

**CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF  
ENGLAND & WALES  
COMMISSION ON SEMINARIES**

***THE PASTORAL CARE OF  
VOCATIONS***

*There have been, and to some extent there still are, many different practical forms according to which the Church has been involved in the pastoral care of vocations. Her task is not only to discern but also to “accompany” priestly vocations. But the spirit which must inspire and sustain her remains the same: that of bringing to the priesthood only those who have been called, and to bring them adequately trained, namely, with a conscious and free response of adherence and involvement of their whole person with Jesus Christ who calls them to intimacy of life with him and to share in his mission of salvation.*

*In this sense, the “seminary” in its different forms, and analogously the “house” of formation for religious priests, more than a place, a material space, should be a spiritual place, a way of life, an atmosphere that fosters and ensures a process of formation, so that the person who is called to the priesthood by God may become, with the Sacrament of Orders, a living image of Jesus Christ, Head and Shepherd of the Church.*

*Pastores Dabo Vobis §42*

- 1 When reflecting on vocations to the priesthood and on the formation which they deserve, the members of this Commission recall the teaching of the Second Vatican Council that Priests are co-workers of the Bishops so that their apostolic mission can be properly carried out. Bishops have a special responsibility and concern for Priests, for the discernment and nurturing of vocations to the priesthood, and for making the best possible provision for initial and on-going priestly formation.
- 2 In undertaking this task the Commission has sought to give the Bishops the opportunity to make informed decisions about future provision for priestly formation and about the future use of available resources, and so to exercise their pastoral care of vocations.

## I THE COMMISSION'S REMIT AND TASK

- 3 At the meeting of the Bishops' Conference in Low Week 2001 the presentation of Reports from the Beda and Venerable English Colleges in Rome and the English College at Valladolid prompted a lengthy discussion about current and future provision of formation for the priesthood in England and Wales. While acknowledging the particular rights and responsibilities of Bishops as trustees of individual institutions, it was agreed that it would be timely for the Bishops to take a collegial overview of the formation offered by all seven seminaries in England and abroad.
- 4 Accordingly the Commission on Seminaries was established with the following terms of reference: **to review the present seminary provision and to make recommendations to the Bishops' Conference in Low Week 2002 on achieving the best possible provision for the formation of candidates for the priesthood.** The Bishops' Conference would subsequently be responsible for noting, modifying or agreeing these recommendations, and determining as necessary the means for their implementation.
- 5 The Bishops' Conference directed the Commission to consult the Holy See, the Bishops themselves together with their Vocations Directors, the Rectors, Staff and Students at the seven seminaries, and the Episcopal Conference of Scotland. The Commission also consulted the National Conference of Priests (NCP), a Consultative Body of the Bishops' Conference.
- 6 From the outset the Commission understood its task to include:
- the examination in each seminary of the processes of selecting and assessing candidates
  - the programme of academic studies and of pastoral, spiritual and personal formation
  - the seminary's particular ethos and contribution to the Church's life in England and Wales
  - the overall adaptability of available resources to meet future needs
- 7 In approaching this task the Commission has considered it essential to declare its view on two important issues:
- The Commission accepted unanimously that there must be places and communities dedicated to formation to the priesthood, where candidates for the priesthood may, over an extended period, enter into a new way of life, apart from their usual home, work or parish environment, and it wishes to affirm the provision to date of such dedicated places and communities by the seminaries.
  - Of critical importance is the unique role that these communities play in the formation of students for a life of priestly celibacy.

## II THE CONSULTATION

- 8 The Consultation process was initiated by sending Preparatory Questions to the seminaries for Rectors, Staff and Seminarians to consider before the Commissioners' visits, and to the Vocations Directors ahead of their joint meeting with the Commissioners. These questions focussed on two areas: the constitution, life and work of the seminary itself, and the broader context of vocation and formation. The Bishops were concurrently invited to respond to additional questions relating to their particular responsibilities and concerns.
- 9 Between September 2001 and February 2002 various members of the Commission met with Archbishop Pittau, Secretary of the Congregation for Catholic Education in Seminaries and Institutes of Studies, the Conference of Vocations Directors, the National Co-ordinating Committee for Seminaries (Rectors), representatives of the Episcopal Conference of Scotland together with the Rectors of the Pontifical Scots Colleges in Rome and Salamanca, the National Conference of Priests, and the Principal and Chairman of Governors of Heythrop College, and the Principal of Campion House, Osterley.
- 10 The schedule of visits to the seven seminaries was completed by the end of 2001, and regular progress reports have been submitted to the Standing Committee and November 2001 Meeting of the Bishops' Conference. Frequent meetings of the Commission, including a two-day residential meeting, have enabled the Commissioners to reach a consensus and to put forward recommendations that they consider prudent and achievable.
- 11 At the end of six months of extensive and detailed consultation, much of the information required by the Bishops to plan for the future of formation for the priesthood is now available for them to consider, thanks in large measure to the generous response of all those who were visited or who sent written submissions. However, there are other bodies and institutions already involved in formation for ordained and lay ministry, or with a potential contribution to make, who should be consulted about the development of strategies for formation at a future stage of this process (in particular the Missionary Institute London, Religious Orders' houses of formation, and Consultative Bodies of the Bishops' Conference other than the NCP).
- 12 In total sixty-eight written submissions were received, with thirteen from individual Bishops, the majority of the remainder from the seven seminaries, and several from formal or informal gatherings and groups of priests at local, diocesan or national level. No particular response is referred to or identified in this Report, but observations and suggestions carrying the strongest support are highlighted here.

### **III SOME KEY OPINIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THOSE CONSULTED**

#### **IIIa The Congregation for Catholic Education in Seminaries and Institutes of Studies**

- 13 Archbishop Pittau, at the Congregation for Catholic Education in Seminaries and Institutes of Studies, saw the Commission's work as *a providential opportunity to look at all aspects of formation*. The provision of a Propaedeutic Period as the norm for all candidates was strongly recommended.
- 14 The Commission was also offered, through Archbishop Pittau, the advice of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, that when initially selecting candidates for priestly formation the Bishops' choice should help to obviate the later development of unhealthy subcultures in seminary life. The Bishops' Conference was asked to consider the advantages of establishing a Catholic (Pontifical) Faculty of Theology in England and Wales.

#### **IIIb The Bishops of England and Wales**

- 15 The principal concerns to arise from the thirteen submissions from Bishops were the fundamental principles on which future plans for formation should be built, the benefits and limits of national oversight and co-ordination, the future disposition of resources, the relationship between seminaries and dioceses, and the significance of pre-seminary contact and training, together with On-Going Formation.
- 16 It was strongly felt that the chief concern of the Commission should be the formation of candidates within a stable and prayerful community where human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation are integrated, rather than the specific training opportunities which such a process of formation would require.
- 17 Many Bishops believed that continuity within a community would benefit the majority of seminarians, while a few Bishops felt that some might need to experience more than one setting in the course of formation. It was also considered important that, in general, resources should not be disposed of, but adapted so as to support the Church's mission and ministry.
- 18 While acknowledging the work of the Bishops' Committee for Ministerial Formation, it was nonetheless considered important that the Bishops seek to influence at a national level strategies for selection, formation, assessment and post-ordination mentoring through appropriately developed structures. The Bishops ought to engage together in a serious discussion about the expression of priesthood they consider best suited to the future missionary and pastoral needs of England and Wales, before setting up a national body to co-ordinate the work of vocations promotion, initial and continuing formation.
- 19 Many Bishops favoured the use of a Propaedeutic Period based at the English College, Valladolid, while others preferred the diocese as the location for such preparation. The offer of intellectual priming by Campion House, Osterley for those

preparing to enter seminary should be included in the range of options that Bishops consider.

- 20 It was thought immensely important that effective links between the diocese and seminaries should be maintained and where necessary strengthened, so that Bishops are able to contribute significantly to the governance of the seminaries they use and that seminaries may come to understand and honour the character of the individual dioceses they serve. The role of the Vocations Director as liaison between diocese and seminarians should be strengthened, and clarified by the drafting of a nationally recognised job description.
- 21 Most responding Bishops emphasised the need to develop the opportunities offered by the seminaries to support diocesan programmes of On-Going Formation, alongside and sometimes integrated with training for the Permanent Diaconate and lay leadership.
- 22 There was strong support for greater sharing of the resources available for formation throughout England and Wales, and agreement that, while resources ought to be more concentrated than at present, there should still be significant regional seminaries in England (in various permutations of North, Midlands and South) maintaining important University links. A sustainable future was envisaged for the national colleges abroad, with Valladolid concentrating on pre-seminary formation, the Venerable English College, Rome offering post-ordination graduate studies, and the Beda College, Rome continuing to develop as an international house of formation for English-speaking seminarians drawn largely from British Commonwealth countries.

### **IIIc Other Responses**

- 23 Many of the concerns and preferences expressed in the Bishops' submissions were reflected in the responses from a variety of groups and individuals. Of the sixty-eight responses, fifty-five were received from seminarians and seminary staff, from individual priests and from informal groups and Diocesan Councils of priests, directly or through the NCP. Some significant insights springing from the written submissions and a number of widely held opinions are summarised here.
- 24 It was repeatedly observed that the present consultative process need not be by way of exception, but could form part of a regular process of review and contact between the Bishops and those engaged in formation. Some disappointment was expressed that the initial stage of the consultation had not been wider, so as include lay people whom priests seek to serve and together with whom they would wish to prepare for more effective collaborative ministry.
- 25 There was a strong plea for national criteria to judge cognitive, spiritual and psychological maturity when selecting candidates, criteria which would be demonstrably "rigorous and universal", and which would take due and obvious account of the implications of the *Nolan Report*. Similar national criteria could be developed for the continuous assessment of seminarians.
- 26 Many responses reflected on the implications of increasing the number of seminarians in individual formation communities. While some felt that student year groups should

be big enough for effective peer formation, others emphasised that having sufficient flexibility to offer courses well-suited to the needs of individual students depends on the number of staff available. Many considered it important that programmes of formation should have a degree of flexibility in order to suit the individual seminarian's needs, with dioceses and seminaries working closely together and with sufficient account being taken of the student's skills and experience (cf *PDV* §64).

- 27 Contact with lay people as students and tutors in the course of formation was stressed in many responses as an effective way to prepare for collaborative ministry. The recruitment, training and professional development of staff for formation was regarded as a priority for the improvement of current provision.
- 28 There is a widespread sense that the relationship between seminaries and Vocations Directors needs to be clarified so as to better benefit dioceses and students. It was felt that collaboration within the dioceses between seminary staff and Vocations Directors would help the promotion of vocations.
- 29 Some responses urged the Bishops to develop an overall strategy for the On-Going Formation of priests, making use of seminary resources, developing at national level a basic job description for diocesan Directors of On-Going Formation, and establishing policy on suitable support systems, mentoring and supervision for those recently ordained.
- 30 Many of the views expressed envisaged a national body through which the Bishops would be able to exercise their pastoral care of vocations and have collegial oversight of the provision of formation before and beyond ordination. Such a body would assist in developing a co-ordinated strategy on selection and assessment and the sharing of resources, help improve information about Ecclesiastical Education and Seminary Funds, and promote prayerful support within the parishes. The NCP noted that in any national overview of priestly formation "reference to Christ is the absolutely necessary key for understanding the reality of the priesthood".
- 31 The Commission received two significant reports that it wishes to commend to the Bishops. *Governance : Selection/Assessment : Sexuality* was prepared in 2001 by the Rectors of the seminaries and offered both to the Standing Committee of the Bishops' Conference and to this Commission.
- 32 *Proposal for a Pre-Seminary Year* is a reflection on the Propaedeutic period as recommended in *PDV*, drawn up in March 1995 by a working group, and taken up by the English College, Valladolid in the development of its pre-seminary programme.

#### IV THE COMMISSION'S VIEWS ON PRIESTLY FORMATION IN GENERAL

- 33 There are several factors that have influenced the Commission in assessing the information gathered through the consultative process. These include some basic principles and convictions, together with an awareness of the wider theological and missiological context in which the question of priestly vocation and formation is set.
- 34 The Commissioners have borne in mind the clear perception of *Pastores Dabo Vobis* that there is about the priesthood that which abides and that which must develop:

*There is an essential aspect of the priest that does not change: the priest of tomorrow, no less than the priest of today, must resemble Christ...the priestly vocation will continue to be the call to live the unique and permanent priesthood of Christ.*

*It is equally certain that the life and ministry of the priest must also adapt to every era and circumstance of life. For our part we must therefore seek...to discover the tendencies of contemporary society, recognize the deepest spiritual needs, determine the most important concrete tasks and the pastoral methods to adopt, and thus respond adequately to human expectations. (PDV § 5)*

- 35 The Commission recognises the changing image of the priesthood as it has adapted to meet pastoral and missionary demands, and sees a yet more effective role for the Bishops in influencing the direction and pace of change. It affirms the gift of celibacy as *a sign of God's love for this world and of the undivided love of the priest for God and for God's People...a positive enrichment of the priesthood (PDV § 29)*. Accordingly, a central feature of formation must be helping students to engage in a process of sexual and emotional growth and integration that will continue throughout their lives, so that celibacy will be seen as a positive gift and as a sign of the Kingdom.
- 36 The Commission believes that a national body to oversee the pastoral care of vocations, consisting of Bishops and others appointed by the Bishops' Conference, is desirable for the development of policy and strategies on:
- the selection of candidates
  - the use of the Propaedeutic Period
  - the formation and assessment of seminarians
  - the support and mentoring of those recently ordained and provision of On-Going Formation for priests
  - the role and task of Vocations Directors
  - the recruitment, training and professional development of seminary staff
  - national sharing and management of resources
- 37 In relation to On-Going Formation the Bishops are strongly urged by the Commission to reflect on the benefits to their dioceses of encouraging some of their recently ordained priests to pursue post-graduate studies.

- 38 Alongside the national and regional settings for formation, with the diocesan connexions and pastoral opportunities that those afford, the Commission sees a continuing value in maintaining the European dimension: the colleges in Rome and Valladolid provide a broadening experience of Catholic culture and a means of contextualising the Church’s mission and ministry in England and Wales.
- 39 It concerns the Commission that the duration of “short courses” may not always allow adequate time for formation, discernment and the assessment of candidates by the Bishops: it believes that shorter courses should be seen as exceptional.
- 40 The Commission is aware that a number of questions require further reflection or information before they can be answered. These concern the provision of bespoke courses for individual seminarians and the range of options needed to make such provision, lay involvement in formation and assessment, developing co-operation with the study houses and educational institutes of the Religious Orders.
- 41 The Commission believes that further consultation is necessary to bring many of these questions to resolution, and recommends that the permanently established national body should also be responsible for carrying forward any resolutions agreed by the Bishops’ Conference and should take up issues needing further consultation in the next stage of the process.



## V PROFILES OF THE SEVEN SEMINARIES

- 42 The Commission was impressed during its visits to the seven seminaries in England and abroad by the commitment of Rectors, Staff and Students to the task of formation entrusted to them, by the high standards set and achieved within the communities, by the willingness to enter into discussion on the wide range of issues within the Commission's remit, by their aspiration to secure the highest quality of formation, and by their generous co-operation in all things.
- 43 The visits enabled the Commissioners to experience and appreciate something of the tradition and ethos of each institution, and to note the value placed on its particular contribution to the life of the Church at diocesan, regional or national level. The visits have led to an understanding of each seminary which could not have been gained from written material only.
- 44 The profiles which follow carry an assessment of the strengths of each place, indicate areas of achievement where there have been significant growth and development, and outline the potential for future development.

### Va St Mary's College, Oscott (1/2 October 2001)

- 45 The Commission recognises the vision, strategic thinking and energy which are shaping Oscott, and among the students a sense of their mission to take Christ to a fragmented world. There is a very strong sense among staff and students alike of the Catholic history and identity of the place, a distinctive ethos that strengthens its missionary vision today. Oscott's location affords fruitful pastoral and study opportunities, while being conducive to prayer and reflection.
- 46 The seminary offers a network of friends and a sense of solidarity which supports mission in an antipathetic world. Public prayer and worship seem well-prepared and central to the life of the community. The academic links with the Universities of Birmingham and Leuven are generally experienced as beneficial. The property is well-developed with up-to-date facilities, and Oscott's investments provide a strong financial basis for future plans.
- 47 **Overall** the Commission was impressed by the atmosphere of serious commitment to the task of formation, and to the integrated approach at Oscott. It recognised a desire to develop a programme of On-Going Formation so as to draw priests back to the seminary. However, it felt that among the students themselves human and spiritual formation should be worked out in closer relation to issues of life-style, and that the Staff should seek more effective integration of the four elements of formation.
- 48 The college's strong sense of history and identity is exploited for the benefit of its mission today, while the financial assets which the college enjoys enable it to have viable development plans and to recruit able and professional staff in all departments.
- 49 **In conclusion** the Commission highlights, amongst Oscott's considerable assets, the strong sense of its heritage, its felicitous location in the midlands of England and on the edge of the country's second city, and its financial stability. It is significant that at

the University of Birmingham Oscott has access to the largest Theology Faculty in the country. However, the Commission also agreed that more work needs to be done in drawing the staff together towards a concerted view on the implementation of *Pastores Dabo Vobis*.

**Vb St John's Seminary, Wonersh (2/3 October 2001)**

- 50 The strong sense of commitment to Bourne's Sulpician model of formation based on a common life was matched by the students' strong sense brotherhood and the staff's awareness of modelling priesthood. The four elements of *PDV* seem to have been well-integrated through a programme followed by staff and students together. A long-established Selection Conference has evolved an effective methodology, while the Bishops/Staff Meeting encourages and enables mutually beneficial dialogue with sponsoring dioceses.
- 51 Much has been achieved on comparatively slender resources, despite the unpredictability about future development and the severe problem of recruiting staff. The seminarians recognise the emphasis on being the primary agents of their own formation and feel that they are treated as mature people, while staff seem open to positive and negative criticism.
- 52 **Overall** Wonersh seems to have gone some way along the path of successfully integrating the four elements of *PDV* and there is a collaborative atmosphere between Rector, Staff and Students. While relationships with the dioceses are generally well-structured, there is quite a strong sense of provincial identity and of ties with the metropolitan see.
- 53 The Commission echoes the concern that academic staff as formators are expected to have too broad a range of abilities and frequently find themselves insufficiently trained for these roles. Careful planning of teaching and contact time for Part-Time Degree Students may in future facilitate greater opportunities for involvement in appropriate settings between seminarians and lay students. The Commission recognises that the links with the University of Surrey encourage an approach from staff to their work which is both professional and accountable.
- 54 **In conclusion** the Commission acknowledges the achievement of staff who have a coherent vision, know what they are doing and are enthusiastic, and the benefits of Wonersh's pleasant subrural location. It is concerned about the seminary's financial dependence on student fees, and about Wonersh's perceived remoteness.

**Vc Venerable English College, Rome (21/22 October 2001)**

- 55 The Venerable offers a breadth of educational and cultural experiences, while life in Rome strengthens the sense of the Church's universality alongside what it means to be an English or Welsh Catholic in today's secular environment. The student from England and Wales has the valuable experience of studying with seminarians from around the world at one of the Pontifical Universities. A comparatively small staff can be close to the student body, which tends to relate to them as formators rather than as teachers. The clear assessment procedures seem to be appreciated by the students.

- 56 The presence of young student priests in the college and in Sherwin House is viewed as very positive, giving encouragement and a good example to the seminarians. The example of the martyrs continues to inspire and help prepare students for an uncertain future in England and Wales, while the college is imbued with a strong sense of its history and identity.
- 57 **Overall** there are compelling reasons for continuing to use the Venerabile as a place of pre- and post-ordination formation, and it would be important for the college to develop an even more effective and integrated policy for initial and continuing formation.
- 58 The Bishops benefit from and value the college's presence in Rome and the Commission considers it important that adequate personnel be available to help carry the heavy burden of hospitality which currently falls on a small though dedicated and generous staff team.
- 59 **In conclusion** the Commission values the unique experience of the centre of the Catholic Church and the opportunity to study at one of the great Pontifical Universities of Rome which formation at the Venerabile affords, and it sees the college's villa at Palazzola as a magnificent asset. The Commission encourages the college to continue improving its integration of human and pastoral development within the formal seminary programme. It is obliged to note that the provision of formation at the Venerabile is costly.

#### **Vd Beda College, Rome (22/23 October 2001)**

- 60 The Beda's specificity is its offer of a four-year course for older students in an international community. It understands itself as providing priests who are reflective and paced, and offers a view of priesthood that is being shaped by and with people from a range of countries and cultures. Its students are in the main people with a wide variety of abilities and lengthy experience.
- 61 A high priority is given to the pastoral dimension of studies and to preparation for sacramental ministry, and the staff is keen to provide human development courses. There is a significant awareness that particular assessment criteria may need to be developed for an international group of seminarians, with stronger links forged especially through the Vocations Directors.
- 62 **Overall** the college could be viewed as viable in material terms and in providing a programme of formation for older students in an international setting. It makes a valued contribution to the work of formation internationally, but is not an appropriate setting for candidates under the age of forty.
- 63 The Commission recommends continued reflection within the college on the possible expansion of its international role, and the development of admissions criteria for students from England, Wales and the other "feeder" countries.
- 64 **In conclusion** the Commission wishes to recognise the tremendous contribution which the Beda has made to the life of the Church in England and Wales and its successful history. It sees the College as economically viable and the development of

its international potential as both a benefit and a significant pointer towards its future. The Commission believes that in the main the Beda course no longer corresponds with the contemporary requirements of priestly formation in England and Wales, and questions whether its formation programme is sufficiently geared towards the needs of an international body of seminarians. The Commission notes at the Beda a lack of appropriate pastoral engagement and an uneven approach to academic studies.

**Ve St Cuthbert's College, Ushaw, (20/21 November 2001)**

- 65 The Commissioners' visit took place during the President's sabbatical absence, but after having met with him in Nottingham. It is clear that the successful system of governance strengthens an already good relationship between the college and the Bishops of the Northern Province and Shrewsbury diocese. The presence of the Conference Centre and the development of the Institute for Mission have provided collaborative opportunities and extended Ushaw's.
- 66 The human development programme allows the integration within personal development of issues arising from pastoral experience, and the college's assessment procedures appear comprehensive and open, with a clear communication of expectations. Its link with Durham University is valued by the college and gives extensive credibility to its work. Despite the extent and current under-use of the site, the college appears to be on a fairly sound financial footing, with income generated by internal re-use of the buildings and from investments.
- 67 **Overall** the Commission applauds the strong involvement by the "client" Bishops in the development of policy for Ushaw and in the college's governance, seeing in these relationships an opportunity for strengthening the corresponding links with the Vocations Directors. However, it would wish to see a more effective inter-relationship between on the one hand the developing plans for the Institute for Mission, the Conference Centre and for realising the potential of the other buildings on site and on the other the regular work of formation and assessment within the seminary community.
- 68 It was not clear to the Commission that the seminary does in fact lie at the heart of the overall scheme of development, and that the resources dedicated to the wider development are of benefit to the core work of priestly formation. The Commission feels that Ushaw needs to project a clearer vision of priestly formation so as to dispel any lingering doubts that policy might be unduly influenced by the need to use so vast a collection of buildings.
- 69 **In conclusion** the Commission recognises Ushaw's strong sense of local Catholic tradition, its long history of service, its rich heritage of formation and its historically important library. However, the seminary's recent imaginative development of its resources and the provision of new programmes of study for the local Church have shifted the focus away from the programme of priestly formation, making it as a consequence less effective. At the same time, we do not believe that the overall developments would be successful without the presence of the seminary at Ushaw.

## Vf Allen Hall (4/5 December 2001)

- 70 There seems a united view among the staff that Allen Hall is truly a place of discernment for those who believe themselves called to priesthood and who have been accepted. The location in London offers, together with cultural and pastoral opportunities, a broad cross-section of capable staff, and overall the course of studies and formation seem quite well integrated. In Human Development the model of accompaniment has been appreciated, and the Extended Pastoral Placement, involving students, priests and laity in a learning agreement and in assessment, is well supported.
- 71 The presence of students from religious orders generally benefits the community, and students show appreciation of the staff, the courses offered and their experience of seminary life. Fortnightly accompaniment with a formator has led to a more balanced and thorough mode of assessment. The economic forecasts are improving with the possibility of more income generation from summer use of the site.
- 72 **Overall** the Commission was satisfied with Allen Hall as a formation community, affirms the many good things achieved by the staff, and notes especially their commitment to an integrated pattern of formation. It sees considerable potential in developing the link with Heythrop College, and wishes to encourage the enhanced use of professional psychological assessment in the selection process.
- 73 The Commission recognises the emergence of a stronger, more co-ordinated leadership, and the potential for the many desirable elements of formation already present to cohere even more effectively. The limitations of the site and the buildings have enabled the community to focus symbolically on *martyrdom* in an attempt to let the heritage of the past speak and inspire today, and so contribute to the college's sense of identity.
- 74 **In conclusion** the Commission's strong impression is that Allen Hall has taken *Pastores Dabo Vobis* seriously, and has reconstructed its pattern of formation on the basis of the Encyclical's four elements of formation. While its location offers many pastoral and academic opportunities, its buildings are unsuited to the life of the community and to the task of priestly formation.

## Vg St Alban's College, Valladolid (10/11 December 2001)

- 75 There is a strong sense of the martyrs' tradition as a living thing imbuing the life of the college and enhancing its identity. The community is modest and realistic, drawing benefits from its small size, so that staff and students live as a family. It has a revered and established place in the city and the local diocese, and makes the most of its links and cultural opportunities. The students value the programme of formation, especially access to staff time.
- 76 On the whole pastoral opportunities have not been constrained by the college's location. However, academic achievement is held back by the Augustinianum's "ceiling" at Baccalaureate level. While it is clear that the gradually diminishing community has become unviable, the Propaedeutic Year has become a major strength

to be offered more widely. The college's considerable and well-husbanded assets offer scope for imaginative future development.

- 77 **Overall** the Commission sought to distinguish between the institution itself and its capacity to adapt, and the circumstances of the current seminary community. If the Propaedeutic Year, which is well-founded and well-resourced, were to be used more widely the college could continue to make a valuable contribution to the work of formation for England and Wales.
- 78 The Commission applauds the increasing opportunities afforded for On-Going Formation and can see benefits in combining resources for pre-seminary and post-ordination formation on the same site. With a coherent vision within and sustained support from outside, the college could find a place in the overall pattern of formation for England and Wales.
- 79 **In conclusion** the Commission recognises the college's strong and formative sense of its history and tradition of service, and sees its setting as enriching the experience of seminarians by exposing them to European and Catholic culture. Valladolid benefits from a family atmosphere in the college, and from the experience of hosting visitors to its beautiful Country House. Its successful Propaedeutic Year has worked well, has been appreciated by those who have undertaken it, and is a notable achievement of the college. The Commission must note the limited possibilities for academic formation offered in Valladolid itself, and the unfavourable image in some places from which the college has suffered.

## VI THE BEDA COLLEGE : A CASE APART

- 80 The case of the Beda stands apart because of its unique status, its specialised work and the potential for developing its international dimension.
- 81 The Commission noted that most vocations in England and Wales today could be described as “late”, calling many people no longer in the first flush of youth but with a degree of experience and maturity. The shorter, four-year course will not always be appropriate for individuals in their thirties or even forties, and the Commission would prefer to see a course of usual length alongside other diocesan seminarians as normative for older students. However, Bishops may prefer to retain the option of a four-year course at the Beda for exceptionally mature and experienced candidates.
- 82 At the same time the Beda has continued to develop successfully as a college offering places to seminarians from a wide variety of English-speaking Commonwealth countries, and looks set to be able to continue this service to countries whose vocations to the priesthood are flourishing and increasing in disproportion to the resources locally available to support them. The Commission looks positively on these developments and foresees the Beda continuing to evolve its current admissions policy.
- 83 Consequently, the Commission would encourage the advancing of policy and plans for the Beda unconstrained by the Recommendations of this Review. It suggests to those with responsibility for the Beda that the college consider the re-negotiation of its Statutes so as to reflect the new and emerging reality of its situation. The role and contribution of the Beda are valued by the Commission, but not regarded as integral to its proposals for priestly formation for England and Wales.

## VII OPTIONS FOR FUTURE USE OF RESOURCES FOR FORMATION

- 84 The Commission has reviewed and analysed a variety of possibilities for the future disposition of resources currently available for formation, always keeping in mind the missionary and pastoral needs of England and Wales, the theological basis for the provision of priestly ministry and the formation of candidates, the importance of many established ecclesial, academic and ecumenical links at diocesan, regional and national level, and the overall responsibility of the Bishops for the pastoral care of vocations.
- 85 A variety of permutations has taken shape on the basis of two different but not incompatible approaches to providing the core programme of formation within one or more seminary communities, alongside the complementary provision of locations for the Propaedeutic Period and Post-Graduate Studies or On-Going Formation. The various models of a National Seminary on one or more sites, two or more Regional Seminaries, and the use of colleges abroad (excepting the Beda College) have been extensively scrutinised by the Commission, in a process of discernment leading to some firm Recommendations.

### VIIa A National Seminary on One Site

- 86 The Commission gave great consideration to the notion of establishing a National Seminary which would require and enable the Bishops to establish a nationally co-ordinated policy on priestly vocations and formation. This in turn would foster the development of national criteria and procedures for the nurturing of vocations, the initial selection of candidates, their assessment and integrated formation after the pattern of *PDV*, the recruitment, training and professional development of staff, and the provision of On-Going Formation.
- 87 It briefly considered the advantages of locating a National Seminary on one site, where the best available staff and resources could be pooled, and accommodation provided for up to 250 seminarians. The only location with the potential to take such numbers is currently Ushaw College.
- 88 However, it was clear to the Commission that Ushaw's location in the North-East of England would make the one otherwise viable site extremely remote from most of the dioceses to be served by a National Seminary, would make the provision of regular pastoral opportunities difficult during term, would require an undesirably large number of resident staff to maintain a reasonable seminarian-formator ratio, and would in truth be far too large to be an effective community for formation. **These arguments have persuaded the Commission not to adopt this option.**

### VIIb A National Seminary on Two Sites

- 89 The possibility of a National Seminary on two sites was next considered. A systematic division would be possible between seminarians in the first cycle of Philosophy and those in the second cycle of Theology, with staff focussed according to academic expertise, and locations chosen so as to maximise the academic links available and required, and to offer a variety of regional and demographic settings (for



example: Wonersh in the Surrey countryside as the location for Philosophical studies which would largely be taught in-house, and Oscott on the outskirts of Birmingham as the location for Theological studies which would benefit from the links with the Universities of Leuven and Birmingham).

- 90 This option has many of the advantages of the “one-site” model for a National Seminary, while also strengthening the regional links between the seminaries and the “feeder” dioceses. However, the need for seminarians to change location in the course of their formation would make the processes of formation, discernment and assessment too disparate and difficult. For the purposes of governance and in order to oversee, assess and advise the Bishops on the progress of their seminarians, this option would require the establishment of a national co-ordinating body as the common point of reference for the two campuses of the National Seminary and for the Bishops whose dioceses they would serve. **In the interests of an integrated programme of formation and assessment, the Commission rejects this option.**

### **VIIc Three Regional Seminaries in England**

- 91 The Commission next turned its attention to the possibility of Regional Seminaries with responsibility for the provision of formation in a particular province or region. Regional seminaries would build upon the connexions and loyalties enjoyed at present, would honour diocesan and regional specificities, would take advantage of the range of academic and pastoral networks already in place, and would strengthen the sense of belonging and continuity with a number of traditions of formation valued by the dioceses. They would be open to wider local use for On-Going Formation of priests, Permanent Diaconate training and lay formation.
- 92 A choice presented itself to the Commission between maintaining three or two Regional Seminaries to serve England and Wales. If three seminaries were located in the North of England, the Midlands and the South, initial formation could take place entirely at home, leaving the Venerable English College, Rome exclusively for Post-Graduate studies and St Alban’s College, Valladolid as the normal location for the Propaedeutic Period. **The Commission did not pursue this option since it would have reduced the Venerable to a post-graduate residence.**

### **VIIId Two Regional Seminaries in England and the English College, Rome**

- 93 Alternatively, maintaining only two Regional Seminaries would retain most of the benefits of this model, but allow the additional flexibility of being able to send students for initial formation to the Venerable. At the same time an increasing number of priests could undertake post-graduate studies based at the English College, while pre-seminary formation would be based at Valladolid. At home, the North and Midlands of England would be served by one Regional Seminary, the South of England by the other, with Wales having access to both. **This is the option the Commission favours and wishes to develop.**
- 94 A major consideration throughout has been the use of the colleges abroad, given that the Commission sees a continuing and increasing value in enabling those preparing for priesthood in England and Wales to experience something of European Catholic culture in the course of formation.

- 95 The Commission has reflected on the possibility of greater co-operation, leading perhaps to the sharing of buildings and resources, between the Pontifical Scots College and the Venerabile, but has been discouraged from pursuing this option by the response of the representatives of the Episcopal Conference of Scotland and of the Scots College. A discussion about the future possibilities of working with the Scots Colleges abroad is yet to be concluded.
- 96 The Commission had originally considered the Venerable English College, Rome to be a suitable setting for a predominantly post-graduate house of studies and therefore for On-Going Formation. Other considerations have made it clear to the Commission that a great deal would be lost by limiting the Venerabile in this way, and that in all probability there would not be a sufficiently large number of post-graduates from England and Wales to make such a proposition viable.

## VIII THE COMMISSION'S RECOMMENDATIONS

- 97 The Commission concludes its Report with **two groups of Recommendations**. In the first group are general recommendations which set out some of the necessary ingredients for a coherent national programme of priestly formation, and for carrying forward the work undertaken by this Commission. In the second group are specific recommendations about the Commission's preferred model for the future pattern of formation.

### VIIIa General Recommendations

- 98 The Commission for Seminaries makes the following general Recommendations for future priestly formation in England and Wales:

- i. That a National Board for the Pastoral Care of Vocations be established to develop a co-ordinated national policy on vocations and formation for the priesthood. The Board would be accountable to the Bishops' Conference and to the Bishops individually. It would be responsible for the evolving of policy on selection, assessment and formation, the Propaedeutic Period and On-Going Formation, and the recruitment and training of staff.
- ii. That a Propaedeutic Period of one year should be introduced as the norm for candidates to the priesthood, and should be seen as integral to formation.
- iii. That post-graduate studies should be strongly encouraged and should be seen as continuing formation.
- iv. That the National Board initiate a national programme for the recruitment, training and professional development of seminary staff.
- v. That the National Board be set up without delay to carry out the Resolutions agreed by the Bishops' Conference

### VIIIb Specific Recommendations

- 99 The Commission makes the following specific Recommendations about the future use of resources for formation:

- i. That seminary provision be established in two institutions in England, with each offering a full programme of formation. In order to achieve this there should be a merger between St Cuthbert's College, Ushaw and St Mary's College, Oscott in the North and Midlands of England, and a merger between St John's Seminary, Womersley and Allen Hall in the South of England.
- ii. That the Venerable English College, Rome be used for initial formation for the priesthood alongside the seminaries in England, and that it develop its facilities for post-graduate studies.

- iii. That St Alban's College, Valladolid should become the location for the Propaedeutic Period, and should continue to develop opportunities for the On-Going Formation of priests.
- iv. That the National Board for the Pastoral Care of Vocations should oversee the programme of formation at all the designated locations, and should have formal links with the Trustees and Governing Bodies of each institution.
- v. That the Bishops' Conference seek funding for the implementation of the Report of the Commission on Seminaries and for the operations of the National Board for the Pastoral care of Vocations from the Lisbon Trust.

100 **The Commission urges most strongly that all its recommendations be implemented by September 2003.**

## IX CONCLUDING REMARKS

- 101 The members of the Commission have considered it a privileged task and a serious responsibility to review on behalf of the Bishops' Conference the provision of formation for the priesthood in England and Wales. It wishes to renew its thanks to all those, Bishops, Priests, Deacons, Religious and Laity who have willingly and generously contributed to the consultative process which has enabled the Commission to assess future needs and to make firm Recommendations.
- 102 In particular it pays tribute and offers thanks to the Rectors, Staff and Students at the seven seminaries in England and abroad for their welcome during the schedule of visits and their readiness to provide information and insights whenever called upon to do so. The Church's treasury of dedicated staff and promising candidates for the priesthood is the most precious of the resources that it has been our task to assess, and they have encouraged and inspired us in the completion of this review.
- 103 The Commission has had the unique opportunity to experience all seven seminaries within a short period of time, and so to make a comprehensive assessment of the current resources and a broad appraisal of the future needs for the provision of formation in England and Wales. It is significant that this task has not previously been undertaken in this way by the Bishops' Conference. The Commission also regards it as encouraging that such a diverse group of Commissioners has been able to reach unanimity in its conclusions and recommendations, and hopes that its work will enable the Bishops' Conference to achieve a similar consensus on these difficult issues.
- 104 The Commission concludes its task full of confidence for the future mission and pastoral care of the Church in England and Wales and inspired by the valediction of Pope John Paul in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*:

*Dear brother priests...our Lord himself, with the strength of his Spirit, has called you to incarnate in the earthen vessels of your simple lives the priceless treasure of his Good Shepherd's love.*

*Pastores Dabo Vobis* §82

+Malcolm McMahon (Chairman)  
+Kevin McDonald  
+Arthur Roche  
Jack Kennedy  
Bernard Longley (Secretary)  
19 March 2002