

THE PROBLEM OF VOCATIONS AND SOME PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS*

by Archbishop Carmine Rocco

The biggest problem we have in the Church, not only in the Philippines but also in the whole world around us, is the problem of vocations. At this moment, we all know the crisis of vocations in the world.

In the Philippines, we are in special situation. Until now the family — the Filipino family — is very good in general, above-average; and, from some studies made by Msgr. Frondosa and by the Apostolic Nunciature, we arrived at this conclusion: we may still increase the number of vocations in the Philippines.

IMPROVING

We are improving, but we must improve still more; otherwise, in 10 years, we shall have here in the Philippines this proportion: 1 priest for 30,000 people. Now, at this very moment, we have about 1 priest for 15-16,000 persons, I mean the priests who are working directly on the care of souls. So, I am now speaking very candidly to you and to the Bishops about this situation.

Today, we are in a very bad situation. Forgive me, but I have to speak to you very frankly at this moment: we are in a very bad situation; and we can foresee that in 10 years the situation will be much worse than today. So if we don't work efficiently for having many more vocations, as we should, in the Philippines, the fault is ours, mine and yours. If we cannot now resolve this problem, afterwards it will be very late and the fault will certainly be ours.

* This is the text of the address given by Archbishop Carmine Rocco, Apostolic Nuncio, at the close of the First National Convention on Vocations held (Jan. 17-19) at Our Lady of Guadalupe Minor Seminary in Makati, Rizal.

I can perhaps say that I have already visited all the dioceses in the Philippines. We have a population of about 38 million; and we scarcely have 4,000 priests many of whom are still working in schools with the Sisters and with their Bishops. So the problem is very deep and it is very urgent that we find some solutions; and the first solution is to have more vocations and good vocations. You know that at this time we have many, many priests going out, and many are dying. Thanks to God, it is not so in the Philippines! **And in the Church many are introducing changes with or without the authorization of the Holy Father and of their Bishops and major superiors.**

So what is the means that we can employ to give the Philippines more priests and good priests? How can we avoid drop-outs?

NECESSARY

Some are advocating the elimination of Minor Seminaries. I personally cannot accept that. I personally think that the **Minor Seminaries are absolutely necessary at this moment in the Philippines.** I know we have some parts of the Church where Minor Seminaries are no longer existing; but I can assure you this is absolutely another situation. In Italy, for example, the Minor Seminaries are now without students. The Bishops are very, very sad because they don't have priests for tomorrow. **They do not even have students for their Major Seminaries that in 4 or 5 years will also be empty.**

Now we need many more seminarians. As Msgr. Frondosa was saying, we have a 1-million population-increase in the Philippines every year; and that the normal proportion between the priests and faithful is one priest for every 12,000 people.

We need more than 1,000 priests more for the whole population. Many religious priests are going out and many are dying so we have to take care of the Philippines. No more priests come from abroad because of the same crisis.

In ten years we will lose about 500 priests more; we will need to replace them in proportion to our population increase and, if possible, to find some other solutions.

So your work, my dear Fathers, is very fundamental for the whole Church. In my trips I observe our people: some go to Church; some others do not go to Church and, in my opinion,

it is because they have not had sufficient formation. What will happen after some years especially when the old generation has died. Then the Filipino families will almost be completely lost especially in the rural areas. Your work is fundamental! Now what may we do to remedy such situation? Prayer and good example; for our young generations, for our seminarians and very deep spirituality: these are fundamental too in our seminaries!

GOOD SELECTION

I think some of you are rectors of seminaries. You would better make a good selection both in Minor Seminaries and Major Seminaries. We know that some of them are simply pushed by their families.

If you have some good seminarians, especially Major Seminarians, who cannot pay their fees, you are authorized to write to me and I will try to pay for them.

Furthermore, we should also always consider or distinguish quality from quantity. In other words, although we are in need of many priests, I think it is better to have less priests but very good ones, than many that are not so good. So quality is fundamental!

As I have told you, in the Philippines we have so many problems. Let us resolve all our problems: not only the material ones but also the spiritual. Let us solve them with the help of our laymen. They will help our seminaries by their example of truly Christian life. Vocations come from such families and from such laymen: so I would recommend to you to have a special care for our good lay people.

We also have to work in our schools. The schools today need our help; they need our direction; they need our support; and from the schools we may get the vocations for the clergy and for the religious life. Don't forget our Catholic schools and not only Catholic schools but all schools; after all, in our schools whether private or public, we also have Catholic students; and we must help them and teach them about vocation.

The laymen will also help with their prayers; they will give good example in their families; and may be our Lord will also give them the seed of vocation in their souls.

I also wish to tell you to put up Association of Padres de Familias or Fathers of Families: many vocations come from the families of good fathers.

TEACHERS' ROLE

The teachers in schools will also be of great help to get good vocations: they know their students better than we do!

I feel that the Philippine Republic and the Church in the Philippines have a big mission to accomplish. We can even say that we have enough vocations in the Philippines; but we would all like to see a little more than that. In all other parts of Asia, they are mostly Buddhists, Shintoists, and Maoists: ours is the only Catholic nation here. Hence, the Filipino people have a big responsibility: we have the responsibility to make our Lord Jesus Christ known to the other nations of Asia. We cannot expect to get many priests today from Europe and from the United States. They no longer have so many priests there; and they really can no longer send us any, because there are no more vocations, no more new missionaries. We should prepare good priests not only for our country, but to work as missionaries in foreign countries.

So your work will be very big: and I will inform the Holy Father about the importance of the Filipino Church.

Let us therefore consider it as our added responsibility to give or send Filipino priests that will work for the conversion of Asia.

After this Convention, let us start some other activities and means of promoting and recruiting vocations: let us work quietly but determinedly.

Let us work for the increase, both in quantity and quality, of priestly vocations in this country.

Let us make the proper selection under the guidance of our Bishops.

Yours is a very important task; and right now you may be working only for your dioceses and religious congregations; but very soon you will be working, as you all should, for the whole of Asia.