard to their persons and their pastoral ministry, as well as the resources they require for the exercise of this ministry, and in all these matters the Congregation offers appropriate assistance to bishops.

§2. The Congregation gives practical expression to the concern of the Apostolic See for the formation of those called to Holy Orders”.

Art. 5

The text of Art. 94 of the Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus* is replaced by the following:

§1. It assists bishops in ensuring that in their Churches vocations to the sacred ministries are fostered with all possible diligence and that students are suitably educated in seminaries — to be established and directed in accordance with law — and provided with a sound human, spiritual, doctrinal and pastoral formation.

§2. It exercises careful vigilance to ensure that the community life and governance of seminaries fully correspond to the requirements of priestly training and that the superiors and instructors contribute as best they can to the personal formation of sacred ministers by the example of their own lives and sound teaching.

§3. The Congregation is also competent to establish interdiocesan seminaries and to approve their statutes”.

Art. 6

The Congregation for Catholic Education is competent to structure the academic curricula of philosophy and theology, after consultation with the Congregation for the Clergy in areas of its respective competence.

Art. 7

The Pontifical Work of Priestly Vocations (cf. Motu Proprio of Pius XII [4 November 1941]) is transferred to the Congregation for the Clergy.

Art. 8

By virtue of the matters treated, the Prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy is *ex officio* President of the Permanent Interdicasterial Commission for the formation of candidates for Holy Orders, established in conformity with the Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, Art. 21, §2, of which the Secretary is also a member.

Art. 9

The Interdicasterial Commission for a more equitable distribution of priests in the world is suppressed.

Art. 10

On the day these norms take effect, proceedings pending at the Congregation for Catholic Education involving matters transferred from its competence are to be forwarded to the Congregation for the Clergy for resolution.

I order that all that I have decided in this Apostolic Letter issued Motu Proprio is to be fully observed, anything to the contrary notwithstanding, albeit deserving of special mention, and I decree that it is to be promulgated by publication in the daily newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* and to take effect fifteen days after promulgation.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 16 January in the year of our Lord 2013, the eighth of my Pontificate.

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