The Establishment of the English Seminaries in Rheims and Rome, and Their Fruits

But the Catholics have been most benefitted, consoled, and strengthened by the foundations of the seminaries at Rheims in France and at Rome, which began in this way. The horrors of the queen's persecution and the Catholics' troubles were worsening by the day, and certain wise, zealous, and God-fearing men saw that nothing had been able to calm or mitigate the storm. They feared that the English Catholics both in England and abroad would be killed off by age, or abuses in the jails and prisons, or long and arduous exile—or that they would ultimately lose heart, witnessing every day the many savage martyrdoms of their friends and companions. And so they decided that to prevent the Catholic religion from withering on the vine in that land, they ought to create a school or seminary for able young Catholics, who would be nurtured and transplanted, and then grow to replace those passing away. Because they had no doubt that, no matter how this sect of perdition flourished, it must fall (so long as the Catholics did not despair) and come to an end, as all the others that past centuries had raised up against the Catholic Church and God's truth had come to an end. For no heretical cult has yet been able to please men for any length of time, nor endure or persevere in one form, instead always going through drastic changes and alterations. We see this in the heresy of the Arians, who, though they had the might of the princes and monarchs of the world upon their side, ultimately came to an end.

Therefore, since a huge number of accomplished young students had fled England and taken up residence in the provinces of Flanders to live safely as Catholics among Catholics, they gathered in Douai under the discipline and leadership of Doctor William Allen (who later studied theology in the university there and is now a cardinal, on account of his great virtues). Little by little they came to form a bustling college, sustained at first by the alms of several servants of God, and then by the generosity and beneficence of the Apostolic

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3. 2 Pet. 2:3.
See. But as the heretics in England were agitating and threatening yet greater evils, it became necessary for the college to relocate to Rheims in France, as our Lord ordained and the Most Christian King of France desired, where it has flourished to the highest profit and benefit to the kingdom of England. And to better this good, His Holiness Pope Gregory XIII (whose name will be lovingly and gloriously recalled in every age for this kindness and for many others like it done for the Church) created another wonderful college for the English at Rome, in the ancient hospice of that nation, which he endowed with ample rents and entrusted to the fathers of the Society of Jesus, for the instruction and governance of the English students, just as they governed and instructed the Germans of the Germanicum and the clerics of the Collegio Romano. These two seminaries have been like two impregnable fortresses, to this very day giving life and health to the Catholics still in England. For each day countless good-hearted young men of extraordinary abilities arrive to be instructed and educated in the universal and solid truths of our holy religion. After they have absorbed what is needful and have been examined and proved for several years, they return to the kingdom ordained (many of them with further degrees), to teach and preach what they learned in the seminaries. Thus it is that in a few years more than three hundred clerics have been trained in the two seminaries, and transplanted and dispatched to England to cultivate that abandoned vineyard beset with wild beasts, which they have done with so much spirit and effort that many have watered it with their blood. It is a miracle, belonging to the mighty

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4 William Allen was made a cardinal in 1587. Educated at Oxford, Allen fled England in 1565, establishing the English College at Douai in 1568, to sustain the large number of English Catholics in exile on the Continent. The college received papal confirmation within months of its foundation. Allen received his doctorate in divinity in 1570, and governed the college until 1588. See the “Historical Introduction” to Thomas Francis Knox, ed., The First and Second Diaries of the English College, Douay: And an Appendix of Unpublished Documents (London: David Nutt, 1878), xv–cvii.

5 Intensifying anti-Spanish animus in the Low Countries during the late 1570s made the situation of the English College at Douai ever more precarious. In 1578, the English were expelled from the town, and transplanted the seminary to Rheims, where they were welcomed by a French government dominated by the stridently Catholic Guise family. Ibid., xlix–lvi.

6 In April 1579, Gregory provided the ancient English pilgrim hospice at San Tommaso as a site for a second English seminary and endowed the enterprise with considerable incomes toward its support. The Collegium Germanicum et Hungaricum, begun in the days of Ignatius of Loyola, was a Jesuit-run college dedicated to training German youths to combat Protestantism in their homelands. The Society also directed the Collegio Romano, the primary Jesuit seminary. Pastor, History of the Popes, 19:237–51.

7 Isa. 5:5.