

Whither Seminaries and Scholasticates?¹

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In all the major dioceses of India, there is a seminary for the training of candidates to priesthood ; in Poona, there is the 'Papal Seminary' where the brighter youths from all dioceses are sent to acquire a 'Pontifical Degree' in philosophy and theology ; most religious orders and congregations have their own scholasticates where the younger religious are taught the sacred sciences ; some of them make it a point that their philosophates and theologates should be habilitated to confer bachelor and licentiate degrees ; in this matter, Jesuits yield to no one : they consider their ability to turn out good 'graduates in sacred sciences' as an essential part of the eminent service they should render the Church.

There is something analogous among Protestants and Anglicans. In many centres, we find theological schools and colleges—such as Bishop's College, Calcutta, Serampore College, Union Theological School, Barisha, United Theological College, Bangalore—for the training of aspirants to priesthood and ministership. Some of these institutions are qualified to teach up to B.D. and M.Th. level.

The Problem

In many places there takes place a phenomenon which is called 'vocation crisis'. This phenomenon is ascribed by many to a diminution of faith and generosity among the younger generation. This is, I think, an oversimplification. The vocation crisis

¹ This article was first meant as the putting together of a few considerations about the shifting of the Jesuit Theologate (St. Mary's College) from Kurseong to Delhi. The dynamics of this thinking forced us to broaden our effort into a study of the whole problem of the training of seminarians and 'scholastics' in India in the context of the Church of today and finally into a reflection having a truly oecumenical dimension. Our essay bears the mark of our original intention ; yet we think that the problem is treated in it in a way which really interests all Christian Churches. This impels us to publish it in this oecumenical-minded *Journal*. We bring it out with the permission of the Jesuit Provincial. We thank Fr. Fallon and Fr. Detienne whose helpful criticisms and suggestions have helped us to improve our text.

is closely linked to the whole storm which shakes the Church today, which forces her to question herself, to question her ways and her institutions, to question her teaching. The Church will weather this storm not by clinging desperately to the structures of a by-gone era, but by renewing herself and directing herself in an enlightened and creative way towards the future. At the present stage, it is already clear that nothing in her will ever more be exactly *like before*: such notions as authority, as obedience, as priestly existence, as vocation, etc., will never again mean exactly what they meant in the past. A new Church is coming into being, a Church which does not suffer that anything in her should be a substitute for the Gospel, a Church, therefore, truer to Christ and truer to herself. In this context, the vocation crisis must be seen as a part of the whole operation by which the Church tries to realize better what she is as a 'royal priesthood' (1 Pet. 2:9). Those who entertain the hope that, once the storm is over, the number of 'vocations' (the word being taken in the traditional, rather superficial, sense) will go up betray their inability to grasp what is really taking place in the Church.

In many countries, seminaries and scholasticates have been closed or are being closed. New ways of forming the aspirants to priesthood are being tried—most of them being avowedly transitory solutions. The whole context which we have just tried to sketch out indicates that, if these developments are indeed related to the 'vocation crisis', they are—more fundamentally—motivated by the fact that the Church as a whole is coming to an awareness of herself which renders the traditional institutions and methods obsolete.

All these developments concern the Indian Church in a very intimate manner. The Indian Church is part and parcel of the universal Church; she must, with the universal Church, move into the new era.

The vocation crisis is not yet felt in India. This fact does not necessarily indicate that the system in vigour for the training of seminarians and young religious must be kept unchanged and that, 'according to the needs', new seminaries and scholasticates of the traditional type should be erected. Those who, in the present set-up, are responsible for the intellectual and religious training of the young clergy, have a duty to take stock of the developments taking place in the Church; they should endeavour to understand the deeper motivation of these developments, study the way in which, and the extent to which, they concern the Indian Church; they should desist from all undertakings whose only aim is to keep alive antiquated structures; they should with boldness and far-sightedness, but in a gradual manner, steer the Indian Church into the new era. Much has already been done in recent years in India, as well among Catholics as among Anglicans and Protestants, for the reform of the training to the Sacred Ministry. There is a considerable work of rethinking and reforming going on.

In this article, we shall show that, at the heart of the upheaval taking place in the Church today, there is a new discovery of the reality of man and of the reality of faith. We shall indicate that this discovery leads to a new understanding of priestly existence and, therefore, in the way in which priests should be formed. We shall try to visualize what this new understanding means in the terms of the Calcutta situation and to perceive the direction in which, in Bengal, we should go together.

The Traditional Outlook

What is man? What is faith?

Our conception of what should be the intellectual and religious training of aspirants to priesthood and our understanding of what should be the set-up of a seminary or scholasticate depend very much on the answer we give to these two questions. Let us first examine the traditional answers and the way in which these answers determine the whole system of ecclesiastical studies.²

According to the scholastic conception, man is first of all a *subject*, that is a *principium cognoscitivum* or a *principium intellectivum*: the 'external reality' is first of all object, that is a collection of *cognoscibilia* or *intelligibilia*; the relation between man and the world, in so far as it is determined by man's essence, is primarily a relation of knowledge; the human act *par excellence* is the act of knowledge by which man creates a quasi-identity between himself and the world. This act can be studied in itself and for itself. In its integrity, it is judgement, affirmation: the act in which truth—*adequatio intellectus ad rem*—resides. Let us note here the tendency of scholastics to deduce the subject-object relation to the speech process.

Intellect and will are two different faculties eliciting two different acts. There is, however, a close relationship between both. Scholastics emphasize this fact. The will has a role to play in moving the intellect not only in the assent of faith, or in those cases where the intellect has to commit itself even though there is a lack of 'objective evidence', but, in a general way, in every judgement. There is a mutual involvement of intellect and will. However, it is the intellect which is the 'form' of man, his 'essential principle': in so far as man is a subject, the will is *the dynamism of a being who is essentially a power of knowing, who realizes himself through the act of knowledge*. Reality offers itself to man as *something to be known*. The end of man consists

² This study will be more a study of the principles on which the traditional answers are based and of the main implications of these principles than a study of the position of this or that particular theologian. We realize that many a scholastic theologian would take exception to the picture we draw of the 'scholastic position' and would consider it a caricature. Yet the trend is there, all-pervading. It is necessary to isolate it in order to bring out the newness of the awareness which the Church gains of herself and to show the direction in which she moves.

essentially in a state of knowledge: God himself becomes the *object* of man's intellectual contemplation. In this act of contemplating God, man, the knowing subject, reaches his perfection.

The scholastic conception of faith is based on these anthropological data. As an objective reality, faith is essentially something which concerns the intellect. It is God himself *as truth*; it is the divine truth as *contained* in a deposit entrusted to the Church; it is *a doctrine—a language*—to be accepted and *to be known*. As a subjective reality, faith is the act by which man, the knowing subject, adheres to the revealed doctrine, by which he acknowledges the divine truth as contained in this doctrine.

The assent of faith is free. This means that, in the act of faith, the intellect is moved by the will; it means also that good dispositions, an attitude of openness and submission are necessary to lead man to faith.

In his book, *La foi et la théologie*,³ Y. Congar describes faith as an 'extremely rich totality'. It includes both a 'noetic aspect' and a 'dynamic aspect'. As knowledge, faith develops on the plane of Church orthodoxy, the plane of collective reality, objectifiable and communicable; as existential commitment, it concerns 'personal life'. Congar insists that these two aspects cannot be dissociated: the Biblical *gnosis* is for man a rule of life as well as a perception of truth; the disciple of Christ is a man who, through trustful communion with his Master, aims at a formation of his whole personality, ideas and behaviours (p. 91). Notwithstanding, the noetic aspect of faith can be studied in itself and for itself (p. 73).

Theology is 'a science by which reason, taking from faith its certitude and its light, endeavours through reflection to understand what it believes, that is to say the revealed mysteries with their consequences' (p. 127). Faith, in its two aspects, is the soul of theology. Theology is both a science and a wisdom. As a science, it is a rational building up of the revealed data through which some truths appear as related to other truths as to their principles (p. 131). As wisdom, it is knowledge through the highest cause, through the principle of the order of history and of the world (p. 188).

As can be seen, the study of theology, though based on faith—a commitment of the whole man—is considered as being essentially an intellectual pursuit, an activity of reason taking place in the realm of principles. On the one hand, there is a certain body of 'supernatural truths'—a certain discourse—called Revelation; on the other hand, there is a body of 'natural truths'—another discourse—called Philosophy. The object of theology is, in some way, to combine these two discourses into one.

As houses of theological studies, seminaries and scholasticates are first of all places where aspirants to priesthood should deepen and strengthen their faith. This deepening and strengthening

³ Collection, *Théologie Dogmatique*, Desclée, 1962.

are ordered towards the perfecting of their knowledge and understanding of the revealed truth (as proposed by the Church). Through this perfecting, they acquire wisdom and, thus, prepare themselves to become teachers of truth, men who are able to make other people adhere to the true doctrine, that is embrace the true faith, become members of the true Church.

There is no special need that seminarians and 'scholastics' should be in close contact with the world, that they should keep in touch with people. The study of theology will make them know things 'through the highest cause, through the principle of the order of history and of the world'. As men of wisdom, they will be able to face any situation, to solve any human problem. Deserted areas seem to be the most convenient places for the building of seminaries and scholasticates.

*Existential Anthropology*⁴

The central discovery of contemporary philosophical anthropology is that there is a living unity between man and the world which is more fundamental than the distinction subject-object. In its fundamental reality, the world which I perceive 'around me' is not an objective world distinct from me; it is essentially the world-which-I-live, my world, a *milieu* constituted by that totality which I call my life, my existence, my subjectivity.

As a subjectivity, I am not a 'subject', I am a world unfolding, building itself from a definite centre. I am a life-act which, in its centre, is act-body, which, in its totality, is act-world. This life-act is a self-transcending existence: directing itself towards its supreme fulfilment. In its integrity, this existence is a self-transparent act-volition, that is freedom-personal-act.

As freedom, my personal-act is a self-determining existential endeavour. My essence is my personal-act considered in so far as it is *determined by itself*: by its unfolding, by the totality of the *milieu* it constitutes as its self-expression. Therefore, my essence is the specification of my existence. In its integrity, it is the *self-determinedness* of my act, it is *freedom*.

My personal-act is a continually self-surpassing endeavour—*as such*, it is really freedom. My personal-act projects itself continually ahead of itself—of itself already specified, of itself existing in the form of a constituted world; it tends towards the fullness of itself. My essence fully realized is not something past (something which precedes me, which is prior to my existence), it is not even something present, it is the fullness of my future, the end towards which I tend.

My act-world is not the whole world. There is a world which is transcendent to me. This world is not a 'material world'

⁴ We have developed this anthropology in our book, *The World of Persons*, Burns and Oates, London, 1967. A French revised edition, *L'univers des personnes*, has been published in the Collection, *Museum Lessianum*, by Desclée de Brouwer, Bruges, in 1969.

existing *in itself* in an independent way, it is a plurality of act-worlds—of personal acts distinct from each other, though ontologically related to one another, interpenetrating.

These acts-worlds distinct from me constitute the whole human world. Through each modality of my expressive *milieu* (of my body, of my world), in each aspect of my existence—in my very freedom—I am given to myself as a relation to, a participation in other human subjectivities, as a relation to, a participation in the whole human world. Each modality of my incarnate being, while it is fundamentally and inalienably a manner in which my personal-act expresses itself, determines itself, is also a manner in which it communicates itself to the other personal-acts (in which it goes to them and loses itself in them), in which it receives itself from them (in which it is generated by them, in which it discovers and enriches itself *through their mediation*).

My personal being can never be *identified with* my relation to the other subjectivities. I do not receive from them the *totality* of myself. No doubt, in my very freedom, I depend on them, I am ontologically related to them; however, to the extent that I reduce myself purely and simply to my relation to the others, to the extent that I let myself be possessed by them, I alienate my freedom, I negate myself.

However, in my freedom—at that existential summit where I can say ‘I’ in the truest, the most inalienable manner—I do not experience myself as the source of my being. In my freedom, I experience myself as given to myself, as *created*. Therefore, my personal-act-world exists in its totality as a relation to, a participation in, an Act which is absolutely transcendent to the world of persons. This Act is the Transcendent Principle—the *Alpha*—of my existence; he is the Transcendent End—the *Omega*—of my existence; he is the Transcendent *Milieu* of my existence—Fullness of Presence.

Knowledge, Intellect and Will

Things offer themselves to me not primarily as ‘objective realities’ to be known ‘in themselves’ but as modalities of my existence, as concretions of my personal life, as manners in which I communicate myself to, receive myself from, the other human persons. My knowledge of things is not a self-consistent act which can be studied in itself and for itself; it is the self-transparency of the operation by which my life-act—my personal-act—constitutes things as expressions of its self-actuating, self-transcending endeavour; it is the self-transparency of the manner in which, through the various modalities of its existential field, it communicates itself to and receives itself from the other personal-acts-worlds—while tending towards its end. There is truth in my knowledge of things—in my judgements, in my speech—to the extent to which my personal-act, while constituting things as expressions of itself, actuates itself in an authentic manner, that is to

say, in conformity with the Divine Will, with the End for which it is created. As *adequatio intellectus ad rem*, truth is not primarily something which is found in the judgement—in speech—, it is something *which is done in daily life, in existence*. We see in this the concrete way in which freedom is implied in every judgement, in every knowledge.

Intellect and will cannot be conceived as two different 'faculties' exercising two different quasi-independent activities. My will is the transcendent-self-determined-dynamism of my act-world; it is my life-act as actuating itself into an act-volition, into a personal appetite of its end. The intellect is the power which my personal-act-world has of illuminating itself in its expressive centre—in other words, the power which my personal-act has, in tending towards its end, of making itself more and more self-transparent. My intellect—understood in this way—guides my will, enables it to actuate itself in an 'intelligent' manner, but it does not exist outside my will: it is *constituted* by the self-transcending movement of my act-volition. It is in the whole operation by which, while involving myself in the concrete human reality—in the present—, I tend towards my fulfilment—towards the future, towards the fulfilment of all—, that my self-knowledge—my 'intelligence'—exists in its actuality and authenticity. This operation is not the act of a being who is essentially a power of knowing; it is the self-actuating of an existence which is both act-life and act-world. The fulfilment towards which I tend is not a state of pure knowledge; it is my personal realization as act-world in the community of persons, in union with the Transcendent Principle and the Transcendent End of my existence.

Faith

In Christ, the Transcendent End of my existence offers itself to me in a perceptible, tangible way. Faith is the act by which I surrender myself to Christ who comes to me in the present, in the situation in which I find myself, through those among whom I live. Christ presents himself to me not as a truth to be known, as a doctrine to be accepted, but as somebody whom I must realize in myself through my commitment to the present in view of the future—in view of the Kingdom.

In every aspect of its existence—in its existence as freedom—, my act-world is given to itself as a relation to, a participation in, all the other acts-worlds which form the human world. I am *generated* in my own being by the living community of which I am a member. As a believer, I am *generated* in my faith—in the totality of my self-commitment to Christ in the present—by the community of believers, by the whole human community. It is the self-commitment of all the believers which constitutes them as God's people; it is my self-commitment within the community of believers which constitutes me as a member of God's people.

As knowledge, faith is never a self-consistent act which can be exercised, studied, understood in itself and for itself. As a Church reality, it is the self-understanding which the community of believers reaches *in the act by which in the present it commits itself to the service of men in Christ, by which it surrenders itself to Christ through its involvement in the community of men in view of the Kingdom*. As a personal reality, it is the self-understanding which I—an individual believer—reach *in the act by which, in the present, I commit myself in the community of believers to the service of men in Christ, by which I surrender myself to Christ through the service of men in the community of believers in view of the Kingdom*. The self-commitment of the whole person in answer to the concrete call of Christ is, therefore, the *act* of the knowledge of faith. *Outside this act*, there cannot be any genuine faith, any genuine understanding of the mystery of Christ, any true doctrine, any truth, any Gospel, any Revelation; outside this act, there are only *empty words*—formalism, legalism and pharisaism. We are here at the very heart of the scriptural message.

The object of the knowledge of faith is never an 'objective truth' which offers itself ready-made in an 'objective world'; it is never a well-defined *doctrine* containing the divine truth in a perfectly satisfactory and definitive way; it is never a collection of dogmatic statements which have in themselves and by themselves, for every man and for all times, an absolute truth. The knowledge of faith is not something above history and outside existence, a knowledge of eternal essences, a platonic wisdom (it is urgent that Christian thinking and living should sever its link with Greek philosophy). The understanding which the Church acquires through faith is not an understanding of God in himself, of Christ in himself (as 'objects'); it is an understanding of God, of Christ *in herself*—that is of herself as related to the transcendent God, to the transcendent Christ, of herself as realizing *in herself* the mystery of Christ. She acquires this understanding not through an 'assent of the mind to the revealed doctrine', but through the act by which she makes herself into a living epiphany of the transcendent mystery, by which she makes herself Gospel, by which she does the truth ('The man who does the truth comes out into the light so that it may be plainly seen that what he does is done for God' John 3:21)—that is, through her involvement in the world, her service of men, in view of the Kingdom: her existential faith, her living hope, her active charity. In this perspective, the knowledge of faith is never something which is acquired once for all; it is something which must continually be reacquired, actualized, perfected. Through her involvement in the world, the Church must make her own the experience of men, their language; she must let herself be modelled by her time, generated by the living humanity of which she is part and parcel; she must let the existence, the daily life, the language of men become in her Gospel, epiphany of the Christ mystery. Through this concrete surrender of herself, she becomes truly the light of the world, she preaches

the Gospel, she leads men towards the Kingdom. Without this surrender, she reduces herself to a lifeless doctrine, to a static system, to a code of rubrics, to a canon law which are for men stumbling-blocks rather than the good news of their salvation, rather than a hope illuminating their daily struggles and their daily sufferings—she, thereby, betrays Christ and the Gospel.

This does not mean that the believers must reject the whole 'teaching of the Church', the whole 'ecclesiastical set-up'. To the extent that, in the past, the community of believers has expressed and organized itself *in the act by which it made itself true to Christ*, it has expressed and organized itself *in truth*. The past teaching and organization of the Church have a meaning for today in so far as the present is really the realization of the past. By rejecting purely and simply her past teaching, the whole of her institutions and structures, the Church would reject Christ himself. However, the Church cannot preach Christ simply by repeating her past sayings and keeping alive her whole 'traditional' set-up; she proclaims the truth in the act by which, committing herself to Christ in the present, involving herself in the world of today in order to build it in Christ, she actualizes the *truth* of the past—she *does the truth*—and, thereby, 'comes out into the light'. This implies that she should often forgo the letter of her past teaching in order to bring out its truth, that she should continually question her organization in order to see whether she *really*, in the present, makes herself for all instrument and sacrament of salvation, that she should continually, through her involvement in the world in view of the Kingdom, revitalize her self-understanding, that she should continually renew and reform herself—*Ecclesia semper reformanda*.

Faith and Theology

Although Congar stresses the fact that faith is a commitment of the whole man, his views about theology as a science and as a wisdom are still very much influenced by Greek intellectualism, in particular by Aristotelianism. It is not enough to assert that faith is an extremely rich totality comprising a noetic aspect and a dynamic aspect; we must understand what faith really is as personal-act, what the noetic aspect is *within this act*. The 'noetic aspect' can in no way be considered independently of the 'dynamic aspect'. Far from being a mere *element* or *aspect* of the life of faith, personal commitment is the whole of that life. It is only *within* that commitment that there can be an authentic knowledge of faith. Therefore, as intelligence, faith is not something impersonal; it is not an adhesion to a system of objective truths, of concepts; it is not mere language. *To the extent that it is true*, it is a personal reality rooted in that which constitutes the very being of the believer: his existential faith, his freedom. It is personal commitment which gives to the language of faith its meaning, its truth. Separated from its intrinsic relation to the life

of faith, this language loses its substance, it becomes a mere conceptual discourse which no longer *means* anything. Concretely, faith as intelligence *is identical* with existential faith, it is the luminousness of this faith: the luminous presence of the personal-act to itself in the operation by which, in the present, it adheres to its End, by which it actuates itself as a relation to, a participation in the transcendent mystery.

The opposition which Congar introduces between the 'ecclesial' character of faith as knowledge and the 'personal' character of faith as commitment cannot be accepted. The fact that the knowledge of faith is really *constituted* by existential faith shows us that the existence of the Church as the level of language is founded upon its existence at the level of personal commitment. Fundamentally, it is the interpenetration of the various acts-worlds which creates the community fact, it is the communion of all believers at the level of existential faith which creates the Church fact (while being *my* act, the commitment of my faith is the act-in-me of the living community of which I am a member). Therefore we shall not identify the 'communicable' with the notional, the 'objectifiable'; we shall acknowledge that all authentic communication is an exchange taking place at all the levels of existence (human language is true, it creates community bonds to the extent that it adheres to life, that it expresses it). To place the Church reality at the level of 'pure' language, at the level of a faith which, as knowledge, would be essentially an assent to 'objective truths', is to make of the Church a system where, in the last analysis, persons do not count, it is, therefore, to deny the Church as a community of persons. Far from being a collectivity bound together by the exchange of ready-made truths (a collectivity based upon uniformity in language), the authentic Church is the place where, in concrete existence, in the communion of hearts, in the service of men, truth *is done*. It is as such that she is also the place where truth is said, the place of true language.

This fact shows us what must be in the Church theological work.

As pointed out, Congar conceives theology as a discipline which, as a Church task, builds itself essentially at the level of knowledge, that is to say at the level of the objectification of the revealed truth, at the level of language. This position is that of scholasticism: theology is a science, a work of the discursive intellect, a systematization of the 'revealed doctrine' with the help of abstract principles. No doubt, it is also wisdom, but, as such, it remains essentially knowledge: 'knowledge through the highest cause, through the very principle of history and of the world.'

This conception, influenced by Greek thought, leads to a deformation of the Gospel message. Theology tends to be satisfied with itself; it abstracts itself from history; it builds itself into a static system which can be studied outside any definite human context, outside any concrete commitment. Candidates to priesthood are separated from their natural environment, deprived of

the possibility of acquiring a personal experience of the human problems of their time, 'trained' in an artificial ambiance, away from the anxieties which form the warp and woof of man's daily existence, sometimes in material conditions far above those in which the great majority of their compatriots, of their fellow believers live, in a language and cultural tradition foreign to that of the people among whom they will have to live and work. At the end of such training, they have assimilated the 'sacred language', but they have unlearned the language of men; they have acquired 'wisdom', 'adhered with the intellect to the whole doctrine', but they have still to learn how to believe. Many are the priests who today suffer deeply from the state of alienation in which the training they have received has plunged them.

The root of the evil is that, under the influence of Aristotelianism, the knowledge of faith has been conceived as a whole locked up in itself, a whole developing in itself and for itself. Therefore, the root of the evil is the divorce between the knowledge of faith and the commitment of faith, the priority given to the former over the latter (priority expressed in the teaching of the textbooks and catechisms, in the formulation of the 'acts of faith', in the current conception of the 'true Church of Christ' and of the 'true faith', in the set-up of seminaries and the organization of theological research, etc.). The remedy does not consist in a rejection of intelligence, in a diminution of the theological effort, but in a conversion bringing about a true intelligence of the mystery of Christ, an enlightened theological effort. In conformity with the Biblical message and the data of our integral experience, we must accept the radical primacy of existential faith. It is only on the basis of a lived faith—of a concrete involvement in the human community in view of the Kingdom—that there can be an authentic theological reflection. A study of the revealed truth cut from life, aiming at a purely scientific understanding of its 'objective', is both a perversion and an illusion: it deforms the message which it pretends to light up and, thereby, makes itself unable to express its truth. Can those young men who, for years, have been separated from the living community, who have 'studied theology' in an artificial ambiance, who, at the end of their 'training', hardly know the language of the people among whom they have to live and to whom they must address themselves, validly consider themselves as the priests of that people, can they say that they have really understood the message they must transmit to it? The mystery of Christ reveals itself to each one as the truth of his own existence, it incarnates itself for each community in that which forms the very life of that community. It is only through self-identification to those we want to serve, through the sharing of their existence, that we can attain an authentic understanding of that which the mystery of Christ means to them. A theological study carried out in the abstract can only lead to a self-alienation.

However, through being rooted in a concrete involvement, theological study must not enclose itself within narrow limits.

The existential faith of each believer is essentially a relation to and a participation in the faith of the whole people of God. The effort which each one makes to insert himself in the human environment in which he lives must in some way equate itself to the effort which the whole Church makes to open herself to the world and to serve the world. Likewise, the reflection which each believer carries on on the basis of his commitment must have the same dimensions as the reflection which the whole Church carries on on the basis of her union to Christ in the present. To be valid, theological research implies therefore an opening to and a study of the thought of the Church. It is not enough to say that theological reflection and research must spring from existential faith; we must say also that an explicit study of theology—of theology as an articulate expression of the deeper life of the Church—must feed personal reflection and guide our involvement in the world. We understand this clearly when we perceive what theological language really is. In its deeper reality, it is nothing but the faith of the people of God telling itself to itself. When we open ourselves to the experience of the whole Church and study her language, we unite ourselves in a luminous way to her self-commitment. We render this opening and this study authentic to the extent that we integrate them into our personal faith. Therefore this faith, involvement of our whole personality in the present in answer to the call of Christ, remains always the very foundation of our theological effort. By studying the thought of the Church in a mere academical way, we reduce our theological study to a sterile exercise: we neither open ourselves to the deeper experience of the Church, nor develop our personal faith.

This is the perspective in which we must understand what theology is as wisdom. The Christian 'wise man' is not a mere copy of the Greek 'wise man'; the Christian wise man is a man who, by living a life of faith, of hope and of charity, has reached authentic freedom, the freedom which man possesses in Christ. No doubt, Christian wisdom is also knowledge, but it is never pure knowledge. As intelligence, it is the understanding of things which springs from a reflective effort, from a study of the Christian message carried out in the act by which the person unites himself to Christ in the present, involves himself in the world in view of the Kingdom. This involvement is the *act* of Christian wisdom, of theological wisdom—a wisdom of salvation.⁵ As wisdom, theology is the crowning of philosophy. It differs from the other sciences not only by its 'object', but fundamentally by the radical character of the commitment it implies. It is in that commitment and through it that, while being knowledge of faith, it can also become a rigorous knowledge. Its rigour will reside not in the geometrical precision of the notions it utilizes, but in the fidelity with which it expresses the whole content of Christian existence and experience, of the existence and experience of the Church.

⁵ Congar, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

Faith and Priesthood

Such is the understanding of man, of faith, of theology to which a coming back to 'the things themselves'—on the hither side of the superstructures built up by Scholasticism—leads us. These considerations enable us in some way to grasp the deeper meaning and motivation of the 'contestation' going on among priests nowadays, of the changes taking place in the way of training aspirants to priesthood; they enable us in some way to perceive the direction in which the Church is moving, in which the Indian Church should go, if she is to remain in the main stream of Christian life and thinking.

The 'vocation crisis' and the 'contestation' among priests are two related phenomena which both express a deep dissatisfaction about the 'traditional' way of conceiving priesthood. Let us see in a positive way the new orientation which is taking shape.

The people of God is constituted by God as a community of believers—that is, as a community of persons who, in answer to Christ's call, commit themselves in the present to the service of their fellow men in view of the Kingdom. The Act by which God creates this community 'actualizes' itself for each believer *in his personal faith*. As a community of believers, the people of God is a 'holy priesthood' (1 Pet. 2:5); each member of this people is called to be an instrument for the salvation of all, especially for the salvation of those among whom he lives. Therefore each believer is a man *with a vocation*.

The vocation of each believer expresses itself *in his faith*, determines and realizes itself *through his faith*. This faith is the act by which the believer realizes himself according to his deeper finality, by which he answers the call which constitutes him in his individual being, in his relationship to the other members of the human family. This act is the actuation *of the whole of himself*; it makes him fulfil his function in the world of persons, it puts him at the service of the community. This means that the professional achievements of the believer are concretions of his faith. It is his faith which constitutes what he achieves as a scientist, as a technician, as a doctor, as a tradesman, as a lawyer, as a teacher, as a clerk, as a worker, etc. By refusing to build the human world according to the demands of his profession—of the present, of his human environment—to actuate the sum total of his potentialities in accordance with his particular call, the believer denies his faith, fails to realize himself according to God's will, prevents himself from growing in Christ and from leading the world to Christ.

It is on the basis of a concrete involvement in the human community in view of the Kingdom, of a commitment to a life of service—on the basis of a lived faith—that priesthood must come. To take somebody away from his community, away from the world, to teach him 'the faith', to 'ordain' him, then to parachute him back in a particular community and make him the priest of that community is to put the cart entirely and irremediably before the

horses. It is at the heart of a living community, in answer to the call of that community, that man must become a priest. The priest is a man who represents a human community, a community of faith, who enables that community to express itself fully, to become more and more what it should be in Christ. Wherever there is a community of believers, there *are* men called to become priests. The call to priesthood springs from the very existence of community as a community of faith.

In this perspective, it seems that married people should be able to accede to priesthood. What is required first of all is a *living faith*. Such a faith is found in many married people. Why should they be prevented from becoming the priests of their communities ?

Other people would become priests on the basis of a faith lived in celibacy. Those celibates would not be first of all men 'studying to become priests', but men dedicating their life to a concrete service of their fellow men in a definite environment. As a community of faith, each religious congregation would be first of all a community knit together by a common commitment. The people of God, the human family will always be in need of dedicated celibates, of unmarried priests.

Theological Training

All this, it is evident, calls for a thorough reshaping of the whole set-up of 'theological training'. In many countries, the reform is already at an advanced stage. The following are noticeable :

- (1) The number of 'vocations' of the traditional type is fast decreasing.
- (2) Seminaries and scholasticates are being closed.
- (3) Smaller communities of a new type are coming into being.
- (4) 'Theologates' move to the heart of bigger cities. These theologates are no longer conceived as being exclusively to this or that religious entity. Their students come from very different quarters.
- (5) Evening lectures opened to 'lay people' are started.

These developments go together with the fact that more and more priests do not want any more of a clerical state which in some way deprives them of their manhood. They feel that, faith being really manhood coming to itself, their priesthood, as a sacrament of faith, should be for them a more intense, more authentic, deeper manner of being men. In other words, they want to be priests on the basis of what they are as men rather than try to become men again on the basis of a priesthood which has hopelessly—they feel—dehumanized them. Rather than having priests who, on the basis of their priesthood, become teachers, clerks, engineers, scientists, doctors, workers, cooks, rikshawallas, sweepers, etc., let us have men who, on the basis of the service

they render to their fellow men in view of the Kingdom as teachers, clerks, engineers, scientists, doctors, workers, cooks, rikshawallas, sweepers, etc., become priests.⁶

The situation of the Indian Church is a particular one:

- (1) There is in India a minority of people who declare themselves Christians (though there are many people who, through their sincerity—which is *already* faith—link themselves in some personal way to Christ and, thereby, introduce themselves into the people of the Covenant).
- (2) The 'vocation crisis' is not yet felt in India.
- (3) There is, so far, little 'contestation' among the Indian clergy. There is also little original and creative thinking taking place among them.
- (4) The Indian clergy is on the whole 'conservative-minded'.
- (5) Overtaking the clergy, the Indian laity is becoming more and more wide awake (the Bangalore Seminar has shown it in a conclusive manner). However, among many communities, there is still a strong attachment to traditional ways, to the traditional ecclesiastical set-up; there is little openness to the 'non-Christian' world, there is little oecumenical-mindedness.

This situation has to be taken into account. The effort to steer the Indian Church into the new era must be a determined but also a gradual one. The Indian Church must not become a dry stick, it must grow into a more and more vigorous living branch.

In so far as the 'training of priests' is concerned, there cannot be any question of doing away immediately with the present set-up of seminaries and scholasticates. Yet, efforts must be made, within the present set-up, also through new initiatives, to make things progress in the direction in which the whole Church is moving. It is necessary first of all to understand *what is taking place*, to grasp *the deeper motivation* of the reforms introduced

⁶ The question whether priests should be 'allowed to marry' appears to me as a question wrongly put. There are men whose married life is a dimension of their faith, who, on the basis of *that* faith, should become priests; there are men whose celibacy is a dimension of their faith, who, on the basis of *that* faith, should become priests. Fidelity to the initial commitment should as a rule be required—it is required from any man worth the name. Particular cases where 'exceptions' have to be made should be dealt with by the representatives of the community of believers (among whom pastors are the first). They would appreciate such cases not by subsuming them under abstract principles, but by taking everything into account: particular situations, the good of the community, of the whole people of God, of the whole family of men; they would remember that Christ did not come to condemn, but to save, to transform the human crowd into a Kingdom of love.

everywhere. By making small changes with a view to the bigger aim to be reached, we act in an enlightened and purposeful manner (on the contrary, by making a big shake-up without understanding what it is all about, we behave irresponsibly).

We should give up the idea of building new seminaries and scholasticates of the traditional type. Some bold initiatives should be taken.

Let us take as an example the Calcutta situation. Working in the Calcutta field, we find secular priests, Jesuits, Salesians, Redemptorists, Irish Christian Brothers, Missionary Brothers of Charity; we find a good number of religious congregations of nuns; we find priests, ministers and nuns belonging to other Christian Churches. The younger members of these various groups are trained in a completely independent manner. Each group has its own 'houses of formation' in or outside Bengal. All these groups carry on their own activities in a rather individualistic manner. In spite of the fact that a certain coming together is taking place, there is still a good deal of rivalry, sometimes of ill-feeling, among them. Yet, we have all the same aim in view: the service of the people of Bengal in answer to the call of Christ, in view of the Kingdom.

Dedication to a common task is what binds men together. The people of God in Calcutta—the Church of God which is in Calcutta—is formed by all those who involve themselves in the human reality which we call Bengal in order to build it in Christ. These believers know that they must fulfil their task in an intelligent way—they know, therefore, that they must think their *faith*, that they must study. They are united by a common commitment and a common involvement—by a common will, a common *faith*. (A Jesuit working in Calcutta is closer to a Salesian working in Calcutta, to a Loreto nun working in Calcutta, to an Anglican priest working in Calcutta, than to a Jesuit working in Madras). They must, therefore, do their thinking, their studying together. What sense, what purpose is there in that scattering of efforts, in that building of independent little chapels? For their training, nuns go to Barrackpore, Kurseong, Goa, etc., Jesuits to Patna, Bombay, Poona, Kurseong, etc., Salesians to Bandel, Sonada, Shillong, etc., Redemptorists to Bangalore, secular priests to Barrackpore, Anglicans and Protestants to Serampore, Bishop's College, Calcutta, Behala, and so on and so forth. And the result should be: the Church of God which is in Bengal!

Let us come to something concrete. The Calcutta Jesuits are in the process of rethinking the training of 'theirs'. Formerly, such a rethinking would have been considered as something concerning exclusively that entity called the Calcutta Vice-Province of the Society of Jesus and, in that entity, it would have been considered as a task to be carried on exclusively by an inner circle (Jesuits not belonging to that circle and hazarding some suggestion would have been told politely but firmly to mind their business). We realize that such a method is no longer valid, that it is

unevangelical. The Calcutta Jesuit Province does not exist as a self-contained, self-sufficient entity ; it is essentially a part of that broader fellowship formed by the Church of Christ which is in Bengal (itself a part of the universal Church) ; this Church is essentially a part of the whole human reality of Bengal (itself a part of the whole human family). Therefore, to be ourselves, to become truly what we are called to be, we need all our fellow believers, we need all the people of Bengal.

As a distinctive body, the Society of Jesus in Bengal must be a group of men dedicating themselves in Christ to the service of their fellow men—in other words, it must be a group of men trying to live together a certain life of faith, of hope, of charity. The act by which a believer joins the Society of Jesus should be the act by which, making his the faith of the group, he begins to share its life.

The 'training' of young Jesuits should be from the beginning something purposeful. From the start, they must feel committed to a concrete task—a service. To that effect, they must make themselves one with the human environment in which they want to live and work (this implies a thorough study of Bengali, an attunement of their whole personality to the human reality of Bengal). The community—or communities—in which they are integrated should be the backbone of their formation. Each member of this community should realize that it is only through the mediation of the other members that he can become what he should be—as a man, as a believer, as a religious, as an apostle. Therefore, there must be sharing of life, of experiences, of responsibilities ; there must be prayer in common, regular revision of life . . . The daily celebration of the Eucharist must be the centre of the life of the community. This community must be an open community : a community of faith, of charity, knit together by a common will to serve men in Christ. The meaning of all this is that the training of younger Jesuits begins in the effort of all Jesuits to convert themselves into men of faith, to turn their communities into evangelical communities. Without this effort all discussions about the 'training of scholastics' are based on a lie.

The Jesuit community must consider itself part and parcel of that fellowship formed by the Church of Christ which is in Calcutta. Religious, secular priests, ministers, deacons, 'lay' people, all of us—believers—are working together for a common purpose. Let us collaborate in training our younger brothers and sisters, in continuing to train ourselves, in thinking our faith, in studying, in the context of the human reality of Calcutta, of Bengal (the reality through which Christ calls us, which he wants to build into his Kingdom). Each one of us needs all the others in order to become truly himself ; each of our communities needs all the other communities in order to become what it should be in the Church of God, in the Calcutta field. There should be collaboration at all the levels. So much can be done once we break down the walls. This is the evangelical way of doing things.

Calcutta Jesuits ask themselves whether they should not open a theologate in Calcutta. This problem is an insoluble one as long as it remains a purely Jesuit problem. Where to find the Jesuit professors to 'staff' this theologate, and the Jesuit students to frequent it? The problem acquires a quite new dimension when we think it in terms of the whole task which the people of God is called to fulfil in Bengal. It becomes an inspiring idea.

We must realize that in the context of today, this is the only way open to us. Something is already taking place in Calcutta. On some occasions Catholics, Anglicans, Protestants meet to discuss together some aspects of their faith; nuns are eager to acquire a sound theological culture; evening lectures and discussions are started for lay people. We are already committed to a concrete task. Something is growing, a new 'holy priesthood' is coming into being.

All this shows us that Calcutta is already and will become more and more a place where theological work is being done. Has the theological training of the clergy to be considered as something different from this work? The more we think of it, the more we realize that the two have to be fused into a single theological endeavour: into the effort which the Church of Christ in Calcutta makes, while putting herself humbly at the service of all, to bring to light the mystery of her inner life, the whole Christ-mystery as present in the human reality of Bengal. The notion of a clergy being formed outside that effort will appear more and more as an incongruity. *That effort* will be priest-generating.

This does not mean that institutions where sessions of a broader type are held will be meaningless. As pointed out above, the theological effort of each individual believer must in some way equate itself to the theological effort of the whole Church. In this perspective, central institutions where experiences are brought together, where a common understanding is developed, where various topics are treated, will remain necessary. These central institutions will be characterized by their catholicity. (The idea of a Jesuit institution meant exclusively or primarily for the theological training of young Jesuits will no longer hold good.) The theological work done in these institutions will be determined by their *raison d'être*, it will not be merely parallel to the work carried on at the regional level.

The work must be done in a progressive way. There cannot be any question of abolishing from the start all differences. The situation in which we find ourselves is the result of a history, the realization of a whole past—a sinful past, as well as a past of grace and of faith. We must start from it, acknowledging the differences, accepting them not as an end—as something truly satisfactory and definitive—but as the stuff of which the present is made—a present which is a moment in the growth of that totality which we call the Kingdom—'until we come to unity in our faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God, until we become the perfect Man, fully mature with the fulness of Christ himself' (Eph. 4:13).

In an atmosphere of mutual respect, we must try first to develop what unites us: our will to serve the people of Bengal and to build it in Christ. This will—our self-commitment, our existential faith—is something which expresses itself primarily not in a doctrine, but in concrete attitudes through which we 'do the truth'. Our non-Bengali young people should study together Bengali, try, with the help of their Bengali brothers and sisters, to assimilate the Bengali culture, to make themselves one with the people of Bengal. Subsequently, on the basis of this sharing of life, of works, of experiences, a common effort can be started to think together our faith—the totality of our commitment to Christ in Bengal, in the world of today—to develop our self-understanding—that is, our understanding of the Christ-mystery in us. Thus, from an effort to *do the truth* together, we come little by little to an effort to *realize and tell the truth* together. Our coming together at the level of life, of existence leads us to a coming together at the level of theological thinking—not of a thinking which finds in itself its meaning, but of a thinking which is directed towards a more enlightened, more personal, more human commitment—'so that we may make a unity in the work of service, building up the body of Christ' (Eph. 4:12).