

THE NATURE OF SACERDOTAL AND RELIGIOUS VOCATION

The Modern Dispute and the Opinions Involved

In the question of sacerdotal and religious vocation all authors are agreed that a candidate must be called by God to be admitted lawfully into a seminary or religious institute. But how God calls, and how it can be known whom He has called . . . questions which touch upon the very essence of a divine vocation . . . receive widely differing responses. The contemporary problem of religious and sacerdotal vocation, accordingly, is not concerned with the existence, nor even with the necessity, of a divine invitation, but with its essence. Simply enough, unanimity is present in regard to the fact: a divine vocation is necessary for the priesthood and religious life; diversity of opinion arises in regard to the nature of these vocations.

The opinions, of course, are many and varied. Solely to list them would be too time-consuming for the scope of this study. Accordingly, we shall consider only the extreme positions which are involved in the contemporary problem. Are religious and sacerdotal vocation something internal, i.e., a special grace infused into the soul of the candidate by God; or is the reality involved something external to the candidate, an invitation of legitimate authority to embrace the religious state or sacerdotal office?

There are a few who believe that this phrasing of the problem is no longer valid. For them vocation is no longer a problem to be solved. As they see it, the question has been definitively settled by the decree of the Commission of Cardinals of July, 1912, singling out for special commendation three propositions contained in Canon Lahitton's book, *La Vocation Sacerdotale*:

- (1) No one ever has any right to ordination antecedently to the free choice of the Bishop.
- (2) The requisite on the part of the one to be ordained, which is called sacerdotal vocation, does not at all consist, at least necessarily and ordinarily, in a certain internal attraction

of the subject or in inducements of the Holy Spirit to enter the priesthood;

- (3) On the contrary, in order that one may be rightly called by the Bishop, nothing further is necessary in the one to be ordained than the right intention together with suitability. . . .¹

Canon Lahitton himself and a few other authors have interpreted this decree as a condemnation of any internal vocation to the priesthood or religious state antecedent to what may be called the external, ecclesiastical vocation of the ordaining bishop or legitimate religious superior.² Such an interpretation, of course, goes obviously beyond the intent and the clear sense of the words themselves. Critical authors are agreed that the theory proposed by Canon Lahitton is not at all approved nor is the internal vocation theory condemned.³ In fact the Canon himself admitted the existence of an internal vocation but dismissed it as being useless from a practical point of view and requiring far too subtle consideration for the apparently busy theologian.⁴ The internal vocation is too much

¹ *A.A.S.*, V (1913), p. 290.

² Cf. J. Lahitton, *La Vocation Sacerdotale*, Nouvelle Edit. (Paris: 1913), pp. 19-20; J. Blowick, *Priestly Vocation* (Dublin: 1932), pp. 114-116; A. Vermeersch, *Epitome Juris Canonici*, II, n. 242, s. 3; *Religious and Ecclesiastical Vocation*, trans. by J. G. Kempf (St. Louis: 1925), p. 69; Wm. J. Feree, "Church's Need of Vocations," *The Catholic Education Bulletin*, Vol. XLI (August: 1944), p. 298; A. F. Coogan, "The Priest and the Fostering of Vocations," *The Missionary Union of the Clergy Bulletin* (Sept., 1945), p. 59.

³ F. Cappello, *Tractatus Canonici-Moralis de Sacramentis*, II, Pars III, n. 374; A. Mulders, *La Vocation au Sacerdoce* (Bruges: 1925), pp. 66 ff.; A. Carr, *Vocation to the Priesthood: Its Canonical Concept* (Washington: 1950), p. 27; N. McFarland, *Religious Vocation: Its Juridic Concept* (Washington: 1953), pp. 34 ff.; E. Wuenschel, "The Traditional Notion of Vocation," *The Missionary Union of the Clergy Bulletin* (March: 1945), pp. 28-29.

⁴ Cf. J. Lahitton, *op. cit.*, pp. 96 ff. It is noteworthy that the grace the Canon dismissed as useless is "a general principle which is found in every series of graces, by means of which God leads a creature to any sort of supernatural goal" (p. 109). We may well agree with Lahitton that such a grace, if it exists, would be useless. Father Vermeersch as early as 1903, the year of the first Paris edition of his work, had come to the same practical conclusion. In the early part of his work he considers the reality of internal grace, but later identifies the totality of vocation with the Bishop's summons to Orders. Cf. *Epitome Juris Canonici*, II, n. 242; *Religious and Ecclesiastical Vocation*, p. 69; H. Davis in his "Religious Vocation," *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record*,

a part of the constant tradition of the Church, before and after the decree, to even suggest seriously that the Commission was questioning the reality of this vocation.⁵

What did the Commission condemn? Briefly, the excesses of what may be called the *Attraction Theory* as it was delineated by Canon Lahitton. It is necessary to emphasize that the condemned elements were those which were presented by Canon Lahitton. They were not the elements as presented by the authors criticized by the Canon. Indeed, those who have investigated the matter have discovered that the Canon has not given a thoroughly accurate statement of this theory as proposed by the various writers he has attacked.⁶ Nor has any author been found who has held the theory in its totality as presented by the Canon. Accordingly, that the decree of the Cardinals may be intelligible we shall incorporate into the description of the *Attraction Theory* the elements presented by Canon Lahitton.

The proponents of this theory maintained that the vocation to the priesthood or religious state is a divine call administered immediately to a man's soul, urging him instinctively, or perhaps even

Vol. XII (1918) also treats of religious vocation as a general grace to be channeled off into religious life by the subject (p. 232) and ends by citing Vermeersch and Lahitton with approval.

⁵ As originally planned this study was to devote a major section to the consideration of the teaching of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, to the various decrees and papal pronouncements, to the teaching of Theologians and Canonists before and after the decree of the Commission of Cardinals, etc. However, the evidence for the necessity and existence of an internal vocation to the religious life and the priesthood is so overwhelming as to prohibit the execution of the plan at the present time. The following authors have collected a proportionately small cross section of the available positive evidence: L. Sempé, "Vocation," *Dict. Theol. Cath.*, Vol. XV-2, col. 3149-3174; Carr, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-29; McFarland, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-63. The Apostolic Constitution, *Sedes Sapientiae*, gives preeminent place to the internal vocation. ". . . the foundation of the whole religious, sacerdotal, and apostolic life—a foundation which is known as divine vocation—is, as it were, essentially made up of a twofold element: the one divine, the other ecclesiastical. Now in regard to the first part, the call of God to enter upon a religious or priestly state must be considered so necessary that if it is lacking the very foundation on which the edifice rests must be called wanting." English translation by the Cath. Univ. Press, p. 4.

⁶ Cf. A. Mulders, *op. cit.*, pp. 54 ff.; Hurtaud, O.P., *La Vocation au Sacerdoce*, Paris: 1911, p. 9, p. 441.

sensibly, as it were, by a secret voice. Since young people may be deceived in feeling that this secret voice is whispering in their souls, hence there are needed certain signs through which they can determine whether this voice is real or imaginary. Holding first place among these signs is a peculiar, supernatural, mystical attraction, a strong and permanent inclination, or a sweet impulse which is felt in the profound depths of the soul and leaves little or no doubt that one has been called by God.⁷ Unless one is conscious of this divine impulse, he may not consider becoming a candidate for the religious or clerical state. On the other hand, one who has been moved this way and enlightened divinely, obtains a right to ordination or admittance to a religious institute. Such is the substance of the attraction theory as presented to the Commission of Cardinals in the works of Canon Lahitton.

As is obvious from perusal of the terms of the decree, there is no right to ordination resulting from the fundamental postulate of the attraction theory, the mystical inclination or divine enticement. In regard to this interior attraction itself, the Commission has determined that it does not constitute, at least necessarily and ordinarily, sacerdotal vocation. We have here a balanced judgment that condemns the excesses of the attraction theory. Nothing is said about the existence or non-existence of an internal vocation. Nor is anything said to limit sacerdotal vocation to the external call of the ordaining bishop, the theory proposed by Lahitton and Vermeersch. This theory depends upon its own merits for any approval that can be given to it. In the light of the constant tradition from

⁷ This theory had its beginnings in the troubled days in France during the post-Reformation period. Some moralists and canonists to establish norms for the selection of suitable candidates for the priesthood undertook an intensive study of clerical vocation. The first of these authors was Hallier (1595-1659) who spoke of vocation as an invitation of God manifested by a secret voice. "*De Sacris Electionibus et Ordinationibus ex Antiquo et Novo Ecclesiae Usu*," in J. P. Migne, *Theologiae Cursus Completus*, V. XXIV, Paris: 1860, Pars I, sec. I, cap. II, n. 15. Other authors usually cited, as favorers of the attraction theory include: Olier, *Traité des Saintes ordres* in Migne, *Oeuvres Completes*, Paris: 1856; Abelly, *Sacerdos Christianus*, Vesontione: 1838; Branchereau, *De la Vocatione Sacerdotale*, Paris: 1896. For a list of authors who applied the attraction theory to Religious vocation cf. Farrell, *The Theology of Religious Vocation*, St. Louis: 1951, pp. 10 ff.

the earliest times to the latest pronouncements of the Holy See on the subject of sacerdotal and religious vocation, the external theory is of dubious authority and questionable merit. There is an element of truth contained in it, the necessity of considering the juridical or ecclesiastical vocation as contributing to the integrity of divine vocation. Modern studies on the subject⁸ have happily given to this external element its full value as constituting divine vocation in its integrity, a point which need not detain us here. The controversy does not at all detract from the necessity and the reality of an internal divine vocation.

THE NATURE OF RELIGIOUS AND SACERDOTAL VOCATION

At the outset of the investigation into the nature of sacerdotal and religious vocation, it is necessary first of all, to recognize a twofold sense of the word vocation: active and passive. In the active sense, vocation refers to the action of God which is identical with His Substance. Obviously, we encounter no problem in determining the nature of vocation in this sense; equally obvious, too, is the fact that such a determination of the nature of this divine reality throws little light upon the practical problems involved. Vocation in its passive sense; as it is received in man and expressed in his own human acts, is the reality that must be considered.

Secondly, as received in man, vocations will differ, just as every effect of grace affords an opportunity to distinguish the graces themselves. In the passive sense, therefore, religious and sacerdotal vocation are distinct realities demanding distinct consideration. Accordingly, separate treatment must be given to both vocations; which proposes a problem of method of treatment. Sheer expediency has dictated the method adopted in this study. Religious vocation has received more detailed treatment in the classical authors. So we shall start with religious vocation and later and more briefly apply to sacerdotal vocation the elements which seem to be common to both. Finally, the difference will be noted in an attempt to determine the specifying element of sacerdotal vocation.

⁸ Cf. A. Carr, *op. cit.*, Part II; McFarland, *op. cit.*, c. V.

A final word of explanation in regard to the method adopted seems advisable. Examination of the works of St. Thomas and St. Alphonsus reveals that the former has treated extensively the matter of religious vocation; the latter, of sacerdotal vocation. We have used them as the fundamental theological authorities in the respective sections. Their own authority was one factor in selecting them as the sources of the doctrine to be proposed. Moreover, as is obvious from their own works, they are crystallizing a corpus of doctrine based upon the evidence of Sacred Scriptures, the teaching of the Fathers, and the practice of the Church. In the absence of any positive theological considerations in the present study, the authority of these two Doctors of the Church as faithful interpreters of tradition, it is hoped, will supply, and adequately so.

THE NATURE OF RELIGIOUS VOCATION

It is in one of his polemical works, *Contra pestiferam doctrinam retrahentium homines a religionis ingressu*, that the foundations of St. Thomas' teaching on the nature of religious vocation are laid. The broad and general outlines of his doctrine are sketched in his consideration of the need of taking counsel before entering into a novitiate. Here the Angelic Doctor distinguishes clearly between an external and internal vocation. The first external vocations were given by Christ to His Apostles, and these vocations still re-echo in the world. For, as Christ said to His Apostles: "What I say to you I say to all." Accordingly St. Thomas maintains that a general or universal, external vocation to the religious state is extended to all Catholics in every age; because "we must accept the words of Christ which are related in Sacred Scripture, as if we were hearing them from the mouth of the Lord Himself."

As the terminology suggests, this external vocation is distinguished from an internal vocation, in which God acts interiorly upon the rational faculties of man. This vocation is described in various ways depending upon the text of Scripture or the writings of the Fathers cited by St. Thomas as an internal locution by which the Holy Ghost persuades the mind, an internal inspiration, an impetus of grace, an illumination of reason, an internal instinct.

The phrases themselves and the context indicate that here internal vocation is taken in the active sense of a divine movement in the soul and faculties of man. This is vocation viewed from God's side. What is to be said of it on man's side? It is an act involving the rational faculties of man, an act of intention, "*propositum religionis assumendae*." In the doctrine of St. Thomas⁹ this internal vocation is of paramount importance. In fact, for him it is the only efficacious vocation. Of itself the external vocation has no efficacy save that of grasping the attention of the mind; it is powerless to bring a man to follow Christ. The barriers of the mind and will can be cleared only by an internal divine call. Hence no one will respond truly to an external vocation if he is not equipped with the necessary interior dispositions of mind and will effected by the grace of God.

This is the explicit teaching of St. Thomas on the nature of religious vocation. Obviously it is not a fully developed doctrine. That would hardly be necessary to carry on the dispute with his contemporaries who readily accepted his definitions of religious vocation and differed from him only in regard to a few practices. What he has given us, however, a nominal definition of religious vocation on the part of man and a judgment in regard to its efficacy in relation to external vocation, offers a solid foundation for the elaboration of a real definition of the nature of religious vocation.

First of all it is necessary to determine accurately what the nominal definition signifies. *Propositum religionis assumendae* indicates both the distinction of religious vocations (*propositum*) from its goal, i.e., the embracing of the religious state, and the proper mode of defining religious vocation. Vocation must be accepted as a motion to a goal, from which it is distinct, and in terms of which it must be defined, for this is proper to all motions. Since the religious state is embraced with the act of pronouncing the vows of religion, vocation's proper and perfecting goal to which it must be proportioned is the act of religion involved in pronouncing the vows.

Secondly, attention must be focussed on *propositum*, the act in man which is expressive of religious vocation. The term is indica-

⁹ Chapters 9 and 10 include much of St. Thomas' teaching on religious vocation. Further references are to this work.

tive of the act of will known as decision or command with the nuance of firmness. This act of the will must be distinguished from simple volition, i.e., mere complacency in the recognition of the religious state as a good and holy thing. This latter is not a religious vocation. It is simply a spontaneous, automatic movement of the will necessarily following upon the recognition of the greatness of the religious life. As an attraction to the religious life, it may serve as the seed of vocation. It is not itself vocation, nor even a sufficient sign of the presence of a vocation. True religious vocation will be satisfied with nothing less than an actual intention, the act of willing the goal to be attained by the use of the proper means, perfected and completed by consent and especially by election of the religious life as a means to attain the end of the Christian life. Concretely then, religious vocation will be expressed as a decision to do the things necessary to be a religious; there may be, of course, some vagueness about what exactly must be done but the general willingness to take these means is present and is characterized by firmness. The context of St. Thomas, considering the matter in terms of the virtue of prudence which is obviously involved in this matter, suggests that the act of religious vocation, the *propositum*, is the act of command.¹⁰

St. Thomas' nominal definition has proved itself most fruitful as a starting point in the inquisition of a real definition. His formula is indicative of the method to be used in defining vocation, the basic analogy of motion to a goal to be employed, and the generic character of this motion as an act of decision or command. He has insisted, too, upon the supernatural character of this decision, for it is the expression in man of the influence of divine grace upon his faculties. A supernatural entity, a grace of God, religious vocation must be; for no one can aspire to a supernatural goal without the influence of the supernatural principles of divine grace. The precise problem then is clear. The elaboration of a real definition of religious vocation involves the determination of the nature of the grace or graces required to product in man the firm decision to embrace the religious state.

¹⁰ For the sake of variety we have used interchangeably command, decision, intention. Strictly, the proper designation seems to be command.

It is extremely tempting to settle upon an actual grace as constituting the nature of religious vocation. Then it would be possible for us to leave the matter shrouded in complete mystery. An actual grace is the movement of God, and since God's movements are identical with His unknowable substance, we can hardly be blamed for not knowing too much about religious vocation. Knowing little or nothing about religious vocation, we must work in the dark in counseling. Should we make a mistake, even a costly one, we may readily excuse ourselves, for after all we are confronted with the mystery of God's grace. Most assuredly there is a mystery involved in divine vocation, but it is the same mystery involved in every attempt to know something about the nature of divine grace. Sooner or later we must come face to face with an impenetrable barrier. But why so soon? Why must the mystery begin here exactly at the point where the least can be known about this mysterious element? Why can we not proceed farther along the way, using the analogies employed in the theology of grace to come to a more fruitful understanding of the mystery of religious vocation?

Certainly the realities of the question demand that we go beyond an actual grace. An actual grace is essentially transitory, coming and going instantaneously. On the other hand, a permanent tractable foundation is required for religious vocation. Permanency is required, for the ultimate end of religious vocation is the embracing of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience. In other words, divine vocation is perfected and completed when the candidate makes profession of vows, a goal attained after the completion of the canonical novitiate. Since the vocation must be accepted as a human motion, a motion of will and intellect toward the goal, something may well be expected to endure to keep the candidate moving toward that goal. Indeed, it is this note of permanency that guarantees the tractable character of vocation. We speak of cultivating religious vocation; Pope Leo XIII has spoken of God sowing the seed of vocation in the generous hearts of young men. Are these meaningless metaphors? Or are they efforts to express in an intelligible fashion the enduring character of religious vocation? It seems that unless permanency must be attributed to

vocation in some way, the candidate can hardly be said to move toward the goal, and no one can truly be said to cultivate vocations.

Most likely, then, we must exclude an actual grace as the entity that constitutes religious vocation, for it lacks the permanency required for vocation. This permanency serves also as a signpost indicating that the nature of this divine vocation will be found among the virtues, for permanency is an attribute of virtue. Fortunately, more than a signpost is available to direct the course of the investigation and to establish on certain grounds what has already been seen to enjoy some probability; vocation to religious life involves one of the virtues. Nothing less than a principle incorporating into a terse formula the fundamental notion of a virtue limits the search to the realm of these supernatural habits: "Wherever is found a good human act, it must correspond to some human virtue." Simply enough, virtues are the proximate principles of good human acts both in the natural and in the supernatural order. Since the intention to embrace the religious state, religious vocation as it is expressed in man, is definitely a good act, it must have as its principle a virtue. Moreover, since the object of this act is a supernatural one, the virtue must be one of the infused virtues. Generically, therefore, religious vocation consists in an infused virtue capable of producing the intention of entering the religious life.

The work of singling out this virtue by a process of exclusion may be facilitated, indeed completely omitted, in this case. On the basis of the common principle that means must be proportioned to ends, the field is narrowed down to the virtue of religion. The end of a religious vocation is an act of the virtue of religion; it is most probable therefore that the means, religious vocation, must itself be an act of the virtue of religion. The certain establishment of this fact requires simply the examination of the nominal definition of religious vocation to determine whether or not the reality signified by this formula preserves the formal *ratio* of the virtue of religion. *Propositum religionis*, the firm intention to embrace the religious state, is the accepted nominal definition. Mere substitution of the generic notion of the religious state as a way of serving God shows that the essential notion of religion as service or cult of God must enter into the definition of religious vocation. Again, the fact that

the virtue of religion is located in the will whose elicited act is intention confirms the fact that religious vocation which is expressed in man as an intention must be an act of will perfected by the virtue that is concerned with the service of God. Hence religious vocation must be an act of the virtue of religion.

Specifically, religious vocation is an act of devotion, the primary and universal act of the virtue of religion. By the act of devotion man offers himself wholly and entirely to God to serve Him. This it accomplishes by promptly dedicating to God the will, the faculty that can dedicate everything else. It alone among the acts of the virtue of religion has the nuance of total dedication; whereas the other acts dedicate a particular faculty to God or offer definite things to Him. Thus prayer offers the intellect; adoration, the service of the body, sacrifice, external things, and so on. Each act has its own small segment of reality for its proper matter. Devotion offers man himself to the service of God. It alone, therefore, among the acts of religion can meet the demands of religious vocation's intention to dedicate oneself wholly and entirely to the service of God by professing the evangelical counsels.

With the elaboration of the fact that religious vocation is essentially an act of devotion, the process of defining by way of successive divisions of subordinate *genera* has reached its term. No further qualitative distinctions which are the basis of specific distinctions may be made. Such distinctions would have to be found in the formal object of religion and its act devotion, which in its simplicity cannot be qualified without changing it and thereby demanding a change in the virtue and in the act it specifies. Therefore the conclusion of this method of defining establishes religious vocation as essentially an act of devotion.

Yet we cannot stop here. Devotion is the universal act of religion, inseparable from all the acts of this virtue. Accordingly, religious vocation must be distinguished in some way from all the other acts of the virtue of religion which include devotion and from simple acts of devotion itself. Surely there is a world of difference between being devout in a single act that is accomplished in a comparatively brief time and devotedly pledging oneself to a prompt service of

God in all the acts of one's life. Accordingly some basis of distinction must be uncovered.

Qualitative distinctions in regard to the formal object of the virtue of religion, as has been indicated, are impossible; for these distinctions change the object and consequently the virtues and acts specified. Likewise to assign a numerical distinction by reason of time and circumstances alone would be an *evasio elenchi*, for being devoted in a single act differs radically from being devoted for one's whole life. A quantitative notion, that of degrees of intensity, offers a valid basis for distinguishing religious vocation from the ordinary acts of devotion. On this basis the conclusion of this investigation into the nature of religious vocation establishes religious vocation as an intense act of devotion, distinguishable from other acts of devotion by reason of its intensity. All of which requires considerable explanation.

"Intense act" as used here does not have the same signification this phrase and its equivalent "more fervent" have, when they are used to describe the act disposing to an increase of charity and the other virtues. This latter signification would demand that an increase of charity accompany the act of devotion which is religious vocation. Although this remains in the realm of the possible, still there is no necessary connection between divine vocation and an increase of charity, just as there is no necessary relation between devotion and increased charity. In fact, although devotion can dispose to greater charity, it is charity that is the cause of devotion, and greater charity the cause of greater devotion. Accordingly "intense act" does not indicate the fervent act that is accompanied by an increase of virtue.

Rather the phrase simply means that religious vocation, because it has a superior object, the religious state, than the objects of simple acts of devotion, must itself be a greater act, i.e., one which fulfills more perfectly the potentialities of the eliciting virtue by bearing upon a greater object than is found in any of its other acts. Although the word "intense" is not used commonly in this sense in theology, still the reality is present and must be denominated. As a matter of fact the usage here is completely in accord with the principles of St. Thomas. As he indicates, the intensity of qualities,

habits, and virtues has an objective reference. Thus we speak of a man of great strength and ability precisely because he can do many and difficult things. This reference to the greatness of the object is maintained here. Involving a greater object than the ordinary objects of religion, therefore, religious vocation requires a greater or more intense act of devotion than simple acts of devotion. On this basis religious vocation must be termed the most intense act possible to the virtue of religion; for it is concerned with religion's greatest object, the religious state, which fulfills perfectly the virtue of religion's power to dedicate a man totally to divine service. This is, therefore, precisely what constitutes a religious vocation: a most intense act of devotion intending religion's greatest object, the religious state.

This conclusion derived from an objective consideration of religious vocation reveals the necessity of considering religious vocation from the point of view of its subjective conditions, its material factors. Because religious vocation is the act of a moral virtue, it requires previous prudent judgment to establish the medium in accord with the individual's capacity to attain the proposed object. Furthermore, because religious vocation is an act of the virtue of religion, religion's medium must be established on the basis of an individual's capacity to pay his debt to God and God's willingness to accept man's tokens as payment on man's debt. Again, because religious vocation is an intense act of devotion, the subject must have the spiritual factors necessary to produce the intensity of this act. Consequently attention must be given to those elements which constitute the human faculty, the elements which account for the intensity of the act of devotion, the elements which make the religious life desirable to a subject even as they make it possible for him reasonably to aspire to the religious state. It is these elements that constitute on the part of the subject the material factors of religious vocation.

We are looking for various elements which simultaneously render the subject suitable for the religious life, make the religious life desirable to the subject, and make it possible for him to produce the intensity of the act required for religious vocation. All this must be accomplished without involving any change in the virtue

eliciting religious vocation, the virtue of religion, and without involving necessarily any increase in the intensity of the virtue itself. The act will vary in intensity, but not the virtue. Theology knows of but one element of a virtue that meets these requirements, the material factor of a virtue called by St. Thomas the inclination of a virtue to act.

By reason of this material factor the moral virtues can produce acts of greater or less intensity at different times in the same individual without varying the degree of the virtue. It is this inclination to the act of a particular virtue that explains why "one man can be more prompt to the act of one virtue than to the act of another." It supplies, too, the reason why one saint's life will provide a splendid model for one virtue, and another saint's difficulties in performing the acts of this virtue may be a consolation to others experiencing similar difficulties. But especially it explains why individuals are more ready and willing and suitable to perform the acts of one virtue and, at times, more intensely than usual.

This material factor of the virtues, the inclination to their acts, has a congerie of causes. St. Thomas lists four: dispositions of nature (individual nature), gifts of grace, habitual ways of acting, and good judgment. These elements are what constitute the human faculty, the essential factor required on the part of man to establish the virtue of religion's medium. They are the factors, too, that can account for the intensity of the act of devotion which constitutes religious vocation.

The accurate determination of the exact nature of each of these elements may be effected quite readily by an analysis of the religious state and the demands it will place upon candidates. In regard to three of the factors, natural dispositions, mental ability, and character have been codified into a list of requirements affecting the validity or liceity of entrance into the various religious institutes. We need not here analyze these factors; we may content ourselves with the observation that these factors, while definitely contributing to the genesis of a religious vocation by establishing a candidate's suitability for religious life and making the life desirable to him, do not exercise their influence independently of the fourth factor, gifts of grace. We are concerned here with a state of life and, although

the religious state has its human side and its juridical facet, it is essentially a spiritual, supernatural reality affording the individual the opportunity to take his stance in relation to God. As a state, it has as its essential core the grace of Christ the head as it is participated in His members. Essential to the object and end, the state of life, gifts of grace must also enter into the act or means by which this state is attained and aspired to.

We have already determined the essential grace required, the act of devotion. Now we are seeking for a grace or series of graces which render the individual capable of meeting the demands of the religious life and actually desirous of embracing this way of life with a desire that can account for the intensity of devotion required for religious vocation. This it must do without demanding on the part of the subject an advanced degree of virtue, for the religious life is not reserved for saints: nor may it necessarily involve an increase in charity and the other virtues, as already indicated.

From the point of view of the object, evidently, if this grace is to be considered necessary for religious vocation, some factor necessarily connected with the religious state must demand its presence in an individual in such a way that without it religious vocation is rendered impossible. What grace or graces fulfill these requirements?

It is of course impossible to eliminate from the way of divine providence the fact that God occasionally makes His will so manifest that there can be no doubt about it in an individual mind. The case of St. Paul, whose vocation involved being thrown to the ground, illustrates this kind of vocation, so extraordinary that it must remain always a way which men must neither expect nor have a right to claim.

Again, in some instances there are under the impetus of grace an illumination of mind and a movement of will so powerful that the soul seems to be moved to the service of God without any previous deliberation or counsel. Those summoned know only this: they wish to be religious. They have no ready answer for the question: "Why?" Some theologians, however, can tell them why they have no answer and at the same time offer a sound explanation of why they have a religious vocation. A superhuman element is at

work in them, the inspiration of the gift of piety in an advanced state. Piety, which renders a man docile to the Holy Spirit in matters of divine worship, like every gift in the advanced stages goes beyond actions that are commanded to those that are counseled. It is recognized that this gift in its advanced stages can prompt a man to give himself over wholly and entirely to the service of God, an intention that becomes efficacious in the religious life.

Both an extraordinary actual grace and the gift of piety in its advanced stages thus can account for the intensity of the act of devotion which constitutes religious vocation. Neither, however, can be singled out as the proper and immediate cause. The actual grace is an extraordinary element. The gift of piety does produce the effect of greater intensity of devotion, and in its advanced stages looks for its objects among the counsels of perfection, but piety can hardly be called a univocal cause of devotion, i.e., one to which the effect is assimilated in nature. The act of devotion as an act of a virtue should be under the control of reason and will; the gifts prompt one to act in a way superior to reason and will, a way con-natural not to man but to God. Piety's action, then, in this matter is after the manner of an analogical or equivocal cause, a cause superior in nature to the effect produced. Consequently there is still need to uncover an immediate, univocal principle of the intensity of devotion required for religious vocation.

As has been indicated, intensity as used to qualify devotion signifies that the act of devotion has for its object the greatest of the objects falling under the virtue of religion. To effect intensity in this act, therefore, is to incline the will, the subject of religion, to this superior object not merely under the aspect of service to God, for religion itself attains the object under this formality, but precisely as superior service. An effect in the order of execution, this element of directing the will to an object under the aspect of great or difficult is also an object in the order of intention and specification. Specifically it is the object of the virtue of magnanimity. It is magnanimity, therefore, the virtue which inclines to the great acts of all the virtues, that accounts for the intensity of the act of devotion which constitutes religious vocation. Magnanimity is the

principle material factor of religious vocation; it is the subjective condition for religious vocation.

Because of its primary act of tending to great and difficult things, magnanimity without doubt is the virtue accounting for the intensity of the act of devotion which constitutes religious vocation. Simply enough, the religious life is essentially a great way of life; it is a total dedication to God; it is a holocaust, a zealous, studied pursuit of perfection. Greatness is inseparable from its essence. Greatness of soul, or magnanimity, must be found in the candidate who aspires to the religious life.

By way of summary, we submit that the objective consideration of religious vocation established it as a most intense act of devotion; the subjective consideration resulted in the presentation of magnanimity as an indispensable condition for religious vocation. Combined, these two elements establish religious vocation on the human side as an act of devotion in a magnanimous mode. Accordingly religious vocation may be defined as the intention of an individual elicited by the virtue of religion to dedicate himself promptly and unreservedly (generously, or magnanimously) to the great and difficult service of God entailed in fulfilling the three vows of religion concerned with the evangelical counsels of perfection. It is believed that this real definition of religious vocation in terms of devotion and magnanimity is an explanation of the nominal or descriptive definition given to this divine invitation by St. Thomas: *propositum religionis*.

THE NATURE OF SACERDOTAL VOCATION

As already indicated our authority in the matter of sacerdotal vocation is St. Alphonsus,¹¹ who wondered that in a matter of such importance so few moralists had written. The context indicates that St. Alphonsus was aware of the realities involved in the distinction between internal vocation and the external vocation which in recent years has been proposed as the sole required vocation. St. Alphonsus does not make the distinction explicit; he could hardly

¹¹ St. Alphonsus has treated sacerdotal vocation in his tract on Orders. Cf. *Theologiae Moralis*, Bk. 6, Tract 5, chap. II, Dubium II, "Quae requirantur in ordinando," n. 802.

be expected to do so, for there is a noted absence of authority for calling a vocation what is now known as the external, ecclesiastical or juridical vocation.¹² He speaks only of the internal vocation and states that its necessity is apparent from the teachings of the Holy Fathers, from Sacred Scriptures, and especially from St. Paul. The latter reference, of course, is to the text of St. Paul to the Hebrews, c. 5:

Every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in the things that pertain to God, that he may offer up gifts and sacrifices for sins (v. 1).

Neither doth any man take the honor to himself, but he that is called by God, as Aaron was (v. 4).

In the text of St. Paul this divine vocation is so necessary that not even Christ Himself was dispensed from receiving it from His Father:

So Christ also did not glorify himself, that he might be made a high priest: but he that said unto him: Thou art my Son, this day I have begotten thee.

As he saith also in another place: Thou art a priest forever, according to the order of Melchisedech (v. 5-6).

St. Alphonsus finds many instances in Sacred Scriptures which confirm the teaching of St. Paul in regard to the necessity of a divine vocation for the priesthood.¹³ While St. Alphonsus does not mention the matter expressly, it is obvious that in his mind sacerdotal vocation, unlike religious vocation, is a special one addressed to particular individuals. Scriptures do not record any general voca-

¹² Cf. P. Ladislaus, *De Vocatione Religiosa*, Romae: 1950, pp. 108-111: Ecclesiastical Vocation "is not found in tradition: the Church teaches that there is one vocation to the religious state, even in the external forum, and it is that vocation which is called divine or theological. No document is found which speaks of a twofold vocation" (p. 108).

¹³ For a more detailed treatment of sacerdotal vocation in the Scriptures and in the early Fathers, cf. Sempé, *op. cit.*, col. 3149-3153.

tion to the priesthood. For St. Alphonsus then, sacerdotal vocation in the active sense, which alone is considered, is a special grace of God granted to particular individuals to aspire to this high office.

This special grace produces special effects in the prospective candidates, effects which, to the extent that they are capable of observation and study by men, can serve as signs of the internal divine vocation. Holding primary place among these signs is "*recta intentio, nimirum desiderium vacandi divinae gloriae et saluti animarum.*" This we may accept as man's response to God's grace, as a nominal definition of sacerdotal vocation.

As in religious vocation, there is here also a *propositum*, a decision, for St. Alphonsus, "*intentio or nimirum desiderium.*" The goal is specified, too, the priestly office with its twofold functions of service for the honor and glory of God and for the salvation of human souls. Both functions will exercise a determining role in the elaboration of a real definition.

The application of the methodology used in the elaboration of the definition of religious vocation results in the following conclusions:

1. Like religious vocation (and this seems to be true of all vocations to the secondary states of the Christian life) sacerdotal vocation consists essentially in an act of devotion, a dedication of one's service to the honor of God. The priest's whole role in the divine economy is to be a man of God, one put aside for the things that pertain to God.

2. An act of charity, a kind of pastoral zeal would serve as the imperating element. The priest's devotion must feed upon love of God, obviously enough; and as this devotion is extended to the children of God, charity assumes a special aspect of willing to others their supernatural good, the salvation of their souls. This was the intention of Christ, the High Priest and Shepherd of souls. Accordingly, we may denominate this charity as priestly or pastoral.

3. Finally the greatness of the office of priesthood demands the exercise of the virtue of magnanimity. One of our own outstanding American theologians has anticipated this conclusion. His words are worth quoting in full.

The very act by which a fervent youth determines to strive for the priesthood is an act of magnanimity, qualifying an act of divine charity. Out of love for God and the desire to do something great for Him, he "tends toward things that are worthy of great honor." Those who fulfill the priestly functions in the Church of Christ perform deeds that are worthy of honor in the eyes of God; hence the aspirant to the priesthood desires an office that is most honorable. He seeks to be a mediator between God and men. . . . Truly, the aspirant to the priesthood seeks things worthy of great honor.¹⁴

Sacerdotal vocation, then, seems most suitably defined in terms of devotion, magnanimity and pastoral zeal, as the intention of the aspirant to devote himself promptly or wholeheartedly to the service of God and the salvation of souls.

EDWARD P. FARRELL, O.P.

Digest of the Discussion:

Monsignor O'Connor initiated the discussion with extended remarks on the vocation to the priesthood according to Lahitton. After indicating by direct quotation the various factors in a vocation mentioned by Lahitton he questioned how Father Farrell among others could describe Lahitton as holding for "external" vocation only. Father Farrell recognized the quotations as authentic expositions of Lahitton's earlier position, but he reiterated his assertion that ultimately Lahitton maintained the position commonly attributed to him. In corroboration of his position and that of Lahitton Monsignor O'Connor alleged a quotation from the *Sedes Sapientiae*. To this Father White replied that the total text of the papal document advanced notions other than those of the passages quoted. Father Hughes pointed out that the *Sedes Sapientiae* affirmed a specific grace of vocation, whereas Lahitton rejected this in favor of a mere generic grace.

Father Taylor raised the question of a possible conflict between a juridical condition and a moral right in priestly vocations. Father Carr explained the juridical call as a sign of the divine call, making the former the formal element par excellence in vocation. Father Farrell noted that such a position involved an impossible merging of internal and external elements.

Father Goodwine asked whether or not it is proper to speak of religious vocation and also asked about the signs of a vocation. To the first

¹⁴ F. Connell, "Magnanimity: A Priestly Virtue," in *From an Abundant Spring*, New York: 1952, p. 34.

Father Farrell replied that the term vocation, although not so used by St. Thomas, may be extended to apply to the invitation to the religious state. To the second Father Farrell replied by emphasizing the three signs already mentioned: intention, firmness, and a spirit of generosity.

Father Regan asked for Father Farrell's opinion on psychological evaluation of candidates. Father White noted the requirements of *Sedes Sapientiae*. To the request of Father Regan for information on the cultivation of vocations Father Farrell gave a more ample exposition of the conditions mentioned in his outline.

DOMINIC HUGHES, O.P.,
Providence College.