

THE KINGDOM OF GOD: EVER ANCIENT EVER NEW:
REFLECTIONS UPON THE VATICAN II COUNCIL: PRESENTATION 10
LIFE AND SERVICE WITH CHRIST:
THE DECREES ON THE TRAINING, LIFE AND MINISTRY OF PRIESTS

I. The priesthood was ordained by Christ and quickly expanded into three orders, bishops, priests and deacons. The training for these orders gradually developed over time until the seminary system we have now became dominant. Likewise, the callings for a life of prayer, a life of noble simplicity, and the promise of celibacy developed over time, although with some variations.

A. The institution of an ordained clergy came from Jesus Himself, who appointed special disciples to carry out His missions. The early Church then established three orders of the clergy, bishops, priests and deacons.

1. During His earthly life, Jesus specifically appointed twelve men, who were called Apostles, to show forth His truth and glory before Him. During His public ministry, He called the Apostles, commissioned them and gave them authority to proclaim the faith, to administer the sacraments, and to defeat the forces of evil. See, e.g., Matt. 10:1-5; 18:18-20; 28:16-20; Mark 16:15-18; Acts 1:1-8. He also appointed seventy-two other disciples to assist Him in similar ways, but did not give them the power to cast out demons. Compare Luke 9:1-6 with Luke 10:1-12.

2. Scripture and Tradition recount how the early Church recognized other clerics both to succeed the Apostles and to assist these successors.

a. Acts of the Apostles describes the Apostles as laying hands on others (particularly Saints Paul and Barnabas and early assistants who were apparently what we now call deacons) and thus conferring a portion of their authority upon them. See Acts 6:1-6, 13:1-3. They also appointed Saint Matthias to succeed Judas Iscariot. Acts 1:21-26. Saints Paul and Barnabas also appointed *presbyteroi*, now called priests, in cities they evangelized. See Acts 14:23.

b. Especially in two of the pastoral letters, 1 Timothy and Titus, the Bible describes three levels of Church office, *episcopoi* (bishops), *presbyteroi* (priests) and *diaconoi*. See, e.g., 1 Tim. 3:1-13, 5:17-22; Titus 1:5-16. St. Paul had laid hands upon and thus ordained Saints Timothy and Titus to lead the church in Ephesus and Crete respectively as what we would now call in English bishops. They in turn had the authority to ordain others.

c. Early Church documents refer to the offices of *episcopos*, *presbyter*, and *diaconos*. See, e.g., *Didache* ch. 15; Letter of St. Polycarp to the Philadelphians ch. 5-6; Letters of St. Ignatius of Antioch to the Trallians ch.3 and to the Magnesians ch. 3-4, 13, and to the Philadelphians ch. 7-8.

3. The early Church gradually sorted out the roles of bishops, priests and deacons in accord with the understanding that bishops would lead areas of the Church (now called dioceses), priests would administer the sacraments (except Holy Orders) and teach and guide the people, and deacons would assist the bishops and priests.

4. Deacons can either be transitional (preparing for the priesthood) or permanent. There have always been many permanent deacons in the Eastern traditions of the Church, as there were initially in the western tradition. But from about the fifth century to the Vatican II Council, permanent deacons were rare in the West, with some notable exceptions, such as St. Francis of Assisi. In Lumen Gentium, the Constitution on the Church, the Vatican II Council restored the common use of permanent deacons in the Latin side of the Catholic Church, and said that married men could receive this consecration.

5. At the beginning, all priests were under a bishop, who was generally in charge of a diocese, or another area of the Church. Over the course of time, religious orders (e.g., Benedictines, Augustinians, Franciscans, Dominicans, Jesuits) developed; and the also had priests. And so, to this day, a priest or deacon can be either diocesan (and thus ordained for a specific diocese) or religious order, and thus consecrated to that order and under the leadership of that order. There are no “free agent” priests or deacons. Priests and deacons are ordained for a diocese or religious order, and are thus under obedience to the local bishop (or other local ordinary) or to their religious order. There are also some other arrangements, such as the personal prelature of Opus Dei, the military dioceses, and the Anglican Ordinariate.

B. Until the Council of Trent in the sixteenth, the training of priests was extremely varied, and most priests were not particularly well educated. The Council of Trent called for more systematic training of priests in what we now call seminaries.

1. St. Paul cautioned St. Timothy to be discerning in whom he ordained. And later, there were many commentaries on the qualifications of a priest, such as St. John Chryostom’s essay On the Priesthood and St. Gregory the Great’s book The Rule of Pastoral Care. However, each bishop or religious order had its own way of discerning and training new priests.

2. Because training was frequently minimal, priests were often given homilies and other sermons to preach, rather than compose such works themselves. Likewise, there were extensive manuals on what to say in Confession, and the penances to give.

3. Despite the minimal education of many clergy, the most educated people in the Middle ages were generally clergy or religious brothers. In fact, in some times and places, the clergy were almost the only literate people. Nevertheless, there were often calls for better training for priests. For example, Charlemagne launched an effort to make sure that all clergy had basic training and literacy; and in fact he wanted to promote universal literacy. His program made some progress, but lapsed after his death. Throughout the Middle Ages, most priests were simply trained by other priests, although some clerical students who were to become leaders and teachers attended the universities that rapidly developed in the High Middle Ages.

4. In response to challenges from the Protestant Reformation, Church leaders met at the Council of Trent from 1545 – 1563. And, in 1563, the Council of Trent in turn called for organized seminaries that would train priests for the future. It also called for careful discernment about who would be let into the seminaries and later ordained priests. This decree led to the beginning of the seminary system that we have now.

5. By the 20th century, the seminaries largely been sorted out such that there were minor and major seminaries. Minor seminaries would focus on the topics that we think of as covered by high school and the beginning of college. Major seminary would then focus on philosophy and then graduate theological studies. Most seminarians would attend four years of minor seminary (basically college seminary) and four years of major seminary. Many priests, however, had attended seminary even in high school years. In 1967, there were 122 junior seminaries with 16,000 students in the United States. On the other hand, some men entered seminary after they had graduated college, but that was less common.

6. After the Vatican II Council, seminaries began sorting themselves out into high school seminaries, college seminaries, and major seminaries, the latter of which consisted of pre-theology studies (focused on philosophy and languages, especially Latin) and theology studies. In the United States and the western world generally, the number of high school seminaries declined dramatically. For example, in 2009 there were 8 junior seminaries with about 600 students in the United States. See Gerald Corson, “Minor seminaries: Are they making a comeback?” in *Crisis Magazine* (Sept. 23, 2009.) The majority of seminarians in the United States now enter seminary after graduating college, but an increasing number are now beginning with college seminary. In the United States, of the 430 priests being ordained this year, about 61% entered seminary after college; another 37% joined seminary before or while in college; and another 2% were in high school seminary. See Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, Georgetown University, “The Class of 2018: Survey of Ordinands to the Priesthood” (April, 2018.) If a seminarian enters seminary after college, he generally takes two years of pre-theology courses (largely dealing with philosophy and languages) in a major seminary and then takes theology courses, in the same or a different major seminary. If a seminarian enters in seminary before he enters college, or before he graduates from college, he attends college seminary first, where he studies philosophy and languages; and then he proceeds onto theology studies in major seminary.

7. Before the Vatican II Council, classes for college and major seminary were basically in Latin, although modifications developed over the course of the 20th century to allow more flexibility. Language barriers could be a substantial issue in who could train to be a priest. For example, St. John Vianney struggled with seminary studies due his difficulty with the Latin language.

- C. The compensation for priests was also varied, and sometimes led to great disparities.
1. From the beginning, religious order priests took vows of poverty, which meant that they would have few or no possessions of their own. Their income would go

to the order and support would come from it. How this discipline was lived out in practice varied substantially, and there was both admiration for the dedication of religious priests (and brothers and sisters) and sometimes criticisms for the high standard of living that some of them enjoyed from the income that went to the order. For example works such as St. Bonaventure's Life of St. Francis present the ideal of religious life. On the other hand, the prologue of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales has some humorous examples of this fine living among the religious.

2. Diocesan priests were supported in a variety of fashions. Sometimes they were paid by the local lord, which could lead to a conflict of interests. Much of their income came from stipends for Masses and other sacraments. There were also such arrangements as "benefices" which meant that a priest would be supported by the income of land, or even businesses owned by a parish, as well as its own offertory income. This situation sometimes led to competition for the most lucrative benefices, as well as situations where one pastor would have several parishes (and the income from them) and pay other priests to minister in them. Bishops likewise had lands for the diocese that were supposed to make them independent, but could also lead to competition for the most prestigious appointments. Starting in the 10th century, bishops were also often noble lords in feudal system. In this area again, there was admiration for many priests who lived simple lives; and the Church's income did lead to the ability to engage in many projects (such as churches, charities, hospitals, and magnificent works of art and music), which also employed many people. But there could be criticism for the competition for income and the high lives of some clergy. The prologue to Chaucer's Canterbury Tales praises a parish priest for his devotion, holiness and simplicity of life, but also subtly criticizes other priests who do not live as they should.

3. The Council of Trent made some reforms of this system. For example, it mandated that a priest could receive only one Mass stipend per day, that a pastor could ordinarily have only one parish, and must live in that parish, and likewise that a bishop could ordinarily lead only one diocese, and must live in that diocese.

4. By the 20th century, Western nations had generally adopted systems of regular compensation system for priests. But in many areas, especially mission countries, stipends and other side income continued to be a major issue.

D. From the beginning, prayer life was always central to the priesthood. Over the course of time, certain prayers, in addition to the Mass, became a standard part of a priests' life.

1. From near the beginning, priests regularly prayed a series of organized prayers based upon the Psalms. These prayers became known as the Liturgy of the Hours, the Divine Office or the breviary.

2. Religious orders had varying rules on how to structure the day according to prayer. For more traditional orders, such as the Benedictines, there were clearly defined times of prayers. For the later orders, such as the Dominicans and Franciscans, the schedule tended to be more flexible. Diocesan priests generally worked out their own times of prayers; but there were priests who lived together

(e.g., in oratories or the canons of a cathedral), who had a regular schedule for prayer and often a rule of life in general.

- E. Celibacy, that is refraining from marriage and, by extension, from all romantic attachment and conjugal relations, has always been preferred for the clergy and eventually became required for priests in the Latin tradition.
1. From near the beginning of the Church, all bishops were taken from celibate men. And, in almost all times and places after the beginning of the Church, priests did not marry after ordination.
 2. From early times, many places in the Latin tradition took only unmarried men; and that discipline became favored by the public, for it set aside priests as more solely in the service of God and neighbor. Starting in the 11th century, such celibacy became mandatory for priests and deacons in the Latin side of the Church. In Lumen Gentium, however, the Vatican II Council began allowing married men to become permanent deacons in the Latin side of the Church.
 3. The eastern traditions of the Church generally were willing to allow married men to become priests for their dioceses (or eparchies); however, even there bishops are always unmarried, and priests would not marry after ordination.
 4. There are several reasons for this requirement of celibacy. First, the priest lives more like Christ who took the Church as His mystical spouse. See, e.g., Eph. 5:31-32; Rev. 21:2, 9-14. Second, the priest becomes more like the saints in heaven, who are not married or given in marriage. See Mark 18:25. Third, the priest has a more mystical sense of prayer in union with the Church; in a similar fashion, the priests of the old covenant were required to refrain from conjugal relations for three days before ministering in the Temple. See 1 Kings 21:4-5; cf. 1 Cor. 7:5. Fourth, the priest can be more exclusively devoted to service in the Church. See 1 Cor. 7:32-35.

II. When Pope St. John XXIII called for a new Council, it was agreed upon from the beginning that there would be a document on the training of priests and a document on the life and ministry of priest. Those two documents were almost reduced to minor commentaries, but then were brought back to become full decrees at the Third Session of the Council.

- A. As the Council was approaching, the Preparatory Commission on Clergy and Laity drafted a decree called On Clerics, which described the rights and duties of priests. Meanwhile, the Preparatory Commission on Seminaries and Catholic Schools prepared a detailed 60 page decree on the promotion of vocations and the organization of seminaries.
- B. Between the Second and Third Sessions of 1963 and 1964, Cardinal Julius Dopfner proposed a plan to move the Council ahead more quickly by reducing seven of the remaining 14 documents, including the decrees on priests and seminaries, to be a few paragraphs each. The Coordinating Commission reduced the decree on priests to be a few paragraphs and the decree on seminaries from 60 to 4 pages.

- C. On October 13, 1964, Archbishop Francis Marty of Rheims, Germany introduced the decree on priests, now called simply On Priests, to the Third Session. The speeches, led off by Cardinal Albert Meyer of Chicago, made it clear that the bishops wanted a much more substantial document. (Likewise, the Council would call for a restoration of the other documents as well, except for the decree on sacraments, which ceased to be a separate decree, but rather was largely incorporated into other documents.) Although there was much speculation in the press regarding priestly celibacy, Pope Paul VI said that the Council should not seek to call for changes in that discipline. He would later publish a letter in 1967 affirming the call to priestly celibacy in the Latin tradition of the Church, while the eastern traditions retained their practice of allowing married men to become priests.
- D. With regard to the Decree on Priests, there was also a great debate on how to balance two aspects of the priesthood, the notion of priests as mediators between God and humanity and the more pastoral aspect of building up the Church and society in the world; there was the related idea of how much to emphasize the role of sanctification (especially through the Mass and other liturgies) and how much to emphasize evangelization, preaching and good example to the world. See Guy Mansini and Lawrence Welch, “The Decree on the Life and Ministry of Priests,” in Vatican II: Renewal Within Tradition at 206 – 208. After the Third Session, the Coordinating Commission received 10,000 recommendations on material to add. See John O’Malley, What Really Happened at Vatican II at 273. The Commission returned to draft another document now on the priesthood that would incorporate the commentary and focus on both the life and ministry of priests.
- E. On November 11, the Coordinating Commission presented its decree on the seminaries, now called On the Instruction of Priests. The document called for a decentralization in control over seminaries, along with overall guidance on how they were to be run. There was some debate on whether and how much to emphasize the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas in seminary formation. By the following January, there were 420 requests to emphasize the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas and 317 asking that the decree give no special preference for his teachings. See Anthony Akinwale, “The Decree on Priestly Formation: *Pratum Totius*” in Vatican II: Renewal Within Tradition at 240. But with regard to the decree as a whole the bishops were generally favorable to it, with the call to add some of the material that had been removed. They thus voted 2074 – 41 to move ahead with the decree in its current form, with some revisions and additions.
- F. During the Fourth Sessions, both decrees were brought up for final approval.
1. The Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, now called Presbyterorum Ordinis, came before the Council on October 16. All but 12 bishops voted to have it as the basic texts; but they recommended a few more changes. The final text was brought before the Council on December 7 and was approved on a vote of 2390 – 4.
 2. In October, the Coordinating Commission brought the expanded Decree on Priestly Formation, now called Optatum Totius (*The Desired of the Whole*) to the Council. After a brief discussion, the Council approved of the decree by a

vote of 2318 – 3. In 1992, St. John Paul II expanded on the theme and instructions for seminaries with his apostolic exhortation Pastores Dabo Vobis (I Will Give You Shepherds.)

- G. In 1966, Pope Paul VI published the moto proprio Ecclesiae Sanctae, which implemented this decree as well as the decrees on bishops and religious life.

III. Presbyterorum Ordinis, the Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests outlines the theology of the priesthood, and then provides overall guidance for the way in which priests should minister and live in the world, but not of the world.

- A. There is an introduction, a short chapter on the theology of the priesthood, two longer chapters on the ministry and life of priests, and then a conclusion.
- B. The introduction celebrates the role of priests, recognizes the difficulties of living out the clerical state in modern world, and sets forth the goal of giving guidance in support of the ministry and life of priests. The decree is addressed above all to diocesan priests, but also has many lessons for religious order priests.
- C. Chapter 1, consisting of sections 2 and 3, outlines the overall theology of the priesthood, with its ministry and overall focus on bringing Christ to the people, being in the world but not of the world.
1. Section 2 describes how there is a priesthood of all believers, but also an ordained priesthood that comes from the Apostles, who were the first bishops. As the decree will later do, this section outlines the roles of guiding, teaching and sanctifying. In particular, it emphasizes the uniting the people of God together, being “heralds of the Gospel” and bringing the sanctifying power of Christ to people, especially in the Eucharist.
 2. Section 3 outlines how priests must at the same time be set aside as a witness to the greater kingdom, and yet live in the world with people, showing unity with all of humanity.
- D. Chapter 2, consisting of sections 4 – 10 discusses the ministry of priests. It is in turn divided into three parts. The first part describes the teaching, sanctify and guiding role of priests. The second part describes the priests’ relationships with their bishop, with each other and with the people. The third part discusses the recruitment and distribution of priests.
1. The first part discusses more what a priest does. Tracking the idea of Jesus as prophet, priest and king, the sections describe the priests’ role in teaching, sanctifying and guiding. The sections emphasize the centrality of the Eucharist in all of these roles.
 - a. Section 4 describes “the first task of priests” as working with the bishop to be “ministers of the Word.” In this case, first means first in time, not most important. There is an emphasis both on connecting the faith to people’s practical lives and on teaching through the liturgy.
 - b. Section 5 outlines the priests’ role in sanctifying the people, especially through the sacraments. The Mass and the Eucharist are the

centerpiece of this ministry.

- c. Section 6 outlines the priests' governing roles as pastors, sharing in their bishops' roles in uniting all people together. There is a great emphasis on caring for each person and enabling people to realize their own specific callings.
2. The second part then discusses the priests' relationship with other people, both for his own sake and for theirs.
 - a. Section 7 describes bishops at the same time as leading the priests in their role as fathers, but also being with priests as their brothers and friends. Priests are called to reverence and obey their bishops, and bishops to listen to and care for their priests.
 - b. Section 8 describes the relationship between priests, whether diocesan or "regular," i.e. members of a religious order or similar group. It emphasizes that there should be a "brotherly bond of priests" within and among dioceses and order, not only for mutual efforts, but also to support each other, personally, intellectually and spiritually. Although it does not use this image, priests are meant to be more like Knights of the Round Table than the Lone Ranger.
 - c. Section 9 describes priests' relationship with the laity as both leaders, but also "brothers among brothers." In particular it emphasizes, as did section 6 the call to help each person realize his own abilities and callings, but also to unite "different outlooks in a way that no one is a stranger to the Christian community." The pastoral outlook should extend to all people, within the Church or not.
 3. The third part then outlines the promotion and just distribution of priestly vocations.
 - a. Section 10 calls for priests in areas that have more priests to be willing to serve areas more in need, with their bishops' permission. It also calls for the establishment of international seminaries, special dioceses and personal prelatures to unite the different nations together. The Archdiocese of the Military Services and Opus Dei are examples of responses to this call. At the time, it was the mission countries that needed priests; now the former mission countries are often sending back priests to areas where the faith is much older.
 - b. Section 11 describes the need for all people to be involved in the promotion of vocations. It begins with the bishops' role, but then proceeds onto how the priests, the laity and schools should be involved in the promotion of vocations. There is also a call for specific groups to promote vocations. The international Serra Club, as well as the Arlington Diocese's vocation discernment groups are examples of responses to this call.

- E. Chapter 2, consisting of sections 12 – 21, then outlines guidance for the life of priests. It also has three sections. The first section describes the priests' call to perfection. The second section outlines special callings of a priest, particularly focusing on the promises of obedience, celibacy, and poverty of spirit. The third section some ways of supporting the life of priests.
1. The first part, consisting of sections 12 – 14 describe the priests special call to holiness.
 - a. Section 12 recognizes that all people are called to holiness. But it describes the ministry of priests as both a support of priestly holiness and a call to holiness. For, as the section points out, although God can work even through unworthy instruments, ministry is much more fruitful and persuasive when offered by those who living out the Gospel.
 - b. Section 13 then builds upon this connection between ministry and holiness by describing how the priests' ministry of the word, of sacraments and of guiding people should contribute to their own holiness. The section describes the Liturgy of the Hours as particularly important, and strongly recommends daily Mass even if it is in private. While the section does not use this analogy, it can be said that, as a teacher usually learns precisely by teaching (often more than the student), so a priest should become holier precisely by bringing holiness to others.
 - c. Section 14 describes for the need of each priest and all priests to have: (1) a unity of life by drawing their strength and guidance from Christ in prayer and openness to His will; and (2) unity with each other with mutual support and prayer. In an increasingly specialized and busy world, this unity is particularly important and challenging to maintain.
 2. The second part, consisting of sections 15-17, describes the special callings of a priest in terms of the classic promises of obedience, celibacy and poverty of spirit.
 - a. Section 15 describes the promise of obedience in the context of the overall call to humble service always open to God's will. It describes humility in terms of a radical willingness to serve God wherever a priest is called. This openness to the will of God does not suppress creativity in ministry, but subjects it to the guidance of the Church so that all efforts will be guided together.
 - b. Section 16 describes the promise of celibacy in positive terms of enabling priests to be more perfectly consecrated to Christ, more like the saints in heaven, and more exclusively dedicated to prayer and service of the Church. The section recognizes the Eastern practice of allowing married men to become priests (although not bishops); but even there it points out that celibacy is preferred and a gift, not primary a burden. The section reminds priests, and all who are called

to celibacy, of the importance of ascetic practices that improve discipline and prayer.

- c. Section 17 then describes the priests' relationship with worldly goods. Priests, and the whole Church, should use goods in a way that is helpful to ministry. In administering Church goods, priests should always keep in mind what they are for, i.e., liturgy, the decent support of clergy and staff, the support of the apostolates of the Church, and assistance for those in need. Priests can keep personal property, but should do so only for the sake of what they need for a decent life, not having excess or making those less fortunate feel uncomfortable approaching them. Voluntary poverty, i.e., owning all things in common, as religious brothers and sisters do, is a particularly powerful witness of the faith.
3. Part 3, which consists of sections 18-21, then describes some practices that assist priestly life.
 - a. Section 18 describes ways in which a priest's interior life develops, including through the reading of Scripture, attention to the language of the Mass, regular Confession, regular retreats and spiritual direction, spending quiet time before the Eucharist, and taking advantage of the different traditions of prayer.
 - b. Section 19 focuses on the intellectual development of priests calling for them to continue learning both theology and developments in secular fields that will help them in ministry. The section calls upon bishops to establish ways that priests can engage in continuing education, such as establishing libraries and learning centers and providing time for priests to take courses after ordination. It also calls for bishops to allow some priests to become professional teachers.
 - c. Section 20 focuses on the practical issue of the remuneration of priests, saying that priests should receive payment that enables them to live according to a decent standard of living, exercise charity, and take periodic holidays. The section says that the priests of the same area should preferably receive about the same salary and also calls for the end, or at least dramatic reformation, of the system of benefices, in which priests received the revenue generated by a certain office (e.g., a set portion of the revenues of a parish.) That system was already on the way out, but there were still concerns that it could lead to a focus on the income earned from Church.
 - d. Section 21 calls for funds to be established for the maintenance of retired priests and other employees, as well as their health care. There is also a calling for wealthier dioceses to assist poorer ones in this regard.

- F. Section 22 concludes the decree with a recognition of the struggles of priests in today's world, with so many economic, social and moral forces seeming to go against them. But it points out that we can see many good people and opportunities, especially in areas that are now coming to the faith. We are united with Christ, who brings the world to fulfillment, now as ever, in ways mysterious to us.

IV. Optatam Totius, the Decree on Priestly Formation, gives practical advice on the training of prospective priests. It primarily focuses on seminaries, but also it includes advice on the development of vocations before seminary and after ordinations.

- A. The decree consists of an introduction, seven chapters and a conclusion. The first three chapters deal with overall issues of national standards, promoting and nurturing vocations, and major seminaries. The next three sections deal specifically with spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation. The final section addresses continuing formation after ordination.
 - The three chapters on spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation are the basis for the current way of understanding seminary formation. However, the current programs use a four-fold focus: spiritual, personal, intellectual and pastoral.
- B. The introduction recognizes the need for good priests in implementing the renewal that the Council documents call for. And so it states the goal of this decree as giving overall guidelines for the training of priests. The main focus is on diocesan seminarians, but it has application to religious orders as well.
- C. The brief but very important chapter 1 states that the bishops of each nation should draft norms for seminary training in that country; those norms would then be sent to the Vatican for approval. There is thus a certain decentralization of control to the different nation, but also a call for unity in every nation, as well as adherence to overall guidance from the Vatican. In this nation, the bishops have promulgated the Program for Priestly Formation to guide seminary instruction and formation. The fifth, and latest edition, was approved in 2005.
- D. Chapter 2, consisting of sections 2 and 3, deals with the promotion of vocations, both before seminary and in minor seminaries.
 - 1. Section 2 focuses on the promotion of vocations. Reversing the order from section 11 of Presbyterorum Ordinis, section 2 describes the family as central in promoting vocations and then proceeds onto the role of teachers, priests and all of the faithful. Bishops have the overall role of both calling for people to encourage vocations and judging the suitability of candidates; but all of the people should assist him. The section calls for active prayer, preaching and vocational discernment groups to assist in promoting vocations.
 - 2. Section 3 describes the role of minor seminaries in forming young men to become able to pursue their vocations, while at the same keeping them connected to their families and to their societies.

- E. Chapter 3, consisting of sections 4-7 gives guidelines for major seminaries.
1. Section 4 describes the goal of major seminaries as training future priests in the ministry of the word, ministry of sanctification, and ministry of guiding people as shepherds. These overall goals reflect the focus in sections 4-6 of Presbyterorum Ordinis on the ministry of work, sanctity, and guidance as the overall ways in which a priest brings Christ to people.
 2. Section 5 emphasizes the importance of selecting highly qualified faculty for seminary, who can not only teach, but also give the seminarians good example and an inspiration to joy in their calling.
 3. Section 6 emphasizes the importance of careful discernment to be sure that candidates for the priesthood are qualified in every way. There is a caution against being lax in standards when there is a shortage of priests.
 4. Section 7 calls for regional or national seminaries when individual dioceses cannot each support their own seminaries. This model is the standard for the United States and most nations. The section does also say that, in large seminaries, the seminarians should also be in smaller groups for mutual support.
- F. Chapter 4, consisting of sections 8-12 addresses the spiritual formation of seminarians, which necessarily involves advancement in virtues.
1. Section 8 describes the need for formation so that seminarians are close to Christ, especially in their meditation on Scripture, in liturgies, in ministry, and when serving those in need. There is both a reaffirmation of Marian devotion and traditional devotional practices and a focus on putting the effects of prayer into virtuous practice.
 2. Section 9 focuses on a “sense of the Mystery of the Church,” rather than seeing priestly ministry merely as an occupation leading to recompense and notice. In that context, seminarians can learn to be self-sacrificing in unity with Christ.
 3. Section 10 focuses on the training in celibacy for the sake of serving Christ and His Church with an undivided love. It both presents this state as “a precious gift from God” that leads to generosity and speaks of the need for careful training to be able to maintain this state
 4. Section 11 focuses on progress in the personalities of seminarians. This progress includes high maturity, stable character, prudent decision-making and “those good qualities which are esteemed by men and made Christ’s minister acceptable” such as “sincerity, a constant love of justice, fidelity to one’s promises, courtesy in deed, modesty and charity in speech.”
 5. Section 12 says that bishops, individually and as national conferences, must decide how to set aside specific time for this growth. In the United States, there are usually retreats at the beginning of each school year. In addition,

some dioceses have a spiritual year, or a summer dedicated to spirituality, during seminary formation. This diocese dedicates the summer before the first year of theology training for spiritual formation. Seminarians also have the option of seeing aside an entire year for spirituality.

- G. Chapter 5, consisting of sections 13-18, addresses the issue of intellectual formation in the broad range of subjects, here called “ecclesiastical studies.”
1. Section 13 addresses the preparation for ecclesiastical studies, namely background in the overall subjects generally required in each country for graduate studies, as well as a knowledge of Latin. These subjects are now the focus of college seminary, with pre-theology teaching languages including Latin and Greek; in the United States, seminarians often study Spanish as well.
 2. Section 14 calls for the coordination of philosophy studies and theology studies as well as a course that describes the overall unity and goal of all seminary studies. In the United States, college or pre-theology studies cover philosophy before major seminary, which focuses mostly on theology courses.
 3. Section 15 addresses the study of philosophy, saying that the time-tested philosophical systems should be studied carefully, but that modern systems also need attention. Seminarians should study the broad range of philosophical schools to see what is valuable in them, how to apply them to life, and also how many of them can be the source of errors.
 4. The much-debated section 16 then addresses the study of theology.
 - a. It instructs that seminarians should study theology under the guidance of Church teachings in a way that helps them understand and explain these teachings. There is a call both to be faithful to the Church and to be vibrant in pondering the teachings and explaining them to the people.
 - b. It emphasizes knowledge of Scripture, reiterating the point in *Dei Verbum* that Scripture is “the very soul of theology.”
 - c. The section also calls for general theology courses to combine Scripture, the Church fathers, other great theologians, and especially the synthesis taught by St. Thomas Aquinas. This section thus both affirms the importance of Thomistic studies, but also puts them in the context with other sources.
 - d. The section calls for studies of moral theology to involve how we call all people to “the exalted vocation of the faithful in Christ and the obligation to bring forth the fruit of charity for the life of the world.” Seminarians should learn to teach clear principles, not in a minimalistic way of merely avoiding sin, but in an exalted way of calling all people to holiness.

5. Section 17 points out that good teaching is not merely about communicating ideas, but about forming the intellect so that there is a delight in learning and teaching.
 6. Section 18 calls for bishops to send some seminarians of specific ability to schools for training for teaching or other specific apostolates.
- H. Chapter 6, consisting of sections 19 – 21 address the issue of pastoral training, which had not been as much of a focus in seminary training until this point.
1. Section 19 calls for careful training in all aspects of pastoral work, including preaching, teaching, liturgy, charitable works, and dealing with people who are outside of the faith. There is a particular emphasis on being able to give spiritual direction and guidance, the ability to engage in dialogue with the broad range of humanity, and the ability to demonstrate a charitable spirit.
 2. Section 20 calls for time in seminary to be devoted to pastoral work. Diocese in America and elsewhere generally assign seminarians to parish or other church assignments during seminary studies. Some diocese also set aside an entire “pastoral year” for such training.
- I. Chapter 7 calls for the continuing education of priests after ordination, especially for younger priests. Section 19 of Presbyterorum Ordinis also called for the continuing education of priests, but made it clear that there should be a specific course of training for new priests.
- J. The conclusion affirms that the decree is a continuation of the reforms called for by the Council of Trent. It calls for cooperation between those in charge of seminary formation and the seminarians themselves.