

Pope Pius XI: Apostolic Letter *Officiorum Omnium*

To the most Eminent Father Lord Caietano Bisleti, Cardinal Proto-deacon of the Holy Roman Church, Prefect of the Sacred Consilium which has care for Seminaries and for Universities of Studies: concerning seminaries and the studies of the clergy.

Pope Pius XI – Our beloved son, health and apostolic benediction.

Of all the most holy duties that the fulness of the Apostolic office embraces, there is surely none greater or of broader extent than that of being concerned and bringing it about that a sufficiently large supply of good ministers be available to the Church for carrying out her divine duties. For this task is of a kind that keeps bound together the Church's dignity, its efficiency and its very life, and which is of the greatest importance for the salvation of the human race; since the immense benefits, which have been won for the world by Jesus Christ the Redeemer, are not shared with men except through "the ministers of Christ and the dispensers of the mysteries of God" (1 Cor. 4.1). But now, as from this Chair of blessed Peter in which we have been divinely placed through no merit of our own, we look around the catholic world which has been entrusted to our immediate concerns, it is allowable to consider on the one hand what, and how great, are the needs of souls, and on the other hand how the clergy is in very many ways, particularly because there are too few of them, inadequate for the souls; and to consider, in the case of the problems of duly supplying clergy which were already very serious, how much more serious they have become because of the losses and damages of the recent war. But if what is happening must be very troublesome for all who are zealous for the divine glory and the salvation of others, and especially for sacred Pastors, it is easily understood that we, since we maintain solicitude for all the Churches, are much more earnestly anxious and concerned on that very account than are the others.

Therefore at the start of our being Pontifex Maximus there is nothing more important than to apply a certain special zeal for a matter of such great moment: and in particular to call in the help and make use of the labour of this Urban Consilium whose function it is to govern the education and teaching of all the sacred youth. For we know that many things have already been very appropriately prescribed by our predecessors who employed that same Consilium as an instrument - and all these things we both strongly approve, and we confirm them by the decision of our authority - but among them are many things which we certainly wish to be driven forward even more earnestly than that, as being most particularly conducive to the holy purpose. And therefore we issue this letter to you, our beloved Son, Prefect of the same sacred Consilium, so that, in so far as you particularly are a partner in this great concern of ours, we may engage your very self as a messenger to make known the things that can lighten it.

First of all since, as we have said, the affairs of the sacred order and of the Church have a very close mutual connexion, there can be no doubting that an adequate number of men is being destined at all times by God for the priesthood; otherwise God would at some time be failing his Church in an essential matter, and even to mention that is wicked. Even so, in this particular matter, just as in others necessary for the common salvation of souls, there is in force this law of divine providence, that prayers in common should have the fullest scope for bringing it about. For this is clear and known to all: "The harvest indeed is great, but the labourers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that he send forth labourers into his harvest" (Mt 9.37,38). Therefore since all the best persons have been in the habit of satisfying this duty, with the Church giving them a lead, now, so that the number of candidates for

sacred orders may increase, we wish and desire first of all that there should be observed what is prescribed in the Code of canon law (can. 1353) in this way: “Let priests, especially parish priests, take it in hand that with particular care they keep those boys who show signs of an ecclesiastical vocation away from the world's contagions; let them shape them towards piety, imbue them with the first studies of literature, and nurture the germ of a divine vocation in them.”

And indeed, when they judge the time to be ripe, they will diligently hand their alumni over to some sacred Seminary, so that what the priests have begun may be duly completed in the alumni. But if poverty shall be a hindrance to the young men for this, and if the priests themselves cannot meet the costs, let them stir up the sentiments of good men to come to their aid, by setting before them both the sacred status of the matter and also its incredible usefulness. And at this point we cannot fail to ask all who love the Church to nurture and promote with all their zeal that “Work of ecclesiastical vocations”, which has been advantageously established for carefully assisting boys of good expectation, at home, and with parish priests, and within the confines of Seminaries. For what our predecessors Leo XIII and Pius X very often laid down is of the greatest concern to us and is to be carried through by every means – that the sacred Seminaries are not to be used other than for the purpose for which they were founded, that is, as they should be, for teaching those who attend to sacred things. Therefore not only should there be no room in them for boys or young men who display no inclination of the will towards the priesthood – for it is remarkable how mixing with these harms clerics – but also the exercises of piety, the *ratio studiorum*, and the very kind of regime, must have totally in view the preparation in a fitting way of the minds of the alumni for the performance of the divine task. This is to be the most sacred law of all Seminaries, with none excepted; and indeed, had this law been obeyed more religiously hitherto, there would not almost everywhere be so great a shortage of priests. For it is naturally the case that Seminaries which are not governed in the way their very nature requires do indeed keep their own name, but while in truth they can give much benefit to civil society, they yet give hardly any benefit, or none at all, to the sacred order.

Now it is not our intention to explain here how Seminaries should be established so that they be suitable for educating priests who are well versed in both piety and doctrine; apart from the fact that, our beloved Son, there are some things to which we especially wish all bishops of the sacred to attend diligently as matters of the greatest moment and gravity.

The first thing concerns fostering with every care and promoting the study of the Latin language in the literary schools of clerics; and gaining a grasp of this language, by knowing and using it, is important not merely for humanity and literature but also for religion. For the Church, since it contains all nations in its embrace, since it is going to endure until the consummation of the ages, and since it utterly excludes the common people from its governance, requires by its own nature a universal language, unchangeable, not that of the common people.

Since Latin is such a language, it was divinely foreseen that it should be something marvellously useful for the Church as teacher, and that it should also serve as a great bond of unity for Christ's more learned faithful; that is to say, by giving them not only something with which, whether they are separated in different locations or gathered into one place, they might easily compare the respective thoughts and insights of their minds, but also – and this is even more important – something with which they might understand more profoundly the things of mother Church, and might be united more closely with the head of the Church. It is clear that the clergy should, in advance of the rest, be very studious of the Latin

language for both these reasons, not to mention others; for we do not here run through the estimations by which this kind of speech is recommended, that it is compact, rich, rhythmic, full of majesty and dignity. And you might say with wonder that it was ready-made to serve the glory of the Roman Pontiff, to whom the very seat of Empire came as by a bequest.

But if, in any layman who is indeed imbued with literature, ignorance of the Latin language, which we can truly call the “catholic” language, indicates a certain sluggishness in his love towards the Church, how much more fitting it is that each and every cleric should be adequately practised and skilled in that language! It is certainly their task to defend Latinity with all the more steadfastness, since they are aware that it was with all the more violence that it was attacked by the adversaries of catholic wisdom who in the 16th century shattered the accord Europe had in the single doctrine of the Faith.

Therefore – and this is something guaranteed by canon law (Codex Iuris Canonici can. 1364) – in the schools of literature where the sacred order's expectations reach maturity, we wish the alumni to be instructed very exactly in the Latin language. We wish it also for this motive, in case, when they later approach the higher disciplines that must certainly be both handed on and received in Latin, it happens that through ignorance of the language they cannot achieve full understanding of the doctrines, let alone exercise themselves in those scholastic disciplines by which the talents of youths are sharpened for defending the truth.

Thus the occurrence we often grieve over will happen no longer: - our clerics and priests, when, through neglect of the copious volumes of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church in which the dogmas of the Faith are presented, being both set forth very lucidly and defended invincibly, they have not put enough effort into the study of Latin literature, seek for themselves a suitable supply of doctrine from more recent authors; among these one can virtually say not only is a clear kind of speech and an exact method of arrangement generally lacking, but so too is a faithful interpretation of the dogmas. So it was that Paul warned Timothy: “Hold the form of sound words... Keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding the profane novelties of words and oppositions of knowledge falsely so called; which some promising, have erred concerning the faith” (2 Tim 1.13, 1 Tim 6.20,21). These words, if it were ever otherwise, are in these times especially relevant, since all over the place so very many have become used to hawking various erroneous fallacies, masked under the name and pretence of science. But who could show up and refute these fallacies without thoroughly mastering the understanding of the dogmas of the Faith and the force of the words in which they are solemnly expressed, in short without being skilful in the very language the Church employs?

A second thing for which we require the singular vigilance of Bishops concerns the higher studies of the youthful cleric. What has been most providentially laid down about this matter in canon law (Codex Iuris Canonici, can. 1365 and 1366) ought universally to be observed religiously and inviolably, if the purpose really is to prepare an abundance of priests who are not unequal to the huge magnitude of the task. Therefore, when they have completed the curriculum of literature, let our alumni be most diligently engaged in the study of Philosophy for at least two years, so that they engage in a fitting preparation for sacred Theology. We understand the Philosophy to be “scholastic”, as it was energetically refined by the holy Fathers and by the Doctors of the School with a certain continuity of efforts, and as it was at length brought to the highest level of perfection by the exertion and genius of Thomas Aquinas. Indeed it was this philosophy that our illustrious predecessor Leo XIII did not hesitate to style “the bulwark of the Faith and the strong entrenchment of Religion” (Encyclical Letter “Aeterni Patris”). Certainly it is the

great glory of Leo himself to have restored Christian Philosophy by stirring up love of and devotion to the Angelic Doctor. And we even make this judgment: that, of everything which he most usefully did in his lengthy Pontificate for the Church and for civil society, this one thing was so much the chief, that if the others had not been there this alone would have been enough to commend the name of so great a Pontiff to immortality. So let masters of Philosophy have it as their especial care, in the handing on of this discipline to clerics, to follow not merely the reasoning or method but also the doctrine and principles of saint Thomas: and let them do this the more enthusiastically because they know that no Doctor of the Church is such a cause of terror and fear to “modernists” and other enemies of the catholic faith as is Aquinas.

But what we say concerning Philosophy must also be understood about the discipline of Theology. For, to use the words of Sixtus V: “Indeed the cognition and exercise of this so salutary knowledge which cascades from the most fertile sources of divine Literature, Supreme Pontiffs, Holy Fathers, and Councils, has always been capable of bringing the greatest assistance to the Church, whether for correctly and soundly understanding and interpreting the Scriptures themselves, whether for perusing and expounding the Fathers more securely and usefully, whether for detecting and rebutting various errors and heresies. But in these most recent days, when those dangerous times described by the Apostle have already arrived, and blasphemous proud men and seducers head in the direction of what is worse, as they err and they drive others into error, this (the cognition and exercise of this knowledge) is extremely necessary for soundly strengthening the dogmas of the catholic faith and for refuting heresies” (Bull “Triumphantis”, A.D. 1588 [“Triumphantis Ecclesiae”, concerning St Bonaventure, s.10 - *transl.*]).

For what brings it about that this kind of discipline has the vigour of science truly so called, and that in it – as our most lamented predecessor beautifully expressed it (Benedict XV, *Motu Proprio, De Romana Sancti Thomae Academia*, A.D. 1914) – “there should be as full an explanation and as invincible a defence of the truth divinely handed down as is permitted by human reasoning” – what brings this about is nothing other than Scholastic Philosophy, with Aquinas as leader and master, turned to the use of the sacred discipline itself. Hence “that conjoined and mutually entwined coherence of things and causes, that regularity and disposition like the marshalling of soldiers for battle, those clear definitions and distinctions, that firmness of arguments and the sharpest disputations by which light is distinguished from darkness and truth from falsehood, and the mendacities of heretics, enveloped with sleights and fallacies, are as if with a garment dragged away laid open and stripped bare” (Sixtus V, *loc. cit.*). It follows that the interests of the sacred youth are not well consulted by those who think that all instruction concerning Theology is to be pressed into the “positive method” as it is called, with the scholastic system neglected; and that even less do they satisfy their duty who practise the teaching of this doctrine in no other way than by working through the order and series of dogmas and heresies with learned disquisitions. For that “positive method” must indeed necessarily be joined to the scholastic one, while on its own it is not enough; since our (people) must be well equipped not merely for proving the truth of the Faith, but also for illustrating it and defending it. To review the dogmas of the Faith and the contrary errors chronologically is in fact the task of ecclesiastical history, rather than of Theology.

In the third place, with relevance to the studies of clerics, let him who with the consciousness of his duty controls them certainly not neglect Pastoral Theology (Codex Iuris Canonici, can 1365 s.3): instead, he will assign very much importance to this discipline, by which indeed the salvation of souls is most closely sought to be procured. Nor will he merely teach how divine matters are to be dealt with in a religious manner, but particularly how they are to be applied to men with ever greater fruit. And in this

he will very diligently take our times into account. For the progress of time has introduced many things into the *mores* of the Christian people, things that were unheard of in the times of our fathers; and of these things a priest today must be thoroughly aware, so that he may by the power of Jesus Christ find new remedies for new ills, and bring the salutary power of Religion into all the veins of human society.

Finally, our beloved Son, you should know that what is laid down in the Code of canon law is equally close to our heart: “If a diocesan Seminary (Codex Iuris Canonici, can. 1365 s.3) is unable to be established, or suitable instruction in an established Seminary is lacking, particularly in philosophical and theological disciplines, let the Bishop send the alumni to a foreign Seminary, unless an interdiocesan or regional Seminary shall have been established by apostolic authority” (can. 1354 s.3). And in this matter it is certainly to be hoped that the Bishops whose concern it is should value the providence of the Apostolic See, and should support it with willing spirits. For how many are there who, through a shortage of governors and teachers, or by lack of assets, or from some other cause, cannot take such care as is suitable of the education among themselves of young clerics, if they have any who are ripe for higher studies? Therefore, that they might be able to discharge the enormous duty of their task, this Apostolic See gave them help when appropriate, by founding several Seminaries especially for the convenience of individual regions throughout Italy, and when they were flourishing helped them with a noble quality of rulers and teachers. And from them priests should emerge learned in every good work and ready to devote their whole selves to the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

For our part we wish both to maintain the buildings in good repair and also, as far as it is in our power, to improve with every help that kind of institution, in which both the wisdom and equally the munificence of our predecessors Pius X and Benedict XV have been demonstrated. – But it is the fair and reasonable task also of the holy Bishops, who belong to a region for the sake of which a Seminary of this kind has been erected, that they should all dutifully provide for it. And we certainly ask them to do this not unwillingly, for not only does their common interest require it of them but so also does the reckoning of what is beneficial for them individually. For, once they have realized – as is the case – that each one’s own concern is what is here at issue, and that an interdiocesan or regional Seminary would be for each of their dioceses as good as a major Seminary in which they themselves would individually have the same rights and duties, they will surely never refuse anything that they realize they can confer for its benefit.

Our beloved Son, these are the things which we had to write to you concerning the instruction of clerics. Now it will be the task of this Urban Consilium over which you preside to see to it that both in the sacred Seminaries and in the Colleges of clerics, also in the great Lycea and in the “faculties” or orders of all the teachers who are subject to this same Consilium, that these things be brought diligently into effect everywhere. Therefore by our authority you are to make known these same things to everyone whom they concern. And at the prayer of the most blessed Virgin, Mother of him who is a “priest for ever”, we trust that by the grace of the merciful God the business will be successful, with great profit to the sacred order. Meanwhile we most lovingly impart to you, our beloved Son, the apostolic benediction as auspicious witness of divine gifts and of our particular benevolence.

Given at Rome at St Peter’s on the first day of August in the year 1922, the first year of our Pontificate.

Pope Pius XI

Trans: RPD