

Catholic Seminaries in Australia 1935-2023

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Part 7: Formation for chastity and celibacy

In June 1939, shortly after taking office, Pope Pius XII [Image # 1] gave the Address *Sollemnis conventus* to seminarians concerning clerical chastity and celibacy, and in 1950 followed up with the Apostolic Exhortation *Menti nostrae*, in which he gave precise instructions for the screening of candidates for the priesthood insisting on special attention being given to 'intentions' and 'moral and physical qualifications'. He wanted formation to take place in a 'calm and healthy atmosphere' with the 'younger boys leading as normal a life as possible', and major seminarians 'staying in contact with the events of the day and the judgments and tastes of ordinary people'. Their intellectual training was to be 'on a par with that of the laity', and their spiritual and moral training to be 'of the highest order' with particular attention to 'obedience and chastity'.

In 1954 Pius XII published his Encyclical *Sacra virginitas*, in which he urged all clerics and religious to 'strengthen their holy resolution and be more fully faithful to virginity, chastity, and celibacy'. He also proposed that candidates for the priesthood and religious life who were unsuited for virginity or celibacy to 'be dissuaded from taking it up' and recommended that 'experts be engaged to make the assessments'.

In Australia, experts were not engaged until the 1970s.

Pius XII insisted that seminarians be 'separated from the tumult of the world' and educated in Christian modesty and the 'prudence of chastity'. In 1955 he approved a Circular Letter from the Sacred Congregation of the Sacraments which insisted on local Ordinaries investigating all candidates for the diocesan priesthood before their promotion to Sacred Orders, and in 1956 followed up with his Apostolic Constitution *Sedes sapientiae* and the *Statuta generalia* prepared by the Sacred Congregation of Religious for the selection and training of religious and clerics. Pius XII was determined to refashion the entire formation program to ensure it could meet the needs of modern times.

By this time Pius XII was likely already aware of the sexual abuse of children being perpetrated by priests and religious. From 1947 the US priest and founder of the Servants of the Paraclete, Gerald Fitzgerald, had been recommending to the US bishops and the Holy See that they show 'zero tolerance' for clergy who were sexually abusing children. Much earlier, in 1922, Pope Pius XI had authorised the Holy Office to despatch the ultra-secret Instruction *Crimen sollicitationis* – with norms for processing accusations against priests soliciting sex in the confessional - to diocesan bishops throughout the world.

By the 1950s there was already a growing number of what the Holy See designated as 'defections' - diocesan and religious priests seeking 'laicisation' (i.e. reduction to

the lay state) on the 'pretext' (Vatican term) that they had lacked a genuine vocation or had lost their vocation during formation or in the early years of ministry.

At the same time there were also confidential high level discussions taking place on priestly celibacy. In 1955 Cardinal Masella, Prefect of the Congregation of the Sacraments, revealed confidentially to the world's bishops that large numbers of priests were appealing for release from the obligation of celibacy, but confirmed that the Holy See's position was firm: 'it would preserve the ancient tradition of celibacy for the common good'.

Seminary formation in Australia 1940-1960

Prior to Vatican II the principal advice given to Australian seminarians was: 'if you keep the rules, the rules will keep you'. The formation program remained essentially Tridentine applied with Irish rigidity. In 1942 the Manly President told his seminarians that he would 'not be seeking to impose authority on them or to crush their spirit, for this was not the way to deal with Australian youth'. However, in 1963 the same President stated: 'To guarantee the life of self-restraint demanded in the clerical state, you have to be formed in the ecclesiastical discipline. St Partick's College, Manly, is a Tridentine Seminary.'

Cardinal Norman Gilroy, Archbishop of Sydney, was very intolerant of seminary misdemeanours and demanded harsh punishment. In 1947 he delayed the ordination of 30 seminaries for 6 months for an alleged major infraction of the rules. Prefects were also a feature of most seminaries with the reporting of breaches of discipline a principal responsibility.

During the 1950s the criteria for admission to seminaries and novitiates was personal rather than professional. There was no psychological testing and no standardised medical examination. It was thought that the seminary staff were best able to sort out the unsuitable candidates. But once admitted there was considerable pressure for candidates to stay, and decisions to leave were often referred to as 'defections'. Only in the 1960s were the criteria tightened.

In the mid-1950s Cardinal Gilroy had concerns about the quality of the Manly formation program, but was assured by his two advisors, Fr Jeremiah Hogan SJ and Bishop James Carroll, that there were no causes for 'grave concern'.

Many Australian bishops did not want to be involved in making decisions about the suitability of their own candidates for ordination, and at Manly the President was instructed to report on the progress of all candidates to the Sydney Archbishop alone.

While the educational standards in Australian seminaries was high, until 1954 none could confer degrees. Cardinal Gilroy had set two goals: to seek Holy See approval for Manly to confer theological degrees; and to establish a Catholic university. The first goal was achieved in 1954 with Rome approving a Pontifical theological faculty 'for the benefit of ecclesiastics and religious of Australia and New Zealand and the whole of Oceania' to confer bachelor and licentiate degrees in theology. Lay and

religious students were, however, locked out until 1958 when the faculty gained approval to confer doctorates.

In 1955 the Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Carboni, suggested to the Manly President, Fr James Madden, that he convene a national meeting of all seminary staff to address common problems and to pool experiences. Madden's response was: 'Thank you for your interest in our welfare'. He then made his position clear that 'seminary staff would closely follow the directions of the ecclesiastical authorities, canon law, and Holy See decrees'.

When Pope John XXIII announced the Second Vatican Council in 1958, Cardinal Gilroy asked Madden to provide some advice for the Council on seminary renewal. But Madden had nothing to say, for complacency was pervasive and 'steady as she goes' the policy of the time.

Formation of Australian priests for overseas mission

Before World War II, three seminaries were forming priests for overseas missionary work: those of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, the Columbans and the Redemptorists. However, between 1939 and 1946 four more religious congregations – Marists, Jesuits, SVDs, and Franciscans – began forming priests for overseas mission. When World War II concluded, the Columbans, Marists, and MSCs established missions in Japan, the Jesuits opened a mission in North India, and the Franciscans opened a mission in PNG. Several dioceses also loaned priests to assist them in their ministry.

From 1951 onwards large numbers of Australian missionary priests - Franciscans, Passionists, MSCs, Dominicans and SVDs – were sent to PNG and by 1972 a quarter of the 536 priests there were Australian. From 1952 onwards Australian Marist, Columban and Vincentian priests were sent to missions in the Pacific region, Japan, Korea, Philippines, India, Singapore and Malaysia, and from 1958 to Peru and Chile. In 1971-72 the Oblates and Carmelites sent their first Australian priests to Indonesia, and from 1972 the SVDs sent Australian priests to Paraguay and Peru. Very few Australian missionary priests were sent to Africa.

In 1959 there were 180 Australian priests working in overseas missions and had increased to 259 in 1966 and 365 in 1972 when 16 clerical institutes had 344 Australian missionary priests working outside Australia and 8 dioceses had 21 priests working in overseas missions. However, by 2009, the number of Australian clerical religious ministering in overseas missions had reduced to 125.

Pope John XXIII: defections, screening and cautions

In August 1959 the new Pope, John XXIII [Image # 2], issued his Encyclical *Sacerdotii nostri primordia* on priestly and religious formation and the 1960 First Roman Diocesan Synod also had some instructions on priestly formation. But there was nothing new in either document.

By 1961 John XXIII and his curial advisors were fully aware of the grave deficiencies in the screening program and the processes being used for the admission and formation of candidates for the priesthood and religious life, for far too many candidates with serious psycho-sexual problems were being professed and ordained

and then causing major problems. Religious superiors were asked to take their responsibilities much more seriously and as 'a matter of conscience'.

In the 1961 Instruction *Religiosorum institutio* of the Sacred Congregation for Religious titled *Careful Selection and Training of Candidates for the States of Perfection and Sacred Orders*, a series of instructions were laid down to forestall serious cases of defection by lay and clerical religious, including female religious. The responsible religious superiors were to: i) prefer quality to quantity; ii) check thoroughly for signs of genuine vocation; iii) be 'morally certain' of each candidate's fitness; iv) seek the cooperation of others; v) choose seminary confessors and spiritual directors very carefully; vi) have a uniform and watchful policy among formators to prevent unqualified candidates from proceeding to ordination; vii) urge candidates to form a correct judgment of their vocation; viii) finalise candidate selection within canonical time limits; ix) ensure the candidate's decision is free and informed; x) check candidate's motives; xi) advise the candidate to make known if they feel forced; xii) allow candidates to withdraw without further investigation if a confessor or spiritual director advises, even if already in major orders; xiii) dismiss unworthy, undecided, or apprehensive candidates; xiv) ensure all candidates are carefully and frequently instructed on their duties and obligations for religious and clerical life; xv) ensure candidates are fully aware of the sanctity of religious life and excellence of the priesthood; xvi) ensure young candidates are instructed in the virtue of priestly and religious chastity and warned of the dangers; xvii) bar from priesthood and religious life any candidate unable to observe ecclesiastical celibacy and practise priestly chastity.

The Instruction also listed a range of psycho-sexual indicators which would exclude certain candidates from the priesthood and religious life: inability to observe religious or priestly celibacy; frequent masturbation with inability to break the habit; no firm habit of sexual continency for a period of at least one year; grave sexual sinning (by minor seminarians, novices, temporarily professed religious, clerics and deacons) with someone of the same or other sex causing grave scandal; afflictions with 'evil tendencies to homosexuality or pederasty' constituting serious dangers to the common life and priestly ministry; and a morbid or abnormal sexuality, especially sexual hyperesthesia or an erotic bent of nature.

Before profession, aggregation or ordination the new rules included: all novices and temporally professed must attest to their vocation and declare their intention to follow it forever; superiors must inform themselves of each candidate's suitability; before ordination religious candidates must have taken perpetual vows or aggregation; superiors should be careful in giving dispensations from age or studies; and religious superiors must be truthful with the ordaining bishop about the candidate's training and worthiness.

The Instruction was to be read at all important community assemblies and young candidates informed. It was anticipated that by properly investigating the canonical fitness of candidates for religious life and sacred orders, those who were not fit would be barred at the outset and in time, and only those worthy and fit would be ordained.

However, by 1961 ‘defections’ from the religious life and priestly ministry had increased steadily and according to the Holy See’s research the more common causes (‘pretexts’) presented by the ‘defectors’ themselves were: i) no genuine vocation at time of minor orders; ii) vocation lost during formation or in early years of ministry; iii) undue family influence; iv) undue influence of superiors or directors; v) ignorance of obligations of religious life and celibacy; vi) lack of freedom in accepting obligations of chastity and celibacy; vii) fear of uncertain future if leaving before profession or ordination; viii) difficulty with celibacy; ix) loss of religious spirit; and x) inadequate screening, training or protecting by religious superiors.

The following year, 1962, Pope John XXII authorised the reissue of the ultra-secret Instruction *Crimen sollicitationis* with its procedures now extended to religious clerics.

New Australian seminaries: 1938-1961

From 1938 to 1961, there was another explosion of new seminaries with 50 opened across Australia: 6 juniorates, 17 novitiates, 17 scholasticates and houses of study, 3 minor seminaries, and 7 major seminaries – including 11 changes of location.

The Queensland dioceses opened the Pius XII ‘regional’ diocesan minor and major seminary at Banyo in 1939 [\[Image # 3\]](#), the Adelaide Archdiocese opened the St Francis Xavier ‘provincial’ diocesan minor and major seminary at Rostrevor in 1942, the WA dioceses opened St Charles ‘provincial’ diocesan minor and major seminary at Guildford in 1942, and the Armidale diocese opened St Mary’s diocesan minor seminary in 1955. In the early 1950s when Corpus Christi College at Werribee was overflowing, the Victorian and Tasmanian bishops purchased land at Glen Waverley and planned a purpose-built major seminary to accommodate 500 seminarians. It was opened in 1960 and both seminaries continued to operate until 1971.

By 1961, the year before the opening of the Second Vatican Council, there were 54 functioning seminaries in Australia with a total of 1486 seminarians in formation.

Table: New seminaries opened between 1938 and 1961

Diocese/Congregation	Seminary Type	Year Opened	Location
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Marists	Apostolic School Scholasticate Novitiate	1938 1938 1946	Toongabbie, NSW Toongabbie, NSW Armidale, NSW
Missionaries of Sacred Heart	Scholasticate	1939	Croydon, VIC
Jesuits	Scholasticate Novitiate	1939/ 1957 1957	Pymble, NSW/ Kew, VIC Kew, VIC
Blessed Sacrament Fathers	Scholasticate Novitiate	1940/ 1955 1947/1955	Melbourne/ Lower Plenty, VIC Bowral, NSW/ Lower Plenty, VIC
Dominicans	Novitiate Scholasticate	1940 1948	Camberwell, VIC Wahroonga, NSW
Franciscans	Novitiate House of Studies Juniorate	1940 1949 1955	Cambelltown, NSW Morningson, VIC Robertson, NSW
Queensland Dioceses	Minor Seminary Regional Major Seminary	1939 1939	Banyo, QLD Banyo, QLD
Salesians	Novitiate Scholasticate Juniorate	1941 1944/ 1947 1947	Sunbury, VIC Sunbury, VIC/ Oakleigh, VIC Oakleigh, VIC
Adelaide Archdiocese	Minor Seminary Major Seminary	1942 1942	Rostrevor, SA Rostrevor, SA
WA Dioceses	Major Seminary	1942	Guildford, WA
Divine Word Missionaries	Novitiate Scholasticate Juniorate	1945 1945 1954	Marburg, QLD Marburg, QLD Albury, NSW
Carmelites	Novitiate	1946	Wahroonga, NSW
Augustinians	Novitiate	1947/ 1950	Lindum, QLD/ Whinstanes, QLD
Columbans	Major Seminary	1947/1956/ 1959	Wahroonga, NSW/Sassafras, VIC/Turramurra, NSW
Oblates	Juniorate Novitiate Scholasticate	1950 1950 1955	Geelong, VIC Sorrento, VIC Wheelers Hill, VIC
Paulists	Scholasticate	1951	Parkville, VIC
Servites	Major Seminary	1951	Tuart Hill, WA
Capuchins	Juniorate Scholasticate Novitiate	1951 1955 1958	Plumbton, NSW Wynnum, QLD Hawthorn, VIC
Cistercians	Novitiate Scholasticate	1954 1954	Tarrawarra, VIC Tarrawarra, VIC
Armidale Diocese	Minor Seminary	1955	Armidale, NSW
Pallotines	Novitiate House of Studies	1957 1957	Strathfield, NSW Strathfield, NSW
Franciscan Conventuals	Novitiate	1960	Virginia, SA
Victorian and Hobart Dioceses	Regional Major Seminary	1960	Glen Waverley, VIC

Images:

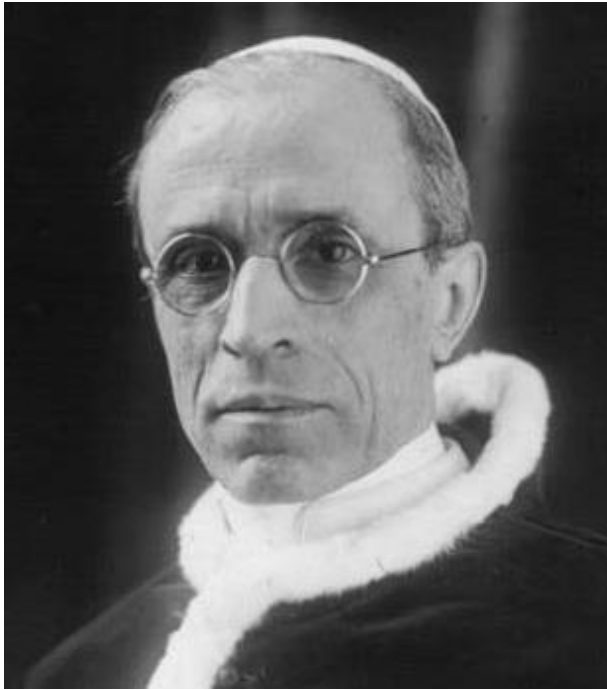


Image: Pope Pius XII (1939-1958)



Image: Pope John XXIII (1958-1963)



Image: Pius XII Regional Seminary, Banyo, QLD (1939-2006; 2007-present)



Image: St Charles Seminary, Guildford, WA (1942-1975; 1994-present)