

# Why An American Seminary In Rome?

By REV. ROBERT F. McNAMARA

(Rev. Robert F. McNamara, professor of Church History at St. Bernard's Seminary, Rochester, is the author of the book "The American College in Rome, 1853-1953.")

December 8, 1959, will be the hundredth birthday of the Pontifical North American College in Rome. The centennial observance, for greater convenience, will take place in October.

It will reach its climax on the afternoon of October 11, when the three hundred students, joined by an equal number of alumni and many representatives of the American hierarchy, will play host to His Holiness, Pope John XXIII.

The North American College. Surely most informed Americans have heard of this Roman seminary maintained by our United States bishops for the training of American diocesan priests. When another pope, the late Pius XII, personally visited and dedicated the new College building in 1953, the event received wide coverage in the press, both religious and secular.

We may anticipate that the institution's centenary will be considered a equally noteworthy.

One question remains, however, which the periodicals may not answer. Why should American bishops maintain in Rome, so far from home, a school to train young Americans for work among Americans?

It is a good question, and we shall attempt to give it a good answer.

But before coming to the point we must first make it clear that the Church in the United States is not the only nation that has a national Roman seminary. The annual Vatican handbook, "Annuario Pontificio," lists some ninety colleges and seminaries supported in Rome by religious orders or national hierarchies. They are equipped to accommodate clerical students from all over the world.

So far as the secular seminaries go, the first of them was founded for non-Roman Italians as long ago as 1457. It is the Capranica College.

After the outbreak of the Protestant Reformation, the pope established colleges for several nations where the faith was imperilled.

The German College dates from 1582; the venerable English College, from 1578; the Scots College, from 1600; the Irish College, from 1628. Colleges for Catholics of some of the eastern rites were set up in the same epoch: the Greek College in 1577, the Maronite College in 1584, and in 1627 Pope Urban VIII instituted the Urban College of Propaganda Fide, to take care of vocations from all mission lands.

Pius IX, the pope who founded the North American College, also had several other colleges to his credit. One of them, the Latin American College (1857) even bears his name: Collegio Pio Latino-Americano. Recent popes have generally followed the practice of Pius IX.

Pius XI, for instance, inaugurated colleges for Russia (1829), Ethiopia (1830), and Brazil (1834). Pope Pius started a Lithuanian College in 1818, and it has been reported that Pope John XXIII may soon become the founder of a Filipino College.

Now the point is this: what considerations have prompted the supreme pontiffs to set up these national colleges?

A glance at the few names

of seminaries listed above will show at once that the popes have acted in some cases for very particular reasons. An urgent need to aid persecuted English Catholics, for example, certainly motivated the establishment of the English College. An urgent desire to heal the rift between the eastern and western churches certainly motivated the establishment of the various eastern rite colleges.

But beyond any particular motives, there have been two basic convictions which have spurred the Vicars of Christ to increase the number of Roman national colleges. The first conviction is that Roman training for the priesthood is the best available. The second is that education in Rome, where the student is in contact with the universal spirit.

The belief that Rome gives the best priestly training is by no means a new papal conviction. Back in the eleventh century, Pope St. Gregory VII was already advocating it. In 1078 he wrote a letter to King Olaf III of Norway, advising him that Norwegian students sent down to be educated "under the wings of the apostles Peter and Paul" would return to the fatherland fully equipped to preach the "correct evangelical and apostolic doctrine."

Time and again since then, the Bishops of Rome have expressed similar sentiments. Today, of course, there are far more excellent seminaries and universities in every continent than there were in St. Gregory's day.

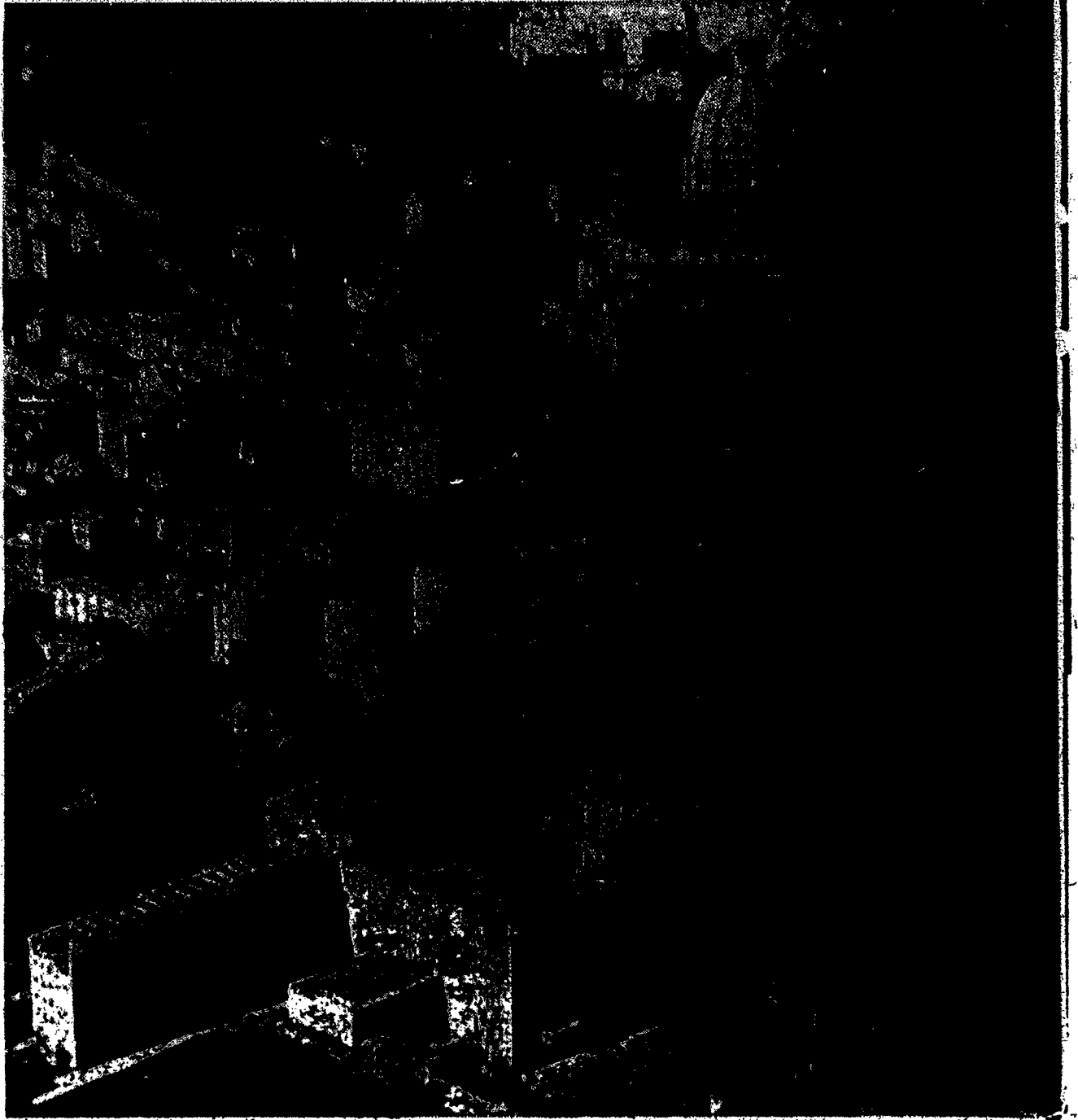
Our contemporary popes, therefore, with Pope Benedict XV, state quite emphatically that one can become a holy and learned priest without leaving one's own country. But they still insist, as Benedict went on to insist, that a Roman priestly education implies far more than adequate instruction. The Eternal City, he pointed out, furnishes the seminarian not only with formal studies, but with innumerable unique "aids, to piety and doctrine."

Who, indeed, can deny this?

What other city can offer such a spectacle of age-old faith as Rome does? How eloquent of Christian truth are its catacombs, its Colosseum, its innumerable shrines of the saints! How inspiring are its churches and its monuments of religious art, old and new? And where can one better experience than here at its very heart, the throbbing vigor of the whole Church?

The second papal conviction, that Rome teaches best a sense of the universal, can scarcely be denied even by the casual visitor. There is no better subject lesson than for him to stand by the doors of the great Roman theological universities at the hour of dismissal, and count the nationalities which the departing students represent.

Members of the national



The new North American College, the large modern building in lower foreground, stands on Rome's Janiculum Hill, less than a ten minute walk from St. Peter's, center of the world wide Catholic Church.

colleges take their major courses at the Gregorian University and other Roman theological schools.

To identify their origins, you need not know the language the students speak. All you need to know is the distinctive cut and color of their uniforms. For each national and special college has its particular garb.

These men in cassocks and mantles of lobster-red? They belong to the German College. Those in his Gregorian University classmates. "Through these new friends we come into contact with the Church in the whole world. We experience ourselves the universality of the Church."

The garb of other colleges is generally less striking, but no less identifiable. You will know a Spanish College from his sky-blue sash, and a Lombard from his red-edged black sash.

The North American college men wear red sashes and cassocks and mantles trimmed with blue. If the red and blue combined with the white of their collars is not a clear enough indication of their national origin, their distinctly American bearing will give the clue.

"If... they dressed themselves in the Greek College's robes," one writer has declared, "you would still know

in an instant that they were Americans... as unmistakably American as baseball or huckleberry pie."

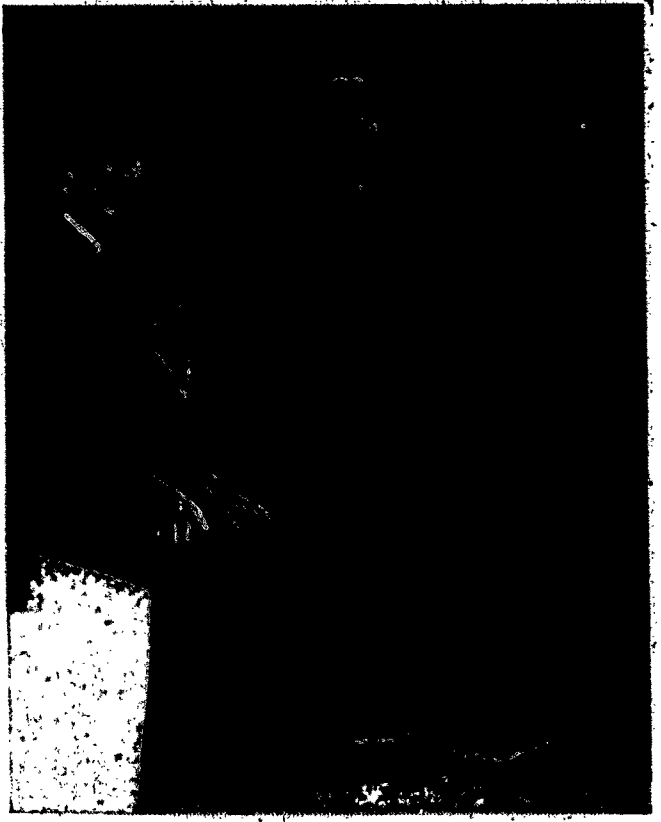
American though they are and do not cease to be, the North American Collegians, like those from other Roman national colleges, tend to undergo a broadening of understanding and sympathy as a result of long exposures to this "little United Nations."

"We are here with the students of sixty-four nations," one of the American has written of his Gregorian University classmates. "Through these new friends we come into contact with the Church in the whole world. We experience ourselves the universality of the Church."

The normal effect of an experience of this sort is to expand one's range of vision from the parochial, provincial, or merely national into the universal. "One begins," explained the late Cardinal O'Connell, to have that noble sentiment of universal charity which is proper to Rome and which the priest must feel for all, since all are children of the great Mother, Rome."

It is no wonder, then, if the Roman graduate carries through life a deep personal interest in the foreign missions and a deep compassion for those persecuted in foreign lands. He has often talked with the future priests of missionary countries. He has sat in the lecture-halls with future martyrs.

Really, however, these two



Rochester priests Fathers Joseph Brennan, William Cosgrove and David Murphy as students at the North American College.

convictions — that Rome is the best teacher and the best broadener of the seminarian — fuse into one conviction. Say that the popes favor a Roman training because it binds the heart of the student closer to the heart of the Holy Father, and you will be stating concisely the whole case.

If Roman teaching is sound, it is sound because it represents papal teaching. If Roman experience is broadening, it is broadening because it represents the catholic outlook of the popes themselves.

Cultivate this "Romanity," Pope Pius XI used to urge his Roman students. When the poet Dante went so far as to speak of "that Rome of which Christ is a Roman," he meant, Pius said, that Christ had located His own vicar at Rome. To Cultivate the Roman spirit is therefore to adhere loyally to the leadership of the Bishop of Rome, Christ's vicar on earth.

The popes have spoken so warmly of Roman training, that it is quite clear they would like to have every seminarian enter it. This is obviously impossible. They must therefore rest content with having about them a few to represent each country.

They know that all those who do come will, in the normal course, carry back and communicate to their flocks their own personal devotion to all that the capital of Catholicism stands for. The effect, said Benedict XV, will be that of "drawing the Christian peoples still closer to the see of Blessed Peter, the center of Catholic unity..."

But does the United States, in particular, need this extra bond of love with Rome? Surely we have been outstanding in our orthodoxy and our loyalty to the successors of St. Peter.

Granted. And granted thankfully. But we must not lose sight of the fact that our very tradition of orthodoxy and loyalty to Rome was established by pioneer American bishops and priests who were themselves truly "Roman" in spirit.

And even before the North American College was instituted (Continued on page 8)

## Bishop Kearney's Appointments

- OCTOBER
- 1 Thursday — DeSales High School, Geneva — Mass of the Holy Ghost — 9:00 a.m.  
Columbus Civic Center — Opening of C.Y.O. Campaign — 6:30 p.m.
  - 2 Friday — St. Joseph's Church — Mass of the Holy Ghost for St. Joseph's Commercial School — 9:00 a.m.
  - 4 Sunday — Church of Our Saviour, New York City — Silver Anniversary of Spirit Magazine of the Catholic Poetry Society of America — 10:00 a.m.
  - 11 Sunday — Sacred Heart Cathedral — Low Pontifical Mass, Opening of Confraternity of Christian Doctrine 10th Regional Congress — 4:00 p.m.  
Blessed Sacrament Church — Confirmation — 7:30 p.m.
  - 12 Monday — Sheraton Hotel — Address, Luncheon Meeting of Confraternity of Christian Doctrine — 12:30 p.m.
  - 13 Tuesday — St. Francis Church, Phelps — Confirmation — 7:30 p.m.
  - 15 Thursday — St. Mary of the Lake Church, Ontario — Confirmation — 7:30 p.m.
  - 16 Friday — St. Ann's Church, Palmyra — Confirmation — 7:30 p.m.
  - 18 Sunday — Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church — Preside and Preach, Golden Anniversary Mass of Parish 11:00 a.m.  
Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Elmira — Low Mass, Ladies of Charity Affiliate — 5:00 p.m.
  - 20 Tuesday — St. Jerome's Church, East Rochester — Confirmation — 7:30 p.m.
  - 21 Wednesday — St. Thomas More Church — Confirmation — 7:30 p.m.
  - 25 Sunday — New York City: Communion Breakfast, New York Chapter, Nazareth College Alumnae.
  - 27 Tuesday — St. Mary's Church — BCCW Convention Mass — 9:30 a.m.  
Chamber of Commerce — BCCW Convention Luncheon — 12:15 p.m.  
St. Anthony's Church — Confirmation — 7:30 p.m.
  - 28 Wednesday — Sacred Heart Cathedral — Solemn Pontifical Mass, Sesquicentennial of the Sisters of Charity in the United States — 7:30 p.m.
  - 29 Thursday — Notre Dame Retreat House — Low Mass, Physicians Retreat — 7:15 a.m.  
Most Precious Blood Church — Confirmation — 7:30 p.m.
  - 30 Friday — Sacred Heart Academy — Low Mass and Confirmation — 9:00 a.m.  
St. Phillip Neri Church — Confirmation — 7:30 p.m.
  - 31 Saturday — St. John Evangelist Church — Opening Dinner of Parish Campaign.

## Bishop Casey's Appointments

- OCTOBER
- 3 Saturday — St. Mary's, Bath — Address, Opening Building Fund Drive — 8:30 p.m.
  - 4 Sunday — St. Mary's, Rexville — Confirmation — 1:30 p.m.  
St. Ignatius, Hornell — Confirmation — 3:15 p.m.  
St. Ann's, Hornell — Confirmation — 4:45 p.m.
  - 6 Tuesday — St. Theodore's, Gates — Confirmation — 7:45 p.m.
  - 7 Wednesday — St. Bridget's, East Bloomfield — Confirmation — 7:45 p.m.
  - 8 Thursday — Holy Ghost, Coldwater — Confirmation — 7:45 p.m.
  - 11 Sunday — St. John's, Clyde — Confirmation — 1:30 p.m.  
St. Michael's, Lyons — Confirmation — 3:15 p.m.  
St. Michael's, Newark — Confirmation — 4:30 p.m.
  - 12 Monday — Columbus Civic Center — Regional Catechetical Congress.  
Sacred Heart Hall — Rosary Guild — 8:15 p.m.
  - 13 Tuesday — St. Pius X, Chili — Confirmation — 7:45 p.m.
  - 14 Wednesday — St. Peter and Paul — Confirmation — 7:45 p.m.
  - 15 Thursday — Christ the King — Confirmation — 7:45 p.m.
  - 18 Sunday — St. Casimir's, Elmira (Also includes St. John's, Elmira) — Confirmation — 1:30 p.m.  
St. Mary's, Elmira — Confirmation — 3:00 p.m.  
St. Patrick's, Elmira — Adult Confirmation for Elmira Deary — 4:45 p.m.
  - 20 Tuesday — Good Shepherd, East Henrietta — Confirmation — 7:45 p.m.
  - 21 Wednesday — St. Augustine — Confirmation — 7:45 p.m.
  - 22 Thursday — St. Michael — Confirmation — 7:45 p.m.
  - 25 Sunday — St. Patrick's, Seneca Falls — Confirmation — 1:30 p.m.  
St. Stephen's, Geneva — Confirmation — 3:15 p.m.  
St. Francis de Sales, Geneva — Confirmation — 4:45 p.m.
  - 26 Monday — Our Lady of Perpetual Help — Confirmation — 7:45 p.m.
  - 27 Tuesday — Holy Rosary — Confirmation — 7:45 p.m.
  - 28 Wednesday — St. Rita's, West Webster — Confirmation — 7:45 p.m.
  - 29 Thursday — St. Monica — Confirmation — 7:45 p.m.

## Hailed By Pope John

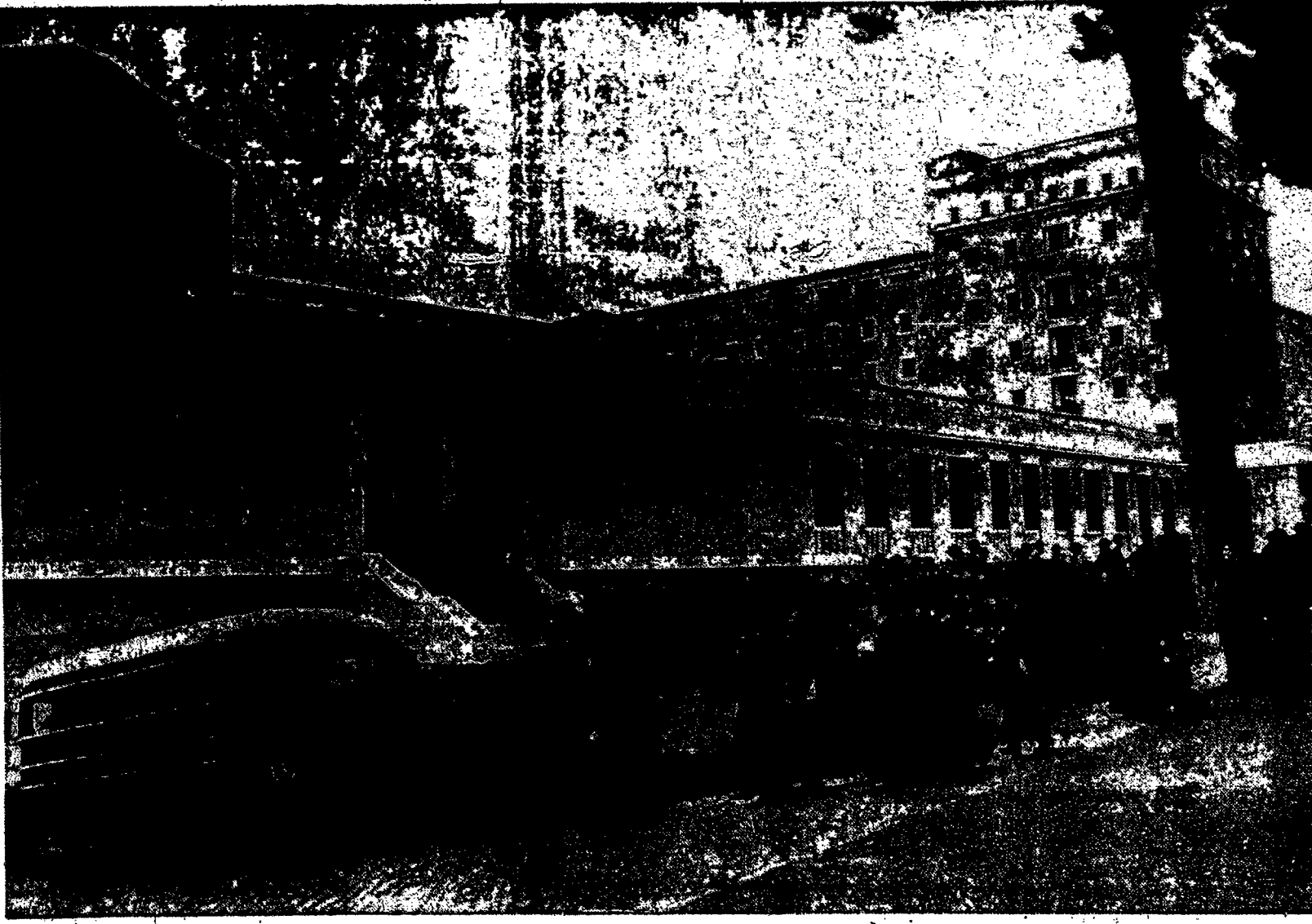
Vatican City — (RNS) — Pope John XXIII inaugurated celebrations of the centenary of the North American College in Rome with a letter declaring that it had "amply fulfilled" its purpose of training priests for a great nation.

The Pope's letter was addressed to Archbishop Martin J. O'Connor, rector of the College, which was founded in 1859 to train selected seminarians from the U.S. dioceses. At present 300 students from 60 American Sees are enrolled there.

IN PRAISING the work of the College, whose graduates have included many members of the U.S. hierarchy, Pope John stressed that the "greatness" of America demands priests of "extensive knowledge," a lively sense of universal values and "the wisdom of clear thought and decisive action."



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U.S. seminarians leave the North American College to attend special classes at Rome's famous theological schools.