TheQualitiesThoseEnteringtheSeminariesaretoHave,andtheOathTheyTake,andtheThingsTheyDoWhileThere

These seminaries do not indiscriminately admit every Englishman who comes to them, but rather carefully choose those most apt for the end they seek. These are usually youngish men, able, virtuous, well inclined and known to be so. They include many nobles, the children of knights and lords, and several firstborn sons and persons of considerable wealth, among the most distinguished of the realm, who, touched with the hand of God, guided by his spirit, and strengthened by his grace, leave their houses, families, and kin, and all the luxury and comfort that they could have had, so as not to lose—or even risk losing—the Catholic faith. These learned men also come to perfect their education and their character, and then to return home to sow Catholic doctrine, and uproot the thorns and weeds from that neglected and abandoned vineyard. These men, after having been examined, considered, and tested for many days, are admitted, making a solemn promise to God our Lord to be employed in his service, to receive sacred orders in due course, and to return to England; the oath runs as follows.

The oath of the graduates of the English seminaries.

I, N.N., of such-and-such English college, mindful of the benefits that God our Lord has done me, first and foremost in having removed me from my homeland, which is so beset by heresies, and in having made me a

1 "Now, as to the entrants to these seminaries, though the queen says they are children, bought, enticed, and gathered by the king’s bribes, yet it is not so; instead, only the worthiest are admitted to the first examination, by a careful selection from those whom God, who gathers the dispersed of Israel, has sent us with a generous hand. Nor is there any great need of conscription to find them, nor have we any necessity of going out to the streets and hedges and highways to compel them to enter—and much less to bring in the good and the bad, the poor and the weak, the blind and the lame […] to fill the house. Indeed, there are so many from among the most distinguished English youths who, disgusted with personal vanities and delusions, offer themselves to us every day that if the supply of earthly funds were equal to the multitude who rush to us […] there is no doubt that the English universities would soon be seen abandoned or utterly vitiated by a lack of ready talent." Philopater, 152–53.

member of His Catholic Church, wishing not to be ungrateful for so great a mercy of the Lord, have resolved to offer myself entirely to his divine service, to the extent I can, in fulfillment of the aims of this college. And thus I promise and swear by Almighty God that I am prepared in my soul, insofar as his divine grace will aid me, to receive holy orders in good time, and to return to England to seek, win, and convert the souls of my neighbors, as and when the superior of this college, according to its institute, judges it good, commanding me so in the Lord.  

This is the oath.

While these English students are in the seminary, they have superiors—who in Rome, Valladolid, and Seville are fathers of the Society of Jesus—whom they obey with utter exactitude. They have rules and statutes, which they observe with great diligence. The hours of every day are divided into exercises in virtue and in letters, such that from the hour they arise to the hour they lay themselves down, no time is wasted or lost. The things they do are usually to improve and perfect their souls, or to learn the skills necessary for winning over the heretics. For their souls, they use spoken and mental prayer, devoutly saying or hearing Mass every day, praying the hours, the rosary, and the litany, the examination of conscience, the reading of some sacred text at table, confession, communion every eight days, preaching during meals on feast days, listening to discourses on topics related to their goals and the means for achieving them, and others things of this kind.  

And no less care is taken that they be well

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3 For the oath sworn by the seminarians at Rome, see Wilfrid Kelly, ed., Liber ruber venerabilis collegii Anglorum de urbe: i. Annales collegii pars prima; Nomina alumnorum i.a.d. 1579–1630, Publications of the Catholic Record Society 37 (London: John Whitehead & Son, 1940), 7.

For the nearly identical oath used at Valladolid, see Henson, Registers, 261.

4 "Indeed, out of the twenty-four hours that naturally make up the day, as much as seven (with an interruption), or at most eight are given over to sleep and to the necessities of the night, as well as three in the day for both meals and rest. The remaining thirteen are so precisely apportioned to lectures, meditation, and the study of letters that not even the least of such great treasures is allowed to be cast away. Moreover, each day they begin all their undertakings with meditation on the divine, or inward prayer (as they call it), in which for a set period of time, with a devout posture of body and a deep dedication of soul and spirit, without speaking aloud, in the deep contemplation of their hearts, all together they approach God, and reflect upon the mystery of salvation, and discuss their business. They throb with moans and sighs; they burn with the flames of fervent desire for eternal life and divine love. This divine practice is followed by the eternal worship of the Christian sacrifice, which we call the Mass, which all devoutly attend each day. Then follows their studies, but according to the rule that in quiet moments the duties of prayer and contemplation are resumed morning and evening, consisting now of litanies, now of words addressed to God, by which his majesty