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## **The Holy See On Forming A Native Clergy—1909-1953**

Francis X. Clark

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# The Holy See On Forming A Native Clergy--1909-1953

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FRANCIS X. CLARK

The purpose of this study is simply to present the teaching of the Roman Pontiffs on the formation of a native clergy, inasmuch as that teaching is contained in the official documents of almost the last half-century.

These official documents are the forty-five volumes of the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, the authoritative record of the activities of the Holy Father and his Congregations for the government of the Catholic Church. In its pages are found the approved texts of encyclicals, allocutions, radio addresses, decrees, etc.

Having selected the documents concerning the Missions, and then in them considered and balanced the references to forming a native clergy, this study now attempts to portray as accurately as possible the mind of the Church on this important topic. Through the following pages it is the Holy Fathers themselves who speak. The only contribution of the author is the selection and concatenation of excerpts, and the translation into English of documents originally written in Latin, French, Italian, Spanish or Portuguese.

## FIRST PRIESTS FROM ABROAD

In speaking of the Missions and a native clergy, says Pius XI, men must begin from a historical fact:

. . . Everyone sees that the first seed of the Gospel has almost always been sown by foreign priests, who, according to the words of the Divine Master: 'Go into the whole world and preach the Gospel to every creature,' have left their own country to bring the light of the Gospel to their brothers. Thus Peter of Galilee and Paul of Tarsus called Rome to embrace and profess the faith of Christ; the bishops Titus and Timothy, although foreigners, taught the truths of the Catholic Faith to the people of Crete and Ephesus. Patrick, a native of Caledonia, became the apostle of Ireland; Boniface, a Briton, won the Germans to Christ. . . .<sup>1</sup>

## BUT NATIVE CLERGY THE GOAL

Though the first priests come from another country, the Church has absolutely no intention that such a practice should continue perpetually or even indefinitely.

Once foreign Missions have begun, nothing certainly helps more their progress and stability than the proper formation of a native clergy; and this has been often . . . solemnly proclaimed by the Supreme Pontiffs . . .<sup>2</sup>

. . . The Apostolic See has time and time again vehemently exhorted Bishops in charge of Missions to take care to educate for the priesthood as many native young men as show signs of a divine vocation, until there is formed for every single place an apt clergy . . .<sup>3</sup>

And Pius XI spoke thus to those responsible for governing Missions:

And first of all we call your attention to the great importance of forming a native clergy. You should do this with all energy. Otherwise We maintain that your apostolate will be incomplete, and still more that it will too long impede and delay setting up and organizing the Church in those regions . . .<sup>4</sup>

Pius XII teaches the same doctrine in his letter to the hierarchy of Portugal:

This above all is dear to Our heart that, as in the Archdiocese of Goa, so also in the other regions subject to Portugal they should have as soon as possible a native clergy exemplarily flourishing . . . We trust that in your usual praiseworthy way there will happily be put in practice that which in our age is a most earnest desire of the Church—the proper formation and education of a native clergy.<sup>5</sup>

And Pius XI shows in his encyclical *Rerum Ecclesiae* that this method is nothing new in the Church. The Apostles did it themselves.

Perhaps it has not been sufficiently considered what were the means and methods by which the Gospel was first propagated and the Church first established . . . From the literary sources of ancient Christianity it is clearly apparent that the clergy whom the Apostles set over any new community of the faithful were not brought in from outside, but selected and received from those born in the region itself . . .<sup>6</sup>

#### WHY? BECAUSE NATIVE CLERGY ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY

Pius XI summed up the reasons most concisely when he wrote in 1926:

. . . The Church . . . has insisted with its missionaries to accept promising native boys for proper training and ultimately for ordination to the priesthood, because it has been its conviction that in no other way can the Kingdom of Christ be set up and established anywhere . . .<sup>7</sup>

Unless the Church has its own clergy in sufficient numbers, it is never truly at home, it is never even secure and safe. For, asks Pius XI:

Suppose owing to war or political upheavals there

is a change of government in some mission territory, and the request is made or a law is passed that the foreign missionaries of a certain country must leave: suppose again, a more unlikely case, that the native population, raised to a higher degree of culture and political development, in order to gain its freedom, wants to drive out of their territory all governors, armed forces and missionaries belonging to the occupying foreign power and that it cannot do so otherwise than by force—what then, We ask, would be the disaster that would threaten the Church throughout all that territory, unless full provision has been made for the needs of the Christian populace by a network of native priests throughout the whole country?<sup>8</sup>

And, adds the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in another document:

This is not a mere hypothesis; such events have already actually happened.<sup>9</sup>

But with a native clergy as the solid support, there will be no danger, says Benedict XV:

And if ever the storm of persecution should arise there to make the Church totter and collapse, one can be sure that with that foundation and those roots it will resist firmly.<sup>10</sup>

#### HOW NUMEROUS SHOULD NATIVE CLERGY BE?

What is the goal of native clergy work? How many priests should there be? Pius XI gave the answer to heads of Missions:

. . . From what we have mentioned, Venerable Brothers, Beloved Sons, it follows that it is necessary that in your territories that number of native priests be present which, without counting on any clergy from abroad, is enough by itself both to extend the boundaries of Christian society and to direct the community of the faithful of that region.<sup>11</sup>

Or as the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith expressed it in 1923:

Then alone can the Church be said to be founded in a region when it supports itself by itself, with its own churches, with its own local native clergy, with its own means; in a word, when it depends there only on itself.<sup>12</sup>

And Benedict XV in 1919:

Wherever there exists a native clergy adequate in numbers, well trained, and worthy of its holy vocation, there you can rightly say that the work of the mission is successfully finished and that the Church is well founded.<sup>13</sup>

### ON RECRUITING A NATIVE CLERGY

1. The first important thing to be noticed is that it is possible to make serious mistakes in recruiting and training a native clergy. The proof of the statement is that such mistakes have actually happened.

Benedict XV complained that

... there are some peoples, long ago illumined by the light of the Gospel, who have risen from a rude way of life to such a degree of civilization that they have outstanding men in every department of secular knowledge, and yet, despite the salutary influence of the Gospel and the Church through many centuries, they still have not been able to produce bishops to rule them nor priests to direct them. Therefore, to all appearances, the methods used in some places to educate a clergy for the Missions have been defective and incorrect . . .<sup>14</sup>

... But after so much insistence on the part of the Supreme Pontiffs, it is sad to see that there are regions to which the Catholic Faith was brought many centuries ago, and yet you will not find there a native clergy, except of an inferior kind. . . .<sup>15</sup>

2. Who has the responsibility for seeing to the formation of a native clergy? The Mission Bishops, Vicars and Prefects Apostolic, and the Superiors of Religious Institutes. It is among the very first and chief of their cares, it is of supreme importance.

So Benedict XV in 1919:

Whoever rule Missions must have their chief cares directed to this, that they educate and train priests from the very people among whom they work. That is the greatest hope of new churches.<sup>16</sup>

And the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in 1923:

It is of the highest importance that Superiors watch carefully that in the Missions entrusted to their institutes attention be paid to the formation of native clergy. And indeed that is necessary, since the various territories were committed to them precisely for the purpose of founding and establishing the Church there. Now the conversion of the infidels is only the beginning, the first stone in such establishment. After this ought to follow the formation of Christian settlements with their own chapels or churches; there also schools, orphanages, asylums, hospitals and other works should be erected (and, if possible, endowed). After this ought to follow, or to go hand in hand with it, the formation of native clergy and of native religious of both sexes.<sup>17</sup>

Again Pius XI in 1926:

And therefore We not so much desire as We will and command that what has already been begun in some places by some should in similar manner be carried through to completion by all who rule over Missions, namely, that you should refuse no promising candidate for the priesthood and its apostolate, provided of course that he is moved and called by God.<sup>18</sup>

Pius XI again, in his letter to the Philippines in 1939 just a few weeks before his death, urged repeatedly his solicitude for vocations to the priesthood here and everywhere; for, he said:

We have always considered the formation of suitable priests the most serious of the serious obligations which press upon Us.<sup>19</sup>

3. Of course increasing vocations mean increasing expenses, and such financial support has always been a heavy burden. In 1919 Cardinal Gasparri, writing for Benedict XV, remarked:

This farseeing work [of training future priests], already happily begun by many, advances more slowly than the necessity demands, not because young men aspiring to the priesthood are lacking, but because the Bishops do not have the funds to support their ecclesiastical formation.<sup>20</sup>

Pius XI, in 1926, frankly admitted the same difficulty and suggested a solution:

Certainly it is true that the more students you admit for proper formation—and it is very necessary that you admit many—the more expenses you will be forced to bear. But do not lose heart. Trust in the most loving Redeemer of men, in whose Providence it will come to pass that, by an increase in the generosity of the Catholic world, the Apostolic See in turn will be able to help you more generously to carry out your sound resolution.<sup>21</sup>

This goal of a numerous, well-trained native clergy is so important that there is even a special organization in the Church to further it. It is called the Work of St. Peter the Apostle. The alms given are to erect seminaries and to support students in them. In the first place, however, members pray:

... That the heavenly Prince of Shepherds may deign to call to the priesthood by heavenly inspiration as many talented youths as possible from pagan nations, and that He may likewise wish that those whom He has called by His grace to this holy undertaking may develop into priests outstanding in knowledge and virtue.<sup>22</sup>

4. How develop vocations? On this particular point there is little to recount; perhaps the Holy Fathers have believed that the methods used everywhere



throughout the history of the Church would suffice. In very recent years, however, Pius XII has gone into detail, on occasions when he was addressing Brazil which, although long ago converted to the Faith, still suffers from a woeful lack of priests:

The continual increase in population makes us spontaneously think of the necessity of multiplying the number of the Lord's workers, in order that in every place and at all times they can satisfy the spiritual needs of the faithful. The selection and formation of priests "is the most serious of all the serious obligations which weigh upon Us" [this Pius XII quotes from the letter of Pius XI to the Philippines in 1939], and you will understand very easily . . . the most vivid desire which We nourish that you should recruit and educate the greatest possible number of seminarians, and thus assure for Brazil, in a not distant future, a sufficient number of good priests. . . .<sup>23</sup>

It will be necessary surely to dispose hearts to receive the influx of grace, principally by spreading among the faithful the knowledge of the sublime dignity of the priesthood, and that by means of religious instruction, religious organizations, Catholic Action, the press, the radio, so that families may appreciate a vocation as a great gift of Heaven and a singular predilection of God, and consider themselves happy in consecrating to the Lord some of their sons. . . .<sup>24</sup>

Another means mentioned by Pius XII is frequent reception of Holy Communion. For then one

. . . understands better what a great benefit the priesthood is for a nation, by which it has, and without which it cannot have, Jesus dwelling in its midst, sanctifying its land. And then he necessarily aspires to the honor of seeing some member of his family ennobled with the divine nobility of the priestly character, made another Christ on earth, and therefore he will rejoice to collaborate as much as possible for the increase and formation of vocations . . .<sup>25</sup>

### ON TRAINING A NATIVE CLERGY

1. Training priests means, of course, that there

must be seminaries. In the detailed report to be presented periodically on the state of the Mission, the head must answer a number of questions on his seminary.

Is there zeal to select promising young men to form a native clergy; where and with what success are they being educated? <sup>26</sup>

And Pius XI, although gladly acknowledging the work done in constructing seminaries, still complained:

. . . Nevertheless we are still too far removed from the progress which must be made in this matter. . . <sup>27</sup>

2. How should candidates be trained in the seminaries? The answer throughout the documents is usually summed up in a few words: "holy and learned," "outstanding in knowledge and virtue." Or as Pius XII prayed in his radio address to the Eucharistic Congress in Peru in 1949:

May you obtain . . . that number of priests, learned and holy, above all holy!, needed for spreading the Gospel and preserving the Catholic Faith in your land. <sup>28</sup>

More in detail Pius XI expressed it thus to heads of Missions:

It is . . . most important that . . . these ecclesiastical students receive a scientific education in sacred and profane studies according to the best method and in courses that are not unduly hastened, or curtailed, but that they should follow the usual course of studies. And be persuaded that if in the seminaries you educate subjects conspicuous for the integrity and purity of their lives, and well prepared for the sacred ministry and most skilled masters of the Divine Law, you shall have prepared men who will not only attract the attention of the leading men of the country, but priests who shall one day be destined to govern the parishes and dioceses. . . <sup>29</sup>

On the full course of training in seminaries through-

out the world Canon Law is sufficiently clear, and to these precepts are added occasional encyclicals of the Holy Fathers and directives which the Sacred Congregation for Universities and Seminaries sends periodically to the whole world or to particular nations. Two apt quotations follow. The first is from an Apostolic Letter of Pius XII:

In the first place we desire that the literary and scientific education of future priests be at least equal to that of laymen who take similar courses of study. In this way not only will the seriousness of their intellectual training be assured, but their decision to persevere or not will also be facilitated. For if a seminarian has had such a course of studies, and he comes to deliberate on his vocation, he will find himself under no necessity to continue. He will be free from the danger that, lacking a cultural preparation sufficient to assure a position in the world, he may feel himself compelled to pursue this way of life not meant for him, following the reasoning of the unfaithful steward: "To dig I am not able, to beg I am ashamed." (*Luke 16:3*). . . .<sup>30</sup>

The second is from Pius XII to the hierarchy of Brazil:

We also know particularly how great is the care to perfect the studies in the major seminaries and to adapt them to the needs of our time. In fact it is necessary that the priest be prepared to present doctrine which is exact, safe and traditional in the manner which will best illumine minds and conquer hearts.

Therefore, in the first place they must perfect themselves in the art of writing and speaking, and those principles are learned during the classical studies. Afterwards it is necessary to know modern errors, weighing and refuting clearly and solidly the principles which are the source of the various systems of today and tomorrow. Finally, they must pay special attention to those speculative and practical problems which are the order of the day and of which the priest ought to know the solution according to Revelation and right reason. . . .

To integrate however these two purposes, namely, to teach solid, traditional, and enlightening doctrine,

and at the same time to present it in a manner adequate to modern needs, has its own particular difficulties. So much so that many times the delicate balance is not observed; on the one hand the teaching is exact, but incomplete and wrapped in archaic forms that are scarcely usable in today's battles, or on the other one falls into novelties, which truly please young men in a certain way, but which corrupt doctrine and hinder a genuine intellectual formation.<sup>31</sup>

Further, the training should not be just sufficient for all. One of the questions to be answered by heads of Missions is the following:

Does he see to it that some seminarian, outstanding for virtue and talent, is sent to selected colleges, especially those in Rome, for special studies?<sup>32</sup>

That this plan might be more readily executed, in 1948 a distinct residence for graduate students was established in Rome, and Pius XII himself graced the occasion with an exhortation to native clergy throughout the world.<sup>33</sup>

#### NATIVE CLERGY ALSO MEANS RELIGIOUS

In speaking of Missions, the term "native clergy" is used constantly. Like any term which reappears often, it is made as brief as possible, and only occasionally is it given its full development.

In that full development, however, it definitely, includes nuns and brothers and religious of every sort.

Oftimes the documents speak of clergy and religious in the same breath, as Pius XII in 1940:

. . . A flourishing native clergy . . . and in the same place, in number equal to the needs, let there be consecrated virgins born in the same land in which they give their services. . . .<sup>34</sup>

And again Pius XII in 1944:

. . . Hence the need of native priests and native sisters. . . .<sup>35</sup>

Such references could be multiplied. The principle

for forming religious is expressed forcefully by Pius XI:

... Those new followers of Christ whom God touches with celestial inspiration and urges on to higher things, why should they not live the life of the evangelical counsels? . . .<sup>36</sup>

In fact, unless there are religious institutes of men and women, and therefore religious priests, brothers and nuns, the Church is not the Church of Christ.

... How shall the Church hold together firmly in pagan lands today, unless it is composed of all those elements from which it formerly grew together in our own countries: that is, from each region's own people and clergy, and its religious institutes of men and women? . . .<sup>37</sup>

... To organize the Church of Christ in your people it is necessary to use all the elements of which, by divine plan, the Church is composed. It follows, therefore, that one of the principal duties of your office is to erect native religious communities of both men and women.<sup>38</sup>

In this matter of religious, Pius XI lays down two principles. The first is this:

If there are natives who wish to be enrolled in the orders and congregations, provided these candidates seem qualified to imbibe the proper spirit of these orders and congregations and to bring forth in the countries in question an offspring that is neither unworthy nor unrepresentative of its mother, it should be considered wrong to dissuade these candidates from their purpose or to prevent them from carrying it out.<sup>39</sup>

The second principle is this:

Still, . . . let them ponder seriously and prayerfully the question whether it might not be more expedient to found new congregations such as may answer better the genius and character of the natives, and be more in keeping with the needs and spirit of the country.<sup>40</sup>

Finally, the religious life must include contempla-

tives, and not only women but men. Thus Pius XI in 1926:

... For these men in their solitary life will win an extraordinary number of heavenly graces for you and your works. . . . In this connection I see in my mind that monastery which the Trappists have founded in the Apostolic Vicariate of Peking, where almost a hundred monks, many of them Chinese, practise high virtue, pray assiduously, live rigorously, labor uncomplainingly. Thus they placate and appease and propitiate the Divine Majesty for themselves and the pagans, and by the very force of their example win the pagans themselves to Christ. . . .<sup>41</sup>

#### NATIVE CLERGY FRUIT, JOY, REWARD OF MISSION LABOR

Since all mission work is incomplete, unfinished, defective unless it terminates in a native hierarchy and clergy that can fully care for preserving and spreading the Church and all its multiple works in their own land, it follows necessarily that to train such a clergy is progress, to produce fit priests and religious is success, to obtain bishops and archbishops is a joy, a crown, a glorious reward. Just as a farmer, after all his toil and patience, rejoices to see his field give forth rice, so missionaries are to rejoice exceedingly when they see the clergy and religious increase.

So Pius XI in 1931, during the first radio message to the world, ever given by a Supreme Pontiff, addressed the missionaries and called the native priests

... the principal fruits and sharers of your labors.  
42

All this was strikingly illustrated in 1927, when Pius XI consecrated the first Japanese bishop in the Vatican Basilica. In the homily after the consecration he explained why he had called him to Rome for the ceremony. Among the reasons was this:

... We have done it to please those Shepherds

and missionaries, who labor there in advancing the Catholic name; and that we might adorn and crown with a reward, as it were, those present missionaries and all those priests, brothers and sisters who from 1889 have been zealous for the formation of a native clergy, and continue to be so more every day. . . .<sup>43</sup>

In the same homily Pius gives some idea of the historical continuity of the work of the Missions, and what it means for future generations to know the fruit and joy of the work which had gone before. For he tells the new Japanese bishop that during the ceremony of the consecration he was filled with great sweetness of spirit:

. . . While We were performing this sacred rite We believed that the bones of Francis Xavier, who first brought the Catholic Faith to your country, and those of the glorious martyrs who died for Christ among your people, were as if exulting and budding forth from their place. . . .<sup>44</sup>

### CONCLUSION

Thus, through all the scattered but unified texts presented above, is seen the doctrine of the Church through the last forty-five years on the formation of a native clergy. As a conclusion, nothing is more fitting than the radio address given in English by Pius XII only a little more than three years ago. On April 29, 1951 he spoke to the hierarchy and faithful of South Africa, as they celebrated the establishment of their hierarchy; in the conclusion to his address he recapitulates movingly the perennial principles of the Church:

If it is right to look back today and rejoice in the achievements of the past, it is of paramount importance to study prayerfully, with devout and eager zeal the bright vision of limitless progress that unfolds before you. This, We are sure, is the daily concern of your Bishops; and no one will realize more clearly and more emphatically than they that, if the Church in South

Africa is to meet the challenge of the future successfully, there must be a marked increase in the number of native clergy. That means that the native Catholic home must be permeated by strong faith, a high esteem of the priesthood, a consciousness of the exalted privilege and honor that come to any family, when God comes to call one of its sons to the service of the altar. Parents imbued with such a spirit will not be wanting in generosity to give of their best to the Lord of the harvest, whose loving heart grieves for lack of helpers to gather it in. When the Church is served and governed by priests and bishops of your own nation, thoroughly trained in the sacred sciences and deeply grounded in the spiritual life, then will the hopes and prayers of the early missionaries be fulfilled; then their long years of toil and sacrifice amid perils and privations, will have received a recompense a hundred fold.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> AAS XVIII (1926) 305.

<sup>2</sup> AAS XII (1920) 247. These are the words of Cardinal Gasparri writing for Benedict XV.

<sup>3</sup> AAS XI (1919) 249.

<sup>4</sup> AAS XVIII (1926) 73.

<sup>5</sup> AAS XXXII (1940) 255.

<sup>6</sup> AAS XVIII (1926) 74.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 305.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>9</sup> AAS XV (1923) 371.

<sup>10</sup> AAS XI (1919) 445.

<sup>11</sup> AAS XVIII (1926) 76.

<sup>12</sup> AAS XV (1923) 370.

<sup>13</sup> AAS XI (1919) 445.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 445-446.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 445.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 444-445.

<sup>17</sup> AAS XV (1923) 370.

<sup>18</sup> AAS XVIII (1926) 76.

<sup>19</sup> AAS XXXIV (1942) 254.

<sup>20</sup> AAS XI (1919) 249.

<sup>21</sup> AAS XVIII (1926) 76.

<sup>22</sup> AAS XXI (1929) 347. Here also can be found the history of this zealous work for seminaries in the Missions.

<sup>23</sup> AAS XXXIX (1947) 286. Throughout these pages the numerous references to Brazil are noteworthy. The reason is that, as in most of South America, the proportion of priests to people is dolefully inadequate. See PHILIPPINE STUDIES I (Sept., 1953) 170.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 287.

<sup>25</sup> AAS XL (1948) 507.

<sup>26</sup> AAS XIV (1922) 295.

<sup>27</sup> AAS XVIII (1926) 74.



- 28 AAS XLI (1949) 296.
  - 29 AAS XVIII (1926) 76-77.
  - 30 AAS XLII (1950) 687.
  - 31 *Ibid.*, 836-837.
  - 32 AAS XIV (1922) 295.
  - 33 AAS XL (1948) 374-376.
  - 34 AAS XXXII (1940) 255.
  - 35 AAS XXXVI (1944) 210.
  - 36 AAS XVIII (1926) 78.
  - 37 *Ibid.*, 74.
  - 38 *Ibid.*, 77-78.
  - 39 *Ibid.*, 78.
  - 40 *Ibid.*, 78.
  - 41 *Ibid.*, 79.
  - 42 AAS XXIII (1931) 68.
  - 43 AAS XIX (1927) 379.
  - 44 *Loc. cit.*
  - 45 AAS XLIII (1951) 382.
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