

Priestly Formation at the University of Notre Dame 1841-1958

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The tale of the founding of The University of Notre Dame is well known, and well documented. In the winter of 1842, six religious brothers and Reverend Edward Sorin of the Congregation of Holy Cross arrived in the remote wilderness of northern Indiana on assignment from their superior, Blessed Basil Moreau. They had come to establish a school that from the beginning Father Sorin believed would become "one of the most powerful means of doing good in this country." Notre Dame has grown tremendously since those first days, and through the collaboration of numerous Holy Cross priests, brothers, sisters and their lay counterparts it has indeed become a powerful means of doing good. This could not have happened though without the contribution and leadership of the many Holy Cross religious who have served the university for almost 170 years. Many of their stories, like the story of Sorin and those first brothers, have been told and retold countless times, while many others doubtless left their mark more quietly in the hearts and minds of the students. What is sure is that the men and women who gave up their lives to serve God as religious of Holy Cross at Notre Dame all began that journey somewhere. This paper tells the story of how the young men called to join the Holy Cross family as priests got their start.

Today, public perception about seminaries and vocations often focuses on negative trends. Images of a shrinking priesthood, empty seminaries, and dying religious orders all too easily come to mind. The story of the seminary at Notre Dame is not exempt from this. In the past 50 years the numbers of seminarians at Notre Dame has decreased, and the same worries about the future are found in the Congregation of Holy Cross that are found elsewhere around the United States. This paper though focuses particularly on the formation of priests before that downturn. There is no doubt

great value in exploring the historical reasons behind the radical change that occurred in the 1960s, and the reaction to that change over the last 50 years. However, the first roughly 100 years of the University of Notre Dame saw a great expansion of formation programs on campus. These years are a story of growth and development, of overcoming obstacles, and of continual hope for the future. This is the story that needs to be told now, because now more than ever, the church is in need of hope. We must actively remember that the majority of the story of the seminary at Notre Dame and vocations to the priesthood is in fact one of great optimism and enthusiasm.

The General Nature of Formation

Before beginning, I think it is helpful to define a few terms and clarify a few things about seminaries and the religious life. First, this paper focuses on the training for men to become priests of the Congregation of Holy Cross. Holy Cross is religious community, a community of priests and brothers that together strive to live out a particular charism or mission in the world. This is different from diocesan priests that devote themselves to working for the church in a particular geographical region known as a diocese. Secondly, formation refers primarily to the period of training for men before they join a religious community and either become brothers or are ordained and become priests. Formation, particularly for priests in religious communities rather than dioceses, can be broken down into a few major parts.

Anyone who approaches the community and asks to join is considered an aspirant. After being admitted to the formation program, the aspirant becomes a postulant, or a live-in guest of the community. At this point, the postulant has not made

any particular commitment, but is beginning to live, pray, and work alongside the community. Many postulants also begin academic studies at this point which will help them later if they continue in formation. A place where these studies occur, either for priests or brothers, might be known as a scholasticate. After his postulancy, a man enters what is known as the novitiate and becomes a novice. During the novitiate a man spends much of his time learning about the religious community, thinking about the vows they will ask him to take, and in prayer to discern if this is in fact the life that God is calling him to. At the end of the novitiate, the man then takes temporary vows, and becomes a full member of the community. If the man believes he is being called to the priesthood, he then enters studies devoted primarily to theology and other skills he will need in ministry. For the purposes of this paper, during the period after the novitiate a man is known particularly as a theologian. Broadly speaking, men at any of these levels can be considered seminarians while the term is most often used to refer to men after they have finished the novitiate.

The stages of formation described above are a general framework. Over time the exact meaning of each of these terms fluctuates according to the situation of the community in a particular location. From here, this paper will explore the ways in which the formation program for men desiring to become priests at Notre Dame developed and changed over time. Having a general idea of what each of these terms means is useful, but their definition cannot be considered absolute. A major goal of this paper is to explore how each of the different stages manifested itself and developed in the context of the formation program at Notre Dame.

Arrival in the United States and the First Postulants

On their arrival in the United States, the Holy Cross community found that many young men were interested in joining their brotherhood. This is why, even before they arrived in South Bend, Father Sorin and the brothers had begun to bring postulants into their midst. Soon after arriving in the Diocese of Vincennes, Indiana, the group set up at a site not far from the city called St. Peter's in 1841. Though they were only there a short time, Father Sorin records in the *Chronicles of Notre Dame* that, "a year had hardly passed before nine vocations were already admitted to the Novitiate," and that "twelve took the habit at St. Peter's in the space of fifteen months."¹ It is not clear whether any of these first few men were ever ordained, but it is safe to assume that they were all, at least at first, admitted as Brothers of St. Joseph alongside the six that had come from France. Beyond admitting new vocations to the community, the community at St. Peter's also records the entrance of at least one already ordained priest. The superior of the Seminary of Vincennes, Etienne Chartier came into contact with the group and eventually was admitted as a candidate. Though he did not remain with the community for even a year, this demonstrates that at least in principle the band was open to building their numbers this way as well. It seems then that from their very first moments in the country, the Congregation was both seeking and finding new members.

Father Sorin makes an interesting note about vocations in the *Notre Dame Chronicles* at this point, stating that "as to genuine Americans, there is no hope of finding subjects amongst them for a religious house of this kind."² This comes in the wake of him reporting that of the twelve who took the habit in those first months, only

¹ Sorin C.S.C., Edward. *Chronicals of Notre Dame du Lac*. Pg. 16

² Sorin C.S.C., Edward. *Chronicals of Notre Dame du Lac*. Pg. 16

half remained seven years later. It is especially interesting to note this in light of the fact that Sorin himself was already developing a deep love for American culture. He was actively learning English, trying to assimilate and would eventually come to display much of the "spirit of liberty" he attributes to the men who left. In fact, it may not be too much of a stretch to say that much of that adventurous energy and free spirit Sorin writes against here is what allowed him and his coworkers in the community to dream so big and work so hard for the university they would all come to love. It is evident too, that though they may have struggled getting men to stay, America was being generous in giving over men for the service of God and community right from the start. With the advantage of historical hindsight, it seems that Sorin was making his critique somewhat prematurely. The American qualities he at first thought were hindering his efforts would eventually become the qualities that allowed for the most growth and expansion in the years to come.

The Move to Notre Dame du Lac and the First Novitiate

Though the Chronicles of Notre Dame record that "St. Peter's was the best choice they could make at the time,"³ this site ultimately did not suit the bishop as an appropriate place to establish a new college. As a result, in November of 1842 seven of the brothers and Father Sorin headed north to a new location alongside a lake in the far north of the diocese. Once there, work began in earnest on the establishment of a new college. The first brick building was completed in the summer of 1843 and the charters for a university and a manual labor school were both obtained even before the building was ready to house the students. In the space of seven years after arriving in the United

³ Sorin C.S.C., Edward. *Chronicals of Notre Dame du Lac*. Pg. 14

States the community saw forty-three postulants, of which half remained in the community beyond their formation.⁴ Sorin, as already noted, blamed this low retention largely on the American spirit of liberty and saw the establishment of a formal novitiate as the best remedy for the problem. As a result, he had already picked out a suitable location, and was drawing up plans for a permanent construction of a novitiate building within a year of arriving at Notre Dame. Construction seems to have been delayed some by more practical concerns and the building was not completed until the following year. Finally, in 1844 the Novitiate was opened on "a little island beyond the lake,"⁵ and the training of priests and brothers formally began.

The dedication of this original novitiate in December of 1844 constitutes the first formal formation house at the university. This was a crucial moment for the community. Up until this point it seems that the 'novitiate' and much of the formation given to new postulants and novices was simply "to give an imperfect outline of the institution so called,"⁶ and to allow them to work alongside the professed members. Father Sorin was concerned enough about the state of formation in those first years that as soon as the new novitiate was opened he personally assumed the responsibility of Novice Master for six months until Father Granger, newly arrived from France, took over. The *Chronicles of the Congregation of Holy Cross in the United States of America*, compiled in 1895, attribute much of the need for the new novitiate to Father Granger who it states

⁴ *Ibid.* Pg. 42

⁵ "The Island" is commonly referred to in early literature from Notre Dame. Originally, what are now distinctly the two lakes on campus were essentially one, with a marshy area between. In the midst of this marshy area, was a hill that remained dry though sometimes the Notre Dame Chronicles record a boat was used to reach it. This provided a fairly isolated spot from the rest of the college, perfect for the novitiate. When the water level was lowered in the lakes years later the lakes separated and the marsh dried up, which is why the area is no longer an "island" but simply the hill where Columba Hall now sits.

⁶ Sorin C.S.C., Edward. *Chronicals of Notre Dame du Lac*. Pg. 42

"had only arrived at Notre Dame from France in October... but in that short time he had gathered together a sufficient number of candidates both for Priesthood and for Brotherhood to found a modest 'nursery of the congregation' and place it on a firm basis."⁷ These chronicles thus affirm the need for the novitiate and confirm that it indeed was the first house of formation on the campus.

The Notre Dame Chronicles speak primarily of the formation of new Brothers throughout their description of the state of vocations in those first few years around the establishment of the university. It is evident that when Father Sorin discusses the shortcomings of the new postulants and the desperate need for the novitiate he is referring primarily to the need for a more concrete way to form new brothers, both for teaching and working, as opposed to priests. In fact, working from the Notre Dame Chronicles alone it would be difficult to tell if there was any sort of priestly formation occurring in those earliest years at all. Yet, writing much later in 1905, Father John Cavanaugh, C.S.C. speaks of the same time period with a more focused eye toward ecclesial formation for men seeking ordination to the priesthood:

From [the opening of the first novitiate] until a separate novitiate and seminary was built for them the ecclesiastical students of the community were trained under varying conditions as circumstances seemed to necessitate- sometimes in the Brothers' novitiate on "the Island," sometimes in the college building among the students and professors. Obviously the method had serious disadvantage, and just as obviously nothing save the most imperative necessity justifies it. On the other hand, anyone who has had the happiness of knowing the holy and learned

⁷ Congregation of Holy Cross. *Chronicles...* Pg. 41

priests prepared in that early day must admit that, judged strictly by results, their training needs no apology.⁸

This critique of the formation at the time is very revealing. Primarily, it is direct evidence that in fact there was some manner of priestly formation accompanying that first novitiate, even in the absence of a formal seminary. Moreover, it alludes to the fact that priest candidates were being already trained on a sort of apprenticeship model, which is clearly the case when the first formal priest's novitiate and seminary opens eight years later. Father Cavanaugh's critique of this rather informal and haphazard situation might seem harsh, especially when one accounts for the rather undeveloped state of the college and the relatively little time that the congregation had been in the United States at all. It is perhaps more understandable in light of the strict structure and rules of the seminary in 1905. The Congregation Chronicles corroborate Father Cavanaugh's account of the informal nature of priestly formation by simply not recognizing its existence except when they record the move of Father Granger and "the novice seminarians" from the original Brother's novitiate to a new priests novitiate, scholasticate and seminary in 1852.⁹ This is much more a statement of fact about the establishment of the new seminary, but it implicitly admits to the presence of seminarians even before 1852.

⁸ Cavanaugh, C.S.C., John. *The Priests of Holy Cross*. Pg. 60

⁹ Congregation of Holy Cross. *Chronicles...* Pg. 42

St. Aloysius: Scholasticate, Novitiate and Seminary

The next major turning point in the history of priestly formation at Notre Dame comes at this point, with the establishment of the first explicit house of formation for new priests at Notre Dame. Up until 1852 the brothers and priests of the congregation who had come over from France, either in the first wave with Father Sorin or in one of several subsequent groups, had brought new men into their midst in a rather unstructured and relaxed manner. As Father Cavanaugh's opinion of this time makes clear however, this was only acceptable because of the peculiar state of the group in America at that time. This was never meant to be a permanent means of forming the future leaders of the college and the community. This combined with the simple reality of a "steady increase of subjects"¹⁰ led to establishment of the new house in 1852, named for St. Aloysius.

Saint Aloysius seems to have been a house of formation unlike any others that would follow it. What is clear from all the sources is that it was a house explicitly for the formation of priests. In the Notre Dame Chronicles Father Sorin records the foundation of a new novitiate in 1852 and in 1853 records that "the magnificent novitiate of the priests as well as that of the Brothers was evidently full of promise for the future."¹¹ This description of St. Aloysius as a novitiate is also found in the Holy Cross Chronicles, where it also mentions that "St. Aloysius' Scholasticate, for so it was called until 1885, was built in 1852."¹² A novitiate would not have been unique, but St. Aloysius' function in the program of formation at the time went far beyond the novitiate. Father Cavanaugh in 1905 refers back to "the opening of St. Aloysius Seminary and the appointment of

¹⁰ Congregation of Holy Cross. *Chronicles...* Pg. 42

¹¹ Sorin C.S.C., Edward. *Chronicals of Notre Dame du Lac*. Pg. 106 & 119

¹² Congregation of Holy Cross. *Chronicles...* Pg. 40

Father Granger as superior in 1852," and continually refers to the men studying there as seminarians. Father Cavanaugh though was certainly conscious of the distinction that was, and continues to be, readily made between novices and full seminarians.¹³ Father Arthur Hope, C.S.C., in his 100 year summary of the history of Notre Dame written in 1943, mentions that "in 1853 Father Alexis Granger cut away the underbrush on the northern edge of St. Mary's Lake, and ... there they laid the foundations for what was known as St. Aloysius' Novitiate."¹⁴ Judging then simply by a majority we might assume that the best description of what was begun that year is simply a novitiate. This is likely true, and is confirmed by the entry in the minor chapter book documenting the community's decision to open St. Aloysius. In an entry dated the 6th of July, 1852 Father Sorin records in his own handwriting that the minor chapter "decided that a novitiate for the Priests should be built immediately."¹⁵ Nevertheless, it may not provide an accurate picture to refer to it quite so simply.

As the inconstancies between these sources suggest, St. Aloysius was a novitiate and more. It seems that the inconsistent and rather unstructured formation of the previous time period was simply moved under one unified roof. Rather than having novices with the brothers in their novitiate, scholastics with the students in the college and seminarians with the priests as would have been likely before St. Aloysius was built, all these groups were now moved together. Evidence for this is provided in a number of interesting places. The first comes from Father Cavanaugh's book. He includes a quotation of a memorandum drawn up by Father Walter Elliott, a Paulist

¹³ Father Cavanaugh makes this distinction himself as he describes the program of formation in place at Notre Dame in 1905 as he is writing. See *The Priests of Holy Cross*. Pg. 90

¹⁴ Hope C.S.C., Arthur. *Notre Dame One Hundred Years*. Pg. 73

¹⁵ *Minor Chapter Book*, July 6, 1852

Father who studied at Notre Dame as a student in 1855. Father Elliot mentions that he had "no recollection of men whose appearance and conversation were more edifying than these scholastics and novices."¹⁶ His description of the way in which he and the other students saw the men of St. Aloysius provides a picture of religious and studious men in varying stages of their formation, together providing a model of religious life to the students on campus. The most complete description of life at St. Aloysius though comes from reflections of Father Joseph Carrier, C.S.C. in a handwritten manuscript entitled "Contributions to the Golden Jubilee of Holy Cross Seminary," which is undated but appears to have been written around the turn of the century. In the document he describes St. Aloysius and his years there as a student in the early 1860's, while omitting the fact that he also served as the superior there beginning in 1868.¹⁷ Though Father Carrier fondly recalls the grounds and shrines around the property he is strongly critical of many other aspects of the life as he found it. Importantly though, the picture he paints is one of a varied formation environment: "the ordinary exercises of the Novitiate were thus far from being strictly observed, owing to the fact that it combined both a postulate or house of studies and a Novitiate."¹⁸ According to Father Carrier, it seems that the entirety of the formation for young men wishing to join the congregation as priests was available in one place at Notre Dame, St. Aloysius.

Carrier speaks not only of men present in their college studies and in their novitiate years but also of four men studying theology together. These men appear to have been in their final stages of formation at the time, and were completing all the necessary preparations through studies and work at Notre Dame itself. "Four young

¹⁶ Cavanaugh, C.S.C., John. *The Priests of Holy Cross*. Pg. 63

¹⁷ Congregation of Holy Cross. *Chronicles...* Pg. 41-42

¹⁸ Carrier C.S.C., Joseph C. *Contributions to the Golden Jubilee of Holy Cross Seminary*.

men were studying theology together; Mr. Corby already a professed member... a young professor at the College whose first name was Philip; Mr. W. Weyandt who soon discontinued his ecclesiastical studies, and Fr. Carrier who was well advanced in most of the branches of his new calling... Mr. Corby was ordained a priest at Christmas of that same year, and Joseph C. Carrier the first of September following."¹⁹ This has important implications not only for understanding the reality of life at St. Aloysius, but also for understanding more about formal seminary formation at Notre Dame, all the way to the establishment of Holy Cross College in 1895. From 1895 until 1968 all the formal theology studies for Holy Cross Seminarians from Notre Dame were done at the Catholic University of America in Washington D.C. Before this though, it was unclear how these theology studies were being done. Carrier's manuscript begins to cast light on this exact question. It seems that the advanced theology studies were being done at St. Aloysius itself, even though Father Carrier was not entirely impressed by them:

The various courses of study both in the novitiate and in the college were irregular, desultory, curtailed and superficial; especially, was this literally true of the classes of Mental Philosophy and Theology, Canon Law, Hermeneutics and Sacred Scripture. Dogmatic and Pastoral Theology, and Sacred Eloquence were either totally discarded or discursively treated. No solid instruction, no serious intellectual formation could result from such, much-to-be-regretted state of things.

Moreover, the story of the ordination of these first priests is somewhat a mystery. It is not clear if they were universally ordained at Notre Dame, or if some were going

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

elsewhere, or even who was doing the ordinations. In fact, it remains a question who the very first priest of the Congregation of Holy Cross or any other order or diocese was to be ordained at Notre Dame. Again, here Carrier helps to fill in some gaps, at least regarding his own ordination. "On August 15 1861 Fr. Carrier made his first profession and two weeks later, September 1st, he was duly raised to the priesthood in the presence of all the priests of the Diocese of Fort Wayne, then assembled at Notre Dame for their annual retreat."²⁰ This is evidence that indeed ordinations were being done at Notre Dame. It also confirms that, at least in Father Carrier's case, the entirety of seminary formation was done on campus. Though it is far from conclusive evidence, this also suggests that the exact timing of ordinations was probably more based on the schedule of the bishop, than a particular formation timetable. Corby and Carrier were both "studying theology together," though they were ordained about 8 months apart. More than this, Father Carrier mentions that he was ordained during the Diocesan annual retreat. This suggests that the ordination was not the primary reason the bishop was in town, and it can be speculated that the ordination was only scheduled because the bishop would be present anyway. On the other hand, because Carrier mentions that his ordination occurred during the annual retreat, it may also be inferred that the yearly diocesan retreat would have been the regular time for ordinations at Notre Dame, and that the Bishop of Fort Wayne may have been the regular celebrant. This is contested though by the fact that Corby's ordination was placed in December of the previous year, not September, and the fact that the Diocese of Fort Wayne was only established in 1857, fourteen years after the college was established.

²⁰ Carrier C.S.C., Joseph C. *Contributions to the Golden Jubilee of Holy Cross Seminary*.

The Combined Novitiate and a Developing Formation Program

The next significant shift in seminary formation at Notre Dame came around 1868 with the recombination of the brothers' and priests' novitiates. This move seems to have been made for a number of reasons. The original papal approbation of the brothers and priests was only given in 1855 and the general chapter records from the time reflect that the brothers and priests were still learning how to live out the Holy Cross mission together. The general chapter of 1868 details the need for greater unification in the work of the brothers and priests, while at the same time clarifying their differences.²¹ This would have been the first General Chapter with Father Sorin as general. It seems possible then that Sorin had combined the novitiates at Notre Dame at least in part to represent his willingness to work directly with the brothers and as acknowledgement of their value to community as a whole. More practically, the move seems to have been occasioned by the realization that the large "missionary home" being built at the head of St. Joseph's lake for retired priests "would never receive approval of the community."²² This fact combined with ample evidence that the number of men desiring to enter the community as both priests and brothers was still increasing makes the decision seem rather simple. Thus, it was deemed appropriate that the novices of both societies, priests and brothers, move to "take possession of the large and beautiful building."²³

It is worth noting at this point that the exact timing of the recombination is not consistent in all sources. In three different sources, two different dates are cited. The Congregation Chronicles were written earliest, and place the opening of the new

²¹ Congregation of Holy Cross. *Decrees of the General Chapter...* Pg. 9-11

²² Congregation of Holy Cross. *Chronicles...* Pg. 42

²³ Carrier C.S.C., Joseph C. *Contributions to the Golden Jubilee of Holy Cross Seminary.*

novitiate "before the end of 1868."²⁴ Father Cavanaugh, writing in 1905, confirms this account citing the opening of a new novitiate in the same year. Father Carrier's reflections however, also written around the turn of the century, mention that the two separate novitiates merged in 1867, one year earlier. This though, could simply be due to the fact that Father Carrier seems to be working almost exclusively from his memory, and may have not used many concrete sources when he compiled his thoughts. Thus, it is fairly safe to assume that the true merger occurred in 1868, which also makes the most sense in its correlation to the general chapter of the same year.

What this meant for St. Aloysius was that it was then used for ten years, from 1869 to 1879, simply as a scholasticate or house of studies.²⁵ According to Father Cavanaugh, "after this transfer St. Aloysius' Seminary was the home of postulants engaged in making the collegiate studies required for admission to the community and of theologians preparing for ordination."²⁶ This also confirms that before the novices moved out in 1867, St. Aloysius almost certainly served as the universal site of priestly formation for the community at Notre Dame: for postulants, novices, and theologians.

A little more light is shed on the subject in the story of Father John Augustine Zahm, C.S.C. Father Zahm was one of the more famous priests of the community to spend time at St. Aloysius, going on to be a major figure in the history of the university, especially known for his focus on Catholic apologetics in science and for his work in education. Zahm came to Notre Dame in 1867 upon his request to join the community. His aunt was a sister at St. Mary's and the young Zahm, growing up in Ohio, would have doubtless been familiar with the community from a young age. When he wrote to

²⁴ Congregation of Holy Cross. *Chronicles...* Pg. 42

²⁵ Carrier C.S.C., Joseph C. *Contributions...* and Congregation of Holy Cross. *Chronicles...* Pg. 41

²⁶ Cavanaugh, C.S.C., John. *The Priests of Holy Cross.* Pg. 72

Father Sorin asking to be accepted at Notre Dame, he was 17 years old. Though tuition at the time cost one-hundred fifty dollars for each five month term, Father Sorin agreed to have him come and try himself for the first term for only 50 dollars.²⁷ Obviously Sorin's investment paid off and Zahm entered full time that same year. The biography of Zahm written by Ralph E. Weber records that Zahm began in the Classical Course at the college where he got off to a rough start but quickly found his niche. After a successful four years of college studies Zahm was formally received into the community when he entered the novitiate in September of 1871. His seminary studies are a glimpse into the program of formation in the 1870's. At this point, the novitiate was combined with the brother's at St. Joseph's Novitiate, and seminary studies were being conducted at St. Aloysius. Beyond simply studying at the seminary though the biography mentions that "because of financial reasons and a shortage of staff, the Congregation assigned its seminarians to teach in the college in addition to pursuing their studies in the seminary." More than this, Weber cites Edward Power's *History of Catholic Higher Education in the United States* and explains that "practically every other Catholic college with a source of seminarians available followed this practice."²⁸ This certainly agrees with the usual program of studies at St. Aloysius mentioned earlier and as described by Father Carrier. Carrier there too mentioned "a young professor at the College whose first name was Philip," in his list of theologians studying alongside himself at the beginning of the 1860's. Also, in seeming confirmation of Father Carrier's scathing review of the quality of academic studies expected for the theologians, Zahm is reported to have been Assistant in the Science Department, Assistant Librarian, Curator

²⁷ O'Connell, Marivn R. *Edward Sorin* .Pg.560

²⁸ Weber, Ralph E. *Notre Dame's John Zahm*. Pg. 8

Edward J, Power. *A History of Catholic Higher Education in the United States*. Milwaukee: 1958. Pg. 92-93

of the Museum, and Assistant in Chemistry, Physics, and Natural Science.²⁹ This list of duties, combined with the rigors and prayer and study that would have been expected, at least to some degree, made Zahm's time in formation at Notre Dame an exceptionally busy one. Finally, in 1872 Zahm took his religious vows and then was ordained in June of 1875 after completing his "busy 'jack-of-all-trades' seminary years," at the university.

The 1879 Fire and Closing of the Seminary

Zahm's experience of formation seems typical of the formation done at St. Aloysius through the 1870's. Things were looking up for the young community and the new college. The number of students was increasing, and the number of priests and brothers were steadily growing as well. No doubt it seemed like Notre Dame, along with its seminary, was truly destined for the great heights Father Sorin had spoke of 30 years earlier. In 1879 though tragedy struck the university and signaled the end of formal formation at Notre Dame for the next 6 years. On April 23, a pleasant spring day, a fire broke out on the roof of the main college building. Despite heroic efforts by the students, religious and townsfolk the building burned completely to the ground also taking with it St. Francis' Home, the infirmary, and music hall. The students were dismissed, but told that the college would rebuild and that they would be welcomed back to "a bigger and better Notre Dame" in September.³⁰ Father Cavanaugh describes the effects of the disaster for the seminary; "only the outlying buildings escaped destruction. In the critical days that followed the old order was necessarily disarranged, for every inch of available room was needed for dwelling purposes; and the Seminary was converted into a home

²⁹ Weber, Ralph E. *Notre Dame's John Zahm*. Pg. 8

³⁰ Hope C.S.C., Arthur. *Notre Dame One Hundred Years*. Pg. 183-185

where aged persons could be cared for amid religious surroundings for the rest of their days."³¹ This was the only moment in the history of the University since St. Aloysius was first opened in 1852 until the present day that the seminary at Notre Dame was closed entirely. Simply because the seminary itself was closed for those few years does not mean that there were no seminarians. However, there is not much mentioned of them, although an article briefly outlining the history of St. Aloysius and later Holy Cross Seminary in the 2007 Province Review mentions "the solution was to move seminarians to other religious houses on campus."³² Despite this, these six years only receive a one-line description in the 1895 chronicles; "From 1879 to 1885 [St. Aloysius] served as a residence for aged gentlemen."³³ The chronicles, doubtless like the community itself at the time, chose instead to focus more on the re-modeling and re-opening of the seminary in 1885.

Reconstruction and Holy Cross Seminary

After the fire, Notre Dame bounced back quickly, led by the stony resolve of Father Sorin who left no doubt that he fully intended to rebuild Notre Dame "bigger and better." In 1885 it seems that the aged and infirm were relocated and St. Aloysius re-opened under the same name. However, the building had undergone heavy use over the course of more than 30 years and finally it "had grown rickety with age and its modest dimensions no longer responded to the strain that increasing numbers [of seminarians] put upon it."³⁴ As a result, only four years after it had been restored as a

³¹ Cavanaugh, C.S.C., John. *The Priests of Holy Cross*. Pg. 74

³² "The Angel's Dorm." *Province Review*, December 2007. Pg. 13

³³ Congregation of Holy Cross. *Chronicles...* Pg. 42

³⁴ Cavanaugh, C.S.C., John. *The Priests of Holy Cross*. Pg. 74

seminary, St. Aloysius was replaced. The new structure, named Holy Cross Seminary, "was thought to be absurdly big at the time."³⁵ What no one could know in 1889 when the new seminary welcomed its first students was that Holy Cross Seminary would stand there for the next 102 years, 78 of them as a seminary in some form and the remainder as a men's dorm for the university. As one could imagine, over those years the building saw numerous renovations and changes to its residents and programs. More importantly though, more than 3,500 aspirants to the priesthood would ultimately spend time there and 588 of those would become priests of the Congregation of Holy Cross.³⁶

Holy Cross originally opened as a direct replacement of St. Aloysius and so high school students, collegians, and theologians all lived and studied in the new building together. The novices also had a new building which had replaced the "large and beautiful" building at the head of St. Joseph's lake which completely burned in November of 1887. Reconstruction had begun that following spring and so at least one class of novices conducted their novitiate with the professed living on the "island."³⁷

Formation at Holy Cross for the next few years likely closely resembled the formation at St. Aloysius before the fire. Depending on their level of study, seminarians would have studied in the high school or collegiate programs at Notre Dame, or been instructed in theology by a small theology faculty working at the seminary itself. Many of the professed seminarians back from the novitiate, like their earlier counterparts, would also have assisted the priests in teaching, preaching, or other ministries in preparation for ordination. Father Joseph Kehoe, C.S.C. produced a brief work on the history of Holy Cross on the occasion of its demolition in 1991. In it he references a record dating

³⁵ *Ibid.* Pg. 74

³⁶ "The Angel's Dorm." *Province Review*, December 2007. Pg. 18

³⁷ Congregation of Holy Cross. *Chronicles...* Pg. 43

back to 1885 of the men who entered Holy Cross Seminary from 1889 through 1966. This register not only gives basic data about the men entering formation such as their name and birth date, but also more revealing information about their education and who recommended that they be accepted. Father Kehoe makes the interesting note that the only concrete requirements to enter the seminary were that "a boy had to be a graduate of a grammar school and recommended by his pastor or a priest of Holy Cross."³⁸

Shortfalls of the Program and the Opening of a new Theologate

Despite the great effort made by the community to give the seminarians the best possible education, the critiques of both Father Carrier and Father Cavanaugh cited earlier were in large part warranted. In their history of the Indiana Province of Holy Cross James Connelly, C.S.C. and Philip Armstrong, C.S.C. describe the early period of formation at Notre Dame:

Up until this time, candidates for ordination in the community had studied theology at Notre Dame while employed there as teachers and prefects of the younger students. There seems to have been no fixed length of time for theological studies, much less a fixed curriculum or trained theologians to teach the courses. Both teachers and students probably worked from manuals of theology.³⁹

³⁸ Kehoe C.S.C., Joseph. *Holy Cross Seminary*. Pg. 3

³⁹ Connelly C.S.C., James T. and Armstrong C.S.C., Philip C. "The History of the Indiana and Midwest Provinces." Pg. 14

There was no formal theology department or faculty at Notre Dame whatsoever, and so any theological studies were done by priests who often themselves had no formal theological training beyond what they had received during their own formation. In fact there was not even a basic religion class taught to lay students at the university until 1920.⁴⁰ Father Zahm, himself a product of formation at Notre Dame at St. Aloysius Seminary, had firsthand knowledge of the shortcomings of this system. After being ordained he had quickly advanced himself in the congregation and by 1895 he had been appointed prefect of studies for the entire Congregation of Holy Cross by the Superior General Father Gilbert Francais. In this new position Father Zahm began pushing hard to reform the program of studies at the seminary proposing to "give future Holy Cross priests a good theological education and at the same time to lay the foundation for upgrading the Congregation's schools by opening a house of studies at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C."⁴¹ Zahm encountered fierce opposition to the project however with both Fathers Corby and Morrissey, also products of Notre Dame formation, arguing against it. In fact, together they conspired to get Father Zahm moved from his teaching position at Notre Dame and assigned to a job at the Generalate in Rome where they believed he would have less direct influence on business in America. Despite this, the General, Father Francais, completely supported Father Zahm, and Zahm was even able to procure a Papal blessing for the new institution.⁴² With this, Holy Cross College at the Catholic University of America opened and seminarians who had already graduated from college and were beginning theological studies were transferred there in 1895 with the first permanent building

⁴⁰ Moore C.S.C., Philip S. "Academic Development: University of Notre Dame..." Pg. 17

⁴¹ Connelly C.S.C., James T. and Armstrong C.S.C., Philip C. "The History of the Indiana and Midwest Provinces." Pg. 14

⁴² *Ibid.*

constructed in 1899. Soon thereafter more opportunities became available for the theologians away from Notre Dame. A house of seminarian studies in Rome was opened in 1896 and the foreign mission seminary was opened in 1906 in Washington D.C., again with an eye towards bettering the academic wherewithal of future Holy Cross Priests and preparing them to take Holy Cross institutions across the world into the future.⁴³

Life at Holy Cross Seminary

The nature of the seminary at Notre Dame had once again changed dramatically. The theologians would not return to Notre Dame until 1968, and so for the next 70 years the university was home only to preparatory, meaning high school and college, seminarians. Despite this, their numbers continued to grow along with the university and by 1905 Holy Cross Seminary had undergone two major additions, essentially doubling its capacity. When Father Cavanaugh wrote his account it offered "ample accommodation for one hundred and twenty-five seminarians. Besides the usual living and study apartments it has its own chapel, recreation parks, library, reading rooms, heating and lighting plants, and cuisine."⁴⁴ Beyond the physical improvements, Holy Cross Seminary had undergone great changes in its program of formation since its first years as a continuation of St. Aloysius. From studies, to spirituality right down to the rhythm of daily life at Holy Cross the routine was laid out in detail and followed closely. Records of the daily horarium extend back to at least Father Cavanaugh in 1905 who mentions that the seminarian "rises at five o'clock in the morning and after completing

⁴³ Connelly C.S.C., James. "The Congregation of Holy Cross in the United States..."

⁴⁴ Cavanaugh, C.S.C., John. *The Priests of Holy Cross*. Pg. 74

his toilet and makes a visit to the Blessed Sacrament... Shortly after breakfast there is a half hour's instruction... A quarter of an hour before dinner is devoted to particular examination of conscience," moreover, the seminarians all "make a brief visit to the chapel after each meal, on leaving the seminary grounds for classes and walks, and on returning."⁴⁵ Principally these changes came with time as the program in general became increasingly specialized, with Notre Dame focusing on the high school and college students and Washington D.C. along with a small number of other institutions becoming responsible for all graduate studies.

Father Cavanaugh describes in detail the life at the seminary for "a boy who comes to Holy Cross after completing the work of eighth grade in any good school" and "enters at once on a course of special training which differentiates him at the very outset from the ordinary collegian."⁴⁶ At this time Notre Dame continued to be a primary and secondary school as well as a college. The focus on formation of boys so young then made complete sense with the mission of the school in general. Though there were certainly more young boys in the seminary in 1905, there would have been boys in the preparatory school identified by their priest teachers as good candidates for seminary studies from the founding of the school. For the boys in the preparatory or high school program the development of the natural virtues and the spiritual regime was the primary focus of their first years at Holy Cross. This was the largest of the programs, and over the course of those years many boys would leave. In fact only about 28 percent of men entering Holy Cross from 1885-1928 would make it to ordination.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Cavanaugh, C.S.C., John. *The Priests of Holy Cross*. Pg. 81

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* Pg. 79

⁴⁷ "The Angel's Dorm." *Province Review*, December 2007. Pg. 18

After about four years, around the age of 18 the young men who had progressed sufficiently far would move on to the novitiate.⁴⁸ There Cavanaugh describes a strict regimen of prayer and studies, marked by silence and obedience. The novitiate was still located on campus where it served both the priest and brother novices, but the strict schedule kept the novices distinctly separated from the normal course of life at the university. The year is described glowingly by Cavanaugh who describes it as "a spiritual experience which seldom fails to leave a life-long impression on the young religious."⁴⁹

Following their year at the novitiate the seminarians would normally return to Holy Cross for four more years of study as a collegian at the University. It does seem possible though that some students would have already done their college studies prior to the novitiate and that these students would move directly to Washington D.C. for their theology studies. The students who stayed at Notre Dame would typically continue the spiritual regimen he had developed over the previous year while beginning studies that would "develop a body of priests who shall know something about everything and everything about something."⁵⁰ Practically this meant that the students would typically follow the "Classical Course" at the university which had developed over time to itself become more regimented and structured. Nevertheless seminarians were encouraged to specialize in other subjects if they so desired so that they might teach or research in that subject later as priests of the community. Upon their completion of a college degree seminarians came to the end of their time in studies at Notre Dame and were sent off to D.C. to complete at least four more years of post-graduate study in theology and often

⁴⁸ Cavanaugh, C.S.C., John. *The Priests of Holy Cross*. Pg. 74-82

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* Pg. 89

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* Pg. 96

in other areas of secular learning which they could later teach at one the Congregations growing universities.⁵¹

The Arrival of Father Finnigan and a New Discipline

This program of formation continued at Holy Cross Seminary with relatively few changes until the year 1919 with the arrival of Father George Finnigan, C.S.C. at Holy Cross as superior. Father Finnigan, only ordained in 1915, was himself a product of Holy Cross Seminary. After ordination he had gone to serve in the Mission Band preaching missions and spent 3 years serving as a U.S. Army Chaplain at the end of World War I. When he arrived back in the U.S. after his service he was assigned as Superior of Holy Cross Seminary and immediately began making changes. An article on Father Finnigan written by Father Bill Simmons, C.S.C. describes it best:

Two new wings were added, a special chapel was built, meals were prepared at the Seminary (instead of having them brought from the University kitchen), showers were installed, and new plans were laid for a new building to be added to the old Seminary. Based on his military experience he developed the "rules" of seminary formation that would continue for the next 40 years. Discipline, obedience, and higher educational standards were among his major concerns.⁵²

Many of the changes enacted by Father Finnigan in the way of the new "rules" were supported and encouraged by the new Code of Canon law promulgated in 1917 which

⁵¹ Cavanaugh, C.S.C., John. *The Priests of Holy Cross*. Pg. 136-146

⁵² Simmons C.S.C., Bill. "From the Archives: George J. Finnigan, C.S.C." *Province Review*, December 2002

"provided for a much tighter and disciplined method of formation in seminaries."⁵³ At Holy Cross this meant that the seminary was now clearly divided into two divisions, junior and senior. The junior division was comprised of the boys in their first three years of high school who were younger and physically smaller in stature. The senior division was made up of the high school seniors, college students, and anyone else who was physically taller in stature. Under Father Finnigan each division was assigned its own dormitories, study halls, recreational facilities, outdoor plying fields, pews in the new chapel, and tables in the dining hall. The distinction between postulants and seminarians was also regularized; classifying all those who had not undergone the novitiate and were not yet in vows as postulants, and recognizing those who had been to the novitiate and were then under temporary vows as seminarians.⁵⁴

With the new 1917 Code of Canon Law also came structural changes to the novitiate at Notre Dame. Before the change, novices typically had only spent one year living at the novitiate and they were often still considered novices for a year after their return to the seminary. These 'novices' would have waited to take their religious vows until after their second novitiate year. The new Code though required that a religious be in temporary vows for a period of at least three years before he could take the final permanent vows. As a result the novitiate was reduced to one year allowing the men to take their vows one year earlier. Accordingly, the novices received the habit of the Congregation at the beginning of the novitiate in preparation for these vows. Notre Dame continued to host the novitiate even in light of the call for more structure and separation for the novices. Yet, a few years later the novitiate did finally leave Notre

⁵³ Simmons C.S.C., Bill. "From the Archives: George J. Finnigan, C.S.C." *Province Review*, December 2002

⁵⁴ Kehoe C.S.C., Joseph. *Holy Cross Seminary*. Pg. 4

Dame after 90 years on campus. In 1934 the novices were packed up and moved to a new property in Rolling Prairie, Indiana. This move came primarily because of a need for more space, the numbers in all the programs continued to steadily grow, but also as a result of the many reforms formation had undergone around the turn of the century.

The First Moreau Seminary and More Changes at Holy Cross

The changes to the seminary in 1919 went even further. Beyond reforming the rules, altering the structure of the novitiate, and expanding and improving Holy Cross Seminary itself, the year also saw the beginning of the construction of an entirely new college level seminary. The new seminary was needed for a multitude of reasons. Partly, it was because of the reforms of Father Finnigan and the belief that formation would be better accomplished if the high school and college students were separated. This also helps to explain the dividing of Holy Cross into the two divisions. More importantly though was the one factor that had driven the development of the seminary from the very beginning: vocations. The number of young men who felt like they may have a vocation, or calling, to the priesthood in Holy Cross had steadily increased since Father Sorin first arrived in the United States. This had spurred the building and renovation of St. Aloysius, and the building and expansion of Holy Cross to this point. Nonetheless, the seminary was again becoming crowded. The numbers of aspirants entering Holy Cross Seminary roughly doubled from 1890 to 1900 and again from 1900 to 1915. In 1919 the number of new men was 55, up from only 23 when the seminary first opened.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Kehoe C.S.C., Joseph. *Holy Cross Seminary*. Pg. 13

This dramatic increase was already on the mind of Father Tom Irving, C.S.C. who became the superior before Father Finnigan in 1912. That year he approached the Provincial, Father Andrew Morrissey, C.S.C., and suggested that a new seminary might soon be needed. Plans were then developed, but the support for the new building did not coalesce until Father Finnigan arrived on the scene. At that point, in 1919, construction began under the leadership of Brother Columkille, C.S.C. The new building was located on the far side of St. Joseph's lake and still stands there today. It is now called St. Joseph's Hall and currently serves at the Parish Hall for Sacred Heart Parish. The seminarians themselves were heavily involved in the construction work, hauling bricks, laying mortar, and nailing planks in place. Through their diligent efforts the doors opened in November of 1920 and the seminarians moved in.⁵⁶ Nonetheless the seminary was built somewhat hurriedly by a force that consisted largely of seminarians not builders. As a result, when the seminarians moved in it was still lacking a few important elements. Namely, there was no kitchen or dining hall and the chapel was not even yet finished. Some have joked that it was built for angels and not seminarians.⁵⁷

The opening of the new seminary marked the end of another significant shift in priestly formation at Notre Dame. Its name also marked a shift in the Congregation as a whole. The Congregation of Holy Cross was founded by Father Basil Moreau in 1837. Soon after though the community found itself in financial trouble and Father Moreau eventually resigned as superior and ultimately died estranged from the order he had founded. Over the course of time Moreau was largely forgotten about by the young community. Yet, when Father Gilbert Francais became General Superior in 1893 he

⁵⁶ "New Moreau Seminary." *Province Review*, February 1957. Pg. 1-2

⁵⁷ "Silver Jubilee of Moreau Seminary." Indiana Province Archives, Undated (1945?).

began a campaign to restore the memory of Moreau and the gifts he gave to the community. Though many names for the new seminary were considered, ultimately it was Moreau's name that won out. This is widely attributed to the restoration of Moreau by Father Francais and a "desire, more or less general among both priests and brothers, to do honor to Father Moreau."⁵⁸ The very presence of that desire was itself remarkable, and the fact that the seminary, the place where all new priests would spend their days in formation, was to be named after Moreau shows that it was no small desire at all.

With Moreau and Holy Cross both operating at Notre Dame, the program of formation again underwent a slight shift. This time most of the changes had been made even before the building opened. With the division of Holy Cross into the two divisions, it was a relatively simple process to move the professed collegians in the second division, which was already fairly autonomous, over to Moreau. This gave much more space to both programs, allowing the community to admit more aspirants than ever before, 69 in 1920. The space freed up was desperately needed; the numbers of men applying would only continue to grow for the foreseeable future.⁵⁹ The move also gave Holy Cross Seminary space to move its entire academic program into the building by 1922. That year, Notre Dame decided to focus on collegiate studies and close its preparatory high school. The congregation though was not ready to give up the high school formation program. The decision was then made to make Holy Cross an independently operating seminary, providing not only for the spiritual aspects of the student's formation, but the intellectual as well.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Kehoe C.S.C., Joseph. *Holy Cross Seminary*. Pg. 13

Life at the new Moreau Seminary followed closely the rhythms and rules that had been developed over the years at St. Aloysius and Holy Cross Seminary with some modifications. The formation and classes were more tailored to those who were further along in their studies and their discernment and the rules required a rather serious commitment. The seminarians, while steadily growing in numbers, had been steadily given a more regularized and more structured life. The program that opened at Moreau in 1920 was a far cry from the haphazard apprentice days of Father Carrier and Father Zahm. This new program had matured by 1920; more men were coming in than ever, and more being ordained than ever. Moreau then, like Holy Cross Seminary experienced relatively few changes as it continued to grow and develop. A side effect of the increased structure and formality of the seminary seems to have been a certain level of isolation. Two scholastic articles written by Moreau Seminarians both describe the fact that indeed "life in a religious house of formation is well regimented," and that "if all men are called to perfection, the Religious nevertheless must be obliged to make a greater effort than the others."⁶⁰ This regimented life in pursuit of perfection remained attractive to many young men despite of, or perhaps because of, their feelings of isolation and numbers of aspirants continued to grow steadily on into the 1950's.

The New Moreau Seminary

In 1957 the community came to the realization that again a change was called for to seminary formation. Despite making requirements for admission increasingly strict and opening the Old College program in St. Edward's hall and the Old College building

⁶⁰ McNally C.S.C., Thomas. "Moreau Seminary." *The Scholastic*, October 11, 1957: Pg. 23
The Scholastic. "'My Day' at Moreau." Unknown: 13-16.

in 1950 to house college men who had not yet been to the novitiate, the seminary was becoming increasingly full. In response a call went out in the newly established Province Review in 1957 outlining the reasons a new seminary was called for and requesting support and funds to see it accomplished.⁶¹ Ground was broken later that year, the cornerstone laid, and in May of 1959, two years to the day after ground was broken, the New Moreau Seminary opened. Built to be a self-sufficient house for up to 200 college level seminarians, the new construction was massive. In many ways it embodied the spirit of the times. Looking back over the history, the community at Notre Dame would have seen little else besides growth and triumph over adversity and obstacles. The numbers too showed that interest in the priesthood was only continuing to grow. This coincided with great growth in the community's mission, not only at Notre Dame, but around the country and the world. As a result the spirit was one of hope and energy. The dedication of the new Moreau was a great party with the presence of the new Apostolic Delegate, the Archbishop of Indianapolis, the Bishops of Fort Wayne and Lafayette as well as at Coadjutor Archabbot of St. Meinrad's Abby and the Superior General of the Congregation.⁶² That August the building became home to a newly professed class of 39 in addition to those moving over from the Old Moreau.⁶³

Old Moreau then became home to the Old College program for a number of years before eventually being turned over for uses beyond formation. As noted earlier, it still stands today and is currently the Parish Center for Sacred Heart Parish. Holy Cross Seminary continued to serve as the high school preparatory seminary with relatively few changes from 1922 on through 1967. Its most distinguished alumni included two

⁶¹ "New Moreau Seminary." *Province Review*, February 1957

⁶² "Dedication of New Seminary." *Province Review*, June 1959. Pg. 5-7

⁶³ "Newly Professed." *Province Review*, August 1959. Pg. 3

archbishops, five bishops, three superiors general, four presidents of the University of Notre Dame and twenty-seven presidents of other universities and colleges.⁶⁴ Despite its illustrious history, by 1967, when the decision was made to close Holy Cross Seminary, the percentage of men who entered and would eventually be ordained had dropped to just 3 percent.⁶⁵ With the ramifications of Vatican II not yet completely understood, and the rapidly changing trends in vocations, the days of an active and vibrant high school seminary had come to an end. The Holy Cross Seminary was closed and converted into a dorm for Notre Dame students. Holy Cross Hall, as it was then known, continued in that capacity until 1991 when it was closed and demolished after more than 100 years of service to the community and Notre Dame.

Conclusions

The program of priestly formation at the University of Notre Dame began with little more than humble roots. Like the university though it quickly grew and developed, becoming ever larger, more structured, and vibrant. From the first postulants brought in to live with Father Sorin and the brothers at Saint Peter's all the way the building of a 200 room college level seminary the story of the first 100 years of formation at Notre Dame is one of progress and expansion. Those years saw the construction of no less than six buildings specifically devoted to men in various stages of formation, and many of those had significant additions. It is difficult to know how many men passed through at least part of that program, and even more difficult to overstate the impact that the program had on the University of Notre Dame and the Congregation of Holy Cross.

⁶⁴ Kehoe C.S.C., Joseph. *Holy Cross Seminary*. Pg. 9

⁶⁵ "The Angel's Dorm." *Province Review*, December 2007. Pg. 18

When people think of the vocations to the priesthood and religious life today, they often think of the so called "vocations crisis". Facts about declining numbers of seminarians, bankrupt dioceses and dying religious orders immediately come to mind. Often times it is difficult to understand why anyone would join a seminary at a moment like this, when it seems like the Church, at least in the West, is dying. Nonetheless, a vibrant seminary is exactly what is needed in order to continue a church that is not dying, but only transforming, waiting, and hoping for the future. Importantly, what is needed to once again grow the seminary at Notre Dame is a sense of hope. This hope can start with the memory of the time when the first images that popped into a Notre Dame priest's mind when someone spoke of vocations was an overflowing seminary and the tremendous hope and opportunity that brought with it. The story of the first roughly 100 years of seminary formation at the University of Notre Dame is that memory. It is a story defined by steady growth, development, triumph, and hope. The men who contributed to developing that program and the priests it produced are models of zealous religious that we can look to today for inspiration as we build upon their foundation and continue to write the next chapter of the story.

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