

Priestly Formation in the Asian Contexts: Application of the Church's Teachings to the Church and the Society in Cambodia^{*}

Fr. Vincent Yves Denis Joseph Senechal
(St. John Mary Vianney Major Seminary, Cambodia)

1. The Socio-religious Context in Cambodia as Background of the Formation of Seminarians
2. The Training of Priests for Cambodia from 1955 to 2015
 - 2.1. A 'Cross-mission' Seminary for Laos and Cambodia
 - 2.2. The Seminary is Recreated in the Refugee Camps
 - 2.3. The Installation in Battambang
 - 2.4. The Seminary is Moved to Phnom Penh
3. Current Priestly Formation in Phnom Penh: What Kind of Priests for Cambodia?
 - 3.1. The Organization of the Priestly Formation in 2015
 - 3.2. Some Ongoing Debates
 - 3.3. What Kind of Priests for Cambodia Today?
4. Conclusion

The 2015 International Symposium on the Asian Seminaries which was held in Seoul last May 22nd to 26th gave us the opportunity to reflect on

* 이 글은 2015년 '재단법인 신학과사상'의 연구비 지원을 받아 연구·작성된 논문임.

the formation of seminarians in the context of the Church in Cambodia. The situation of the Church in Cambodia is a special one, because it is a very small church¹ in a context of first evangelization. The three ecclesiastical territories which comprise the Cambodian territory and its 15.4 million inhabitants are called an 'Apostolic Vicariate' or 'Apostolic Prefectures'. They have not yet been canonically erected as dioceses. These three ecclesiastical territories in Cambodia are the Apostolic Vicariate of Phnom Penh with 14,500 Catholics among a population of 6 million; the Apostolic Prefecture of Battambang with 6,000 Catholics among a population of 5.4 million; and the Apostolic Prefecture of Kompong Cham with about 3,000 Catholics among a population of 4 million.² There is only one Major Seminary in Cambodia, the St. John Mary Vianney Seminary in Phnom Penh, which currently educates eight seminarians. There is no Minor Seminary in Cambodia. For young people who wish to prepare themselves to enter the Major Seminary, there are a House for Vocations (St. Michael House) and the Emmanuel group. St. Michael House hosts six young people this year. The Emmanuel group for young men gathers eight times a year in order to reflect on their vocation.

¹ There are 23,500 Catholics for 15.4 million people, which means that Catholics are 0.15% of the population.

² The number of inhabitants of each ecclesiastical jurisdiction has been calculated by summing the population figures for the provinces that compose it. In 2015, the Apostolic Vicariate of Phnom Penh is composed of the provinces of Kompong Speu, Kampot, Kandal, Koh Kong, Kep, Phnom Penh, Preah Sihanouk, and Takeo. The Apostolic Prefecture of Battambang is composed of the provinces of Banteay Meanchey, Battambang, Kompong Chhnang, Kompong Thom, Uddor Meanchey, Pailin, Pursat, Siem Reap and Preah Vihir. The Apostolic Prefecture of Kompong Cham is composed of the provinces of Kompong Cham, Kratie, Mondulakiri, Prey Veng, Ratanakiri, Svay Rieng, Tbaung Khmum and Stoeung Treng. For the population of each province, see Brinkhoff, T., *The provinces of the Kingdom of Cambodia* (2015). (Retrieved March 17, 2015, from <http://www.citypopulation.de/Cambodia-Cities.html>). The number of Catholics for each ecclesiastical territory was communicated to me by ordinaries: Mgr. Olivier Schmitthaesler, Apostolic Vicar of Phnom Penh; Mgr. Enrique Figaredo, Apostolic Prefect of Battambang and Mgr. Antonymsamy Susairaj, Apostolic Prefect of Kompong Cham.

It has fifteen members this year. As we can see, we deal with small figures. But if the church is small in Cambodia, the faithful are rather young however, in the image of the country whose average age was 24.1 in 2014.³

Another feature of the Church in Cambodia is that most of the faithful are foreign, from Vietnam for the vast majority, and the clergy and religious men and women are also foreign at 91.7%⁴. In this context, the formation of local priests is an unquestionable priority.

Concerning our topic, the touchstone from which we will analyze the formation of seminarians in Cambodia will be the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). The period between 1965-2015 is long enough to be divided into several sub-periods concerning the Seminary: the years of the establishment of the seminary in Phnom Penh in the wake of Second Vatican Council (1964-1970); the closure of the seminary during the war years (1970-1990); the re-foundation of the seminary in the refugee camps in Thailand (1991-1992); the transfer of the seminary to Battambang (1992-1998); and finally, the return of the seminary to Phnom Penh (1998-2015).

This period (1965-2015) was characterized by great instability. The formation of seminarians in recent decades took place in the chaotic context of a church which was almost destroyed by the war (the number of Catholics was 65,000 in 1970 and only 4,000 in 1990, before rising up to 23,500 at present⁵), a church which represents only 0.15% of the

³ See <http://www.statistiques-mondiales.com/cambodge.htm>.

⁴ There are seven local priests for seventy-two priests in total in Cambodia; fifteen local nuns for one hundred and fifty nuns in total; no religious brothers for a total of thirty nine religious brothers. The seventy-two priests are from eighteen different nationalities. These figures come from the Directory of the Catholic Church in Cambodia, published by the Catholic Social Communications of the Catholic Church in Cambodia, 2015.

⁵ The number of Catholics decreased dramatically in 1970, because most of the Vietnamese faithful, who were 60,000 in Cambodia at that time, have been expelled.

population, and where most of the faithful, clergy and religious are foreigners.

In this context, therefore, how is the formation of future priests organized today? How does it take into account the Church's teaching on the formation of seminarians? Are there some local adaptations? What kind of priests does the mission in Cambodia need today?

These are some of the questions we will try to answer. For this, we will be at the crossroads of several disciplines: we will have to describe the religious context of Cambodia and its influence on the candidates to the priesthood; we will have to go through the history of the mission and describe the successive seminaries which have so far trained local priests; we will have to underline the influence of the Church's teaching on the formation of seminarians since the Second Vatican Council; finally, we will have to analyze the current formation and investigate what kind of priests are needed for the proclamation of the gospel in Cambodia now. In short, we will have to be in turn sociologist, historian, ecclesiologist and missiologist. This interdisciplinarity is one of the limits of our investigation because we are obviously not experts in each of these disciplines.

Another problem that we met in our research is the scarcity of publications on the formation of priests in Cambodia since the Second Vatican Council. Thus we interviewed some of the men who were involved in this formation, and we have requested access to certain documents of the seminary that Fr. Robert Piché, the current Rector of St. John Mary Vianney Seminary, and Fr. Bruno Cosme, his immediate predecessor, have kindly provided to us. We thank each of them and all the persons who have accepted to be interviewed by us for this article.⁶

⁶ We interviewed Msgr. Olivier Schmitthaesler, Apostolic Vicar of Phnom Penh since 2010 and bishop in charge of the St. John Vianney Seminary (interview was conducted on March 5, 2015); Mgr. Yves Ramousse, Apostolic Vicar Emeritus of Phnom Penh, who was in activity

Our article may be outlined as follows: after a first part dedicated to present the socio-religious context in Cambodia and its influence on the seminarians, we will inquire in the second part as to how the training of priests for Cambodia has been organized since the 1950s and we will try to assess the importance given to the Church's teaching in this training. Our third and final part will reflect on the present day and on the kind of training needed so that priests be well fitted for modern Cambodia.

1. The Socio-religious Context in Cambodia as Background of the Formation of Seminarians

When we look at the history of the mission in Cambodia, we see that the Apostolic Vicariate of Phnom Penh was sometimes part of the mission of Cochin China (the southern part of present-day Vietnam), then was detached to be attached to Laos, then came back again to Cochin China, before finally being set in the current contours of the country in 1955. Early on, because of the alleged low level of interest of Cambodian in the Christian religion and because Christians often used to return to traditional practices after baptism, it seems that missionaries — both Portuguese and French — considered the Khmer people as “inconvertible”.⁷ During the French Protectorate, the effort of the missionaries largely focused on the care of Annamite faithful (Vietnamese). It is

from 1963 to 1997 (interview was conducted on March 7, 2015); Fr. Francois Ponchaud, Professor of Sacred Scripture at the Seminary during the 1990s and 2000s (interview was conducted on January 23, 2015); Fr. Robert Piché, current Rector of the Phnom Penh Seminary (interview was conducted on January 20, 2015); Fr. Bruno Cosme, his predecessor, Rector of the Seminary from 2002 to 2010 (interview was conducted on 12 February 2015) and lastly Fr. Mario Ghezzi, spiritual director at the Seminary from 2002 to 2007 and professor up to the present day (interview was conducted on March 5, 2015).

⁷ Ramousse, 2009, p. 28; Ponchaud, 2006, p. 91.

therefore not surprising that between 1888 and 1939, the seminary of the mission in Cambodia, first located Culao Gieng (Cochin China) and then moved to Phnom Penh in 1912, trained 115 priests who were all Vietnamese, among whom thirty four were from Cambodia.⁸ It is only in 1957 that the first ordination of a Khmer priest took place. Fr. Simon Chhem Yen was in fact ordained four hundred years after the beginning of the Catholic presence in Cambodia, which dates back to 1555 with the arrival of the Portuguese Dominican Gaspar Da Cruz at the court of the Khmer king in Longvek.

More recently, the origins of the seminarians have diversified. Since the reopening of the seminary in the refugee camps in Thailand in 1991 until September 2014, we calculated a total of twenty-five young men who entered the seminary and among them, thirteen were Khmer, eight were Vietnamese, two had one Khmer parent and the other Vietnamese, and two came from ethnic minorities (the Mondolkiri mountain people). Out of these twenty five candidates to priesthood, ten were new converts and fifteen from Catholic families.⁹

The religious context must be taken into account in the formation of seminarians. Because they are a very small minority in the country, Catholics in Cambodia are necessarily in contact, even if reduced, with the surrounding religions, especially Buddhism and Animism. Even for young people coming from Catholic families, the contact with the surrounding socio-religious context is unavoidable. Often Catholics themselves participate in Buddhist or Animist practices. It is therefore relevant to take into account the socio-religious background of Cambodia when training young people for the priesthood.

⁸ Ponchaud, 2006, p. 124.

⁹ See the list below on footnote n. 48.

Which socio-religious background are we talking about? The peninsula where Cambodia is located was long called *Indochina*. Although the name has now fallen into disuse, it had the advantage of describing well the situation of the people living there. Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand and Laos are indeed located between two major powers and civilizations: India on one side, China on the other; hence the appropriate name for the Indo-China territory lying in-between these two major powers. Historically, the cultures of Cambodia, Thailand and Laos were influenced mainly by India, with a smaller Chinese influence. Vietnamese culture, however, was heavily influenced by China, with only minor influences from India, mainly in the kingdom of Champa, that adhered to Hinduism, and which Vietnam conquered during its expansion towards the south of the peninsula.

In Cambodia, the Indian influence is easily perceived when analyzing the chronological religious strata of the country. The religious world of the great majority of Khmer people indeed refers both to Animism, Hinduism and Buddhism, the latter two religions coming from the Indian world. Theravada Buddhism has been the state religion since 1989 and is the religion of almost everyone in the population¹⁰ although in fact, Buddhism has integrated and assimilated the first two antecedent religious strata.

Animism is very strong in Cambodia, even in the life of some Catholic faithful, and even at times for some seminarians and priests. Khmer people believe that everyone has a spirit which is the “master” of the person; they think that human beings must gain favor of “land” spirits

¹⁰ 96.93% of Khmer people say they are Buddhist, according to the 2008 census (<http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?d=POP&f=tableCode%3a28>). According to Procheasas, 2005, p. 123, this figure was 96.4% in 1998, but the authors noted that this figure probably underestimated the minorities, perhaps because they were cautious about declaring their religion during the census.

which are to be worshiped as true masters of each place; finally, they believe that the spirits of the dead roam around among the living. These animistic beliefs are widespread both in Cambodia and in the diaspora, in town and in countryside, and in all classes of the society.¹¹

Next religious strata that came to overlap Animism is Hinduism. Its presence certainly dates from what we used to call the “Indianisation of Southeast Asia”, which started from the first millennium BC.¹² There are evidences of Hinduism influence in the Khmer language (see the wealth of words derived from the Sanskrit language), in the monuments (see the various complexes of temples and numerous linga, phallic pillars symbolizing creative energy), in statuary, in festivals (see for instance the ritual of traditional marriage), in considering the king as ‘deva-rajā’,¹³ in the presence of bakus (Brahmin priests) in the royal palace, in the symbolic center of cities built as a hill or a mountain temple as a symbolic representation of Mount Meru, the center of the world, the abode of gods and the place of communication between earth and heaven.¹⁴

In fact, Khmer people merge Animism and Hinduism together. As Forest wrote (1992, 13):

“the observer is first struck by the profusion of beings that inhabit the Khmer universe. To the representations of deified elements—soil, sun, moon [...]—are added the gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon: Indra, Vishnu/Narayana, Siva and Sakti Uma Bhagavati,

¹¹ Ponchaud, 2006, pp. 300-306.

¹² S. Crochet, 1997, pp. 16-17.

¹³ See the Hinduist rituals which were performed during the royal enthronement of King Sihanoni in 2004, and the funeral of King Norodom Sihanouk in February 2013. Each year, the King also conducts each year the ceremony of the “sacred plough” which is a ritual ploughing of the virgin earth which starts the ploughing season for Khmer peasants who see ceremony as essential to agricultural production.

¹⁴ Ponchaud, 2006, pp. 306-309.

Ganesha, Brahma, the guardians of four Orient, to name the best known who are mentioned and appeared clearly among a mass of other deities and celestial beings. To animals that vaguely carry the memory of ancient beliefs and mythologies, such as the crocodile or the snake, is added a bestiary of naga, garuda and yaksa. To the protective spirits are added different kinds of ghosts, spirits or goblins [...].”¹⁵

Finally, Buddhism is the last major tradition that has shaped the Khmer religious mind deeply for many centuries already. It was first adopted in its Mahayana form by the Khmer kings from the mid-twelfth century but became established as the official cult only in 1336 AD in its Theravada form.¹⁶ Buddhism in Cambodia has reinterpreted earlier the religious systems and integrated them into its vision of the world and of the human being. Its influence on the Khmer seminarians from rural areas is important. This influence is often unconscious and concerns the understanding of the world, seen as consisting of three levels: there is the underworld, which is the world of the spirits; there is the intermediate world (our world, the world of humans and animals); and there is the world above (the heaven of the gods of Hinduism). Buddhism has an impact on the concept of human beings as composed of vital energies, whose actions produce a good or bad fruit (*phal*) which is called merit (*bonn*) or demerit (*bap*). Buddhism influences the understanding of human fate after death through the belief in the transmigration of beings or reincarnation.¹⁷

The socio-religious context has an influence not only on the seminarians but also on the vocabulary used to express faith. Since the

¹⁵ Forest refers to the classic monograph of Poree-Maspero, 1962, 1964 and 1969.

¹⁶ Procheasas, 2005, pp. 125-126.

¹⁷ On all these points, see Ponchaud, 2006, pp. 310-315.

early 1990s, the training of Cambodian seminarians has mostly been done in Khmer.¹⁸ But there are some difficulties, because the vocabulary available is mainly Buddhist and Hinduist and it is not adapted to Christian theology. For example it is very difficult to translate the words 'God' 'creation' 'resurrection' 'sin' or 'prayer' to Cambodian language because they are heard by the audience according to the cosmology and anthropology usual to Hinduism and to Buddhism.¹⁹ After twenty-five years of teaching of seminarians and of catechists in the Khmer language, most of the theological concepts have been agreed upon. A first lexicon was published in the late 1990s by Fr. Francois Ponchaud, who achieved a remarkable pioneering work. However, the number of professors who teach in the seminary has increased significantly and the new professors who came later sometimes use different words, so up to this day there is no unanimity on the use of certain words. Harmonization of the theological vocabulary will probably be realized gradually through the repeated use of the vocabulary.

¹⁸ During the first part of the twentieth century, the Apostolic Vicariate of Phnom Penh included the southern provinces of Cochin China. The seminarians were trained in the French language. This was again the case in the second half of the 1960s when Bishop Ramousse reopened the seminary in Phnom Penh to train young people from Cambodia and Laos. Nowadays, the training of seminarians in the Khmer language is fully justified because modern-day Cambodia is a fairly homogenous country, ethnically and linguistically. Even if there are sixteen linguistic minorities in Cambodia according to Filippi (2008), the dominant language is clearly the Khmer language. According to Procheasas (2005, p. 144), the socio-economic survey of 1999 showed the following results by ecological zones: in Phnom Penh, 87.54% of the people answered that they do not speak any other language than the Khmer language and those who have another first language speak: English (36.92%), French (21.06%), Chinese (19.87%) and Vietnamese (18.52%); in the plains 98.17% of the people said they do not speak any language other than Khmer; in the area of the Tonle Sap 97.30% of the people said they do not speak any language other than Khmer; in the coastal area 97.19% of the people said they do not speak any language other than Khmer; Finally, in the mountains, 91.04% of the people said they do not speak any language other than Khmer. For this last area, the 8.96% of the people who speak a language other than Khmer speak as first language: Lao (54.13%), a minority language (40.76%), Vietnamese (3.60%).

¹⁹ Ponchaud, 2006, pp. 324-333.

To conclude this first part on the socio-religious context in Cambodia and its influence on seminary formation, we should underline a recent development that has much influence on the current seminarians: the economic growth and rapid technological changes affect Cambodia in the past few years, and its entry into the globalized world and the advent of new media (smartphones, Facebook, etc.). The current Cambodian society is torn between tradition and rapid change. Since Cambodia retrieved political stability after the end of the Khmer Rouge guerrillas in 1998 and since it entered into ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) on April 30, 1999, the external migration — to Thailand, Korea or Malaysia — and the internal migration — mostly to Phnom Penh — has increased greatly.

According to Annat and Delux (2008, p. 337), the internal migration mainly affects the 20-29 years olds. F.-X. Demont (2014, p. 17) describes very well the effects of this internal exodus:

“The creation of a working class, in addition to urban development, has led to a fundamental change in the Cambodian rural society. Until recent years, there was a very strong awareness of belonging to a village community. Individuals could not do any harm to the group to which they belonged, differentiate themselves or even leave the group for any reason. [...] The fact that individuals leave their social group to work and live in a reconstituted group away from the village creates new behaviors. The individual gains some independence and must learn to manage his or her own life and resources. [...] This autonomy of the individual, and the fact that the society takes into account their needs and their individual aspirations is new in Cambodia. Cambodian society is now witnessing the rise of the concept of personal autonomy.”

These rapid and recent changes have been particularly visible in the political movements that followed the elections of 2013. Thanks to the social networks using the Internet and smartphones, tens of thousands of people, mostly young workers and students demonstrated almost daily in late December 2013 in the streets of Phnom Penh, calling for freedom. As indicated by F. Ponchaud (2014, p. 8) “the elections which occurred on the 28th July 2013 have been a real cultural revolution.”²⁰

The current seminarians live in a society with strong cultural influence: Animist, Hinduism and Buddhism, in which the concept of the individual detached from his native group is emerging due to recent social changes. How is this socio-religious context to be taken into account in the priestly formation? How was this formation organized during the last decades in Cambodia? These are some questions we will deal with in our second part.

2. The Training of Priests for Cambodia from 1955 to 2015

We have decided to begin our history of the priestly formation in Cambodia from the mid-1950s because by looking at the situation immediately before the Council, it will allow us to highlight the novelty that the Council has provided for the priestly training in Cambodia.

2.1. A ‘Cross-mission’ Seminary for Laos and Cambodia

An important date in the 1950s for the Church in Cambodia is the 20th September 1955, the date on which the Holy See detached the Cochin

²⁰ Ponchaud, 2014, p. 8.

China provinces of the Apostolic Vicariate of Phnom Penh, so to match the borders of this Apostolic Vicariate with the borders of Cambodia.²¹ Just before this division, the Apostolic Vicariate of Phnom Penh (Cochin China part included) had 126,000 faithful, almost all Vietnamese, out of a population of about four and a half million inhabitants. There were then 25 French missionaries, 77 Vietnamese local priests and 17 seminarians.²² In the latter group, those who were of Vietnamese origin (almost all), were trained at the major seminary in Saigon (Cochin China). For the few major seminarians of Khmer origin, including Simon Chhem Yen, the first Khmer priest ordained in 1957, they were trained mostly in France (Montpellier and Issy-les-Moulineaux). Therefore, before the Second Vatican Council, all the major seminarians for Cambodia were trained abroad, in Vietnam or/and in France. However, the minor seminary was in Phnom Penh. According to Bishop Ramousse, this scattered formation of major seminarians created some difficulty, in particular it didn't bode well for the cohesion of the future presbyterium of the Apostolic Vicariate of Phnom Penh.²³

The Second Vatican Council was an event that deeply marked the Church in Cambodia. It introduced a new way of considering other religions; it invited the baptized to reach out to non-Christians and recommended the use of vernacular languages in the liturgy. Bishop Ramousse became Apostolic Vicar of Phnom Penh at the beginning of the Council and he actively began to apply the Council's teachings in

²¹ According to Mgr. Ramousse (personal communication, November 24, 2011), during the separation of 1955, local priests (all Vietnamese) were asked to choose if they would stay in the Apostolic Vicariate of Phnom Penh or belong to one of the newly created diocese of Cochin China. An overwhelming majority chose to serve in the new dioceses. Therefore it was decided that these new dioceses would pay a financial compensation to the Apostolic Vicariate of Phnom Penh. That was the case for a few years.

²² Ponchaud, 2006, p. 365.

²³ Ramousse, interview.

Cambodia. In 1964, because Vietnamese seminarians in Cambodia who trained abroad faced some visa problems if they continued study abroad, Bishop Ramousse decided to reopen a major seminary in Phnom Penh.²⁴ The dozen seminarians called back to Cambodia by Bishop Ramousse were trained initially at the Bishop house until the construction of the new seminary, a big building with forty rooms, which has been completed in March 1966.

This seminary was a ‘cross-mission’ seminary, both for Laos and Cambodia. These two countries were faced with the same problem, namely the small number of candidates to the priesthood. According to Bishop Ramousse, “the restoration of the major seminary in Phnom Penh aimed to train priests in accordance with what Vatican II requested. We opened this seminary in the wake of the establishment of the Laos Cambodian Episcopal Conference (CELAC). By recreating a major seminary in Phnom Penh, the bishops wanted to train priests in the spirit of Vatican II.”²⁵

²⁴ CELAC (1964-1975), Minutes of the CELAC meeting on April 20th to 23rd 1964, in Vientiane (Laos), p. 5: “The Apostolic Vicar of Phnom Penh needs to open a seminary in his Vicariate: most of his seminarians are Vietnamese, and they are considered as foreigners by the Cambodian authorities; if they study abroad, they must return every six months to get a visa, otherwise they would lose their right to remain in Cambodia; in addition, if they study in Vietnam, the government considers it as an offence; [it is] impossible to send them elsewhere; in addition, if they would be sent to Penang seminary, they would study in English, while they received a French education in secondary schools already. If Mgr. Ramousse can find some supports, he will open the major seminary in Phnom Penh this year with around 20 seminarians; philosophy will be taught in this seminary (French baccalauréat level). There would be a benefit for Laos to send some seminarians in Phnom Penh: the French language is used for studies in both countries, it is the same kind of population, and the two countries are neighbors, etc. It is obvious that the existence of this major seminary in Cambodia will be of great service to Laos missions. It could allow more freedom to choose between religious life and diocesan priesthood. And it will be no more needed to send Lao seminarians in Europe where the way of life and the studies are not well adapted to them.”

²⁵ Ramousse, interview.

In the minutes of the meeting of the CELAC bishops held in Vientiane from the 24th to the 28th May 1968, we read that the bishops wanted to give a clear missionary formation to the seminarians:

“They must be prepared for the evangelization of non-Christians and not just for the pastoral care of Christians. The studies in the seminary and the pastoral training outside the seminary, should help the future priests to acquire a real and deep knowledge of non-Christian environment, pagan religious mentality, and should accustom them to enter into contact and to dialogue with non-Christians.”

This instruction of CELAC bishops about the formation of the major seminarians agreed well with a text of the Second Vatican Council, which is often quoted in the CELAC reports, namely n. 16 of the Decree *Ad Gentes*. This text explains:

“These common requirements of priestly training, including the pastoral and practical ones prescribed by the council should be combined with an attempt to make contact with their own particular national way of thinking and acting. Therefore, let the minds of the students be kept open and attuned to an acquaintance and an appreciation of their own nation’s culture. In their philosophical and theological studies, let them consider the points of contact which mediate between the traditions and religion of their homeland on the one hand and the Christian religion on the other. Likewise, priestly training should have an eye to the pastoral needs of that region; and the students should learn the history, aim, and method of the Church’s missionary activity, and the special social, economic, and cultural conditions of their own people. Let them be educated in the ecumenical spirit, and duly prepared for fraternal dialogue with non-Christians. All

this demands that studies for the priesthood be undertaken, so far as possible, in association and living together with their own people.”²⁶

For Bishop Ramousse, the training of the seminarians for Cambodia in Phnom Penh aimed at opening their mind to the country’s culture and to appreciate it in order to be fully missionary. One of the great changes brought by the Second Vatican Council to the formation in seminaries concerns the contact of seminarians with the outside, is the relationship to the world. As highlighted by P. Molac (2014, p. 50):

“before Vatican II, seminarians used to have very little time out of the seminary. During the nineteenth century, there was only a weekly outing to a countryside house. Gradually, it was accepted that they could help the parish catechism and, with the necessary authorizations in hand, youth camps and scouts activities. After the Second Vatican Council, a pastoral training outside of the seminary became an integral part of formation and it was entrusted to an experienced parish priest.”

CELAC bishops had clearly seen this issue and they wanted to train their seminarians with pastoral experience which could include sufficient contact with non-Christians. At the Special Meeting of the CELAC on the 12th and 13th October 1968 in Vientiane, they declare:

“Currently, the seminarians of Cambodia complete a year of probation in between the first and the second cycle of studies. They are given a function of teacher and catechist, preferably in a community where the priest is not ordinarily resident. They regularly return to the seminary for retreats and recollections. The function of boarders’

²⁶ The Second Vatican Council, *Ad Gentes*, No.16.

supervisor in the minor seminary was excluded from this probation because it is not a true initiation to the ministry and it doesn't give sufficient contact with the people (Christians and non-Christians). This probation may take the form of work in a workshop or a factory, for those who request it. So far, there has been no volunteer. Pastoral practice of longer duration may be granted to those who ask it in order to test their vocation, or may be imposed by the board of the seminary.”

The rector and professors in the seminary tried to work according to these guidelines. Fr. Lesouëf, former rector of the major seminary in Saigon (1952-1961), was appointed the first rector of the major seminary in Phnom Penh. Almost all the professors were missionaries from the Cambodian mission. A missionary from Laos, Fr. Marion, was also part of the team. There were three or four seminarians from Laos in the seminary.

However, despite Bishop Ramousse's desire that the seminarians enter into contact with the Cambodian culture, the formation language was still French because in Laos and Cambodia, which were both former French protectorates, seminarians had received a French education in secondary schools. But according to Fr. Ponchaud, “the appointment of Fr. Rollin and Fr. Destombes as members of the seminary professors team on May 1966 was a clear signal sent by Bishop Ramousse. This was the choice of young pro-Khmer missionaries, who pleaded openly for the khmerisation of the Church in Cambodia.”²⁷

The khmerisation of the Church in Cambodia was a major topic of the 1960s.²⁸ For centuries, the Church in Cambodia showed mainly a foreign face formed by French missionaries and Vietnamese faithful. Thus in 1965, the Catholics of Cambodia were mostly composed of Vietnamese

²⁷ Ponchaud, interview.

²⁸ On this subject, see Ponchaud, 2006, pp. 151-165.

faithful (50,000) and a minority of Khmers (5,000).²⁹ At the beginning of the French protectorate in Cambodia, Bishop Miche, the Apostolic Vicar of Phnom Penh at the time, decided that the new missionaries would learn first the Vietnamese language in order to take care of the Vietnamese Catholic communities of Cambodia, and then optionally the Khmer language. The apostolate towards Khmer people was abandoned in favor of the maintenance of Vietnamese communities. In the 1960s, the arrival of young missionaries (Francois Mangel, Vincent Rollin, Emile Destombes, Francois Ponchaud) animated by the spirit of Vatican II and motivated by the apostolate toward Khmer people, was an important support for Bishop Ramousse who wanted to go in that direction.

However, this dynamic of khmerisation in the seminary was disturbed by three more or less unexpected events. First, the rector of the major seminary, André Lesouëf, was appointed Apostolic Prefect of Kompong Cham on the 26th September 1968.³⁰ Second, Bishop Ramousse decided to close the major seminary in Phnom Penh during the academic year 1968-1969 in order to send all the seminarians to live in a Khmer environment for one year. Did the appointment of Fr. Lesouëf as Apostolic Prefect hasten the decision to close the seminary for one year? According to Bishop Ramousse and to Fr. Ponchaud, this was only because of the poor ability of the major seminarians in Khmer language and their poor knowledge of the culture of the country that this decision was made. The third and last event which stopped the process of

²⁹ CELAC (1964-1975), Minutes of the CELAC meeting, from the 5th to the 8th July 1965 in Phnom Penh (Cambodia), p. 5.

³⁰ On September 26, 1968 the Holy See divided the Apostolic Vicariate of Phnom Penh into three new ecclesiastical jurisdictions, namely the Apostolic Vicariate of Phnom Penh in the south, the Apostolic Prefecture of Battambang in the northwest and the Apostolic Prefecture Kompong Cham in the east. Bishop Ramousse remained Apostolic Vicar of Phnom Penh while Msgr. Paul Tep Im Sotha and Mgr. André Lesouëf became respectively Apostolic Prefects of Battambang and Kompong Cham.

khmerisation in the seminary was the event known as *kap youeun* (“cut the Vietnamese”) which happened in March 1970, when General Lon Nol overthrew King Sihanouk by a coup. At that time a hunt for Vietnamese resulted in hundreds of victims among the Vietnamese Catholics and pushed hundreds of thousands more³¹ to flee to Vietnam. Therefore, the major seminary in Phnom Penh was closed and never reopened at this location.³² It was finally reopened in 1998, but in another place.³³

After the major seminarians were sent to a Khmer environment for one year (1968-1969) and after the Phnom Penh seminary closed definitively (1970), there was no more formation of any future priest for Cambodia during 20 years, the time people were deprived of religious freedom under communist regimes. First there was the civil war (1970-1975), followed by the Khmer Rouge regime (1975-1979) and finally the Vietnamese liberation and occupation (1979-1990). Between 1970 and 1975, many missionaries and faithful were killed and in isolated parishes there were many victims of the war between Communist troops and pro-American troops sent by the Phnom Penh government. Between 1975 and 1979, almost all priests, religious and faithful were decimated by food deprivation, forced labor and summary executions. During the Vietnamese

³¹ At least 250,000 figures given by F. Ponchaud (personal communication).

³² The seminary built in 1965-1966, which was located in the peninsula of Chrouy Chanvar, still exists. The Church couldn't get it back, as was the case for all buildings that the church possessed before the war. The former bishop house of Phnom Penh is currently the City Hall of Phnom Penh. The only exception is the former minor seminary which is now the St. Joseph Parish, also called Phsar Tauch, but it had to be bought again. The Church in Cambodia could get back none of the property possessed before the war without compensation. The major seminary in Chrouy Chanvar is currently the possession of a private company.

³³ According to Mgr. Ramousse (interview), “in 1970, for three months, the seminary became a refugee center for Vietnamese Catholics who wanted to leave Cambodia after the anti-Vietnamese pogroms.” Fr. Ponchaud (interview) remembers also that the Benedictine monks of Kep took refuge there during a certain period of time.

period, many survivors fled the country attempting to reach Europe, North America or Australia.

When we look at the formation of seminarians during the 1960s, the dynamism of the CELAC to put in practice the Second Vatican Council texts is obvious. There was not only the creation of the major seminary in Phnom Penh and the opening to local cultures, but also the establishment of a pastoral outreach for vocations and a rethinking of the teaching given in minor seminaries. Thus in 1968, the bishops, following *Optatam Totius* n. 3, asked to organize the studies in the minor seminaries so that students who decide to leave the seminary could easily continue their studies elsewhere. They also asked that the students, before starting ecclesiastical studies, may receive the same humanistic and scientific knowledge that the young people of their nation receive in order to access to the university.³⁴ In 1969, it was decided to start pastoral activities to promote vocations in Cambodia and the priest in charge at the national level was the superior of the minor seminary. The bishops also requested that there be established a directory of priests and nuns, some special days of prayer for vocations, and advice be given to the families about the promotion of vocations.³⁵ For the year 1970, they also planned to organize a course for the seminarians of Cambodia including the study of Khmer language, of local culture and of Buddhism. That same year, the CELAC minutes of a meeting held on February 27th at Louang Prabang mentions:

“The Phnom Penh major seminary is closed. The bishops spoke at length about the seminary staff problem for the next two years. The resumption of classes is scheduled for the end of September 1970.”

³⁴ CELAC (1964-1975), Special Meeting. 12-13 October 1968 in Vientiane, p. 6.

³⁵ CELAC (1964-1975), Meeting in June 1969 in Phnom Penh, pp. 8-9.

As mentioned above, this reopening never occurred.

2.2. The Seminary is Recreated in the Refugee Camps

It was not until early 1990 that the seminary could restart in the refugee camps. It restarted in Thailand in 1991 first, then inside Cambodia (in Battambang city) in 1992. The seminarians came from the Khmer diaspora, from the refugee camps and from inside Cambodia. In Canada, two young men from Cambodia had expressed the desire to become priests: Tonlop Sophal, who was born in Phnom Penh before the war, and Un Son, from Takeo province.³⁶ In the refugee camps at the Khmero-Thai border, four youth³⁷ also manifested themselves to become priests. Finally, in Phnom Penh, a young man, Nget Viney, had also asked to join.

The seminary therefore was reinitiated in the refugee camps in 1991. The formation was totally given in Khmer language for the first time in the history of the Church in Cambodia. Some of the teachings for the seminarians was part of the formation of the catechists too. The seminarians lived alone in a bamboo hut since foreigners were not authorized to live in the camps. Life was punctuated by daily prayer and participation in the pastoral activities. A professor who was himself a refugee gave them courses of Khmer language; a French seminarian taught them the French language and Fr. Ponchaud came from time to

³⁶ Tonlop Sophal was sent to Saint Irenaeus seminary (Lyon, France) until the end of his studies and was ordained in Phnom Penh in 1995. Un Son was sent to the seminary of Vienne (France) and then joined the seminary in Battambang in 1992.

³⁷ This number of four young men is given by F. Ponchaud (2003, p. 31), which also told us most of their names (interview): there were Suon Hangly, Paul Lay (also called Wang) Phok Sovuthy and a Vietnamese young man who later moved to Fribourg (Switzerland). Paul Lay and Pierre Soun Hangly were ordained priests in 2001. Phok Sovuthy left the seminary in April 1992, when the seminary was moved inside Cambodia, in Battambang.

time for Bible classes. Fr. Bernard Dupraz, Fr. Francois Ponchaud and Sr. Gilberte Masson were the main trainers.

In his pastoral letter published in 1996, Bishop Ramousse wrote:

“The priority given to the promotion of the Church in Cambodia had us give first priority to the creation of a diocesan clergy, an urgent task since all Khmer priests have disappeared. In the refugee camps we had already identified and organized the guidance of priestly vocations. We created then a “major seminary” in Battambang with young men from the refugee camps as well as those who had left their country.”³⁸

For Bishop Ramousse, “the formation of diocesan seminarians had to be the top priority. Particularly in the context of a destroyed Church which is to be rebuilt. It is the duty of the missionary, even alone, to choose one or two young people to follow and help the priest in his mission even in the camps, even in the most difficult conditions. This was important in the context of a particular Church which had been destroyed and was to be reborn. And the rebirth took place in Cambodia: as from 3,000 Catholics in 1990, they are now 20,000 in 2015.”³⁹

2.3. The Installation in Battambang

In 1992, the seminary in the camps was transferred to the other side of the border and it was settled in Cambodia by Fr. Dupraz. The beginnings are described by Fr. Ponchaud (2003, p. 32):

³⁸ Ramousse, 1996, p. 68.

³⁹ Ramousse, interview.

“In 1992, before the refugees returned, Bernard Dupraz came and settled in Battambang where he rented a private house bearing the appropriate name of ‘Belle Riziere’. Viney joined him, officially as a cook, Son as a driver. Ly and Wang crossed the border secretly and also joined them, officially as watchman and gardener. Since Battambang was deprived of everything, from time to time, the four young men went to the Thai border where Fr. Ponchaud and Sr. Gilberte were waiting for them with large sacks filled with pencils, ball point pens and exercise books, covered with old clothes to elude the Thai guards’ surveillance. That is how the ‘seminary’ came into being.”

At that time, the restarting of the seminary in Cambodia accompanied the reconstruction of the Church in Cambodia. The first step was to gather in Catholic communities the faithful who survived and to take care of them. Those were difficult times. People lacked everything, and there was insecurity. In 1993, Fr. Dupraz managed to buy back the land of Battambang parish before the war. On this land, there were also the buildings of the Providence Sisters convent. This land was occupied by the public administration and by individuals. There, Fr. Dupraz installed the parish and the seminary. The buildings were in bad shape. But there were some faithful around the land and it was a Khmer environment.

Bishop Ramousse remembers that “Fr. Dupraz was in charge of a huge pastoral sector and his mission was very heavy. He was both the superior of the seminary, a professor of theology, and especially the only priest in the Apostolic Prefecture of Battambang,⁴⁰ so as such he was “parish

⁴⁰ The Apostolic Prefecture of Battambang, which was created in 1968, has been entrusted to a local priest, Msgr. Paul Tep Im Sotha, as the first Apostolic Prefect. Msgr. Paul Tep Im Sotha was killed by the Khmers Rouges in 1975. In 1992, Fr. Dupraz was the only priest residing in the Prefecture. Mgr. Yves Ramousse became Apostolic Administrator of Battambang on the 21st December of the same year.

priest” of a zone covering an area equivalent to one third of Cambodia. The seminarians were asked to act almost as vicars of Fr. Dupraz. The latter sent them to remote stations such as Svay Sisophon, Siem Reap, Pursat or Chomnaom during the weekends. Each week, the seminarians had to produce reports about their work. Fr. Dupraz analyzed the pastoral situations with the seminarians and he shared with them his experience. It was a very practical training, correlated to the development and reconstruction of the church.”

Because of these circumstances, the seminary training was not very academic but practical and pastoral. Fr. Dupraz was a diocesan priest close to the association of priests called the Prado⁴¹ and he trained the Khmer seminarians in the spirit of the Prado, namely he trained them to be very close to people, to live a simple life, drink no alcohol, and serve for the parish communities every Saturday and Sunday.

At the beginning in 1992, Fr. Dupraz was alone with the seminarians. In 1993, Fr. Ponchaud came regularly to teach the Sacred Scripture, and later, in 1997, Fr. Jean-Marie Birsens, a Jesuit, gave philosophy courses and served as a spiritual director. As in the camps, the whole training was

⁴¹ The Association of Priests named The Prado was founded in 1860 by Blessed Antoine Chevrier, a priest of the diocese of Lyon, in order to evangelize “the poor, the ignorant and the sinners” [...] The priests of the Prado are diocesan priests. They are called by vocation to go especially to the poor and the non-believers, and seek always to know Christ and his Gospel better. They stimulate each other by a team life, which takes the form of regular meetings and, when the ministry allows it, in the context of a common life. As it is a clerical secular institute of pontifical right, the Association of Priests Prado is directly and exclusively dependent on the Holy See for its government and its internal organization. His renewed Constitutions were approved by the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes on the 7th of June 1987. The priests of the Prado are under the full jurisdiction of their bishops. The priests of the Prado work in fifty countries. Currently there are four regions with their special assemblies, their regional leader and council. They have the possibility of admitting candidates to the first initiation and commitments. The four regions are France, Spain, Italy and the Middle East. There is a seminary in Lyon in which The Prado association prepares young men for the priesthood in the spirit of Fr. Chevrier, in order to serve for a diocesan ministry. (Source: <http://lyon.catholique.fr/?Les-prêtres-du-Prado>).

done in Khmer language and except the Bible, there were no documents available in Khmer to teach philosophy and theology. As written by Bishop Ramousse:

“In order to benefit from the advantages of a formation given in their own culture and language and in the pastoral context of a Church which is being reborn, the seminarians follow their basic studies in Cambodia. In the short term this solution is quite onerous: besides the difficulty in finding a team of professors, a new philosophical and theological vocabulary has to be elaborated; but in the long term this is a great chance for the local Church. After completing their common formation at the inter-diocesan Seminary some of them will be able to complete further studies abroad. In view of these studies and in order to facilitate the ongoing formation of the diocesan clergy all will have to learn a foreign language (French or English).”⁴²

Because of this choice of a training in Khmer language, Fr. Ponchaud translated twelve biblical commentaries during the 1990s and provided the first documents for biblical studies in Khmer.

The choice of a priestly formation in the local language was also due to the low level of education of the seminarians at the time of their entry into the seminary. This low level of education was the clear consequence of twenty years of war. It would have been difficult for the seminarians at the time to attend the seminary abroad in a foreign language. Only Nget Viney had studied at the university, mainly Marxist philosophy. Paul Lay, however, could read books in Vietnamese. The French language was still the foreign language of reference in the seminary and most of the books in the library were in French. But this was soon to change as the English

⁴² Ramousse, 1996, p. 68.

language gained ground rapidly in Cambodia. Anyway, the seminarians still did not sufficiently master either French or English to be sent for studies abroad. But as Bishop Ramousse had hoped, after their ordination, they were able to do so.

In 1998, the ordinaries of the three ecclesiastical jurisdictions of Cambodia made an evaluation. It appeared to them that the church was receiving new missionaries who could help in the training of the seminarians, that Phnom Penh was being reconstructed as the economic and intellectual capital quite quickly, and that Fr. Dupraz and Fr. Birsens worked well but were too isolated and had to face too heavy a workload. The pastoral formation given to the seminarians was excellent but the evaluation showed that it was too much for them to act as “vicars” of Fr. Dupraz this was especially detrimental to their intellectual formation.

So the ordinaries decided to recast the priestly training and moved the seminary to Phnom Penh. Fr. Ponchaud (2003, p. 32) writes:

“On 6th March 1998, the Bishops’ Council decided to transfer the seminary to Phnom Penh and in November to move into new premises. This decision enabled them to boost the teaching staff and open the seminary to the foreign influence present in the capital city. The supervision of the seminary was entrusted to Fr. Omer Giraldo Ramirez, a priest from Colombia from the IMEY Society, with the assistance of Fr. Bruno Cosme (MEP).”

2.4. The Seminary is Moved to Phnom Penh

In October 1998, the “new” seminary opened in Phnom Penh. It was installed in the premises of the former language school of the mission, called the Cambodian Catholic Cultural Center (CCCC). There were eight

seminarians, four “old” and four “new” students. Every one of the four new seminarians was sent to a parish for a one year experience before beginning the training in the seminary, but all decided to leave the training in the course of the year. Concerning the four other seminarians considered as the “elders”, who had begun their training to the priesthood in 1991 or 1992, Fr. Giraldo and Fr. Cosme decided to settle a *terminus ad quem* for possible diaconal and priestly ordinations.

Before the opening of the seminary in October, Fr. Cosme and Fr. Giraldo had visited some seminaries in Europe and in Asia and had read the Church documents concerning the priestly formation. They kept in mind some principles, such as to organize the seminary life by following the standards of *Pastores Dabo Vobis* and of the *Ratio for Seminaries* published by the French Bishops Conference; they decided to take the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as the basis for the intellectual formation. They paid attention to a strict separation of the internal forum from the external forum, and they tried to get a good balance between human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation. The daily spiritual life was punctuated by Mass, the divine office prayers and daily personal prayer. Translation efforts were exerted to make available in Khmer the divine offices of morning prayer, midday prayer, evening prayer and night prayer. A translation of *Dei Verbum* and the elaboration of a Gospel synopsis were also completed.

Fr. Giraldo and Fr. Cosme also asked advice to experienced missionaries on how to organize the training. Fr. Cosme remembers having meetings and discussions with Fr. Jim Noonan, Sr. Luise Ahrens, Fr. John Bart and Fr. Toni Vendramin.⁴³ This was a kind of informal

⁴³ Cosme, Interview.

Seminary Board of Advisers. Finally, an official one was created a few years later.⁴⁴

In 1999, at the request of the bishops, Fr. Cosme founded the Emmanuel group, a group to help young men to reflect on the consecrated life as a priest or a religious. The meetings, organized during weekends over a period of two years, allow young men even now to approach the life of priests and religious, as well as to identify possible obstacles to a decision. Each member of Emmanuel group has to choose a spiritual director. The creation of this group was particularly important. As stated by Bishop Ramousse (interview): “a seminary can only function with a strong pastoral care of vocations.”

As was already the case in the refugee camps and in Battambang, the teaching in the Phnom Penh major seminary was in Khmer with sometimes a few documents in French. The library in Battambang, which was only in French, had been moved to Phnom Penh. But because of Fr. Giraldo, who couldn't speak French fluently, and especially because of the new dominance of English language in Cambodia and in Asia in general, it was decided to continue to teach in French only to the four “old” seminarians while the four new seminarians would start the study of English as their first foreign language.

In Phnom Penh, the volume of intellectual studies was increased if compared to the time of the seminary in Battambang. Fr. Giraldo taught philosophy and he hired a professor of philosophy from the Royal University who had done his PhD in Japan to teach too. Fr. Cosme taught dogmatic theology, the sacraments and the morale. Fr. Ponchaud taught

⁴⁴ According to Fr. Ghezzi (interview), this official Board of Advisors was created in 2005 and the members were Fr. Cosme, Fr. Ghezzi, Fr. Fidanza, Mrs. Salay Sangkhum and another member whose name was not remembered by Fr. Mario.

the Bible. Some thematic seminars were organized at times and usually the trainers came from abroad.

During these years, the St. John Mary Vianney seminary⁴⁵ also received several generations of foreign seminarians (French, Indian or Thai) for a one year experience out of their own country. The goal was not to have them attend the courses, taught in the local language, but to live the common life with the Cambodian seminarians, have a charity commitment outside and to discover another language and culture. The seminary also developed links with the seminary in Laos. The two countries are part of the same Episcopal Conference and they cope with similar pastoral problems. A Cambodian seminarian was sent to Laos in 2000 and some professors and seminarians from Laos came to Phnom Penh a few times. The reflection in common and these frequent contacts opened the two seminaries to the outside.

On the 10th of June 2001, the four most advanced seminarians were ordained deacons, and they became priests on the 9th December 2001, which brought the number of local priests in Cambodia from one to five. These ordinations emptied the seminary and there officially remained only two major seminarians during the first half of 2002: Hout Bora and Nep Tao. However, since Msgr. Susairaj, the Apostolic Prefect of Kompong Cham, had decided to send Hout Bora to be trained in the Philippines, there was ultimately only one major seminarian in Phnom Penh. However, two other young men, Sok Na and Phan Borey, who had showed their interest for the priesthood but had not yet finished high school, were accepted at the seminary to share the common life while pursuing their

⁴⁵ The name of Phnom Penh Major Seminary as we know it now (St. John Mary Vianney Major Seminary) was chosen in the late 1990s or the early 2000s by the batch of four seminarians who were ordained priests in 2001. They were particularly sensitive to the fact that St. John Mary Vianney had to cope with intellectual difficulties on his journey to become a priest.

high school studies. The problem of the small number of seminarians was threatening the very existence of a major seminary in Cambodia.

Fr. Mario Ghezzi, who joined the seminary as a spiritual director in September 2002, remembers this critical time. Fr. Ghezzi joined the seminary while Fr. Cosme, who had just become the new rector of the seminary, was alone with the three young men. That year, the courses taught to Nep Tao were opened to some lay people. Fr. Schmitthaeusler was asked to teach the History of the Church. According to Fr. Ghezzi, when he joined the seminary to help Fr. Cosme, there was “only one major seminarian, Nep Tao, who had a low level of general education and was a recent convert. In 2002-2003, that was my third year of Khmer language study. With Father Bruno [Cosme], we gave in turn some spiritual conferences on *Pastores Dabo Vobis* and I provided some spiritual direction. Then in September 2003, I began to teach. I mainly used the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* for my teaching. I also asked Fr. Ponchaud to translate some parts of *Gaudium et Spes*. But Tao had much difficulty to understand. He finally left the seminary during the 2004 main holidays.”⁴⁶ At the end of the academic year 2003-2004, the evaluation of Fr. Ghezzi was rather dark: “I did not want to teach anymore as we did for one seminarian only. The two lay people had stopped and they only came for a few lessons. At one point, we had no more major seminarian.”⁴⁷

The period 2002-2006 was therefore a very sensitive one during which the very existence of the seminary sometimes seemed threatened. However, two new candidates were admitted in September 2004 and especially the two students Sok Na and Phan Borey grew stronger in their vocation and quickly approached the end of high school. At the opening

⁴⁶ Ghezzi, interview.

⁴⁷ Ghezzi, interview.

of the academic year 2006, two seminarians (Muong Ros and Phan Borey) could begin the philosophy cursus, and they were followed a year later by Sok Na. An important decision at this time was to send them to the Royal University of Phnom Penh to study philosophy. The decision to send them to the Royal University was based on the fact that the Church in Cambodia did not have the human resources to teach philosophy in the seminary itself. There were also some positive points. Sending them there gave them a diploma recognized by the government and they were in contact with young people of their generation. It should be added that the Italian missionaries (PIME) were very active at the Faculty of Philosophy of the Royal University of Phnom Penh at that time.

In 2007, Se Sat joined the seminary. His profile was different from the others since he had studied English at the university before entering the seminary. He could therefore directly register as a student at the Faculty of Philosophy. Meanwhile, the philosophy studies of Phan Borey, Muong Ros and Sok Na gave satisfaction: they generally got the best marks among their cohort and were often elected as delegates. They also invited their fellow students from the university to join in the various feasts of the seminary (opening ceremony, Christmas, closing ceremony).

As these four seminarians came close to the end of their four-year license studies, the question arose of how to proceed for the theology cycle: should it be organized at the seminary in Phnom Penh for so few seminarians or should the seminarians be sent abroad to continue their theological studies? Among the missionaries interested in the training of future diocesan priests, the debate raged for some time. Finally, in 2009, the bishops decided to have the theology courses in Cambodia and they asked Fr. Cosme to prepare a three-year cycle of theology.

Fr. Cosme prepared a program that he submitted to the bishops and to the seminary board. Professors were sought both inside and outside the

country. Among them, there were some new missionaries who arrived in Cambodia a few years earlier (Fr. Hemelsdael, Fr. Kim Taejin, Fr. Senechal), some more experienced missionaries or local priests (Fr. Cosme, Fr. Ghezzi, Fr. Tonlop Sophal, Fr. Evans, Fr. Salorzano, Fr. Paul Lay, Mr. Bill Burns), two professors from the Major Seminary in Ho Chi Minh, a doctor in canon law from the Diocese of Chantaburi (Thailand). On the occasion of a visit, Cardinal Zen, the Archbishop of Hong Kong, became filled with enthusiasm for the opening of this theology cycle in such a small church and offered himself to teach the course of eschatology in 2010.

In October 2010, Fr. Cosme was replaced by Fr. Piché as rector of the seminary. A sister from the Providence of Portieux Sisters and a novice from the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (FMA) attended the courses as regular students in theology, which increased the number of students in the theology class to four. Even if the lexicon of theological and philosophical vocabulary to express the Catholic faith in the Khmer language had clearly improved and developed in twenty years (1990-2010), especially thanks to Fr. Ponchaud's work, a number of words still needed to be thought out. The regular meetings of professors, especially in 2010 and 2011, helped to discuss the pedagogy and the harmonization of the Khmer Catholic vocabulary. The experience showed that it is only by sharing the professors' lexicons and by natural selection that this vocabulary would tend toward harmonization.

During the last five years, some books on dogmatic theology, the Trinity, Christology and morals or history of the Church were translated and used by students. In 2012, the new bishop of Phnom Penh, Bishop Schmitthaesler, asked Fr Ponchaud to translate all the documents of the Second Vatican Council and Fr. Hemelsdael to translate the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. They both accomplished their mission in one year

only and provided the professors and the seminarians with valuable documents which many people do not yet have in their native language.

On November 23rd 2013, Phan Borey and Muong Ros were ordained deacons in Phnom Penh and became priests respectively on November 22nd and December 6th 2014, the former in Kompong Cham, the latter in Battambang. Sok Na their companion was ordained as a deacon on June 18th 2014 and was called by Bishop Schmitthaeusler to be ordained as a priest on June 27th 2015. At the beginning of September 2014, five young men had entered the St. John Mary Vianney seminary.

Since the reopening of the seminary in the refugee camps in Thailand in 1991, there have been twenty five young men who entered the seminary for Cambodia until September 2014: thirteen Khmer, eight Vietnamese, two who had one Khmer parent and one Vietnamese parent, and two from the ethnic minorities (from Mondolkiri province). Out of these twenty five candidates, ten were new converts and fifteen from Catholic families.⁴⁸ All received an education following the government programs, either they studied in government schools or attended school in

⁴⁸ Here is the list of the 25 seminarians for Cambodia who were accepted in the seminary between 1991 and 2014: LAY Paul [1991-2001]; SOUN Hangly [1991-2001]; PHOK Sovuthy [1991-1992]; UN Son [1992-2001]; NGET Viney [1992-2001]; HOM Sok [1997-1999]; CHAOM Saly [1997-1999]; VONG Thim [1998-1999]; LONG Somphoas [1998-1999]; HOURT Bora [1999-2004]; PRAK Neth [2001]; NEP Tao [2001-2004]; SOK Na [2001-2015]; PHAN Borei [2002-2014]; MUONG Ros [2004-2014]; TOUCH Sitha [2004-2006]; SE Sat [2007-...]; SOK Khoeun [2013-...]; SAM Khian [2010-...]; KANN Vanna [2013-2015]; SOK Somnang [2014-...]; VEN Kan [2014-...]; YI Dara [2014-...]; PRAK Bunhong [2014-...]; HENG Sophat [2014-...]. Out of these 25 young people, there are 13 Khmers, 8 Vietnamese, 2 who come from one Khmer parent and one Vietnamese parent, 2 from the Ethnic minorities; 6 have been ordained as priests and one is now deacon and will probably become priest soon; 10 left the seminary; 8 now are continuing their formation towards the priesthood. It should be noted the high proportion of Khmer compared with the composition of the Catholic community in Cambodia. But a recent reversal has taken place since 2014-2015, 6 of the 8 current seminarians are Vietnamese, the other two are Khmer and from an Ethnic minority. The names underlined are those of the seminarians who have been ordained as priests. There is one exception: SOK Na, who was ordained deacon on June 17th 2014, is not yet a priest but will most likely be ordained a priest on June 27th 2015.

an NGO which implements the government's education program. Until 2004, it was observed that most candidates who have joined the seminary had not yet finished high school. None has made a comprehensive curriculum in a Catholic school because there is not yet a full Catholic curriculum from kindergarten to university as it was the case before the Khmer Rouge regime (1975-1979).

If we consider that 80% of Catholics in Cambodia today are of Vietnamese origin, it is notable that 50% of the seminarians during this period were Khmer youth. Out of these 13 Khmer seminarians, 7 are new converts coming from Buddhism, which means that their parents are not Catholics.

The figures remain small, since there are only seven (soon eight) local priests and eight seminarians in Cambodia. However, there is a dynamism which is under way. Even fragile, this dynamism has been consolidated during the last ten years. The impetus given by the bishops in the pastoral care of vocations (monthly prayer nights for vocations, reflection groups on the vocation such as Emmanuel group and Good News group, gathering of hundreds of young people at national level for the World Day of Vocations, support to St. Michael House for Vocations, dynamic youth ministry, etc.) gives hope for a continued development of the seminary and of the local clergy in the coming years. And the active follow up of the seminary by the bishops, especially the Bishop of Phnom Penh who is in direct charge, is an important point. Not only does Bishop Schmitthaesler celebrate Mass, dine at the seminary and meet the seminarians once a month, but he also teaches the seminarians himself, particularly concerning the social doctrine of the Church.

3. Current Priestly Formation in Phnom Penh: What Kind of Priests for Cambodia?

After having studied the socio-religious context in Cambodia as background to the formation of candidates to the priesthood (part one), and having perused the history of the formation of priests for Cambodia from 1955 to 2015 (part II), we now would like to see how the current priestly formation is organized, then evoke some ongoing debates and finally reflect on the kind of priests needed for today's mission in Cambodia.

3.1. The Organization of the Priestly Formation in 2015

Since September 2014, at the request of the bishops, a new curriculum has been implemented for the major seminary. Previously, from 2006 to 2014, the seminarians used to study philosophy for four years at the Royal University of Phnom Penh and then would study theology at the seminary for three years. Although this practice was particularly motivated by the lack of philosophy professors available in the Church in Cambodia, it had the advantage of giving an official academic diploma to the seminarians and also put them in contact with the Khmer students.

According to Bishop Schmitthaesusler (interview):

“there are three major reasons for the change of curriculum. First, the teaching of philosophy at the Royal University of Phnom Penh was not adapted to the needs of a student in theology, because the teaching is still too influenced by Marxist philosophy. The vocabulary that the seminarians need concerns metaphysics, but they do not learn it at the university. Moreover, this teaching was too formal and did not push the

students to question themselves. Finally, the need for seminarians to be in contact with the society at this stage of their formation is not so obvious. In fact, unlike many countries in Asia, our seminarians have not been trained in a minor seminary and they were already in contact with the society because they studied in public high schools. And young people who entered the major seminary in recent years were usually not very sure of their vocation. We experienced that by studying philosophy at the university, they become like other students. The studies took precedence over discernment and spiritual life.”

Because of this evaluation of the situation, the bishops asked Fr. Piché to replace the previous curriculum (four years of philosophy at the Royal University of Phnom Penh followed by three years of theology at the seminary) by a propaedeutic year followed by a six-year cycle of courses taught in the seminary. This six-year cycle was to include in every year language courses, philosophy and theology.

There are several advantages in this new system. In particular, philosophy courses followed by seminarians can more easily be linked to their theological studies. Philosophy professors are mixed: some come from the Catholic Church and others come from the university but are hired by the seminary. There is also more time to digest the theology courses, because they are not any more concentrated over three years but distributed into six. This new curriculum also correct the disproportion in the former program between philosophy (4 years) and theology (3 years), which was not usual in seminaries around the world where it is usually a first cycle of two years of philosophy followed by another cycle of four years of theology. This new curriculum will also place greater emphasis on learning English. For access to major texts, the goal is that the seminarians be at ease with English language.

In this new program, the propaedeutic year is thought as an introductory year. The students study introductory courses that allow them to enter the cycle. Another novelty concerns their pastoral formation during the propaedeutic year. Instead of joining a parish every Sunday, the seminarians in propaedeutic year accompany the bishop of Phnom Penh three weekends per month. They go with him on his visits to parishes, diocesan celebrations, etc. Each of them has a task to assist the Bishop. Therefore they do not start directly with pastoral formation in a parish but discover the Apostolic Vicariate of Phnom Penh by accompanying their pastor.

The first batch of students who joined the seminary in 2014 is currently trying out this new system. Obviously, there are also some weak points, especially the fact that the students in the cycle will be at different levels. But one of the positive points is that the seminarians will have more time to assimilate the courses.

3.2. Some Ongoing Debates

During the 2000s, there was a debate about training future priests in Cambodia instead of sending them to study abroad. The question was particularly raised in 2009 when the rector of the seminary asked the bishops if he should prepare a cycle of theology in Phnom Penh or send the seminarians abroad for their theological studies. Strong arguments can be put forward for each of these two positions. And it is also possible to think of other intermediate possibilities. We present here the arguments for each of these positions.

Supporters of sending seminarians abroad point first of all to the small number of seminarians. According to them, there are not enough seminarians for a dynamic community life in the seminary in Cambodia.

They also highlight the problem of the Khmer language. They consider it too limited in term of theological vocabulary. This problem is intensified by the fact that teachers are almost all foreigners (except Fr. Tonlop Sophal and Fr. Paul Lay), and this does not facilitate the students' understanding of the teaching. An additional argument concerns the opening of seminarians to the universal world and Church. According to proponents of this position, having a seminary in Cambodia does not help future priests to be open to the universal Church and it locks them into their own culture, specifically in the ecclesial culture of Cambodia. Access to the English language is becoming a common feature of the Cambodian elite of the early twenty-first century, they say, and young Khmer people are enthusiastic to go abroad. Also, according to this view, it is a mistake not to send seminarians abroad, so that they can speak English fluently and have access to theological books in that language, because the Khmer documents are too few. Proponents of this position recognize that what is done at the seminary in Phnom Penh in the current situation is good. But they believe it could be done even better by sending seminarians abroad, for example to the Philippines, to Thailand or to Rome. Cambodia is now part of ASEAN, they said. World globalization has an impact on Cambodian society which must be taken into account by the seminary as well.

On the contrary, proponents of the priestly formation in Cambodia talk about the establishment of a seminary in Cambodia as essential in the construction of the local Church. All countries that have well-established major seminaries today, they say, began modestly and gradually developed an education of quality. This requires the development of a theological vocabulary in the language of the country and the production of documents by professors in the local language, which helps to incarnate the language of faith in the local language. The beginnings are usually

difficult, but by sending seminarians to be trained abroad, we only postpone this necessary work of insemination of the culture of a country through the language of the Catholic faith. Experience shows that the students who studied abroad, once they return, often search for words in their native language to express theological ideas which they learned in another language. The evaluation conducted by Fr. Cosme in 2009 also showed that the level of English of the seminarians at that time was considered too weak to allow them to study abroad, for example in a major seminary in Singapore or in the Philippines. For vocations, the presence of seminarians in Cambodia is also important because they are living signs for other young people that God is calling them. And finally, the priestly training in Cambodia as a common basis for all local priests favors their cohesion within the presbyterium and strengthens their attachment to their diocese.

There are also some intermediate possibilities for the priestly formation. A seminary in Cambodia can also invite a good number of visiting professors from abroad who would teach in English, in order to open the mind of the seminarians to the universality of faith. This is in some extent already the case in the seminary in Phnom Penh. But this does not replace the full immersion in an English speaking environment which is the most effective way to learn English, but also the most expensive financially. Another possibility would be to send the seminarians to complete their formation abroad after their ordination or after some years of ministry. This approach is advocated by *Ad Gentes* n.16:

“Moreover, suitable priests should be chosen, after a little pastoral practice, to pursue higher studies in universities, even abroad and especially in Rome as well as in other institutes of learning. In this way the young churches will have at hand men from among the local clergy

equipped with the learning and skill needed for discharging more difficult ecclesiastical duties.”⁴⁹

Finally, the bishops decided in 2009 to favor the organization of a theology cycle based at the seminary in Phnom Penh. After five years of experience, the curriculum of studies has been recasted, which fits with what *Optatam Totius* requests.⁵⁰ From this point of view, the Church in Cambodia is really in line with the Second Vatican Council.

Another recurring debate concerns the absence of the minor seminary in Cambodia. For some Asian missionaries, this absence is seen as an anomaly and a handicap for the development of diocesan priest vocations. There was indeed a minor seminary in Phnom Penh until 1975 but it was washed away in the turmoil of war. In the 1990s, the former minor seminary building was acquired to become the current St. Joseph parish.

European missionaries do not consider the absence of minor seminary in the same way because minor seminaries no longer exist in their countries. Minor seminaries have disappeared in some European countries because they were no longer making sense. The question that arises is whether in the context of Cambodia, to establish a minor seminary would make sense?

This question is not really new. In June 1969, at the meeting of CELAC bishops in Phnom Penh, the Bishops of Laos and Cambodia asked themselves the following question:

⁴⁹ The Second Vatican Council, *Ad Gentes*, No.16.

⁵⁰ *Optatam Totius* n.1 : “Since only general laws can be made where there exists a wide variety of nations and regions, a special “program of priestly training” is to be undertaken by each country or rite. It must be set up by the episcopal conferences, revised from time to time and approved by the Apostolic See. In this way will the universal laws be adapted to the particular circumstances of the times and localities so that the priestly training will always be in tune with the pastoral needs of those regions in which the ministry is to be exercised.”

“To the question of whether it is necessary that each Apostolic Vicariate have a minor seminary, we give a negative answer. But we think that each Vicariate may have its probatorium under one form or another (school or center).”⁵¹ In fact, the difference between a *probatorium*-center and a *probatorium*-school is that in the former case, students take courses from another educational institution while in the second, the probatorium is a school itself (=minor seminary)⁵²

Today in Cambodia, the Church has a good number of student centers (CCSC, St. Clara, Mgr. Paul Tep Im) and youth hostels (St. John the Baptist, St. Francisco, St. Augustine, Kompong Thom, Kompong Cham, Battambang, etc.). It has however only one *probatorium*-center for young men who are discerning their vocation while studying outside: it is St. Michael House for Vocations. If starting a minor seminary in Cambodia made sense, the lack of priests would be the first obstacle to start it now in Cambodia. Currently, the Bishop of Phnom Penh rather wishes to increase the number of *probatorium*-centers in his vicariate.

3.3. What Kind of Priests for Cambodia Today?

That is the question we have asked to several of the persons we interviewed.⁵³ The synthesis of their responses shows that since the beginning of the twenty-first century Cambodia needs humanly strong and stable priests because the society is currently very unstable, and needs men with strong spiritual life centered on the Eucharist and on Christ. This human and spiritual balance is important in order to have a strong

⁵¹ CELAC (1964-1975), Minutes of the meeting of CELAC June 1969 in Phnom Penh, p. 9.

⁵² CELAC (1964-1975), Minutes of the meeting of CELAC October 1968 in Vientiane, p. 6.

⁵³ See the list of interviewees in Note 5.

and open identity. These priests must be able to enter the interreligious dialogue and not to retreat in the Catholic world as a refuge, because in the context of Cambodia, Catholics are a drop in an almost entirely Buddhist society. They must be able to enter the Asian theologies and explain the faith simply and with conviction. Another feature requested for the future priests in Cambodia today is to have a sense of the universal Church and the sense of the local Church. After some few decades, now the Church in Cambodia has a good number of catechumens. Seminarians should learn to love the church in which they enter and understand that they must get involved in it from the first year of seminary. They must be men who have a big heart for the people, who can think, reflect and bring the Gospel making it understandable to ordinary people.

Finally, for this third part of our article, let us give the last words to the current rector of the seminary, Fr. Piché (interview), who summarizes his most important principles: “For the formation of seminarians, I am using *Pastores Dabo Vobis* and the *Ratio Fundamentalis*. Fr Cosme, the previous rector, had already set up almost everything according to these foundational texts. What I am trying to do is to train future priests who would have the Source within them; priests who would be animated from within, so that what drives them to act be in themselves. I do not insist so much on the external rules because if they are eager to become priests, they will follow this framework. But I insist on having in oneself the contact with our Lord who drives us to move forward. I do my best to train priests who may be good shepherds, who have the missionary zeal to reach the non-Christians. From my point of view, the two most important points are the personal contact with the Lord and the concern for non-Christians. The rest can be learned. But having these two qualities is the most important. I also emphasis a lot the motives in the spiritual life. Why am I doing this or that activity? Do I want to become a priest for the

material benefits? If this is the case it will not hold long. Finally, I emphasize the friendship between priests. We have a common life in the seminary; sometimes we have outings to develop this friendship between us.”

4. Conclusion

We come to the end of our inquiry on the formation of priests in Cambodia during the past fifty years. Our analysis has highlighted the intense efforts of the Church in Cambodia to implement the directives of the Second Vatican Council to form priests who are spiritual pastors and missionaries, at ease within the Cambodian society. The difficulties were and are still many: lack of staff, the small number of seminarians, the need to forge a Catholic theological vocabulary, the lack of teaching materials written in Khmer language, the vicissitudes of history, especially war.

The Second Vatican Council has led the Church in Cambodia to settle a local seminary in order to dialogue and announce the faith deeper in the Cambodian society. The establishment of the Episcopal Conference Laos-Cambodia (CELAC) drove powerfully the implementation of the Council. Creating a seminary in the refugee camps and in Battambang in a context of very high vulnerability was an act of great faith! On the 1st of May 2015, Bishop Schmitthaeusler opened the diocesan inquiry about the proposed martyrs of Cambodia: Bishop Joseph Chhmar Salas and his 34 companions, who passed away at the time of the Khmer Rouge. Let's hope that this enquiry will help the Church to give to the seminarians of Cambodia some models of the faith of these soon-to-be-saints who could support them in their priestly formation and in their future pastoral and missionary ministry.

Bibliography

- Annat, G. / Delux, L., “La jeunesse cambodgienne entre rêve, pragmatisme et désenchantement”, in *Cambodge contemporain*, A. Forest (ed.), Paris: IRASEC Les Indes Savantes, 2008, pp. 317-361.
- CELAC (1964-1975), *Compte-rendus des Reunions de la Conference Episcopale Laos-Cambodge (CELAC). 1964-1975.*
- Crochet, S., *Le Cambodge*, Paris: Karthala, 1997.
- Demont, F.-X., “Des défis pour le Cambodge” (Oct. 2014), in *Missions Etrangères de Paris*, n. 498, pp. 16-20.
- Filippi, J.-M., *Recherches préliminaires sur les langues des minorités du Cambodge*, Phnom Penh: Funan / Unesco, 2008.
- Forest, A., *Le culte des génies protecteurs au Cambodge. Analyse et traduction d'un corpus de textes sur les neak ta.* Paris: L'Harmattan, 1992.
- Molac, P., “Panorama historique de l'évolution de la formation des candidats au presbytérat”, in *La formation presbytérale aujourd'hui*, Pelchat, M. (Dir.), Montréal: Novalis, 2014, pp. 35-52.
- Ponchaud, F., *Cambodge 2014, la situation politique et sociale* (Oct. 2014), in *Missions Etrangères de Paris*, n. 498, pp. 8-15.
- _____, *The Church in Cambodia Facing the World (1992-2002)*, Phnom Penh: Cambodian Catholic Cultural Center, 2003.
- _____, *La cathédrale de la rizière. Histoire de l'Eglise au Cambodge*, Tours, Editions CLD. 2^e édition, 2006.
- Porée-Maspero, E., *Etudes sur les rites agraires des Cambodgiens*, Paris / La Haye: Mouton, vol. 1 ; vol. 2 et vol. 3, 1962.
- Procheasas, *Cambodge, population et société aujourd'hui*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005.
- Ramousse, Y. (1996). A Church is Reborn: Evaluation of a Pastoral Approach. In Ponchaud, F. (2003). *The Church in Cambodia Facing the World (1992-2002)*. Phnom Penh: Cambodian Catholic Cultural Center, pp. 67-78.
- _____, “The Missions Etrangères in Cambodia”, in *The Missions Etrangères in Asia and the Indian Ocean*, Moussay, G. (ed.), Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2009, pp. 27-47.
- The Second Vatican Council, *Ad Gentes*, Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church.
- 투고(접수)일(2015년 5월 12일), 심사(수정)일(2015년 6월 4일),
 게재확정일(2015년 6월 12일)

■ Abstract ■

□

This article aims at reflecting on the priestly formation in Cambodia since the Second Vatican Council. The situation of the Church in Cambodia is a special one, because it is a very small church in a context of first evangelization. In 2008, 96.93% of the population was Buddhist. The recent history of the country has been characterized by a strong instability and twenty years of war. In this context, what kind of priests does the country need? How to train the few candidates to priesthood? How to take into account the teaching of the Church on the one hand, and the local church context on the other hand?

In the first part of the article, the author describes the background of the seminarians when entering the seminary. Cambodia has been shaped by different religions which have a strong influence on the people in term of understanding of the world and of the human beings. Cambodia is also evolving and is entering very fast in the new era of a globalized world which has a strong influence on the youth, especially through the media revolution.

In the second part, the history of the priestly formation from 1955 to 2015 is inquired in detail. It shows that the bishops in Cambodia have endeavored to settle a major seminary in spite of the limited human resources and small number of candidates, in order to fulfill the Second Vatican Council and train the candidates in their native language. This attempt has faced several times major threats but finally has moved ahead.

The third part of the article deals with the current situation in 2015. It explains the change of curriculum which just occurred, underlines two

recurrent debates among the missionaries and finally describe the kind of priests needed in Cambodia according to the bishops and priests interviewed for this article.

► Key Words: Seminary, Cambodia, Priestly Formation, Vatican II, Phnom Penh.

■ 국문 초록 ■

□

아시아 상황에서의 사제 양성: 캄보디아 교회와 사회에 대한 교회 가르침의 적용

벵상 이브 드니 조제프 세네살 신부
(캄보디아 성 요한 마리아 비안네 대신학교 교수)

본고는 제2차 바티칸 공의회 이후 캄보디아의 사제 양성을 고찰하는 데 목적이 있다. 캄보디아 교회의 상황은 특별한데, 1차적 복음화의 맥락에서 보았을 때 굉장히 소규모의 교회이기 때문이다. 2008년에는 인구의 96.93%가 불교 신자였다. 캄보디아의 최근 역사는 극심한 불안정성과 20년에 걸친 전쟁으로 특징지을 수 있다.

이런 상황에서 캄보디아에는 어떤 방식의 사제 양성이 필요한 것일까? 어떤 방식으로 극소수의 후보자들을 사제직을 향해 훈련시켜야 할까? 어떻게 해야 보편 교회의 가르침을 고려하는 동시에 지역 교회의 상황 역시 고려할 수 있을까?

본고 1부에서, 필자는 신학생들이 신학교에 입학하는 배경에 대해 서술하였다. 캄보디아는 다양한 종교들로 형성된 국가인데, 이러한 종교들은 세계관과 인간관의 측면에 강한 영향을 미치고 있다. 또한 캄보디아는 진보하고 있고, 국제화의 새 시대에 매우 빠르게 진입하고 있으며, 이는 특히 미디어 혁명을 통해 젊은이들에게 강한 영향을 미치고 있다.

2부에서는 1955년부터 2015년까지 사제 양성의 역사를 자세히

기술하였다. 이를 통해 제한된 인적 자원과 미미한 후보자 수에도 불구하고 제2차 바티칸 공의회를 완수하여 모국어로 후보자들을 양성하기 위해 캄보디아의 주교들이 대신학교를 정착시키려 노력해 왔음을 볼 수 있다. 이러한 시도는 여러 번 큰 위협에 부딪혔지만 끝내 전진하였다.

3부에서는 2015년 현재의 상황을 다루었다. 얼마 전 이루어진 커리큘럼의 변화를 설명하고, 선교사들 가운데서 반복적으로 제기되는 두 가지 논쟁들을 부각시키며, 본고를 위해 인터뷰한 주교들과 사제들의 의견에 따라 캄보디아에 어떤 사제들이 필요한지를 서술하였다.

▶ 주제어: 신학교, 캄보디아, 사제 양성, 제2차 바티칸 공의회, 프놈펜.