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VOCATIONS CRISIS AND MANAGEMENT OF RELIGIOUS VOCATIONS IN THE LIGHT OF GENESIS (2:5)

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Abstract

This paper examines the ongoing crisis of religious vocations within the Catholic Church through the lens of Genesis 2:5, using both the historical-critical method of exegesis and the analytical method of research. The vocational decline in priesthood and religious life, particularly in Western nations, poses significant challenges to the Church's sacramental, pastoral, and community functions. Employing the historical-critical method, the study explores the theological and cultural contexts of Genesis 2:5, revealing a divine-human partnership where vocations, like the natural world, require both divine provision (rain) and human effort (cultivation). Through the analytical method, the paper synthesizes historical, cultural, and theological insights, offering practical recommendations for addressing the crisis. The research emphasizes a balanced approach between prayer for divine intervention and proactive efforts to cultivate environments conducive to vocations, advocating for a rethinking of vocation management that prepares the "ground" for future growth within the Church.

Keywords: Vocations, Crisis, Management, Genesis, Religious Life

Introduction

The Catholic Church is currently experiencing a significant crisis in religious vocations, particularly concerning priesthood and consecrated life. This crisis has become more pronounced in Western countries, where there has been a steady decline in the number of ordained ministers and professed religious. The impact of this decline extends beyond the religious communities themselves, affecting the Church's ability to meet the pastoral, sacramental, and social needs of a growing lay population (Quiñones, 2024). While the global number of Catholics continues to rise, the decreasing number of priests, religious men, and women creates a pastoral vacuum, leading to overworked clergy and limited access to the sacraments (Vatican, 2022). This situation has sparked considerable concern within the Church, prompting scholars and church leaders to explore theological and practical responses to the crisis.



In addressing the vocational crisis, the metaphor presented in Genesis 2:5 offers valuable insight. The verse describes a primordial state of the world where, in the absence of rain and human cultivation, no vegetation could grow. This reflects an essential divine-human partnership, in which both divine provision (rain) and human participation (cultivation) are required for growth and fruitfulness (Westermann, 1994). Applying this to the vocational crisis, religious vocations can be understood as divine gifts that require human stewardship for their flourishing. God calls individuals to a life of service, but the community must actively cultivate an environment where these vocations can be nurtured and realized. Without proper human involvement in creating fertile “soil,” vocations may wither just as crops would without cultivation (Habel, 2000).

This paper aims to explore the crisis of religious vocations through the theological lens of Genesis 2:5, employing both historical-critical and analytical methods to investigate the biblical, cultural, and theological contexts of the text. In doing so, it proposes a model of vocation management that emphasizes the cooperation between divine calling and human preparation. This approach offers a hopeful framework for addressing the current vocational shortfall, urging the Church to reframe the crisis not as an irreversible decline but as an opportunity to cultivate an environment in which future vocations can take root and grow (Bevans & Schroeder, 2004).

Preliminary Clarifications:

a. Vocation: Priesthood and Religious Life

A person’s vocation is typically defined as a summons from God to a certain stage of life where they can achieve holiness. The term vocation originates a Latin term *vocatio*, meaning “a calling” or “summoning.” It derives from the verb “to call,” *vocare*. There is a “universal call [*vocatio*] to holiness in the Church,” as stated by the Second Vatican Council (*Lumen Gentium*, 39). The lay, religious, and priestly states are all vocations in this instance. For the sake of this essay, however, the priestly and religious vocations within the Church are highlighted.

Within the Catholic Church, males are ordained to the Catholic priesthood, a sacramental ministry and vocation that serves as a conduit between God and humanity, a spiritual leader, and a representation of Christ. Priestly ordination is a ceremony that bestows sacred authority and makes one a priest. As representatives of Christ in worship, instruction, and service, priests function in *persona Christi*, deriving their authority from an uninterrupted line of bishops that begins with the apostles. The following passages in the Bible serve as the cornerstones of the Catholic priesthood: Matthew 10:1-4, where Jesus names the apostles; 1 Corinthians 11:24–25, which establishes the Eucharist; John 20:21–23, where Jesus commissions his disciples; and 1 Timothy 4:14, which deals with the laying on of hands. The primary responsibilities of priests include: Leading during worship, celebrating the sacraments (especially Eucharist); providing counsel, reconciliation, pastoral care, proclaiming the Gospel, interpreting the scripture, and administering sacraments, blessings, and sacramentals (CCC 1536-1600).

In addition to the vocation of a priest, there is the religious life. According to the evangelical counsels of poverty (i.e., giving up material possessions and desires), chastity (embracing celibacy



for the sake of the Kingdom), and obedience (submitting to God's will and community leaders), the religious life is a vocation within the Catholic Church where people dedicate themselves to a life of prayer, service, and community (Kanu 2011, 2015 and 2016). A public pledge to become a closer follower of Christ marks the beginning of the religious life. This way of living might be monastic, consisting mostly of contemplative life with an emphasis on work and prayer, or it could involve apostolic and monastic life combined (CCC 916-933; Perfectae Caritatis 1-25; Vultum Dei Quaerere 1-37; Kanu 2018, 2019).

b. Vocations Crisis

Vocations Crisis refers to a decline in the number of individuals pursuing priestly or religious vocations, leading to a shortage of ordained ministers and consecrated religious. The causes include: secularisation and cultural changes, decline of traditional Catholic families and communities, increased options for personal fulfillment, spiritual and moral relativism, and scandals and crises within the Church. The consequences include parish closures and mergers, reduced sacramental availability, increased workload for remaining clergy and decreased Catholic presence in social services. However, while there is a decrease in the number of priests and religious, there is an increase in the number of the lay faithful. The number of Catholics worldwide increased by 14 million in 2022, according to the Vatican's 2022 Statistical Yearbook of the Church, thus rising from 1.376 billion in 2021 to 1.390 billion in 2022. While the Catholic Church in Africa continues to grow, the Americas recorded a 0.9% increase and Asia a 0.6% increase (Quiñones 2024). The number of Catholics in Europe has remained steady at 286 million from 2021 to 2022.

Since 2012, the number of priests and religious have continued the downward trend. Globally, the number of priests decreased by 142 from 2021 to 2022, going from 407,872 to 407,730. This is different in Africa where vocations have continued to grow. The number of priests in Africa and Asia increased by 3.2% and 1.6%, respectively, while the number remained steady in the Americas. Oceania saw a 1.5% decrease in priests, while Europe had a 1.7% decrease. There are also fewer seminarians worldwide. According to the Vatican numbers, there were 1.3% fewer men preparing for priesthood in 2022 than in 2021 (Quiñones 2024). This decrease is most marked in Europe, where there has been a noted vocations crisis since 2008.

The number of seminarians decreased by 6% from 2021 to 2022. The number of seminarians also decreased in the Americas by 3.2% and in Asia by 1.2%. But Africa saw a 2.1% increase in the number of seminarians, while Oceania had a notable 1.3% increase. Africa had the highest number of seminarians in 2022, at almost 35,000 men, while Oceania had the least, at almost 1,000. Asia and the Americas had roughly 30,000 and 27,000 seminarians, respectively, while Europe, which makes up about 10% of the world's population, had only 14,461 seminarians. With the decline in the number of priests and religious, there has been a significant increase in the number of permanent deacons, increasing by 2% from 2021 to 2022. Thus, while the global Catholic Church saw 142 fewer priests from 2021-2022, there are 974 more permanent deacons worldwide (Quiñones 2024).



Regarding the number of professed religious men who are not priests, it has decreased by 360, from 49,774 in 2021 to 49,414 in 2022. While there are more religious women than priests by almost 50%, the number of religious women is also declining. According to the most recent data from 2021 to 2022, their numbers have declined by 1.6% , meaning that almost 10,000 fewer religious sisters worldwide. This decline is most prevalent in Oceania, Europe, and North America, where the number of women religious decreased by 3.6%, 3.5%, and 3% respectively. South and Central America also saw a slight decrease of more than 2,000 religious women. This is, however, different in Africa as there is a 1.7% increase (Quiñones 2024). Southeast Asia's numbers also reflects a small increase of 0.1%, implying about 200 more religious women.

Imperative for Interventions

The vocational crisis in the Church has become a source for concern for the church as the increasing number of the lay faithful would ultimately need more pastoral care than before; and this calls for an urgent intervention. In this regard, this study proposes that insights from Genesis 2:5 comes as handy and relevant tool for this urgent intervention. Indeed, just as the rain, a divine gift, is withheld until there is someone to manage it, vocations are a sacred calling from God that require proper human stewardship. This partnership between divine provision and human responsibility highlights the need for active nurturing and management of vocations to address current challenges in the Church. Accordingly, the following exegetical study of Gen 2:5 and its theological motifs are of great importance, serving as significant intervention in addressing the current vocation crisis.

Exegesis of Genesis 2:5

English Text of Genesis 2:5:

Now no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up -- for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no man to till the ground

Genesis 2:5 provides a unique perspective on the relationship between divine action and human participation in creation. The verse depicts a primordial state where vegetation is absent due to lack of rain and human cultivation, setting the stage for God's subsequent actions (Westermann, 1994). This interplay between divine provision and human activity provides a apt theological framework for understanding God's relationship with creation and humanity's role within it. In the context of religious vocations, Genesis 2:5 serves as a powerful metaphor, as the land awaits divine action (rain) and human participation (cultivation) to become fruitful. Similarly, addressing the crisis may involve praying for vocations and cultivating an environment where they can be properly received, nurtured, and managed (Topliss, (2017).

a). Historical and Cultural Context of Gen 2:5

Genesis 2:5 shares themes with Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) creation myths, reflecting cultural understandings of a primordial state. In the *Enuma Elish* Babylonian myth describes a time when



only primordial waters existed, similar to the pre-vegetation state in Genesis (Dalley, 2000). Egyptian accounts, *Heliopolitan Creation Myth*, also begin with land emerging from waters, followed by vegetation (Pinch, 2002). The Sumerian myth of *Enki* and *Ninhursag* features a barren earth before divine intervention, paralleling Genesis (Kramer, 1963). These connections suggest Genesis engages with common ANE motifs while offering a unique theological view (Walton, 2006).

From the cultural viewpoint, agriculture was central to ancient Israel, reliant on rain rather than rivers, unlike Egypt. This is reflected in Genesis 2:5's emphasis on rain (Borowski, 2009). In this connection, Israel's Mediterranean climate, with its wet winters and dry summers, made rainfall crucial for crops (King & Stager, 2001). Terrace farming was labour-intensive, agreeing with the need for human cultivation mentioned in the verse (Hopkins, 1985). The "bush of the field" likely refers to the crops grown in Israel, such as grains and fruit trees (Zohary et al., 2012).

Weather in the ANE was often seen as divine action, evident in Genesis 2:5's mention of God withholding rain (Klingbeil, 2014). This verse reflects the ANE belief in the interconnectedness of rain, vegetation, and human labour (Hiebert, 1996). Water scarcity was significant in the region, and the absence of rain would resonate deeply with an ANE audience (Tsumura, 2005). The verse highlights the balance between divine provision and human effort in agriculture (Borowski, 2009). Understanding this context enhances our view of vocations, seeing them as a partnership between divine calling and human effort, much like the agricultural success of ancient Israel depended on both rain and cultivation. Genesis 2:5 underscores this divine-human collaboration, framing vocations as essential for community flourishing, just as rain and labour were vital for ancient agriculture.

b). Literary Context of Genesis 2:5

Genesis 2:5, part of the second creation narrative (Genesis 2:4b-25), offers a more intimate depiction of human creation than the cosmic view in Genesis 1. Often attributed to the Yahwist (J) source, it emphasizes God's anthropomorphic qualities and human relationships (Wenham, 1987). The verse describes the pre-human conditions before the Garden of Eden, highlighting the interconnectedness of divine provision, human presence, and the flourishing of creation (Alter, 2004). Structured with two clauses explaining the absence of plants and rain, it underscores the interdependence of natural phenomena and human labour (Cassuto, 1961). The verse serves both as myth and aetiology – symbolically explaining the human condition and illustrating the need for rain and labour for agricultural success (Westermann, 1994). However, von Rad (1972) argues these narratives provide deeper theological insights into divine-human relationships.

There are also literary devices that significantly enhance the meaning and impact of Genesis 2:5, namely:

Merism: where the phrase "bush of the field" and "small plant of the field" likely signifies a merism, a speech figure using two contrasting parts to represent a whole, emphasizing the completeness of the pre-creation state (Sarna, 1989).



Anthropomorphism: describing God's action of causing rain highlights His active role in creation, a characteristic of the divine source (Brueggemann, 2010).

Foreshadowing: referring to the mention of rain and human cultivation foreshadows later themes in the narrative, including the establishment of the garden and human vocation as caretakers of creation (Walton, 2001).

These devices highlight the theological theme of cooperation between divine provision and human responsibility, which informs our understanding of religious vocations as a partnership between divine calling and human effort.

c). *Content Analysis of Gen 2:5*

The Hebrew text of Genesis 2:5 presents a rich mosaic of linguistic and theological insights relevant to the understanding of vocations. The verse begins with the terms *Si^aH* and *haSSädè*, referring to "shrub" and "of the field" respectively. Interestingly, *Si^aH* can also mean "meditation" or "contemplation" (Brown-Driver-Briggs, 1906), suggesting an intertwining of the tangible and spiritual realms that resonates with the nature of religious vocations. The field (*haSSädè*) represents the arena of human activity and divine provision (Wenham, 1987), which in vocational terms could symbolize the "field" of ministry or religious life. The word *ʔe^orem*, meaning "not yet," conveys a sense of anticipation and potentiality (Koehler & Baumgartner, 2001). This state of readiness for future growth can be applied to the nurturing of vocations, emphasizing the importance of preparation and expectation. The verb *yicmäH* (had sprung up), from the root ((*camäH*), is often used metaphorically for spiritual growth in biblical Hebrew (Brown-Driver-Briggs, 1906), providing a powerful image for the development of religious vocations.

The causative form *himʔîr* (had caused it to rain) emphasizes God's active role in providing the necessary conditions for growth (Waltke & O'Connor, 1990). This underscores the divine initiative in the process of calling individuals to religious vocations, while also acknowledging the need for human participation. The divine name (YHWH Elohim) combines God's covenant relationship (YHWH) with His power as creator (Elohim) (Sarna, 1989), presenting a comprehensive view of God's nature that is significant in understanding His role in vocations. The term *ädäm* while often translated as "man," can refer to humanity in general (Clines, 1993). In the context of vocations, it emphasizes the human element in cultivating what God provides. This is further elaborated by the verb (*la`äböð*), "to work" or "to serve," which has a rich semantic range including both physical labour and spiritual service (Brown-Driver-Briggs, 1906). This dual meaning beautifully encapsulates the nature of religious vocations as both work and worship.

Finally, the wordplay between *ädäm* (man) and *ädämâ* (ground) emphasizes humanity's connection to the earth (Alter, 2004). In the context of vocations, this could symbolize the grounded, incarnational nature of religious life, balancing the spiritual call with practical, earthly service. This linguistic analysis reveals several themes relevant to vocations: the interplay between divine initiative and human response, the concept of potentiality and growth, the holistic nature of religious service, the balance between rootedness and transcendence, and an ecological model of



interdependence. These insights provide a rich foundation for exploring the nature and nurture of religious vocations through the lens of Genesis 2:5, offering new perspectives on addressing the vocations crisis and managing religious vocations in contemporary contexts.

Theological Motifs of Vocation in Gen 2:5

Genesis 2:5 presents a nuanced view of God as both creator and provider, which has significant implications for our understanding of vocations. The verse implicitly acknowledges God's role as the ultimate source of creation, particularly in the phrase "the Lord God had not caused it to rain" (Frethem, 2005). This emphasizes God's sovereignty over natural processes, which can be paralleled with God's role in initiating vocations. The lack of rain is not presented as an oversight, but as an intentional withholding until the appropriate time. This suggests a God who provides with purpose and wisdom (Brueggemann, 2010). In the context of vocations, this can be understood as God providing calls to religious life at appropriate times and in appropriate measures. The state described in Genesis 2:5 is one of incompleteness, awaiting further divine action. This presents creation as an ongoing process rather than a one-time event (von Rad, 1972). Similarly, the church can view the calling and nurturing of vocations as an ongoing, dynamic process.

A key theological insight from Genesis 2:5 is the interplay between divine action and human activity. The verse presents rain (divine action) and human cultivation as complementary necessities for vegetation to flourish. This suggests a model of divine-human cooperation rather than either divine determinism or human autonomy (Westermann, 1994). While highlighting human dependence on divine provision (rain), the verse also affirms human dignity by presenting human activity as necessary for creation's flourishing (Middleton, 2005). This balance is crucial in understanding vocations as both divine gift and human responsibility. The mention of "no man to work the ground" suggests that God creates in anticipation of human participation. This can be seen as a theological foundation for understanding vocations as part of God's creative and redemptive plan for humanity (Walton, 2001).

The specific mention of rain and vegetation in Genesis 2:5 carries rich theological symbolism. In the arid climate of the Ancient Near East, rain was often seen as a sign of divine favour. Its absence in Genesis 2:5 creates a tension that anticipates God's providential action (Tsumura, 2005). This can be paralleled with the understanding of vocations as a form of divine blessing upon the Church. The absence of vegetation represents an incompleteness in creation. Its eventual appearance signifies the fulfilment of God's creative purpose (Wenham, 1987). Similarly, vocations can be seen as essential for the fullness and fruitfulness of the Church. The interconnection between rain, soil, vegetation, and human activity presents a theology of ecological interdependence (Habel, 2000). This can inform our understanding of vocations as integrally connected to the overall health and mission of the Church. The emphasis on material elements (water, soil, plants) as vehicles of divine action suggests a sacramental view of creation (Edwards, 2006). This resonates with the Catholic understanding of vocations as tangible manifestations of God's call and grace.



These theological insights from Genesis 2:5 provide a rich foundation for understanding the nature of religious vocations. Vocations, like rain, can be seen as divine gifts, provided by God in His wisdom and timing. The flourishing of vocations, like the growth of vegetation, requires both divine initiative and human response and nurture. The current vocations crisis might be viewed not merely as a shortage, but as a call to prepare the ground – creating environments where vocations can be recognized, nurtured, and flourish. The interdependence suggested in the verse encourages a holistic approach to vocation promotion and management, recognizing it as integral to the overall health of the Church ecosystem. This theological analysis of Genesis 2:5 offers a biblical paradigm for addressing the vocations crisis. It suggests that effective management of religious vocations involves not only praying for more vocations (asking for ‘rain’) but also cultivating an environment (preparing the ‘ground’) where vocations can be properly received, nurtured, and flourish.

Management of Religious Vocations: Implementation of Insights from Genesis 2:5

The study of Genesis 2:5 offers a fresh perspective on the current vocations crisis in the Catholic Church, reframing it as a phase in God’s ongoing creative work that invites human participation (Westermann, 1994). This approach balances trust in God’s timing with active preparation for vocations (Owens, 2018), shifting from a crisis mentality to hopeful preparation (Bevans & Schroeder, 2004). The Genesis 2:5 model emphasizes that vocations are part of a broader “ecosystem” of faith, church, and society, reflecting ecological interdependence (Habel, 2000). It calls for a comprehensive approach encompassing various forms of consecrated life and ministries (O’Murchu, 2014), with vocation directors seen as cultivators (Jamison, 2013).

Current practices often focus on prayer for vocations and increasing numbers, potentially neglecting the creation of fertile environments for vocations to flourish (Owens, 2012). Improvements should include developing a more holistic approach to formation, shifting focus from recruitment to cultivation, balancing divine and human elements, creating a pervasive culture of vocation, adopting an ecological model, and embracing divine timing (Rossetti, 2011).

By implementing the following discussions on these themes, therefore, the Church can move towards a more effective and theologically grounded approach to managing religious vocations, addressing the current crisis while preparing for a fruitful future.

i. Cultivating a Culture of Vocations

The concept of “preparing the ground” for vocations, as inspired by the Genesis 2:5 model, involves creating an environment where vocations can flourish. This preparation is not just the responsibility of church leaders or vocation directors, but involves the entire faith community. By cultivating a culture of vocations, we create fertile soil where God’s call can be heard, discerned, and nurtured. Families play a crucial role in cultivating a culture of vocations. As the primary site of faith formation, families are often where the seeds of vocation are first planted (John Paul II, 1981). Parents who live out their own vocations with joy and commitment provide powerful examples for their children. They can foster an atmosphere of openness to God’s call by



encouraging prayer, discussing vocations, and supporting their children's spiritual growth (Jamison, 2013).

Communities, including parishes and schools, also play a vital role in nurturing vocations. They can provide exposure to various forms of consecrated life and ministries, offering young people a broader understanding of vocation. Parishes can create "vocation-friendly" environments by regularly praying for vocations, inviting religious and priests to share their stories, and providing opportunities for service and leadership (Mokone & Pali, 2022). Spiritual formation is fundamental in cultivating a culture of vocations. It helps individuals develop a personal relationship with God, which is essential for hearing and responding to His call. Rossetti (2011) emphasizes the importance of prayer, particularly contemplative prayer, in discerning one's vocation. Regular engagement with Scripture, participation in the sacraments, and spiritual direction can all contribute to deepening one's spiritual life and openness to God's call.

Formation programs should aim to develop not just knowledge of the faith, but also spiritual maturity and a sense of mission. O'Murchu (2014) argues for a holistic approach to formation that integrates psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions. This comprehensive formation can help individuals better understand themselves and their place in God's plan, making them more receptive to vocational discernment. Creating environments conducive to vocations involves more than just talking about vocations; it requires promoting a culture where faith is lived out authentically and joyfully. Owens (2012) suggests that such environments are characterized by a strong sense of community, opportunities for meaningful service, and a focus on personal growth and discernment. Silence and reflection are also crucial elements of a vocation-friendly environment. In our noisy, fast-paced world, creating spaces for quiet reflection can help individuals hear God's voice more clearly. Retreats, days of recollection, and guided meditation can all contribute to this (Jamison, 2013).

Moreover, fostering a culture of vocations means challenging the prevailing cultural narratives that may discourage religious vocations. This involves presenting consecrated life and priesthood as viable and fulfilling life choices, countering negative stereotypes, and highlighting the joy and purpose found in these vocations (Mokone & Pali, 2022). Technology and social media can also play a role in creating environments conducive to vocations. While they can be sources of distraction, when used thoughtfully, they can also be powerful tools for outreach, education, and community-building around vocations (Rossetti, 2011). By and large, cultivating a culture of vocations requires a multi-faceted approach that involves families, communities, spiritual formation, and the creation of supportive environments. By "preparing the ground" in this way, we create fertile soil where vocations can take root and flourish, responding to the vocations crisis with hope and active participation in God's ongoing creative work.

ii. The Church's Role in Vocation Management

Church leadership plays a crucial role in fostering vocations. Bishops, priests, and religious superiors have a responsibility to create an environment where vocations can flourish. Pope Francis (2014) emphasizes that leaders must be "protectors of vocations," nurturing and guiding



those who feel called to religious life or priesthood. This involves not only promoting vocations but also addressing obstacles that may discourage individuals from pursuing their calling. Leaders are called to be living witnesses of the joy and fulfilment found in religious life and priesthood. Their example can be a powerful catalyst for vocations. As Rossetti (2011) notes, “The best vocation program is a joyful priest.” Church leaders also have a responsibility to ensure that their communities are welcoming and supportive of those discerning a vocation, creating what Jamison (2013) calls a “culture of vocation.”

Formation programs are essential in preparing individuals for religious life and priesthood. However, their effectiveness has been a subject of debate in recent years. For example, many traditional formation programs may not adequately prepare individuals for the challenges of contemporary ministry and religious life. Effective formation programs should balance spiritual development with practical skills, psychological maturity, and a deep understanding of contemporary culture. Owens (2018) suggests that formation should be seen as a lifelong process, not just a preparatory phase. This approach aligns with the Genesis 2:5 model, which emphasizes ongoing cultivation. The effectiveness of formation programs can be enhanced by incorporating elements of mentorship, real-world ministry experience, and opportunities for deep personal reflection. Regular evaluation and adaptation of these programs are necessary to ensure they remain relevant and effective in nurturing vocations (Mokone & Pali, 2022).

iii. Balancing divine initiative and human effort

The Genesis 2:5 model emphasizes the interplay between divine action (rain) and human cultivation. In vocation management, this translates to balancing trust in God’s initiative with active human effort. While recognizing that vocations are ultimately a gift from God, the Church must also take concrete steps to create an environment where these vocations can flourish. This balance involves maintaining a strong emphasis on prayer and spiritual discernment while also implementing practical strategies for vocation promotion and support. As Bevans and Schroeder (2004) note, this approach recognizes both the “already” of God’s action and the “not yet” that requires human participation.

iv. Implications for Vocation Directors and Formators

The Genesis 2:5 model suggests a shift in approach for vocation directors and formators, moving from a focus on recruitment to an emphasis on preparation. Rather than simply trying to increase numbers, the priority becomes creating fertile ground where vocations can naturally emerge and grow. This shift involves a more holistic approach to vocation ministry. Vocation directors should focus on fostering a culture of vocation within their communities, helping individuals discern God’s call in their lives, whether that leads to religious life, priesthood, or another form of Christian service. As Jamison (2013) suggests, this approach sees vocation directors as “cultivators” rather than “recruiters.” To implement this new approach, vocation directors and formators need to develop a range of skills. These include spiritual direction, counselling, and the ability to create and implement formation programs that address the whole person. Mokone & Pali (2022) emphasise the importance of cultural competence, as vocation directors must be able to



relate to and guide individuals from diverse backgrounds. Additionally, skills in community building, conflict resolution, and pastoral care are crucial. Vocation directors should also be adept at using modern communication tools and social media to reach potential candidates and create supportive networks (Rossetti, 2011).

The Genesis 2:5 model, with its emphasis on divine timing, calls for patience and trust in God's providence. Vocation directors and formators must resist the pressure to produce immediate results and instead focus on long-term cultivation. This patience should be balanced with active preparation, creating environments where vocations can flourish when the time is right. As Owens (2018) notes, this approach requires a deep trust in God's plan and timing, even in the face of apparent shortages or crises.

By and large, the Genesis 2:5 model offers a timeless principle of divine-human cooperation that can be fruitfully applied to various contexts, including vocation management. Moreover, this approach aligns with the Catholic tradition of reading Scripture in light of current realities, what is often called the "hermeneutical circle" (Bevans & Schroeder, 2004). It demonstrates the ongoing relevance and applicability of biblical wisdom to contemporary church life and ministry.

Recommendations

- i. Church communities, including families and parishes, must create environments that nurture vocations. This can involve encouraging prayer, providing opportunities for youth to engage with religious life, and promoting a culture where consecrated life is viewed as a viable and fulfilling vocation.
- ii. Formation programs for seminarians and religious should be holistic, integrating spiritual, psychological, and social dimensions to prepare candidates for contemporary ministry challenges. This includes ongoing mentorship and real-world ministry experience.
- iii. Vocation directors should shift their focus from recruitment to cultivation. They must act as "cultivators" by preparing the ground for vocations to emerge, creating spaces for discernment and spiritual growth, and using modern communication tools to engage with potential candidates.
- iv. While active steps are essential, vocation promotion should be rooted in trust in God's providence. Prayer for vocations remains vital, but this must be paired with patient, long-term strategies that respect divine timing and readiness for new growth in vocations.

Conclusion

The vocational crisis within the Catholic Church calls for a reimagined approach to vocation management, grounded in both theological insight and practical action. The decline in religious vocations, particularly in Western countries, highlights the urgent need for new strategies that address both the spiritual and practical dimensions of promotion of vocations. Genesis 2:5 provides a meaningful framework for understanding the delicate balance between divine calling and human



responsibility in nurturing religious vocations. Like the earth awaiting rain and human cultivation, vocations require both divine grace and active human effort to thrive. This theological model emphasizes that while prayer and reliance on God's providence are essential, they must be paired with concrete efforts to create environments conducive to discernment and growth.

By promoting a culture that emphasizes prayer, formation, and active stewardship, the Church can better prepare the "soil" for vocations to flourish. This preparation involves the entire faith community—families, parishes, schools, and leaders—working together to create spaces where God's call can be heard and nurtured. Additionally, more holistic formation programs that address the spiritual, psychological, and social dimensions of religious life are essential in equipping individuals for the challenges of modern ministry.

This approach offers hope and an opportunity to shift from a crisis mentality to one of trustful preparation, ensuring that when God's call comes, the Church is ready to respond with fertile, well-prepared hearts and communities. The Genesis 2:5 model reminds the Church that vocations, like crops, are part of an ongoing process of growth, requiring patience, cultivation, and divine timing. By embracing this perspective, the Church can move beyond short-term concerns and focus on long-term, sustainable solutions to the vocational crisis.

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