

RELIGIOSORUM INSTITUTIO

Congregation for Religious

Careful Selection And Training Of Candidates For The States Of Perfection And Sacred Orders (S. C. Rel., 2 Feb., 1961).

An Instruction, Religiosorum institutio, to the Superiors of Religious Communities, Societies without vows, and Secular Institutes on the careful selection and training of candidates for the states of perfection and Sacred Orders is as follows.

Purpose, Binding Force, And Extent Of This Instruction

1. The Instruction Quantum Religiones

The training of religious and of others pursuing perfection and aspiring to the ranks of the clergy in the states of perfection has always been particularly close to the heart of the Sacred Congregation for Religious. Thus, in the Instruction Quantum Religiones, of 1 December, 1931, the Sacred Congregation instructed the superiors general of religious communities and clerical societies on the proper religious and clerical training of their subjects, and on the investigation to be carried out before profession and the reception of Sacred Orders.¹

The main purpose of this Instruction was, in so far as human frailty may permit, to forestall serious cases of defection not only from the religious state but likewise from the sacred ranks in which religious had been enrolled through the reception of Orders.

2. The Purpose Of This Instruction And Its Binding Force

Now, however, without any change in the chief directives and criteria contained in the aforesaid Instruction, this Sacred Congregation proposes to take up this same question again and to treat it anew (can. 22), especially as regards the selection and training of candidates and the investigation to be made prior to professions and Sacred Orders in order that the aforesaid Instruction may be in complete harmony with subsequent developments and with later pertinent pontifical documents.

3. The Principal Sources Of This Instruction

In the Jubilee Year of 1950 there was held at Rome an International Congress of the States of Perfection, in which specialists summoned from all over the world on the basis of their knowledge and experience, spoke and wrote on the selection, nurturing, and perfecting of religious and clerical vocations. These discussions were published in the four-volume Acta et Documenta of the Congress. Later, congresses were held in various nations and in them the same topics were taken up.

During this same period other documents of the utmost importance appeared. These were the encyclical letter of Pope Pius XI, of immortal memory, Ad Catholici Sacerdotii, of 20 December, 1935,² and various others published by Pope Pius XII, of venerable memory, to whom the states of perfection are so indebted, such as his Exhortation to the Clergy, Menti Nostrae, of 23 September, 1950,³ his encyclical letter, Sacra Virginitas, of 25 March, 1954,⁴ his allocution, Sollemnis Conventus, of 24 June, 1939, to

all clerical students and their superiors,⁵ his allocution, *Haud Mediocri*, of 11 February, 1958, to the superiors general of religious orders and congregations resident in Rome.⁶ and especially the Apostolic Constitution, *Sedes Sapientiae*, of 31 May, 1956, on religious, clerical and apostolic training of clerics in the states of perfection.⁷ Nor of any lesser value are those documents which the Sovereign Pontiff, John XXIII, happily reigning, has issued on the priesthood and priestly formation, both in his solemn allocution on the occasion of the first Roman Synod and likewise in the Synodal Constitutions.⁸ There was also published a reserved Circular Letter of the Sacred Congregation of the Sacraments on 27 December, 1955,^{8a} addressed to local Ordinaries for secular clerics, imposing an investigation of candidates before their promotion to Orders.

Certainly it was most opportune for, and even the duty of, this Sacred Congregation to incorporate the fruits of this longstanding and rich experience and evolution into a new Instruction, which would likewise serve as a particularized commentary on the Apostolic Constitution, *Sedes Sapientiae* (cf. n. 40 and the *Statuta Generalia*, art. 17).

4. To Whom This Instruction Is Addressed

This Instruction is addressed to the superiors of religious communities, societies living the common life, and secular institutes, especially as far as the last are concerned, if their members are incorporated into the institute as clerics. Therefore, although frequently, for the sake of convenience, only religious will be mentioned, the norms and criteria set forth in this Instruction are also applicable to the members of the other states of perfection (cf. *Stat. Gen.*, art. 16, §§ 1-2).

Likewise, although the Instruction refers especially to candidates for the clerical state, nevertheless those points which by their very nature deal with the selection and training of candidates for the states of perfection are, with due adaptations, to be applied also to lay religious, including religious women (*Ibid.*, §3, 2°).

I. The More Common Causes Of Defection

5. An Inquiry Into The Causes Of Defections

It is necessary at the very outset to set down the most frequent grounds alleged for defections and to lay before superiors the reasons which religious priests claim to be the causes why they lose interest in the life they have embraced and ask the Holy See for secularization or even for "laicization," i.e., reduction to the lay state. Attention must be drawn also to the pretexts under which these same religious priests presume to leave the religious life and return to the world on their own initiative, or even make so bold as to question before the Apostolic Dicastries their clerical obligations, especially celibacy. Once the causes of defections are known, superiors will be able to exercise more experienced care and vigilance either in examining the divine vocation of candidates or in strengthening and preserving it by their devoted efforts.

In general, the aforesaid religious claim either that they entered on this way of life and continued in it without a genuine divine vocation, or that they lost the genuine divine vocation during the period of their formation or in the early years of their ministerial life.

6. Undue Family Influence

Frequently such religious claim undue influence from parents and members of their family, inasmuch as

they were born into a large or poor family and thus were advised either by their parents or by other relatives to leave the paternal home and go to the seminary as a happy solution of family difficulties and were even at times pressured by request, persuasion, or even disguised threats, into embracing the life of perfection and the priestly life and continuing in it. As a result, they allege that their repugnance or reluctance to accept the religious clerical state, for which they had an aversion, was broken down.

7. Undue Influence Of Superiors And Directors

There were also those who lay at the door of their religious superiors and their spiritual directors the responsibility for their most difficult situation, claiming that these latter, although they had noticed in them no happiness in the religious clerical life, no spirit of piety, and no zeal as they grew older, nevertheless did not hesitate to urge them on, either because they hoped the subjects would do better in the future or because they were more interested in the number than in the quality of vocations, or because, blinded by a false sense of kindness toward the candidates, they threatened them with the danger of loss of eternal salvation if they left the religious clerical state.

8. Ignorance Of Obligations And Lack Of Liberty In Accepting Them

Not infrequently religious priests plead insufficient knowledge of religious and clerical obligations, especially celibacy, or uncertain will in advancing to perpetual profession or Sacred Orders. If they entered a religious seminary as young boys or in their early adolescent years with only a confused knowledge of the religious and ecclesiastical vocation or with a very uncertain will, these unfortunate religious and priests claim that they never got over this state of mind, once they had completed their studies and their years of formation. Nevertheless, they did not withdraw from the path on which they had entered either because they heedlessly followed their companions according to custom, or because, being bashful and incapable of any serious decision, they unwillingly went along with the urgings and counsels of their superiors. Hence they affirm that in making profession or receiving Orders they were not sufficiently aware of the obligations of the priestly life or did not accept them with full freedom.

9. Fear Of An Uncertain Future

At times such candidates, on the verge of Sacred Orders or perpetual profession and somewhat mature in age, finding themselves without academic degrees and untrained in any art or liberal profession, were afraid to leave the religious life, feeling deep down in their hearts that if they returned to the world, they could not make an upright living unless by manual labor, or would be obliged to make difficult and uncertain efforts to acquire a liberal profession. Therefore they regarded the decision to continue in the religious clerical life as a lesser evil.

10. Difficulty With Chastity

Sometimes these religious priests affirm that it is now impossible for them to observe chastity, first because of bad habits contracted in youth, which were sometimes corrected but still never completely eradicated, and secondly because of sexual tendencies of a pathological nature, which they feel cannot be brought under control either by ordinary or extraordinary means, even those of a spiritual order, in such a way that they frequently fall into the solitary sin.

11. Loss Of The Religious Spirit

Lastly, not infrequently there is adduced as a cause the loss of the religious spirit either because, under the insidious impact of present-day naturalism, these priests become incapable of discipline and

religious observance, or because, living in religious houses an indolent and unproductive life, deceived by the desire of life outside and ill-regulated pseudo-apostolic activism and neglecting the interior life, they fall victims to dangers of all kinds, which they do not avoid and do not even recognize.

12. Weakness And Subjective Character Of Such Arguments

Unfortunate religious priests bring forth these and other similar arguments, at times even attempting to make the Church responsible for their deplorable condition, as though the Church, through her ministers, had admitted them to the religious and priestly life without the necessary qualifications, or did not know how to train and protect them once they had been called unto the portion of the Lord. But, as the Sacred Congregation of the Sacraments states in the above-mentioned Circular Letter: "it cannot be denied that these charges made by the priests during the trials have only a shadowy appearance of truth, for often the only proof is the statement made by the plaintiff alone, a very interested party, and not by witnesses or documents proved in court."^{8b} Nor is this surprising since these unfortunate religious priests not infrequently take their present state of mind and psychic crisis, which has gradually evolved over a period of years, and unconsciously transfer it to the time of their profession and ordination, being unaware of the inner change which has taken place within themselves.

13. Removal Of All Appearance Of Justification For These Claims; Superiors' Obligation In Conscience

And yet the honor of the Church, the welfare of religious communities and the edification of the faithful demand of superiors most accurate diligence and untiring zeal in order not to provide even a vestige of foundation for priests advancing such claims.

Superiors should see to it that they be not responsible for the mistakes or errors of those in charge of selecting and training young men. This will be the case if they are culpably uninformed of the norms laid down by the Church, or ignore them, or apply them carelessly; if, ignoring the necessary discernment of spirits, they admit into religious life and allow to remain therein those who have not been called by God, or if they neglect to give proper formation to those who are evidently called and to safeguard them in their divine vocation. Therefore, this Sacred Congregation regards it as its duty to exhort superiors most earnestly always to keep before their eyes the norms herein set forth, being mindful of the grave warning of this Sacred Congregation in its Instruction, *Illud Saepius*, of 18 August, 1915: "When a religious leaves his order, the superior of that same order, if he has diligently examined his conscience before God, will very frequently be well aware that he himself is not without fault and has failed in his duty. This neglect of duty is often verified either in the admission of candidates or in training them to the religious life, or, after they have made vows, in keeping watch over them."²

II. The Care To Be Taken In The Selection Of Candidates For The State Of Perfection And The Clerical State

A) General Warnings

14. Quality Before Quantity

First of all, although vocations to the state of evangelical perfection and to the priesthood are to be promoted by every means (*Stat. Gen.*, art. 32), still care must be taken lest an immoderate desire to increase numbers should interfere with quality and selection. Let all be convinced that, unless great zeal for an abundance of students is closely bound up with proper care for their formation, such zeal does not produce the desired effects, and even does just the contrary. For just as it is evident that, with the help of