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A Seminary Rector in English Canada During and After the Second Vatican Council

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If it had depended on me, the Second Vatican Council would never have taken place. I was reasonably happy with the Roman Catholic Church as I had known it from childhood, and with my place in it as a priest ordained in 1952. When Pope John XXIII convoked the Council, and when, closer to home, my Superior General appointed me rector of the Basilian seminary, I managed to muster enough courage out of a spirit of obedience, but not with any marked enthusiasm, to accept the changes and responsibilities entailed. The Second Vatican Council opened at St. Peter's in Rome October 11, 1962, and closed December 8, 1965. I was rector of St. Basil's Seminary, Toronto, from June 1, 1964 to July 1, 1967. These two three-year events are not of equal importance in the history of the Catholic Church in Canada, but they are necessarily connected, and it is the purpose of this paper to record some aspects of that relationship as a lived experience. After a survey of the state of the Basilian major seminary in the first years of the Second Vatican Council, I shall review the evolution which took place during the three years of my rectorship, and attempt in a final part to review the changes in the broader context of contemporary church history.

St. Basil's Seminary in 1964

One of the striking features of the seminary, as far as I could ascertain, was how very little it had changed over the years. The major seminary of which I became rector in 1964 was not radically different from the seminary I had known as a student of theology in 1950. It was a religious house where young men aspiring to the

priesthood were trained in theology, in prayer, in a life of discipline. The passive voice is used advisedly here because the seminarians had little to say about their formation. They took it for granted that the seminary authorities knew best what was to be learned and what done to prepare them for a happy and fruitful ministry.

The Basilian major seminary differed from diocesan major seminaries in some respects, even though it offered the same courses in theology which Canon Law required. For one thing, the seminarians were all graduates of a provincial university, having pursued their undergraduate courses as scholastics on a secular campus with lay students. Destined in large part to be teachers, the Basilian scholastics obtained the Bachelor of Arts degree either from the University of Toronto through St. Michael's College, or from the University of Western Ontario, and later the University of Windsor, through Assumption College, and many of them began graduate studies for the Master of Arts or attended the Ontario College of Education before beginning their theology courses. The secular studies, in the tradition of St. Basil the Great, were meant to help the Basilian student develop into a well integrated Christian humanist; they were also chosen by the superiors with an eye to meeting certain needs in the Basilian schools and colleges throughout Canada and the United States. Most of the scholastics taught high school for two or three years prior to theology, so they were necessarily older, ranging in age from twenty-four to twenty-eight, than their peers in the diocesan seminary. They had also lived as religious under vows since the novitiate, which was normally made after graduation from high school. They were trained to live in community, not just as a prelude to their apostolate after ordination, but as a way of life for life.

Because of their mature years, experience, and familiarity with religious life (most of the theology students were in final vows) the Basilian seminarians enjoyed a modicum of flexibility in their rule as compared, say, to the students of theology in the Grand Séminaire de Québec. Basilians have never tolerated excessive rigidity of rule. Nevertheless, as a result of a spirituality in the 1940's which emphasized perfection in strict religious observance, the seminarians in St. Basil's Seminary prior to and even during part of the Second Vatican Council achieved a remarkable degree of monastic regimentation. The hours of study, work, recreation, and

devotions were carefully regulated, leaving little room for private initiative or personal style. Common life had come to mean creating a common man. Just as the Basilian cassock made all Basilians look alike, so the order of the day went far towards obliging them to live alike. Theology, the queen of the sciences, was a common course of study. It had its own language and content, true at all times and everywhere, regardless of the students' aptitudes or private interests. St. Thomas Aquinas and a few approved theologians such as Tanguerey and Prümmer were the authoritative teachers. They were presented tract by tract from year to year in much the same way. The course of studies in the major seminary followed the prescriptions of Canon Law for all seminaries: four years of training of nine months each in the areas of Dogmatic and Moral Theology, Church History, Canon Law, Sacred Scripture, Liturgy, Sacred Music, Predication. Textbooks were prescribed for most courses, those of Dogma, Moral and Canon Law being in Latin. In St. Basil's Seminary lectures were always given in English, contrary to the norm elsewhere.

There was a sameness about the Basilians' approach to God. Basilian spirituality consisted largely of personal devoutness based on the principles of union with Christ in the interior life. This personal union was sought through frequent prayers in community and in private. It was strengthened as the devotional practices multiplied: rosary, stations, benediction, forty hours, First Fridays, First Saturdays, novenas. In this respect Basilians were no different and probably no better, than other religious the world over.

On coming back to St. Basil's Seminary in 1964, I at once recognized the order of the day which everyone without exception was still expected to follow:

6:00	Rising
6:20	Morning Prayers and meditation
6:50	Mass
7:30	Breakfast followed by 20 minutes ofrecreation
8:15	Manual labour
9:00	Classes
12:00	Lunch
1:30	Study, Classes, Outdoor recreation
5:00	Study
5:50	Particular Examen

6:00	Supper followed by recreation
7:30	Night Prayers, followed by 20 minutes of Spiritual Reading
10:00	Retiring

Outside the time and areas of recreation, silence was the rule throughout the entire house, and "grand silence" reigned from night prayers until after breakfast. All spiritual exercises were made in common, and a late arrival or absence had to be reported to the rector. Each seminarian had an assigned place in the chapel and the refectory. Except for the Epistle and Gospel, Mass was said entirely in Latin according to the rite promulgated by Pius V in 1570. In keeping with the minute details of the rubrics, the priest turned around toward the congregation only at the "Dominus Vobiscum," ideally not raising his eyes above the lower step of the main altar. The seminarians wore white surplices over their cassocks, and remained some ten to fifteen minutes after mass for private thanksgiving. The rector said the community mass, the priest faculty-members said mass side by side in two altar rooms. That was the only acceptable way of beginning each day. The acceptable way of eating in community was governed by tradition. Staff and students ate together, the former at a slightly-raised headtable. A seminarian read from a book at all meals except breakfast, which was taken in silence, but the rector was always free to pronounce a "Benedicamus Domino" which allowed talking. Special guests ate in a separate small dining room. A local rule regulated smoking, listening to the radio, watching television: these activities were limited to the times and areas of recreation. Each seminarian had his manual labour assignment; he also took his turn waiting on tables, clearing and setting up again for the next meal. A bell announced the beginning and end of all exercises. No visiting was allowed in the private rooms and permission had to be asked of the rector to see visitors in the parlour outside visiting hours. Seminarians went home to see their families only once a year, or if the distance was great, once every two years. The seminarian either fitted into this pattern of life or he withdrew from the Congregation.

Like all congregations of simple vows and common life, the Basilians were governed by their own Constitutions, approved by Rome. They also had a General Rule which summed up specific

customs common to the entire congregation. These two documents had to be read once in public, once in private, each year. Every individual house had its own local rule. Years of conferences and spiritual direction impressed on the seminarian how important the rule was: "Show me the religious who keeps his rule" Pope Pius X was supposed to have said, "and I will canonize him."

Each seminarian had a spiritual director whom he visited once a month to discuss progress and difficulties in the religious life. He went to confession usually once a week and had a brief interview with the rector once every two months who questioned him on things pertaining to the external forum only. He was notified of his call to vows or orders by the rector, a decision which had been made by the Superior General and his Council and which the seminarian did not think of questioning.

This was the seminary life I had known in the early fifties and the seminary life I found again in 1964. The training in "goodness, discipline and knowledge" (Basilian motto) had helped to form a priestly character in the seminarians, preparing them to live in the world without being contaminated by the world. By and large it had been effective.

Evolution in St. Basil's Seminary 1964-1967

Pope John XXIII surprised the Catholic world, which included myself, when he announced on January 25, 1959 his intention to convoke an ecumenical council in Rome. It was to be a truly ecumenical council, a council of 'aggiornamento,' a new Pentecost in the Church. The idea of 'aggiornamento' naturally appealed to seminarians: no one knew exactly what it meant, but if the Church was to show herself in all her beauty to the modern world, as Pope John indicated she should, then the future priests concluded quite logically that they should not be cut off too completely from the world in which they would teach and preach the Risen Lord.

In 1962, the year the Council opened, one copy of the *Globe and Mail* appeared in the library reading room of St. Basil's Seminary. Until then no secular newspaper had been permitted. By 1963 it had made its way to the community room of the semi-

narians, and certain newsmagazines such as *Time* and *Life* had also begun to appear: small events in themselves, but indicative of the fact that the world had begun to enter the seminary, and that the seminary authorities trusted the seminarians to make proper use of it. Cardinal Léger of Montreal had called out in the Council at the end of October 1963 for "a theology; of this worldly-realities."[1] The next step would be to turn outwards from the seminary towards the world, even during the years of formation.

Whether by design of God, or man, or both, the first complete document to come out of the Second Vatican Council was the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (December 4, 1963). "Declergify the liturgy!" one of the Council Fathers had cried out.[2] All too long it had remained the strict domain of the clergy; it must now become once again the liturgy of the whole people of God. The Constitution dealt with the very soul of Catholic worship. On reading excerpts from it in the press, we discovered that it called for simplification, participation, less rigidity, more joyful spontaneity; the mass was for the people, so the priest should turn towards the people and speak their language. In the year 1964-1965 we at St. Basil's Seminary set about implementing the recommendations of the new Conciliar document. We placed a small altar in front of the main altar facing the congregation and began to celebrate the Eucharist with more emphasis on participation. Beginning November 29, 1964, the first Sunday of Advent, we began using English for the entire mass, except for the canon, as the Canadian bishops had permitted. Suddenly we realized that the Gregorian chant in Latin no longer quite fitted the mass in the vernacular. Brave attempts were made to adapt it to the English language, not always with edifying success, and composers began a frantic search for new and appropriate music of genuine religious inspiration, again with uneven results. In the spring of 1965 we began using the restored rite of concelebration. Our traditional morning and evening prayers, the acts of faith, hope, and charity, etc., were abandoned in favour of Lauds and Vespers recited antiphonally in English.

Although no new thing was introduced into our worship without prior discussion and preparation both among the seminary staff and

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1 *America,* 109:626, November 16, 1963.

2 *Bishop LASZLO,* Eisenstadt, Austria, *The Tablet*, 218:6460, March 14, 1964.

the body of seminarians, change had nonetheless come in the heart of seminary life with an unexpected swiftness which resulted in a kind of breathless euphoria for the enthusiasts and an uneasy malaise for the rest. A number of priests and seminarians preferred the mass in Latin, they did not like concelebration, they did not like guitars in the chapel and they seriously questioned whether Lauds and Vespers in English fulfilled the obligation of the Divine Office for those hours. So we entered the new liturgical age of the Church amidst cheers and sighs. The Vatican Fathers were calling for renewal (another word as magic as "aggiornamento"), but the form the renewal would take was never clearly defined, and seminary rectors had hitherto relied upon clear definitions.

In the name of renewal, seminarians felt urged to seek a new sense of personal responsibility. They wanted to think for themselves, to have the opportunity to make responsible judgments, and to do this they had to have some freedom to choose what they would do with their time. A predetermined schedule with ringing bells precluded any individual initiative. 'Trust us to live a good religious life in our own good time' the seminarians seemed to be saying, whereas I, the rector, had to ask myself, 'Yes, but what about the weakness of fallen human nature? Will more personal freedom and choice aid or impede growth in holiness? Will a more humane seminary rule help prepare better the priests of tomorrow?' Without realizing it, I was of the mind of the Council Fathers of Trent who had established seminaries in the sixteenth century.

After consultation with my local councillors, the seminary staff, the seminarians, and the General Council, and after several meetings with moderators of scholastics in other Basilian houses, I judged it reasonable to undertake, at least by way of experiment, the following disciplinary reforms:

– daily mass could be attended either at 7 a.m. or 11 a.m. or 4:30 p.m.

– places were no longer assigned either in the chapel or in the refectory; the headtable in the refectory came down from its platform and guests no longer ate apart.

– the cassock became obligatory only for liturgical celebrations. In a conference given in April 1967, I sternly reminded the students

that the customary street dress was still the black suit, white shirt, black tie; however, they tended more and more towards secular clothes.

– talking was henceforth permitted at all meals in the hope of thereby strengthening fraternal charity. Breakfast began in common, but each one was now free to leave when he had finished. Lunch became a buffet style meal served between 12 noon and 1 p.m.

– the time of recreation was left up to the individual, smoking was allowed in the private rooms at any time, and radios were no longer forbidden.

– what had been *a rule* of silence throughout the seminary became an *invitation* to silence, especially in the areas where conversation might disturb someone at work, at prayer, or asleep. Again it was my hope that silence would be observed as an act of charity towards one another in a community of brothers.

– one designated day a week became a totally unstructured day, except for meals, when each one was responsible for his own schedule. In common parlance it soon became known as "a day off."

– occasional visits to the family were allowed, provided the distance and cost were not prohibitive.

– only the rising bell and a bell for meals were retained.

I permitted these changes in an attempt to sound a more positive note in the regulations governing life in the seminary, and to devise a rule more in keeping with the mature years of the seminarians and the trend towards more democratization. The changes were not introduced all at once, but they came about for the most part in the course of 1965-1966. Careful assessment was supposed to be made from time to time; in fact, little honest assessment was made, and what began as an experiment soon became an irreversible way of life.

The following table shows what an ordinary day in St. Basil's Seminary had become by 1967 and to what it had evolved in 1970:

ORDER OF THE DAY AT ST. BASIL'S SEMINARY, TORONTO, ONT,

	1967	1970
6:30	Rising	Rising, Morning Prayer
6:50	Lauds	of the Church, Eucharist
	Meditation	at hour chosen by each group
7:20		
11:00	Masses	Meals at usual hours
4:30		
8:00	Breakfast	Class scheduling in T.S.T.
8:30 - 11:00		Calendar
	Classes	
12:00 - 1:00		Evening Prayer of the Church
	Lunch	at hour chosen by each group
1:00	Study, Classes,	
	Outdoor Recreation	
5:50	Scripture Reading	
6:00	Supper	
7:30	Vespers	

These exterior reforms succeeded in creating a more relaxed atmosphere among most of the seminarians, although some thought the atmosphere too relaxed and told me so. Seminarians felt a little more at home in the seminary, felt they were less a part of an institution whose rigours were to be endured after the manner of plain soldiers in military camp.

The new-found freedom soon led, however, to a deterioration of spirit. With less to complain about, a number of the change-for--change-sake seminarians began to feel less happy and more introspective. They did not know what to do with their time. Serious students had no trouble adapting, but the less serious developed a lackadaisical attitude towards almost everything. Manual labour assignments were neglected or performed irregularly; punctuality and attendance at the common exercises suffered. Since the General Rule of the Congregation was being revised in preparation for the chapter of 1967, some seminarians began to cast doubt on the entire concept of rule and this attitude led to a decline in respect for authority and tradition.

Many basic questions about the priesthood and religious life were being asked in the years 1964 to 1967: What is the role of the priest in the church, now that the layman has begun to emerge and become aware of the priesthood of the laity? Will clerical celibacy become optional? Is the priesthood a life-long commitment? How

permanent are final vows? How final are holy orders? Is there any essential difference between a priest and an ordained minister? With these disturbing interrogations went an identity crisis: Who am I? Where am I going? Am I doing 'my own thing?' Reputable and less reputable theologians and psychologists raised the same questions in the media, and naturally this questioning attitude had an impact on young clerics. They began to doubt what they had heretofore taken for granted. Seminarians sought spiritual directors with whom they could relate best, and some of them were priests uncertain of their own vocation, priests who were suffering a crisis of obedience and authority.

One of our students in theology, who had done graduate work in psychology, became involved in psychotherapy at an institute in Toronto for mildly neurotic people. He found a few seminarians in our seminary who had developed a neurosis over their religious vocation, and interested them in the psychotherapeutic process. With the permission of the Superior General (not very willingly granted) they attended the institute, and eventually left the seminary to become fulltime members of the psychotherapy group. They were not underhand about this experiment. They discussed it with me regularly and tried to allay my misgivings. What bothered me most about their arguments was the separation they made between the natural and the supernatural. They reduced the spiritual to a merely psychic area where prayer and grace had no part and all that mattered was a loving human relationship with a select few. They had their own vocabulary which I found strange, and my traditional stock of expressions concerning vocation and the religious life left them quite indifferent. I concluded that it was the inevitable result of misunderstood personalist theology and the stress on interpersonal relationships so much in vogue in those years.

To the assembled body of seminarians I gave spiritual conferences on what I considered to be the essential aspects of the priestly vocation, and I endeavoured to communicate the pertinent documents coming from the Council via the Catholic press, *Perfectae Caritatis, Optatam Totius, Presbyterorum Ordinis,* for example, but my words and even the words of the Council Fathers were weighed in the balance with those of more popular voices in newspapers and paperbacks calling out for a new theology of doctrine and morals. To each individual seminarian I accorded a

private interview once every two months; but what in the past had been a short routine examination of certain points of the rule, now became a long and painful session in which the seminarian did more talking than the rector. On the initiative of the seminarian himself, the former type of interview, which wisely had touched only on matters belonging to the external forum, evolved into a quasi psychoanalytic process of self-revelation. Having neither the training nor the prudence of a psychoanalyst, I tended to sympathize with each scholastic who bared a tormented soul. This did little to help the seminarian in question, and usually left me after three or four such interviews in a row perplexed, fatigued, exasperated.

The theology courses in the years 1964-1967 did not change fundamentally from what they had been prior to the Council, but new methods of learning were adopted. Instead of explaining tracts in time-honoured textbooks and giving notes in his course, the professor of theology assigned topics in his particular discipline with extensive reading lists of modern authors, and arranged seminars in which student papers were read and discussed. Pope John XXIII's inaugural speech in the Council had given impetus to this openness to contemporary writers: "Doctrine," he said, "must be studied and expounded through the methods of research and through the literary forms of modern thought."[3] The student of theology became a searcher personally involved in the learning process rather than a passive recipient of truths and ideas that were ready made.

In the year 1966-1967 there were seventy-six students of theology at St. Basil's Seminary, fifty-two of whom were Basilians (31 Americans, 21 Canadians), six Edmundites, four Benedictines, three Oratorians, one diocesan seminarian. The teaching staff consisted of four Basilians who lived at the Seminary, three at the Medieval Institute (Toronto), one at St. Michael's College (Toronto), one at the General Curia (Toronto). In addition there were two Dominicans, one Redemptorist, one diocesan priest, all of whom lived at St. Michael's College. There was a final group from outside the seminary, one was a diocesan priest from St. Augustine's Seminary (Scarborough), one a Sister of Sion, and three lay

[3] Henri FRESQUET, *The Drama of Vatican II,* Random House, N.Y., 1967, p. 23.

professors.[4]

The situation of St. Basil's Seminary on the campus of a reputable secular university made it an apt candidate for admission into the new Toronto School of Theology (TST) which was being founded in 1966-1967. Through St. Michael's College, it, along with St. Augustine's Seminary and Regis College, could become the Catholic constituent member of the TST on an equal basis with Emmanuel College (United), Knox College (Presbyterian), Trinity College (Anglican), Wycliff College (Evangelical). Such a bold venture would scarcely have been possible without the Vatican II Decree on Ecumenism, November 21, 1964. Popular speakers such as Reverend Gregory Baum, O.S.A., went untiringly across Canada telling Catholic audiences that Protestants should no longer be considered heretics, but rather "brothers in the Lord"[5] and that they were indeed members of Christian churches rather than sects. On the practical level, the negotiations of the prefect of studies at St. Basil's Seminary, Reverend Elliott B. Allen, C.S.B., who was aware of "the increasing complexity of adequate professional education in theology" and who foresaw "the manifold opportunities provided by the other theological colleges grouped on the Toronto campus,"[6] helped to make this development such a success that St. Basil's Seminary began to draw students from all over the North American continent. Although the number of Basilian seminarians has decreased (see chart p. 70 "Withdrawals"), St. Basil's College (the name was changed in 1971) is still operating to capacity in its role as a university seminary. The Basilian Superior General, Reverend Joseph C. Wey, C.S.B., reported to the General Chapter of 1973: "Our own scholastics receive there a profoundly Catholic theological training with a practical training in preparation for the ministry and ecumenical contacts and experience that must benefit all their later apostolate."[7] As the Basilian seminarians, and their

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4 *Report* of the Superior General to the General Chapter of the Congregation of Priests of St. Basil, 1967, pp. 82, 84, 85.

5 *Unitatis Redingratio* 1, 2, in *The Documents of Vatican II,* ed. Walter H. Abbott, S. J., Guild Press, N.Y., 1966, p. 345.

6 *Report* of the Superior General to the General Chapter of the Congregation of Priests of St. Basil, 1967, p. 85.

7 *Report* of the Superior General in *General Chapter of the Basilian Fathers,* July 1973, Vol. 11, ed. St. Thomas More College, Saskatoon, p.234.

professors of theology, became more aware of their separated brothers on the same campus, they also formed closer community ties with their fellow religious of other communities and with the personnel of the diocesan seminary. Where before religious and diocesan clerics had kept to their own particular houses, 'qui se ressemblent, s'assemblent,' especially those who had built their houses of formation in splendid isolation from the secular university, they now began to lose their sense of holy rivalry and to discover one another as 'brothers in the Lord.' A new day in Catholic community relationships had dawned. In the light of this new day it was plain to see that the Good News of the Gospel had to be announced in the highways and byways. Medical schools were beginning to involve even first year students in the real life of the hospital patients. Why not the seminary also in the real world of the inner city?

Involvement in various forms of the apostolate was nothing new for Basilian seminarians, since they had been active in extra-curricular works during their years of high school teaching. But Vatican II was calling for some involvement in all problems of society[8] and seminarians could not read a document such as "The Church in the Modern World" without wanting to respond to it. During the years 1964-1967 they became increasingly engaged in catechetical programs in Toronto parishes, instruction of converts in the Catholic Information Centre, assistance to the Brothers of the Good Shepherd Refuge, religion courses to student nurses and junior professed religious, retreat work with high school students, talks on religious radio programmes, visits of compassion to people suffering from illness, loneliness, emotional imbalance, camp work for underprivileged children. They showed amazing courage and willingness, in many cases convinced that the only expertise necessary could be learned by doing. These apostolic works were co-ordinated by a priest member of the seminary staff who acted as counsellor to the seminarians. This going out to the world gave a fresh and practical dimension to their reading and study, a benefit they acquired most often at night, and which offset the embarrassment I, as rector, felt at not knowing where anyone was any longer

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8 " "...even during their course of studies, and also during holidays, they should be introduced into pastoral practice by appropriate undertakings." *Optatain Totius* VI, 21, ed. Abbott, *op. cit.,* p.455.

at any given time of the day or night.

In keeping with the spirit of democracy and collegiality which the bishops had shown at the Council, the seminarians asked to have a say in the process of recommendation to vows and orders. They had for some time been preoccupied with the anonymity of their call. I, therefore, invited the seminarians to make a submission, either in writing or in person, concerning the call of individual seminarians to vows or orders. I also published a list which went out to all the houses of the Congregation announcing who was eligible for renewal of vows or final profession or orders, and inviting written comments. In this way the entire Basilian Community was able to participate in this important annual event. Not many did participate, but the fact that they were invited to do so was deemed an important step forward in the process of 'aggiornamento.' Ordinations to the priesthood began to take place in the young priest's home parish rather than as a class together in Toronto. For the first time in the history of the Basilian Congregation, seminarians elected their own representatives to attend the Pre-Chapter Convention of the Basilian Fathers in 1966, and the General Chapter in 1967. The seminarian delegates participated in these two conferences with full voting powers, and they contributed wisely to the deliberations, especially in matters concerning the unordained members of the Congregation.

One of the most discussed topics during my rectorship, and Heaven knows we discussed many things, was prayer. We probably discussed more than we prayed. Were the old forms adequate to give expression to the new spirit of openness and freedom and ecumenism and sharing? What new forms were possible? Little by little, especially in my third year as rector, it become obvious that devotion to the Blessed Sacrament was beginning to wane, at least in the form of visits to the chapel, and exposition on First Fridays had to be shortened from all day to two hours, for want of adorers. Devotion to the rosary of our Lady fell into disrepute among some, and fewer seminarians made the stations of the cross. The value of daily mass was also called into question would it not better to celebrate the Eucharist as a community well once or twice a week than daily in a routine fashion? I sensed that this attitude was due, not so much to a distaste for the devotional practices revered in another era, as to a desire to concentrate on the new liturgy and implement the new constitution in all its richness, so that while

there were necessarily some losses and an apparent decline in fervour, there were also some significant gains. Teams of liturgists carefully prepared weekday and Sunday celebrations of the Eucharist in common for maximum participation, and the growing popularity of bible vigils or shared prayer sessions revealed that the seminarians felt a reverence and love for the word of God which was not so evident in earlier times, such as my own.

Challenging though it was to live and work in such a sensitive area as that of formation in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council, I and all the moderators of scholastics were alarmed at the number of young men turning away from the Basilian way of life to seek a new vocation in the world.

WITHDRAWALS FROM THE BASILIAN CONGREGATION 1961-1967

Year (Nov. 1)	Novices	Scholastics	Priests
1961-62	18/56	14/199	-/449
1962-63	15/50	19/213	1/456
1963-64	13/63	15/223	1/469
1964-65	17/44	27/229	4/481
1965-66	12/41	46/202	-/491
1966-67	5/10	48/176	6/494

WITHDRAWALS FROM ST. BASIL'S SEMINARY 1964-1967

Year (Nov. 1)	Theology Students	Undergraduates
1964-65	1/55	9/34
1965-66	5/53	4/20
1966-67	4/54	0/15[9]

The Years 1964-1967 in Retrospect

Looking back now on those three years, 1964-1967, I cannot point to any "cause célèbre" in the annals of St. Basilss Seminary. There were no strikes, sit-ins or liturgical aberrations in our seminary as there had been elsewhere in some other seminaries. But the general climate of the times and some of the dramatic events happening in the Church caused a confusion in the minds of both seminarians and faculty, a sadness too, and a cynicism which probably explains in part the withdrawals from the religious life.

The nineteen sixties saw the struggle for civil rights in the United States,

[9] *Report* of the Superior General to the General Chapter of the Congregation of Priests of St. Basil, 1967, p.77.

when a whole generation of new radicals joined hands in a feeling of friendship and community as they sang "We Shall Overcome."[10] Herbert Marcuse published his *One-Dimensional Man* in 1964, a bleak and depressing book which called for revolt at the grassroots. That most venerable of institutions, the university, became aware of a growing threat to her long cherished independence and academic freedom; it came on the one hand from the state which supplied more and more of the money, and on the other from the students demanding more say in what they were taught and how it should be taught. It was a decade of drugs, rock music, permissiveness, demonstrations, violence. Some of the spirit of the age was necessarily reflected in the Church and more particularly in the seminaries in what might be called a crisis of obedience and authority.

When the hierarchy in the Netherlands (one archbishop, six bishops) signed a letter late in 1960 declaring what they understood the forthcoming ecumenical council to be, they opened a chink in the fortress of the Church's central administration through which other dissenting voices were to be heard. On papal infallibility they said: "this personal infallibility is part of the official infallibility of the bishops of the world which in turn is founded upon the infallible faith of the whole community."[11] It was a clear call for collegiability in the Church and decentralization of authority. Cardinal Liénart of France acted in this same vein when in the opening session of the Council he had the election of the one hundred and sixty members of the Conciliar Commissions postponed until the Council members could get to know one another better. It was a refusal in the name of the majority of the world's bishops to accept lists prepared ahead of time by the Vatican officials. Nor did the Holy See enhance her position of authority by publishing *Veterum Sapientia,* February 22, 1962, the decree which imposed the use of Latin in seminary lectures the world over. The Mediterranean countries saw it as an attempt on the part of a few conservatives in the Vatican to curtail the use of the vernacular both in the liturgy and in the teaching of seminarians. The non-Mediterranean countries by and large ignored it. But this decree enraged some priests. They found it a prime example of "the disreputable teaching authority of the Church.[12] Reverend Charles Davis, in particular, cited it as one of the reasons for his departure from the priesthood and the Catholic Church in December 1966, an event which made a profound impression on many of his readers and fellow clerics in the English-speaking world, including Canada which he had visited on a speaking-tour in 1964.

The ultimate authority of the Holy See was further eroded by the much-publicized controversy over birth control. The liberal theologians predicted a relaxation in the Church's laws because, they claimed, contraception within a loving charitable structure, i.e. a Christian family, is

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[10] John PASSMORE, "Paradise Now," in *Encounter*, 35:5. November 1970, p. 8.

[11] Henri FRESQUET, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

[12] *Western Catholic Reporter,* January 12, 1967, p.4.

not necessarily against God's will. One of Canada's leading weeklies early in 1965 gave the argument prominence in an article "The Catholic Dilemma: who's right about birth control?"[13] Even the most liberal Catholics agreed that it was not right to defy authority, but they felt free to argue with it, as Paul did when he discussed with Peter the observance of Jewish and pagan customs, (Galatians 2, 11-14). They also felt as well-informed as the pope and in a better position to weigh the difficulties of married life.

Little wonder then that the documents coming out of the Council were seen not just as a call to renewal but also as an opportunity to question the authority of the hierarchical church, and in some cases to reject it. Reverend Gommar de Pauw defied Lawrence Cardinal Shehan, archbishop of Boston. February 3, 1966, when the cardinal suspended him for scandal as the active and vociferous president of the Catholic Traditionalist Movement. Reverend William Dubay of Los Angeles a month later, March 10, 1966, was suspended by James Cardinal McIntyre for proposing in his book *The Human Church* a clergy union to protect the rights of priests in dealing with bishops. These incidents were given full coverage in the Catholic and secular press. On June 24, 1967, the syndicated weekly magazines across Canada carried a feature article "Religion and Rebellion in the Roman Catholic Church" in which five priests, four of them religious, gave their reasons for leaving the Catholic Church which, they said, was stupid, arrogant, unjust, cruel and obsolescent.[14]

Incidents of this sort caused seminarians and faculty alike to re-examine their commitment to Christ and his way of life as laid down in the Gospels. With some of the structure gone out of their lives, and with more opportunity to make personal choices, the seminarians began a new process of growth, accelerated and painful, but inevitable. They knew it was relatively easy to leave the seminary and the Basilian Congregation, even if they were in final vows or major orders. The Superior General did not hesitate to apply for dispensations; he wanted no candidate to undertake the life and duties of the priesthood simply because he was eligible and no impediment had been found. Not all candidates were, in fact, fully aware and committed. A considerable number left the priesthood within five years after ordination. I, as rector, have to claim my share of the responsibility for those mistakes. I failed to realize soon enough that what appeared at the time as a process of destruction and death was in fact a process of change and growth, and that while we did not see clearly where we were going, nevertheless something new and very good was happening. The Council Fathers had shown us by their example that a learning process was possible in the midst of renewal and that a remarkable degree of consensus could be achieved on controversial issues. Only slowly did we realize that each one had a contribution to make in the business of building community and only too late did I realize that some of the younger confreres (we had several undergraduates in the seminary)

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13 *The Star Weekly,* February 27, 1965.

14 *Weekend Magazine*, 17:25, pp. 3-8.

had not known the experience of closely-knit family ties and had come seeking to discover these for the first time in religious life. It took time and distance to see the picture in focus.

One of the freshest breaths of air for priests and seminarians to come out of the Second Vatican Council was the term *caritas pastoralis,* pastoral charity, in the decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests.[15] Here was a key expression in the theology of sanctity through service. The unifying principle in the life of the priest, and the student for the priesthood would seem to lie in "pastoral charity," the model of which is the love of Christ the Good Shepherd for his flock. There was no intention to downplay the importance of the interior life. The Council Fathers were simply saying that no mere external arrangements of the ministry, no mere practice of religious exercises of piety could bring about the unity of life they envisaged for the priest, who is a brother among brothers and sisters, a man of service. I honestly think the seminarians were coming to grips with this problem even before the appearance of the conciliar document and certainly before their directors had time to measure the full impact of the Council teaching on this point. Their concern for "genuineness, authenticity, freedom, love, honesty, self-fulfilment and individuality"[16] prepared them for this broader understanding of the spiritual life better than the monastic programme of a more tranquil age. It had its dangers, the most obvious of which was the temptation of the 'apostle' to decide for himself what his mission would be. But the rector, with his training and experience, was well aware that all works of the apostolate had to be conceived within the mission of the Church, in harmony with the bishop's pastoral programmes. Punctuality and cloister mattered less, so long as the 'brother among brothers' was growing in pastoral love after the manner of the Good Shepherd.

Conclusion

I left the seminary in 1967 with no sense of a good job well done, simply that something new had got underway. Perhaps the most surprising fact about those three years was that the unchangeable institution known as the seminary had indeed been capable of rapid and profound transformation. Discipline, prayer, study, apostolate had all taken a new direction. When my successor, Reverend Gerald T. Gregoire, C.S.B., arrived July 1, 1967, to share in that chastening experience of being a seminary rector in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, he found that St. Basil's Seminary had entered into a new era, not an easy one, to be sure, but one which Pope John XXIII had foreseen for the entire Roman Catholic Church as necessary and long overdue.

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15 *Presbyterorum Ordinis* III, 14, ed. Abbott, p. 563.

16 John J. Evoy, "How Neurotic Is the New Breed ?", *Thought*, 41:8, Spring 1966.