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ON THINK

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OUT VOCATIONS

to FOUR STATES of LIFE

Single



Priesthood



Marriage



Religious



By George E. Ganss, S.J.

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On Thinking Out Vocations — to Four States of Life

George E. Ganss, S.J.

THE PARTY had been just right, and John and Mary were on their way home. The guests had been full of fun, the games absorbing, and the food just what one wanted.

“My, I’m glad I was there,” said Mary. “So am I,” replied John. “And to think I almost missed it!” “How come?” Mary wanted to know. “Well, Fred’s invitation came when I felt lazy, more like staying home. So I began to think I might not have much fun, and I could merely sit in the easy chair and watch television without any effort. I almost turned the invitation down. But I thought the matter over again, and then I decided, ‘yes’.”

“You know, I felt the same way,” Mary told him. “But now I’m so glad I went. I wouldn’t have missed that party for anything.” “Ditto,” was John’s reply.

INVITATION AND ACCEPTANCE

When John and Mary made those comments, they little dreamed that their train of thought was, in a small way, similar to that which brought a vocation to many a happy mother, father, priest, brother, or nun. But similar it was. For every voca-

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THE QUEEN’S WORK

tion has within it God's invitation to a way of living, and a decision to accept it.

This pamphlet will treat of vocation in a comprehensive sense. It will have a triple aim: 1) to give a brief description of each of the four chief states of life open to young Catholics: marriage, single life, priesthood, and religious life; 2) to present principles which furnish a sound norm for choosing intelligently among them; 3) to show by examples how the norm can be applied in practice.

WHAT IS A VOCATION?

When Catholics used the word *vocation* a few decades ago, they almost always meant one of the consecrated states: priesthood or religious life. Today, however, many theologians apply the word to all the states of life. For example, even the Holy Father himself, Pope Pius XII asked the 30 million members of the Apostleship of Prayer to pray "that lay persons too may recognize and fulfill their vocation in the Mystical Body."

It is interesting as well as helpful to clarify the meanings of *vocation*. The English word was derived from the Latin *vocatio*, which means a summons or an invitation. Today our English word, as any dictionary will show, has many meanings, such as: a calling or invitation; the act of calling to a particular state, business, or profession; the occupation itself or the profession which one has entered, such as that of priest, doctor, nurse, or mechanic.

Sometimes an act of calling brings to the one called an obligation to come. The *Letter from the President* by which a draft board summons a young man to induction leaves

him no choice. He must freely accept it or take a heavy punishment. That is also true of God's summons which theologians call *vocation to the Faith*. When God by His graces leads an adult non-believer to acquire sufficient instruction and then to perceive, "I have an obligation to enter the Church," the adult must freely accept God's summons, or else incur the punishment announced by Christ to His Apostles (Mark 16:16): "Preach the Gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized shall be saved, but he who does not believe shall be condemned."

In other instances, however, God's *vocation* is an invitation which the person is free to accept or reject, much the same as he may accept or reject an invitation to a party. Without imposing an obligation, God invites the man or woman to something — such as a way of living — which is better for him or her. If he accepts, God loves Him more. He gives him an increase of sanctifying grace immediately and more abundant actual graces in the future. If the person does not accept, God does not love him less than before, or hold any grudge against him. All this holds true especially of the four chief states of life.

FOUR STATES OF LIFE

To speak practically for present purposes, there are four chief states or permanent situations in life to which God invites young Catholics. He gives the youths free will and an opportunity to make their own choice *wisely*. The states are those of: marriage; single persons in the world; priesthood; and religious life as a nun, brother, or priest.

God invites each young person to serve Him in one or another of these states. But He leaves him or her the opportunity to manifest greater or less return of love to God by choosing the state in which he, with his character and temperament, will probably serve God best. Before he chooses, God leaves him free to choose any one of the states. After he chooses, God wants him to serve Him according to His directives for that state, and to forget what might have happened if he had chosen another.

Thus God in His providence gently brings it to pass that within the Church, Christ's Mystical Body, there is a great variety of ways for individuals to serve God and work out their spiritual development or perfection. The varied ways are suitable for different characters, "There are varieties of workings, but the same God who works all things in all. Now the manifestation of the Spirit is given to everyone for profit" (I Cor. 12:6-7). God gives to one person the ability and desire to be an effective priest, to another to teach, to another, to show mercy with cheerfulness (Rom. 12:6-8), to another, to love and care for his husband or wife as Christ loved the Church (Eph. 5:25). "But all these things are the work of one and the same Spirit, who allots to everyone according as He wills" (I Cor. 12:11).

About each one of these states a well instructed Catholic has a positive and inspiring view which can make life in the state something deeply happy, meaningful, and satisfying. Each is a state in which a man or woman can work out the perfection or rich spiritual development of his Christian person, with all that that implies. He

can live happily and successfully for this world and the next.

MARRIAGE

In the Catholic view, marriage is a state of life in which a husband and wife can help each other to work out better the spiritual perfection of their Christian persons. Each can foster this attitude: "I love you, and I want to take you to heaven with me—not only to heaven, but to a higher place in heaven." The Sacrament of Matrimony brings graces to the bride and groom, and brings into existence the Christian family described so beautifully by St. Paul (Eph. 5:21-6) as a Mystical Body in miniature. Marriage is the means which God has established to propagate the bodily life of His Church. Hence it is accurately described in the Code of Canon Law as a lasting union of a man and woman for the purpose of begetting and training children, and for the mutual helpfulness and love of husband and wife in regard to both body and soul. The truly Christian family has always stood high in the esteem of the Church.

THE SINGLE STATE

Marriage is obviously beautiful, attractive, and important in God's plan for the human race. Yet He has never intended all men and women to marry. He has permitted many to suffer sickness or physical disabilities which make marriage impossible or inadvisable for them. Also, Christ Himself commanded monogamy, that is, that one man should have only one wife at a time. Yet often, as He knew, illness or permanent disabilities would make marriage inadvisable or impossible for many a man.

Often, too (for example, after a war), there would be more women in society than men. Clearly, therefore, He intended many men and women to live in the single state. Hence the Church, like Christ, esteems this state highly. In it one can serve God well and achieve great spiritual growth.

More important still, God has revealed that if one chooses to remain single for the purpose of being free to serve God better, one pleases God more than if he marries. This is the clear teaching of Christ: "There are those who bar themselves from marrying for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Only a strong soul should try to master this lesson" (Matt. 19:12). St. Paul explains why. "He who is unmarried is concerned [or at least can concern himself more] about the interests of the Lord, how he may please the Lord. But he who is married is concerned about worldly interests, how he may please his wife. The unmarried woman or the virgin is concerned with the Lord's interests, is intent on being holy both in body and in mind. But the married woman is concerned with worldly things, how she may please her husband. I say this for your benefit [i.e., to indicate an opportunity of greater spiritual development], not to hold you in check [by obliging you to remain single], but [to point out an opportunity] that you may attend assiduously to the Lord without distractions" (1 Cor. 7:32-35).

Some remain single because they desire to escape the responsibilities of married life. They prefer "single blessedness" for selfish interests or adventures, for instance, to have more money, to pursue some career which seems interesting but not important.

For example, they would like to go to Hawaii in a sailboat. These persons do not please God more than if they marry.

But if one remains single to perform a worthwhile service for God or his fellow men which marriage would make difficult or impossible, he is accepting God's vocation to the single state. With the advice of a spiritual director, he or she might even make this state permanent by means of a vow. Or he might become a member of a "secular institute," and make his life virtually that of a religious without a distinctive habit or community life.

Many would like to marry but are prevented by some misfortune, such as sickness, or even the failure to meet a truly suitable marriage-partner. In this *lack of an opportunity to enter a truly Christian marriage* they can recognize God's vocation or invitation to the single state. By accepting His vocation willingly, and by devoting themselves to works which help His Church, they can lead truly significant and dedicated lives which bring them deep peace of soul.

In his address on "Woman's Duties in Social and Political Life" on October 21, 1945, Pope Pius XII beautifully expressed this consoling message. His statement simultaneously contributed much toward clarifying the nature of *vocation*. "The young Catholic girl . . . who remains unmarried through necessity, trusting nonetheless in the providence of our heavenly Father, recognizes in the vicissitudes of life the call of the Master: "The Master is come and asks for you" (John 11:28). She hearkens; and *in the exclusion of Matrimony she*

recognizes her vocation. Then, with a sorrowful but submissive heart, she too devotes herself to noble and most diversified good works."

THE PRIESTHOOD

God invites many men and women into marriage where they will concern themselves especially with the bodily life of the new little members of His Church. He also invites many young men and women to become priests or religious and to consecrate themselves wholly to caring for the spiritual life of the members of the Mystical Body.

A priest is a man invited by God to stand as the representative or mediator between men and God. As the mediator of men to God, and in their name, the priest offers to God their gifts, especially the most sublime gift, Christ Himself in the Mass. As the representative of God to men, the priest baptizes them into the Mystical Body, forgives them their sins, nourishes their souls with Holy Communion, brings them God's teaching which inspires them to lead their lives happily and well. No group of men has brought greater gifts to mankind than the priests of God's Church. A young man who embraces the priesthood can be sure that he will have, not a soft life, but one which is genuinely happy. His satisfaction increases constantly with his growing consciousness of the worthwhileness of the priesthood and of the happiness it brings to men.

THE RELIGIOUS STATE

God also invites young men and women to enter the religious state as sisters, brothers, or priests. In it they generously

consecrate their whole selves to Him by the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The rich young man indicated that he wanted to give a more outstanding service than that of ordinary persons who were content to keep the Ten Commandments. Christ said to him: "If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come follow me" (Matt. 19:16-30).

The rich youth did not accept Christ's invitation. But ever since, many other generous young men and women, impelled by a generous love of Christ, have heard those words and said, "Here Lord, take me. I gladly offer myself to help you in spreading your kingdom and bringing your joy and peace to men." Thus they have put themselves in position to receive greater graces and joys from God, and to do their part in promoting works of great importance to the Church in religious life. They enter a society to tend toward their spiritual development by the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience according to the constitutions of the order entered (Canons 487, 488).

The outstanding excellence of this state is the total surrender and dedication of self to God. The person sacrifices possessions, marriage, and ownership of his own self in order to be able to seek God alone, and to make Him the center or preoccupation of his thoughts and deeds. He wants to live for God. Throughout his life, the vows make his acts more meritorious than they would otherwise be.

INDECISION

When John and Mary accepted the invitation to the party and had so much fun, they had another friend, Bill, who missed it. They asked him why.

“Shucks,” he said, “I just kept putting off my decision. I thought something better might turn up. I didn’t yet know the field of possible choices. So I didn’t make up my mind to accept the invitation until it was too late.” “Well,” Mary asked, “did you have a good time at home?” “Darn it, no. I just sat at home bored and worried. I felt I was missing something. Now I know I did miss it.”

Like Bill, many young men and women find themselves full of procrastination, indecision, or reluctance about another difficult decision they must face: what they will do with their lives. It is the problem of “my vocation.” It is often troublesome, but it ought to be thought through.

THE NEED OF A DECISION

God invites every young Catholic to one or another of the four states. He invites, but He does not compel or oblige him to any one of them. If the youth does not accept the invitation, he does not sin or diminish in God’s love. But he may forfeit many further invitations or graces which God would otherwise have given him in the future. If he accepts, he becomes much dearer to God, merits an increase of sanctifying grace, and puts himself in position to receive a greater abundance of actual graces throughout the rest of his life.

In regard to each invitation or vocation, God manifestly wants the young person to make a decision of acceptance. That is a

point which is too often overlooked by those still wondering about a state of life.

A SOUND NORM FOR CHOOSING

What is the norm or principle by which Bill or Joan can make his choice one that is truly wise? A worldly-minded person will ask himself: what do *I* like the best? That is, he will probably follow an impulse to choose according to his worldly likes or his emotional attractions, rather than according to values.

But the generous boy or girl, who really wants to find God's will rather than his own, will use a different procedure, somewhat like this. He will keep clearly in mind the chief purpose and opportunity of life: "God made me to give me an opportunity to increase my sanctifying grace by serving Him here below with generosity rather than mediocrity, and consequently have a greater capacity to praise and enjoy Him in heaven. For, the praise and joy of heaven are proportional to the grace merited here." Then keeping this in view as the end to which the states of life are means, he or she will ask himself: "In which of these states am *I*, with *my* abilities, character, and temperament, likely to increase my sanctifying grace the most?" Or, in other words, "In which of these states am *I* likely to serve God the best?" In other words still, "In which of these states shall I probably bring greater glory to God, greater benefits to my fellow men, and greater happiness to myself throughout time and eternity?"

There is, however, a common mistake into which many fall, because they fail to keep the mind on the true norm, greater service or glory to God. They select the

state of life which they humanly like the best. Then they subtly rationalize their choice by saying, "I can serve God just as well in it." Thus they turn the means (the state of life) into their end or goal and reduce the true end (the service of God) to a means. They are trying to conform God's will to their own, rather than to conform their will to His. That is not the way to true happiness and peace. In *His* will, as Dante has aptly said, is our peace.

At first this norm, like most other principles, may seem abstract or elusive. But concrete examples (two or three drawn from each state of life) will make clear how it can be applied in practice — or misapplied.

THE MARRIAGE OF FRED AND NANCY

Fred Jones was a happy-go-lucky extrovert, 20 years old. He did not like books or laboratories or discussions about serious matters. He gave no thought to careful choice of a state of life, but preferred to drift. He fell in love with Nancy White, a girl just like himself. Their interests were confined to surface fun such as dancing, movies, parties, and kisses. They did not read any Catholic books or pamphlets about marriage; but he thought her pretty and she regarded him as handsome. Was not that enough? They drifted into marriage. Three months later Fred was drafted. Within a year his baby boy was born, while he was overseas. Twenty months later still he was discharged from the army, happy to come home. But when he arrived he was dismayed. Nancy's love for him had cooled. She had found the evenings alone with her baby too boring. So she went out

with other men. Fred and Nancy quarrelled, month upon month. Then, without even seeking her pastor's permission, Nancy sued Fred for divorce and won the decision from the judge. Three months later she appeared before another judge and "married" another man. These sad events have matured Fred. He realizes, with sorrow but too late, that his thoughtless drifting was not the right way to bring a happy marriage into being.

LAURA SOREN

Laura Soren was a vivacious girl who enjoyed fun. She found her studies hard to master, but she gave them enough time and effort. She had an unusually quick temper, which often got her and her companions into trouble. Without meaning it, she generated friction when she was in a group. Nevertheless, she took a proper interest in religious knowledge and practice. She really preferred God's greater service to her own desires. Then she received an offer of marriage from a fine young Catholic. But for a long time, too, she had been deliberating about becoming a nun. What was she to do now?

Before making this difficult decision she prayed, and she sought more knowledge. She read a good book about Catholic marriage, and another about religious vocation. She talked the matter over with Father Degel. She knew him to be one who would give her helpful knowledge but who would leave the decision to herself. Together they came to a conclusion: the religious life is nobler because it offers more opportunities for growth in grace; but with her temperament Laura was not likely to take as many

of these opportunities as she would probably take in marriage. She probably would not adjust well to community life, even though she honestly tried. So she decided that God was inviting her more strongly to Catholic marriage. It seemed to be the best state for her, with her temperament and personality, to work out her Christian perfection or spiritual development. She said yes to His invitation. Now she is trying hard to live as a devout Catholic wife and mother, raising her two young sons and a daughter as fine little Catholics.

AUDREY FELSER

Audrey Felser was also a lively character—quite like Laura Soren, except that Audrey was quick at studies. No one was surprised when she became a teacher in high school. God sent her, too, the thought of becoming a nun. But she also had strong desires of marriage. She thought, she prayed, she talked to understanding nuns and a priest. With their aid she finally decided that religious life would not be a prudent choice for her, but that marriage would be.

At the age of 26 she was engaged. But her good Catholic fiancé was killed in Korea. This was a heavy blow to Audrey. But in prayer she recognized that God never permits evil or misfortune to come to any of us except when He can and will draw good from it; also, that if we accept our misfortunes with resignation to God's will rather than turn sour, cynical, or self-pitying, we can make them the occasion of growth in grace. She became resigned to God's will, and got over her sorrow.

After a year she received an offer of marriage from another man. But unfortunately, his character and opinions were dangerous. In all likelihood he would be a constant occasion of sin to her. She felt that if she rejected his offer of marriage, probably she would have to remain single the rest of her life. To say "no" to him almost broke Audrey's heart. But she clearly saw that if she remained single she would be serving God better. So she resolutely refused his proposal. In this exclusion of marriage she recognized God's invitation or vocation to her into the single state.

She read again the beautiful words of Pope Pius XII in his address to women on October 21, 1945, and they gave her strength and guidance. "The young Catholic girl . . . who remains unmarried through necessity, trusting nonetheless in the providence of our heavenly Father, recognizes in the vicissitudes of life the call of the Master: 'The Master is here and asks for you' (John 11:28). She hearkens. And in the exclusion of matrimony she recognizes her vocation." Reassured and encouraged by this beautiful doctrine, Audrey did not waste time or spoil her character by self-pity. She offered herself to work in a field where the Church has great need today. She became a lay teacher in a Catholic high school. There she is doing great work now. She is drawing much deep satisfaction from it, and lots of fun besides. She knows that she has a life full of great significance for herself, her country, and her Church.

DICK SPANGLER

Dick Spangler, a senior in high school, had the esteem of his companions. They regarded him as an ordinary good fellow, one of the crowd. He took part in sports, but was not a star. He succeeded fairly well in his studies, but others in his class were better. Now and then he found himself in trouble for some more or less inadvertent breach of discipline, but he paid the price and forgot it. He enjoyed parties and dates and dances, and generally took for granted that someday he would marry. Now and then, however, he had the thought: "It might be good for me to become a priest." That thought came in his first year of high school, but he forgot it through a growing interest in other things. It returned again in third high. This time he pushed it out of his mind. He saw other things in life which he preferred to do. But during his retreat in fourth high, the thought came back again, stronger than ever. Once more he felt like pushing the idea aside in favor of his own inclinations toward his dream-life in the world. But then he recognized the thought as God's invitation, His actual grace. Manly character that he was, he resolved to face the issue and think the matter through.

"Have I the qualifications? Physical? Yes, my health has been good enough. Intellectual? My marks have been at least average. Moral? With my confessor's help, I have kept myself free from habitual falls into mortal sin, and he has told me I am fit to enter a seminary. My reason to enter? I'm not merely seeking an easy life, or studies I like, or companions I like, or honor which I dream will be mine. But I think

I shall probably serve Christ better as a priest than as a layman, and merit more grace, and help my fellow men more — and that in regard to their eternal welfare. I don't want to waste my life, or merely drift through it. Rather, I want to give myself to something truly worth-while — a real cause. I'm willing to do any work God in His providence assigns to me. But I'd rather like to do the work ordinarily done by the diocesan priests in the parishes.

“What, then, are the pros? A multitude of spiritual benefits: increase of grace, complete dedication to God and to noble work. All of this stores up treasure in heaven. What are the cons? So many good things must be sacrificed: home and friends who must be left behind, money and what it will buy, marriage, the prospect of being one's own boss; one must accept a bishop or religious superior instead.”

Dick thought these matters over, not fretfully as if the whole job had to be done in one evening, but calmly and prayerfully during a whole month. During it he jotted down the ideas which occurred, pro and con. He received Holy Communion often, and prayed for light to know what was best for him to do, and strength to do it. Gradually he became aware of this. The values he had listed under “con” were material, tangible, and more humanly attractive to flesh and blood, while those written under “pro” were abstract, somewhat intangible, but in fact far greater. They brought deep satisfaction to the mind when it was quiet enough to gaze upon them steadily. Hence, illumined by God's grace even though he did not know it, Dick worked

up the courage to accept God's invitation. In his own words he talked out his thoughts to God.

DICK'S FRIENDS

By graduation time Dick had his acceptance to the seminary. Then he learned that many of his friends had been fighting a similar battle inside their souls. Bob Jeffreys, Stan Whitehouse, and Mary Harmon had not brought themselves to a decision. They were merely going to drift along for a while. Ten years later, they are drifting still. Some fellows and girls seem simply unable to bring themselves to a decision; and thus they miss half the joy of life. To rush into any state of life is highly dangerous. But perhaps chronic indecision is even worse for taking the joy and meaning out of life. It turns men or women into worry-warts.

John Miller had decided to be a priest. But, unlike Dick, John thought that his abilities and interests were in the direction of teaching, one field where the Church has a growing need today; that he would be more at home and merit greater grace in that life. So while Dick entered a diocesan seminary, John went to a religious order which teaches.

Cora Skobis had felt like a battlefield full of shell holes. For inside herself there had been for a while a big battle between her head and her heart. Her heart pouted for more dates and parties and maybe a marriage. If only she should get into it suddenly, she thought, it would at last extinguish that troublesome idea of religious vocation which God just would not let her forget. But her head told her that

she could adapt herself to religious life if only she would. Eventually she worked up her generosity and courage, and accepted God's invitation. She had felt that it would break her heart to make the decision. But she got a surprise. The decision healed her aching heart and brought her deep peace. Now she looked forward with desire to get into the new life she had chosen. God's joy had followed the battle she had so generously fought.

GERRY PRAT

Gerry Prat was another fine character who felt an inclination through elementary school and high school to dedicate his life to God as a priest. Gerry, however, found study difficult. He liked to work with his hands. No matter how hard he worked at study, the hours dragged along and his grades remained barely satisfactory. But when he was taking an engine apart or repairing a roof he never even noticed that time was passing. After graduation from high school he took a variety of jobs. Yet the work in factories, while pleasant enough, seemed spiritually insignificant, just a pass-time. Then it occurred to him that he could dedicate his life to God as a lay brother in a religious order, and serve Him by his hands as well as others could by their brains applied to study. He is a happy lay brother today.

HELEN HALFORD

Helen Halford was a normal, ambitious, energetic, generous, courageous, and clear-headed American girl who had reached the time when she must decide what to do in life. She was too big hearted to be content

merely to seek a comfortable living for herself; she wanted to help toward making the world a better place in which to live.

Perhaps she did not display much piety externally, and surely she liked to have innocent fun with her crowd. But deep in her heart she loved Christ so much that she desired to help to spread His kingdom and to aid her fellow-men — yes, to aid them especially in what counts most, the saving and perfecting of their souls.

She surveyed the possibilities: stenographer, clerk, teacher, nurse, perhaps something else. Of course she thought of motherhood and all its nobility; and then she remembered that motherhood can be either physical or spiritual, as our Holy Father Pius XII so beautifully stated in his address to women in 1945: "Every woman is made to be a mother: a mother in the physical meaning of the word or in the more spiritual and exalted but no less real sense."

Then came the thought of becoming a nun. At first she shied away. Sometimes, too, she felt a tendency to procrastinate her decision. "Things are so nice as they are now," she felt. "Why shouldn't I merely let them be?" But in her better moments she realized that she had to bring the matter to a head sometime. Also, again and again God sent that thought back, and it seemed stronger each time: "Would I do well to become a sister?"

Helen courageously stood up to the problem and thought it through. "Have I the qualifications? Health? Yes, enough. Intellectual ability to do the work of the Order of which I am thinking? Generally, my grades have been at least good. Tem-

perament? Well, I've been able to get along reasonably well with my companions. So, I suppose, I'll be able to adapt myself to the social life in the convent, too; at least, if I really try. My motives? I'm not just seeking an easy life, but I want to serve God better, grow closer to Him, benefit my fellow men, and aid the Church in one of several of the ways in which sisters do this."

From time to time doubts turned up, or problems. Then Helen sought counsel, both from a nun and from a priest. Both were understanding persons before whom she could think out loud a bit without feeling that she was committing herself. Both gave her the information she needed to make her decision intelligently, but did not urge her one way or another.

Sometimes Helen was frightened at the thought of what she must sacrifice to gain the benefits of religious life. But she reflected that to gain anything truly worthwhile, generally we must give up something else less good. At length she worked up the courage to say: "Dear God, you have given so much to me, and loved me so much. I want to love you back; and to prove it, I shall give my whole self back to you. Cost what it may, I'll be a nun."

That was Helen's decision which set her on the way to her vocation. Later she began her new life in the novitiate; and quickly she found that God was already paying her back for the sacrifices she had made. She sensed a deep happiness in living for God. She noticed that her motives to do this were growing stronger. She experienced in her own self what St. Augustine meant when he cried out in the very first chapter of his *Confessions*: "Thou

hast made us, O God, for thyself; and our hearts cannot be truly at rest until they find their repose in thee.”

Also, she experienced more and more joy in living with her truly excellent companions. Their characters were as varied as their experiences, and this fact helped to keep life interesting and full of little surprises. But all of them seemed cheerful, helpful, pleasant, charitable, and happy in the pursuit of high ideals. They had their occasional trials, disappointments, and blue days, just as persons in other walks of life. But they also had Christ's outlook which made these burdens easier to bear. Helen felt like a beloved daughter resting in the arms of God, her loving Father. She came to realize more and more that Christ promised His followers a hundredfold in this life as well as greater happiness in the next.

In time the day of her final profession arrived. It was a day which brought much of God's peace to her and her mother and dad. They knew that she had entered into a life bringing joy to her, benefit to the Church, and glory to God.

In this entire procedure Helen was like a surprisingly large number of America's young Catholics, men and women alike. Far from being merely self-seeking, they are beautifully noble and generous. Therefore, they desire to give themselves wholly to someone worthy of their love. They want to devote themselves along with their talents, ingenuity, and energy to a truly worthwhile cause.

They do not want to spend — or rather waste — their lives by seeking chiefly or merely their own convenience and selfish

interests. As they readily see, the road to genuine happiness lies in the opposite direction: devotion to others. He who desires deep happiness must seek a busy life and a life in which he is spending himself to make others happy. For, from the very effort to make others happy he draws deep happiness himself. That is a message easily drawn from the paradox of Christ: "He who is bent on saving his life must part with it anyway; but he who freely parts with his life for my sake will save it in the end" (Luke 9:24).

RESUME

Today, after many years, Fred Jones is living as an ordinary Catholic, but with a feeling that his life is lonely and pointless. Nancy, who divorced him and "re-married," is still living out of the Church. She has pretty well killed her conscience, but every now and then it jabs her with feelings of remorse and fear which spoil her enjoyment of the other good things of life.

But the case is different with Laura Soren, Audrey Felser, Dick Spangler, Cora Skobis, Gerry Prät, and Helen Halford. One and all, they are happy, each in his own vocation, that way of living which he chose after prayerful thought and competent counsel. Each is absorbingly busy doing service to God and his fellowmen within the Mystical Body, and happy by the very doing.

Above all, each of them is glad that he truly sought to learn and follow God's will rather than merely his own inclinations in choosing a state of life. That is, he did not merely drift into one way of living rather

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than another, or postpone his decision indefinitely. Instead, he brought the issue to a head.

He or she set himself to the task of thinking out, not "which state of life do I like the best," but rather, "which state is the best for me?" "To which state of life does God seem to be inviting me most strongly and clearly — me with my character, generosity or lack of it, temperament, adaptability, and talents?"

Each found the answer by applying a correct norm. He or she asked himself: "In which state am I, with my character and abilities, likely to increase my sanctifying grace the most, and thereby be happier myself, in time and eternity, by bringing a greater glory to God?" When an honest weighing of the pros and cons had made him think that God was most clearly inviting him to one of the four possible states rather than the others, he regarded that thought as God's vocation or invitation. He made a decision to accept it willingly, and with a readiness to forget what might have been if he had chosen another. That, rather than mere drifting or indecision, was the way to a significant and happy life.



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