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# VOCATIONS CONGRESS

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NOVEMBER 20-24, 1973

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for  
Catholic Education

VOCATIONS  
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## FINAL DOCUMENT

### Introduction

At a time when a large number of local Churches are becoming aware that those responding to the calls to a consecrated life are insufficient in number to meet the needs and expectations of the People of God, the assembly of Bishops delegated by the Episcopal Conferences meeting here in Rome, at the invitation of the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, for a period of tranquil and serious reflection together, takes on a special sign value: it witnesses to a strong and enlightened approach to the problem and to a total confidence in the grace of God Who is guiding His Church.

The considerations of those participating in the Congress were primarily based on the "Action Plans" which were previously developed by the Episcopal Conferences and exchanged between the various countries.

Reflecting together on these documents has enabled the delegates to understand more clearly those points in the Plans on which clearer agreement was developing, despite the diversity of local situations, as well as those points which, in the general opinion, called for urgent action.

These, then, are the matters which are brought together in this document, the result of a work accomplished with the help of grace and with a view to more satisfying results in the future. This, no doubt, is what the Conferences anticipated from the exchanges of ideas between the delegates.

Taking part also in these discussions were a large number of delegates from the Oriental Churches and from some mission territories, as well as delegates from the unions of Superiors General and secular institutes. This document was worked out with a view to a horizon constantly opening out on the Church Universal, the world, and on the whole People of God, in whose midst vocations to a consecrated life develop in a variety of "ministries" already existing or possible in the future.

The remarks and suggestions in the following pages are to be seen against the background of the "Plans of Action" of the Episcopal Conferences which they reflect accurately.

THE DELEGATES TO THE VOCATIONS CONGRESS  
Rome, November, 1973

# I. Necessity of Sound and Appropriate Theological Reflection

1. Every special vocation in the Church should be seen as an extension of baptismal grace. Every specific impulse given to the encouragement of vocations implies progress in the Church's apostolate. Moreover, the vocation apostolate requires a sound doctrinal basis expressed in a language which confronts the problems of contemporary man. It was not the objective of this Congress to build up a synthesis of those dogmatic beliefs that constitute the present Church teaching on vocation. The Congress did, however, desire to affirm the importance of this teaching. It extends an invitation to specialists in this field to pursue this study and takes this occasion to indicate several points on which the attention of the delegates was particularly focused.

2. God is the author of every vocation; it is He Who calls; it is He Who inspires the free response of man; it is He Who gives the grace of fidelity. His call and our response occur in history, and thus they contribute to the coming of the Kingdom of God and, at the same time, to the building up of a better world (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 39; Second General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, 1971, *Justice in the World*, II). Christ wished His Church to participate in His priestly, prophetic, and royal office (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 31). He also desired for her the various gifts of the Spirit. The episcopal, priestly, and diaconal ministries, as well as the varied forms of consecrated life manifest the richness of the grace of Christ. This same richness enables us to feel confident that, confronted with new needs, His Church will be able to develop new forms of ministry and consecrated life to respond to such needs (cf. *Motu Proprio Ministeria quaedam*, August 15, 1972).

The Lord has invited us to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into the harvest. We must welcome this invitation in a spirit of faith full of hope. We should often recall this invitation of

the Lord: there can be no true vocations apostolate without habitual prayer, a prayer of trust and perseverance.

3. Every vocation has its origin in the designs of God, the Lord of history. Through the working out of personal vocations God leads the whole world to that final regeneration which will be the beginning of a new world. Christ, the God-man, sums up in Himself all the values of the world and of men in order to give them their true significance.

4. Vocations must also be seen in the framework of Church. Indeed, every vocation of special consecration is for the Church which, in turn, exists for men. To help men to discover His Will, God makes use of mediators and various signs. Today some of these differ from those of yesteryear. It is the mission of the Church to educate men to see these signs in the light of faith.

## II. The Specific Vocation Apostolate

5. *The General Apostolate and Promotion of Vocations.* It should be emphasized that the promotion of vocations can be carried on only within the general apostolate of which it constitutes an essential dimension. The Church as a whole is interested in the genesis and full flowering of all vocations. The participation of representatives of religious and secular institutes in this Congress enables us to state clearly this principle: in the perspective of the general and fundamental call to baptismal fidelity the promotion of vocations must be concerned with the various kinds of calls to consecrated life—vocations to the ministerial priesthood and the diaconate, vocations to the profession of the evangelical counsels in religious institutes vowed to the contemplative or apostolic life, vocations to secular institutes and also calls to new forms of the apostolate and consecrated life which the Spirit may be bringing forth.

Moreover, those who have taken up a particular calling in the Church have a duty to promote impartially other types of consecrated life and to make those known in the community. All have the right to receive sound and open teaching on the theology of the spiritual life, understood in all its aspects. Those responsible for this teaching should seek to develop, at the same time, a sound ecclesial sense and a capacity for the discernment of spirits.

6. *The Situation of Society, the Church, and Youth.* Being aware of the true situation of the Church and society in our times is an indispensable condition for the establishment of a plan for the promotion of vocations. Bearing this in mind, it is right to insist on the necessity of a serious study not only of sociological facts and individual attitudes, but also of the causes which explain the present vocation crisis. A careful examination will bring to light promising aspects as well as disturbing features of the situation. This study ought to be carried out in a realistic way taking care to give due recognition to the positive values of our

times in the work for vocations. These should be seen especially in what has become a modern phenomenon, namely the presence of a quite homogeneous social reality called "Youth." The courageous involvement of so many young people in social and political work, despite some tactlessness at times, gives us all reason for optimism. Values are witnessed to by these young people which are not alien to the power of the Spirit and to realization of God's plan in the world. In his discourse to the delegates to this Congress the Holy Father said:

"We also believe, however, in the immense wealth of energies latent in the young people of our time, so open to the great ideals of justice, so eager for authenticity, so ready to devote themselves to their brothers. If we find them so sensitive to the sight of humanity suffering because of injustice, hunger, and violence, how can we resign ourselves to thinking that they cannot be equally sensitive to the problem of a mankind that demands no less forcefully the presence of God and the distribution of His grace through the priestly ministry? We are of the opinion, therefore, that there are still many young souls capable of embracing magnanimously and faithfully the ideal of an existence consecrated to Christ and to souls to the point of heroism" (cfr. *L'Osservatore Romano* n. 268, 11/22/1973).

The new situation in which the Church finds itself, especially in some countries, seems to call for new kinds of ministry and consecrated life. Care should be taken, however, to safeguard both the specific character of the mission of the laity in the Church as well as to affirm the absolute necessity of the priestly ministry.

7. *Evangelization Endeavors—in General.* A Plan of Action for the promotion of vocations presupposes a wider task of evangelization and spiritual formation. Christians, including young people, must be brought, through an apostolic Plan of Action, to know the missionary appeals of the Church to meet the needs of the world of today, especially its spiritual needs. Such knowledge leads to a genuine commitment. It is only a missionary Church, a Church conscious of its missionary role, that deserves to attract vocations. In a plan for spiritual formation it is necessary to stress the importance of catechesis, of spiritual direction, and all those other privileged experiences in which, under the movement of the Spirit,

the soul particularly enjoys listening to the Word of God, interior silence, and prayer.

8. *The Family.* Within Christian communities the fundamental responsibility for the promotion of vocations is taken on by the family (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 11; *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 52). Moreover, it is on such an understanding that the work of promoting vocations must be based. The family must be aware of its own vocation and of its central role in awakening and sustaining vocations to a consecrated state. All vocational promotion work should help the family to become a privileged milieu where a deeper understanding of the Word of God helps to develop little by little a loftier sense of values. We could mention the need for intimacy with God in prayer, strong attachment to the Church's mission, and the giving of oneself to the poorest of our brothers. Inspired by this Gospel spirit, the family becomes not only a source of vocations for the service of the Church, but also a center that is able to offer help and support during those difficult moments that sometimes are experienced by those intent on making spiritual progress.

9. *The Parish and Faith Community.* Every individual Christian needs to be a member of a faith-community in order to develop spiritually. The same can be said for every vocation. It is necessary that he whom God is calling be in a suitable community, a parish, a school, a lay apostolate movement, or a spiritual-life group. To be authentic and credible, a faith-community should be joyful, prayerful, attentive to the Word of God and open to the poor.

10. *The Youth Apostolate.* Youth apostolate has for its goal awakening young people more and more to the responsibility of playing a role in the mission of the whole Christian community. To accomplish this end, the apostolate of youth must reach young people where they are and seek to have them discover how the realization of God's plan for them will enable them to develop on both the human and spiritual levels. At the same time, it will prepare them well to respond to the needs of the Church and the world today. A courageous presentation of the message of the Gospel, put forward in its fullness and centered around the Person of Christ, Who died and arose from the dead, will lead them to a more profound understanding of the role that each of them should play within the Church in all the spheres of contemporary reality.

In this way they will be assisted gradually to discover the Christian sense of the total liberation of man. The young must be given the opportunity to see a Church that is alive and to participate in this life, especially in the liturgical life. Likewise they should be invited to take part in the apostolic activities of their parish or their faith-community in a manner suited to their age.

Some groups of young people show evidence of a greater openness to the things of the spirit. They would profit very much from a sharing in the prayer life and apostolate of truly evangelical communities, whether they are ecclesiastical, religious, or lay. It is probable that the young people would not be the only ones to benefit from this exchange.

11. *Adult Apostolate.* The call of God to the priesthood or to another consecrated life was never confined only to young people and today also it is being addressed to adults of every age and from all levels of society. The vocation apostolate should reach out in a special way to persons of mature age and know-how to take advantage of their valuable experience. In their life and their work they show their vocation. It is necessary, in accordance with the spirit of *Optatam totius*, n. 3, to have due regard for their experience when proposing a formation program and course of studies for seminarians of mature age.

### III. Some Principles for a Pedagogy on the Promotion of Vocations

12. *Those Responsible for Promoting Vocations.* The Bishops were convinced that this matter constituted one of the most important of their responsibilities, one that called for courage, imagination, and persevering effort. They are the first ones with responsibilities for the promotion of vocations. The Major Religious Superiors and those in authority in secular institutes must share in this solicitude of the Pastors of the Church in accordance with the spirit of n. 35 of *Christus Dominus*.

However, Bishops, Superiors, and all others in authority share this task very closely with all members of the Christian community, especially parents, teachers, and all consecrated persons themselves.

13. *Necessity for a Formation in Prayer.* A vocation develops in the intimate relations established with the One Who has given the call. Fidelity to the call of God implies some degree of experience in prayer. We have already emphasized the importance of the family atmosphere and the faith-community, in which young people grow up, as privileged places for the discovery of prayer, not as a theory but as a lived experience. In all times during vocational development it is necessary that the spirit of prayer be awakened in the young, especially through their consciousness of the presence of God in their daily life.

14. *Witness of the Priest and Consecrated Persons.* Personal witness is an indispensable element of all pedagogical activity. It is particularly necessary in the promotion of vocations. Men come to understand the life of a priest or a consecrated person not in books but through their relations with living persons. It is important that they see in these dedicated persons Christ, the Servant of Men, totally devoted to His Father and to His salvific mission. Such witness is possible only with a true conversion of individuals and, perhaps, of institutions. Personal conversion is the work of

a lifetime. Consecrated persons have very great need of periods of time to deepen their faith in Christ and to strengthen their commitment to His cause. The beauty of their vocation will be so much more obvious to the degree that it is manifested very naturally in their joy and in the conviction which they display in speaking of and living out their calling.

15. *Call to a Ministry and to a Consecrated Life.* Young people and also adults must be brought to understand the priesthood and the different forms of consecrated life. The information given up until now has, perhaps, not been always sufficiently complete. Publications on this matter should try to reconcile exact doctrine with the clarity required in a popular presentation.

At the right moment, it is important to know how to invite one or another person to think about choosing the priestly ministry in the Church and, similarly, to present more directly to certain persons the thought of a call to some form of consecrated life. Our time which is characterized by its attention to "persons" invites us above all to have a great respect for each person. But respect is not indifference and, in order to make His call heard more clearly, the Lord expects from us some prudent interventions made with evangelical fortitude.

16. *Sustaining Priestly and Religious Vocations.* A vocation develops with the passing of time; it must be sustained, and it needs both the help of spiritual guides and the support of the community. In the Church's tradition this has been provided for by the setting up of major and minor seminaries, to which the Council gave particular support, and various kinds of houses of formation (cf. *Optatam totius*, n. 3, 4; *Perfectae caritatis*, n. 18). In his discourse to the delegates to this Congress the Holy Father took pains to state such centers should be "truly privileged places of piety, study, and discipline." It is of prime importance that the seminaries and other formation centers should present a clear and attractive image of the priesthood or the consecrated life.

However, it is not the responsibility of this Congress to study in detail the question of the reform of seminaries or of initiation procedures followed in communities dedicated to a consecrated life. Some new types of formation for the ministerial priesthood and the consecrated life have been tried out in certain countries.

If the current situation of the world calls for adjustments in the way of working within some countries, care should be taken not to allow a tradition that has maintained links between spiritual life, intellectual work, and initiation to the apostolate to fade away.

## IV. Organization of the Promotion of Vocations

17. *Coordination of Vocational Promotion.* The diocesan center is the most important organ for coordination. Composed as it is of priests, religious of both sexes, members of secular institutes, and laity, it shows forth the unity of the Church in the service of vocations. It should have links with all Church activities and with priestly and religious formation centers. Its pastoral action should seek to coordinate the center more particularly with the wider pastoral apostolate of the diocese and in a special way, with that of youth.

National vocation centers coordinate the activity of the diocesan centers and assist them in their apostolate.

This form of coordination could also be undertaken with profit at the higher echelons of the Universal Church for better collaboration between those Roman curial departments whose competence requires them to study questions relative to vocations: the Congregations for the Bishops, for the Oriental Churches, for the Clergy, for Religious and Secular Institutes, for the Evangelization of Peoples, for Catholic Education, and the Commission for Social Communications, the Council of the Laity, and the Committee for the Family.

After having expressed its wish for a greater measure of coordination of those different competencies which have some relationship with the matter of promoting vocations, the Congress would like to draw the attention of all very particularly to the recommendation of the decree *Optatam totius*, n. 2, d, insisting on the necessity of effective collaboration between the diverse regions of the Church in order to permit those regions, which the Lord has blessed by sending them more laborers for the harvest, to come to the aid of those other places where the supply of vocations is quite inadequate.

18. *World Vocation Day.* The whole year long the Church is concerned about vocations. But, there are times when the Church chooses to bring this question to the notice and the prayers of the faithful in a special way. The Holy Father has very often urged that the World Day of Vocations be celebrated. It gives an opportunity to pastors to speak to the faithful on the importance and beauty of the priestly ministry, the diaconate, and the various forms of consecration to God that exist in the Church today. For everyone it is a day of intercession that more will respond to the invitation of Christ.

19. *Social Communications Media.* Modern society is very much influenced by modern means of communication. We live in an age of pictures and instant communications. The young especially are very deeply influenced by these phenomena. They derive their image of the priesthood and consecrated life from what they see and hear.

The Church must make special efforts—a difficult task and rarely achieved—to speak to the young in their own language. As well as being very conscious and open to the objectives of the diocesan apostolate, the moderators of the vocational apostolate should also be adept at establishing a rapport with the young, and in a more general way, with today's young adults. The way the mass media use language can be learned; the Church should use as much as is required of it, especially the moderators of formation centers and vocation directors.

## Conclusion

It is not without some reason that people are speaking today about a "crisis" on account of the current lack of vocations, a lack which is not indeed universal, but which is experienced very widely throughout the world.

This Congress, however, has undertaken this period of reflection on vocations not under the grip of fear or defeatism, but rather under the stimulating vision of the action of Christ and of His Spirit in the many diverse situations of the modern world. In the spirit of *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 3, we have felt true and intimate solidarity with the human and historical reality that is ours. We consider that the purifications that the Lord permits his Church to endure in our times can and should be the occasion for wholesome reactions and for taking new steps forward which would not be possible at a less difficult period. Our time, like so many others in history, must in its turn proclaim that the death and resurrection of Christ is the only model according to which the events of the world and the unfolding of the lives of individuals must be "redeemed," that is bought back.

In many countries the work of promoting vocations can appear, from a human viewpoint, a very thankless task on account of the numerous obstacles that are opposed to it. But, all who assume a responsible role in the promotion of vocations, whether at the diocesan, national, or universal level, all these priests, religious, and laity, in our opinion, should be able to count on the efficacious support of the hierarchy.

Gathered together near the tomb of the Prince of Apostles we recall the spirit of faith of his unique vocation. He also experienced during his life new and often difficult situations. May the Lord give to us, may He give to all whom He calls, the courage and strength He gave to Peter; may He give us the same Spirit. It is in the power of this Spirit that we place our hope.

## NOTE

(Prepared by the committee which edited the final document)

1. *The nature, scope, and structure of the document.* The document, approved by the Congress on November 24th, 1973, was based on the texts formulated by the six working groups into which the Congress divided itself. Then this document was improved according to the amendments that were presented at the time and sent to all the participants in the Congress at their homes. Taking the opinions sent in by the participants, the special committee, which was elected by the Congress itself, went through the text again to give its present definitive form.

In undertaking the final revision, the committee wished to maintain the structure of the text as it was voted on by the Congress, without trying to change it into a perhaps more systematic arrangement. Helpful though this might have been, it would not so fully reflect the nature and scope wished for by the Congress.

The Congress, of course, did not intend to produce a doctrinal document. Rather, it preferred to gather together a number of reflections and suggestions on certain points which could serve to help those working for vocational promotion and which perhaps could be useful for those revising and improving "Plans of Action."

Some participants in the Congress, after reading through the projected final text, have suggested new and fuller formulations of some paragraphs. In spite of the fact that some of these suggestions were excellent, the editorial committee felt it must remain faithful to the original text. The work of commenting on and developing the individual points made in the document is one that can be done better by the vocational organizations existing in the various countries of the world.

Other participants wanted a text that would be enriched with practical examples. However, the committee felt that the document sufficiently met the demand for practicality. To enumerate examples would have excessively lengthened the document. Furthermore, this would have simply meant re-copying, without being complete about it, the practical suggestions contained in the 40 or so "Plans of Action" of the various countries and regions, which already have been copied once and exchanged with all the Bishops' Conferences of the world. This document, naturally, cannot be studied apart from these "Plans of Action" because it is intimately related to them and is meant to be of service to them.

2. *Which vocations are being treated here.* The Congress, assuming as its basis of thought the fundamental vocation of "Christian," wished to treat of: the vocation of the ordained minister, that is, of the priest and the deacon (see *Lumen Gentium*, nn. 28-29); the various forms of religious life, contemplative and active, clerical, and lay, (see *Lumen Gentium*, n. 43 and especially see *Perfectae Caritatis*, nn. 7, 8, 9 and 10); and the profession, when it is recognized by the Church, of the evangelical counsels in secular

institutes (see *Perfectae Caritatis*, n. 11). The Congress also had in mind vocations to the "non-ordained ministries," whether these might be those directly instituted according to the *Motu Proprio, Ministeria quaedam*, of August 15th, 1972, or those, deriving from the norms of this same *Motu Proprio*, which are established by Episcopal Conferences. Finally, the Congress also intended to treat of the "missionary vocation" which the recently concluded Ecumenical Council called a "special vocation" and which can involve priests, religious, and laity (see *Ad gentes divinitus*, n. 23).

Bearing this general intention of the Congress in mind, the committee did not think it was necessary to always repeat the whole list of the various kinds of vocations. If the document sometimes refers to one or the other type of vocation, this is usually clear from the words themselves.

The expression "vocations of special consecration" can mean: a) religious vocations (see *Perfectae Caritatis*, n. 5); b) vocations involving a profession of the evangelical counsels in secular institutes (see *Perfectae Caritatis*, n. 11); the priestly vocation (see *Presbyterorum ordinis*, nn. 7 and 16).

The term "ministries" can take on different meanings, depending on the context. It can mean: a) the "ordained ministries"; b) the "instituted ministries," that is those set up according to the *Motu Proprio, Ministeria quaedam*. The expression "new ministries" only refers to ministries that are already instituted or are about to be instituted according to the norms of the *Motu Proprio*. This expression does not refer to any hypothetically possible new "ordained" ministries.

3. *Transient situations and permanent duty.* The Congress' document does not hide the seriousness of certain situations and attempts to make a contribution towards their solution. However, the Congress was convinced that concern for vocations is a permanent duty of the entire Christian community, independently of any set of emergency circumstances. The document tries to present both of these aspects of the matter.

Finally, since working in the vocational area is not separable from the general life of the Church, the Congress was convinced that this work will be successful, with divine assistance, of course, in the measure in which it is inserted into the general renewal of the Church willed by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council.







