

The essence of the vocation: constitutive elements

Introduction

The divine origin of the vocation was considered in the former talk. We will talk about the essence of the vocation and its constitutive elements. In our *Vocations Directory*, after stating about the God' call, it follows the call of the church.

I'll divide the exposition in these parts:

1. Church's call.
2. Candidate's suitability.
3. How does God call?
4. Candidate's answer.
5. Perseverance in the path.

1. The church calls

Vocations Directory, 7: “«A divine vocation must receive confirmation, approval, and official direction from the supreme hierarchy to whom God himself entrusts the ruling of the Church» [Pius XII, *Sedes Sapientiae*, 13]. Therefore, in spite of the gifts that may adorn him and in spite of his right intention, no one can feel definitely called unless the Church calls him”.

John Paul II, *Message Vocations*, 1997, 4: “Each vocation is a personal and original event, but also a community and ecclesial event. No one is called to walk alone. Every vocation is raised by the Lord as a gift for the Christian community, which must be able to enrich itself with it. Therefore, a serious discernment is necessary, carried out by the person concerned together with those responsible for the community who accompany him on his vocational journey”.

Vocations Directory, 9: “The ecclesiastical authority not only has the right but also the **obligation** to use all necessary means to know the candidate's suitability and thus to be able to make a strict selection”.

Vocations Directory, 10: Pius XI teaches that “(the Superiors) must abide by the most reliable solution, which in such cases is best for the young men because it moves them away from a path that could lead them to eternal damnation”.

Vocations Directory, 11: “Before admission to holy orders (or temporary profession), a **rigorous** [sic!] selection must be made. If the Superiors have any real

doubt or if they lack knowledge about the candidate, the candidate must be told that he is seen as not having a vocation for our congregation. Later, selection for orders must be made on account of the reports, specifically for the diaconate and the priesthood”.

Spirituality Directory says (n. 90): “Good doctrine is not enough. We need “teachers” who are very spiritual and have a clear intention of making a **very rigorous selection of candidates**. This is extremely important in order to maintain the good spirit of the community. When choosing, it is better to err on the side of excess rather than deficiency”.

As you well know, IVE members make 5 temporal professions and the perpetual one. Const., 253. “The temporary profession will be made during the first four years for a period of one year each, and then for a two-year period”. Before each profession, the provincial superior will perform the own selection of the candidate (scrutiny).

2. Candidate’s suitability

The *Vocations Directory* speaks about the candidate suitability. It says, n. 8: “There is a third element that is an **effect** of God’s calling, as well as a **condition** that the Church calls “suitability”. The threefold suitability of the candidate must be: **physical** (and psychological), **intellectual** and **moral** (which implies having a right intention).⁴ If suitability is lacking, it is a sign that God is not calling and thus, that the Church should not call”.

Quote 4 says: “The most characteristic sign —indispensable to a priestly vocation— is “undoubtedly a righteous intention, that is, a clear and decisive desire to be totally consecrated to the Lord’s service,” Paul VI, *Summi Dei Verbum*, 23.

Then: a) physical or psychological; b) intellectual and c) moral (right intention).

Optatam Totius, 2: “The duty to foster vocations affects all Christian life... once the suitability is proven, divine Providence entrusts the legitimate ministers of the Church with calling the candidates who, with righteous intention and complete freedom, ask for such a high ministry and, after knowing them well, with consecrating them with the seal of the Holy Spirit to worship God and serve the Church” [*Vocations Directory*, 12].

3. How does God call? (Vocations, 13-25, chapter 3)

Vocation, 13: “Normally, God’s call is interior. It is God who, from within, inspires in souls a desire to embrace such a lofty and sublime state, as is consecrated life”.

1). First, God shows us the goodness of the religious life, the *Vocations Directory* says, 14. “When a man is called only from within, then a lengthy deliberation and the advice of many are necessary to learn whether the calling truly comes from divine inspiration”.

STm, *Vocations Directory*, 14: “The inner and unselfish desire to embrace the religious state is an authentic divine calling, since it is a desire that goes beyond nature. Therefore, it must be followed instantly ... Thus everyone, even now, must receive this advice as though they were hearing it from the Lord’s own lips. And whoever is guided by this advice may justifiably think that he has received an authentic religious vocation”.

STm: “Thus we see that this counsel [*if you would be perfect, go, sell all that you have, and give to the poor*] is no less to be followed by all men than if it had been given to each men individually by the own mouth of the Lord” (*Contra Retrahentes*, chapter 9).

2). An inner calling.

Vocations 15: “The impulse toward loftier things is characteristic of a divine calling. This is why the desire for religious life—being so sublime and elevated—can never come from the devil or from the flesh”.

3). Counsel / advice. Who should be consulted?

Vocations Directory, 19. In two cases: “1) with regard to the manner of entering and 2) with regard to any specific obstacle that may arise by accepting the religious state” (Vocations, 19). And it goes on: “In such cases, one must always consult prudent men who, with supernatural judgment (and not moved by passions), can assist in the discernment of God’s will. Relatives must never be consulted, for in this case they do not fall within the category of friends, but rather in that of enemies of vocations, according to the prophet Micah *a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household* (Mic 7:6), a phrase that our Lord quotes in Matthew 10:36 (*35 For I have*

come to set a man 'against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; 36 and one's enemies will be those of his household).

4. Candidate's answer

STm: "Definition" of vocation: "Si igitur voci conditoris exterius prolatae statim obediendum esset, ut dicunt, multo magis interiori locutioni, qua spiritus sanctus mentem immutat, resistere nullus debet, sed absque dubitatione obedire" (*Contra Retrahentem*, cap. 9). "If the external voice of the Creator must be obeyed, much more the interior voice, through which the Holy Spirit changes the mind [changes the heart of man, *Vocations Directory*, 17; mentem immutat], must not be resisted but obeyed without doubt".

STm, STh I, 2, introd.: "Because the chief aim of sacred doctrine –theology– is to teach the knowledge of God, not only as He is in Himself, but also as He is the beginning of things and their last end, and especially of rational creature, as is clear from what has been already said, therefore, in our endeavor to expound this science, we shall treat: (1) Of God; (2) of the rational creature's advance [motu in Deum, movement] towards God; (3) of Christ, who as man, is our way to God".

[Quia igitur principalis intentio huius sacrae doctrinae est Dei cognitionem tradere, et non solum secundum quod in se est, sed etiam secundum quod est principium rerum et finis earum, et specialiter rationalis creaturae, ut ex dictis est manifestum; ad huius doctrinae expositionem intendentes, primo tractabimus de Deo; secundo, de motu rationalis creaturae in Deum; tertio, de Christo, qui, secundum quod homo, via est nobis tendendi in Deum. Consideratio autem de Deo tripartita erit. Primo namque considerabimus ea quae ad essentiam divinam pertinent; secundo, ea quae pertinent ad distinctionem personarum; tertio, ea quae pertinent ad processum creaturarum ab ipso.]

This is important to consider the vocation as part of the movement toward God, or, in other words, *sub specie aeternitatis* –under the eternity consideration; from the perspective of the eternal; under the aspect of eternity–.

John Paul II wrote in the "*Messages World Day of Prayer for Vocations*" (1979-2005):

1979, 3. In the treasure of the Gospel there are preserved the beautiful responses given to the Lord when he called. The response of Peter and Andrew his brother: *Immediately they left their nets and followed him* (Mt 4:20). The response of Levi the publican: *And he left everything, and rose and followed him* (Lk 5:28). The response of

the Apostles: *Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life* (Jn 6:68). The response of Saul: *What shall I do, Lord?* (Acts 22:10). From the time when the Gospel was first proclaimed right up to our time, a very large number of men and women have given their personal response, their free and deliberate [conscious] response, to the call of Christ.

Then let us reflect together, in the light of faith. Our life is a gift from God [*sub specie aeternitatis*, it's ONE life]. We must do something good with it. There are many ways of living life well, using it for serving human and Christian ideals. My reason for speaking to you today about total dedication to God in the priesthood, in the religious life, in life as a missionary, is that Christ calls many from among you to this extraordinary adventure ... [encouraging, enthusiasm] He wants to speak to the people of today through your voice. He wants to consecrate the Eucharist and forgive sins through you. He wants to live with your heart. He wants to help with your hands. He wants to save through your efforts. Think about it carefully. The response that many of you can give is given personally to Christ, who is calling you to these great things ...

You will meet difficulties. Do you think perhaps that I do not know about them? I am telling you that love overcomes all difficulties. The true response to every vocation is the work of love.

1980. 4. Dear young people, on this occasion I want to extend a very special invitation to you: reflect. You understand that I am talking about very important things. It is about consecrating one's entire life to the service of God and the Church. It is a matter of consecrating it with sure faith, with mature conviction, with free decision, with generosity to all tests [infallible, foolproof generosity] and without repentance [regret, come back] ... You must penetrate with your thought, enlightened by faith, into the otherworldly dimension of the divine plan of universal salvation ... Open your heart to the joyful encounter with the risen Christ. Let the power of the Holy Spirit act in you and inspire you with the right choices in your life. Ask for advice.

Let us pray for the young people, to whom the Lord addresses his invitation to follow him more closely, so that they do not get distracted by the things of this world, and open their hearts to the friendly voice that calls them; so that they feel capable of dedicating themselves, for life, with an undivided heart to Christ, to the Church and to souls; so that they believe that grace gives them the necessary strength for such a donation and they see the beauty and greatness of priestly, religious and missionary life.

1981, 2. They [priests and consecrated persons] must educate others, especially the young, so that they discover the pleasure of serving the Church.

1982, 1. With these words [*I have come so that they may have life and have it abundantly* (Jn 10:10)] the Lord Jesus reveals to us the mystery of the Christian vocation and, in particular, the mystery of each vocation totally consecrated to God in the Church. Indeed, this consists in being called to offer one's life, so that others may have life and have it abundantly.

1984, 5. Today, dear young people, there are many voices that try to invade your conscience. How can you distinguish the Voice that gives true meaning to your life? Jesus makes himself felt in silence and in prayer. In this climate of intimacy with Him, each one of you will be able to perceive the invitation, sweet and at the same time firm, from the Good Shepherd who says: *Follow me!* (cf. Mk 2:14; Lk 5:27).

... Each call of Christ is a unique and unrepeatable love story.

What is your answer? Do you perhaps lack the courage to answer yes? Do you feel alone? Do you wonder if it is possible to commit oneself to the following of Jesus in a total way and for life?

If He calls you and draws you to Himself, rest assured that He will not abandon you. Many times we read in the Gospel: *Do not be afraid!* (cf. Mt 14:27; Mk 6:50); *I will not leave you orphans* (Jn 14:18). It means that He knows our difficulties and gives those called strength and courage to overcome them. Jesus is everything in our life; therefore, trust him!

1985, 3. Do they [the call to a life poor, chaste and obedient] seem very difficult because they involve resignations, sacrifices and even the surrender of life? Observe the readiness of the Apostles.

The Lord himself reveals the disproportion between the immense needs of universal salvation and the insufficient number of his collaborators. *The harvest is great but the workers are few* (Mt 9:37): he exclaimed seeing the crowds of all times tired and burdened like sheep without a shepherd. In my apostolic journeys to all parts of the earth, I see more and more the relevance of the Savior's lament.

Only the grace of God, requested by prayer, can fill this painful disproportion. Will you remain indifferent listening to the rising cry of humanity? I exhort you to pray and also to offer your persons, if the Owner of the harvest wishes to send you as workers to his harvest (cf. Mt 9:38).

Put yourself in the front row among those who are ready to leave their own land for a mission without borders. Through your persons Christ wants to reach the whole of humanity.

1992, 5. *But most of all I address the youth of today*, and I say to them: "Let yourselves be seduced by the Eternal One", repeating the words of the ancient prophet:

"You duped me [seduced me], O Lord ... you were too strong for me and you triumphed" (Jer 20:7).

Let yourselves be charmed by Christ, the Infinite who appeared among you in visible and imitable form. Let yourselves be attracted by his example, which has changed the history of the world and directed it toward an exhilarating goal. Let yourselves be loved by the love of the Holy Spirit, who wishes to turn you away from worldly things to begin in you the life of the new self, created in God's way in righteousness and true holiness (cf. Eph 4:24).

Fall in love with Jesus Christ, to live his very life, so that our world may have life in the light of the Gospel.

1993, 4. I turn to you especially, dear young people! Let yourselves be summoned [questioned, interpellated] by the love of Christ; recognize his voice which rings in the temple of your heart. Receive his luminous and penetrating glance which opens the paths of your life upon the horizons of the mission of the Church, today more than ever committed to teaching man his true being, his end, his destiny and to revealing to faithful souls the unspeakable riches of the love of Christ. Have no fear of the fact that the response he requires is radical, [radicalness of his exigence] because Jesus, who has first loved you, is ready to give what he asks of you. If he asks much it is because he knows that you can give much.

1996, 3. These particular vocations [to the priesthood, the religious life, to the work of the missions and to the contemplative life] call for respect and acceptance, for the full availability of bringing one's own existence into play, for an unremitting prayer of petition. They also presuppose a loving attention to and a wise and prudent discernment of the seeds of vocation present in the hearts of so many children and young people.

1997, 4: "Each vocation is a personal and original event, but also a community and ecclesial event. No one is called to walk alone. Every vocation is raised by the Lord as a gift for the Christian community, which must be able to enrich itself with it. Therefore, a serious discernment is necessary, carried out by the person concerned together with those responsible for the community who accompany him on his vocational journey".

2003, 5. The call of the Lord Jesus still resounds today: *If any one serves me, he must follow me* (Jn 12:26). Do not be afraid to accept this call. You will surely encounter difficulties and sacrifices, but you will be happy to serve, you will be witnesses of that

joy that the world cannot give. You will be living flames of an infinite and eternal love. You will know the spiritual riches of the priesthood, divine gift and mystery.

Characteristics of the response to a calling

Vocations Directory, 22: There are primarily three:

Promptness: “means quickly executing what God wishes, not postponing it ... without delay” (*Vocations Directory*, 23).

Generosity: “that is to say with perfection ... determination ... God wants a total commitment. He wants our unrestricted and undivided heart” (*Vocations Directory*, 24).

Heroism. “Is the disposition of those who truly wish to follow Christ, in such a way that, as St. Paul states, *they want to die to be with Christ* (Phil 1:23), and as St. Thomas states, do not back down in the face of difficult tasks that nevertheless lead to the glory of God and the salvation of souls” (*Vocations Directory*, 25).

5. Perseverance in the vocation

Vita Consecrata, 17. In response to this call and the interior attraction which accompanies it, those who are called entrust themselves to the love of God who wishes them to be exclusively at his service, and they consecrate themselves totally to him and to his plan of salvation (cf. *1 Cor* 7:32-34).

This is the meaning of the call to the consecrated life: it is an initiative coming wholly from the Father (cf. *Jn* 15:16), who asks those whom he has chosen to respond with complete and exclusive [= just one] devotion. The experience of this gracious love of God is so deep and so powerful that the person called senses the need to respond by unconditionally dedicating his or her life to God, consecrating to him all things **present and future**, and placing them in his hands. This is why, with Saint Thomas, we come to understand the identity of the consecrated person, beginning with his or her complete self-offering, as being comparable to a genuine holocaust.

Then, we don't know what will happen (superior, mission, country, culture, community, personal health, changes, assignments) but we have accepted the call and have decided freely to follow Our Lord. We have sign a blank cheque/check, and God writes the amount.

Perseverance is the grace of graces. Therefore, it's necessary to pray asking this grace, continuously. About the perseverance, our *Vocations Directory* says, in a theological point of view:

65. A vocation to the religious state may be considered as the precious pearl of Scripture that we must preserve with great fervor and the utmost care. St. Alphonsus set forth three ways to keep it: secrecy, prayer, and recollection.

66. [St Alphonsus Mary of Liguorio] We must bear in mind that vocations are preserved *only through prayer*. One who abandons prayer will certainly abandon his vocation. It is necessary to pray, and to pray much ... Also, a religious should receive communion frequently and meditate often about his vocation, considering how great a favor God has granted to him by calling him to Himself.

67. [St Alphonsus Mary of Liguorio] Thirdly, *recollection* is indispensable, and this cannot be achieved without distancing oneself from worldly conversations. What is required to lose a vocation in the world? Nothing. All it takes is a day of recreation, a saying from a friend, a scarcely mortified passion, an interest, a fearful thought, an unsuppressed quarrel. One who does not abandon these pastimes should be convinced that he undoubtedly will lose the vocation.

We should know how to ask for the grace of perseverance in a vocation and how to care for it daily and never abandon the means that are within our reach to preserve this treasure from the soul's enemies.

St Thomas Aquinas says, I-II, 109, 10. Perseverance [third meaning] is called the abiding in good to the end of life. And in order to have this perseverance man does not, indeed, need another habitual grace, but he needs the Divine assistance guiding and guarding him against the attacks of the passions, as appears from the preceding article. And hence after anyone has been justified by grace, he still needs to beseech God for the aforesaid gift of perseverance, that he may be kept from evil till the end of his life. For to many grace is given to whom perseverance in grace is not given.

Our Lady

St John Bosco, quoted by Fr Fuentes, *who you will forgive*: With those for whom the priestly ministry seemed to be an unbearable burden, Don Bosco showed great confidence. The *Biographical Memoirs* of him say: "He felt great sorrow when he met a priest who did not know how to respect his condition and, at times, even shed tears. He would have wanted to hide that wretch from everyone's eyes. Many were recommended to him by the Bishops themselves or the Capitular Vicars. He, with all charity and deep respect, managed to rehabilitate them, encouraging them, holding long conversations with them and even helping them materially. His zeal was amply rewarded, and he was almost able to restore everyone to priestly honor before God, before men, and before his own superiors. And turn back on the right track, they persevered in the faithful fulfillment of their religious duties. He even converted some

of the fallen into heresy, inducing them to an edifying retraction. We could cite examples and names that we omit out of finesse. The most difficult thing was keeping out of the occasion those whom the ecclesiastical authority had punished for intemperance. If Don Bosco met them, when they had relapsed into some excess, he tried not to humiliate them; he looked at them with such an air of kindness and compassion that the poor little ones felt touched at heart. He never uttered a word that could tarnish the sacred character with which they were invested.

By counseling these poor wayward ones, who perhaps objected to their long-standing customs, the relationships contracted, the dreaded dangers and revenges, the lack of vocation, he knew how to show how easily it was possible, through the grace of God, to overcome all difficulties and difficulties. He exhorted to overcome all fear with the thought of the goodness and protection of Mary, recalling the words of Don Joseph Cafasso: «Even if by chance a priest would have entered the sanctuary without a vocation, if he effectively enters and becomes a fervent son of Mary, you can be sure that this mother will obtain from her Son [Jesus], out of goodness and mercy, what he did not have as a vocation, that is, the spirit of his state, the necessary gifts and a complex of graces that will make him a true minister of Lord».

And as for the future, if he saw them distrustful of reaching their eternal salvation or of recovering the lost prestige before the people, he [Don Bosco] added: “Love, serve and honor Mary; make it known, loved and honored by others. Not only will not a son who has honored her be lost, but he can aspire to a particular crown [of glory]”.

[Del libro del P. Fuentes: Con aquellos para quienes el ministerio sacerdotal parecía ser una carga insoportable, Don Bosco, mostraba una gran confianza. Dicen sus *Memorias Biográficas*: “Sentía gran pena cuando se encontraba con un sacerdote que no sabía respetar su condición y, a veces, hasta llegó a verter lágrimas. Hubiera querido esconder a aquel desgraciado a los ojos de todos. Muchos se los recomendaron los propios Obispos o los Vicarios Capitulares. El, con toda caridad y profundo respeto, se las arreglaba para rehabilitarlos, animándolos, sosteniendo con ellos largas conversaciones y hasta ayudándolos materialmente. Su celo fue ampliamente recompensado, y casi pudo devolver a todos al honor sacerdotal ante Dios, ante los hombres y ante sus propios superiores. Y repuestos en el buen camino, perseveraron en el fiel cumplimiento de sus deberes religiosos. Convirtió, incluso, a algunos caídos en la herejía, induciéndolos a una edificante retractación. Podríamos citar ejemplos y nombres que omitimos por delicadeza. Lo más difícil era mantener alejados de la ocasión a aquéllos a quienes la autoridad eclesiástica había castigado por intemperancia. Si don Bosco se los encontraba, cuando habían recaído en algún exceso, procuraba no humillarlos; los miraba con un aire tal de bondad y compasión, que los pobrecitos se

sentían tocados en el corazón. No soltaba jamás una palabra, que pudiera mancillar el carácter sagrado de que estaban investidos.

Al aconsejar a estos pobres descarriados, que quizás le objetaban sus inveteradas costumbres, las relaciones contraídas, los temidos peligros y venganzas, la falta de vocación, sabía demostrar con qué facilidad se podía, mediante la gracia de Dios, superar todas las dificultades y los exhortaba a vencer todo temor con el pensamiento de la bondad y protección de María, recordando las palabras de don José Cafasso: «*Aun cuanto por casualidad un sacerdote hubiese entrado en el santuario sin vocación, si se mete efectivamente y se convierte en un hijo fervoroso de María, puede estar seguro de que esta madre le conseguirá de su Hijo, por bondad y misericordia, lo que no tenía por vocación, o sea el espíritu de su estado, las dotes necesarias y un complejo de gracias que lo harán un verdadero ministro de Señor*».

Y en cuanto al porvenir, si los veía desconfiados de alcanzar su eterna salvación o de recuperar el prestigio perdido ante el pueblo, añadía: *Amad, servid y honrad a María; hacedla conocer, amar y honrar por los demás. No sólo no se perderá un hijo que la haya honrado, sino que puede aspirar a una singular corona*”].

Some objections (sly objections)

a). First objection. To delay. (*Vocations Directory*, 29) “It is said that *Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light* (2 Cor 11:14) and thus he tricks the unwary by an appearance of good”. For this reason, it’s important the counsel of an experienced person.

b). Other objection. One must examine what might have a bad outcome, carefully asking for advice; one cannot enter into religion with the **danger of apostatizing or falling into despair**.

Vocations Directory, 30: “Other times, the endeavor itself is safe, but it has bad results because a man has changed its purpose. But the fact that some men who have become religious, have changed for the worse and have apostatized, is no reason for delaying to enter religious life, on the plea of requiring longer deliberation. The same pretext might be used as an excuse for not embracing the Faith, or approaching the Sacraments, for as we are told by St. Peter (2 Pt 2:21), *it had been better for them not to have known the way of justice, than after they had known it, to turn back*. If we follow this reasoning we would not perform works of justice for we read in *Ecclesiasticus that*

the Lord makes ready the sword, for the man who passes from justice to sin. (26:27, Vul.)

... Let us add other similar propositions: “if he who enters in religion leaves, the initial intention did not come from God,” or also “the zeal of those who lead him to become a religious was not inspired by God.” St. Thomas counters: “God’s plans are never destroyed, according to Isaiah, *My counsel shall stand, and all my will shall be done* (Is 46:10)” “... God, in his inalterable plans, inspires in some the desire to enter in religion, but he does not grant them the grace to persevere in it.”

c). Other objection. To have an extraordinary certainty (of the spiritual perfection). (*Vocations Directory*, 32)

“Some fear that they might not achieve perfection once they enter religious life”.

It could be the “certainty” to persevere. The confidence must be put in God, who helps everyone to achieve the goal.

d). Other objection. From relatives and friends.

They don’t judge supernaturally the vocation but according to the feeling or pain that produces the separation of anyone. Other times it is the idea of losing the son or daughter.

e). Other objections (*Vocations Directory*, 42-64). Sometimes, we think that we are not worthy of being a priest. Or I lack the qualities, charm, conviction. I am not good enough for the apostolate. I have been a great sinner. If currently all clergy and religious are lax, why become a priest. As a committed lay person I can do much more. But God can be served anywhere. I have a girlfriend, and I love her. I want to be completely sure.