

The Education and Formation of Clergy

David Motiuk

Abstract

(Українське резюме на ст. 261)

Fr. David Motiuk provides a clear and well-documented framework for a reexamination of priestly formation programmes in the Eastern Catholic Churches. The author first gives reference to primary sources for priestly formation: conciliar and post-conciliar documents, as well as those specific to the Eastern canonical tradition. Using Title X, Chapter 1 of the Eastern Code on “the Formation of Clerics” as an organizational scheme, the author formulates a whole range of general principles and applies them to the particular circumstances of clerical formation in the “diaspora.” Recognizing the “right and obligation” of a Church *sui iuris* to train clerics and other ministers, the author emphasizes the need to “foster” vocations, to develop appropriate programmes of priestly formation, and, especially, to establish institutions where a vocation is “more fully cultivated, proven and confirmed.” Seminaries are to have established statutes and directories, be provided with all necessary resources: financial support, formational and administrative staff. Clear admission guidelines should be established and followed. Specific programmes may need to be established for “late vocations” and for deacons not destined for the priesthood. In some cases a propaedeutic period may be warranted. All areas of priestly formation should be adequately addressed: human, spiritual, academic and pastoral. Provisions should be made for discernment in the area of celibacy and marriage. Theological formation should, as much as possible, reflect the unique heritage of the East. Pastoral formation programmes should be adapted to the needs of place and time, the aptitude of the individual candidate and the needs of the candidate’s particular ministry. Seminarians are to be instructed in the obligations of clerics so that the challenges of clerical life may be

undertaken freely for the common good. In conclusion, the author emphasizes the importance of the education and formation of candidates for sacred orders as a necessary component for reform and renewal in the Eastern Catholic Churches, both in those areas where they are historically present, as well as in territories where their witness can complement the Western tradition in a fruitful and valuable manner.



Introduction

As part of Pope John Paul II's call for reform and renewal in Eastern Catholic Churches, the Apostolic See of Rome has recently expressed increasing interest in the education and formation of Eastern clergy. The following presentation examines some of the reasons behind the current concern for priestly formation. The study then looks at the various source documents of the Church which provide norms on priestly formation, namely, the conciliar and post-conciliar decrees; the *fontes* of the canons of the Eastern Code on formation; the post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Pastores dabo vobis*; and the "Sacred Canons" of the East. A significant portion of the work treats specific formation issues: the right of the Church to train clerics, fostering vocations, programmes of priestly formation, minor and major seminaries, admission to seminaries, specific areas of priestly formation, formation of deacons not destined for the priesthood, clerical obligations, and annual reports and visitations.

The material of the presentation is organized according to Title X, Chapter I, of the Eastern Code on "The Formation of Clerics." The pertinent canons are reproduced in an appendix to the document for easy reference together with their counterparts of the Latin Code for comparison.

1. Why the Concern for Priestly Formation Now?

1.1 In Europe

On the eve of a historic meeting of bishops and religious superiors of the Eastern Catholic Churches in Europe held in

Nyíregyháza, in the Eparchy of Hajdúdorog, Hungary, from June 30–July 6, 1997 – the first time for the Eastern Churches in Europe to meet since the great persecution – the Roman Pontiff drew attention to the difficult situation in which these Churches find themselves due in part to a lack of priests:

Deprived for decades of their clergy, often imprisoned or at any rate subject to wearisome surveillance and constantly restricted pastoral action, today these Churches... face the arduous task of emerging from the catacombs to respond to the needs of the faithful, released at last from the bond of oppression but troubled by new illusions and subjected to new challenges.¹

To aid in the rebuilding of the Eastern Churches in Europe the Congregation for the Eastern Churches organized two formation courses for Eastern clergy in July, 1998. The first was offered for priests of the Greek Catholic Eparchies of Romania in Cluj.² The second was a renewal course for rectors, superiors and spiritual directors of the Eastern seminaries in Europe – in particular, of Ukraine, Romania, Slovakia and Rome – held in Nyíregyháza, Hungary.³ The report on these seminars underlines the intention of the Congregation in convoking the gatherings:

These initiatives are essential, since the persecution of the churches, which ended with the collapse of the communist regimes at the end of the 1980s, prevented the systematic formation of the clergy in these countries.

¹ Letter to Cardinal Achille Silvestrini, Prefect of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches, June 28, 1997, in *L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English* 31:26 (July 1, 1998): 2.

² This undertaking was co-organized by the Greek Catholic Bishops of Romania and is the third such course in as many years.

³ The course was intended to carry out what had been decided by the Eastern Catholic Bishops of Europe at their meeting in Hungary in 1997. The final report of this episcopal gathering stressed that “formation at every level should be recognized by all as a priority in the Church’s life.”