



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE PAUL VI
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 400th ANNIVERSARY
OF THE COUNCIL OF TRENT'S CALL
FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SEMINARIES**

Monday, 4 November 1963

The great rite we are celebrating speaks for itself. Its solemnity shows the importance of the reason which led Us to assign it this date - November 4, the feast of St. Charles Borromeo - and this seat, the Basilica of St. Peter, where the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council is taking place, and to entrust its celebration to the venerable Cardinal Pizzardo, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Seminaries and Universities.

With this extraordinary thanksgiving to God and with this great imploring of grace from God, we intend to commemorate worthily the fourth centenary of the institution of diocesan schools known as seminaries, for the training of pupils who are preparing to receive sacred ordination and to exercise worthily the priestly ministry.

It is known that this institution (of seminaries) was made by virtue of Canon XVIII of the 23rd session of the Council of Trent, dated July 15, 1563. The implementation of this decree immediately found zealous promoters, among the first of them St. Charles, who had just been made Archbishop of Milan, readily applied to his diocese and his province the decisions of the Tridentine Council.

Convinced as he was of the decisive importance of the institution of seminaries, he at once founded several. Undoubtedly he was the first to provide for the largest of his seminaries, set in the heart of the city, a monumental seat which is still regarded as one of the classic buildings of the sumptuous Milanese Renaissance, and which is about to reopen after restoration, and resume its centuries-old and providential function.

My Lord Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński will speak on the historic origin and ecclesiastic significance of the institution of seminaries this afternoon, in this very same basilica which is now being used as a council hall. We are grateful to him for adding to the interest of such a theme the prestige of his experience and of his dignity.

How great the esteem which we must all give to the seminary and what reward that educators and especially students will draw from this centennial commemoration, will be mentioned in an apostolic letter, addressed to all the bishops of the Church, the publication of which is imminent. It opens with the words "Summi Dei Verbum" and has been drawn up with the expert collaboration of the Congregation of Seminaries and of Universities.

To this pondered and ample document, as is required by the gravity of the theme which is the first of this form and importance of Our pontificate, We have entrusted many, though not all, the matters which We thought We should mention on such a propitious occasion regarding such a vast and important subject.

Therefore, it is not necessary that We dwell on this at length during this ceremony. That apostolic letter of Ours will express to you Our thoughts and Our wishes. But We would not wish to miss saying a word to these most beloved seminarians whom We see here taking part in the sacred rite, and whom We now want to embrace with all Our fatherly affection, regarding them almost as the representatives of their co-disciples, of all the seminarians in the Church of God.

To you We open Our lips and We shall say to you, beloved students of Our seminaries, along with St. Paul: "Our heart is wide open to you."(1)

We regard you as the most authentic and generous representatives of youth, which among the supreme choices that must needs be made in the first lucid clear-sightedness of life and in the first revelation of true love, has discovered the best, the one choice above all others. Do you remember "...the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field; a man who finds it hides it, and in his joy goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."(2)

We speak of that youth which has discerned among all the gifts which life offers and of which youth is avid, that one gift that is worth all the others. Do you remember "...Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls. When he finds a single pearl of great price, he goes and sells all that he has and buys it."(3)

We speak of that youth which has distinguished one voice, among all those surrounding it and bewildering or enchanting it, a voice with a singular, mysterious but unmistakable tone, grave and gentle, mild and powerful, a soft and secret voice, sounding inside, as if tormenting, in the secret place of the conscience, and outside, as if pacifying, in the trust of serene and authoritative advice, of a call which, interpreting that inner life, says that it is divine and that it is indeed addressed to

youth, who is not afraid of big things but fears, rather, evil and mediocre things. It is a voice which is at one and the same time an exhortation and a command, a voice as simple as a sigh and as profound as a drama, the voice of Christ, which again today, and today more than ever, says: "Come, follow me."(4)

You young people who are listening to us, did you hear that voice: "Come, follow me"? It goes on: "I am the light of the world. He who follows me does not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."(5)

You well know what this dialogue is called. It is a vocation, and each one of you guards it in his heart as the secret of his life, the direction of his future, the strength of his action: "Come, follow me."

Let Us here today, precisely as the Vicar of Christ, who first addressed (these words) to the Disciples who were to become His Apostles, repeat them to you, to your comrades and to any other young persons, of the present or of the future, who have the grace and the courage to listen to them: "Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."(6)

This is tantamount to saying: the work of redemption is not accomplished in the world and in time without the ministry of dedicated men—men who, through an oblation of total human charity, implement the plan of salvation and of infinite divine charity.

Had God willed it, this divine charity could have spread itself and performed salvation directly. But the design is a different one. God will save men in Christ through a service rendered by men. God did not give the world only a revelation and a religion. He gave a Church, an organized society, a flexible community, in which brothers work for the salvation of other brothers.

He set up a hierarchy; He instituted a priesthood. Where the priesthood of Christ reaches, there reaches the message and the virtue of Christ's salvation. The Lord willed that the spreading of the Gospel should depend on the number and the zeal of the workers of the Gospel.

This is why the call to the service of the Gospel is of incalculable importance. It concerns the drama of the salvation of the world. The gift of a vocation is a secret of God, but let it not be cowardice, sloth, pusillanimity, deafness, or impurity—beloved sons—that deprive it of youthful souls whom the thought of God would have made pure and strong for the ministry of His Kingdom.

Blessed be you, sons, who know these truths and convert them into daring and humble experience. Blessed be you, who know what the attraction of the ecclesiastic vocation can be today. It is certainly not dynastic custom, nor the liking for a peaceful living in a good benefice, nor yet the prospect of clerical honors, nor the will of others replacing or prevailing over that of the candidate, and not even pessimistic disgust for an unbearable world, nor the disappointment of

dashed hopes which trace the path that leads you to the seminary.

It is not even the more noble aspects of culture and art, which in themselves can harmonize, in a subordinate way, with the authentic attractions which today lead a young man to become a priest. The authentic attractions which make you students of the seminary are paradoxical ones of the follower of Christ, who said: "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."(7)

Vocation today means renunciation. It means unpopularity, it means sacrifice. It means preferring the inner to the external life, it means choosing an austere and constant perfection instead of comfortable and insignificant mediocrity. It means the capacity to heed the imploring voices of the world of innocent souls, of those who suffer, who have no peace, no comfort, no guidance, no love; and to still the flattering, soft voices of pleasure and selfishness. It means to understand the hard but stupendous mission of the Church, now more than ever engaged in teaching man his true nature, his end, his fate and in revealing to faithful souls the immense, the ineffable riches of the charity of Christ.

It means, young men, to be young, to have a clear eye and a big heart. It means accepting the imitation of Christ as a program for life, His heroism, His sanctity, His mission of goodness and salvation. No other prospect of life offers an ideal more true, more generous, more human, more holy than the humble and faithful vocation to the priesthood of Christ.

This is not emphasis, beloved sons. It is not rhetoric. And above all, it is not suggestion or a lie that gives the Church the daring to speak thus. It is the knowledge that the Church has of your hearts, of the graces that the Lord has let flow into your souls. It is the esteem that she feels for you. It is the hope that she places in your youth and in your generous dreams.

And perhaps, sons, the Church would not dare to express, regarding you, such high and difficult prospects if she did not have the practical possibility of being near you in announcing them, to help you in heeding them and following them. Had the Church not developed her art as a teacher of souls, and did she lack the place and instruments for exercising it, she could not speak to you with such frankness.

But today, the Church has made herself capable and will be even more so in the future, of exercising her sublime mission as the educator of future priests, because the Church has instituted her seminaries for this purpose. The seminary is the school of inner silence, in which speaks the mysterious voice of God. It is the training unit for training in the difficult virtues. It is the house where Christ, the Master, lives.

Do you remember the two disciples of John, on hearing that he said of Jesus, who was passing on the bank of the Jordan: "Behold the Lamb of God!?" They followed Jesus, who "turned round, and

seeing them following Him, said to them, 'What is it you seek?' They said to Him, 'Rabbi, (which interpreted means Master) where dwellest thou?' He said to them, 'Come and see'."(8)

If ever, young men, the same question should rise from the uncertain and stirred up depths of your souls, who feel that Jesus is the only Savior and the One whom you are seeking and who is seeking you, and there should come to your lips (the question): "Master, where dwellest thou? Where can we meet you, unite with you and then take over your same mission?" Remember that through the Church, through your bishops, your superiors, your teachers, the answer is always the same: "Come and see." And the blessed door of the seminary will open before you. Amen.

NOTES

1. 2 Cor. 6, 11.
2. Matt. 13, 44.
3. Matt. 13, 45.
4. Matt. 19, 21.
5. John 8, 12.
6. Mark 1, 17.
7. Mark 8, 34.
8. John 1, 38-39.