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VOCATIONS TO THE PRIESTHOOD

By
VERY REVEREND LYMAN A. FENN, S.S., D.D.



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Vocations to the Priesthood

(Their Discovery and Development)

BY

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FOREWORD

A VOCATION to the priesthood is like gold in the hills, which can be brought to light only by the labors of the miners who dig for it. Priestly gold lies hidden among the splendid young boys of the parishes of our land, waiting to be uncovered by those who would bestir themselves for the search.

The general law of the Church thrusts the burden of the search directly upon the shoulders of priests, especially pastors. But the Sisters and Brothers of our schools, and those who devote their lives to the teaching of Christian Doctrine, because of their many intimate dealings with the children of the parish, and because of the confidence the children so often place in them, can be of great help to parish priests in the work of discovering vocations to the priesthood.

Practical experience reveals the extent of this help. There are nuns and Brothers who, with intelligent and prudent zeal, are ever on the alert to find priestly timber among the fine boys of the parish. Their efforts rarely go unrewarded. They take up their station in a place and within a few years they direct one, two, perhaps even more boys to the seminary. Let them be changed, however, and should no one with like enthusiasm replace them, vocations drop off, though the parish remains the same, with the same school, the same families, and the same general atmosphere.



What secret do these consecrated men and women possess? Have they some strange charism, some mysterious, mystical aptitude to read hearts and discern vocations, a gift not given to their fellow priests or fellow religious? No! They possess, it is true, more prudence and zeal than others; *but they are successful chiefly because they are interested in the problem, because they use well their years of experience with the growing boy, and because they know what is expected in a candidate for the priesthood.*

No doubt the discernment and development of vocations offer an exquisite task in practical psychology. How shall the priest, the Brother, or nun, recognize the signs, if any appear, or discern amid the complex stirrings of a boy's mind the germ of a vocation? And what can be done to foster that vocation, once it is discovered? It is with the hope of helping fellow priests, and our nuns and Brothers in this task that the following pages are offered.

Feast of the Annunciation, 1938.

St. Joseph's College,
Mountain View, Calif.

CHAPTER ONE

WHAT IS A VOCATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD?

WHAT is a vocation? This is a question which seems to demand an answer at the outset of any discussion on the ways and means of fostering vocations. We must know precisely what we are to look for before we can begin the search. Yet there are so many factors entering into the problem that the word "vocation," so often used, may leave but confusion in the mind.

We are sure of this much: we know that Christ Himself called His first priests; their vocation was divine. We are equally sure that Christ has been calling boys and young men to the priesthood ever since Apostolic times. The call to the priesthood always was, always will be divine. There are certain minor differences, to be sure, between the vocation of the Apostles and that of the modern boy, but the central Figure in every true call is the Person of our High Priest, beckoning, inviting, drawing to Himself those "whom He would."

Here, therefore, is something certain to start with, and something we may usefully carry all the way through the discussion. For the purpose, then, of obtaining a clearer notion as to the nature of a vocation, we shall consider:

- I. Christ's call of the Apostles, as it is told in the pages of the Gospel;
- II. Christ's call of the youth of today;
- III. The definition of a vocation;
- IV. The implications contained in the above for those who search for vocations.

I. Christ's Call of the Apostles

A. THE GOSPEL STORY

John the Baptist was preaching at the ford of the River Jordan. With him were a few followers, who had gathered round the Baptist and had begun to receive from him a special training. They had often heard him tell the wondrous story of the Promised One. They had listened reverently to his lessons on prayer and on the necessity of the practice of penance. As the Baptist spoke, there appeared a Figure coming toward him on the opposite bank of the river. There seemed nothing extraordinary about the Man. He was dressed in the working clothes of a Galilean. He now walked down the river bank, as He had often walked in the lanes of Nazareth, where not a neighbor had detected in Him anything of note. He walked on, head bowed in meditation. So ordinary did He seem that those about John would not have heeded Him, save perhaps to remark that there passed a fellow countryman, for John's followers were also Galileans.

But John recognized Him. He recalled a meeting on another day, when this same Young Man had presented Himself for baptism. The heavens had opened and a voice from heaven had said: "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." John now recognized Him, and could not let Him pass by, for he was there to bear witness to Him. The time had come to declare Him. "Behold the Lamb of God." On the day previous the same Figure had passed, and John had pointed Him out with the same quiet, simple words. This time, however, the "Ecce" struck a note of curiosity in the hearts of two of the disciples. They crossed at the ford to the other bank to discover for themselves what it was that made John single out the passing Stranger.

Timidly they followed the steps of the "Lamb of God" in silence and at a little distance, until at last He turned to query: "What seek you?" For the first time they looked upon the face of Jesus. His eyes met theirs; they were the glad eyes of a friend meeting a friend. There was in His manner that which commanded respect; yet there was a friendliness which invited companionship. They were caught by Christ's loveliness. Spontaneously they hailed Him with the title "Rabbi," a name reserved to teachers in Israel and to those held in high esteem. "Rabbi, where dwellest Thou?" Then our Blessed Saviour answered in a way that gladdened their hearts. "Come and see." "They came and saw where He abode and stayed with Him that day."

Such is the story of the meeting of the first Apostles with our Lord. In the weeks that followed He searched out others, now by the shores of the Lake of Galilee, now while passing a man sitting in the customhouse. To each He issued the compelling call: "Follow Me," and when He had gathered twelve men about Him, He impressed upon them in a most solemn manner, and after a night spent in prayer, the fact that the call to the apostolate went out from Him and from Him alone. Our Lord reminded them of this again in that touching hour after the Last Supper, when He was bidding them farewell. "You have not chosen Me; but I have chosen you; and have appointed you, that you should go, and should bring forth fruit; and your fruit should remain."

Christ—the Twelve—John the Baptist—these are the persons with whom we are concerned in the vocation of the Apostles. A closer examination of the gospels will reveal the part played by each.

B. ANALYSIS OF THE ELEMENTS OF THE CALL OF THE APOSTLES

1. *He Who Called*

He who called the Apostles was Almighty God. Christ in His own Person did the selecting; for, as St. Mark tersely puts it: "He called unto Him whom He would Himself" (Mark iii. 13).

God had prepared these men for their high calling long before their meeting with the "Lamb of God." By His providential design He had made them to be the sons of sturdy Jewish families, had given them by bent of nature and training those dispositions of generosity and good will, of ready sacrifice, of obedience and reverence, which were to play so large a part in their wholehearted response to Christ's invitation when the time came for Him to issue it. God's finger, then, was upon them from the beginning, fashioning in their souls those traits of character, those signs or marks of a vocation, as we now call them, which our Blessed Lord was to purify and elevate into priestliness.

With His own designing providence, His divine knowledge, His power to read human hearts, the Son of God knew perfectly the caliber of the men whom He chose, their strength and weakness. "All things are naked and open to his eyes" (Heb. iv. 13). "Whence knowest thou me?" asked the puzzled Nathanael at first encountering Christ. "Jesus answered and said to him: Before that Philip called thee, when thou was under the fig tree, I saw thee" (John i. 48). He foresaw with divine clarity how they would develop under His influence and how they would bear the responsibilities He was going to entrust to them after their ordination to the priesthood.

2. *Those Who Were Called—The Apostles*

The Twelve came within the circle of Christ's friendship with a fundamental fineness, with solid virtues, and with a grand spirit of generosity which prompted them under God's grace to meet our Lord's demands. This was their chief desert—their eager reaching to the heights of Christ until they followed solely out of a pure love for Him.

But this did not come about in a day or week. Even though they brought fine qualities to the first seminary, where Christ was the Master, they were by no means ready for ordination. They had faults to overcome; for example, they were inclined to be jealous at times of their own ambitions, and sluggish in giving up their opinions. Though they possessed an innate sense of reverence and piety, it was vague, with only the beginnings of a love of our Lord, and with no fixed desires for the priesthood; for they were as yet ignorant of Christ's Person and His mission; they did not yet understand the nature of His kingdom, nor did they know what wonderful plans He had in store for them.

They needed training, and our Saviour spent the greater part of His earthly ministry in instructing and educating them. The end of His training was Himself, and His purpose was to induce in them utter devotion to Himself, union with Him, action for Him.

Thus, when they had become priests, no longer did the selfish desire for leadership in a worldly kingdom intrigue them. Only their Master and all that was His, His holy Church and the souls He had come to save, filled their lives and inspired their actions. Thus was established for all future generations of priests the single motive that alone is worthy in one who aspires to the priesthood—the love of Christ, of His Church, and of mankind. To this motive we now give the name of "right intention."

3. *John the Baptist's Role in the Call of the Apostles*

It is true that Christ in His own Person, with His voice and beckoning gesture drew to Himself the first candidates. But we must not forget that even in so doing, in some important instances, He had other men, human agents, bring those candidates to Him or point Him out to them. Andrew, in his joy at finding the Messiah, hurried off in search of his brother Simon and brought him to Jesus. "And Philip findeth Nathanael." St. John the Baptist was never destined to be a priest; yet in the plan of God he was the first to encourage vocations, for he directed the steps of the two disciples to the Source of priestliness. These men had never before heard of Jesus, and from the human point of view we may say that the Lamb of God would have passed unnoticed and forever unknown had not John pointed Him out. Thus the Forerunner became the type and symbol of all those human agents, parents, priests, teachers, whom God uses to bring promising young boys to Himself. Their motto might well be: "Behold the Lamb of God."

II. Christ's Call of the Youth of Today

Although it is true that Christ no longer walks in the flesh, that He does not now visit our homes and schools and playgrounds, going about among our boys audibly, visibly, tangibly drawing to Himself those whom He would, what a falling short of faith it would be to think that His influence, because of that, is now less real. There is, indeed, a parallel to be drawn between the call of the Apostles and the vocation of the youth of our own times.

1. *God's Providence and Vocation*

Both reason and faith tell us that nothing happens in this world by chance, that every circumstance, every detail

of life occurs according to the knowledge, will, and permission of Almighty God. Let us now apply this general doctrine of divine Providence to the case of a vocation to the priesthood.

It was by God's design, as we have seen, that the Apostles were prepared in body and soul for their fruitful meeting with Jesus, and their subsequent response to His schooling. Just so, God decrees to bring this or that individual boy into the priestly state. As a consequence of this decree He creates and endows the selected person with fitting qualities of grace and nature. The natural and the supernatural meet in him to form a happy blending of physical, moral, and spiritual characteristics that will make for a successful life in the ministry. He will be ready for his meeting with Jesus and for the Saviour's invitation to "come, follow me."

Most frequently the chosen one is born into a deeply religious family. His first teacher is a pious mother, who imparts her own spirit of faith to him and gives him a respect and reverence for all things Catholic. It may be that he is sent to a school, where he falls under the influence of splendid teachers and zealous priests. But however mysteriously God reveals the working of His plans (and those plans never seem exactly alike in every case), reveal them He does to those whose duty it is to have eyes to see and ears to hear. The selected one has God's stamp upon him in the shape of those discernible traits of character which are called the signs or marks of a vocation.

These signs take on a very great importance to those who search for vocations. Our Blessed Saviour no longer treads the lakeshores of the earth to discover with the glance of God those who are fitted for the priestly state. He has passed that glorious privilege on to us, His priests and His religious, poor men, who possess no power to read

minds or to peer into the future to see how this little boy or that will get along in the priesthood. But, as always, our Lord does not leave us without guidance. Upon His chosen ones He has placed the telltale signs, which we, with our prayers, our prudence, and our powers of observation, must set out to find.

2. *The Right Intention and Vocation*

Not every fine Catholic boy, who may appear to us well equipped for life in Christ's ministry, is destined for the priesthood. To those fitting qualities of body and soul must be joined the God-given desire to be a priest.

What the genesis of this desire is we do not know, for it is pre-eminently the work of grace. We have seen how Christ attracted His disciples, and how attraction grew to strong desire, love, friendship. He did so by His own winning personality and influence, and He who said: "Behold, I am with you all days" still continues to exercise His influence upon our boys.

The grace, merited by our Redeemer, although invisible, is a spiritual reality which swells in the soul, and touches the mind and will. It inspires thought; it prompts desire and action. Then there is the Presence of our Lord in the Holy Eucharist, which is the chief vehicle of grace to the heart of a boy. In his Holy Communion he comes to look, as it were, upon the beauty of Christ's face, and like the Apostles his interest is caught. Soon will come the question: "Master, where dwellest thou?", and just so soon will follow the invitation: "Come and see." When the spell of Christ's friendship is upon him, a word is dropped by his mother or teacher, a sermon is heard, some little pamphlet is read, some priest attracts him, and the shining vision of the altar swims into his ken. The desire to be a priest thus springs into being.

It will not be very clear at the beginning. In some boys it will be little more than the general reverence and Catholic goodness that prompts them to respect the priest; in most the desire will be vague and motives obscure and un-analyzed. More cannot be expected of a small boy in this regard than that he be generous and that under proper advice he betake himself off to Christ's own school, the seminary.

The chief purpose of the seminary will be to clarify, to purify, to elevate that desire into the "right intention," love of our Lord, and love of souls, and to stabilize and secure the permanence of the intention by all the habits of obedience, chastity, and the rest that the priesthood requires. Once in the seminary, removed from the world's deadening influence, Christ will have the young man for Himself. Here He may work His will upon the mind and heart of the boy, and once again the effect of our Saviour's friendship prevails. As in any friendship, the young Levite by his being daily with Jesus must come to have likes and interests in common with our Lord. A new flame of love burns ever deeper in his heart and he is won over gradually to Christ. As he advances closer to ordination, more and more the person of the Master comes to the foreground of his love and affections. Ever more surely he learns to surrender himself wholly to his jealous Lord, to think with Christ, to look upon things from Christ's point of view, to will with Christ. And so, yet another time is the training of the Apostles in Galilee re-enacted in the case of the boy of today.

3. *The Call of the Bishop and Vocation*

Not all desires for the priesthood are God-given. Sometimes boys who are manifestly unfit, who lack this or that important quality, or who have some serious obstacle block-

ing their entrance to the seminary, will wish to be priests. Not rarely they stubbornly cling to their determination. Who is to determine finally whether a candidate is a fit subject for ordination?

As the priest is a public minister of the Church, who but She, the Spouse of Christ, can decide officially upon one's worthiness for the office? She does so through the bishop of the diocese for which the young man is to be ordained. The prelate, either personally or through the seminary faculty, issues what is known as the canonical or ecclesiastical call.

III. Definition of a Vocation to the Priesthood

Piecing together the various features explained above, we see that there are two elements in a vocation to the priesthood—the divine and the ecclesiastical.

Considered as a divine call a vocation may be defined as that disposition of divine Providence whereby God, according to His pleasure, chooses certain men for the work of His sacred ministry, endows them with the qualities and graces necessary for the work, and places them amid such surroundings that they will eventually obey the call that goes out to them from Him.

The ecclesiastical call places the *Nihil Obstat*, as it were, on the divine call; that is, it authoritatively establishes the presence of the true, God-given calling in a particular case, giving out the decisive word that the candidate possesses the due characteristics, together with a pure and worthy intention of wanting to become a priest. Thus the two elements combine to form the complete vocation, the canonical call being based on the divine call, and presuming and confirming its reality.

All this doctrine has been clearly stated in a decision,

made on June 20, 1912, by a commission of cardinals and approved by Pope Pius X. "In order that one may be rightly called by the bishop, nothing further is required beyond the right intention, together with that suitability which is based on such gifts of nature and grace and which is proved by such probity of life and sufficiency of knowledge as will give a well-founded hope that the candidate will be able to discharge the duties of the priestly state properly and fulfill the obligations of that state in a holy manner."

IV. Implications Contained in the Foregoing for Those Who Search for Vocations

The priests of the parish and the teachers of the school will not be concerned with the canonical call, which is the business of the bishop, nor with the long testing of the candidate's moral fitness and sufficiency of knowledge, which is done in the seminary. Rather they have to do chiefly with the boy during that period of his youth before he enters the seminary. Theirs is the wonderful privilege of looking for and helping to develop the divine side of the vocation.

Their task is twofold. They will ever be on the alert for the promising boy, who gives evidence of being of priestly timber. They will consequently know well those positive and recognizable traits which are the marks of God's calling. In order to help them toward this knowledge, we shall devote the second chapter to the enumeration and explanation of the marks of a vocation as they are to be found in the growing boy.

They will, in the second place, be ready to assist the genesis of a desire for the priesthood, which evidently must take hold of a boy before he will even dream of becoming

a priest. They will hold up the beauty of the priesthood before the eyes of likely boys; above all they will direct them to the Person of our Blessed Lord, the Source of all priestly longings. "Behold the Lamb of God" will be on the lips of these John the Baptists of the present day. The third chapter, consequently, will treat of the various means of fostering the desire, of reaching the heart of a boy.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SIGNS OF A VOCATION

WHAT signs are we to look for as pointing to the presence of a call from God? What qualities shall we expect to find in a prospective candidate that will give the well-founded hope that he will be a successful seminarian and a holy priest? The gospels have told us what types and characters Christ Himself deemed worthy and acceptable; so we can do no better than to make use of the lives of the Apostles as the basis for an explanation of the marks of a vocation. We shall consider these signs under three heads: 1, the intellectual; 2, the moral and spiritual; 3, physical fitness and home background.

But before considering the particular signs, it will be well to bear in mind two important facts. The first is that we can never have ironclad certainty that this or that individual possesses all the marks. We can never say in truth: "I am positive that he has a vocation—or that he will surely be a priest." The best we should look for are those signs which give promise and hope that the boy will develop well in the seminary. He will have twelve long years of training, of discipline, of study between him and his ordination day, and those years, God willing, will bring to flower the seeds of a vocation which we look for in the boy in his present stage of development. Too great certainty in the matter will lead to mistakes, or at the least to many disappointments.

However, we must remember secondly that while we can only hope, we must at the same time have high ideals as our standards of measurement in the search for future priests, for the priesthood is the destiny of the finest.

There must be some personal distinction in the candidate who will exercise his ministry in this non-Catholic, democratic American atmosphere, where, too, there is creeping in the tendency to accept or reject a man on his personal merits or defects, regardless of his priestly dignity. *Hence, we must expect all the signs, described in the following pages, to be present to some degree in a boy; complete lack of even one of them creates a presumption against a genuine vocation.* Is this expecting too much? Will our search inevitably end in failure? No! But it will not produce the large numbers of candidates that we may dream of. It will rather single out the chosen few. After all a vocation to the priesthood is rare, and one good priest will do more than ten bad or mediocre ones. (According to the latest statistics, as given in Bishop Stockums' book *Vocation to the Priesthood*, page 52, there is only one priest for every 5,678 people in the whole world; only one for every 1,084 Catholics. Another priest has expressed the rarity as follows: "In every two hundred Catholic families with school children, one vocation should be found every year.")

The First Sign—Intellectual Talent

A. THE APOSTLES

The Apostles, with the possible exception of one or two, were not well educated, even according to the standards of learning of their day. "Seeing the constancy of Peter and John, understanding that they were illiterate and ignorant men, they wondered" (Acts iv. 13).

But if they were unschooled, they were not stupid, for it took more than the minimum of native ability to absorb so much of our Lord's doctrine in three years. To them "it was given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of

Heaven" (Matt. xiii, 11). It must be recalled, moreover, that when they joined the ranks of Jesus' followers, they were already adults, and there was no time for them to undergo the slow and long training which the normal learning process requires. The wonderful knowledge and grasp of Christ's teaching which they manifested after Pentecost was the result of the coming of the Holy Ghost upon them, "the Spirit of truth, who taught them all truth." In their case it was the Holy Ghost who supplied the knowledge, even a portion of which under present conditions demands fair intelligence and many years of hard work.

B. THE BOY

The priest, like the Church whose minister he is, has a mission to man's spirit. Not by physical force does he accomplish this mission but by spiritual ways and means. Mind and spirit, thoughts and ideas, words spoken and written, these are the priest's tools that he must use well or forever be handicapped in realizing the very purpose for which he is ordained. Definitely he belongs to the class of mental workers.

Besides, more demands are made today on a priest's intellectual and scientific ability than ever before. Our present Holy Father states these demands as follows: "None (of the clergy) should remain content with a standard of learning and culture which sufficed, perhaps, in other times; they must try to attain, or rather, they must actually attain a higher standard of general education and of learning. It must be broader and more complete; and it must correspond to the generally higher level and wider scope of modern education as compared with the past." A candidate for the priesthood, then, must have the mental

capacity and desire for pursuing a long and strenuous course of studies.

Now the seminary curriculum of twelve years, no matter how thorough and well planned, cannot take the place of native intelligence. It presupposes it and merely attempts to develop it and bring it to actual fruition. Neither the seminary nor the student (and what teacher does not know this!) can count on a sudden descent of the Holy Ghost. Our schools, indeed, cannot train any and every boy to be the intelligent and practical leader which the priesthood demands, simply because every boy has not the inborn ability to become an intelligent leader. Plato has well said that men are from birth either of gold, or of silver, or of baser metal. Hence in selecting boys for the priesthood, great attention must be paid to the factor of intellectual talent. And no amount of piety, be it noted well, can substitute for the lack of mental equipment. The pious dullard may in the course of his years lose his piety, but his dullness will ever remain.

How, then, are we to judge in practice whether this twelve- or thirteen-year-old boy has the talent sufficient for him to carry successfully the seminary studies? It is not easy to form a judgment concerning the small boy's intellectual equipment. Pedagogical insight and experience are necessary; and even with both a teacher may overestimate a talent. Leaders in the eighth grade may be failures or very mediocre students in high school. Here are a few general hints which may help in coming to a decision.

1. The young boy should be able to grasp clearly present class matter, and the meaning of the facts as they are presented in grammar school subjects. He must be able to understand, for example, the function of parts of

speech in English grammar, or the reason for the use of certain methods in working out problems in arithmetic.

2. He must have a reliable memory. It has been said that memory is in direct correlation with general intelligence, taking humanity as a whole. This does not mean, of course, merely the ability to reproduce mechanically what is said or read (learning "by heart") but implies an ability to apply what is known to new situations, *v. g.*, the power not only to recall a method or rule of working a problem in arithmetic, but the power to apply it to a new set of figures. Reliability of memory likewise supposes the gift of a practical judgment. There are some little fellows, diligent in their way, who will sit down to a history lesson, for instance, with the determination to memorize every part of it, having no power of selecting the important items or studying the lesson as a whole. They absorb part by part like blotters, with no sense of evaluation. The knack of learning a lesson as a whole has proved to be a particularly reliable gauge of a student's intellectual ability.

These two capacities—the ability to grasp class matters, and reliability of memory, in the last analysis depend upon the faculty that a boy possesses to pay attention, even when the matter is not attractive to him, as quite commonly happens in arithmetic class. He must have the capacity to fix his attention on a subject in order to grasp and understand it, and he must be able to make repeated efforts of attention in order to remember it. Consequently, as in any effort-making activity, the will here comes into play.

As a matter of fact, the strength of a student's will may often be a deciding factor in passing judgment on his intellectual fitness for the seminary. We must ask:

has he the earnest will to work, the capacity for sustained application? The star of a class, who with a richly endowed intellect can obtain a 95 per cent in any subject with ease, will never become a leader as a man, unless he has also the quality of "sticking" to his work. On the other hand, many boys with average or little better than mediocre mental equipment have gone from year to year in the seminary, showing steady improvement thanks to their methodical plodding and their diligent tending to business.

The Second Sign—Moral Fitness

Coupled with an intellectual aptitude our young candidate must have a certain amount of moral fitness; that is, he must possess those fundamental habits of will and heart which can be developed later into all the priestly qualities which the Church expects to find in her sacred ministers. Of course, we shall not find perfection in a thirteen-year-old. A boy of this age has the defects that go with his state of development. He is all boy, if he be healthy and normal. He will be very thoughtless of others at times, and selfish. But underneath these faults, which are more typical than individual, we must discern at least the beginnings of certain gifts of spirit, which, if absent, can never be replaced by training.

The moral and spiritual gifts of a person, even a young one, form a closely-knit whole which we call "character." So closely bound together are they that they act as a unit in practice, the whole character being made manifest in every act, especially if that act be the result of deliberation and conscious effort. There is danger, therefore, of presenting a one-sided picture if we single out for description the individual gifts of spirit, when actually they never occur thus singly or alone. Humility, for ex-

ample, runs into the spirit of sacrifice, and, if there is any dividing line between them, it will be very thin. Again, the obedient boy will have the elements of generosity in his make-up. However, with this in mind and for the sake of greater clearness, we shall treat moral fitness under the following heads: 1, humility and obedience; 2, generosity and the spirit of sacrifice; 3, reverence; 4, kindness; 5, uprightness of character.

1. HUMILITY AND OBEDIENCE

A. *The Apostles*

That quality which our Lord looked for in His Apostles seems more especially to have been humility. He knew that a proud disposition undermines or rather kills the spirit of humble and voluntary obedience, an obedience which is prompted by respect for authority and the will of another. As the functioning of His Church was to depend upon just such humble submission to authority, no wonder that He looked for it first among those whom He would have for His priests. With what scathing words He condemned the Scribes and Pharisees, who "love the first places at feasts, and the first chairs in the synagogue." Although they were the leaders of the Jews, better educated than the rest, knowing well that Old Law, which Christ had come, not to destroy but to fulfill, not one of the Pharisaic leaders was chosen to be among the Twelve. Rather, He selected men of humble station, men who, though they made mistakes were quick to admit them. They were such as could cry so sincerely: "Depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord." They were those who would accept Christ's commands without question, simply, and in a literal manner.

B. *The Boy*

How do humility and obedience manifest themselves in an American small boy? When he is faced with the awesome question, "Do you want to be a priest?", the first reaction of our average Catholic boy is to draw back in humility with the thought: "I am not good enough." In fact, this humble attitude persists in some of the finest youngsters to such an extent as to become an obstacle to their deciding to enter the seminary. But the humility and obedience we look for here are rather those week-day qualities which show in every move the boy makes—in the classroom or on the recreation grounds, in the street, in the church, and in the home. If in all circumstances he does without grumble or question what he is told by parent, by teacher, or by priests, then obviously he has a boy's obedience and the humility necessary to exercise it.

There is one type of boy we must eliminate from the ranks of candidates. He is the cross-grained grumbler who chafes under restraint. Every teacher knows him. The wry grimace, the stubborn little shrug of the shoulders greet commands or suggestions. Such youngsters have in their blood a tendency to fault-finding, take exception to everything, discover each new command as an occasion for growling, always know better than their superiors, whom they usually distrust. Characters like these, whose nature is one of pride and insubordination, are most emphatically not suited for the priestly state. Their chafing and grumbling would only grow in the solitary life of the priesthood, and the authority of their bishop, to whom every priest solemnly promises reverence and obedience on the day of his ordination, would be a source of irritation rather than of inspiration and comfort.

2. GENEROSITY AND THE SPIRIT OF SACRIFICE

A. *The Apostles*

Christ did not choose His disciples from among the wearers of purple nor from those who were clothed in soft garments. True, He did issue a touching invitation to the rich young man to "go, sell what that hast—and come, follow Me." But the sense of sacrifice was wanting in the youth, and "he went away sad, for he had great possessions." He who was to demand of every man who would come after Him that he deny himself and take up his cross, wanted generous characters, schooled in adversity and stiffened by strenuous work and abnegation. So the Twelve He chose were generous and self-sacrificing. Thus, as a simple matter of course the Gospel tells us of the readiness that two of them showed when Christ called them: "And they (James and John) *forthwith* left their nets and father and followed Him" (Matt. iv. 22). They all could exclaim: "We have left all to follow Thee," and tradition has it that every one of them (Judas excepted) endured the pains of martyrdom for the sake of Christ.

B. *The Boy*

Are our boys rugged enough in character to evince this apostolic spirit of self-denial? How often have we heard that American life is a soft one, and that the children of this generation are reared in an atmosphere of ease and comfort which is anything but conducive to cheerful cross-carrying? Without doubt, there is much truth in the statement, but there are many boys, none the less, who even in boyhood show signs of a sense of sacrifice.

It is in the home where they best give practical evidence of the trait. Are they habitually thoughtful and helpful

toward their mother, and toward other members of the family? If so, this already indicates a lack of selfishness and the beginnings of a generosity that can grow into a beautiful priestly and self-forgetting love of souls. The wise and honest mother often gives testimony of the presence or absence of the quality in her son. In talking to the priests or Sisters she will remark that her boy Johnnie is so thoughtful about the house, whereas "that other one, Jim," thinks of nobody but himself.

The characteristic of generosity also manifests itself in the school, in the recreation grounds, in Church, in fact everywhere, so long as the boy is acting naturally, not in a studied manner as he is apt to do when on parade. It is a good sign, for example, if the young lad keeps working with gritty, persistent effort when his lessons are difficult. It is a bad sign, if he gives up in the face of difficulties and is too easily discouraged by them. The generous and sacrificing youngster will be reliable in a boy's way and with a boy's sense of responsibility, whenever duties in school or in the church are imposed upon him. He will be faithful at serving early morning Masses long after the novelty of the bell ringing and candle lighting has worn off.

This type of boy, given, of course, the other necessary qualities, makes a fine seminarian. Obedience and the long routine of the clerical training do not frighten or fatally discourage him. His high-mindedness, his boyish eagerness to do something worth while will not melt away under the telltale test of self-denial. There's the test! Does the boy deny himself, that is, is he generous and thoughtful of others in the normal, every-day happenings of his life? (The passing splurge of self-sacrifice during a Lenten period may only be his way of "showing off.") If so, we can reasonably expect that our candidate will spend a

happy priesthood, not saddened and made cynical by its sacrifices, or long-faced before the hardships it entails. Perhaps no other single quality of character makes the priesthood such a congenial and happy existence than this one of generosity. Most failures seem to come from lack of it.

We must make sure, then, reasonably sure that the boy we would recommend to the seminary possesses this indispensable gift of generosity. If the youngster lacks it, we must take equal pains to spare the seminary his presence. And are there any practical warning signs which would point out that lack? There is one that appears always to be trustworthy. Beware of the boy who is forever making excuses for himself. Boy language has a name for him; he is the "alibi artist." His soft answers turn away wrath, and his dodges get him out of the way of all attempts at correction. He is simply never wrong, and has a way of shifting the blame for failures and mistakes to others, even to his teachers. (Unfortunately, doting and foolish parents will often believe his story and take his side, with the consequent heartache to the teacher.) Such a boy does not last very long in the seminary, for he will never stand squarely in the face of his faults, and there is no way that the seminary influence can touch him. Making excuses and shifting blame may not be a serious and abiding fault in a little boy (especially if he be the youngest of a family); but, when it persists into the early teens, it has an ugly way of persisting throughout life. Benjamin Franklin made the sad remark that one who makes excuses is never good for anything else.

There is another character trait which renders a boy very doubtful timber for the priesthood. It is the *overweening* desire to seek attention. It is true that every boy (and man, unless he be a saint!) enjoys being noticed and

is not indifferent to praise. But when this desire inspires all or most of the little fellow's actions and dominates his motives, then the seminary is no place for him. Whether the trait grows out of his home conditions, where perhaps he is petted, yielded to in his whims, and generally quite spoiled; whether it comes from too much attention at school; or whether it grows out of his peculiar temperament, makes no difference. When it is present in this exaggerated form, it is disqualifying. The seeker after attention is your overcultivated, self-conscious altar boy, who looks well in his red-sashed cassock on Easter Sunday and who knows it. His hands he keeps piously folded and his eyes demurely cast down, except when he glances furtively to see if "Father" or "Sister" is admiring him. In his games he will play to his audience, and boys have a name for him, too. They call him the "grandstand artist." This boy can seldom, if ever, develop that sense of independent sacrifice so essential in the priesthood. Rather, he is more apt to degenerate into that very unhappy person who lives on self-pity.

3. REVERENCE

A. *The Apostles*

The sturdy fishermen of Galilee possessed an innate sense of reverence and a solid piety even before they met the Master. They seem to have been faithful in their religious duties as Jews, going up to Jerusalem for the celebration of religious feasts. In fact, it was while on one of these journeys to the South that they first heard of John the Baptist, and were attracted to the man, who was preaching the doctrine of penance and the remission of sins.

No lightheaded or impious men were these who were drawn by the stern voice of the one crying in the wilderness. They had a sense of religion which made them put the proper values on sacred persons and things. And the very first time they met the Lamb of God, they addressed Him, as we have remarked, by a name, given only to respected persons in Israel—Rabbi, Master or Teacher. They developed that reverence and devotion for the person of Christ as the years of their companionship with Him sped by. Even though they grew to know Him so well, even though they were in many ways familiar and intimate with Him, even though they were called “not His servants but friends,” they never lost respect. Such was not the case of all the followers of our Lord. His very familiarity, His lowliness, was for many a stumbling block to the accepting of His greatness. “Is not this Jesus, the Son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?” is the way they dismissed His teaching on the Bread from Heaven. But with the Apostles the very closeness to Jesus inspired and increased their confidence in Him. Faith deepened; love grew to be all-possessing until it gripped every fiber of their beings. Priestly, zealous hearts were thus built out of native piety and they came to be on fire for the love of the Master.

B. *The Boy*

We turn now to those lively, restless creatures of the classroom and ask: what should be the small boy's piety and reverence? Reverence is a subtle thing, which reveals itself in little, sometimes intangible ways. In older students of the college or university level it is more easily discerned, and its lack is more glaring. We have met with that abominable flippancy, that sophisticated indifference to the supernatural which some Catholic students affect. But the

younger boys, the ones we are more concerned with, still have their childhood simplicity. In their case it would be an easy matter to judge reverence, if we had but to count the number of novenas a boy makes in the course of a year, or the number of times he frequents the sacraments. These, however, may or may not of themselves indicate piety.

Reverence, rather, is divined by a particular accent in voice and manner in the presence of everything sacred, including the boy's own conscience. The chosen lad has a temple in his heart, a special presence of the Holy Ghost, creating reverence in him. He will possess the faith and religion of a boy with a boy's seriousness. He may be every inch a boy; we prefer that he is. He may fight with his companions, and play as hard or harder than the next. His very abundance of life gets him into trouble and out of it. He discovers pleasure perhaps not at all in arithmetic but with all his boy's real life, he has a capacity for the love of God which surprises his teachers when an accident reveals it to them. He may occasionally race with the other altar boys to see who can light the candles most quickly, but generally the church will not be a playground for him. Although he may feel at home in serving at the altar or in making his visits, he will never show that familiarity and boldness which boys do evince who lack the sense of reverence.

He will, therefore, retain that charming reserve which respect for his consecrated elders inspires, before the sometimes familiar ways and special favors of priests and Sisters who take a marked interest in him. Were he lacking in reverence, he would follow up the advantages of their favors by a catlike freedom, thus showing by his actions that consecrated objects have cheapened in his eyes. (But may we insert here a word of warning! Reverence in the boy is a beautiful gift, which draws upon

itself the admiration of older people. But priests, Brothers and Sisters can spoil or dim its luster by overmuch attention!)

4. A KINDLY DISPOSITION

A. *The Apostles*

Do we find that a kindly disposition was one of the characteristics of the band of Apostles? The frank Gospel account tells of the quarrels they had; how they argued as to who should be first in the kingdom of heaven. We know of the impulsive outbursts of St. Peter, and of the rebukes he received from the lips of the Gentle One. But in spite of these outbreaks which were, after all, infrequent, we know that the Apostles lived in very close association with one another for a long period, that they fished from the same boat for days and nights on end. They shared one another's joys and hardships, feats which anyone living in a community is well aware they could not have accomplished were they irascible and quarrelsome. On the positive side, we hear at the very outset of Andrew's running off to the brother Simon to share with him the good news that he had found the Messiah. Philip likewise rushed away to find Nathanael. And they were all of a fundamentally kind disposition to learn thoroughly from Christ the lessons of Christian tolerance and amiability.

B. *The Boy*

We usually associate kindness and self-control with more mature persons, who have rubbed shoulders with their fellow men and who by their experiences have learned to take men for what they are—weak or strong, easily disturbed or calm, volatile or phlegmatic, courageous or timid.

Youth, on the other hand, and especially a boy's youth, suggests thoughtlessness and even cruelty towards companions, the more so if those companions are inferior in physical or mental abilities. No! we cannot expect a boy of twelve or thirteen to have mastered an unruly disposition or to have acquired a positive and well-thought-out attitude towards his fellows. That would be expecting the boy to be a man. Consequently, it will be more practical to approach the question of kindness from the negative side, by describing certain types of boys who so lack the disposition as to be unfit candidates for the priesthood.

There are some youngsters who cannot get along with their companions. Constant friction arises out of their cantankerous spirits and quarrelsome little natures. They seem to be all barb, with a dubious talent for picking out the flaws of others, and for drawing attention to them by biting remarks and offensive statements. What happens to such boys? Sometimes they manage to sweeten their dispositions, but too frequently either their companions avoid them or they in turn give up the attempt to go with others, falling back upon themselves to become lonely, isolated, souls—lone wolves that break from the pack.

Characters of this type will not get on well in the seminary, where the family spirit must prevail, and where participation in the give and take of community life itself furnishes an excellent training in tolerance and fraternal charity.

It seems unnecessary to add that the same type is altogether unsuited for the priesthood, especially the pastoral ministry. To be "all things to all men," to have consideration for human weakness, to sympathize with the unfortunate and to smile with the glad, these put to the test even the habitually kind, and are utterly beyond the reach of the irascible man.

What of the hot-tempered boy? I do not mean the one who is perpetually cranky or nasty by temperament, but the one who flares up with fists clenched and voice at its loudest when provoked? This characteristic forms no obstacle to the priesthood, provided the boy is making attempts to control his temper. As a matter of fact, it may become a wonderful asset to him in his maturity if he manages to bridle his temper. Some of our greatest churchmen, the men who do things for Christ, are those who have diverted wild tempers into channels of tireless activity.

5. UPRIGHTNESS OF CHARACTER

A. *The Apostles*

Our blessed Saviour seldom used terms of reproach. Rather, He reached men's hearts by the method of kindness and encouragement. But if ever human defect soured even the sweetness of the Sacred Heart and drew from the divine lips withering rebuke—it was hypocrisy. "Woe to you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites: . . . whited sepulchers. . . . You serpents, generation of vipers."

It is beyond question, then, that no hypocrites were found among those whom Christ chose to be His successors in the priesthood. The Apostles were straightforward, genuine *men*. They possessed within themselves the happy blending of those natural virtues which gave to them a disarming openness of soul. It is the sum total of such virtues that we have designated by the general term "uprightness of character."

The Twelve, indeed, were forthright. Nathanael was the Israelite in whom there was no guile, and St. Peter was outspoken to the point of bluntness in expressing his oft-mistaken opinions. St. Thomas was as honest as he

was stubborn in clinging to his doubts. And their concerted "Is it I, Lord?" at the Last Supper was not posed, but an unaffected question for all, that is to say, for all save one.

B. *The Boy*

Most of our Catholic boys are open and artless characters, whose faces and whose actions candidly mirror what goes on within them. Most of them are quick to own up to misdeeds or to admit mistakes. Most of them find it difficult to hide guilt even when they are tempted to do so, being poor liars and clumsy quibblers, and most of them are honest in their examinations and plain dealing in telling the truth. It is among this majority that we can expect to find the germs of a true vocation.

However, there is a small minority of boys who lack that openness of soul, who are furtive, even untruthful and sneaky. So obviously ill-fitted are they for the priesthood that one may wonder if the thoughts of becoming a priest would ever occur to them. But there is no need for wonderment. Desires for the priesthood have a way of keeping strange company at times; and because the company is strange and unbalanced, because there is furtiveness and guile, it is doubly difficult to dissuade the would-be candidate that he should not enter the seminary. If dissuasion is impossible, then at least warning should be given to the seminary authorities, who can definitely close the doors against him.

The Third Sign—Physical Fitness and Home Background

The qualities discussed up to the present pertain to the internal make-up of the candidate, and are of prime

importance. We have now to consider some external traits and circumstances which, while secondary, have a bearing upon the fitness of a young man who desires to be a priest.

Canon law sets up certain qualifications of physical fitness and proper home environment and pronounces that various defects in bodily structure and health, certain social blemishes arising out of the candidate's family background are impediments or irregularities. It is easy to understand the Church's attitude. The priest occupies a position of prominence in society. The eyes of his flock are ever upon him. Hence physical abnormalities or taints of name and reputation, which would pass unnoticed or would not prejudice the work of a man in private life, cannot be tolerated in the person who is always before the public in performing his priestly functions. The dignity of the priesthood and the efficiency of Christ's work are here at stake.

A. THE APOSTLES

The Gospels speak little about the physical fitness or family background of the first priests. But we can be sure that men who lived so much of their lives in the open, and who carried on the strenuous occupation of fishing, were well able physically to be fishers of men and to bear up under the hardships of their many missionary journeys.

As for the good reputation of their families, in some instances we know the names of the mothers and fathers of the Apostles and in each case they are presented to us as respectable, hard-working people of sturdy stock. Moreover, in the light of Jewish interest in a good or bad name (witness their attitude toward Mary Magdalen and the woman taken in adultery) and of the tribal pride in ancestry and genealogy, we may suppose that the Jews would have used any smirch of reputation as an excuse for refus-

ing to accept the preaching of the Apostles, had the latter been unacceptable to their countrymen on this account.

B. THE BOY

1. *Physical Fitness*

A boy need not have the physique of a professional athlete in order to study for the priesthood, but he should be a normal, healthy individual. The following defects would definitely eliminate him from the ranks of prospective candidates: blindness, or eyesight so poor as to hinder the pursuit of close study; deafness, muteness, or an incurable defect of speech; privation of a limb, or hand, or of the thumb and index finger (used in consecrating the Sacred Species and in distributing Holy Communion); pronounced lameness or serious facial imperfection. In fact, any defect that would interfere with the offering of Mass in a decent manner, without involuntary oddity and without scandal, must be considered as an impediment. Hence we must also add excessive nervous trembling, epilepsy, and shocking bodily malformations, such as curvature of the spine.

There are other diseases and afflictions which may render the boy's immediate entrance into the seminary an imprudent experiment. Severe heart murmur, anaemia, glandular trouble that demands a very special diet, and the like, may be curable, or they may grow progressively worse. Sometimes youngsters are languid and lacking in physical energy because of certain organic troubles, for example, an infection of the lungs. Hence arises the demand on the part of seminary authorities of a thorough physical examination by a competent doctor before they will accept the application of a student.

Mention must also be made in this place of the mental health of the candidate. The innumerable disorders of the conscious life of man, all the phobias and obsessions, fits of melancholia, hysteria and the many more, usually develop fully only in later life. But some mental diseases give warning of their presence in early youth, and the alert teacher, even though not trained in psychiatry, can detect the symptoms. If a boy is odd, and given to peculiar actions, especially if other members of the family manifest similar peculiarities, if he is always being ridiculed and mocked at by others and never taken seriously, if, as a result, he separates from the rest and withdraws into himself, the teacher may suspect with very good grounds that there is here the beginnings of a mental abnormality. The kindest and most prudent action in this instance is to advise against entrance to the seminary.

2. *Home Background*

A boy may get his red hair and blue eyes from his mother, and his tall stature from his dad, but oh! how much more than mere bodily traits does he receive from his parents! Their culture and traditions, their faith and sound Christian principles, all these are poured into his being from his cradle days. And, under God, it is most frequently in the home that there are implanted in his soul, the virtues of obedience and generosity, the spirit of self-sacrifice, humility, and reverence, which, as has been explained, constitute the moral fitness in a worthwhile candidate.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the Church desires the candidate's home surroundings to be examined in detail. She wants to know what kind of parents he has and what is the depth of their Catholicity. She inquires, too, about

possible marriage difficulties, for an aspirant must have been born in lawful wedlock.

Even the economic situation in the home will have a bearing upon the boy's fitness. Not that the family need belong to the so-called upper class of society or to be well-fixed financially. If that were a condition, our seminaries would be depleted; for, as our present Holy Father has remarked: "It hardly does honor to those higher classes of society that they are on the whole so scantily represented in the ranks of the clergy." No, most of our seminaries and priests come from the middle or poorer class and very few of them are able to meet fully the costs of a clerical education.

However, there are poor and poor, and this is the point to be stressed. There is a respectable and "proud" poverty, which maintains its independence in the face of hardships and carries itself in Christian resignation. And there is the poverty which is degrading, which comes to look upon charity as its due, which forgets how to say thank you, and which loses the sense of responsibility. When the sense of gratitude and appreciation is missing, how can we expect a boy ever to value the finer things of the priesthood? Indeed, it is but very rare that a suitable candidate will emerge from such killing surroundings.

CHAPTER THREE

MEANS OF FOSTERING VOCATIONS

IN this chapter there remains the task of indicating ways of fostering vocations, that is, means of arousing interest in the priesthood, of helping a boy come to a decision about his vocation, and of advising him to enter the seminary. We shall first try to mark out clearly the position of those who use the means. Next we shall consider some types of candidates with whom we have to deal, as their varying reactions will largely determine the way we choose to approach them. And thirdly, we shall treat of the chief means of fostering vocations.

I. The Position of Those Who Foster Vocations

“Behold the Lamb of God.” These directive words of John the Baptist, as was pointed out in the first chapter, are big with meaning for us. The humble Precursor directed two of his disciples to our Lord, but he did nothing more than direct. He merely bore witness to our Saviour, as though saying to the men who were with him: “There is the Fountain Head of all true vocations. Go to Him!”

The next step was left to the disciples themselves. Christ intruded on no man, for He respected the dignity of human freedom, which He Himself had created. He issued an invitation, and then waited for a response. He would have willing faith only, spontaneous allegiance. But once that faith was given, then the more graciousness, the more intimacy, the more love He bestowed, thus drawing by affection, not forcing by any moral persuasion.

The present-day John the Baptists, priests and teachers,

bear witness to Christ. Theirs it is to direct the boy to our Lord as to the One who issues the real invitation to "come, follow Him."

Theirs is not, therefore, to urge the boy to enter the seminary by that constant encouragement which amounts to moral force. No good can come from pressure thus exerted. Under its influence the boy without any vocation may try the seminary for a time, until with a growing sense of responsibility he wakes up to the fact that his entering never was his own personal idea. On the other hand, a boy whom God has destined for the priesthood may fight against the desire precisely because there is so much urging that he cannot be sure whether the desire is his own or that of an overzealous adviser. Boys have been known to put off entering the seminary for four years or even longer, because they were bewildered by too much advice or because they resented what seemed undue interference in so personal a concern.

The grace of a vocation to the priesthood is given to the one called and to no other. As a result he himself must correspond with it and all its attendant divine helps. Like the Apostles, he must answer the call personally. As we know, the desire for the priesthood comes into being under God's grace and waxes strong by many contacts with the Person of Christ in prayer, in the Confessional, in Holy Communion, in visits to the Blessed Sacrament. What a wise adviser will do, then, is to get and keep the desirable candidate in touch with our Lord in as many ways as possible.

II. Various Types of Candidates

It is commonplace to remark that each likely boy presents a problem in himself and that no two can be approached on the question of a vocation in exactly the same

manner. Let us take some of the typical cases we meet with among the youngsters of an American parish.

There is first of all the boy who is not reluctant to disclose his desire to be a priest to responsible persons. The wish has teased him from early boyhood, perhaps since the day of his first Holy Communion. He has never wanted to be anything else. His mother knows of his ambition, is secretly overjoyed, but tries to hide her gladness for fear of influencing her son in a decision which she insists must be his own. His teacher and all who have to do with his training take it almost for granted that he will enter the seminary when he is old enough. The only problem presented by such a boy is to ascertain that his hopes are not built upon a pious illusion, but are well founded upon the proper qualifications of body, mind, and spirit. His longing will easily be kept alive by the ways to be presently suggested.

There are many splendid boys, however, who shrink from laying bare their secret ambitions to any one. Sacred and timid hopes may often be in their hearts, but not often on their lips. They have at their tender age already acquired the American aversion for wearing one's heart on the sleeve, and while they in their innermost souls have been dreaming of one day wearing the sacred vestments, how shame-faced they would be if ever one of their companions discovered this secret. Then they would be branded as "pious," the "minister's son" of Protestantism, and that would mean breaking with the common run of boys. In public, in the classroom of all places, what squirming chagrin would be theirs, if ever they were singled out as among those who were "going to be priests"!

An imagined lack of talent may sometimes be responsible for the humble boy's unwillingness to unburden himself of the secret that is close-locked within his breast. His

past report cards are not landmarks of triumphs in his studies. He never did take first prize in any subject, and he entertains an abiding fear that he would "never make the grade" in the seminary.

Or his reticence is much more frequently due to that exalted idea of the priestly state, which he has inherited as part of his Catholic birthright and in the light of which his own small faults and shortcomings loom large. He is not "good enough" to be a priest; he dare not cast his lot and hope upon so high a destiny. And thus the very quality which is so charming and which presents so much priestly promise—a Catholic boy's humility—seals his lips and makes him loathe to tell his secret.

Again he may be reluctant to speak of his hidden longings, because of a refined sense of responsibility to his parents. There may be many children. Dad doesn't make much money, and Mother is always trying to find ways to save. Not realizing that it is chiefly from homes like his own that the Church recruits her clergy, not knowing that financial difficulties can always be ironed out when a boy is really worthy, he guards his secret with the fear that the expenses of the long seminary training put the priesthood beyond his reach.

These sturdy little chaps with such fine priestly potentialities may pass out of the primary grades into high school and eventually out into the world without ever disclosing their youthful dreams. With wistful regret they may put aside their boyhood ambitions and thus would that germ of vocation, which should have matured in the seminary, meet the same sad fate as that of the good seed which fell among thorns. "The Lamb of God," the Maker of priests, would pass by, not unnoticed but unreached. A few words of encouragement from us, priests or teachers, what would they not have done for them!

These boyish difficulties we must bear in mind in planning our approaches. We must somehow break through the barrier of shyness; we must put into words the chief perplexities that, harassing the heart of a boy, may keep him mute. But any method we use must be employed with great discretion and prudence, else we may tamper with the youth's freedom by overinsistence, betray his secret by divulging our own hopes for him or get ourselves into embarrassing situations by strongly encouraging boys, only to discover later that there is present some disqualifying trait or some insoluble family difficulty.

III. Chief Means of Fostering Vocations

1. TALKS ON VOCATION

Teachers of high schools and of the upper grades or grammar schools have wonderful opportunities to present the question of vocation to their young charges and to hold up to them the divine beauty of the priesthood. In God's Providence they may be the very ones destined to arouse the curiosity of the small boy in the priestly life. They have many chances to explain what a vocation is and to set forth its various marks. They may often propose the priesthood as a life of utter devotion to our Saviour, and of self-sacrifice for the salvation of souls, a life, at the same time, which brings great happiness to those who live it. They may point out the grand powers given to "another Christ"; his power to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and to distribute the Bread of Life to hungry souls; the power to heal wounds in the confessional and to bring Christ's strength to the sick and dying. It will be well-nigh impossible in our talks to make the round of the many-sided beauty of the priesthood.

And let us not suppose that the twelve- or thirteen-year-old boy cannot appreciate, at least vaguely, the sublimity of the priesthood. Underneath his restless, mischievous behavior, there is an unspoiled taste for goodness and an attraction for things that are noble and of good reputed. We who have lost so much of the spirit of childhood may fail to realize the capacity of a child's heart for the love of God. With God's grace the boy can and will, if he has the stuff of which priests are made, respond to his teacher's suggestions.

If he is a hero worshiper, then propose Christ as his Hero. If he dreams of conquests, and what boy doesn't, let human souls become his prey. Urge him to join the ranks of the recruits of the Church Militant to battle as a brave warrior under Christ's standards against the world of malice and deceit. Thus we may assist the genesis in the heart of a boy of that proper and fitting desire which leads him of his own decision to the portals of the seminary.

There are difficulties, however, that will probably arise out of these public talks. A teacher, or any one with any degree of cleverness and enthusiasm will be able to stir a great many boys, at least in the beginning. The sixth and seventh graders will come running; but the crowds in the sixth thin out in the eighth. Your eight graders lean to the side of the sophisticated; they begin to be conscious of their dignity, and, as adolescents, in their boyish methods weigh values and count the costs of the priesthood. Many, like the young man in the Gospel, turn away sad.

As this thinning out process itself serves as a sifting of the desirables from the undesirables, it is useful to begin talks on the priesthood in the lower grades, even the fifth or sixth, so as to be able to watch boys over a period of years. This enables the teachers to discern the stable from the unstable, the persistent desire from the passing fancy,

and also gives time to check whether a boy has the requisite qualities that mark out a vocation.

Some of the undesirables who lack this or that necessary trait will, nevertheless, arrive at the end of the eighth grade still persisting in their desire to enter the seminary. Perhaps they come from good families of the parish, or perhaps younger brothers or sisters will be in the teacher's class in a year or so, and it will be necessary to keep in the good graces of the family as far as possible. This is embarrassing for the pastor, the teacher or the principal of the school who, when asked to write a letter of recommendation, cannot in conscience do so. At least a non-committal letter may be given to the boy, so long as a very pertinent one is sent privately to the seminary, disclosing the reasons that render the boy's application unacceptable. The seminary can find means of rejecting the applicant without betraying the confidence of the pastor or teacher.

2. FREQUENT ATTENDANCE AT MASS, HOLY COMMUNION, SANCTUARY SOCIETIES

Love and intimacy with our Blessed Lord beget a yearning to do Christ's priestly work, for true love always begets action. And how can we better help to foster that love than by encouraging the frequent attendance at the sacrifice of the Mass and frequent reception of the Body of Christ. By this means once again we are directing the promising boy to the very Source of holiness. Pointing out Christ's loveliness we ask the young and generous soul to draw near, to "come and see." By his frequent contacts with the holy and powerful personality of our Saviour, the little fellow's affectionate nature is drawn to the Sacred Heart, and there springs up that friendship with Christ which is so vital in the priesthood. Our Blessed Lord, you will recall, kept His chosen ones close to Him-

self. "They were with Jesus." So, too, is the heart of a boy kept close to Him through the Sacrament of the Eucharist. With his Holy Communions and his little visits, the spontaneous allegiance to Christ takes root in his soul. Thus, when the invitation comes to spend his whole life in the company of our Lord as a priest, his will be a ready and personal response.

Another means of bringing promising youngsters closer to Christ and to things sacerdotal is to get them into the sanctuary society. Serving the priest in all things connected with the Sacrifice of the Mass gives the young lad a proximity to the Altar, which does much to interest him in the priesthood; for, as we know, "wings grow in flying." Besides, altar boys participate in a very special manner in the fruits of the Mass.

3. VOCATION WEEK, VOCATION RETREATS, AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

In many dioceses one week of each year is set aside as "vocation week." Schools are expected to participate in the movement and many do so by having little retreats or tridua. Some teachers seize the opportunity for asking their students to write autobiographical sketches, stating their ambitions and what they wish to be.

All such methods are useful in keeping the vocation question alive. They serve to make the young people face the problem of their future, set them thinking about it, and act as so many wedges to reach into the heart of a boy.

4. THE CONFESSIONAL

"Talk to your confessor." "If you are thinking of becoming a priest tell your confessor about it." Here is

advice which should frequently be given to those who are inclined to the priesthood. This in no way compromises the hidden hopes of a timid boy, whose Catholic instincts prompt utter confidence in the secrecy of the confessional. Moreover, a candidate for the clerical life should first obtain the approval of his confessor, who, perhaps best of all, knows what virtues or what faults lie rooted in the innermost recesses of his soul.

On the confessor's own side, his confessional will prove a most practical and fruitful means of contacting boys. When a sterling youngster, clean of heart and earnest of soul, comes into the box, the question, "Have you ever thought of becoming a priest?", often elicits a negative answer. One missionary priest uses this suggestion effectively: "Say three Hail Marys every night to our Blessed Mother to learn God's will and your vocation. Then write to me in a month, and I'll be praying, too." Again the shy boy's secret is respected; yet it serves to draw him out or set him thinking.

5. THE DISTRIBUTION OF PAMPHLETS ON VOCATIONS

The distributing of pamphlets on vocations, or the leaving of them in the sacristy, in the church, in the classroom rack, or in some readily available place, where the boy may take them unknown to his companions, further serves to keep the vocation question fresh. There are dozens of such pamphlets on the market, paper-covered booklets that are inexpensive.

6. PRAYER

We have left to the last the most powerful means of fostering vocations. To busy ourselves with the work of discovering and developing vocations, yet to neglect pray-

ing to God to grant them would, at the lowest estimate, betray an idea of the priestly office which is lacking in supernatural vigor. A vocation to the priesthood is God's work. As in any other grace, and much more explicitly in this special one, God expects us, yes, even commands us to ask Him through our prayers to send laborers into the harvest. There is a boy, there are several, whom you believe God has moulded to be vessels of election. You have suggested the priesthood to them. You have them frequenting the sacraments and raising their boyish minds and hearts to God in prayer. You have given them little books to read. There remains but one thing more for you to do, and it is more important than all the rest. But if your zeal has carried you thus far, surely you have been doing it all the while. Beseech Almighty God in prayer that He will sow the seeds of a vocation in good ground—in the souls of these young boys, "who in a good and perfect heart, hearing the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit in patience" (Luke viii. 15).

Prayer for the Increase of Vocations to the Priesthood

Antiphon. Why stand ye all the day idle, go ye into my vineyard.

V. Ask the Lord of the harvest.

R. That he send laborers into his vineyard.

LET US PRAY

God, who willest not the death of the sinner, but rather that he be converted and live; grant, by the intercession of blessed Mary ever Virgin, and of all the saints, laborers for Thy Church, fellow laborers with Christ, to spend and consume themselves for souls. Through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

