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# The Teacher and Vocations

by

Rev. John B. Delaunay, C.S.C.

A great sculptor once stood, mallet and chisel in hand, before a jagged block of marble. He gazed at it with the eyes of a creator and asked himself, "Shall I make it a god, a man or a vase?" Because he had a true sense of values his answer came, "It shall be a god!"

The religious teacher, gazing upon the breathing marble of a child's soul might ask herself the same dramatic question, and she would give a like answer: "I shall, with the help of grace, make this soul the beloved image of God." This is the sacred ambition of every consecrated teacher; this is the primary end of all Catholic education.

One aspect of this great work, however, often fails to receive the attention it deserves. It is the guidance of the child in the all-important task of finding his Vocation. Lack of knowledge, not of zeal, usually explains this weakness in the work of the Catholic educator.

In these pages we shall try to give the Catholic teacher—Brothers, Sisters and laity—a short, practical theology of Vocation. We shall try to answer the following questions: What is a Vocation? How many kinds are there? What is the role of the teacher in the awakening of Vocations? What means are most effective in carrying out that work successfully? And, what are the normal signs of Vocation?

## Each Life Planned by God

The teacher who watches the daily classroom development of her pupils must be convinced that every child there has a Vocation. The ancient pagans taught the existence of numberless gods and goddesses who stood over the child's cradle and divided among themselves every detail of the infant's training and education. Each of these gods was thought to have his own well-defined specialty.

Our Catholic religion teaches us to believe in a Divine Providence which guides every one of our steps and leads us along the paths which God has mapped out for us. We are not mere cogs in a gigantic, purposeless machine. Nor are we toys of chance; what we call chance is merely God's unseen Will directing our lives. Vocation, therefore, is the path along which the Father is leading His child. To follow our Vocation is to follow, with love, God's plan for us.

Secondly, the educator must remember that God, having given each child a special Vocation, also gives him all the helps he will need to follow that Vocation. If the child leaves God's path and strikes out for himself, that help is withdrawn; he is left alone and unaided. We feel we are watching a force of tremendous strength and power when we see a train roaring swiftly round curves and over bridges. It easily pulls its passenger cars and heavy freight. But if the engine should jump the track and leave the road its makers planned for it, only destruction and tragedy can result. So it is with human lives. God always offers happiness and prosperity, his love and greatness of soul to the person who sincerely tries to discover and follow the Divine plan for his life. But if we leave God's path and follow the signposts of passion, ambition and pleasure, we will wander into dangerous country where we may be hopelessly lost.

Therefore, the religious teacher should impress upon herself and upon her pupils the importance of choosing the



right vocation. The teacher should try to get this lesson across before passions dim the clearness of the child's vision.

### **The Two Great Roads**

Young men and women standing at the crossroads of life and looking for their particular way to Heaven see two roads stretching out before them. Each has its difficulties, but one is broad and well-travelled, winding its way gradually toward eternal life: it is the road of the common life, the life which pursues salvation in the world, whether it is in the single or married state. The other is narrow, frequently rugged and steep, but it leads straight to the end of the journey: it is the road of the priestly or religious life.

The first road is for those who are called to live the ordinary Christian life in the world. It is the life which from all eternity God selected for the Mother and Foster-father of His Son. It is the life which Christ ennobled and sanctified by bringing to its initial act the grace and blessing of His presence at the Wedding of Cana. On that day, by changing the water of the Old Law into the generous wine of the New, He clothed this life with a sacramental dignity. He Himself, from childhood, shared the labors and cares of that life. He never refused to sit at the table of those engaged in worldly pursuits. He gathered around Him as His intimate companions men who were leading the hard life of bread-winners. Even at the foot of the Cross, the common life was well represented in the persons of the three Marys.

The common life, consecrated and raised up by the example and blessing of God Himself, is a life of uncommon merit and dignity. Not only is it possible to work out one's salvation in following this road, but many have achieved sanctity in it. The Church places before us models like Saints Felicitas, Perpetua, Monica, Elizabeth, Louis the King of France, Isidore, Joachim, and many others.

They are called to this life who feel no particular attraction towards the priesthood or the religious life, or who, although feeling such an attraction, lack the necessary aptitude. About the middle of the last century, there lived in the French town of Tours, a man who was regarded by his townspeople as a saint. Several friends advised this man, Monsieur Dupont, to enter the priesthood or the religious life. "I shall pray," he answered, "that God may enlighten me as to His Will." After a period of time he told his advisers: "In vain have I prayed. I feel no inclination whatever towards the priesthood or the religious life. It is my Vocation to remain in the world and there to serve God and work for the salvation of souls." So he remained a layman, and lived a life of heroic sanctity.

Therefore, the teacher who is a religious and has a high regard for this special Vocation should not make the mistake of believing that all virtuous souls are called to leave the world. Deeply religious people are needed to establish model Christian families. The essential thing is not to aim at selecting a higher or lower mode of life, but the life which God intends one to follow.

### **The Privileged Vocation**

The second vocation, that of the consecrated life, invites men and women to the perfect service of God in the state of the priesthood or the religious life. This calling is sublime and leads directly to the heights of self-denial and perfect union with Christ. Our Lord has been called the first religious of His Father, and we know that He is the Great High-Priest of the Almighty. So the greatness and beauty of the priestly and the religious lives consist in the fact that their followers tend, as far as human frailty permits, to reproduce in themselves the life of Our Lord. Priests and religious are, by profession, other Christs.

We should remember that the exalted dignity of the priesthood and the religious state makes it necessary for the Catholic teacher to exert all his power to guide each pupil in the difficult task of selecting the path of his life. A writer of our day has said: "I tremble at the thought that the whole life of man hangs upon two or three decisions made at an age ranging between sixteen and twenty." This anxiety of mind should be felt by every teacher who is keenly conscious of her sacred responsibility.

"Vocation," says St. Alphonsus, "is the main cog-wheel of life. As in a clock, when the main cog-wheel goes wrong, the whole machinery is out of order, so, when vocation is missed, the rest of life is a ruin." Every Catholic educator is called to play a role of great importance in helping the boys and girls committed to her care to start life in the right direction. The nature of that role will be the theme of the next chapter.

### **Awakening of the Vocation**

Saint Eulalia, a maiden of twelve, was being brutally scourged by pagan executioners. While the lashes were tearing her flesh, she was heard to cry out: "O Lord, they are writing Thy victories on my body. How I love to read them there. Thy adorable name, O Lord, gleams on me in red." In the same way, though with gentle hands, the Catholic educator writes the name of Jesus and the victories of His love on the souls of her pupils.

It sometimes happens that zealous teachers are mistaken about the part they should play in the work of awakening Vocations. Usually this error is caused by a false idea about the nature of the Divine Calling.

Until recent years, most spiritual writers placed the essential element of the Divine Call in a strong interior attraction towards the privileged life. If this sensible urging

of the Holy Spirit was lacking, and if the desire or longing to be a priest or a religious was absent, there was no real Vocation. Vocation was a mysterious, unseen entity lurking within the child's soul; its presence was to be felt in some intuitive way by the child.

The practical result of this teaching was that many Catholic teachers, acting on the belief that the germ planted by God would grow solely under the Divine influence, dared not interfere in a case where God was so directly concerned. They feared to speak a word of sympathy or gentle encouragement at a time when human intervention would have set the child on the privileged path. How many have been heard to say, "It is dangerous to speak of Vocation! If a boy or girl has the Divine Call, God will see to it and supply the means of following it." The whole burden was thrown on God; the teacher's role was merely to watch and pray.

Others, though holding to this principle, were blissfully illogical and acted as if they were co-workers with God. Even in this case, however, their zeal was checked by the chilling fear of meddling in the designs of the Almighty. They dreaded a possible mistake and because of this dread they shrank from speaking to a child about the priestly or religious Vocation.

### **The Teacher's Role**

This theory of "the inner voice" and the "mystic perception" of one's Vocation was very common until early in this century when a French priest, Canon Lahitton, rebelled against it. In his book he maintained that this popular view was not the traditional teaching of the Church. A Vocation to the priesthood does not consist in any subjective feeling or inclination for that state; rather, it is conferred from without by the Bishop of the diocese. Practically, this means that we need not look for boys *with* a Vocation, but for candidates *for* a Vocation, that is, boys who, by their piety and general

fitness, give promise of being worthy of the great gift bestowed upon them at the moment of ordination. All that is required is a right intention, and such fitness of nature and grace as affords a well grounded hope that the candidate will conscientiously discharge the priestly functions.

According to Canon Lahitton, that which the old theory called "Vocation" is merely a *responsiveness* to actual grace which floods the mind with light, shows it the beauty of the priestly state and strengthens the heart, upholding it in the sacrifices required for the attainment of the sublime end. Vocation, then, is not from within, but from without.

The book brought on a storm of protests from theologians. In fact, there was a strong attempt to have it placed on the Index of Forbidden Books. However, Pius X personally intervened and created a Commission of Cardinals to examine the question. The Commission decided in favor of the book; the Holy Father later confirmed this decision and implied a definite approval of the chief doctrines taught in the work.

This approval of the Holy See has a very practical importance to the Catholic teacher who advises her students about their Vocation. It implies that the teacher should not decide whether the pupil is called to the priesthood or the religious life but only whether he possesses the basic qualities required by that Vocation.

No teacher hesitates to recommend a young man she has taught for the position of a bank clerk, or a young lady for the position of confidential secretary. In the same way, when a teacher finds in a child piety, purity of life and intention, together with the absence of natural or canonical impediments, such as ill health or the obligation to support his parents, why should she fear to turn the child's mind to the heights of sacrifice demanded by the religious life or the priesthood? After all, she is not giving the child a Vocation; nor is she discovering a Vocation which the child previously

had. She is merely judging that this boy or girl shows certain signs which, in the ordinary course of events, and with the Grace of God, will impel the Bishop or the religious superior to call the candidate either to the Altar or to profession.

Afterwards, Rectors of Seminaries, Novice Masters or Mistresses, and Spiritual Directors will with all possible care watch over the growth of the candidate's fitness and will supply the information for the final judgment to the Bishop or Superior. But how will children ever conceive love and admiration for the privileged Vocation, and how will they take the initial step to reach it, unless their attention has first been drawn to it by the understanding and sympathetic voice of their teacher, and unless the shyness and hesitation of young souls are overcome by the help and encouragement of a zealous Catholic teacher?

### **Necessity of the Teacher's Help**

The principles laid down for the teacher's cooperation in the work of Vocation are supported by the lessons of experience. It is true that the lives of the saints teem with examples of direct divine intervention: the roads to Damascus are many and filled with wonders. But it is not so with the normal cases of priestly or religious Vocations. Several years ago a survey was made of about one hundred priests. It showed that approximately ninety of these Vocations were awakened by the help of sympathetic teaching Sisters. These teachers, with their human limitations, correctly read the heart of a young boy; they saw his fitness for the higher state and quietly got together the material and spiritual helps necessary for the success of his work. It seems a large majority of the priests in this country owe the happiness and dignity of their lives to the help they received from teachers. And these teachers are rewarded by remembrances



in the Masses of the priests whom they taught and guided to the Altar steps.

What is true of the priestly life is still more true of religious Vocations of women. The average Catholic girl loves and admires her teacher. To her young heart, the sympathetic nun who is moulding her mind and soul is the living picture of a sacred ideal of beauty and sanctity. Often a mere suggestion that the girl is able, with God's help, to attain the same ideal will bring forth the generous, honest response which is the first step toward a Sister's profession.

Father Elliott, of the Paulist Fathers, once described the teacher's role in the work of Catholic education in this way: "Take a diamond ring and write with it upon a window pane. The words can never be effaced till the glass is destroyed. The human soul can never be destroyed, and upon it the teacher writes God's truth and love with the prophet's pen of iron, with the point of a diamond."

How accurately these words describe the teacher's work of fostering Vocations. The Catholic teacher who cooperates in this holy task is using the diamond-point of his ardent zeal to draw upon immortal souls a true likeness of Jesus Christ, a likeness whose beauty bewilders the angels of heaven.

Moreover, in this work the teacher is reproducing in herself a characteristic trait of our Saviour's personality. Jesus once stood on a hill watching the wavering cornfields beneath Him and said, "Behold the fields are white unto the harvest . . . but the laborers are few. Pray to the Father that He may send laborers into His field."

That anxiety of Christ as He looks on the world and sees souls perishing because the laborers are few, that Divine yearning for Vocations to help reap the priceless harvest of Redemption, these sacred feelings pass into the heart of the teacher. Looking over the narrow field of her classroom, she seeks laborers for the harvest and beseeches God that

He may choose some of these children for the Divine task. In this way she imitates Christ's zeal for Vocations and becomes, in this as in other respects, a living image of Our Blessed Lord.

The religious teacher must love the Church and desire to see the works of her Community thrive for the glory of God. The scarcity of both priestly and religious Vocations is a major hindrance to this. The death of a good priest or religious is a double blow to the Bishop or superior. In addition to the personal loss they feel, they must ask themselves, "Where can I find a replacement?" All too often there is no one available, and they must place the extra work on men and women who are already wearing themselves out with long hours and hard work. The projects of the Diocese or Community will suffer; the health and physical endurance of the priests and religious will be overtaxed. All this for the lack of Vocations!

Finally, the Sister who is zealous in this holy work ensures her own salvation and is preparing for herself an eternity of heavenly glory. A story is told of a Roman matron who, when asked by a friend to show her precious stones and ornaments, called in her four children and said, "*These are my jewels.*" Similarly the religious teacher should regard as precious jewels the children she has helped toward a priestly or religious vocation. What a crown it will be for her when she appears before her Judge! What comfort to be able to say as she lies on her death-bed: "O my God, Thou knowest that I have not been a fervent religious. I have too often neglected the observance of my rule. Alas, I may have lost sight of the sacredness of my vow, but see, O Lord, how many children I have gained for Thee. See all those priests saying Mass for their teacher; all those religious praying for me." Surely this will be a consoling thought in a dread hour.

On one occasion, some one asked the well-known Do-

minican preacher, Father McKenna, how many vocations to the priesthood he had awakened during the forty or more years he had been interested in that work. He answered that he did not know the exact number but that there must have been *two hundred or more*. Of course, this is an exceptionally large number. But it is not exceptional to find in Communities one or several religious who are eminently successful in this great work. However, not only a few, but *all* of the members of a religious Community have the duty to cooperate with God in bringing priests to the Altar, Sisters to the Convent. This truth must be fully recognized by all those who have pledged their lives to the service of their Master. No one can love Him truly and neglect the work of Vocations.

It remains for us to study the means by which Vocations are awakened and the signs by which they are discerned.

### **Means of Awakening Vocations**

In writing to his convert, Philemon, St. Paul made this statement: "Thou owest me thy own self also. Yea, Brother, may I enjoy thee in the Lord." (I, 19) The heart of the great Apostle was thrilled with the thought that his efforts had aided a precious soul to take the first steps toward eternal life. He looked upon this disciple as his possession and the comfort of his old age. In the same way, the religious teacher can claim as her own those whom her efforts have brought to the path of the privileged Vocation. But how will she undertake to lead them to that sublime state? What means are appropriate to that end?

Five means may be mentioned, which, if used consistently, will ordinarily yield fruitful results. Two of these means refer to the personal qualifications of the teacher: prayer and religious fervor. Two others bear upon the character of the teaching: discipline in the classroom, and sound Catholic education. The last one deals with the dispositions of those who are taught: the fostering of piety among pupils.

## The Teacher's Prayer

Let your imagination carry you away to climb the rugged slope of one of the Galilean hills. There, far away from the haunts of men and far above the noise of the busy city, Christ is praying. While the purple glow of evening fades into the cool darkness of night, He is in intimate communion with His heavenly Father. He is praying for Vocations. And only when the early light of morning brightens the eastern mountains does He come down to gather the first College of priests, and the first Community of religious. We might wonder why Our Lord should pray—He whose touch can raise the dead. Although He does not need help from above, He spends the night in prayer before choosing His Apostles that He might afterwards say to those who are eager to awaken vocations: "I have given you an example."

He has given us not only an example, but also a precept: "Pray ye the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into His field." "Pray ye," with earnest, humble, confident, persevering supplication. Direct that prayer toward success in the important work of Vocations. How many of us remember this intention? We never fail to beg God to increase our school attendance, to swell the number of our boarders, to watch over the health of our pupils, but do we ever beseech Him earnestly to awaken within hearts the first dream of a priestly or religious Vocation?

The mother of Cardinal Vaughan was in the habit of spending an hour every night before the Blessed Sacrament in order that God might call to Himself all of her children. Her prayers were answered. Her five daughters became religious and six of the eight boys, priests. Of these six priests, one died a Cardinal, one a Bishop, another a famous preacher of the Society of Jesus. The other two boys entered the seminary, but later withdrew. They married and became the fathers of priests and nuns. Would that all religious teachers

caught a spark of that wonderful zeal for Vocations! Would that all had a similar ambition to see their spiritual sons and daughters follow the narrow path!

The practice of prayer is brought to life and made doubly powerful by the exercise of penance. God's generosity is proportionate to the intensity of our desire. But desires that are clothed merely with words are apt to be ineffective. On the contrary, desires which place in our hands the whip of mortification to chastise our bodies, desires which strengthen us against ourselves and help us to conquer our likes and dislikes, these certainly are sincere. God reads in them a proof of the earnestness of our aspirations. Such prayers he never fails to answer. This explains the wonderful power of penitent souls in the work of Vocation. Religious have been known to take the discipline daily that God may multiply Vocations. Others offer for the same end their trials, labors and humiliations. True zeal for the glory of God will inspire everyone with the means best adapted to his or her particular character.

### **The Teacher's Fervor**

Religious fervor, or personal sanctity in the teacher is another powerful means of drawing Vocations.

What does a child yearn for in the morning of life? He longs after two objects: greatness and happiness. He should not be criticized for this ambition because it has its root in nature itself, where God has planted it. In itself it is good and it becomes bad only when it turns to an unworthy object.

No sooner is the child conscious of his God-given faculties, than he looks around for a perfect embodiment of this greatness and happiness towards which his nature tends. That child is blessed who finds at an early age teachers whose souls breathe forth the wonders of Divine grace, whose hearts radiate the joy of Christ. He may look timidly at the strange

religious garb; his nature may shrink from the sacrifices such a life entails. But the sweetness and majesty of a fervent soul will fill his own heart with wonder and the desire to imitate such a life.

A priest-friend of mine who helped lead many boys to the seminary attracted them by his noble, ascetic appearance, by his dignified yet natural conduct everywhere, but especially in the sanctuary and the sacristy. When preparing for Mass, he greeted the boys in a friendly, fatherly way; but his mind remained serious, lost in the great mysteries he was about to perform. The altar boys, seeing him making his thanksgiving, would stand quietly in their places, observing him closely. They would look up to him with admiration, and feel, "It is something great to be a priest! I wish I could be a priest!" A similar feeling will come over pupils who daily and hourly gaze upon a fervent religious teacher.

The religious life has been compared to a window in a Cathedral—dull, bleak, ugly without; but if we go within we find a blaze of beauty. So it is with the individual religious soul. Apparently it leads an austere, unattractive and forbidding life, but this is only a superficial impression. If that soul is really fervent, it will be easy even for the outsider to penetrate its sanctuary and gaze upon a loveliness not of this earth. In this beauty, there lurks a mysterious charm that lures souls, drawing them to taste some of that heavenly sweetness.

The history of religious Communities proves this point. An Order or Congregation is more attractive to young men and women to the degree that its members are more fervent. When St. Aloysius Gonzaga was asked why he had chosen the Society of Jesus, he answered that he had been drawn to it by the austerity of the early members. St. Benedict, hidden in the caverns of Subiaco, saw his blessed solitude invaded by throngs of applicants, eager to learn from his words



and example the beauty of fervor. It is related of St. Bernard that mothers hid their children when they knew that the holy man was near. So great a charm clung to his presence that all who saw him wanted to follow in his footsteps. While this legend is probably an exaggeration, it does indicate something of the mysterious attractiveness of fervor in the soul of the good religious.

Of all the virtues that make up fervor, there are some which, more than others, attract souls to the privileged Vocation. Chief of these is charity. Charity is a precious plant which bears many beautiful blossoms. We may mention especially kindness, courtesy and patience.

Kindness is the fragrance of hearts that love Jesus. It shows itself in thoughts, words and deeds. Necessary in all, it is indispensable in the teacher. A spiritual writer has said that the best teacher is the one that best wins the children's hearts. This is usually done by gentleness of manner, tone of voice, looks and gestures. The teacher must be incapable of outbursts of anger. She must be unfailing in patience, scrupulously prudent in speech and careful never to wound unjustly by bitter words, sharp remarks or peevish scolding. Never must she strike one of her pupils, no matter how great the provocation. All these manifestations of charity are necessary if the teacher is to preserve her influence. Without them, she may instruct minds, but she will never lift up hearts, and she will never win souls to Christ.

It is especially important that the teacher should never criticize her Community or its members in the presence of her students. Such remarks can be fatal to the work of Vocation. How can she expect to draw others to her own mode of life if she reveals to strangers the weaknesses and failings of her own life and of her Sisters? Children may approve and join in the criticism, but they part with their teacher with a decreased esteem of the Community. No religious body will

thrive if it is widely known that its members are not united among themselves. No one chooses to go where discord and unhappiness exist.

### **Discipline in the Classroom**

It is true that the seed of Vocation is usually cast into the soul by the two means we have mentioned: prayer and fervor in the teacher. But the germ is as delicate as it is precious. It must be carefully guarded against all influences which might impede its growth. The Catholic school is the rich soil in which that germ will come to maturity; the religious teacher is the laborer to whom God has entrusted the task of sheltering it and providing for it an atmosphere favorable to its growth. This is why discipline in a school and classroom is an important element in the fostering of Vocations.

Discipline is rule, order and good behavior. Absence of discipline spells misrule, disorder, and abuses of all sorts. When discipline reigns, souls are happy and active in their growth. If, on the contrary, chaos and anarchy are permitted to hold sway, souls suffer, and sin creeps in. The choicest hearts will lose their zeal under such a corrupting condition. A school or academy in which there is no discipline will be barren of Vocations.

The secret of discipline and order lies in a nice balance between the sterner and the sweeter virtues of religion, between harshness and laxity. Some one has cynically compared children to young cubs, which must be tamed. The whip alone will not achieve success with a child nor will the stick of candy or the pink doll. Where these fail, the firm and steady hand will succeed.

Therefore, any religious teacher interested in awakening Vocations must cultivate the qualities which foster order and discipline. She must strive to be firm without being harsh. She must be loving, though not sentimental; kind, but not weak.

Above all else, she must be impartial. Children do not resent discipline, but they abhor injustice. With the astuteness of trained detectives they soon find out the slightest sign of injustice in their teacher. Once she fails in this matter, her pupils lose confidence in her. Partiality destroys the influence of the teacher and renders her powerless to do anything to foster Vocations.

Probably the most effective means of preserving order and discipline in the school and classroom is to keep the minds of the pupils actively engaged. To this end, a well-prepared class, whose least details are skillfully planned will do more to check mischief than the stiffest rod or the sharpest command. Likewise, when boys and girls are kept at work preparing studies under the direction of the teacher, their minds become so absorbed that little time is left for disorder and misbehavior. In this sense, study safeguards morals. A keen and active mind is the most receptive soil for the seed of Vocation.

### **Sound Catholic Education**

Discipline and good order in school and classroom are but negative means of fostering Vocations. To their influence must be added the mighty strength of a thoroughly Catholic training of mind and heart. The religious teacher ought never forget that the primary end of her ministry is not to prepare children for examinations, not to fill their minds with worldly knowledge, not to enable them to secure good positions. It is rather to mould souls and to train them for the duties of Christian life, to give them a deep-seated love for Christ and His Church and to prepare an elite for the battles of our Faith. All else is secondary, whatever be the pretensions and claims of college or academy catalogues. If that sublime end is not attained, the work is a dismal failure.

Furthermore, if we are not zealous in this respect, we cannot hope to be blessed with Vocations. Vocation implies

sacrifices made out of love for God. These practices of self-denial will not be won from the reluctant natures of our children, unless their souls are inspired by a clear vision of the ideal before them. How will they be willing to dedicate their lives to the service of a God whom they know but little? How can they appreciate the high honor of being priests or religious, if they have not been taught how sacred our Faith is and how noble it is to work for souls? A school or academy which neglects religious instruction, or in which that all-important part of the program is but poorly taught, will be marked with the lack of generous and enlightened souls, and though it may otherwise prosper, it will not be the Alma Mater to many priests and religious.

Thus, the teaching of religion should be the most honored part of the school curriculum. Translated into practical terms, this principle implies that the religion class will be prepared as carefully as, even more carefully than merely secular classes. Yet is not the contrary too often the case? The simplicity of the truths of Faith and our familiarity with them often lead us to believe that we need not spend much time in preparing the religion class. As a consequence, some children who have spent several years in parochial schools or academies, display amazing ignorance of the truths of Faith. Certainly no privileged Vocation will ever grow in such benighted souls.

May it be urged that in our schools a greater stress be laid upon the teaching of the Life of Christ? Children are naturally loving and tend to reproduce what they admire. If the charm of the Humanity of Our Savior is made real to their hearts, their souls grow warm with the love of Jesus and the desire to follow Him. We've all seen tiny children kneeling before the Crib with eyes glowing with love and hearts eager to do something personal to please "little Jesus." Christ, if known to little children, if lovingly studied by older pupils, will win many valiant hearts to His service!

There are so many ways open to the zealous teacher to mold the souls of her pupils, in and out of the classroom, that we need not treat of them here. A word spoken at an opportune time, a kind letter written during the period of the child's absence, a gentle reminder to a class of the approach and significance of a great feast-day, these are but a few of many such means offered by religious education.

The special subject of Vocation is too universally neglected in our schools. How many children have clear notions of what a Vocation is? How many know of the obligation they are under to follow the particular path God has prepared for them? Are they ever impressed with the solemnity of the choice? Is their attention sufficiently aroused to this important subject? It may be suggested that a well-prepared lecture or talk be given every year to the children assembled for the purpose. The parish priests or the chaplain could perform this task well.

### **Fostering of Piety**

If the fostering of piety among our children is treated in the last place, it is not because we place little importance on its function in the work of Vocation. It is rather because the piety of children is normally based upon the example of the teacher's fervor, upon the good order and discipline of the school, and finally upon the religious influence of Catholic education. In truth, piety is so essential that there is the hope of a Vocation in every devout child, while, on the contrary, a pupil devoid of piety, even though he possesses all the other qualifications, gives no promise of so great a blessing.

What, then, is piety? It consists less in the number of religious practices performed than in a determined disposition of the heart. This disposition is made up of two elements: tender love and generous service. To love God, to feel unhappy when His interests are jeopardized, and to experience joy when He is praised and obeyed—such is the first quality

of piety. To give Him substantial proof of this love, to dedicate time, strength and resources to His service—that is the second and no less essential manifestation of piety.

Only when this double spirit reigns in a school and inspires individual souls, will it be practical for the teacher to look around in search of Vocations. If a school or academy is noted for the spirit of worldliness, if the pupils are known to be indifferent toward the things of God and unresponsive to generous impulses, this is an almost certain sign that no privileged Vocations will grow there. If God permits that a fervent soul finds its way into such a lukewarm environment, He may give it the grace to escape the corruption of the atmosphere, and thus the soul can be saved for the inspiration of the higher call. But this is an exceptional and rare grace which the teacher must not expect or rely on. The history of our schools teaches this lesson; some are found to yield a generous harvest of Vocations; others are barren of such glorious fruits. The reason is to be sought in the piety of the pupils, or in its absence.

The chief obstacle to the growth of piety is the unchecked growth of the *leading defect*. This is the special weakness, the strong tendency toward a particular fault, which seems to be present in the character of each of us. Every person has some tendency toward all the sins, but almost always there is some special frailty which is the weak point in the individual's personality.

The zealous teacher who spends her day with children will, therefore, feel a keen anxiety until she discovers the defect in each of her charges. For this defect is also the deadliest enemy of Vocation. She will use all the tact and patience at her command in order to point out the nature and dangerous effects of that passion, to follow its traces in the child's conduct, and to indicate the appropriate means to root it out.

Leading defects may be classified under seven heads:



1) pride of domination, whose chief manifestations are anger and stubbornness; 2) pride of complacency, which finds its expression in vanity and vain boasting; 3) pride of timidity or weakness, which is self-centered, broods in silence and lacks the power to confide in anyone; 4) pride of sensitiveness, which enrolls its victims in the large army of the world's injured ones and causes them to detect insult and injury where none are meant; 5) sensuality of sloth, which is the cause of all laziness and failure; 6) sensuality of pleasure, which is the mainspring of self-indulgence; 7) sensuality of dissipation or inconstancy, which seeks satisfaction in all things, without finding it anywhere. This simple classification of leading defects is given in hope that it may help some teachers in the difficult task of discovering the pet passions of their pupils.

The chief positive means of fostering piety in the pupils is, of course, the devotion to the Holy Eucharist. When children are properly instructed on this vital subject, they respond with whole-souled enthusiasm to any suggestion which will help them to honor and please Our Lord. This cannot be done altogether by the priest, either in the pulpit or in the confessional. It is properly and primarily the task of the Sister in the classroom. It has been noted that the number of Vocations in an educational establishment is in proportion to the number of frequent communicants.

### **Signs of Vocation**

It is the exclusive part of the confessor or spiritual director to decide whether a young man or woman should take the initial step in the path of the privileged Vocation. In normal cases, however, the teacher has a role of great importance. Her advice and encouragement usually help the child to become aware of the higher call. And her zeal and skill help to guide and strengthen the subject in hours of darkness and doubt. This work, of course, demands a rare tact and dis-

cretion. It supposes an especially thorough knowledge of the ordinary signs of Vocation. Such a knowledge will help the teacher to avoid mistakes and bitter disappointments.

Two chief qualities must be found in every pupil whom the teacher is encouraging to embrace the higher life: an *aptitude* for that life and a certain *attraction* toward it.

Whenever God predestines a creature to a particular work, He always gives it the ability required for the performance of that work. In addition to this, He places within it an inclination toward that type of activity. In other words, He fashions it, then draws it toward the end He has in view.

Therefore, it is clear that a leaning toward a particular Vocation does not come from God if it manifests itself in a subject that is unfit. Likewise, when a soul seems worthy of the call, the teacher must be sure that it is a disinterested desire which inclines that soul to this form of life.

The idea of fitness itself is rather complex: it contains such elements as family, temperament, a certain standard of intelligence, and peculiar requirements of heart in the subject. Attraction is still more difficult to analyze, existing as it does in many degrees and being accompanied by manifold intentions.

The teacher who discerns a germ of Vocation in a pupil's work, or who is consulted on the subject, must first inquire about the family and home surroundings of the candidate. This does not mean that wealth and social prestige are elements of fitness. God finds His own amidst the poor as well as the rich. Here we are talking about the moral standing of the family. Careful discrimination on this point is required, both for the honor of the priesthood and religion, and for the interests of the child himself.

In the Code of Canon Law the Church restates her jealous watchfulness over the good reputation of her ministers. The tremendous dignity of the priestly office compels her to

close the sanctuary gate against anyone who may bring scorn or ridicule on the priesthood. Even when the subject himself is innocent, the fault of his parents can exclude him from Holy Orders.

This may seem unjust if we fail to understand that a Vocation to the priesthood is given, not for the benefit of the individual, but for the whole mystical body. A man, completely innocent in his own life, might do harm to the Church because of external circumstances. In this case it would be unreasonable to admit him to Orders. Perhaps a comparison might make this reasoning clearer. Assume that a good man is unjustly sentenced to ten years in prison as an embezzler. Though his innocence could not be proved in court, his Bishop might know that he was not guilty of the crime. Would anyone argue that this man should be admitted to the priesthood on his release from prison? As a convicted criminal—at least in the eyes of the state—he would be a source of scandal and ridicule to the faithful. This is the same kind of reasoning which compelled the Church to make illegitimate birth an impediment to Holy Orders.

Some critics maintain that this legislation punishes children for the guilt of their parents. No one holds that the son inherits his parents' sin, the way he may inherit red hair or some physical weakness. However, it is possible that an environment of moral laxity may have its effect on the child. Habits formed in the earliest years have a great influence on a man's character. Bishops and religious superiors should be cautious about accepting subjects from a home in which there is little moral or religious training.

The following rules may be of practical value to teachers: 1) No effort should be made to turn a child of a dishonorable family towards a privileged Vocation; 2) If the child himself applies and insists energetically on being given a fair chance, he should be submitted to a rigorous and prolonged trial in order that the certainty may be had that his

personal merits are overcoming the handicaps of his environment; 3) Such a child, if otherwise exceptionally fit, may be admitted after he has proved his personal worth; 4) In general, one should look for Vocations in families that are thoroughly moral, honest and deeply religious. Candidates from such homes may at times appear less attractive, but they give promise of wholesome fruit.

### Temperament

The next sign of a Vocation is the temperament of the candidate. It is not enough that his moral nature be free from stain, but it must also be favorable to the growth of the priestly or religious ideal.

Some infirmities are sure signs of the lack of Vocation. For instance, the deaf, the blind, the seriously deformed are, in most cases, unable to fulfill the functions of the ministry, and the Church forbids their admittance.

It is less easy to determine the aptitude of temperament. Character is the fruit of temperament. This is said without denying free will. It is essential, therefore, to keep away from the sanctuary and the religious life souls that are by nature unfit to bear the yoke of Christ.

The temperaments we must guard against are three in number: the indolent, the violent, and the melancholy.

A religious teacher should be most careful before guiding to the higher life children of weak and indolent temperament. Though such temperaments easily submit to rule, they lack initiative, they work negligently, and too often it is through them that the worst disorders creep into the most fervent religious bodies. But the very essence of their unfitness is their lack of moral energy and the facility with which they fall prey to all vices.

Watchfulness on this point is the more necessary because the teacher may be deceived by outward appearances. The quiet exterior and placid countenance of such children give

an impression of interior peace. Lifelessness and outward calm should not be mistaken for virtue. Before admitting characters of this stamp, the educator should make sure they are capable of exertion.

Of course, acts of laziness are not the same as habits of sloth. Isolated acts may be corrected, but it is very difficult to mend the type of extreme indolence just described. The probability is that they cannot be trained into good priests or fervent religious.

Normally, violent natures are less dangerous. They need moderation, but it is easier to control than create. When life overflows, it is not so difficult to regulate the excess.

There are, nevertheless, temperaments that are so violent, so impatient of restraint, that they are unfit for the higher life. They explode at the least touch. The outburst may not last long, and they return repenting and lamenting the act which was the result of instinct rather than deliberation. But whether responsible or not, such natures constitute a destructive element in religious work and should not be encouraged toward the privileged Vocation.

A defect of this sort is easily noticed in little children. The skillful teacher will distinguish the corrigible from the hopeless.

Melancholy temperaments are not favorable to the growth of priestly or religious vocations. St. Teresa used to exclude them from her convents. They are, indeed, deserving of pity. Their tendency to think themselves shunned, scorned and persecuted by others, embitters their own life and saddens that of their companions. They should be helped and all sympathy given them, but they should not be admitted to the higher life. If they manifest an inclination towards Vocation it is wise to give them to understand that they will succeed better in the world than in the priesthood or in religion.

In general, preference is to be shown to open, cheerful

and even dispositions. Such natures may not be faultless, but if energetic, they will improve and grow worthy of the high calling.

### **Qualities of Intellect**

We must now turn to the two most important signs of Vocation: the qualities of mind and heart. They are in reality the only essential ones, for the others are vital only in so far as they influence these two.

Naturally, children with bright and keen intellects are highly desirable for the priesthood and the religious life. Every teacher feels this by instinct. Especially in our day, a great intellect wins the recognition of the world and is able to gain minds to Christ and His Church. It is, moreover, a fact that God chooses the leaders of his people from the elite of the world. In past ages, great geniuses humbly dedicated their masterful gifts to the Divine service. Today we generally find a high quality of intellect in the privileged calling. If we do not lead in the intellectual world, it is not for lack of talent, but rather for want of cultivating the talent we have.

Of course we must not confine ourselves to brilliant intellects. Ordinary talent, when joined with common sense and skill in the handling of men and things, is even more useful than transcending genius. The average mind fits in wherever employed and is able to accomplish an incalculable good for souls.

Even inferior minds may be given encouragement toward the higher life, when they otherwise give guarantee of soundness of heart. In such cases, however, perfect docility and humility are necessary. If they are inclined to be stubborn or proud, their usefulness is greatly minimized for the best reasons will not move their narrow minds.

It is not easy to determine that an individual is intellec-



tually unfit for the priesthood or the religious life. Humility and a high degree of virtue will cover a multitude of mental defects. The example of the Cure of Ars proves this point sufficiently.

Sound judgment is the most precious of the intellectual qualities which fit a man or woman for the priesthood or the religious life. An erratic mind, on the contrary, whatever wealth of learning it may possess, will not only be powerless to work successfully for souls, but will even cause a great deal of harm. Most scandals and misfortunes in the Church and in religious communities are due to ill-balanced minds.

Children in schools should, therefore, be watched with utmost vigilance. If they are hasty in their actions, if they are odd in their behavior, if they habitually show queer ideas and are frequently guilty of grave indiscretions, it is an infallible sign that they are absolutely unfit for Vocation.

Self-sufficiency and pride are other signs of lack of Vocation. Even the most brilliant intellects, if impatient of guidance, will lapse into tragic errors. A child, therefore, who displays an overweening reliance on his own views and scorns suggestions and advice from others should not be encouraged toward the higher life, if there is no sign of improvement in him.

The best subjects for Vocation are those who are intelligent, sound of judgment, humble and docile.

### **Qualities of Heart**

The heart is the main spring of the moral life. The qualities of heart in a candidate for the privileged Vocation must consequently be examined with the greatest care.

Two chief qualities of heart stand out as particularly necessary: purity and generosity.

In the matter of Vocation, purity of heart is a question

at once delicate and difficult. It belongs to the confessor or the director to pass final judgment on this important point. Basing his decision upon the moral stamina of the candidate, the confessor may, for instance, welcome some, although they are not guiltless, and, on the other hand, reject others in spite of their actual innocence. Combining the principles of sound theology with the laws of human psychology, he will strive to read in the present the secret of the future.

But the religious teacher is not without her share of responsibility. She judges from appearances, it is true, but appearances are at times singularly enlightening as to the tendencies and the habits of the child. Moreover, outward facts reveal the inner state of the soul. Certain signs are infallible witnesses of the purity of heart, such as the fear of even venial sin, the avoiding of dangerous companions, modesty of dress, hatred of evil books, careful upbringing in the home and, especially, love of sacrifice.

In any case, the teacher must keep from the privileged path any pupil that has exercised a corrupting influence over companions either by word or deed. Such a child may at the moment indicate regret, but it is probable that his habits will later reawaken and lead him into grievous faults.

The second quality of heart which indicates a fitness for Vocation is generosity and readiness to make sacrifices.

One day a group of boys had settled down to a ball game in the school yard when a visiting priest appeared, looking for a server. Every boy displayed a keen and absorbing interest in his game and appeared not to notice the intruder. All but one! He threw his glove on the ground and ran to the sacristy to prepare the Altar. Not too many years later this boy, who was willing to give up his personal pleasure, was ordained and is doing wonderful missionary work in foreign lands. So it will be with children who from an early age show a readiness to give up their own will to serve God. They are

already indicating one of the surest signs of Vocation. The holy germ takes deep root in generous and self-sacrificing hearts.

A teacher must, therefore, keep her eyes open for such children, and when all other qualifications are present, she must not hesitate to speak the word which may bring a good priest or a fervent religious to the feet of Christ.

May we be allowed to give here a few practical rules which will serve as a guide to the teacher in judging the aptitude or fitness of her charges: 1) Avoid haste in judgment. A long acquaintance is necessary before the teacher knows the child. All are not equally easy to read. Some good qualities or defects are on the surface, while others are deep-rooted. On the other hand, little faults may grow into dangerous manifestations, while serious difficulties may be overcome by persevering good will.

2) The defects above-mentioned need not exclude anyone unless they are notable. We must rely on the influence of grace and the personal effort of the subjects. For instance, the son of a father who is addicted to excessive drink may be more inclined than another to the same defect; but if he seriously resolves to avoid the least occasion and give abundant proof of strength of will, why should the father's vice exclude a child from the higher calling? The greater the defect, however, the longer and more severe should be the trial.

3) When the fitness of a child is certain, he may be spoken to fearlessly, though discreetly. If his fitness is doubtful, it is best not to take the first step. Should the child himself ask, the doubt must be resolved in favor of the higher life. Vocations are so rare that none should be lost from neglect. The training preparatory to the priesthood or the religious life will change the doubt to certainty.

## Attraction

Not every child who is fit for the priesthood or the religious life is called to that life. He must also exhibit a leaning towards this special state. From the fact, therefore, that a pupil seems pious, zealous, and self-sacrificing, we need not conclude at once that he is predestined for the privileged Vocation. These signs are purely negative. The positive sign is the spontaneous inclination of the souls toward that state.

This attraction takes many forms. At times it is felt very strongly at an early age. Such was the case, for example, with St. Therese of the Child Jesus and with many other souls who never give serious thought to any life other than the priestly or the religious.

At other times inclination toward the higher life is mingled with hesitation, and it may even be hidden within the depths of a soul that is utterly unconscious of it. What must the teacher do under such circumstances?

The first case is not hard to solve. In souls that are eager, generous and open, the attraction is discerned without difficulty. It manifests itself in an eagerness for the practices of the priesthood or the peculiar ministry of a religious community, and by a lively desire to join in them.

It frequently happens that the attraction suddenly and mysteriously disappears. Evil passions, the cares of study or the glamor of the world, may for a while becloud the light of Vocation. Thus the Star of Bethlehem vanished out of the sky, while the Magi were in Jerusalem. The practical line of conduct for the teacher is to create conditions favorable for the return of the attraction; pious readings, taking part in works of zeal, a good retreat are means which render the soul attentive to the Voice of God. Prayers should also be used abundantly that the Will of God may be made known.

When a pupil openly declares his inclination towards Vocation, the role of the teacher is clearly defined. She must

make sure of the aptitude of the candidate, of the perseverance of the attraction and then help the child to find his way into the Seminary or the Novitiate.

The case of wavering attraction is more difficult to handle. Certain children, unable to make a decision themselves, would not heed suggestions that might be made to them. If such subjects show no striking fitness or clearly defined attraction, it is best to let them grapple unaided with their own doubts. But it often happens that by their intellectual and moral qualifications, they appear chosen for works of zeal. They are upright and, once settled in a state, they will successfully fulfill the duties of their Vocation. The lack of decision may be superficial and caused by the instinctive dread of jumping in. Wavering souls, more than others, need the kindly guidance of a friend.

If the doubt perseveres, should an attempt be made to solve it in favor of the higher calling? St. Thomas puts the question with regard to the religious life, and answers in the affirmative. The reason given is solid: It is always lawful to counsel one to embrace the state that is more perfect, the more favorable to eternal salvation, and the more profitable to the glory of God. Moreover, as pointed out above, it must be remembered that the teacher is not deciding the Vocation of the pupil, but is acting as an adviser for the preparation to that Vocation.

Some children are utterly unconscious of the Call, strange as this statement may sound. Dissipation of mind, thoughtlessness, perhaps even sin, prevent them from hearing the inner Voice. Others feel the inclination within but out of timidity never manifest that desire to any one. This is the case very often with boys.

Under these circumstances the teacher must take the initiative. By discreet questioning, she must arouse the child's attention to the real but silent aspirations of his heart. A

kind word will bring out ideals, which otherwise would never have been made known. How many men and women in mature age have been heard to say: "If in my childhood some one had spoken to me of Vocation, I might have become a priest or a religious."

Take an example: You have in school a boy who excels in every respect. He leads the class. He is humble, docile, courageous. His conduct is an example to all. How you would like to see him a priest! But nothing in his words or deeds indicates that he is thinking of that sublime state. He is now preparing "in a general way for a business or professional career." Are you going to let him go without a word? Will you not give him at least one chance of choosing? It is so easy for you to breathe a word of warning to this child about the seriousness of his choice of life, to picture before his eyes the greatness of the priesthood and the glorious privilege of saving souls. He may never have thought of it. Your advice may lead him into the privileged path. We are not so bashful when there is question of canvassing for students. Why should we be timid when God's highest interests are at stake?

To what particular state or community will the teacher direct the candidate for the higher life? Will it be toward the secular priesthood or a community of men? If it be a girl, to what institute of women is she destined? On this point the teacher must be broad and discreet.

As a rule, she must not force her own personal views or interests upon a child who already inclines toward a particular state or community. The wishes of the subject, his or her special aptitudes, must be taken into account, though it is not unlawful, of course, to consider the needs of one's own community. This, however, must not be done in the face of a clearly defined attraction toward another institute. The spirit of charity and broad-mindedness will dictate the teacher's conduct.



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