

BACKGROUND OF THE 4TH INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS ON VOCATIONS*

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On May 10-14, 1971 in the historical City of Rome, delegates from twenty-eight countries of the Catholic World aside from those of the "Department of Vocations" of CELAM, Sacred Congregation for the Oriental Churches, for the Clergy, for the Religious and Secular Institutes, and for the Evangelization of Peoples, sat in assembly for the 4th International Congress on Vocations. The Church, keenly observing and feeling the trends of the times, has become fully conscious that the greatest and most effective instrument within her framework of saving souls is suffering more than ever before and probably in the future from the felt need of vocations to the priesthood and religious life. What was a stream of vocations before has turned into a trickle. It is very alarming. Something immediate must be done; hence, the 4th International Congress on Vocations.

The International Congress on Vocations was set with a background of eye-opening doctrines brought about by Vatican II. Vatican clearly defined the dynamic character of the doctrine of particular vocations (i.e. vocations to the priesthood and religious life). Particular vocations emanate from man's baptismal vocation and those particular vocations, for their steady growth and strength, must seek the nourishment and environment of a Community of Faith. (A community of Faith is composed of good practical Catholic families, youth movements, Catholic Action groups, etc.). But sad to say this doctrine of particular vocations has not really reached the full

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comprehension and grasp of the People of God; it has not saturated to the fullness, the mature thinking of the Faithful so much so I say that in the course of time, it was very easy for materialism to weaken if not totally detach its hold on the laity. **People have never fully realized that in their baptism God begins to sow the first seeds of vocation in the heart of man.** This concept should be underscored in the thinking of men, especially of parents who should see to it that they nurture and safeguard the burgeoning of the seeds of vocation in their children. The youth and adults, by the indefatigable dedication and committed interest of bishops, priests and religious, should be so enlightened with this doctrine of particular vocation that they should have a deeper appreciation of their baptismal vocation and discover through successive impulses of grace an eventual call to the priesthood or the religious life.

Cognizant of the existence in several countries of a not-too-well-developed exercise of co-responsibility between the bishop and priest, between superior and religious, the Church, very much aware that this unhealthy relationship is seriously prejudicial to vocations in many instances a sure drawback in an effective vocation program, considers it that this exercise of co-responsibility be of great moment in the forum discussions of the 4th International Congress on Vocations. Unless there is a balanced and sufficiently developed understanding of responsible delegation, this will always shade an objectionable feature in any vocation program. **The Church must be a picture of unity if she is to truly convince this sophisticated world that hers is the truth.**

The 4th International Congress on Vocations convened also to place under wise discussions the results of secularization, of technical society and of urban concentration. These results have created impersonal structures (specifically a non-religious involvement attitude) more frequent in our society. Drastic changes in our modern society have correspondingly produced a variety of human commitments which may counterpunch the commitments of priests. **The man of today with his many faceted ways of thinking and living should be attended to satisfactorily by the Church by means of her "pluriformity of priestly ministry".** Vocationally speaking, this pluriformity of priestly ministry demands and looks back for a special preparation of candidates during their seminary life; otherwise, they will not be able to converge and channel in one path of salvation the divergent and oftentimes confused thoughts and pur-

poses of men. With this in mind, the 4th International Congress of Vocations came together and it was necessary that it should openly come out with a concrete declaration that the "Presbyterate represents as a ministry of unity." **The Priests and religious should unite the people; they should not disunite them.**

Painted in the background of the 4th International Congress on Vocations was a striking scene of our society's drifting sense of values. The drift has lingered through every stratum of human life; even the lives of priests and religious have not been left unreached and untouched. **The sudden change in the people's sense of values has created a semi-monster of doubt on the value of celibacy. It has brought into existence a state of emotional instability among priests and religious even to the extent of defection. This crisis of identity has registered not a positive but a negative reaction to the sacerdotal or religious life. To borrow the words of Cardinal Garrone "this malaise puts priests in a much less favorable mood and condition for preparing priests, for discerning and directing vocations...."** The preciousness and angelic beauty of the state of celibacy seem to lose its lustrous dignity in the face of worldly affluence and pleasures. With this one thing among other things to solve, the 4th International Congress on Vocations agreed to discuss in a body.

The restlessness of our young people today is profoundly expressive of their lack of true principles and sound philosophy in life. It is indicative of their intense search for authenticity. In spite of their less numerous number today in their readiness to serve the church, these young people show at the same time an intense need of values. The most evident of these values are a "sense of solidarity, their desire for liberation, their quest for authenticity, as well as their need, too, for silence and spirituality and for new values of Faith. To these must be added their interest in problems of justice and peace, and a spirit of creativity which is sometimes linked with a rejection of institutionalism." The youth have been mixed up in and misled by the apparent truths of materialism. Even their intentions and motives in entering the priestly or religious life are so propped on the micro nucleus of wrong philosophies that somewhere along the course of their seminary training they fall out, thinking that they will not reap happiness in such a life. But, can in truth, a truly dedicated priestly or religious life fall short of making a man happy? Of course not. In

One way or another, these activism and need of values of our youth can greatly influence motivations for seeking a priestly or religious life. Because motivation is the springboard of one's action, the Church then had to convoke a congress on vocations in order to acquire a deeper insight into the mentality and motivations of those who present themselves for the priesthood, the religious life and other types of service to the Church. Such knowledge will facilitate a better psychological approach to these candidates and a wiser use of the criteria for judging the value of their intentions.

One of the discussion items on the floor of the 4th International Congress on Vocations was the problem arising from "the restoration of the Diaconate and form new functions of ministerial type entrusted to lay people." This restoration of the Diaconate has blurred "the specificity of the presbyterate and of certain forms of religious life." Further studies are required on this point.

Vocations, learning and interest in the priestly or religious life can be totally stripped of their substance and endowment by means of a poor adaptation of our language to different age-groups, mentalities and situations. The 4th International Congress on Vocations had to tackle with this problem of language adaptation in order to psychologically best preserve and even to develop the original qualities of His call; to do otherwise can possibly spell as it is even felt now the gradual depopulation of our seminaries and novitiates. A complete disregard for the problem of pedagogical method too can weaken or even divest a priestly or religious calling of its primordial zest. Because of its vital role in vocation training and development, the problem of instructional method had received special attention also in the lengthy deliberations of the 4th International Congress on Vocations.

This, in general, was the background of the 4th International Congress on Vocations when it met in the City of Rome last May 10-14, 1971.