

Introduction

The notion Apostolic Vocations refers to the Vocations of all Christ's faithful people, that is, the members of the Church. The vocation of all Christian people is essentially a call to holiness and apostolate. Holiness is an attribute of God. Those called by God must possess this attribute. God, the originator of all calls, in his relationship with his people Israel manifested fidelity and loving kindness, righteousness and compassion (cf. Ex 34:6-7). He directed Moses to teach his people to imitate his holiness: "say to all the congregation of the people of Israel, You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy" (Lev 19:2). Holiness means being like God the origin of all vocations. Apostolate is a sharing in the vocation of Christ, the head of the Church, who shares his mission with men. The vocation of Christ is to bring back all the children of men back to God. He was sent by the Father to reconcile all men to God in himself. It refers also to each and every activity in the Church which is directed towards carrying out her mission, the mission of evangelization. Hence, every obedient response to Christ's call which serves him and his mission is apostolic vocation. Every apostolate is preeminently the living and proclaiming of the will of God on earth as in heaven by the Mystical Body of Christ through its work. Hence, the genuine work of every Christian done in the name of Christ receives authentication or is part of the work of Christ who was sent on a mission by the Father. When Christ was about to ascend to the Father he entrusted the mission to his apostles to be continued, which they in turn handed over to their successors.

The Fathers of the second Vatican Council teach that the Christian vocation essentially is a calling to apostolate. *Apostolate* refers to each and every activity in the Church which is directed toward carrying out her mission. (The Church was founded to spread the kingdom of Christ over all the earth for the glory of God the Father, to make all men partakers in redemption and salvation, and through them to establish the right relationship of the entire world to Christ. Every activity of the Mystical Body with this view goes by the name of apostolate. The Church exercises it through all its members, though in various ways. Cf. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 2). In respect to this calling, every member of Christ faithful shares at the same time in the life and activity of the body and no member of the Church is ever off duty. The whole body of Christ achieves full growth in dependence on

the full functioning of each part (Eph 4:6). Between the members of the body there exists, further, such a unity and solidarity that a member who does not work at the growth of the body to the extent of his possibilities must be considered useless to both Church and to self.

THE CHURCH AND THE APOSTOLIC VOCATIONS

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that the whole Church is apostolic in two ways (CCC863). (1) Firstly, the Church remains in communion in the faith and life of Jesus Christ through the successors of St. Peter and the original apostles; (2) Secondly, she is sent forth into the world. Every member of the Church, whether priest or layman, shares in this mission to be a missionary. Every Catholic has a mission to teach and preach the Gospel. All are sent forth under different degrees of holy orders as witnesses. Every vocation that serves and obeys Christ is an apostolic vocation, for an apostolate is nothing more than the activity of the Mystical Body of Christ in the work of living and proclaiming the will of God on earth as it is in heaven.

THE MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH AND THE APOSTOLIC VOCATIONS

The sacrament of baptism incorporates one into the body of Christ. The Church teaches that all Christ's faithful people, as members of a living Body of Christ, should be active. The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, making it more elaborate, teach: "It is incumbent on every disciple of Christ to do his or her share in spreading the faith" (LG 17; cf. AG 36). They used the analogy of human body to explain the importance of every member of the Church. They observed that Just as, in the structure of a living body, no part is merely passive, but each part shares in the body's workings as in its life; so, too, in the body of Christ, which is the Church, the whole body, 'each part working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up(AA 2). The Church is Jesus' living body; her vital functions are his own priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions.

Every baptized person is a member of the living body of Christ. Each person should be ready to do, in ways appropriate for each, what the Church as a community is called to do, that is, worship God and offer him gifts, receive and hand on his word, and serve and build up his kingdom here on earth. Nobody should think that his or her potential contribution would be too insignificant to matter. In a living human body, every organ's functioning is important to the whole body. Just as a natural human body's head needs the body's feet, so Jesus needs his members. If any part of the body is not functioning, the rest of the body

parts would be sick and in serious pain. In the same way, if any member of Christ's faithful people decides not to fulfill his or her role in the Church, he or she would be causing Christ and other members of his body pain and inconvenience. Hence, in relating this to apostolic vocation of all the baptised, no member of the Church is ever off duty. Since no part of a living body can remain passive without harming the others, no member of the body of Christ can remain inactive without harming the other parts. (see 1 Cor 12.21–22, Col 1.24; *CMP*, 23.E).

It is incumbent on every disciple of Christ to carry out his or her share in spreading the faith" (LG 17; cf. AG 36). everyone should help carry out the Church's mission: "Just as, in the structure of a living body, no part is merely passive, but each part shares in the body's workings as in its life; so, too, in the body of Christ, which is the Church, the whole body, 'each part working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up'

FACTORS AFFECTING APOSTOLIC VOCATIONS

1. Opposing doctrinal truth to pastoral practice.
2. Despair at the rejection of personal ministry or when ministry fails.
3. The challenge of need to have the answer to problems.
4. Challenge of being too familiar with liturgical and spiritual exercises.
5. Challenges coming from type of person and temperament.
6. Intellectual challenge
7. Unbelief – lack of faith in vocation,
8. Pride – attaching too much importance to the position of the believer,
9. Sectarianism or denominationalism – division,
10. Wrong spirit – seeking honour above the mission or ministry,
11. Shallow commitment – double dealing

PRIESTLY VOCATIONS

The entire church participates in the priestly anointing of Christ in the Holy Spirit. In the Church, all the faithful form a holy and royal priesthood. They offer spiritual sacrifices through Jesus Christ and proclaim the greatness of him who has called them out of darkness into his marvelous light. 1 Pet 2: 5;9. In Christ, his entire Mystical body is united to the Father through the Holy Spirit for the salvation of all men.

The Church needs always the union with its head to carry out the mission entrusted to her. Because of this necessary existential need for the Body to remain in union with the Head for continuous union with God, Christ instituted the sacrament of his continuous activity in bodily form in the Church. Hence, the ministerial priesthood finds its reason for being in light of this vital and operative union of the Church with Christ.

Through the ministerial priesthood Christ continues to accomplish among his people the work which as Head of his Body belongs to Him alone. Thus, the ministerial priesthood renders tangible the actual work of Christ, the Head, and gives witness to the fact that Christ has not separated Himself from his Church; rather He continues to vivify her through his everlasting priesthood. For this reason, the Church considers the ministerial priesthood a gift given to Her through the ministry of some of her faithful. This gift was instituted by Christ to continue his own salvific mission. For this reason, therefore, there is indisputable need for ministerial priesthood in the Church and in the world.

THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL THE BAPTISED

The Church teaches, through the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, that though honor and reverence must not be taken from those who carry the torch of the apostles through the sacrament of Holy Orders, there is a priesthood of the people that participates in their priestly mission. According to the Fathers, there are two participations in the one priesthood of Christ. The ministerial and priesthood all the baptised. When we talk about the priesthood of all the baptised, we say that the whole community of believers is, as such, priestly. The faithful exercise their baptismal priesthood through their participation, each according to his own vocation, in Christ's mission as priest, prophet, and king. Through the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation the faithful are 'consecrated to be a holy priesthood.

PRIESTLY ACTION OF THE BAPTISED

The Church recognizes the priesthood and the apostleship that falls to her non-ordained members. She attaches much importance to it and encourages them to live up to their vocations. She constantly reminds them that it is in the conscious intention to act apostolically that this office, this mission, is fulfilled. Just as priest must intend the sacrifice of Transubstantiation, people must intend to be witnesses in their lives in order to be priestly, to be apostolic. It is not what one claims by assertion, it is a lived conscious act that must flow from one's consciousness of whom he/she is by the virtue of baptism. Through our baptism, we are all called to follow the apostles as apostles ourselves, heeding the call to action that ends every Mass "Go and spread the Good New". This invitation challenges every non-ordained member of the Church to take part in being a faithful members of the new people of God, who share in the new covenant relationship, that is, being adopted as sons and daughters of God. They form part of the nations baptized in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit by carrying within them, everywhere they go, the person of Jesus Christ, who is the way, the source of true joy, and eternal peace.

The Gift of the Ministerial Priesthood

The Church considers the ministerial priesthood a gift to her through the ministry of some of her faithful. This gift was instituted by Christ to continue his own salvific mission in the Church through the Bishops and their successors. The identity of the priest comes from the specific participation in the Priesthood of Christ, in which the one ordained becomes, in the Church and for the Church, a real, living and faithful image of Christ the Priest, a sacramental representation of Christ, Head and Shepherd. Through consecration, the priest receives a spiritual power as a gift which is a participation in the authority with which Jesus Christ, through his Spirit, guides the Church.

CARE OF PRIESTLY VOCATIONS

Agents of priestly formation

The Most Holy Trinity

The principal agent of priestly formation is the Most Holy Trinity, who shapes every seminarian according to the plan of the Father, both through the presence of Christ in His word, in the sacraments and in the brothers and sisters of the community, and through the many actions of the Holy Spirit. In the formation of those whom Christ calls and in vocational discernment, the primacy of the working of the Holy Spirit calls for a reciprocal listening and cooperation between the members of ecclesial community, priests, deacons, consecrated persons and laity(RFIS no.125).

The Candidate

All formation, including priestly formation, is ultimately a self-formation. No one can replace us in the responsible freedom that we have as individual persons (PDV no.69). Each seminarian is the protagonist of his own formation and is called to a journey of ongoing growth in the human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral areas, taking into account his own personal and family background. Seminarians are likewise responsible for establishing and maintaining a climate of formation that is consistent with the values of the Gospel (RFIS no.130).

The Diocesan Bishop

The work of the priest and his person is that of Christ. It is Christ, through his Spirit, that throws light on and gives strength to vocational discernment and the journey. Jesus is represented in the priestly formation by the Bishop (PDV no.65). It is the Bishop who is primarily responsible for admission to the seminary and formation for the priesthood. This responsibility is expressed in the choice of Rector and of the members of the community of formators in the preparation and approval of the statutes, the programme of formation and the Rule of Life. The Bishop should know how to establish a trustful dialogue with seminarians so as to enable them to be sincere and open. He must be diligently attentive not to exercise

his authority in such a way as to undermine the Rector and the other formators in the discernment of the vocation of the candidates and their adequate preparation (RFIS no.127).

The Presbyterate

All priests should show their apostolic zeal by fostering vocations as much as possible, and should draw the heart of young men to the priesthood by the example of their humble, hardworking and happy lives, as well as by their mutual charity and fraternal cooperation (OpT no. 2). They should be in communion and in full harmony with the diocesan Bishop, sharing his concern for the formation of candidates through prayer, sincere affection, support, and visit to the Seminary. Each priest must be aware of his own responsibility regarding the formation of seminarians. Every priest who receives a seminarian for a pastoral placement to work with him ought to work generously with the community of Seminary formators, by open and concrete dialogue (RFIS no.129).

The family and The Christian community

The work of fostering vocations is the responsibility of the whole Christian community. The community is bound to carry out this responsibility by living full Christian life. The greatest contribution is made by families of the candidates. The families are animated by a spirit of faith, charity and piety and thus provide the first seminary. The parishes play prominent role because it is within them and in their abundant life the young people themselves take an active part. Initial priestly formation must keep the influences from the family and the community in mind. The seminary is called to undertake an educational enterprise with the seminarian and also to take up a true pastoral engagement with their families. Seminarians should know how to recognize and accept their own family situations realistically and with human Christian maturity. They must also know how to deal with problems that may arise and, wherever possible, how to share with the family their own vocational path.

The formators

The community of formators is made up of priests who are chosen for it and well prepared, commissioned to work in the delicate mission of priestly formation. The group of formators is not merely an institutional necessity but, above all, it is a genuine educating community that offers a coherent and eloquent witness to the values that belong to priestly ministry. Edified and encouraged by such an example, the seminarians will welcome, with docility and conviction, the proposals made to them for their formation.