

## THE NEED FOR MORE VOCATIONS



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Since the priesthood is needed by society, there must be sufficient priests to minister to the needs of the same.

On this matter, the Church has a problem similar to that of population explosion and inadequate food production. There are so many people now that there is not enough food for everybody. Hence, the problem of poverty and hunger and social unrest.

There are several solutions to the world problem. One would be to diminish the number of people by wars, non-control of disease, or plain genocide, until the ratio between population and food production is balanced. Another solution would be to intensify food production through land reforms and scientific farming so that there will be enough food for all. Still another solution would be to intensify food production and at the same time control the population growth through proper family planning.

With regard to our present problem, it is an admitted fact that there are so many people, catholics and non-catholics, and so few priests to serve their spiritual needs. One solution would be to listen the number of the people or to limit the sphere of priestly service to a selected group. This, of course, is out of the question. The second is to exert effort to increase the number of priests so that there will be enough to serve all. This is the only acceptable solution.

### Why few Vocations?

Before we can study ways of promoting vocations to the priesthood, it is necessary that we know the reasons why there are few vocation in the first place.

In a survey conducted among the UST Seminarians the following causes were mentioned:

1. causes arising from the laity
  - a) religious ignorance
  - b) wrong ideas about the priesthood
  - c) poverty
2. causes from environment
  - a) materialism
  - b) sex glorification
  - c) progress of other professions
3. causes from the clergy — loss of appreciation for the priesthood by the laity
  - a) due to the mediocrity of priests
  - b) social insecurity of priests
  - c) defective training in the seminary
  - d) defective campaign for vocations by priests
  - e) defective relations among priests and with their superiors
  - f) the bad example of priests and seminarians

A detailed analysis of these causes may be the subject of another study. Here let it suffice to give general ideas of these causes.

The causes arising from the laity are due to factors such as the lack of religious information on the subject of vocations and the priesthood. This is a case of a vicious circle because this lack of information is due to the lack of priests also. We have the question of poverty when the family of the seminarian cannot give the financial support needed for the long studies of the candidate and there are no provisions to solve the difficulty.

The causes arising from the "present environment" are evident and lamented by all Catholics of good will. The sense of values has changed. The attitude to material things, to

wealth, is not the ideal one. Everywhere, the movies, many TV shows, and publications ooze with sex from their very pores. Then we have the admirable advance and progress of worldly sciences and professions due to emphasis in specialization which has definitely overshadowed the priesthood.

The causes of this lack of vocations coming from the priests and the priesthood are due to the defects of the priests themselves and defects in the system. For, indeed, will the people have a high regard for the priesthood when they hear preachers with eleven years or remote preparation in the Seminary speak from the pulpit in a manner that violates the most common rules of public speaking?

Will the people have respect for the priesthood when they see priests administer the Sacraments, especially Holy Mass, in unbecoming disarray, and in apparent ignorance of the "drama" value of the liturgical ceremonies, not to mention some moral defects which they abhor in their priests?

And speaking of the system, will anyone want to become a priest if he has seen one abandoned in his old age after dedicating the best years of his life in the service of his Church?

And will the people have respect for the priest and the priesthood if they see Seminarians no different from the hippie or the unrestrained, boisterous and uneducated bum who has never seen a book on good manners and right conduct?

These are the causes of the lack of vocations for the priesthood. Perhaps there are many more. They can be the subject of another study.

But our immediate task is to point out the remedy and to apply it as soon as possible. For if we do what is on our part, God will not fail to do His — to move the hearts of our parents and of our generous youth towards the Sacred Priesthood.

The Vatican II Decree on Priestly Formation says: "*The task of fostering vocations devolves on the whole Christian community, which should do so in the first place by living a fully*

*Christian way.*"<sup>1</sup> The various sectors in this "Christians community" are:

1. the youth
2. the family
3. the parish
4. the catholic associations
5. the schools
6. the priests and the bishops

### The Youth

The Vatican Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity says of the youth: "*Young persons exert very substantial influence on Modern society.* There has been a complete change in the circumstances of their lives, their mental attitudes, and their relationships with their own families. Frequently, they move too quickly into new social and economic conditions. While their social and even their political importance is growing from day to day, they seem to be unable to cope adequately with the new burdens imposed upon them.

*"Their heightened influence in society demands of them a proportionately active apostolate.* Happily, their natural qualities fit them for this activity. As they become more conscious of their own personality, they are impelled by a zest for life and abounding energies to assume their own responsibility, and they yearn to play their part in social and cultural life. If this zeal is imbued with the Spirit of Christ and is inspired by obedience to and love for the Shepherds of the Church, it can be expected to be very fruitful. They themselves ought to become the prime and direct apostles of youth, exercising their apostolate among themselves and through themselves and reckoning with the social environment in which they live.

*"Adults ought to engage in friendly discussion with young people so that both groups, overcoming the age barrier, can become better acquainted and can share the special benefits each generation has to offer the other.* Adults should attract

<sup>1</sup> Vat. II, Dec. on Priestly Formation, no. 2

young persons to the apostolate first by good example, and, if the opportunity presents itself, by offering them balanced advice and effective assistance. For their part, young people would be wise to cultivate towards adults respect and trust. Although the young are naturally attracted to new things, they should exercise an intelligent regard for worthwhile traditions."<sup>2</sup>

*From these words we can see that the Council is aware of two characteristics of the youth — idealism and ambition, which have to be directed to religion and to the priesthood if they are to share in the solution of the problem being discussed here.*

There must be a change in the attitude of the youth towards the priesthood. Our youth must have the high and proper ideal about the priesthood. They must know that as heaven is above the earth, as eternity is above time, as the soul is above the body, so the priesthood is far above other earthly professions and states of life. An earthly monarch can cast his subject into prison or release him therefrom. But he cannot penetrate into the sanctuary of the soul. The priest, on the other hand, can release the soul from the prison of sin and restore it back to the liberty of the sons of God.

The youth must revise their idea of the priest and come to realize that he is a *Shepherd* because he leads his flock into the green pastures of the Sacraments; he is a *Father* because he breaks the Bread of Life to his spiritual children; is a *judge* because he passes the sentence of pardon on self-accusing criminals; he is a *Physician* because he heals souls from the loathsome distempers of sin; he is the *Ambassador of God* because he is anointed to proclaim His glory on earth; like Christ, he is the *Mediator* between God and men, the spiritual leader reigning not over unwilling subjects, but over the hearts and affections of a people who pay him the tribute of their love which neither gold nor silver can buy.<sup>3</sup> Only when the youth has this idea of the priest will they become interested in the same.

They must also realize that the priesthood is not a crowded profession, that there is room for many more, and that it offers

<sup>2</sup> Vat. II, Dec. on Apostolate of the Laity, no. 12

<sup>3</sup> J. Cardinal Gibbons, *Faith of Our Fathers*

plenty of challenges to the reasonably ambitious — challenges to serve the people of God; challenges to greatness in the ecclesiastical sciences. For this reason there is a need for biographies of great priests who will serve to inspire our idealistic youth.

### **The Family**

Of families, Vatican II has this to say: "Outstanding contributions are made to this work (vocations) by families which are alive with the spirit of faith, love, and reverence and which serve as a kind of introductory seminary."

*Spirit of faith, love and reverence* — these are the qualities needed to make the family a preparatory seminary. In other words, the members, parents and children, must be all real members of the "people of God" so that in such wholesome atmosphere vocations may sprout. Candidates may come from broken homes, but they may be asking admission not because they found something (service of God), but perhaps because they are escaping from an intolerable situation. Such "vocations" are not good for the Church. Vocations of this kind which turn out well are rather exceptions to the rule. The good tree bears forth good fruit and the bad tree bears forth bad fruit. This is true with families and vocations to the priesthood. Besides, it is an admitted fact that the atmosphere in the home can influence the choice of the children's vocation in life.

It is also important that the parents have the right ideas about the priesthood and that they be generous to God and His Church. They must not be like Cain who offered to God what he did not like. Rather they must be like Abel who offered the fatted calf for which reason he was abundantly blessed.

### **The Parish Community**

The parish is the small community of the people of God. It can greatly influence the youth towards the priesthood if it has an environment that breathes with faith and charity. It must be the concern of the parishioners to create and foster such an environment. The laws of the land are good enough with regard to decency in movies and publications. If we have

movies and publications going around which are harmful to the morals of the people specially the youth, it is because of the apathy of the community. The community does not bother about the enforcement of the laws. The parish, therefore, must have vigilance permeated by the moral teachings of our holy religion for the sake of the children and the youth.

### **The Catholic Associations**

The associations can help much in this campaign for vocations. The members of the associations can be the parents themselves as in the case of the Catholic Women's League and the Holy Name Society, the Knights of Columbus or the Cursillo Movement. In their study clubs and regular meeting they get proper instructions on the subject which can guide them later in the education of their own children. It is indeed comforting to note how many vocations come from families whose parents are cursillistas. In fact, many cursillistas themselves and members of the Catholic Youth Movement have entered the Seminary.

Catholic lay leaders can also join civic organizations like the Lions Club, the Rotary, etc. There they can exercise their apostolate in creating goodwill towards the Church, by spreading the correct ideas about religion and the priesthood, and thus prepare the ground for vocations to blossom in the families of their fellow members.

### **The Schools**

The schools can be fertile grounds for priestly vocations if the school atmosphere and environment is christian. Teachers have a very wholesome influence on their students. The Catholic associations in the campus can do much good. There are many priests who, as students, were members of the Legion of Mary in their respective schools. Such practices as class Mass, occasional recollections, the Angelus at noon and in the evening over the school sound system are of great help. Catholic school administrators must be vigilant lest their roster of professors be infiltrated by teachers who have no respect for religion nor for the Church and who take advantage of their classes to sow seeds of doubt and unbelief.

### Priests and Vocations

Of priests Vatican II says: "To the greatest possible extent every priest should manifest the zeal of an apostle in fostering vocations. Let him attract the hearts of the young people to the priesthood *by his own humble and energetic life, joyfully pursued, and by love for his fellow priests and brotherly collaboration with them.*"<sup>4</sup>

Elsewhere we read: "This duty then (of promoting vocations) is a part of the priestly mission by which every priest is made a partaker in the care of the whole Church, so that workers will never be lacking for the people of God on earth. . . . In the first place, therefore, by the ministry of the Word and *by the personal testimony of a life radiant with the spirit of service and true pascal joy*, priests should have it dearly at heart to demonstrate to the faithful the excellence and necessity of the priesthood. . . . Vocational projects, therefore, whether diocesan or national are warmly recommended to priests. In sermons, in catechetical instructions, and in written articles, priests should eloquently set forth the needs of the Church both local and universal, putting into vivid light the nature and excellence of the priestly ministry."<sup>5</sup>

At the Philippine Seminary Rectors' Meeting on Feb. 17-18, 1971, the first item discussed was the problem of vocation recruitment and discernment. Two resolutions were presented on the matter, namely, the establishment of a National Commission on Vocations and that of an Diocesan Commission to take care of the work in the diocesan and parochial levels.

But during the discussions it was the consensus of the Seminary Rectors that vocation recruitment will be successful only if the community of the people of God has the "*proper image*" of the priesthood. Now, who can be most effective in projecting that proper image of the priesthood? Surely, neither the national nor the diocesan commission, but the priests themselves. The priests, therefore, play a very important role in the task of recruiting vocations.

<sup>4</sup> Vat. II, Dec. on Priestly Formation, no. 2

<sup>5</sup> Vat. II, Dec. on Ministry & Life of Priests, no. 11



### The Bishops and Vocations

Of Bishops, Vatican II says: "*It is the Bishop's duty to make his people active in promoting vocations and to see to it that all vocational resources and activities are closely coordinated.*"<sup>6</sup> "*As a father he should make every sacrifice to help those he judges to be called to the Lord's service.*"<sup>7</sup>

The Bishop should established vocations organizations in the diocese to which the combined effort of all the sectors of the Christian community must be coordinated by one diocesan center. In the Rector's conference mentioned above, it was pointed out that the Bishops have a very important role. For, indeed, without their support both commissions will fail. Besides, it is the Bishop who can most effectively encourage the priests to project the proper image of the priesthood.

The Bishop should establish Foundations to finance the Seminary and to help needy seminarians in a way that is not inconsistent with human dignity. A plan may be devised whereby the semiarian, after ordination, will contribute to that original foundation for the benefit of those who will follow him in the seminary. A Foundation, being permanent, will save succeeding Bishops from worries about the seminary.

In the Rectors' Meeting mentioned above the following resolutions about seminary financing were submitted to the Bishops' Conference.

1. The question of salaries of seminary personnel shall be left to the Episcopal Commission on Clergy Remuneration.
2. To have the seminary libraries adequate and up to date, it is proposed that the amount of ₱10,000.00 be appropriated for Major Seminaries, and ₱5,000.00 for Minor Seminaries.
3. Since the Seminaries operate on deficit:
  - a) the pension of seminarians shall be raised,
  - b) foundations must be established,
  - c) other sources must be tapped such as the "seminaristicum" and special fund raising campaigns for the purpose.

<sup>6</sup> Vat. II, Dec. on Priestly Formation, no. 2

<sup>7</sup> *op. cit.*, no. 2

4. We do not advise seminarians to have private benefactors. We rather recommend that all aids by private individuals be coursed through the Foundations or through the Seminary Superiors.
5. As a policy, the family of the seminarian shall defray the expenses of the son. In case this cannot be done,
  - a) let there be a "seminary educational loan" program,
  - b) let there be scholarships
  - c) let the seminarian be employed in suitable jobs

As can be seen from these resolutions and plans, adequate financing plays a tremendous role in the proper functioning of the seminary. Without money it will be very hard if not impossible to run a seminary. And so perhaps, we should have second thoughts with such proposals as the dispossession of the Church of her properties. In the olden times the Church could live on alms. But not anymore. Modern society demands that the Church finance herself the modern way — by investments and foundations.

Finally, since it is the Bishop's responsibility to make the final decision on whether a seminarian is to be ordained or not *he must firmly maintain the high standards of the priesthood "even when there exists a regrettable shortage of priests. For God will not allow His Church to lack ministers if worthy candidates are admitted while unsuited ones are speedily and paternally directed towards the assuming of the other tasks and are encouraged to take up the lay apostolate readily, in a consciousness of their Christian vocation."*<sup>8</sup>

#### **The Philippine Priests, Inc.**

It may be timely and proper to make special mention of the PPI and its role in the promotion of vocations. This is the first national organization of priests in the Philippines. In a way it corresponds to the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines. Now, if the Bishops united in an organization like the CEBP can accomplish great things, surely the Filipino priests united in the PPI can also carry out grandiose projects.

One such project may be the drafting of a "*Code of Ethics for Priests*". Codes of Ethics are found useful because they a)

<sup>8</sup> *op. cit.*, no. 6

define professional conduct for the new member and help keep the old member in line, b) they prevent control or interference by the government or by society through someone of its agencies, c) they develop higher standards of conduct. In short, a Code of Ethics improves the quality of the members as well as the services to the community.<sup>9</sup>

There are Codes of Ethics for Lawyers, Doctors, Nurses, Educators, etc. *As is the case with other professions, a Code of Ethics for Priests can greatly help solve the problem of vocations in both quantitative and qualitative aspects.*

### Proper Distribution of Priests

We have lengthily discussed the need for more vocations to the priesthood so as to have sufficient ministers to attend to the needs of the population. However, we discover that the situation concerning population and food production is also found in this problem of population and the number of priests.

There is panic about the disproportion between the world population and food production. But if we analyze the real situation we find that there is really enough food for all if only there is enough charity in those who have more food than necessary. In a particular country there may, indeed, be a frightening poverty. But in another there may also be affluence. And so if the affluent countries help the poor ones the problem would indeed be solved or at least minimized.

*Similarly, in a particular country or diocese there can be a frightening lack of priests while in another there may be more than what is needed. And so the solution would be the proper distribution of priests so that not one nation or diocese is overcrowded while another is left in dire need. It should not happen that while in some dioceses where there are too many priests, they lose courage for lack of work, in another where there are very few priests, they lose courage for over work.*

This problem was taken up at the First International Congress on the Distribution of Priests held in Malta on May 25, 1970.<sup>10</sup> It based its discussions on the Vatican II statement: "Priests belonging to dioceses which are rich in vocation should show themselves willing and ready, with the permission or the

<sup>9</sup> Titus, *Ethics For Today*

urging of their Bishop, to exercise their ministry in other regions, mission or activities which suffer from the shortage of priests."<sup>11</sup> And elsewhere, "... Bishops should strive to see to it that apt sacred ministers as well as assistants... be prepared for the missions and other areas suffering from a lack of clergy. As far as possible, they should also arrange for some of their own priest to go to such missions or dioceses to exercise the sacred ministry permanently or at least for a set period of time."<sup>12</sup>

No doubt this distribution of priests will involve many problems and difficulties. That is why Vatican II has set some rules to cover the same. But this has always been practiced in the Church under other names such as "reciprocal extra-diocesan work" "or in aid to needy dioceses."

The details of this project can be very well taken at the Episcopal Conference of the nation as well as at the Diocesan Senate of Priests. But one thing should be borne in mind: no priest, who is not fully prepared or lacks that sense of mental adaptation or, for that matter, anyone who got into trouble in his own diocese should be eligible to undertake work in another diocese, country or continent. Great care must be taken not to allow or give occasion to anyone who seeks evasion of some sort from his own place, nor to those who do not normally fulfill satisfactorily their duties inherent to their mission. *In other words, those sent to other dioceses should not be "problem-priests" whom their diocese would only be too glad to get rid of, but those who are filled with the Spirit of the Lord. We can learn from the example of the Religious Orders who sent their best qualified priests to the Philippines when the work was most difficult — during the first centuries of the Christianization of this country.*

<sup>10</sup> F. Galea, *Priests' Universal Apostolate*, Apollinaris 1970, Fasc. 2-3, p. 283

<sup>11</sup> Vat. II, *Ministry & Life of Priest*, no. 10

<sup>12</sup> Vat. II, *Bishops' office*, no. 6

"For God will not allow His Church to lack ministers if worthy candidates are admitted while unsuited ones are speedily and paternally directed towards the assuming of the other tasks and are encouraged to take up the lay apostolate readily, in a consciousness of their Christian vocation."