

FEATURES

GUIDELINES FOR SCREENING CANDIDATES FOR THE SEMINARY

(Taken from the 'Ratio Fundamental^{is} Institutionis Sacerdotalis'
by Pope Paul VI)

by

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In the words of our Holy Father, the late Pope Pius XII in "Menti Nostrae", we priests are a holy race set apart by God for His service which must look for its own preservation by seeking for itself its own descendency in posterity by fomenting, forming (encouraging) and supporting vocations to our state of life who in the day of tomorrow will take our place in the ministry. Among the duties of a priest specified in the Papal encyclical letters on the priesthood, one duty of paramount importance of each priest that can not be relegated to others, nor abandoned to posterity, is this duty to make sure that when he dies, some others are there to take his place whom he through his own efforts has **fomented, formed, encouraged, and supported** to the priesthood. This is one duty which we, as priest, can not abdicate. This duty is four fold — to foment, to form, to encourage and to support vocations to the priesthood. Vocation crisis would not exist, especially, to the priesthood if each priest would take to heart this obligation.

Yet often, in the busy schedules of our lives, we fail in this, not so much as due to poor interest, as to the lack of guidelines for proper selection of boys with vocation. We fail to discern when a boy of our parish or classroom may have a vocation. Falling to see the gliter of the gem we take no interest. Lacking interest we have no enthusiasm or desire to foment, encourage, form and support a vocation. To help us in the fulfillment of this obligation the "Ratio Fundamental^{is} Institutionis Sacerdotalis" of Pope Paul VI has given us some guidelines for screening candidates for the seminary and the priesthood. These guidelines may be helpful to many of us who are busy, and have no time to dig into Papal Encyclicals.

"For the Church has maintained that in every vocation there are two elements to be considered — one the divine element, namely, the seed of vocation or the grace of the call of God placed in the

soul of the person called by God; another, the natural element, namely, the natural qualities and dispositions that would not hinder the grace of God, but help it to pursue the goals of the vocation. Grace does not do away with nature, but it takes it and lifts it up to higher perfection" (*Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* No. 51).

Divine Element of a Vocation

"For the Church maintains — as is apparent from her doctrine, experience, and practice — that certain signs of divine vocation can be discerned right from boyhood which demand careful and specialized attention" (*Ibid.*, nt. 80) "...in boys — which it frequently shows itself, like a "seed in company with certain elements of divine Grace". The qualities of the Grace of a Vocation are:

A). Spiritual Fitness of the boy (*Ibid.*, No. 8).

1. That the boy live a normal Catholic Life.
2. That the boy fulfill his spiritual duties as a Catholic
 - Sunday Mass
 - Frequent the sacraments.
3. Says his daily prayers (even minimal).
4. Obedient and subject to family life, not troublesome in the family.
5. Is not subject to moral aberrations
 - alcoholism
 - drug addiction
 - inordinate proclivity to sex
 - frequent bad company

B). Complete freedom of the boy in his vocation (*Ibid.*, No. 8).

1. His vocation is not forced upon him by parents, parish priest or any priest, religious sister or teacher who may want to see him a priest.
2. His vocation is not imposed on him by circumstances:
 - a desire to study which he can not fulfill except in the seminary
 - a desire to enjoy the social status of a priest
 - a desire to enjoy the nice comforts of life and economic security of the state of the priesthood.
 - a desire to be liberated from the poverty of his family background.
 - a desire to acquire means to help poor parents or help brothers and sisters.

3. A compulsive fanatical desire to be a priest without regard of rules and regulations, and of the workings of grace in man's soul.

C.) **Honest and right intention of the boy in his vocation** (*Ibid.*, no. 8).

This right intention must be shown by the boy in positive ways. Grace is a potentiality in the soul of a person. It is intrinsically repugnant that a potentiality in the soul of a person be not reduced to act. The positive signs expected of a candidate are (*Ibid.*, no. 7):

- a distinct piety
- an ardent love of God and neighbor
- a leaning towards the apostolate
- a sincere desire to follow the rules and regulations of the state of life of the seminary and the priesthood.
- a sincere desire to follow the workings of grace in his soul.

Natural Element of a Vocation

"This Grace of God (vocation) manifested as a seed must be rooted on **natural endowments**: if any is lacking, it is to be doubted if a vocation is really there. Hence, the young student must be carefully examined as regards:

1. Family background
2. Physical fitness
3. Human and Moral qualities
4. Spiritual qualities
5. Intellectual qualities

in order that sure factors for a judgment of their fitness may be had in good time" (*Ibid.*, no. 12). Before any boy is considered for admission into the seminary these elements should be carefully examined in him, namely, the supernatural element of a vocation (the "seed" as it is manifested) and the natural endowments or qualities. This assessment will cover in particular the following details (*Ibid.*, no. 39):

1. Family Background

The family background of the boy has its importance in a vocation. A boy whose parents are:

- not properly married
- have been unfaithful to marriage

- whose parents are given to alcoholism (any of them), gambling (any of them), addiction
- whose parents are not mentally balanced or have psychologically marked deficiencies

should be disregarded as candidates to the seminary. There are many elements hidden in the personality of such a boy which sooner or later would render the pursuit of the goals of his vocation difficult to attain. The office of the priest requires from those called the continuous pursuit of certain standards of behavior compatible with the evangelical state of the priesthood set down by Jesus Christ. A defective family background breeds certain elements in the personality of the person incompatible with those standards of behavior. To force the issue is tantamount to a "Deus ex machina" attitude, which attitude Jesus condemned when He said, "It is wrong to tempt God". Can a persistence on the part of a candidate with the wrong family background be taken as a sign of the Grace of Vocation? It should be strongly doubted.

2. Physical Fitness

The life of a priest is a strenuous one. The training in the seminary requires a healthy body. "*Mens sana in corpore sano*". If a boy is sickly, he should be disregarded as a candidate. The sickness spoken of here are sicknesses of permanent nature, and rather serious ones, especially, the contagious ones. If in doubt let the opinion of a physician be the verdict.

3. Human and Moral Qualities

- sincerity in words and deeds
- emotional stability and maturity
- good manners in dealings with elders and companions
- keeping their word in honor (honoring their word, compulsive liars, cheaters and gossipers should be disregarded)
- steady concern for justice (not emotional concern for justice. Persons given to fantasy or to emotive irascibility in this regard should be examined as to their emotional maturity)
- feeling for friendship in an honorable manner not with a wrong sense of loyalty nor in an emotive way. Irascible persons and emotive persons given to exclusive friendship should be excluded
- sense of responsibility in doing his duties and in using the freedom and trust given to him (compulsive rule — breakers

should be examined carefully to determine the depth of their intellectual capacity to comprehend the responsibilities of the state of life of the priesthood)

- industrious and hardworking (lazy people should be immediately disregarded. The priesthood should not be the hide-out or the refuge of lazy people).
- the will to work with others (The priest is a member of a team in the task of evangelization. The capacity of a person to work as a team member and to sublimate his own personal view for the sake of the common good is a quality needed from the personality of a person occupying the office of the priest)
- cheerful and not melancholic in temperament or disposition.

4. Spiritual Qualities

- spirit of fellowship with companions (founded in the love of neighbor)
- apostolic and missionary concern (founded in the love of God)
- respectful of rules, regulations, law and order
- modesty in dress and behavior or language is a quality contrary to the evangelical standards set down by Christ for his ministers)
- spirit of sacrifice (an over-complaining attitude about hardships, and privations is a contrary quality)
- humility in spirit (an obstinate love for his own views and opinions, and his own false sense of dignity is a wrong quality in candidate for the priesthood).
- virile dispositions of piety and devotion grounded in faith, and not emotionalism or effeminate sensitivity in the practice of piety and prayer
- chaste in his dealing with companions, in his language and in his readings and mannerisms.

5. Intellectual Qualities

- right ideas of the priesthood and what it involves
- proper convictions about his faith and vocation
- correct judgment as to one's faith and vocation
- with sufficient mental capacity to complete the studies required of him in the seminary.

The definite choice of a state of life should be obtained from the boy in good time and as soon as possible, to prevent any harm to the candidate from exposure to a way of life which will end in frustration, because from the beginning there was no vocation (*Ibid.*, no. 40) Should a doubt be present, the safer opinion should be followed, namely, that there should be positive signs of a vocation (*Ibid.*, no. 41). If there are no positive signs of a vocation, there can not be a vocation. Vocation is a grace of God, which He uses to manifest to men those whom He has called. As such this grace should be discernible by men for them to recognize whom God has called. To maintain that a person has the grace of vocation without its being discernible in the conduct of that person is a blasphemy against God. The persistent desire of a person to become a priest does not constitute a vocation. It may be religious fanaticism. Positive signs of a vocation is a safer way rather than mere personal persistence amounting to nothing. "Ex nihilo nihil provent".