

10.3.1. The Drafting of the 1990 Ratio Institutionis (by Dom Armand Veilleux)

“The Constitutions of our Order, drawn up between 1967 and 1987, and then approved by the Holy See in 1990, were further filled out by an important document called the Ratio Institutionis or “Document on Formation.” This document, written in the same spirit as the Constitutions, was also the fruit of years of work, involving all the communities and all the Regions of the Order; it was then studied, discussed, amended, and voted on at the Mixed General Meeting of 1990. To understand its guiding principles and the meaning that the Order wanted to give it, it could be useful to look not only at its own history but also what came before it.”

Prehistory: The “Ratio” of 1958Up until 1955 in men’s monasteries, with rare exceptions, almost all the choir monks became priests. The formation of the novices was given in two parallel novitiates, one for the choir monks and one for the lay brothers. For the lay brothers, once the novitiate ended, there was, in general, no more systematic formation. They went to the Sunday chapters of the abbot, to the sermons on feasts of sermon, and to the “repetitions” that their father master gave them. In some monasteries these repetitions were merely pious reflections of a nature to stir up fervor (fervorino!); elsewhere it was a more solid teaching, like the catechism. As for the choir monks, at the end of the novitiate, they began studying for the priesthood. The formation of the novitiate involved courses on the Rule and the vows, as well as learning the observances, i.e., everything needed to make profession with full knowledge!On the whole, theological studies in our Order were rather weak, even if certain monasteries had an excellent tradition of spiritual and doctrinal formation. In general the same manuals were used as in the major seminaries, but in most 37 Dom Armand Veilleux has been abbot of Scourmont since 1999, after having been abbot of Mistassini (Canada) from 1969 to 1976, and of Conyers (USA) from 1984 to 1990; he was Procurator of the Order from 1990 to 1998.

247chapter 10: Guiding Principles of Developmentcases formation in the monasteries was far from having the same academic value, even though the spiritual formation could be excellent. After the novitiate and theological studies there was little organized formation. There were simply “theological conferences” for the priests. Then, in 1956, the Holy See issued the document Sedes Sapientiae on formation or, more specifically, studies in religious communities. New demands were made of all the communities. In particular it was asked that in monasteries where studies were done (which was the tradition of our Order), it was necessary to have qualified professors with recognized degrees.Sedes Sapientiae also asked that each religious Institute draw up a Ratio Studiorum. Ours was published in 1958. It bore the title

Document extrait du [site de l'abbaye Notre-Dame de Scourmont](#), qui se trouve sur le territoire de Forges, à sept kilomètres au sud de la ville de Chimay, en Belgique. Notre-Dame de Scourmont est une abbaye de l'Ordre Cistercien de la Stricte Observance.

Ratio Institutionis, praesertim studiorum. The accent was clearly on studies, which was a good thing, because studies had been neglected in the Order up to that time. It must not be forgotten that this was the time when, under the influence of Fathers de Lubac, Rahner, Congar, Chenu, and many others, theology became oriented toward the rediscovery of its scriptural and patristic foundations. This then led to a rediscovery and new understanding of our monastic tradition, including the tradition of lectio divina. Dom Gabriel Sortais took these demands very seriously, leading to the construction of Monte Cistello, which had about 90 students the year that the Council opened. 1965: Consequences of the Decree of Unification The Decree of Unification—which did not suppress the lay brothers but rather the distinction between two classes in our communities, establishing a single category of monks—put the question of formation in a new way. At the same time, in several monasteries of men, a current of what was called “lay monasticism” began to emerge. More and more the need was felt to form “monks” before forming “future priests.” It was at this time also that collaborative efforts between monks and nuns began. All profited from this collaboration: the nuns’ formation had not always been very solid doctrinally, but it had always been oriented toward the monastic life and not toward the priesthood! 1968: Document on Formation In 1968 the need was felt to revise our Ratio, precisely because of all this evolution. A commission of representatives from most of the Regions of the Order (the