

PONTIFICAL WORK FOR ECCLESIASTICAL VOCATIONS

NEW VOCATIONS FOR A NEW EUROPE

(In Verbo tuo...)

Final Document of the Congress
on Vocations to the Priesthood and to Consecrated Life
in Europe

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*By the Congregations:
for Catholic Education,
for the Oriental Churches,
for Institutes of Consecrated Life
and for Societies of Apostolic Life*

INTRODUCTION

Let us give thanks to God

1. Blessed be the Omnipotent God who has blessed the continent of Europe with every spiritual blessing, in Christ and in His Holy Spirit (cf *Eph*1, 3).

We give Him thanks for having called this continent, from the beginnings of the Christian era, to be a centre for spreading the good news of the faith, and to show forth in the world His universal fatherhood. We give Him thanks because He has blessed this soil with the blood of martyrs and the gift of innumerable vocations to the priesthood, the diaconate and the consecrated life in its various forms, from the monastic life to secular institutes. We give Him thanks because His Holy Spirit continues, today, to call the sons and daughters of this Church to proclaim the message of salvation in every part of the world, and still others to witness to the truth of the Gospel that saves, in married and professional life, in culture and politics, in art and sport, in human and working relationships, each one according to the gift and the mission received. We give Him thanks because He is the voice that calls and gives the courage to respond, He is the pastor who guides and supports everyday fidelity, He is the way, the truth and the life for all those who are called to realise in themselves the Father's plan.

The European Congress on Vocations

2. Gathered together in Rome, from 5 to 10 May 1997, for the Congress on Vocations to the Priesthood and to Consecrated Life in Europe,(1) we entrusted to the Lord of the harvest the work of the Congress itself, and also the anxiety of the Church in Europe, at this difficult and demanding time, together with our gratitude to God who is the source of every consolation and author of every vocation.

Gathered together in Rome we have entrusted those whom God continues to call in our day to Mary, who is the ideal image of the creature called by the Creator. To Saints Peter and Paul and to all the saints and martyrs of this city and every city and Church of Europe, of past and present, we now entrust this document. May it express and communicate that richness which we received during the days of the Roman assembly, just as the martyrs and saints once witnessed to the love of the Eternal One.

In effect, the Congress was a moment of grace: the fraternal sharing, doctrinal deepening, the encounter of different charisms, the exchange of various experiences and difficulties present in the Churches of the East and the West have enriched each and every one. They have confirmed in each participant the will to continue to work with passion in the field of vocations, notwithstanding the dearth of results in some of the Churches of the old continent.

The strength of hope

3. From the *Working Document of the Congress* to the *Concluding Propositions*, from the Holy Father's *Address* to participants to the *Message to the Ecclesial Communities*, from the interventions during sessions to the discussions in study groups, from the informal exchanges to the testimonies, there was a common thread connecting all the acts and every moment of the meeting: *hope*. A hope which is stronger than every fear and doubt, hope that has sustained the faith of our brothers and sisters of the Churches of the East during times in which it was hard and personally risky to believe and to hope, and which now is rewarded by a renewed flowering of vocations, as was witnessed to at the meeting,

We are profoundly grateful to these brothers and sisters, as we are to all those believers who continue to testify that "hope is the secret of the Christian life and the breath which is absolutely necessary for the Church's mission, particularly vocations ministry... Therefore we must regenerate it in priests, educators, Christian families, religious families, secular institutes, in all those who must serve life with the new generations".(2)

We write to you children, adolescents and young people...

4. Strengthened by this hope we address ourselves to you, *children, adolescents and young people*, so that in your choice of future you may welcome God's plan for you: you will be happy and fulfilled only by being open to fulfilling the Creator's dream for his creature. How we wish that this document could be like a letter addressed to each one of you, in which you could sense, with the help of your educators, the care which Mother Church has for each one of her children, that particular care which a mother has for the youngest of her children. A letter in which you might recognise your problems, the questions that live in your young hearts and the answers that come from He who is the eternally young friend of your souls, the only one who can give you the truth! Know, dearest young people, that the Church anxiously follows your progress and your choices. And how beautiful it would be if this letter would rouse up in you some kind of response, so that a dialogue may continue with the one who is guiding you...

...to you, parents and educators...

5. Filled with the same hope we address you *parents*, called by God to collaborate with His will in giving life, and you *educators*, teachers, catechists and promoters, called by God to collaborate in different ways in His plan of formation for life. We wish to tell you how much the Church appreciates your vocation, and how much it relies on your vocation to promote the vocations of your children and a real and proper vocational culture.

You parents are also the first natural vocational educators, while you formators are not only instructors who introduce people to the essential choices: you are also called to generate life in these young people whom you will open up to the future. Your fidelity to God's call is the precious and irreplaceable means by which your children and pupils might discover their own personal vocation, so that "they may have life, and have it abundantly" (*Jn* 10, 10).

...to you pastors and priests, and consecrated men and women...

6. Still with hope in our hearts we turn to you priests and consecrated men and women, in the religious life and in secular institutes. You who have heard a particular call to follow the Lord in a life totally dedicated to him, you are also called, in a particular way, to give witness to the beauty of this *sequela*.

We know how difficult this proclamation is nowadays and how easy is the temptation to discouragement when the effort seems useless. "Vocations promotion, with respect to other ministries in the Christian community, is the most difficult and most delicate".(3) However we wish also to remember that there is nothing more stimulating than a witness to one's own vocation, which is so passionate as to make it contagious. Nothing is more logical or coherent than a vocation which generates other vocations and makes them completely "fathers" and "mothers". In particular, with this document, we wish to address not only those who have an explicit role in vocations promotion, but also those of you who are not directly involved in it, or those who maintain that they have no responsibility in this area.

We wish to remind these people that only a concerted witness will lead to effective vocations promotion, and that the so-called vocations crisis is above all related to the reticence of some witnesses which weakens the message. *In a Church which is totally vocational, all are vocations promoters*. Blessed are you, then, if you can express with your lives that to serve God is beautiful and fulfilling, and reveal that in Him, the Living one, is hidden the identity of every living person (cf *Col* 3, 3).

...to the whole People of God in Europe

7. Finally, we wish to be "Samaritans of hope" for those brothers and sisters with whom we share the difficulties of the journey. We wish to address the same message of hope to the whole People of God, on pilgrimage in this ancient and blessed continent, in the Churches of the East and the West. At one time the proclamation of the good news spread out from here, thanks to the courage of many evangelisers who witnessed even with their blood. And still today, we wish to believe, the Spirit of the Father is calling.

He sends throughout the world the children of this generous continent where Christianity has its roots, but it too has need of the New Evangelisation and new evangelisers. Now we too present ourselves to the Lord, as the Apostles once did, conscious of our poverty and the needs of this Church: "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing" (Lk 5, 5). But above all we want to believe and hope "on his word" that the Lord, like before, can also today fill the boats of the apostles with a miraculous catch and transform every believer into a fisher of men.

From the Congress to life

8. The scope of this document, therefore, is that of sharing with all of you the moment of grace which the Congress was. Without attempting to make an accurate synthesis of it, nor of drawing up a systematic treatise on vocation, fraternally we wish to place at the disposition of the whole Church, in Europe and outside Europe, in its different Christian denominations, the most significant fruits of the Congress.

The style will seek to express as far as possible our will to make ourselves understood by all, because all, without distinction, are called to realise their own vocation and promote that of their neighbour.

Above all, it will seek to marry theological reflection and pastoral praxis, theory and pedagogical experience, in order to provide a concrete and practical help to those working in vocations promotion.

We do not intend to say everything, not only so as not to repeat what other documents have already said, and said well, in this regard,(4) but also to remain open to the mystery, to that mystery which envelops the life and call of every human being, to that mystery which is also the path of vocational discernment and which will only be completed at the moment of death. *Either vocations ministry is mystagogic, and therefore sets out again and again from the Mystery (of God) in order to lead back to the mystery (of mankind), or it is nothing.*

The divisions of the document

9. Concretely the present text follows the logic which guided the work of the Congress: from the concrete realities of life to reflection, in order to return again to concrete reality. The pastoral care of vocations must be measured against everyday realities, precisely because it is pastoral in function and at the service of life. As a result we will begin with an attempt at surveying the situation, so as then to analyse the topic of vocation from the *theological* point of view, and so provide a foundation, an essential framework of reference for the discussion to follow.

At this point, the most applicative part begins: firstly *pastoral*, or about great intervention strategies, and then more *pedagogical*. This will be useful for identifying at least some guidelines on the level of method and everyday praxis. And perhaps it is exactly this aspect which is most lacking and most awaited by pastoral workers.

PART ONE

THE VOCATIONS SITUATION IN EUROPE TODAY

***"The harvest is plentiful,
but the labourers are few" (Mt 9, 37)***

This first part constitutes a scholarly look at Europe, fully aware of its cultural complexity, in which an anthropological model of "man without vocation" seems to be dominant. The new evangelisation must proclaim again the strong sense of life as "vocation" in its fundamental call to holiness, recreating a culture favourable to different vocations and ready to promote a real increase in quality in vocations ministry.

"New vocations for a new Europe"

10. The theme of the Congress ("New vocations for a new Europe") goes directly to the heart of the problem: today in a Europe which is new with respect to the past, vocations which are also "new" are needed. It is necessary to justify the affirmation in order to understand the meaning of this newness, and to grasp the relationship with "traditional" methods of promoting vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life. We will not content ourselves, therefore, with taking a snapshot of the situation and listing data, but we shall seek to grasp in what direction the newness might lead and the need for vocations which will flow from that.

At the same time we shall read the present situation, beginning from the expression of Jesus about the mission which awaited him: "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few" (Mt 9, 37). These words are still true and constitute a precious key to the present day. In some way we shall find again in them the just measure of our actions and the just proportion (or disproportion) between a harvest which will always be greater and our few strengths. Protected from every pessimistic interpretation of today, as well as from every pretence at self-sufficiency for tomorrow.

New Europe

11. The *Working Document* has already presented an outline of the European situation, regarding the problem of vocations, which is strongly marked by elements of newness. Here we shall summarise them, according to the analysis which the Congress itself has made of them, seeking to grasp the most significant ones which are destined, in the long run, to condition the mentality and sensibilities of young people, and also therefore pastoral praxis and vocational strategies.

a) A Europe which is diversified and complex

Firstly, one fact is already taken for granted: at the level of young people and their condition and the inevitable vocational reflections, it is practically impossible to define the European situation, in a univocal and static way. We are faced with a *diversified Europe*, made so by various historical-political events (see the difference between East and West), but also by the plurality of traditions and cultures (Greco-Latin, Anglo-Saxon and Slav).

These are also its richness and make experiences and choices more significant in different contexts. Accordingly, if in the countries of the East the problem of how to

conserve their newly refound freedom is highlighted, in those of the West they are questioning themselves on how to live an authentic freedom.

Such difference is also confirmed by the progress of vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life, not only because of the marked difference between the vocational flowering of Eastern Europe and the general crisis which pervades the West, but because, within this crisis, there are also signs of a vocational upturn, particularly in those Churches where constant post-Conciliar work has traced a deep and effective furrow.(5)

If therefore in the East it is necessary to begin a truly organic pastoral programme at the service of vocations promotion, from first contact to formation of vocations, then in the West a different approach is necessary. There we must examine the real theological content and the applicational coherence of certain vocational projects, the concept of vocation which is at the base of it, and the type of vocations which derive from it. At the Congress the following question came up again and again: "Why do certain theologies or pastoral practises not «produce» vocations, while others do?"(6)

Another aspect characterises the present socio-cultural situation of Europe: the surplus of possibilities, occasions, requests, in the face of the lack of focalisation, proposal, planning. This is like an ulterior contrast that increases the complexity of this historical season, with a negative impact at the level of vocations. Like ancient Rome, modern Europe seems similar to a *pantheon* or great temple in which all the "divinities" are present, or in which every "value" has its place and its niche.

Different and contrasting "values" are represented and exist together, without any precise gradation; completely dissimilar codes of reading and evaluation, of orientation and behaviour.

In such a context it is difficult to have a unitary conception or vision of the world, and in consequence, *the ability even to plan one's life is weakened*. In fact, when a culture no longer defines the supreme possibilities of meaning, or does not manage to converge around certain values as particularly capable of giving meaning to life, but places everything on the same level, every possibility of projectual choice falls and everything becomes indifferent and flat.

b) *Young people and Europe*

Young Europeans live in this culture which is pluralist and ambivalent, "polytheist" and neutral. On the one hand, they are passionately searching for authenticity, affection, personal relationships, wider horizons, while on the other they are fundamentally alone, "wounded" by well-being, deluded by ideologies, confused by ethical disorientation.

Even more: "from many parts of the world of young people we note a clear sympathy for life understood as a value which is absolute and sacred..."(7) but often and in many parts of Europe such openness to life is betrayed by politics which does not respect the very right to life, especially for the weakest. Politics which risks making the "old continent" even older. And so, if on one part, these young people are a substantial capital for modern Europe, on which it invests considerably to build its

future, on the other, young people's expectations are not always welcomed in a coherent way by adults or those responsible for civil society.

Two aspects, however, seem to us to be central for understanding the attitude of young people nowadays: the *claim of subjectivity* and the *desire for freedom*. These two requests are worthy of attention and typically human. Often, however, in a weak and complex culture like today's, they give rise — when they meet — to combinations which change their meaning: subjectivity then becomes *subjectivism*, while freedom degenerates into *whim*.

In this context the relationship which young Europeans have with the Church merits particular attention. With courage and realism the Congress highlighted in one of its concluding Propositions: "Often, young people do not see in the Church the object of their search or the place where their questions are answered and their expectations fulfilled. God is not the problem, the Church is. The Church is aware of the difficulty of communicating with young people, of the lack of real pastoral plans..., of the theological-anthropological weakness of certain catechesis. On the part of many young people the fear remains that an experience in the Church limits their freedom",⁽⁸⁾ while for many others the Church remains, or is becoming, the most authoritative point of reference.

c) "*Man without vocation*"

This game of contrasts is reflected inevitably at the level of future planning, which is seen — on the part of young people — at a second glance, as limited to their own horizons, as strictly personal (self-realisation).

This logic reduces the future to a choice of profession, to economic organisation, or to sentimental-emotional satisfaction, within horizons which, effectively, reduce the desire for freedom and the subject's possibilities to limited projects, with the illusion of being free.

These are chosen with no reference to the mystery or the transcendent, and perhaps, too, with little responsibility in relation to life, one's own and that of others, of life received as a gift to be generated in others. This is, in other words, a sensitivity and a mentality which risks producing a type of *antivocational culture*. As if to say that in a Europe which is culturally complex and deprived of fixed points of reference, similar to a great *pantheon*, the prevalent anthropological model seems to be the "*man without vocation*".

A possible description of this: "A pluralistic and complex culture tends to produce young people possessing an incomplete and weak identity with consequent chronic indecision in the face of vocational choices. In addition, many young people do not possess the 'elementary grammar' of existence, they are nomads: they move around without stopping either at the geographical, affective, cultural, or religious level; they are "trying out"! In the midst of such a great quantity and diversity of information, but with so little formation, they appear lost, with few points of reference. Accordingly they are afraid of their future, they experience anxiety in the face of definitive commitments and they question themselves about their being. If on the one hand they are looking for autonomy and independence at all costs, on the other, as a refuge, they

tend to be very dependent on the socio-cultural context, and to seek immediate gratification of the senses: on what 'I like', on what 'makes me feel good' in an emotional world which is made to measure".(9)

It is a great sadness to meet young people, even intelligent and talented, who have no will to live, to believe in something, to work towards great ends, to hope in a world which can become better even thanks to their own efforts. They feel themselves *superfluous* to the game or drama of life, as if they have resigned in the face of it, been wounded along the broken paths which have been reduced to the minimum level of tension in life. Without vocation, but also without a future, or with a future which, at the most, will be a photocopy of the present.

d) *The vocation of Europe*

Nevertheless, this Europe of many souls and a weakened culture (which nevertheless exerts a strong influence) possesses unsuspected energies, it is as lively as ever and is called to play an important role on the world stage.

Never before has the old continent shown forth so strongly the *call to unity*, even although it still displays the wounds of recent, sometimes violent, conflicts. A unity which is yet to be built up, even although certain walls have fallen, and which must be extended to the whole of Europe and to all those who seek hospitality and welcome there. A unity which can not only be of a political or economic nature, but also, and firstly, a spiritual and moral unity. A unity which yet must overcome ancient grudges and old suspicions, and which could find once again, in its ancient Christian roots, a motive for convergence and a guarantee of understanding. A unity which, in particular, will touch the present generation of young people to make it stronger and more complete, from the East to the West, the North to the South, defending it from every contrary temptation of isolation and reliance and concern only for one's own interests, and proposing it to the whole world as an example of harmonious living together in the midst of diversity.

Will these young people be capable of assuming such responsibility?

If it is true that the young person of today runs the risk of being disorientated and finding himself without a precise point of reference, the "new Europe" which is being born could become a goal and provide an adequate stimulus to young people who, in reality, "are searching for freedom and truth, spirituality, authenticity, their own personal originality and transparency, who together desire friendship and reciprocity", who are seeking "companionship" and want "to build a new society, founded on values such as peace, justice, respect for the environment, attention to diversity, solidarity, voluntary work and the equal dignity of woman".(10)

In the final analysis, the most recent research describes the young people of Europe as wounded, but not in desperation; influenced by ethical relativism, but also wishing to live a "good life"; aware of their need of salvation, even without knowing where to look for it.

Their most serious problem is probably the ethically neutral society in which they happen to live, but their resources are not exhausted. Especially in a time of transition

towards new goals, such as our own. This can be seen from the many young people inspired by a sincere search for spirituality and courageously committed to social involvement, trusting in themselves and in others, spreading hope and optimism.

We believe that these young people, notwithstanding the contradictions and the "weight" of a certain cultural environment, could build this new Europe. Their own vocation is alluded to in the vocation of their mother-land.

New evangelisation

12. All of this opens up new directions and requires that a new impulse be given to the very process of evangelisation of the old and the new Europe. For some time now the Church and the present Pope have been asking for a profound renewal of the contents and method of proclaiming the Gospel, "in order to make the Church of the twentieth century ever more able to proclaim the Gospel to the people of the twentieth century".(11) And, as we have been reminded by the Congress, "there is no need to be afraid of being in a period of passing from one shore to the other".(12)

a) The "ever" and the "new"

This is a question of joining together the "ever" and the "new" of the Gospel, to offer it to the new questions and conditions of the man and woman of today. It is urgent therefore to propose again the heart or the centre of the kerygma as "eternally good news", rich with life and meaning for the young person living in Europe, as the proclamation which can respond to his expectations and enlighten his search.

Tension and challenge especially concentrate around these points. On this depends the image of man which is to be realised and the great decisions of life, of the future of the person and of humanity; of the meaning of freedom, of the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity, of the mystery of life and death, of loving and suffering, of work and pleasure.

It is necessary to clarify the relation between praxis and truth, between personal historical moment and universal definitive future or between good received and good given, between awareness of gift and choice of life. We know that it is precisely around these points that there arises even a certain crisis of meaning, from which derives an antivocational culture and an image of man without vocation.

Therefore it is from here that the path of the new evangelisation must begin, in order to evangelise life and the meaning of life, the demand for freedom and subjectivity, the sense of being for the world and of being in relationship with others.

From this a vocational culture and a model of man open to the call can emerge. So that the good news of the Lord's resurrection will not be lacking in a Europe which is profoundly redesigning itself; the same Lord in whose blood scattered peoples are reunited and those far away become close, breaking down "the dividing wall of hostility" (Eph 2, 14). We can even say that *vocation is the very heart of the new evangelisation on the threshold of the third millennium*. It is the call of God to man for a new season of truth and liberty, and for an ethical re-foundation of European culture and society.

b) *New holiness*

In this process of inculturating the good news, the Word of God becomes man's companion and encounters him along the way to reveal to him the Father's plan as a condition for his happiness. And it is exactly the Word taken from the letter of Paul to the Christians of the Church of Ephesus, which also today leads us, the People of God in Europe, to discover what is perhaps not visible at first sight, but which is also event, is gift, is new life: "So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (*Eph 2,19*).

This is not, clearly, a new word, but it is a word which makes us look again in a new way at the reality of the Church in the old continent, which is anything but an "old church". She is a community of believers called to the "youthfulness of holiness", to *the universal call to holiness*, strongly underlined by the Council(13) and reiterated afterwards, in various circumstances, by the Magisterium.

Now, it is time that that call be made again with strength and reach every believer, so that each one "may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth" (*Eph 3, 18*) of the mystery of grace entrusted to their own life.

It is already time for that call to inspire new models of holiness, because Europe above all needs that particular holiness that the present moment requires, original therefore, and in some way, without precedent.

People who are capable of "*building bridges*" are needed in order to join together ever more the Churches and the peoples of Europe and to reconcile souls.

"Fathers" and "mothers" who are open to life and to the gift of life are needed; *husbands and wives* who witness to and celebrate the beauty of human love blessed by God; people *capable of cultural dialogue and of "cultural charity"*, for the transmission of the Christian message by means of the languages of our society; *professionals and simple people* who are capable of imprinting on their civil life and on their working relationships and friendships the transparency of the truth and the intensity of Christian charity; *women* who can rediscover in the Christian faith the possibility of living fully their feminine genius; *priests* with a big heart, like that of the Good Shepherd; *permanent deacons* who proclaim the Word and the freedom of service to the poorest; consecrated *apostles* with the ability to immerse themselves in the world and in history with a contemplative's heart, and *mystics* so familiar with the mystery of God as to know how to celebrate the experience of the divine and show God present in the events of life.

Europe needs new *confessors*: of the faith and of the beauty of believing; *witnesses* who would be *credible believers*, courageous even to the shedding of blood; *virgins* who would be so not only for themselves, but who could point out to all that virginity which is in the heart of each one and which leads immediately to the Eternal, the source of all love.

Our continent is eager not only for holy people, but for holy *communities*, so enamoured of the Church and the world as to know how to present to the world itself

a free, open and dynamic Church, which is present in the modern day history of Europe, close to the agonies of the people, welcoming towards all, promoting of justice, caring for the poor, not preoccupied by her smaller numbers nor with placing limits on her action, not frightened by the climate of social de-Christianisation (real but perhaps not so radical and general) nor by the (often only apparent) scarcity of results.

This will be the new holiness which can re-evangelise Europe and build a new Europe!

New vocations

13. And so a new discussion is introduced on vocation and vocations, on culture and vocations promotion. The Congress took into consideration a certain sensitivity which is already widely diffused with regard to these topics, at the same time, however, proposing "an appropriate 'leap' for opening up new horizons in our Churches".(14)

a) Vocation and vocations

Just as holiness is for all the baptised in Christ, so there exists a specific vocation for every living person; and just as the first is rooted in Baptism, so is the second connected to the simple fact of existing. The vocation is the providential thought of the Creator for each creature, it is his idea-plan, like a dream found in God's heart, because the creature is found in his heart. God the Father wants this to be different and specific for each living person.

The human being, in fact, is "called" to life, and how he comes to life, carries and finds in itself the image of He who called him.

Vocation is the divine invitation to self-realisation according to this image, and is unique-singular-unrepeatable precisely because this image is inexhaustible. Every creature expresses and is called to express a particular aspect of the thought of God. There he finds his name and his identity; he affirms and ensures his freedom and originality.

Therefore if every human being has his own vocation right from the moment of his birth, there exist in the Church and in the world various vocations which, while on a theological level express the divine image impressed on man, at the pastoral-ecclesial level they respond to the various needs of the new evangelisation, enriching ecclesial interplay and communion: "The particular Church is like a garden in flower, with a great variety of gifts and charisms, movements and ministries. Hence the importance of the witness of communion among them, abandoning every spirit of «competition»".(15)

Indeed, it was stated explicitly at the Congress that, "there is need of openness to new charisms and ministries, perhaps different from the usual. The evaluation and the place of the laity is a sign of the times which has yet to be fully discovered. It is revealing itself as ever more fruitful".(16)

b) Culture of vocation

These elements are progressively penetrating the conscience of believers, but not yet enough to create a true and proper *vocational culture*,⁽¹⁷⁾ capable of going beyond the confines of the believing community. Accordingly, the Holy Father, in his *Address* to the participants in the Congress wished that the constant and patient attention of the Christian community to the mystery of the divine call would promote a "*new vocational culture* in young people and families".⁽¹⁸⁾

This is a component of the new evangelisation. It is the culture of life and openness to life, of the meaning of life, but also of death.

In particular it makes reference to values which are perhaps a little forgotten by certain emerging mentalities ("culture of death", according to some), such as gratitude, openness to the mystery, sense of the incompleteness of the individual and, at the same time, of his openness to the transcendent, readiness to allow oneself to be called by another (or by Another) and be questioned by life, faith in oneself and in others, freedom to be touched by the gift received, by affection, by understanding, by forgiveness, discovering that what is received is always undeserved and exceeds one's just measure, and is the source of responsibility for life.

The ability to dream and think big is also part of this vocational culture, that wonder that allows the appreciation of beauty and the choosing of it for its intrinsic worth, so that it might make life beautiful and true, that altruism which is not only an emergency solidarity, but which is born of the discovery of the dignity of every brother and sister.

In opposition to the culture of distraction, which risks losing sight of and annulling the serious questions in the pulping of words, there is a culture which can once more find courage and zest for the big questions, those related to one's future: *in fact, the big questions also make small answers big*. However, it is the small and everyday responses which provoke the big decisions, such as the decision on faith; or which create culture, such as the decision about vocation.

In any case the vocational culture, insofar as it is a complex of values, must more and more cross over from the ecclesial consciousness to the civil, from the awareness of the individual or the believing community to the universal conviction that it is impossible to build any future, for Europe of the year two thousand, on a model of man without vocation. In fact the Pope continues: "The discomfort that reveals, through the world of young people, even in the new generations, pressing questions on the meaning of life, is confirmation of the fact that nothing and no-one can smother in man *the demand for meaning* and the desire for truth. For many this is the field in which the vocational search is placed".⁽¹⁹⁾

It is precisely this demand and this desire which give birth to an authentic culture of vocations; and if the demand and desire are in the heart of every person, even in those who deny it, then this culture could become a type of common ground where the believing conscience meets the lay conscience and confronts itself with it. With generosity and transparency it will give to the lay conscience that wisdom it has received from on high.

In this way, such a new culture will become the right and proper terrain of the new evangelisation, where a new model of man can be born and allow new holiness and new vocations for Europe of the year two thousand to flourish. In fact, the shortage of specific vocations — vocations in the plural — is above all an absence of the vocational consciousness of life — vocation in the singular —, or rather the absence of a culture of vocation.

This culture, today, is probably becoming the primary objective of pastoral work for vocations(20) or, perhaps, of pastoral work in general. What kind of pastoral programme, indeed, would not cultivate the freedom of feeling oneself called by God, or give birth to newness of life?

c) *Pastoral care of vocations: the "leap in quality"*

There is another element that connects pre-Congress reflection with analysis during the Congress: the awareness that pastoral work for vocations is faced with the need for a radical change, for "an appropriate ?leap", according to the *Working Document*,(21) or of "a leap in quality", as the Holy Father has recommended in his *Message* at the end of the Congress.(22) Yet again we find ourselves faced with a clear convergence to be understood in its authentic significance, in this analysis of the situation which we are proposing.

This is not only an invitation to react to feelings of tiredness or of a lack of confidence because of the few results; nor do we intend, with these words, to provoke the simple renewal of certain methods or to recover energy and enthusiasm, but we want to indicate, in substance, that vocations promotion in Europe has reached a critical point, a decisive moment. There has been a history, moving along the years, like natural seasons, and which now must necessarily proceed towards the "adult" and mature state of vocations promotion.

Therefore this is neither about undervaluing the sense of this movement, nor of blaming anyone for what was not done in the past; rather, our feeling and that of the whole Church is of appropriate recognition for those brothers and sisters who, in conditions of notable difficulty, have generously helped so many boys and girls and young people to search for and find their vocation. In any case, this is about understanding once more the direction which God, the Lord of history, is giving to our history and also to the rich history of vocations in Europe at today's decisive crossroad.

— If vocations promotion arose as an emergency related to a situation of crisis or shortage of vocations, today it can no longer see itself in the same precarious or negative way, but — on the contrary — appears as a *stable and coherent* expression of the motherhood of the Church, open to the unstoppable plan of God, which always *generates life* within her;

— if at one time vocations promotion referred only or mainly to certain vocations, now it must tend ever more towards the promotion of *all* vocations, because in the Lord's Church, either we grow together or no-one grows;

— if at its beginnings vocations promotion sought to limit its field of intervention to certain categories of people ("ours", those closest to the Church's circle or those who seem to show immediately a certain interest, the best and most worthy, those who have already made an option for the faith, and so on), now the need is ever more apparent for courageously extending to *all*, at least in theory, the vocational proclamation and proposal, in the name of that God who has no preference among people, who chooses sinners from a sinful people, who makes of Amos, who was not a son of a prophet but only a gatherer of sycamores, a prophet, and calls Levi and goes to the house of Zacchaeus, and can raise up sons of Abraham even from the rocks (cf Mt 3, 9);

— if before vocations work rose up, in great part, from fear (of extinction or of numbering less) and from pretence at maintaining determined levels of presence or activities, now fear, which is always a pessimistic counsellor, gives way to *Christian hope*, which is born of faith and is projected towards newness and the future of God;

— if a certain vocations promotion is, or was, continually uncertain or timid, as if to seem almost inferior with respect to an antivocational culture, today true vocations promotion can be carried out only by those who are *convinced* that in every person, no-one excluded, there is an original gift of God which waits to be discovered;

— if at one time the objective seemed to be recruitment, and the methodology was propaganda, often with compulsory inroads into the individual's freedom or with episodes of "competition", now it must be made ever clearer that the purpose is the service of giving *to the person*, so that he might be able to discern God's plan for his life for the edification of the Church, and in this recognise and realise his own truth;(23)

— if at a time not so long ago certain people deluded themselves by seeking to resolve the vocations crisis by debatable methods, for example by "importing vocations" from other places (often uprooting them from their environment), today no-one should delude himself about resolving the vocations crisis by going around it, because the Lord continues to call *in every Church in every place*;

— and so, in the same way, the "vocations scapegoat", a willing and often solitary improviser, must continue to move from promotion made up of periodic initiatives and episodes towards a vocational education which is inspired by a *tested method of accompaniment*, to be able to give appropriate assistance to the one searching;

— in consequence, the same vocations promoter must become more and more an *educator in faith and formator of vocations*, and vocations promotion should become more a *concerted effort*(24) of the whole religious or parish community, of the whole institute or diocese, of every priest or consecrated person or believer, and for all vocations in every phase of life;

— and now, finally, the decisive movement should be made from the "pathology of tiredness"(25) and resignation, which justifies itself by blaming the present generation of young people for the vocations crisis, to the courage to ask oneself the right questions in order to understand any eventual mistakes, so as to arrive at a new creative and fervent thrust of witness.

d) *Little flock and great mission*(26)

The coherence with which we proceed along this line will more and more help to rediscover the dignity of pastoral work for vocations and its natural position of centrality and synthesis in the pastoral environment.

Here, too, we come from experiences and conceptions which, in the past, ran the risk of marginalising pastoral work for vocations in some way, considering it as less important. At times it presented an unsuccessful face of the modern Church or it was judged to be a sector of pastoral work which was less well founded theologically with respect to others, a recent product of a critical and contingent situation.

Vocations promotion continues perhaps to live in a situation of inferiority, which on the one hand can be harmful to its image and indirectly to the efficacy of its work, but on the other can also become a favourable context for identifying new pastoral directions and experiencing them with creativity and freedom — freedom also to make mistakes.

Above all, this situation can remind us of that other "inferiority" or poverty of which Jesus speaks observing the crowds who followed him: "The harvest is great, but the labourers are few" (Mt 9, 37). Faced with the harvest of the Kingdom of God, faced with the harvest of the new Europe and the new evangelisation, the "labourers" are, and will always be few, "small flock and great mission", so that it will be even clearer that a vocation is the initiative of God, a gift of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

PART TWO

THEOLOGY OF VOCATION

"There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit..." (1 Cor 12, 4)

The basic purpose of this theological part is to try and grasp the meaning of human life in relation to God the Trinitarian communion. The mystery of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit underlies the full existence of mankind, as a call to love in the giving of self and in holiness; as gift in the Church for the world. Every anthropology cut off from God is illusory.

This is about understanding the structural elements of the Christian vocation, its essential architecture which, evidently, must be theological. This reality, already the object of much analysis even by the Magisterium, is rich with a spiritual, biblical-theological tradition which has formed not only generations of calls, but also a spirituality of the call.

The question about meaning for life

14. At the school of the Word of God the Christian community welcomes the highest answer to the question of meaning which rises up, more or less clearly, in the heart of each person. This response does not come from human reason, even if it is always dramatically provoked by the problem of being and one's destiny, but from God. It is He who gives the key to clarifying and resolving the big questions which make man a

questioning subject: "Why are we in the world? What is life? What is there beyond the mystery of death?"

It should not be forgotten, however, that in the culture of distraction, in which the young people of today find themselves, fundamental questions run the risk of being stifled or removed. The meaning of life, today, rather than being sought out, is being imposed: either from what is lived in the immediate or from what satisfies our needs, the conscience becomes ever more obtuse and the truest questions remain elusive.(27)

Therefore the task of pastoral theology and spiritual accompaniment is to help young people to question their lives so that, in the decisive dialogue with God, they can formulate the same question as Mary of Nazareth: "How is this possible?" (*Lk* 1, 34).

The Trinitarian icon

15. In listening to the Word, with wonder, we discover that the most comprehensive and fitting biblical-theological category for explaining the mystery of life, in the light of Christ, is that of "vocation".(28) "Christ the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most high calling".(29)

Therefore the biblical figure of the community of Corinth presents the gifts of the Spirit, in the Church, as subordinate to the recognition of Jesus as the Lord. Truly Christology is at the basis of every anthropology and ecclesiology. *Christ is the project of man*. Only after the believer has recognised that Jesus is Lord "under the action of the Holy Spirit" (*1 Cor* 12, 3) can he welcome the statutes of the new community of believers: "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one" (*1 Cor* 12, 4-6).

The Pauline image clearly highlights three fundamental aspects of vocational gifts in the Church; these three aspects are strictly connected with their origin in the bosom of the Trinitarian communion and with specific reference to the individual Persons.

In the light of the Spirit the gifts are an expression of His infinite *gratuitousness*. He himself is charism (*Acts* 2, 38), the source of every gift and expression of the irrepressible divine creativity.

In the light of Christ vocational gifts are "*ministries*", which express the different types of service which the Son has lived even to the gift of his life. In fact "he came not to be served, and to give his life..." (*Mt* 20, 28). Jesus is therefore the model for every ministry.

In the light of the Father the gifts are "*operations*", because from Him, the source of life, every being receives its own specific dynamism.

Therefore the Church, as an icon, reflects the mystery of God the Father, of God the Son and of God the Holy Spirit; and each vocation carries in itself the traits characteristic of the three Persons of the Trinitarian communion. The divine Persons are the source and model of every call. Indeed, the Trinity, in itself, is a mysterious

interconnection of calls and responses. Only there, within that uninterrupted dialogue, can each living person find not only his roots but also his destiny and his future, what he is called to be and to become, in truth and freedom, in the reality of his history.

In fact these gifts, in the ecclesiological statutes of 1 Corinthians, have a concrete, historical destination: "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor 12, 7). There is a higher good which regularly supplants the personal gift: to build up in unity the Body of Christ; to make visible his presence in history "so that the world may believe" (Jn 17, 21).

Accordingly the ecclesial community, on the one hand, is seized by the mystery of God and is a visible icon of it, and on the other, it is totally involved with the history of mankind in the world, in a state of exodus, towards "the new heaven".

The Church, and every vocation in it, express an identical dynamism: to be called for a mission.

The Father calls to life

16. The existence of each one is the fruit of the creative love of the Father, of his efficacious wish, of his generative Word.

The creative act of the Father has the dynamics of an appeal, of a call to life. Each person comes to life because he is loved, thought and willed by a good Will who preferred him to non-existence, loved him before ever he was, knew him before forming him in his mother's womb, consecrated him before he saw the light (cf Jer 1, 5; Is 49, 1.5; Gal 1, 15).

Vocation, then, is that which explains in depth the mystery of an individual's life, and is itself a mystery, of absolute predilection and gratuitousness.

a) "...in his image"

In the "creative call" a person appears suddenly in all the richness of his dignity as the subject called to relationship with God, to stand before Him, with others, in the world, with a face which reflects the same divine features: "Let us make man in our own image and likeness" (Gen 1, 26). This triple relation belongs to the original design, because the Father "chose us in him — in Christ — before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him" (Eph 1, 4).

Recognising the Father means that we exist in his way, having been created in his image (Wisdom 2, 23). In this, therefore, the fundamental vocation of man is contained: the vocation to life and to a life immediately conceived in the likeness of the divine life. If the Father is the eternal spring, total gratuitousness, the eternal source of existence and love, the individual is called, in the small and limited measure of his existence, to be like Him; and therefore "to give life", to assume the life of another.

The creative act of the Father, then, is that which provokes the awareness that life is a consigning to freedom of the individual person, who is called to give a response which is personal and original, responsible and grateful.

b) *Love, the full meaning of life*

In this perspective of the call to life one thing is to be excluded: that people might consider existence to be something obvious, necessary, casual.

Perhaps it is not easy, in today's culture, to experience wonder before the gift of life.(30)

While it is more difficult to understand the meaning of a life given, which will benefit others, a more mature conscience is needed, some kind of spiritual formation, in order to understand that the life of each one, in every case and before any choice whatsoever, is love received, and that in this love is already hidden a subsequent vocational project.

The simple fact of being should fill all of us with wonder and great thanksgiving towards Him who, in total freedom, created us from nothing by speaking our name.

And then the perception that life is a gift should not only give rise to a thankful attitude, but should slowly suggest the first big response to the fundamental question of meaning: *life is the masterpiece of the creative love of God and is in itself a call to love*. A gift received which, by its nature, tends to become a good given.

c) *Love, the vocation of every person*

Love is the full meaning of life. God has so loved man as to give him his very life and to make him capable of living and loving in the divine manner. In this excess of love, the original love, man finds his radical vocation, which is a "holy vocation" (2 Tim 1, 9), and discovers his own unique identity, which immediately makes him similar to God, "in the image of the Holy One" who called him (1 Pet 1, 15). "Creating the human race in his own image and continually keeping it in being, — says John Paul II — God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion. Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being".(31)

d) *The Father who educates*

Thanks to the love that created him no-one can feel "superfluous", because he is called to respond according to a plan that God considers appropriate for him.

Then each person will be happy and fully realised, standing at his post, welcoming the divine educational proposal, with all the fear and trembling that a similar claim raises up in a heart of flesh. God the creator who gives life, is also *the Father who "educates"*, who draws out of nothing what does not yet exist to bring it into being; he draws forth from the heart of man what He himself has placed there, so that he may be fully himself and what God has called him to be, in His way.

Hence the nostalgia for the infinite which God has placed within each one as a divine seal.

e) *The call of Baptism*

This call to life and to the divine life is celebrated in Baptism. In this sacrament the Father tenderly reaches down to the creature, the son or daughter of the love of a man and woman, in order to bless the fruit of that love and make him or her fully his child. From that moment the creature is called to the holiness of the children of God. Nothing and no-one can ever extinguish this vocation.

With the grace of Baptism, God the Father intervenes to illustrate that He, and only He, is the author of the plan of salvation, within which every human being finds his personal role. His act is always precedent, anterior, it does not await man's initiative, it does not depend on his merits, nor is it based on his abilities or dispositions. The Father knows, designs, inserts the instinct, places a seal, calls even "before the creation of the world" (Eph 1,4). And then He gives strength, He walks beside, He gives support, He is Father and Mother always...

In this way the Christian life acquires the significance of a responsorial experience: it becomes a responsible reply in the building up of a filial relationship with the Father and a fraternal relationship with the great family of the children of God. The Christian is called, by means of love, to encourage the process of similarity with the Father which is called the theological life.

Accordingly, fidelity to one's Baptism urges one to ask ever more precise questions about one's life and oneself; above all in order to encourage oneself to live life not only based on human aptitudes, which are also gifts of God, but based on His will; not according to worldly perspectives, so often of little matter, but according to the wishes and plans of God.

Fidelity to one's Baptism, then, means looking above, as children, in order to discern His will for one's own life and future.

The Son calls us to follow Him

17. "Lord show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied" (Jn 14, 9).

This is Philip's request of the Lord on the eve of His passion. It is the yearning for God, present in the heart of every person: to know his own roots, to know God. Man is not infinite, he is immersed in the finite; but his desire turns towards the infinite.

And the disciples are surprised by Jesus' response: "Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14, 9).

a) *Sent by the Father to call mankind*

The Father has created us in the Son, "who reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature" (Heb 1, 3), predestining us to be conformed to His image (cf Rom 8, 29). The Word is the perfect image of the Father. In Him is the Father made

visible, the Logos through whom "he has spoken to us" (*Heb* 1, 2). His whole being is in "being sent", to bring God, as Father, close to men and women, to reveal His face and His name to them (*Jn* 17, 6).

If man is called to be a son of God, therefore no-one better than the Incarnate Word can "speak" to him about God and portray the image of a son. Hence, the Son of God, coming to this earth, has called us to follow Him, to share His life, His word, His death and resurrection; even His sentiments.

The Son, the one sent by God, is made man in order to call mankind: the one sent by the Father is the caller of mankind.

Therefore there does not exist a passage of the Gospel, or a meeting, or a dialogue, that does not have a vocational significance, that does not express, directly or indirectly, a call of Jesus. It is as if His human engagements, provoked by the most diverse circumstances, were for Him an opportunity for confronting the person with the strategic question: "What will I do with my life?", "What is my path?".

b) *The greatest love: to give one's life*

To what does Jesus call us? To follow Him so as to be and act like Him. More particularly, to live the same relationships that He has with the Father and with all people: to welcome life as a gift from the hands of the Father in order to "lose" and pour out again this gift on those to whom the Father has entrusted it.(32)

There is a unifying trait in the identity of Jesus which constitutes the full meaning of love: *mission*. It expresses its oblatinal nature which attains its supreme epiphany on the cross: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (*Jn* 15, 13).

Therefore every disciple is called to repeat and relive the sentiments of the Son, which are synthesised in love, the decisive motivation of every call. But, above all, every disciple is called to make visible the mission of Jesus, is called *for* the mission: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (*Jn* 20, 21). The structure of every vocation, indeed its maturity, lies in continuing Jesus in the world so as, like Him, to make of one's life a gift. The sending-mission is in fact the instruction of the eve of Easter (*Jn* 20, 21) and is the last word before ascending to the Father (*Mt* 28, 16-20).

c) *Jesus, the formator*

Every person called is a *sign* of Jesus: in some way His heart and hands continue to embrace the little ones, to cure the sick, to reconcile sinners and to allow Himself to be nailed to the cross for love of all. Being for others, with the heart of Christ, is the mature face of every vocation. Therefore it is the Lord Jesus who is the *formator* of those who call, the only one who can mould in them His same sentiments.

Every disciple, responding to His call and allowing himself to be formed by Him, expresses the truest traits of his own choice. Accordingly "the recognition of Him as Lord of life and history, brings with it the self-recognition of the disciple (...). The act

of faith necessarily brings together 'Christological recognition' and 'anthropological self awareness'".(33)

Hence the pedagogy of the Christian vocational experience evoked by the Word of God: "And He (Jesus) appointed twelve, to be with Him, and to be sent out to preach" (Mk 3, 14). In order to be lived in its fullness, as gift and mission, the Christian life needs strong motivations and, particularly, profound communion with the Lord; in listening, in dialogue, in prayer, in the interiorisation of sentiments, in allowing oneself every day to be formed by Him and especially in the ardent desire to communicate to the world the life of the Father.

d) The Eucharist: the instruction for the mission

In all of the catecheses of the early Christian community the centrality of the Paschal Mystery is clear: to proclaim Christ who died and rose again. In the mystery of the bread broken and the blood poured out for the life of the world the believing community contemplates the supreme epiphany of love, the giving of the life of the Son of God.

Therefore in the celebration of the Eucharist, the "summit and source"(34) of the Christian life, the greatest revelation of the mission of Jesus Christ in the world is celebrated; but at the same time is celebrated the identity of the ecclesial community brought together in order to be sent, called for the mission.

In the community celebrating the Paschal Mystery every Christian takes part and enters into the style of the gift of Jesus, like Him, becoming bread broken to be offered to the Father for the life of the world.

In this way the Eucharist becomes the source of every Christian vocation; at the Eucharist every believer is called to conform himself to the risen Christ totally offered and given. He becomes an icon of every vocational response; as in Jesus, in every life and in every vocation, there is a difficult fidelity to be lived even to the extent of the cross.

He who participates in the Eucharist welcomes the invitation-call of Jesus to "do this in memory" of Him, in the sacrament and in life, to live "remembering", in the truth and liberty of daily choices, the memorial of the cross, to fill one's existence with gratitude and gratuity, to break one's own body and to pour out one's own blood. Like the Son.

In the end the Eucharist generates the witness, prepares the mission: "Go in peace". We move from the encounter with Christ in the sign of the Bread to the encounter with Christ in every person. The believer's commitment is not exhausted in going into, but in coming out of the temple. The response to the call encounters the history of the mission. Fidelity to one's own vocation springs from the source of the Eucharist and is measured in the Eucharist of life.

The Spirit calls to witness

18. Every believer, enlightened by the knowledge of the faith, is called to know and recognise Jesus as Lord; and in Him to recognise himself. But that is the fruit not only of a human desire or the good will of mankind. Even after having lived a prolonged experience with the Lord, the disciples continue to need God. Indeed, on the eve of the Passion, they experience a certain anxiety (*Jn 14, 1*) and are afraid of being alone; and Jesus encourages them with a promise that had never before been heard: "I will not leave you orphans" (*Jn 14, 18*). Those who were first to be called in the Gospel will not be left alone: Jesus assures them of the enduring company of the Spirit.

a) *Consoler and friend, guide and memory*

"He is the 'Consoler', the Spirit of bounty, whom the Father will send in the name of the Son, the gift of the risen Lord",⁽³⁵⁾ "so that he may remain with you always" (*Jn 14, 16*).

In this way the Spirit becomes the friend of every disciple, to make them countercurrent witnesses to the most confusing event in the world: the death and resurrection of Christ. In fact, he is a "memory" of Jesus and his Word: "He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (*Jn 14, 26*); indeed "he will guide you into all the truth" (*Jn 16, 13*).

The enduring newness of the Spirit consists in guiding towards a progressive and profound understanding of the truth, the truth that is not an abstract notion, but God's plan in the life of every disciple. It is the transformation of the Word into life, and life according to the Word.

b) *Vocational promoter and accompanier*

In this way the Spirit becomes the great promoter of every vocation, *He who accompanies the journey* in order to reach the goal, the interior icon that, with infinite imagination, moulds the face of each one in the likeness of Jesus.

His presence is always close to every man and woman, in order to lead all to the discernment of their own identity as believers and as people who have been called, to mould and model this identity exactly according to the model of divine love. As the patient artisan of our souls and the "perfect consoler", the Spirit sanctifier seeks to reproduce this "divine imprint" in each one.

Above all the Spirit enables those called to bear "witness": "He will bear witness to me, and you also are my witnesses" (*Jn 15, 26-27*). This way of being of each one called is the convincing word, the very content of the mission. Witnessing does not consist only in suggesting the words of the proclamation as in the Gospel of Matthew (*Mt 10, 20*); rather in keeping Jesus in your heart and proclaiming Him as the life of the world.

c) *Holiness, the vocation of all*

And so the demand for a leap in quality for pastoral ministry today becomes a question that without doubt commits us to listening to the Spirit: because He is the one who proclaims "the things that are to come" (*Jn 16, 13*), who gives a new spiritual

intelligence for understanding history and the life that flows from the death and resurrection of the Lord, in whose victory is the future of every person.

Therefore it is legitimate to ask: where is the Holy Spirit's call for our time? Where must we adjust our directions in our vocations programmes? But the response will come only if we welcome the great call to conversion, addressed to the ecclesial community and to everyone in it, as a real path of asceticism and interior rebirth, so that each one may recover fidelity to his own vocation.

There is a *primacy of life in the Spirit*, which is at the base of every vocations programme. It requires us to overcome a widespread pragmatism and a sterile exteriority that leads one to forget the theological life of faith, hope and charity. Attentive listening to the Spirit is the new breath of every pastoral action in the ecclesial community.

The primacy of the spiritual life is the premise for responding to the *nostalgia for holiness*, which, as we have already said, is also current in this era of the Church in Europe. Holiness is the universal vocation of every man,⁽³⁶⁾ it is the main road onto which converge all the little paths that are particular vocations. Therefore the great appointment of the Spirit for this period of post-conciliar history is the holiness of those called.

d) *Vocations at the service of the vocation of the Church*

However, proceeding effectively towards this goal signifies adhering to the mysterious action of the Spirit in certain precise directions, which prepare and constitute the secret of a real vitality for the Church of the year two thousand.

Firstly the eternal, central role of *communion*, which is reflected in the *icon of the ecclesial community, visible in the plurality of gifts and ministries*,⁽³⁷⁾ is suitable to the Holy Spirit. In fact it is precisely in the Spirit that each Christian discovers his absolute originality, the uniqueness of his call and, at the same time, his natural and indelible tendency towards unity. It is in the Spirit that vocations in the Church are so many and, at the same time, are one single vocation, to unity of love and witness. It is also the action of the Spirit that makes possible the plurality of vocations in the unity of the ecclesial structure: *vocations in the Church are necessary in their variety in order to realise the vocation of the Church, and the vocation of the Church — in its turn — is that of making possible and practicable vocations of and in the Church*. All of the different vocations, therefore, are directed towards bearing witness to love, towards the proclamation of Christ, the only saviour of the world.

This is the originality of the Christian vocation: to integrate the fulfilment of the person with the realisation of the community; this means — yet again — to make the logic of love prevail over the logic of private interests, the logic of sharing over the logic of a narcissistic selfishness with regard to one's talents (cf *1 Cor*, 12-14).

Holiness, therefore, becomes the true epiphany of the Holy Spirit in history. If each person of the Trinitarian Communion has his face, and if it is true that the faces of the Father and the Son are familiar enough because Jesus, in becoming man like us, has revealed the face of the Father, then the saints become the most expressive icon of the

mystery of the Spirit. In this way also everyone who faithfully believes in the Gospel bears and reveals the face of the Holy Spirit in his own particular vocation and in the universal call to holiness.

e) *The "yes" to the Spirit in Confirmation*

The sacrament of Confirmation is the moment that expresses in the clearest and most aware manner the gift of and the meeting with the Holy Spirit.

The one to be confirmed, in the face of God and His gift of love ("Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit"),(38) but also before his own conscience and the ecclesial community, answers "amen". It is important to recover at the formational and catechetical level the rich meaning of this "amen".(39)

Above all it means "yes" to the Holy Spirit and, with him, to Jesus. This is why the celebration of the sacrament of Confirmation provides for the renewal of baptismal promises and asks the one to be confirmed to renounce sin and the works of evil, which are always ready to disfigure the Christian image; and above all the commitment to live the Gospel of Jesus and, particularly, the great precept of love. This is about confirming and renewing the vocational fidelity to one's identity as a child of God.

The "amen" is a "yes" also to the Church. In Confirmation the young person declares himself ready to undertake the mission of Jesus continued in the community. Committing himself in two directions, so as to make his "amen" more concrete: to *witness* and to *mission*. The one who has been confirmed knows that faith is a talent to be used; it is a message to be transmitted to others *through one's life*, through the coherent witness of one's whole being; and *through the word*, with the missionary courage of spreading the good news.

And finally the "amen" expresses docility to the Holy Spirit in reflecting and deciding on one's future according to *God's plan*. Not only according to one's own aspirations and abilities; not only in the spaces which the world allows; but above all in harmony with the plan, always hidden and unforeseeable, that God has for each one.

From the Trinity to the Church in the World

19. Every Christian vocation is "particular" because it questions the freedom of every person and generates a most personal response in an original and unrepeatable history. Therefore each person, in his own vocational experience, finds an event that cannot be reduced to a general schema; the history of every person is a little story, but is always a unique part of a greater story. In the relationship between these two histories the human being plays out his liberty.

a) *In the Church and in the world, for the Church and for the world*

Every vocation is born in a precise place, in a concrete and limited context, but it does not turn in on itself, it does not tend towards private perfection or the psychological or spiritual self-realisation of the one called, rather it flowers *in the Church*, in that

Church that journeys through the world towards the Kingdom, towards the realisation of a history that is great because it is the history of salvation.

The ecclesial community itself has a profoundly vocational structure: it is called for the mission; it is a sign of Christ, the missionary of the Father. It says in *Lumen Gentium*: "the Church, in Christ, is in the nature of a sacrament — a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men".(40)

On the one hand, the Church is a sign that reflects the mystery of God; it is an icon that goes back to the Trinitarian communion in the sign of the visible communion, and to the mystery of Christ in the dynamism of the universal mission. On the other hand, the Church is immersed in human time and lives in history in a state of exodus, is in mission to the service of the Kingdom to transform humanity into the community of the children of God.

Therefore history asks the ecclesial community to listen to people's expectations, to read those signs of the times that make up the code and language of the Holy Spirit, to enter into critical and fruitful dialogue with the modern world, sincerely welcoming traditions and cultures to reveal in them the plan of the Kingdom and plant there the seed of the Gospel.

In this way the small great story of each vocation intersects with the history of the Church in the world. Just as it is born in the Church and the world, so every call is at the service of the Church and the world.

b) *The Church, community and communion of vocations*

In the Church, the community of gifts for the one mission, is realised the movement from the condition of believer inserted into Christ through Baptism to his "particular" vocation as a response to the specific gift of the Spirit. In this community every vocation is "particular" and is specified in a life project; there are no generic vocations.

In its particular nature every vocation is, at the same time, "necessary" and "relative". "Necessary" because Christ lives and makes himself visible in His body that is the Church and in the disciple who is an essential part of it. "Relative" because no vocation can exhaust the witnessing sign of the mystery of Christ, but expresses only an aspect of it. Only all of the gifts together can reveal the whole body of the Lord. In the building every stone needs the other (*1 Pet 2, 5*); in the body every member needs the other in order to allow the entire organism to grow and for the common good (*1 Cor 12, 7*).

This requires that the life of each one is planned around God who is its only source and provides everything needed for the good of all; it demands that life be rediscovered as truly significant only if open to following Jesus.

However it is also important that there be an ecclesial community which will help each person called to discover his own vocation. The climate of faith, prayer, communion in love, spiritual maturity, courage in proclaiming, of intensity in the spiritual life all contribute to making the believing community into terrain that is

appropriate not only for the flowering of particular vocations, but also for the creation of a vocational culture and a readiness in individuals to receive their personal call. When a young person recognises the call and decides in his heart the holy journey for realising it, there is normally a community there that has created the premises for this openness and obedience.(41)

So, we note that: *the vocational fidelity of a believing community is the first and fundamental condition for the flowering of a vocation in the individual believer, especially in the youngest.*

c) *Sign, ministry, mission*

Accordingly, every vocation, as a stable and definitive choice of life, opens up in three directions: in relation to Christ every call is a "*sign*"; in relation to the Church it is a "*ministry*"; in relation to the world it is "*mission*" and witness to the Kingdom.

If "the Church, in Christ, is in the nature of a sacrament", then every vocation reveals the profound dynamic of the Trinitarian communion, the action of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as the event that makes those called be *in Christ* as new creatures modelled on Him.

Every vocation then is a *sign*, is a particular way of revealing the face of the Lord Jesus. "The love of Christ urges us on" (2 Cor 5, 14). In this way Jesus becomes the moving force and the decisive model of every response to God's appeals.

In relation to the Church every vocation is *ministry*, rooted in the pure gratuity of the gift. The call of God is a gift for the community, for the common good, in the dynamism of many ministerial services. This is possible in docility to the Spirit who makes the Church a "community of gifts"(42) and generates love in the heart of the Christian, not only as an ethic of love but also as profound structure of the person, called and enabled to live in relation with others, in an attitude of service, according to the freedom of the Spirit.

In the end, every vocation, in relation to the world, is *mission*. It is life lived to the full because it is lived for others, like Jesus did, and therefore it is life-giving: "life generates life".(43) Hence the intrinsic participation of every vocation in the apostolate and mission of the Church is a seed of the Kingdom. Vocation and mission constitute two faces of the same prism. They define the gift and contribution of each person to God's plan, in the image and likeness of Jesus.

d) *The Church, mother of vocations*

The Church is the mother of vocations because she gives birth to them, with the power of the Spirit, she protects them, nurtures them and sustains them. She is mother, particularly, because she exercises a precious *mediating and pedagogical function*.

"The Church, called by God, established in the world as a community of those called, is in her turn an instrument of God's call. The Church is a living call, through the Father's will, through the merits of the Lord Jesus, through the strength of the Holy

Spirit (...) The community, which is aware of being called, is aware that at the same time it must continually call".(44) By means of this call, in its various forms, and at the same time as it, there also runs the appeal that comes from God.

The Church exercises this mediating function when she helps and stimulates each believer to be aware of the gift received and of the responsibility that the gift brings with it.

She also exercises it when she acts as the authoritative interpreter of the explicit vocational appeal and herself calls, presenting her needs for the mission and the demands of the People of God, and inviting them to respond generously.

She also exercises it when she asks the Father for the gift of the Spirit who raises up an assent in the hearts of those called, and when she welcomes them and recognises in them the same call, explicitly giving and entrusting with faith and trepidation a concrete and always difficult mission among men and women.

We can add, finally, that the Church manifests her motherhood when, in addition to calling and recognising the suitability of those called, she also provides them with an appropriate initial and ongoing formation and ensures that they are accompanied along the path of an ever more faithful and radical response. Certainly the Church's motherhood can not be exhausted in the moment of the initial appeal. Neither can that community of believers be called mother that simply "waits", entrusting totally to the divine action the responsibility of calling, as if she were afraid of making the appeal; or that takes for granted that children and young people, in particular, will know how to welcome immediately the vocational appeal; or that does not offer considered pathways for the proposal of a vocation and the welcoming of it.

The vocational crisis of those called is also a crisis, today, of those calling. At times they are reticent and lacking in courage. If no-one calls, how can anyone respond?

The ecumenical dimension

20. Europe today needs new saints and new vocations, believers capable of "building bridges" that shall help to unite the Churches. This is a typical aspect of newness, a sign of the times of the pastoral care of vocations at the end of the millennium. In a continent marked by a profound desire for unity, the Churches must be first to give the example of fraternity that is stronger than any division and is to be built up again and again. "Pastoral care of vocations in Europe, today, must have an ecumenical dimension. All vocations, present in every Church of Europe, are committed, together, to taking up the great challenge of evangelisation on the threshold of the third millennium, and giving a witness of communion and faith in Jesus Christ, the one saviour of the world".(45)

In this spirit of ecclesial unity, the sharing of the goods that the Spirit of God has sown everywhere and reciprocal help between the Churches shall be promoted and encouraged.

The Catholic Churches of the East

21. The Catholic Churches of the West must pay greater attention to the spiritual and formation programmes of the Oriental Catholic Churches; this can only be of benefit to vocations ministry in all the Churches.

Of singular importance in the formation of vocations for the Oriental Churches is the Sacred Liturgy. It is there that the proclamation and adoration of the Mystery of salvation is made and where communion is born and fraternity among believers is built up, to the point where it becomes the true formator of the Christian life, the most complete synthesis of its various aspects. In the Liturgy the joyful confession of belonging to the tradition of the Oriental Churches is joined to full communion with the Church of Rome.

It is impossible to promote vocations to the priesthood and to the monastic life if there is no return to the sources of one's own original tradition, in harmony with the Holy Fathers and their profound sense of the Church. This far-reaching process requires time, patience, respect for the sensibilities of the faithful, but also determination.

Therefore the Bishops, religious Superiors and pastoral workers of the European Oriental Churches are requested to be aware of the urgency of the situation for all of their Churches, recuperating and maintaining their respective liturgical patrimonies, which contribute in an irreplaceable way to the birth and development of theology and catechesis. This, following the example of the mystagogical method of the Fathers, opens people to the experience of the call and the spiritual life, and brings to maturity a sure and strong ecumenical spirit.(46)

Within the various ecclesial experiences, and by means of studies that present the historical, theological, juridical and spiritual patrimony of the Churches to which they belong, Oriental young people can find educational environments appropriate for helping them bring to maturity the universal sense of their dedication to Christ and the Church.

It is the Bishops' responsibility to promote, to approach sympathetically and accompany with fatherly care those young people who, individually or in groups, ask to dedicate themselves to the monastic life, highly valuing the charism of the monastic communities, which are rich with formators and spiritual guides.

The ordained minister and vocations in the reciprocity of communion

22. "In many particular Churches, vocations ministry still needs to clarify the relationship between ordained ministry, vocations of special consecration and all other vocations. A unitary vocations ministry is based upon the vocational nature of the Church and of every human life as call and response. This is at the base of the Church's commitment to all vocations and particularly for vocations of special consecration".(47)

a) The ordained minister

Within this general sensibility, a particular pastoral attention would seem to be needed, today, for the *ordained ministry*, which represents the first specific way of proclaiming the Gospel. It "represents in different times and places the permanent

guarantee of the sacramental presence of Christ, the Redeemer", (48) and expresses precisely the Church's direct dependence on Christ, who continues to send His Spirit to her so that she may not remain closed in on herself, in her cenacle, but may travel the paths of the world proclaiming the Good News.

This vocational organisation is expressed in three grades: *episcopal* (to which is related the guarantee of the apostolic succession), *presbyteral* (which is the "sacramental representation of Jesus Christ... the Shepherd") (49) and *diaconal* (the sacramental sign of Christ the servant). (50) To Bishops is entrusted the ministry of calling those who aspire to Holy Orders, so that they might become their collaborators in the apostolic office.

The ordained ministry makes the Church to be, above all in the celebration of the Eucharist, "the source and summit" (51) of the Christian life and of the community called to remember the Risen one. Every other vocation is born in the Church and is part of its life. Accordingly the ordained ministry enjoys a service of communion in the community and, because of this, has *the compulsory duty of promoting every vocation*.

Hence the pastoral translation: the ordained ministry for all vocations and all vocations for the ordained ministry in a reciprocity of communion. The Bishop, therefore, with his presbyterate, is called to discern and cultivate all the gifts of the Spirit. But in a particular way the care of the seminary must become a preoccupation of the whole diocesan Church in order to guarantee the formation of future priests and the establishment of Eucharistic communities as the full expression of the Christian experience.

b) *Attention to all vocations*

The discernment and care of the Christian communities is extended to all vocations, whether to those already traditional in the Church or to the new gifts of the Spirit: religious consecration in the monastic life and apostolic life, the lay vocation, the charism of secular institutes, the societies of apostolic life, the vocation to marriage, the various lay forms of association related to religious institutes, missionary vocations, new forms of consecrated life.

These different gifts of the Spirit are present in different ways in the Churches of Europe; but all of these Churches, in every case, are called to give a witness of welcome and care to every vocation. A Church is alive to the extent to which its expression of the different vocations is rich and varied.

In a time like our own, then, in need of prophecy, it is wise to encourage those vocations that are a particular sign of what we will be although it has not yet been revealed to us (cf 1 Jn 3, 2), such as the *vocations of special consecration*; but it is also wise and necessary to encourage the prophetic aspects typical of every Christian vocation, including the *lay* vocation, so that the Church, in the sight of the world, may be an ever clearer sign of the things to come, of the Kingdom which is "already but not yet".

Mary, mother and model of every vocation

23. There is a creature in whom the dialogue between the liberty of God and the liberty of man takes place in a perfect way, so that the two liberties can interact, fully realising the vocational project; a creature given to us so that, in her, we can contemplate a perfect vocational plan, that should be implemented in each one of us.

She is Mary, the image that has emerged from God's dream about the creature! In fact she is a creature like us, a small fragment into whom God has managed to pour all of his divine love; a hope given to us so that, seeing her, we too may welcome the Word, so that it may be fulfilled in us.

Mary is the woman in whom the Most Holy Trinity can fully manifest its *elective liberty*. As Saint Bernard says, commenting on the Angel Gabriel's message at the Annunciation: "This is not a Virgin found at the last minute, or by chance, but chosen since before time began; the Most High predestined her and prepared her".(52) This is echoed by Saint Augustine: "Before the Word was born of the Virgin, He had already predestined her as His mother".(53)

Mary is the image of the divine choice of every creature, a choice which was made from eternity, and was totally free, mysterious and loving. A choice that regularly goes beyond what the creature can imagine for himself: which asks him for the impossible and demands only one thing, the courage to trust.

The Virgin Mary is also the model of *human liberty* in responding to this choice. She is the sign of what God can do when he finds a creature free to welcome His proposal. Free to say "yes", free to walk the pilgrimage of faith, which will be also be the pilgrimage of her vocation as a woman called to be the Mother of the Saviour and Mother of the Church. This long journey will be completed at the foot of the cross, through an even more mysterious and sorrowful "yes" that will render her fully mother; and then again in the Cenacle, where, today, she continues, with the Spirit, to generate the Church and every vocation.

Mary, finally, is the perfectly realised image of *woman*, the perfect synthesis of the feminine genius and the fantasy of the Spirit, who in her finds and chooses His spouse, the virgin mother of God and man, daughter of the Most High and mother of all the living. In her every woman finds her vocation, as virgin, as bride, as mother!

PART THREE

THE PASTORAL CARE OF VOCATIONS

"...Each one heard them speaking in his own language" (Acts 2, 6)

The concrete guidelines for the pastoral care of vocations do not come only from a correct theology of vocation, but by means of certain operational principles, in which the vocational perspective is the soul and the unifying criterion of all pastoral work.

Then the faith journeys and the concrete places are indicated where the vocational proposal must become the daily commitment of every pastor and educator.

In part one the analysis of the situation provided us with the framework of the present day vocational reality in Europe; part two proposed a theological reflection on the meaning and the mystery of vocation, coming from the reality of the Trinity to understanding its meaning in the life of the Church.

It is precisely this second aspect that we now wish to deepen, especially from the point of view of its *pastoral* application.

In the audience granted to participants in the Congress, John Paul II affirmed: "Changed historical and cultural conditions demand that the pastoral care of vocations be perceived as *one of the primary objectives of the whole Christian Community*".(54)

The icon of the early Church

24. Historical situations change, but the point of reference in the life of the believer and the believing community remains the same, that point of reference that is represented by the Word of God, especially where it recounts the events of the early Church. These events of the early Church and their way of living them constitute for us the *exemplum*, the model for being Church. This is true also in regard to the pastoral care of vocations. We shall examine only some essential and particularly exemplary elements, as they are proposed to us in the *Acts of the Apostles*, at the time when the early Church was numerically very poor and weak. The pastoral care of vocations is the same age as the Church; it arose at the same time as the Church, in that poverty unexpectedly inhabited by the Spirit.

At the dawn of this singular history, that is the history of all of us, *there is the promise of the Holy Spirit*, made by Jesus before He ascended to the Father. "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (*Acts* 1, 7-8). The Apostles gather together in the cenacle "*and with one accord devoted themselves to prayer...with Mary, the mother of Jesus*" (1, 14), and immediately they act to fill the post left vacant by Judas with another chosen from among those who had been with Jesus from the beginning: so that "he might become with us a *witness to His resurrection*" (1, 22). And the promise is fulfilled: the Holy Spirit descends with riotous effect and fills the house and the lives of those who before had been timid and fearful, with a rumble, a wind, a fire... "And they began to speak in other tongues...*and each one heard them speaking in his own language*" (2, 4.6). And "Peter standing..., lifted up his voice and addressed them" about the history of salvation (2, 14), an address that cuts those that hear it "to the heart" and provokes the decisive question about life: "what shall we do?" (2, 37).

At this point the Book of the Acts describes the life of the early community, which was marked by some essential elements, such as their diligence in listening to the teachings of the Apostles, brotherly union, the breaking of bread, prayer, sharing of material goods; but at the same time the feelings and goods of the Spirit (cf 2, 42-48).

In the meantime, Peter and the Apostles continue to work wonders in the name of Jesus and to proclaim the kerygma of salvation, regularly risking their lives, but always supported by the community, within which the believers form "one heart and

soul" (4, 32). In it, as well, needs begin to grow and diversify, and so deacons are instituted to meet these needs of the community, even the material needs, especially of the weakest (cf 6, 1-7).

Such strong and courageous witness can only provoke the ire of the authorities, leading to the first *martyr*, Stephen; this underlines that the cause of the Gospel requires the whole person, even his life (cf 6, 8-7,70). Saul, the persecutor of Christians, also assents to the sentence condemning Stephen; this is the same man who, shortly, will be chosen by God to proclaim to the pagans the mystery hidden for centuries and now revealed.

And the story continues, ever more as a sacred history: the story of God who chooses and calls men to salvation, even in unforeseen ways, and the story of individuals who allow themselves to be called and chosen by God.

These notes are enough for us to recognise in the early community the basic lines of pastoral work in a totally vocational Church: on the level of methods and contents, of general principles, of the programmes to be followed and the specific strategies to realise it.

Theological aspects of the pastoral care of vocations

25. But what theology underpins, inspires and motivates vocations ministry as such?

The response is important in our context, because it is a mediating element between the theology of vocation and a pastoral praxis coherent with it, which is born from that theology and returns to it. On this discussion, in effect, the Congress expressed the need for reflection and study, with the intention of discovering the motives which intimately link people and communities to vocational action and in order to highlight a better relation between theology of vocation, theology of vocations ministry and pedagogical-pastoral praxis.

"The pastoral care of vocations springs from the mystery of the Church and places itself at her service".(55) The theological foundation of the pastoral care of vocations, therefore, "can only arise from an assessment of the mystery of the Church as a *mysterium vocationis*".(56)

John Paul II clearly recalls, in this regard, that "*concern for vocations is a connatural and essential dimension of the Church's pastoral work*", i.e. to her life and mission.(57) Therefore, in a certain sense, vocation defines the deepest being of the Church, even before her work. In the very name, "*Ecclesia*", is indicated her vocational make-up, because she is truly *an assembly of those called*.(58) Justly, then, does the *Instrumentum laboris* of the Congress note that "a unitary vocations ministry is based upon the vocational nature of the Church".(59)

Consequently, by its very nature, pastoral work for vocations is an activity ordained to the proclamation of Christ and to the evangelisation of believers in Christ. This then is the response to our question: precisely that *the theology of pastoral work for vocations is rooted exactly in the Church's call to communicate the faith*. That relates to the universal Church, but it is attributed in a special way to every Christian

community,(60) especially in the present historical moment of the old continent. "For this sublime mission of bringing to flower a new era of evangelisation in Europe, evangelisers who have been prepared in a particular way are needed".(61)

In this regard it is appropriate to recall some points of reference, drawn from the present papal magisterium, so that they may become points of departure for pastoral praxis in the particular Churches.

a) Once the vocational dimension of the Church has been highlighted, it can be understood how pastoral work for vocations is not an accessory or secondary element, with the purpose simply of recruiting pastoral workers, nor an isolated or partial moment, determined by an emergency situation in the Church, so much as an activity related to the very *being* of the Church and therefore also *intimately inserted into the general pastoral programme of every Church*.(62)

b) Every Christian vocation comes from God, but always arrives at the Church and passes through her mediation. The Church ("*ecclesia*"), who by her in-built constitution is *vocation*, at the same time *generates and educates vocations*.(63) "Consequently, the pastoral work of promoting vocations has as its active agents, as its protagonists, the ecclesial community as such, in its various expressions: from the universal Church to the particular Church and, by analogy, from the particular Church to each of its parishes and to every part of the People of God".(64)

c) *Every member of the Church, excluding no-one, has the grace and the responsibility of caring for vocations*. It is a duty that enters into the vital dynamism of the Church and into its process of development. Only on the basis of this conviction can pastoral work for vocations manifest its truly ecclesial aspect and develop a plan of action in accordance with this, making use also of specific agencies and appropriate instruments of communion and corresponsibility.(65)

d) The particular Church discovers her own existential and earthly dimension in the vocation of all of her members to communion, to witness, to mission, to the service of God and the brothers and sisters... Therefore she will respect and promote *the variety of charisms and ministries, i.e. the different vocations*, all manifestations of the one Spirit.

e) The hinge of the whole programme of vocations promotion is the *prayer demanded by the Saviour (Mt 9, 38)*. This extends not only to individuals but to the whole ecclesial community.(66) "We must pray unceasingly to the Lord of the harvest, that he will send workers to his Church in order to meet the needs of the new evangelisation".(67)

However it is useful to remember that authentic vocational prayer merits this name and becomes effective only when it creates consistency of life, principally, in the one praying, and associates itself in the rest of the believing community with explicit proclamation and appropriate catechesis, in order to encourage in those called to the priesthood and religious life, as to whatever other Christian vocation, that free, willing and generous response, which carries into effect the grace of vocation.(68)

General principles of pastoral work for vocations

26. It has been highlighted from different parts that we need to give a clear vocational stamp to pastoral work. To attain this programmatic objective we shall delineate certain theoretical-practical principles, which we deduce from pastoral theology and, in particular, from the "points of reference" connected to it. We shall concentrate these principles around some thematic affirmations.

a) *Pastoral work for vocations is the original perspective of general pastoral work*

The *Instrumentum laboris* of the Congress explicitly affirms this: "All pastoral work, and especially that with young people, is intrinsically vocational";(69) in other words, to speak of vocation means speaking of the constitutive and essential dimension of ordinary pastoral work, because pastoral work, from its beginnings and by its very nature, is orientated towards vocational discernment. This is a service offered to every person, so that they might discover the way towards the realisation of a life project as God wants it, according to the needs of the Church and the world of today.(70)

This was already said at the Latin American Congress on vocations in 1994.

However, the perspective is being enlarged: vocation is not only the existential project, but rather all the individual calls of God are, evidently always related in a fundamental life plan, spread over the whole of one's existence. Authentic pastoral work makes the creature vigilant, attentive to the many calls of the Lord, ready to hear His voice and respond to it.

It is precisely fidelity to this type of daily call that makes the young person, today, capable of recognising and welcoming "the call" of his life, and makes the adult of tomorrow not only capable of being faithful to it, but of discovering again and again its freshness and beauty. In fact, every vocation is "daily", is the response every morning to an appeal made anew every day.

Therefore pastoral work shall be permeated by vocational attention, to awaken it in every creature; it will begin with the explicit intention of placing the believer before the proposal of God; it will be used to provoke in the subject the assumption of responsibility in the order of the gift received or the Word of God that has been heard; in fact it will seek to lead the believer to commit himself before God.(71)

b) *Pastoral work for vocations is the vocation of pastoral work today*

In this sense it can really be said that we must "vocationalise" the whole of pastoral work, or do it in such a way that every expression of pastoral work might express in a clear and unequivocal way a project or a gift of God to the person, and stimulate in the same person a desire to respond and become personally involved. Either Christian pastoral work leads to this confrontation with God, with all that this implies in terms of tension, of dispute, at times of flight or refusal, but also of peace and joy related to the welcoming of the gift, or it does not merit the name.

Today this manifests itself in a very particular way, to the point of being able to affirm that pastoral work for vocations is the vocation of pastoral work: it is perhaps its principal objective, as a challenge for the faith of the Churches of Europe. *Vocation is the serious case of present day pastoral work.*

And then, if pastoral work in general is "called" and directed towards this challenge, it must probably be more courageous and frank, more explicit in going to the centre and heart of the message-proposal, more directed towards the person and not only to the group, more made up of concrete involvement and not of vague calls to an abstract faith which is far from life.

Perhaps it should also be a pastoral work that is more pro-vocative than consoling; capable, in any case, of transmitting the dramatic sense of the life of man, called to do something that no-one else can do in his place.

In the passage we have quoted, this vocational attention and tension is evident: in the choice of Matthias, in Peter's courageous address to the crowd, in the way in which the Christian message is proclaimed and received ("to the heart").

Above all it appears clear in its ability to change the lives of those who adhere to it, as can be seen from the conversions and the type of life of the community of Acts.

c) *Pastoral work for vocations is gradual and convergent*

We have already implicitly seen that, in the lives of individuals, there exist various types of call: to life primarily, and then to love; to responsibility to the gift, then to faith; to following Jesus; to the particular witness of one's own faith; to being father or mother, and to a particular service for the Church or society.

They promote vocations, those who acknowledge, firstly, that rich complex of human and Christian values and meanings from which flows the vocational sense of life and of every living person. They open their very lives to numerous vocational possibilities, later converging towards the definitive personal choice.

In other words, for a correct pastoral work for vocations, it is necessary to respect a certain *graduality*, and to begin from fundamental and universal values (the extraordinary good of life) and from the truths which are such for all (life is a good received which, by its nature, tends to become a good given), in order to move then to a progressive specification of the call, becoming more personal and concrete, believing and revealed.

On the more properly pedagogical level it is first important to form people to the meaning of life and to *gratitude* for it so as to then transmit that fundamental attitude of *responsibility* in the face of existence, which, by its very nature, demands from each one a subsequent, *freely-given* response. Hence we move to the transcendence of God, Creator and Father.

Only at this point is a radical and convincing proposal possible (such as the Christian vocation should always be), such as dedication to God in the priestly or consecrated life.

d) *Pastoral work for vocations is generic and specific*

Pastoral work for vocations, in short, necessarily begins from a wide conception of vocation (and consequently from an appeal directed to all), so as then to restrict and

narrow down to the specific call of each one. In this sense pastoral work for vocations is *first generic and then specific*, in an order which it does not seem reasonable to change and which, generally, advises against any immediate proposal of a particular vocation, without an appropriate catechesis.

On the other hand, always on the basis of this order, pastoral work for vocations does not limit itself to stressing in a generic way the meaning of existence, but aims towards a personal involvement in a precise choice. There is no separation, nor less still a contrast between an appeal that underlines values common and basic to existence and an appeal to serve the Lord "in the measure of the grace received".

The vocations promoter, every teacher in the faith, must not be afraid of proposing courageous choices and total giving, even if these are difficult and not in conformity to the mentality of the century.

Therefore, *if every educator is a vocations promoter, every vocations promoter is an educator*, and an educator of every vocation, all the while respecting their specific charism. In fact every call is related to the other, and presupposes and solicits it, while all of them together go back to the same source and to the same objective, which is the history of salvation. But each one in its own particular way.

The authentic vocational educator not only points out the differences between one call and another, respecting the varying tendencies in each individual called, but allows people to see and actively recalls those "supreme possibilities", radical and dedicated, that are open to the vocation of each person and inherent in it.

Educating in depth of the values of life, for example, means proposing (and learning to propose) a path that *naturally* flows into the following of Christ and that can lead to the choice of path typical of an apostle, of the priest or religious, of the monk who abandons the world, of the lay person consecrated in the world.

On the other hand proposing this qualified following as the objective of one's life, by its very nature, demands a preparatory attention and formation about the elementary values of life, the faith, gratitude-gratuity, about the imitation of Christ required of every Christian.

This produces a vocational strategy that is better founded theologically and also more effective on the pedagogical level. There are those who fear that widening the idea of vocation will be harmful to the specific promotion of vocations to the priesthood and the consecrated life; the reality is exactly the opposite.

A gradual approach to vocational proclamation, in fact, allows one to move from the objective to the subjective, and from the generic to the specific, without anticipating or rushing the proposals, but making them *converge* among themselves and towards the proposal which is decisive for the person, to be indicated at the right time and to be gauged with prudence, according to a rhythm which will take account of the subject in his or her situation.

Harmonious and progressive order makes the proposal, which is decisive for the person, much more provoking and accessible. In concrete, the more the young person

is prepared to be able to move naturally from gratitude for the gift received to the gratuity of the good given, then the more it will be possible to propose to him or her the total gift of self to God as the natural, and for some, inevitable outcome.

e) *Pastoral work for vocations is universal and permanent*

There is a double universality: in reference to the *persons* to whom it is directed, and in reference to *the time of life* in which it is made.

Firstly, pastoral work for vocations knows no boundaries. As has already been said above, it is not directed only at certain privileged people, or those who have already made an option for the faith, nor only to those from whom we can expect a positive response. It is addressed to *all*, precisely because it is founded on the elementary values of existence. It is not pastoral work for an élite, but for the people; it is not a prize for the most deserving, but a grace and gift of God for each person, because every living person is called by God. Nor can it be understood as something that only some could understand or be interested in for their lives, because, inevitably, every human being wants to know himself and the meaning of life and his own place in history.

In addition, this proposal is not made only once in life ("take it or leave it") or withdrawn once it has been refused. Instead it must be a continual request, made in different ways and with creative understanding, that does not give up at initial signs of disinterest, which often is only apparent or defensive.

The idea should also be corrected that pastoral work for vocations is exclusively for young people, because in every time of life the Lord's invitation to follow Him is heard, and it is only at the point of death that a vocation can be said to have been fully realised. Indeed, death is the call "par excellence", in the same way as there is a call in old age, in the passage from one time of life to another, in situations of crisis.

There is a youthfulness of spirit that lasts through time, in the extent to which the individual feels himself continually called, and seeks again and again in every period of life a different task to fulfil, a specific way of being, of serving and of loving, a newness of life and mission to be carried out.⁽⁷²⁾ In this sense, pastoral work for vocations is related to the *ongoing formation of the person*, and is itself ongoing. "The whole of one's life and every life is a response".⁽⁷³⁾

In Acts, Peter and the Apostles make no differences between people. They speak to everyone, young and old, Hebrews and foreigners: Parthians, Medes and Elamites represent the great mass without difference or exclusion to which the proclamation and pro-vocation is addressed, with the art of speaking to each one "in his own language", according to their needs, problems, expectations, defences, time or stage in life.

This is the miracle of Pentecost, the extraordinary gift of the Spirit. But the Spirit is with us always...

f) *Pastoral work for vocations is personal and communitarian*

This may seem like a contradiction, but in reality this principle explains the somewhat ambivalent nature of pastoral work for vocations which — when it is authentic — is capable of comprising the two polarities of subject and community. From the vocations promoter's point of view, nowadays, there is an urgent need to move from a pastoral vocations programme run by one person to a pastoral programme more and more conceived as a *community action*, of the whole community in its different expressions: groups, movements, parishes, dioceses, religious and secular institutes...

The Church is called more and more, today, to be *wholly vocational*. Within the Church "every evangelist must be aware of becoming a vocational 'lamp', capable of provoking a religious experience which could bring children, adolescents, young people and adults into personal contact with Christ. In this meeting specific vocations are revealed".(74)

In the same way the *subject* of pastoral work for vocations is the *whole Church*. If it is the whole ecclesial community that calls, then it is the whole ecclesial community that is called, without any exception. In some way the point of departure and the point of arrival are identical, within the different ministries that make up the ecclesial fabric. But the principle is important; it is the reflection of that mysterious identification between the one calling and the one called within the Trinity.

In this sense pastoral work for vocations is *communitarian*. And, always in this sense, it is fine that, on the day of Pentecost, all the Apostles addressed themselves to the crowd and then Peter speaks in the name of the Twelve. Also when choosing between Matthias and Stephen and then Barnabas and Saul, the whole community takes part in the discernment by prayer, fasting, imposition of hands.

At the same time, however, it is the *individual* who must interpret the vocational proposal, and the believer, on the strength of his faith, who must in some way assume the vocation of the other.

Therefore the ministry of vocational calling belongs not only to priests or consecrated men or women, but to every believer, to parents, to catechists, to those involved in education.

If it is true that the appeal is addressed to everyone, it is also true that the same appeal is to be *personalised*, directed to a precise person, to his conscience, in the context of a totally personal relationship.

There is a moment within the vocational dynamic when the proposal goes from person to person and has need of that particular climate that only the individual relationship can guarantee. It is true, then, that Peter and Stephen speak to the crowd; but later Saul needs Ananias in order to discern what God wants from him (9, 13-17), as the eunuch needs Philip (8, 26-39).

g) *Pastoral work for vocations and the unitary-synthetic perspective of pastoral work*

The point of departure is also the point of arrival. Insofar as it is, pastoral work for vocations is the *unifying category* of pastoral work in general, as the natural

destination of every effort, the meeting place of the various dimensions, almost a sort of element for verifying authentic pastoral work.

We repeat: if pastoral work does not "pierce the heart" and place the listener clearly before the strategic question ("what shall I do?"), it is not Christian pastoral work, rather an innocuous working hypothesis.

Consequently pastoral work for vocations is, and must be, related to all the other dimensions, for example to the family and cultural, liturgical and sacramental, to catechesis and the journey of faith in the catechumenate; to the various groups for Christian education and formation (not only with children and young people, but also with parents, engaged couples, sick people and the elderly...) and the different movements (from the pro-life movement to the various initiatives regarding social solidarity).(75)

Above all pastoral work for vocations is the unifying perspective of pastoral work with young people.

It should not be forgotten that the time of growth is strongly projectual and pastoral work with young people cannot exclude the vocational dimension; rather, it must assume it, because proposing Jesus Christ means proposing a precise life project.

Hence a fertile pastoral collaboration, also in the distinction of the two environments: either because pastoral work with young people embraces other aspects beyond the vocational; or because pastoral work for vocations is not directed only at young people, rather it covers a wider spectrum with specific aspects.

In addition we can think how important a *vocational-family* pastoral programme could be; one that would progressively educate parents to be the first vocations promoters-educators; or how valuable would be a vocations programme among the *sick*, that does not simply invite them to offer their sufferings for priestly vocations, but helps them to live their illness, in all its mystery, as a personal vocation; that the sick-believer has the "duty" to live for and in the Church and the "right" to be helped to live in the Church.

This connection will facilitate pastoral dynamism because in fact it is connatural with it: vocations, like charisms, search each other out, they illuminate each other, they are complementary to each other. And on the other hand they become incomprehensible when isolated; you are not doing the Church's pastoral work if you are enclosed in your own specialised area.

Naturally the discussion works in two ways: pastoral work in general must flow into vocations promotion in order to encourage the vocational option; but pastoral work for vocations, in its turn, must remain open to the other dimensions, seeking outlets in those directions.

It is the terminus that synthesises the different pastoral interventions and allows them to bear fruit in the life of the individual believer. In concrete, more attention needs to be paid to pastoral work for vocations, but in exchange, it will provide a specific

dimension destined to making the pastoral initiative in each sector true and authentic. *Vocation is the beating heart of the whole of pastoral work!*(76)

Vocational pastoral itineraries

27. The biblical icon around which we have articulated our reflection allows us to make a further advance, moving from theoretical principles to the identification of some vocational pastoral programmes.

These are communitarian journeys of faith, corresponding to precise ecclesial functions and to classical dimensions of the believing being, during the course of which faith matures and becomes ever more manifest or the vocation of the individual is progressively confirmed, at the service of the ecclesial community.

The Church's reflection and tradition show that, normally, vocational discernment happens in the course of precise communitarian journeys: liturgy and prayer, ecclesial communion, the service of charity, the experience of receiving the love of God and offering it in witness. Thanks to these, in the community described in Acts, "the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem" (Acts 6, 7).

Today, pastoral work must also follow these paths in order to promote and accompany the vocational journey of each believer. A personal and communitarian experience, systematic and committed in these directions, could and should help the individual believer to discover the vocational call.

And this would render pastoral work truly vocational.

a) The liturgy and prayer

The liturgy signifies and indicates, at one and the same time, the expression, origin and nourishment of every vocation and ministry in the Church. In liturgical celebrations we recall God's action through Christ in the Spirit to which all vital dynamics of the Christian can be traced. In the liturgy, culminating in the Eucharist, the vocation-mission of the Church and of every believer is expressed in all its fullness.

From the liturgy there comes a vocational appeal for those who participate.(77) Every celebration is a vocational event. In the mystery celebrated, the believer must recognise his own personal vocation, he must hear the voice of the Father who, in the Son, by the power of the Spirit, calls him, in his turn, to give himself for the salvation of the world.

Prayer, too, becomes a way for vocational discernment, not only because Jesus himself invited us to pray to the Lord of the harvest, but because it is only in listening to God that the believer can discover the project that God himself has planned: in the contemplation of the mystery, the believer discovers his own identity, "hid with Christ in God" (Col 3, 3).

And in addition, only prayer can activate those attitudes of trust and abandonment that are essential for speaking one's own "yes" and overcoming fear and uncertainty. *Every vocation is born from in-vocation.*

But also the personal experience of prayer, as dialogue with God, belongs to this dimension: even if "celebrated" in the privacy of one's own "cell", it is relationship with the Father from whom derives every vocation. This dimension is most evident in the experience of the early Church, whose members were assiduous in "the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2, 42). Every decision, in this community, is preceded by prayer; every choice, especially regarding the mission, takes place in a liturgical context (Acts 6, 1-7; 13, 1-5).

It is the praying logic that the community learned from Jesus who was faced with the crowds who were "harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd...and said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His Harvest'" (Mt 9, 36-38; Lk 10, 2).

In recent years the Christian communities of Europe have developed many initiatives of prayer for vocations and these were widely reported during the Congress. Prayer in diocesan and parish communities, in many cases also "unceasing", day and night, is one of the most travelled ways of creating new awareness and a new vocational culture favourable to the priesthood and consecrated life.

The Gospel icon of the "Lord of the harvest" leads to the heart of pastoral work for vocations: prayer. Prayer that knows how to "look" with evangelical wisdom on the world and on every person in the reality of the need for life and salvation. Prayer that expresses the charity and "compassion" (Mt 9, 36) of Christ towards men and women who, also today, appear like "sheep without a shepherd" (Mt 9, 36). Prayer that expresses faith in the strong voice of the Father, who alone can call and send to work in His vineyard. Prayer that expresses living hope in God, who will never allow His Church to lack the "labourers" (Mt 9, 38) necessary to fulfil his mission.

In the Congress, the experiences of using *lectio divina* in vocations promotion, stirred up much interest. In some dioceses "schools of prayer" or "schools of the Word" are widespread. They are inspired by the now classical principle contained in *Dei Verbum*, that "all the Christian faithful...learn the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures", accompanied by prayer.(78)

When this knowledge becomes wisdom which is habitually nourished, the eyes and the ears of the believer are opened to recognise the Word that calls without ceasing. Then the heart and the mind are able to welcome it and live it without fear.

b) *Ecclesial communion*

The first vital function that flows from the liturgy is the manifestation of the communion lived within the Church, as the people gathered together in Christ by means of His cross, as the community in which every division has been overcome in the Spirit of God who is the Spirit of unity (Eph 2, 11-22; Gal 3, 26-28; Jn 17, 9-26).

The Church offers itself as the human space of fraternity in which every believer can and must experience that union among men and women and with God which is a gift from on high. The Acts of the Apostles is a splendid example of this dimension of the Church: there we find described a community of believers profoundly marked by fraternal union, by the sharing of material and spiritual goods, by kindness and sentiments (Acts 2, 42-48), to the point of being of "one heart and soul" (Acts 4, 32).

If every vocation in the Church is a gift to be lived *for* others, as a service of charity in freedom, then it is also a gift to be lived *with* others. Therefore it is discovered only living in fraternity.

Ecclesial fraternity is not only a behavioural virtue, but also a vocational pathway. Only by living it, can it be chosen as a fundamental component of a vocational project, or only by tasting it, is it possible to be open to a vocation that in any case will always be a vocation to fraternity.(79) On the contrary, there can be no vocational attraction for someone who does not experience fraternity and closes himself to others or interprets his vocation only as private and personal perfection.

Vocation is relation; it is the manifestation of the person whom God created as open to relationship; and even the case of a vocation to intimacy with God in the cloister implies a capacity for openness and sharing that can be acquired only in the experience of real fraternity. "The overcoming of an individualistic vision of ministry and consecration of life in individual Christian communities is a decisive historical contribution".(80)

Vocation is dialogue, it is to feel oneself called by Another and to have the courage to respond to Him. How can this capacity for dialogue be brought to maturity in those who have not learned, in everyday life and relationships, to allow themselves to be called, to respond, to recognise the "I" in you? How can someone be called by the Father who does not seek to respond to his brother?

Sharing with the brothers and sisters and the community of believers then becomes the way, along which one learns to help others participate in their own projects, and for welcoming God's plan for himself. This will, always and everywhere, be a project of fraternity.

An experience of sharing around the Word, reported by some European Churches, is constituted by *bible groups*, or groups of believers who gather together periodically in their homes to rediscover the Christian message and share their respective experiences and the gifts of interpretation of the Word itself.

For young people these centres receive a vocational connotation in listening to the Word that calls, in catechesis and in prayer lived in a more personal and involved, and free and creative way. The bible group or place where people listen to the Word thus becomes a stimulus to ecclesial corresponsibility, because here it is possible to discover different ways of serving the community and developing specific vocations.

Another positive experience of vocations promotion in the particular Churches and the various institutes of consecrated life is the *community of welcome*, which puts into practice the invitation of Jesus to "come and see". The Holy Father has defined this as

the "golden rule of pastoral work for vocations".(81) In these communities or vocations centres, thanks to a very specific and immediate experience, young people can travel a gradual path of discernment. They are accompanied, then, so that at the right moment, they may be able not only to identify God's plan for them, but to decide to choose it as their very identity.

c) *Service of charity*

This is one of the most typical functions of the ecclesial community. It consists in living the experience of freedom in Christ, at that supreme point which is constituted by service. "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant" (Mt 20, 26), and "if anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all" (Mk 9, 35). In the early Church it seems that this lesson was very quickly learned, given that service appears as one of the structural components of it, to the point that deacons are instituted precisely for "service at tables".

Precisely because the believer lives, by grace, the experience of liberty in Christ, he is called to be a witness to liberty and an agent of liberation for men and women. That liberation that is realised not with violence and dominion, but with pardon and love, with the gift of self and service, following the example of Christ the servant. This is the service of charity, whose ways of expression are limitless.

This is perhaps the outstanding way, in a vocations programme, for discerning one's own vocation, because the experience of service, especially where it is well prepared, guided and reaches to its truest meaning, is an experience of great humanity, which leads one to know better oneself and the altruistic dignity as well as the beauty of dedicating oneself to others.

The authentic servant in the Church is the one who has learned to savour as a privilege the opportunity of washing the feet of the poorest brothers and sisters, the one who has won the freedom of losing his own time for the necessities of others. The experience of service is an experience of great freedom in Christ.

Whoever serves his brother or sister, inevitably meets God and enters into a particular union with Him. It will not be difficult for him to discover God's will for him and, especially, to feel himself attracted to fulfilling it. And it will be, in any case, a vocation of service for the Church and the world.

This is how it has been for many vocations during these last decades. Post-conciliar vocations promotion has progressively moved from "pastoral work of propaganda" to "pastoral work of service", in particular for the poorest and most needy.

Many young people have truly rediscovered God and themselves, the purpose of life and true happiness, by giving time and attention to their brothers and sisters, to the point of deciding to dedicate to them not only a part of their life, but their whole existence. The Christian vocation is, in fact, existence *for* others.

d) *Witness-proclamation of the Gospel*

This is the proclamation of God's nearness to men and women throughout salvation history, especially in Christ, and therefore also of the Father's heart of mercy for them, so that they might have life in abundance. This proclamation is at the origin of the journey of faith of every believer. The faith, in fact, is a gift received from God and witnessed to by the example of the believing community and so many brothers and sisters within it, as well as by means of catechetical instruction on the truths of the Gospel.

But the faith is to be handed on, and in time every testimony becomes an active gift: *the gift received becomes the gift given* by means of personal witness and proclamation.

Witnessing to the faith involves the whole person and can be done only with the totality of one's existence and humanity, with the whole heart, the whole mind, the whole strength, until the final, even bloody, gift of one's life.

This growth of meanings of the term is interesting, a growth which basically we find in the biblical passage that is guiding us: see the testimony-catechesis of Peter and the Apostles on the day of Pentecost and, later, the courageous catechesis of Stephen culminating in his martyrdom (Acts 6, 8; 7, 60), and that of the Apostles who rejoiced "that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the name" (Acts 5, 41).

But it is more interesting yet to discover how this evangelical testimony-proclamation might become a specific vocational programme.

The conscience, thankful for having received the gift of the faith, must change itself regularly into a desire and a will to hand on to others what has been received, either through the example of their own life or through the ministry of catechesis. This, then, is destined to illuminate the many different situations of life, teaching each one to live his own Christian vocation in the world.(82) And if the catechist is above all a witness, the vocational dimension will be even more evident.(83)

The Congress reaffirmed the importance of catechesis in a vocational perspective and indicated in the celebration of the sacrament of *Confirmation* an extraordinary vocational itinerary for preadolescents and adolescents. The time of Confirmation could be precisely the "time of vocation", an appropriate time, on the theological and pedagogical level for discovering the gift received, realising it and giving witness to it.

Catechesis must develop the ability to recognise and manifest the gift of the Spirit.(84)

The direct encounter of believers who live their vocation with fidelity and courage, of credible witnesses who offer concrete experiences of successful vocations, can be decisive for helping those to be confirmed to discover and welcome the call of God.

A vocation, in any case, always finds its origins in the awareness of a gift, and from an awareness that is so grateful that it finds it totally logical to place its own experience at the service of others, in order to help their growth in the faith.

Whoever witnesses to the faith with attention and generosity will speedily accept God's plan for himself, in order to dedicate all his energies to its realisation.

From pastoral programmes to the personal call

28. In synthesis, we can say that, in the dimensions of liturgy, ecclesial communion, service of charity and witness to the Gospel, the existential condition of every believer is condensed. This is his dignity and his fundamental vocation, but it is also the condition that allows each one to discover his own particular identity.

Therefore every believer must live the communal event of the liturgy, of fraternal communion, charitable service and the proclamation of the Gospel, because only through this overall experience can he identify *his* particular way of living these same dimensions of Christian being. Consequently, these ecclesial itineraries are to be valued since they represent the main route of pastoral work for vocations, thanks to which the mystery of each one's vocation can be uncovered. These are already classical itineraries, that pertain to the very life of each community that wishes to call itself Christian and, at the same time, reveal its strengths or weaknesses. Precisely because of this they not only represent an obligatory path, but above all they provide a guarantee to the authenticity of the search and discernment.

These four dimensions and functions, in fact, from one side provoke a total involvement of the subject, and from the other they lead him to the threshold of a very personal experience, a demanding confrontation, an appeal that is impossible to ignore, a decision to be taken, that can not be put off for ever. Therefore pastoral work for vocations must expressly help people to try to find their bearings by means of a profoundly and totally ecclesial experience, that leads every believer to "the discovery and assumption of his own responsibility in the Church".⁽⁸⁵⁾ Vocations which are not born from this experience and insertion in the communitarian action of the Church *are at risk of being spoiled at root and are of dubious authenticity*.

Obviously these dimensions will all be present, harmoniously co-ordinated for an experience that can be decisive only if it is all-encompassing.

Often, in effect, there are young people who spontaneously favour one or other of these functions (either they are only involved in voluntary work, or perhaps too much attracted by the liturgical dimension, or they are great theoreticians, a little bit idealistic). It will be important then that the vocational educator encourage the sense of a commitment that will not correspond to the tastes of the young person, but to an *objective measure of the experience of faith*, which can not, by definition, be smothered. Only respect for this *objective* measure can allow one's own *subjective* measure to be introduced.

Objectivity, in this sense, precedes subjectivity, and the young person must learn to give it precedence, if he truly wants to discover himself and what he is called to be. Or rather, he must first realise what is requested of all, if he wants to be himself.

Not only this, but what is objective, based on a norm and tradition aiming at a precise objective that transcends subjectivity, has a notable strength of attraction and vocational gravity. Naturally the objective experience must also become subjective, or

be recognised by the individual as his own. Always however in order to move from a source or a truth that is not determined by the subject and that avails itself of the rich tradition of the Christian faith. Concretely, "pastoral work for vocations possesses the fundamental steps for a journey of faith".(86) And this too highlights the gradual and convergent nature of pastoral work for vocations.

From programmes to the Christian communities

a) The parish community

The European Congress has proposed one objective, among others: to bring pastoral work for vocations into the life of Christian parish communities, where people live and where young people in particular are involved to a greater or lesser extent in an experience of faith.

This entails bringing pastoral work for vocations out of its circle of experts in order to reach the peripheral areas of the particular Church.

But at the same time it is already urgent that we overcome the experiential phase, presently taking place in many Churches of Europe, to move towards real pastoral programmes, inserted into the fabric of the Christian communities, and prizing what is already vocationally fruitful.

Particular attention should be paid to the *liturgical year*, which is a permanent school of the faith, in which every believer, helped by the Holy Spirit, is called to grow in the likeness of Jesus. From Advent, the time of hope, to Pentecost and ordinary time, the recurring cycle of the liturgical year celebrates and proposes a model of man called to measure himself against the mystery of Jesus, the "first-born among many brethren" (*Rom 8, 29*).

The anthropology that the liturgical year helps to explore is an authentically vocational design, that invites every Christian to respond ever more to the call, for a precise and personal mission in history. Hence the attention to the daily programmes in which every Christian community is involved. Pastoral wisdom requests particularly of pastors, the guides of the Christian communities, a precise care and an attentive discernment in order to make the liturgical signs, the lived out experiences of the faith, speak; because it is from the presence of Christ in everyday life, that the vocational appeals of the Spirit come.

It should not be forgotten that the pastor, above all the priest, responsible for a Christian community, is the "direct cultivator" of all vocations.

In truth the full vocational ownership of the parish community is not everywhere recognised; while it is precisely "the diocesan and parish Pastoral Councils in relationship with the national vocations centres...which are the competent organs in all of the communities and in all sectors of ordinary pastoral work".(87)

Therefore we should encourage the initiative of those parishes that have established groups responsible for vocations promotion and various activities for resolving "a vital problem which lies at the very heart of the Church"(88) (prayer groups,

vocations days and weeks, catechesis and witness and whatever else can contribute to maintaining an interest in vocations).(89)

b) *Special places of life-vocation*

In this sensitive and urgent move from vocations work based on experiences to one based on formation paths it is necessary to hear not only the vocational appeals coming from the everyday life of the Christian community, but it is wise to highlight the significance of the *special places* which illustrate life as vocation and the *pedagogical places* of the faith. A Church is alive if, with the gifts of the Spirit, it knows how to identify and evaluate these places.

The *special places* which illustrate the vocational nature of existence in a particular Church are monastic communities, witnesses to the praying face of the ecclesial community; apostolic religious communities and secular institutes.

In a cultural context strongly focused on more immediate things, affected by the cold wind of individualism, praying and apostolic communities open us up to the true dimensions of an authentically Christian life, especially for these recent generations which are clearly more attentive to signs than words.

A particular sign of the vocational nature of life and the community is the diocesan or interdiocesan *seminary*. It fulfils a special role within our Churches. On the one hand it is a *strong sign*, because it constitutes a promise for the future. The young men who come there, the sons of this generation, will be the priests of tomorrow. In addition: the seminary is a concrete reminder of the vocational nature of life and the necessity of the ordained ministry for the existence of the Christian community.

On the other hand it is a *weak sign*: because it requires a constant attention on the part of the particular Church; it needs serious pastoral work for vocations in order to begin each year with new candidates. And also the need to support it economically can be a pedagogical tool for educating the people to pray for all vocations.

c) *Pedagogical places of the faith*

In addition to these special places which illustrate our vocational nature, *pedagogical places* of vocations promotion are also valuable; these are groups, movements, associations, and school its elf.

Beyond these different sociological configurations, especially at the level of young people, it is necessary to appreciate their pedagogical value as places in which people can be wisely helped to reach a true maturity of faith.

This can be effectively pursued if three dimensions of the Christian experience are not ignored: the vocation of each one, communion with the Church and mission with the Church.

d) *The person of the formator*

Another pastoral pedagogical need is being highlighted with particular insistence at this time: the formation of *educators*.

In fact, practically everywhere, people recognise the weakness and problems of the pedagogical places of the faith, which are being hard tested by the culture of individualism, by spontaneous joining together, or by crises in institutions.

Yet, conversely, there is emerging, especially among young people, the need for challenge, dialogue, points of reference. The signs of this are many. There is need for masters of the spiritual life, of significant figures, capable of evoking the mystery of God and disposed to listening in order to help people to enter into a serious dialogue with the Lord.

Strong spiritual personalities are not only people particularly endowed with charisma, rather they are the result of a formation that is particularly attentive to the absolute primacy of the Spirit.

In caring for the educational figures of our communities, two elements should be acknowledged: on the one hand it is a case of making explicit and attentive the vocational educational conscience of all those already called to work in the community with children and young people (priests, religious and laity).

On the other hand the *educational ministry of the woman* is to be properly encouraged and formed, so that, especially in regard to young women, she may be a figure of reference and a wise guide. In fact women are widely present in the Christian communities and the intuitive capacity of the "feminine genius" and the vast experience of women in the educational field (family, school, groups, community) are being recognised.

The contribution of women is to be held especially valuable, if not to say decisive, in regard to the world of young women, which is not the same as that of young men, because they need a more attentive and specific reflection, particularly in the area of vocations.

Perhaps this too is part of the change characterising pastoral work for vocations. While in the past female vocations also arose from spiritual fathers, authentic guides of individuals and communities, today "female" vocations also need references to female figures, personal and communitarian, capable of concretely proposing models as well of life as values.

e) *Organisations involved in pastoral work for vocations*

In order to offer itself as a unitary and synthetic perspective on general pastoral work, pastoral work for vocations must first of all express within itself a synthesis and communion of charisms and ministries.

For some time now the Church has highlighted the need for this co-ordination⁽⁹⁰⁾ which, thank God, has already borne much fruit; parish organisations, diocesan and national vocations centres have already been functioning for some years now with considerable advantage.

However this is not the case everywhere. The Congress just celebrated, in certain cases, has lamented the absence or the scarcity of these structures in some European nations,(91) and has voted that, as soon as possible, they should be properly instituted or appropriately planned.

From even more places it has been observed that, while national centres seem to guarantee a notable support of constructive stimuli for pastoral work for vocations, diocesan centres do not appear to be everywhere animated by the same will to work and collaborate truly in favour of the vocations of all. There is a certain general project of unified pastoral work which still has not become the practice of the local Church, and seems in some way to get stuck in the movement from general proposals to actual implementation in the reality of the diocese or the parish. Here, in fact, individualistic, less ecclesial perspectives and practices have not totally disappeared.(92)

Regarding diocesan and national centres, rather than repeat here what has already been well said about their function, it seems necessary to remember that it is not simply a question of practical organisation, as much as one of coherence with a new spirit that must permeate pastoral work for vocations in the Church and, particularly, in the Churches of Europe. The crisis of vocations is also a crisis of communion in working to increase vocations. Vocations will not arise where an authentically ecclesial spirit is not lived.

In addition to recommending a renewal of commitment in this field and a closer collaboration between national centres, diocesan centres and parish organisations, the Congress and the present Document hope that these organisations might take more to heart two questions: the promotion of an authentic vocational culture in civil and ecclesial society, especially the civil, and the formation of vocations educators-formators, the true and proper central and strategic element of present day pastoral work for vocations.(93)

In addition, the Congress asks that serious consideration be given to establishing, for Europe, an organisation or *supranational centre for pastoral work for vocations*, as a concrete sign and expression of communion and sharing, of co-ordination and exchange of experiences and persons between the individual national Churches,(94) while safeguarding the peculiarities of each one.

PART FOUR

PEDAGOGY OF VOCATIONS

"Did not our hearts burn within us...?" (Lk 24, 32)

This pedagogical section is developed within the Gospel, following the example of the extraordinary vocational promoter-educator, Jesus, and in view of a vocations promotion marked by precise evangelical pedagogical attitudes: to sow, to accompany, to educate, to form, to discern.

We have arrived at the last section which, in the logic of the document, should represent the methodological-applicational part. In fact we began with the analysis of

the concrete situation, to then define the theological elements supporting the subject of vocation, and then return to the concrete life of our believing communities to outline the sense and the direction of pastoral work for vocations.

It remains now to look at the pedagogical aspect of pastoral work for vocations.

Vocational crisis and educational crisis

30. Often in our Churches the objectives and even the basic strategy are clear, but the necessary steps for awakening an openness to vocation in our young people remain somewhat undefined; and this because today, more than before, the educational system is weak, both within and outwith the Church: that system which, together with the definition of the objective to be attained, must also provide the pedagogical paths leading there. With its usual realism, the *Instrumentum laboris* also says this: "In fact, we note the weakness of many pedagogical bodies (groups, communities, oratories, schools and, above all, families)".(95) The vocations crisis is certainly also a crisis of pedagogy and of educational programmes.

We will seek then, always beginning from the Word of God, to highlight precisely this convergence between goal and method, in the conviction that a good theology can normally be translated into practice, become a pedagogy, can outline routes, with the sincere desire to provide the various pastoral workers with an aid, an instrument useful to all.

The Gospel of vocation

31. Every encounter or dialogue in the Gospel has a vocational significance: when Jesus walks the roads of Galilee He is always sent by the Father to call man to salvation and reveal to him the Father's plan. The Good News, the Gospel, is precisely this: the Father has called man through the Son in the Spirit, He has called him not only to life, but to redemption, and not only to a redemption merited by others, but to a redemption that involves him first of all in person, making him responsible for the salvation of others.

In this salvation, active and passive, received and shared, is contained the sense of every vocation; is contained the very sense of the Church, as a community of believers, saints and sinners, all "called" to participate in the same gift and responsibility. This is the Gospel of vocation.

Pedagogy of vocation

32. Within this Gospel we search for a corresponding pedagogy, which is that of Jesus, the authentic *pedagogy of vocation*. This is the pedagogy that every vocations promoter or evangeliser must know how to implement, in order to lead the young person to recognise the Lord who calls, and to respond to Him.

If the point of reference of vocational pedagogy is the mystery of Christ, the Son of God made man, there are many significant aspects and dimensions in his "vocational" activity.

Above all, Jesus is presented to us in the Gospels much more as *formator* than as promoter, precisely because He always works in strictest union with the Father, who sows the seed of the Word and *educates* (leads out from nothing), and with the Spirit who *accompanies* along the path of sanctification.

These aspects open up particular perspectives to those who are involved in pastoral work for vocations and are therefore themselves called to be not only vocations promoters, but, even before this, to be *sowers* of the good seed of vocation, and then *accompaniers* along the path that leads the heart to "burn", *educators* in the faith and in listening to the God who calls, *formators* of human and Christian attitudes of responding to God's appeal;(96) and who are called, finally, to *discern* the presence of the gift that comes from on high.

These are the five central characteristics of *vocations ministry* or the five dimensions of the *mystery of the call* that, from God, arrives at the individual through the mediation of a brother or sister, or community.

To sow

33. "A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they had not much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched; and since they had no root they withered away. Other seeds fell upon thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty" (*Mt* 13, 3-8).

This passage indicates, in some way, the first step along a pedagogical path, the first attitude of the one would place himself as mediator between the God who calls and the one who is called, and is inspired by God's action. God the Father is the sower; the Church and the world are the ground wherein He continues to sow His seed in abundance, with absolute liberty and without any kind of exclusion, a liberty that respects that of the ground where the seed falls.

a) Two liberties in dialogue

The parable of the sower shows that the Christian vocation is a dialogue between God and the human person. The principle interlocutor is God, who calls whom He wills, when He wills and how He wills "in virtue of his own purpose and grace" (*2 Tim* 1, 9); who calls everyone to salvation, without allowing Himself to be limited by the dispositions of the recipient. But the liberty of God meets the liberty of man in a mysterious and fascinating dialogue, made up of words and silence, of messages and actions, of looks and gestures, a liberty that is perfect — God's — and one that is imperfect — man's. Vocation, therefore, is totally the action of God, but in a real way it is also the action of individual people: the work and penetration of God into the heart of human liberty, but also the effort and struggle of men and women to be free to welcome the gift.

Whoever accompanies a brother or sister on the path of vocational discernment enters into the mystery of liberty, and knows that he will be able to help only if he respects

that mystery. Even if, apparently, that must mean a small result. Like the sower in the Gospel.

b) *The courage to sow everywhere*

It is precisely this respect for both liberties that signifies above all the courage to sow the good seed of the Gospel, of the Lord's death and resurrection, of faith and, finally, of following (sequela). This is the necessary condition; no pastoral work for vocations can be done if there is not this courage. We have to sow *everywhere*, in the heart of *everyone*, without preference or exception. If every human being is a creature of God, he is also the bearer of a gift, of a particular vocation which is waiting to be recognised.

Often in the Church we lament the shortage of vocational responses and we do not recognise that, just as often, the proposal is made within a limited circle of people, and probably immediately withdrawn after a first refusal. It is worthwhile here recalling the words of Paul VI: "Let nobody be ignorant, through our fault, of what he or she should know in order to alter his or her life in a different and better direction".(97) And yet how many young people have never received any Christian proposal regarding their life and future!

It is excellent to observe the sower of the parable in the abundant gesture of his hand that sows "everywhere"; it is moving to recognise in this icon the heart of God the Father. It is the image of God that sows in the heart of *every* living person a plan of salvation; or if we wish, it is the image of the "waste" of God's generosity, that is poured out on all because He wants to save all and call them to Himself.

It is this same image of the Father that is evident in the action of Jesus, who calls sinners to Himself, chooses to build His Church with people who appear to be inappropriate for this mission, knows no barriers and makes no difference between people.

It is in reflecting this image that the vocational worker, in turn, proclaims, proposes, arouses, with identical generosity; and it is precisely the certainty of the seed placed by the Father in the heart of every creature, that gives the strength to go everywhere and sow the good seed of vocations, of not remaining within the usual limits but of confronting new environments, in order to attempt different approaches and address ourselves to every person.

c) *Sowing at the right time*

To scatter the good seed of vocation at the most promising moment is part of the wisdom of the sower. This does not mean hurrying the times of choice or pretending that a pre-adolescent has the same maturity to make decisions as has a young person; rather it means understanding and respecting the vocational sense of the human life.

Every season of life has a vocational significance, beginning from the moment when the child opens himself to life and needs to understand its meaning, and tries to question himself on his role in it. Not asking the question at the right time could prevent the sprouting of the seed: "pastoral experience shows that the first

manifestation of a vocation arises, in the majority of cases, in childhood and adolescence. Therefore it seems important to recover or propose formulas that could encourage, support and accompany this first vocational manifestation".(98) Without, however, being limited to this. Every person has his own rhythms and time for maturing. The important thing is that he have a good sower at his side.

d) *The smallest of all the seeds*

For reasons already known to us the job of a "vocational sower" is certainly not a simple one nowadays: there is, properly speaking, no vocational culture; the prevalent anthropological model seems to be that of the "man without vocation"; the social context is ethically neutral and without hope or projectual models. All these elements seem to come together to weaken the vocational proposition and allow us, perhaps, to apply to it what Jesus said regarding the Kingdom of God (cf Mt 13, 31ff.): the seed of a vocation is like a mustard seed that, when it is sown, or when it is proposed or indicated as being present, is the smallest of all the seeds; it does not often stir up any immediate agreement; rather it is negated or denied; and, suffocated by other expectations and projects, it is not taken seriously; or it is regarded with suspicion and diffidence, as if it were a seed of unhappiness.

And then the young person refuses, declares himself not to be interested, has already planned his future (or others have planned it for him); or perhaps he is pleased about it and interested, but he is not so sure, and then it is too difficult and he is afraid...

There is nothing strange or absurd in this fearful and negative reaction; the Lord has already said this. The seed of vocation is the smallest of all the seeds, it is weak and does not force itself, precisely because it is the expression of the liberty of God who intends to respect to the utmost the liberty of each individual.

And so the one guiding the person's journey also needs liberty: a liberty of heart that allows one to keep going in the face of an initial refusal or disinterest.

Jesus says, still in the parable of the mustard seed, that "when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs" (Mt 13, 32); therefore it is a seed with its own strength, even if it is not immediately evident and disruptive and, in addition, needs much care in order to mature. There is a sort of elementary secret that is part of common wisdom: in order to guarantee some kind of harvest in the right season, we have to take care of everything, from the ground to the seed; to pay attention to everything, from what encourages growth to what impedes it. Even against the unfathomable bad weather of the seasons. In the field of vocations something similar happens. The sowing is only the first step, that must be followed by other generous care so that the two liberties may enter into the mystery of the vocational dialogue.

To accompany

34. "That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognising him" (Lk 24, 13-16).

In order to describe the pedagogical expressions of accompanying, educating and forming, we are choosing the story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. It is a significant passage, because, in addition to the wisdom of its content and the pedagogical method followed by Jesus, it seems to us that, in the two disciples, it is possible to see the image of so many young people today, a little saddened and betrayed, who seem to have lost the desire to look for their vocation.

The first step in this journey is *being present*: the sower, or the one who has awakened in the young person the awareness of the seed sown in his heart now becomes *accompanier*.

In the theological part of the present reflection the ministry of accompaniment was indicated as typical of the Spirit; in fact it is the Spirit of the Father and the Son who remains beside the person to remind him of the Word of the Master; it is also the Spirit who dwells in the person to stir up in him the awareness of being a child of the Father. The Spirit therefore is the model to which the older brother or sister must aspire who accompanies a younger brother or sister in the search.

a) *Vocational itinerary*

Having defined the pastoral vocational itinerary, we can now ask: what is a vocational itinerary on the *pedagogical* level?

The pedagogical vocational itinerary is a journey towards *maturity in the faith*, like a pilgrimage towards the *adult state* of a believing being, called to decide about himself and his life *in freedom and responsibility*, according to the truth of the *mysterious project willed by God* for him. This journey proceeds in stages *in the company* of a bigger brother or sister in the faith and *in discipleship*, who knows the road, the voice and the steps of God, who helps to recognise the Lord who calls and to discern the way to travel towards God and respond to Him.

A vocational itinerary, then, is above all a journey with Him, the Lord of life, that "Jesus in person", as Saint Luke notes with precision, who comes down to man's path, makes the same journey and enters into history. But the eyes of flesh often cannot recognise Him; and then human progress remains solitary and the discourse useless, while the search risks perpetuating itself in an interminable and at times narcissistic procession of experiences, even vocational, without any final decision. Perhaps the first task of the vocational accompanier is that of *indicating the presence of Another*, or of admitting the *relative* nature of his closeness or his accompaniment, in order to mediate that presence, or an itinerary towards the discovery of the God who calls and comes close to every person.

Like the two men of Emmaus, or like Samuel during the night, our young people often do not have eyes to see or ears to hear He who walks beside them and, with insistence and delicacy at the same time, speaks their name. The brother or sister who accompanies is the sign of that insistence and delicacy; his task is to help them to recognise the source of the mysterious voice; not to speak of himself, but to proclaim Another who is also present; in the same way as did John the Baptist.

The ministry of vocational accompaniment is a humble ministry, of that calm and intelligent humility which is born from freedom in the Spirit, and expresses itself "with the courage of listening to love and of dialogue". Thanks to this liberty, the voice of He who calls rings out with greater clarity and strength. And the young person finds himself before God, he discovers with surprise that it is the Eternal One who walks beside him in time, and calls him to a definitive choice!

b) *Wells of living water*

"Jesus, wearied as he was with his journey, sat down beside the well" (*Jn* 4, 6); this is the beginning of what we can consider an unedited vocational conversation: Jesus' meeting with the Samaritan woman. The woman, in fact, by means of this encounter, maps out an itinerary towards the discovery of herself and the Messiah, immediately becoming, in some way, His proclaimer.

Jesus' sovereign liberty in seeking His messengers *everywhere and in everyone* also shines out from this passage; but He who is man's way to the Father also takes excellent care to meet the person in her everyday life, or where her expectations are most evident and intense. And how much we can deduce from the symbolic image of the "well". In ancient Jewish society, wells were the source of life, a basic condition for survival of a people always short of water; and it is precisely around this symbol, water *for* and *of* life, that Jesus constructs His approach to the woman with finest pedagogy.

To accompany a young person means knowing how to identify the "wells" of today; all of those places and moments, those provocations and expectations, where, sooner or later, all young people must pass with their empty jars, with their unspoken questions, with their obstinate, often only apparent, self-sufficiency, with their deep-seated desire for authenticity and the future.

Pastoral work for vocations cannot follow a policy of wait and see but should be active on the part of the one seeking and should not give up until it has found, and found at the right place or well where the young person will plan his life and future.

The vocational accompanier must be "intelligent", from this point of view, one who does not necessarily impose his own questions, but begins from those, of whatever type, of the young person; or he is capable — if necessary — of "stirring up and uncovering the vocational question that dwells in the heart of every young person, but waits to be discovered by real vocational formators".(99)

c) *Sharing and con-vocation*

To accompany someone's vocation means, above all, *to share*: one's faith, one's experience of God, the difficulties of the search, to the point of also sharing one's vocation: not in order to impose it, obviously, but to profess the beauty of a life lived according to God's project.

The manner of communicating typical of vocational accompaniment is not didactic or exhortational, and neither is it friendly, on one side, nor is it that of the spiritual

director on the other (understood as someone who imparts a precise direction to the life of another), but it is in the manner of the *confessio fidei*.

One involved in vocational accompaniment *gives witness* to his own choice, or rather, his own being chosen by God, he recounts — not necessarily with words — his own vocational journey and the continual discovery of his own identity in the vocational charism, and therefore recounts also or allows to be understood the difficulties, the newness, the risk, the surprise, the beauty.

This gives rise to a vocational catechesis that is person to person, heart to heart, rich in humanity and originality, in passion and ability to convince, a wise and experiential vocations promotion. A little like the experience of Jesus' first disciples who "came and saw where he was staying; and they stayed with him that day" (*Jn* 1, 39); and this was obviously a deeply touching experience if John, after many years, could remember that "it was about the tenth hour".

Vocations promotion is done only through *direct contact*, because the heart is full and the experience of its beauty continues to charm. Young people are very interested in the witness of life of people who are already on a spiritual journey. Priests and religious must have the courage to offer concrete signs in their spiritual journey. Hence it is important to spend time with young people, to walk on their level, where they find themselves, to listen to them and answer the questions that arise in the encounter". (100)

Precisely because of this, the one who accompanies a vocation is also enthusiastic about his own vocation and the possibility of transmitting it to others; he is not only a convinced witness but a content witness, and therefore convincing and credible.

Only in this way can the message reach the spiritual totality of the person, heart-mind-will, proposing something that is true-beautiful-good.

This is the sense of *con-vocation*: no-one can pass close to someone proclaiming such "good news" and not be touched, "totally" called, at every level of his personality, and continually called, by God, certainly; but also by so many people, ideals, new situations, different provocations, human mediations of the divine call.

And so the vocational sign could be better perceived.

To educate

35. "And he said to them, 'What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk?' And they stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?' And he said to them, 'What things?' And they said to him, 'Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people...' And he said to them, 'O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He

appeared to be going further, but they constrained him, saying, 'Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent'. So he went in to stay with them" (Lk 24, 17-29).

After the sowing, on the journey of accompaniment, it is a question of *educating* the young person. Educating in the etymological sense of the word, as a drawing out (*educere*) from him his truth, what he has in his heart, even what he does not know, especially about himself: weaknesses and aspirations, to encourage the freedom of the vocational response.

a) *Educating to knowledge of self*

Jesus draws near to the two and asks them what they are talking about. He knows, but he wants them both to open themselves to him and, by verbalising their sadness and deluded hopes, help them to be aware of their problem and the real reason for their anxiety. In this way they are practically obliged to review their recent history, bringing to light the true reason for their sadness.

"We had hoped..."; the story appears to be going in a different direction from what they had expected. In reality they had had all the significant experiences in their contact with Jesus, "mighty in deed and word"; but it is as if this faith journey had been unexpectedly interrupted in the face of the incomprehensible event of the passion and death of He who should have liberated Israel.

"We had hoped, but..."; how can we not recognise in this unfinished story the plight of so many young people who seem interested in vocational dialogue, allow themselves to be provoked and show a good predisposition, but then stop when they have to make a choice? Jesus makes the two admit the discrepancy between their hopes and God's plan as it is concretised in Jesus; between their way of understanding the Messiah and his death on the cross, between their so very human expectations and interests and the sense of a salvation that comes from on high.

In the same way it is important and decisive to help young people to uncover the basic misunderstanding: the all too worldly and me-centred interpretation of life, which makes the vocational choice difficult or practically impossible, or makes the demands of the call seem excessive, as if God's plan were inimical to the person's need for happiness.

How many young people have not welcomed the call not because they are ungenerous or indifferent, but simply because *they are not helped to know themselves*, to discover the ambivalent and pagan roots of certain mental and affective plans; and because they are not helped to free themselves from their fears and defence mechanisms, conscious and unconscious, in facing up to their vocation. How many vocations have been cut short because of this educational emptiness.

Above all, educating means bringing out the reality of the I, just as it is, if we then want to bring it to what it should be: sincerity is a fundamental necessity for attaining the truth, but in every case an external help is needed in order to see well the interior. The one who educates about vocation, then, must know the depths of the human heart in order to accompany the young person in the building up of the real I.

b) *Educating to the mystery*

And here is the paradox. When the young person is led to the depths of himself, and can also see his own weaknesses and fears, he has the sensation of understanding better the reason for some of his attitudes and reactions and, at the same time, understands more and more the reality of mystery as *the key to life and his own person*.

The young person must *accept that he does not know*, that he cannot know completely.

His life is not totally in his own hands, because *life is a mystery* and, on the other hand, *the mystery is life*; or rather, the mystery is that part of the I that has not yet been discovered, not yet lived and which waits to be deciphered and realised; mystery is that personal reality that must still grow, rich in life and in existential possibilities still intact, it is the germinative part of the I.

And then accepting the mystery is a sign of intelligence, of interior liberty, of desire for the future and newness, of refusing a conception of life that is repetitive and passive, boring and banal. This is why we said at the beginning that pastoral work for vocations must be mystagogic and, therefore, begin from the mystery of God to lead to the mystery of man.

The loss of the sense of mystery is one of the greatest causes of the vocations crisis.

At the same time the category of mystery is becoming a propaedeutic category of the faith. It is possible, and in certain cases natural, that at this point the young person feels growing within him, like *a need for revelation*, the desire that the Author of life Himself reveals the meaning of and the place that he has to occupy in it. Who else, except the Father, can carry out this uncovering?

Moreover, it is not important that the young person immediately discover (or that the guide immediately perceives) the path he has to follow: what is important is that he discovers and decides in every case to locate *outside of himself*, in God the Father, the search for the foundation of his existence. An authentic vocations programme always and everywhere leads to the discovery of the fatherhood and motherhood of God!

c) *Educating to read life*

In the Gospel Jesus invites the two men on the road to Emmaus in some way to go back to life, to those events that caused their sadness, by means of a wise method of reading: capable not only of reconstructing the events around a central meaning, but of deciphering, in the mysterious fabric of human existence, the outline of a divine plan. This method could be called *genetic-historical* because it searches out and finds in one's own biography the steps and traces of God's passage, and therefore also His voice that calls. This method:

— *is at the same time deductive and inductive, or historical-biblical*: it begins, at the same time, from revealed truth and historical reality, and thus encourages the uninterrupted dialogue between subjective lived events (the facts recited by the two

disciples) and reference to the Word ("And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself", *Lk* 24, 27);

— indicates in *the normative nature of the Word and in the centrality of the Paschal Mystery of Christ who died and rose* a precise point of interpretation for existential events, without rejecting any event, especially the most difficult and the saddest ("Was it not *necessary* that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?", *Lk* 24, 26).

In this way the reading of life becomes a highly spiritual operation, not only psychological, because it leads us to recognise in it the illuminating and mysterious presence of God and His Word. (101) And, within this mystery, it allows the seed of a vocation to be discerned little by little; the seed that the Father-sower sowed in the furrows of life. That seed, even though small, now begins to be visible and grow.

d) *Educating to in-vocation*

If the reading of life is a spiritual operation, it necessarily leads the person not only to recognise his need of revelation, but to *celebrate it*, with prayer of *invocation*. Educating means *e-voking the truth of the I*. This evocation arises precisely from the praying invocation, from a prayer that is more prayer of trust than of request, prayer as surprise and gratitude; but also as struggle and tension, as an "excavation" of one's own ambitions in order to welcome expectations, questions, desires from the Other: from the Father who, in the Son, can speak to the one who is searching for the way to follow.

But then prayer becomes the *place of vocational discernment*, of education for *listening to the God who calls*, because every vocation finds its origins in patient and trustful prayer of invocation; sustained not under pretence of an immediate response, but by the certainty or hope that invocation must be welcomed, and, will in time, lead the one invoking to the discovery of his vocation.

In the Emmaus story all of this is revealed with an essential expression, perhaps the most beautiful prayer ever prayed by the human heart: "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent" (*Lk* 24, 29). It is the supplication of one who knows that without the Lord darkness descends on life, without His Word there is the obscurity of misunderstanding or of confusion of identity; life appears to be without sense and vocation. It is the invocation of one who, perhaps, has not yet discovered his path, but perceives that standing with Him, he will find himself again, because only He has the "words of eternal life" (*Jn* 6, 67-68).

This type of in-voking prayer does not come spontaneously, but needs a long apprenticeship; and one does not learn it by oneself, but with the help of one who has learned to listen to the silences of God. Not anyone can teach this prayer, but only one who is faithful to his vocation.

And then, if prayer is the natural path of vocational searching, today as yesterday and before, we need vocational educators who pray, who teach to pray, who educate to invocation.

To form

36. "When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognised him; and he vanished out of their sight. They said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?'" (*Lk* 24, 30-32).

Formation is in some way the culmination of the pedagogical process, because it is the moment in which the young person is proposed with a *form*, a way of being, in which he himself *recognises* his identity, his vocation, his norm.

The Son is the image of the Father, the formator of men and women, because He represents the image according to which the Father has created them. Therefore He invites those whom He calls to have His same sentiments and to share His life, to have His "form". He is, at the same time, both formator and form.

The vocational formator is such insofar as he is the mediator of this divine action, and places himself beside the young person to help him "recognise" in it his call, and to allow himself to be formed by it.

a) Recognition of Jesus

The decisive moment in the Emmaus story is undoubtedly when Jesus takes the bread, breaks it and gives it to them: "And their eyes were opened and they recognised him". There is here a series of "recognitions" related to each other.

First of all the two *recognise Jesus*, they discover the true identity of the traveller who has joined them, precisely because only He could make this gesture, as the two well knew.

In the vocational perspective this highlights the importance of making strong gestures, unequivocal signs, high proposals, projects of total commitment. (102)

The young person needs to be stimulated by lofty ideals, considering something which goes beyond him and is beyond his capacities, because of which it is worthwhile giving one's life. Psychological analysis also reminds us of this: to ask of a young person something that is less than his possibilities, means offending his dignity and impeding his full self-realisation; in a more positive way, the young person should be asked for the best he can give so that he may become and be himself.

And if Jesus is recognised "in the breaking of the bread", the Eucharistic dimension must underlie every vocational programme: as the typical "place" of vocational encouragement, as the mystery that speaks the general sense of human existence, as the final objective of every pastoral work for vocations that would be Christian.

b) Recognition of the truth of life

At this point in an authentic process of formation for the choice of vocation there comes a second "recognition": *the recognition-discovery, within the Eucharistic sign, of the meaning of life*. If the Eucharist is the sacrifice of Christ who saves humanity, and if this sacrifice is His body broken and blood outpoured for the salvation of humanity, then the life of the believer, too, is called to model itself on the same correlation of meanings: *life, too, is a good received that tends, by its very nature, to become a good given*, like the life of the Word. This is the truth of life, of every life.

On the level of vocations, the consequences are clear. If there is a gift at the beginning of a person's existence, that constitutes him in being, then life has its path marked out: if it is a gift, it will be fully itself only if it is realised in the perspective of self-giving; it will be happy on condition that it respects its own nature. It can make whatever choice it wishes, but always in the logic of the gift, otherwise it will become a being in contradiction with itself, a "monstrous" reality; it will be free to decide its specific orientation, but *it will not be free to reflect on itself outwith the logic of the gift*.

The whole of pastoral work for vocations is constructed on this elementary catechesis of the meaning of life. If this anthropological truth is accepted, then we can make any vocational proposal. Then even the vocation to the ordained ministry or to religious or secular consecration, with its weight of mystery and mortification, becomes the full realisation of the human and of the gift which every person *has* and *is* in the depths of himself.

c) *Vocation as thankfulness*

If it is in the Eucharistic gesture that the two on the road to Emmaus "recognise" the Lord, and every believer the meaning of life, *then vocation is born of "thankfulness"*. It is born of the fertile soil of gratitude, because vocation is a response, not an initiative of the individual: it is *to be chosen*, not to choose.

It is precisely to this interior attitude of gratitude that the reading of one's past life should lead. The discovery of having received, in an unmerited and generous way, must "force" the young person psychologically to consider the offering of self, in the vocational option, as an inevitable consequence, as a certainly *free* act, because it is determined by love; but in a certain sense also *compulsory*, because in the face of the love received from God he feels that he can do no less than give himself. It is beautiful and totally logical that it be so; in itself, it is nothing extraordinary.

Pastoral work for vocations is aimed at preparing this *logic of thankfulness-gratitude*; it is much healthier and more convincing, on the human level, and more theologically founded than the so-called "logic of the hero", of the one who has not sufficiently matured the awareness of having received and feels himself to be the author of the gift and the choice. This logic has taken very little of the sensitivity of modern young people, because it subverts the truth of life as a gift received that tends *naturally* to become a good given.

It is the Gospel wisdom of "You received without pay, give without pay" (Mt 10, 8) (103) addressed by Jesus to the disciples-proclaimers of His word, which speaks the truth about *every* human being: no-one could not recognise himself in it.

It is from this truth that life derives the *form* that it is then called to assume, or it is from this unique figure of the faith that are then born *the different vocational configurations of the same faith*.

It becomes possible, then, even to request somewhat strong and radical choices, such as a call to special consecration, to the priesthood and consecrated life. Therefore God's proposal, because of how difficult and excellent it may seem (and is in reality), also becomes an unexpected promotion of authentic human aspirations and guarantees the greatest happiness. The happiness, full of thanksgiving, that Mary sings in the "Magnificat".

d) *Recognition of Jesus and self-recognition of the disciple*

The eyes of the disciples of Emmaus are opened at the Eucharistic gesture of Jesus.

It is in the face of this gesture that Cleopas and his companion perceive also the meaning of their journey, as a journey not only towards the recognition of Jesus, but also towards their *own recognition*: "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?" (Lk 24, 32).

There is not simply a commotion within the pilgrims who listen to the explanation of the Master, but the sensation that His life, His Eucharist, His death and resurrection, His mystery will always be more than their own life, eucharist, death, mystery.

In the heart that burns there is the discovery of vocation and the history of every vocation. Always related to an experience of God, in whom the person also discovers himself and his own identity.

Forming for the vocational choice means showing more and more the connection between experience of God and discovery of self, between theophany and self-identity. The affirmation of the *Instrumentum laboris* is very true: "the recognition of Him as Lord of life and history, brings with it the self-recognition of the disciple". (104) And when the act of faith manages to connect the "Christological recognition" with the "anthropological self-recognition", then the seed of the vocation is already mature, indeed, it is flourishing.

To discern

37. "And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven gathered together and those who were with them, who said: 'The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!' Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread" (Lk 24, 33-35).

So that the journey to Emmaus might become a vocational itinerary a conclusive passage is needed after the series of "recognitions" and "self-recognitions": the *effective choice* of the young person, to which corresponds, on the part of the one who has accompanied him along the vocational path, the process of *discernment*. A discernment that will certainly not finish during the time of vocational orientation, but must continue until a definitive decision is reached, "for the whole of one's life". (105)

a) *The effective choice of the one called*

Decision making ability

In the Gospel passage that has guided our reflection the choice is well expressed at verse 33: "And they rose at that same hour..."

The indication about the time ("at that same hour") clearly explains the determination of the two, provoked by the word and person of Jesus, by the meeting with Him, and courageously put into action by a choice that is a break with what they were or did before, and indicates newness of life.

It is precisely this decision that is often lacking in young people today.

For this reason, with a view to "helping young people to overcome indecision in the face of definite commitments, it would seem useful to prepare them progressively for assuming personal responsibilities, (...), to entrust them with tasks appropriate to their abilities and age, (...), to encourage a gradual education in the small, daily choices regarding values (gratuitousness, constancy, moderation, honesty...)". (106)

On the other hand, it should be remembered that very often these and other fears and indecision signal weakness not only of the psychological make-up of the person, but also of the spiritual experience and, particularly, of the experience of vocation as a choice that comes from God.

When this certainty is lacking the subject inevitably trusts in himself and his own resources; and when he has realised their precarious nature it is no wonder that he allows himself to be overcome by the fear of making a definitive decision.

The inability to make decisions is not necessarily characteristic of the present generation of young people: it is often the consequence of vocational accompaniment that has not sufficiently underlined the primacy of God in the choice, or that has not prepared people to allow themselves to be chosen by Him. (107)

"Return home"

The choice of vocation indicates newness of life, but in reality it is also the sign of a recovery of one's own identity, almost a "return home", to the roots of the I. In the Emmaus story it is symbolised by the expression: "and (they) returned to Jerusalem".

It is very important, in the preparation for the choice of vocation, to reaffirm the idea that it represents the condition necessary for being oneself and realising oneself according to that singular project that can only give happiness. Too many young people still think the opposite about the Christian vocation, they look at it with diffidence and fear that it cannot make them happy; but they then end up being unhappy like the sad young man of the Gospel (cf *Mk* 10, 22).

How many times have the attitudes of adults, parents included, contributed to creating a negative image of a vocation, especially to the priesthood and to the consecrated

life, even creating obstacles to its realisation and discouraging those who feel themselves called to it! (108)

However this problem will not be resolved with a banal propaganda against it, which would emphasise the positive, satisfying aspects of a vocation, but most of all by underlining the idea that a vocation is God's reflection on the creature, it is the name He gives to the person.

Discovering and responding to one's vocation as a believer means finding that rock on which one's name is written (cf *Apoc* 2, 17-18), or returning to the springs of the I.

Personal witness

At Jerusalem the two "found the eleven gathered together and those who were with them, who said: 'The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!' Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread" (*Lk* 24, 33-35).

The most significant element of this passage, in relation to the vocational choice, is the witness of the two, a particular witness, because it comes in a community context and has a precise vocational meaning.

In fact when the two arrive the assembly is proclaiming its faith with a formula ("The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon") which we know to be among the most ancient testimonies to objective faith. Cleopas and his companion add, in some way, their own subjective experience, which confirms what the community was proclaiming, and confirms too their own believing and vocational journey.

It is as if that testimony were the first fruit of the vocation discovered and re-found, which immediately, as is the nature of a Christian vocation, is put to the service of the ecclesial community. Accordingly we recall what has already been said regarding the relationship between objective ecclesial itineraries and subjective personal itineraries, in a relationship of synergy and complementarity: the witness of the individual helps the faith of the Church to grow, the faith and the witness of the Church supports and encourages the vocational choice of the individual.

b) Discernment by the guide

In the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis* John Paul II affirms that: "Knowledge of the nature and mission of the ministerial priesthood is an essential presupposition, and at the same time the surest guide and incentive towards the development of pastoral activities in the Church for fostering and discerning vocations to the priesthood and training those called to the ordained ministry". (109)

The same could be said, by analogy, when dealing with the discernment of any vocation to the consecrated life. An essential presupposition for discerning these vocations is, first and foremost, to be aware of the nature and mission of that state of life in the Church. (110)

This presupposition comes directly from the certainty that it is God who calls, and therefore from the search for those signals that indicate the presence of the divine call.

There now follow some criteria for discernment, distinguishable in four areas.

Openness to the mystery

If being closed to the mystery, a characteristic of certain modern mind-sets, inhibits any vocational openness, then its opposite, *openness to the mystery*, is not only a positive condition for the discovery of one's own vocation, but also indicates a healthy vocational option.

a) Authentic subjective vocational certainty *makes space for the mystery* and the sensation that one's decision, even if firm, must remain open to a continual investigation of the mystery itself.

Certainty which is not authentic, on the other hand, is not only weak and incapable of encouraging a decision, but is even the opposite, i.e. the pretence of having already understood everything, of having exhausted the depths of the personal mystery, a pretence that can only create inflexibility and a certainty that is often betrayed by later life.

b) The typically vocational attitude is the expression of the virtue of *prudence*, more than ostentatious personal ability. Precisely for this reason the sureness of this reading of one's own future is that of *hope and entrusting* which arise from having faith in Another, in whom one can trust; it is not deduced from the guarantee of one's own abilities perceived as responding to the demands of the role chosen.

c) Another good vocational indication are the capacities for *welcoming and integrating* those opposed polarities which constitute the natural dialectic of the I and human life. For example, a young person possesses this capacity who is sufficiently aware of his positive and negative aspects, of his ideals and contradictions, of the healthy part and the less healthy part of his own vocational project, and who does not presume nor despair in the face of his negative aspects.

d) The young person is well familiar with the mystery of life as the place for perceiving a presence and an appeal who discovers the signs of his call by God not only in extraordinary events, but *in his history*; in the events that he has learned to read as a believer, in his questions, anxieties and aspirations.

e) Also in this category of openness to the mystery there is another fundamental characteristic of the authentic call: that of *gratitude*. A vocation is born of the fertile soil of gratitude; and is interpreted with a slant of generosity and radicality, precisely because it is born of the awareness of the love received.

Identity in the vocation

The second order of criteria rotate around the concept of "identity". In fact the vocational option indicates and implies precisely the definition of one's own identity;

it is the choice and realisation of the ideal I, rather than the actual I, and must bring the person to have a substantially positive and stable sense of his own I.

a) The first condition is that the person shows himself capable of cutting himself off from the logic of identification at the *corporeal* level (= the body as the source of positive identity) and the *psychological* level (= one's own abilities as the only and pre-eminent guarantee of self-regard), and discover instead the radical positivity related in a stable way to being, received as a gift from God (this is the *ontological* level), rather than to the precarious position of having or appearing. The Christian vocation is what brings this positivity to fulfilment, realising to the greatest extent the possibilities of the subject, but according to a project which regularly surpasses him, because it is thought out by God.

b) "Vocation" fundamentally means "call": therefore there is an *external* subject, an objective appeal, and an *interior* openness to letting oneself be called and recognising oneself in a model that the one called did not create.

c) The fundamental criterion about the motivation or the modality of the vocational choice is that of *totality* (or the law of totality); that is that the decision be an expression of a total involvement of the psychological functions (heart-mind-will), and be a decision that is *at the same* time mental-ethical-emotional.

d) More particularly, there is vocational maturity when the *vocation* is lived and interpreted as a gift, but also as a demanding call: to be lived for others, not only for one's own perfection, and with others, in the Church, mother of all vocations, in a specific "sequela Christi".

A vocational project rich in believing memory

The third area on which the one discerning a vocation should concentrate attention is that related to the quality of the relationship between past and present, between memory and project.

a) Above all it is important that the young person be substantially *reconciled with his past*: with the inevitable negative aspects, of whatever kind, that are part of it, and also with the positive, that he should be able to recognise with gratitude; reconciled also with the significant figures of his past, with their richness and weakness.

b) Next, attention should be given to *the type of memory* that the young person has of his history, such as the interpretation he gives to his own life: as a grace or a lament? Does he consciously or unconsciously feel that life owes him, and therefore is still waiting to receive, or is he open to giving?

The young person's attitude to more or less serious traumas from his past is particularly significant. Planning to consecrate oneself to God means in every case *re-taking possession* of the life that you plan to give, in all its aspects; to try to *integrate* the less positive aspects, *recognising them* with realism and assuming a responsible attitude, and not simply feeling sorry for oneself in their regard. The "responsible" young person is the one who is dedicated to assuming an *active and creative attitude*

when faced with a negative event, or who seeks *to benefit in an intelligent way* from a personal negative experience.

Much attention should be paid to vocations that are born of sufferings, delusions, or various incidents that are not yet well integrated. In this case a more attentive discernment is necessary, even making use of specialists so as not to lay impossible burdens on weak shoulders.

Vocational docibilitas

The last phase of the vocational itinerary is that of decision. In reference to this phase the criteria of vocational maturity would seem to be the following.

a) The fundamental requirement is the person's level of *docibilitas*, or rather the interior freedom to let himself be guided by a bigger brother or sister; in particular in the strategic phases of re-elaboration and re-appropriation of one's own past, especially the most problematic, and the subsequent liberty to learn and to know how to change.

b) The requirement of *docibilitas* is basically the requirement of being *young*, not so much as a biographical quality, as more a global existential attitude. It is important that whoever asks to enter seminary or the consecrated life be truly "young", with the virtues and vulnerabilities typical of that time of life, with the will to do and the desire to give his utmost, able to socialise and appreciate the beauty of life, conscious of his own defects and his own potential, aware of the gift of having been chosen.

c) An area particularly worthy of attention, today more than ever, is the *affective-sexual area*. (111) It is important that the young person shows himself able to acquire the two certainties that make the person *affectively free*: the certainty that comes from the experience of *having already been loved* and the always experiential certainty of *knowing how to love*. In concrete, the young person must show that human equilibrium that allows him to know how to stand on his own two feet, he must possess that security and autonomy that will facilitate his social interaction and cordial friendship, and that sense of responsibility that lets him live the same social interaction as an adult, free to give and receive.

d) Regarding *inconsistencies* in the affective-sexual area, a prudent discernment must take account of the centrality of this area in the general evolution of the young person and in present day culture (or subculture). It is not strange, nor is it rare that the young person exhibit certain weaknesses in this area.

Under what conditions can we prudently welcome the vocational request of young people with this kind of problem? The condition is that there also be present these three requirements:

1° that the young person be conscious of the *root of his problem*, which often is not sexual in origin.

2° The second condition is that the young person feel his weakness as something extraneous to his own personality, something that he does not want and that jars with his ideal, and against which he will struggle with his whole being.

3° It is also important to verify whether the subject is able to *control* these weaknesses, with a view to overcoming them, either so that in fact it happens less and less, or so that these inclinations will less and less disturb his life (also his psychological state) and allow him to carry out his normal duties without creating excessive tension nor unduly occupying his attention. (112) These three criteria must all be present to permit a positive discernment.

e) Finally, vocational maturity is decided by an essential element that truly makes sense of all: *the act of faith*. The authentic vocational option is to all effects the expression of believing adhesion, and the more genuine it is, the more it is part of and conclusion to a journey of formation towards maturity of faith. The act of faith, within a logic that makes space for the mystery, is precisely that central point that holds together the sometimes opposed polarities of life, continuously drawn between the certainty of the call and the consciousness of one's own unsuitability, between the sensation of losing oneself and finding oneself, between the greatness of the aspirations and the weight of one's own limitations, between grace and nature, between the God who calls and the individual who responds. The young person who has truly been called must show the solidity of the act of belief while at the same time maintaining these polarities.

CONCLUSION

Towards the Jubilee

38. This document is addressed to the Churches of Europe at time in which the People of God is preparing to celebrate a time of grace and mercy, of conversion and renewal in the Jubilee of the year two thousand. The Congress on vocations, too, is part of this journey of preparation and in some way contributes to guiding it in two directions.

The first is an invitation to *conversion*. The vocations crisis that we have seen and are still living must encourage us to reflect also on our own responsibility, as believers and people called to spread the gift of faith and to encourage in every brother and sister an openness to the call.

All of us, in different ways, must admit to not having fully responded to this call, of having made the Church less faithful to the task of mediating the voice of the Father who calls us to follow the Son in the Spirit; the Church of our families and work places, of our parishes and dioceses, of our religious congregations and secular institutes. We shall come through the vocations crisis only if this process of conversion is sincere and gives fruits of newness of life.

The second direction that this document would like to contribute to the Church's pilgrimage towards the Jubilee is an invitation to *hope*. An invitation that emerges from the whole of the Congress and that we wish now to stress with all our strength of faith. Perhaps there is no other area of the Church's life more needing to open itself to

hope than pastoral work for vocations, especially where the crisis is most strongly felt.

Therefore we reaffirm, at the conclusion of this reflection, our certainty that the Lord of the harvest will not allow His Church to lack workers for His harvest. Indeed, if hope is founded not on our predictions and calculations, which have often been betrayed by history, but "on your Word", then we can and will believe in a renewed flowering of vocations for the Churches of Europe.

This document seeks to be a hymn to the optimism of faith filled with hope, in order to reawaken it in children, adolescents and young people, in parents and those involved in education, in pastors and priests, in consecrated men and women, in all those who serve life with the new generations, in all the People of God in Europe.

Let us pray the Lord of the Harvest

39. Our document, that opened with thanksgiving to the Lord God, can not close without a prayer to the Most Holy Trinity, the source and destiny of every vocation.

"*God the Father*, source of love, who from all eternity calls to life and gives it in abundance, look upon this continent of Europe. Call her again, as You once called her; above all make her aware of Your call, of her Christian roots, of the responsibility which derives from this. Make her aware of her vocation to promote a culture of life, respect for the existence of every man in all its forms and in every instant, unity between peoples, welcoming the stranger and promoting civil and democratic forms of social life, so that Europe may be ever more united in peace and brotherhood.

Eternal Word, You who from all eternity welcome the love of the Father and respond to His call, open the hearts and minds of the young people of this continent so that they may learn to let themselves be loved by the One who conceived them in the image of His Son and, letting themselves be loved, may they have the courage to realise this image, which is Yours. Make them strong and generous, able to take a risk on Your Word, free to fly up high, enchanted by the beauty of following You. Raise up among them people to proclaim Your Gospel: priests, deacons, consecrated men and women, religious and laity, missionaries, monks and nuns, who with their lives know, in their turn, how to call and propose the following of Christ the Saviour.

Holy Spirit, love always young of God, voice of the Eternal one who never ceases to resonate and call, free the old continent from every spirit of sufficiency, from the culture of the "man without a vocation", from that fear that hinders us from taking risks and renders life flat and without taste, from that minimalism that creates tolerance of mediocrity and kills any interior slant and the authentic spirit of youth in the Church. Help our young people to rediscover the full meaning of following Jesus as the call to be fully themselves, fully and forever young, each according to a project planned particularly for him, unique-singular-unrepeatable. In a Europe that risks becoming ever older grant us the gift of new vocations that can bear witness to the "youthfulness" of God and the Church, universal and local, from East to West, and can promote projects of new sanctity, for the birth of a new Europe.

Holy Virgin, young daughter of Israel, whom the Father has chosen as the bride of the Spirit in order to generate His Son on earth, generate in the young people of Europe your same daring courage; that same courage that one day set you free to believe in a project greater than yourself, free to hope that God would have realised it. To you who are the mother of the Eternal Priest we entrust those young people called to the *priesthood*; to you who are the first consecrated by the Father we entrust those young people who choose to belong totally to the Lord, the only treasure and totally loved good, in *the religious and consecrated life*; to you who lived, like no other creature, the solitude of the fullest intimacy with the Lord Jesus we entrust those who leave the world to dedicate their whole life to prayer in the *monastic life*; to you, who generated the early Church and assisted it with maternal love, we entrust *all the vocations* of this Church, that they may proclaim, today as then, to all the peoples, that Jesus Christ is Lord, in the Holy Spirit, to the Glory of God the Father! AMEN."

Rome, 6 January 1998, the Epiphany of the Lord.

Pio Card. Laghi

President

José Saraiva Martins

Titular Archbishop of Tuburnica

Vice-President

(1) 253 delegates from 37 European nations took part in the Congress; they represented the different categories of vocation (laity, consecrated, priests, bishops), and included also some representatives from the sister churches (Protestant, Orthodox, Anglican).

(2) Pontifical Work for Ecclesiastical Vocations, *Pastoral Care of Vocations in the Particular Churches of Europe. Working Document of the Congress on Vocations to the Priesthood and Consecrated life in Europe*, Rome 1996, n.88. Henceforth this text will be cited as *IL* (Instrumentum Laboris).

(3) *Ibidem*, 15.

(4) See, among others, *Developments of Pastoral Care for Vocations in the Local Churches, Experiences of the Past and Programmes for the Future, The Conclusive Document of the II International Congress of Bishops and Others with Responsibilities for Ecclesiastical Vocations* (by the Congregations for the Oriental Churches, for Religious and Secular Institutes, for the Evangelization of Peoples, for Catholic Education), Rome 10-16 May 1981; Pontifical Work for Ecclesiastical Vocations, *Developments of the Pastoral Ministry of Vocations in the Particular Churches* (by the Congregations for Catholic Education and for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life), Rome 1992; Final Declaration of the First Latin American Continental Congress on Vocations, Itaicì 1994 (published in "Seminarium" 34 \$[1994\$

(5) Cf *IL*, 18.

(6) Cf *Concluding Propositions of the European Congress on Vocations to the Priesthood and Consecrated Life*, 8. Henceforward this document will be cited as *Propositions*.

(7) *IL*, 32.

(8) *Propositions*, 7.

(9) *Propositions*, 3.

(10) *Propositions*, 4.

(11) Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 2. See also, on this topic, John Paul II, *Christifideles laici*, 33-34, and *Redemptoris missio*, 33-34.

(12) *Propositions*, 19.

(13) *Lumen gentium*, 32; 39-42 (chap. V).

(14) *IL*, 6.

(15) *Propositions*, 16.

(16) *Propositions*, 19.

(17) The "vocational culture" was the topic of the *Message of the Holy Father for the XXX World Day of Prayer for Vocations*, celebrated on 2V1993 (cf "L'Osservatore Romano" 18XII1992; cf also Congregation for Catholic Education, Pontifical Work for Ecclesiastical Vocations, *Messaggi Pontifici per la Giornata mondiale di preghiera per le vocazioni*, Rome 1994, pp.241-245).

(18) John Paul II, *Address to Participants in the Congress on Vocations in Europe*, in "L'Osservatore Romano", 11V1997, 4.

(19) *Ibidem*.

(20) Cf *Propositions*, 12.

(21) *IL*, 6.

(22) *Address of the Holy Father*, in "L'Osservatore Romano", 11V1997, n. 107.

(23) Cf *Propositions*, 20.

(24) Cf John Paul II, *Vita consecrata*, 64.

(25) *IL*, 85.

(26) An analagous expression was already used in the *Conclusive Document* of the Second International Congress of Bishops and Others with Responsibilities for

Ecclesiastical Vocations, cf *Developments*, 3. From now on this document will be cited with the initials DC (concluding document).

(27) *Propositions*, 3.

(28) Paul VI, *Populorum progressio*, 15.

(29) *Gaudium et spes*, 22.

(30) In this regard, one of the final texts of the Congress expressed it thus: "In the European context it is important to highlight the first moment of vocation: birth. The welcome given to life illustrates belief in that God who 'sees' and 'calls' from the mother's womb" (*Propositions*, 34).

(31) John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, 11.

(32) Therefore, as we are reminded by the Congress, "only in living contact with Jesus Christ the Saviour can young people develop the capacity for communion, bring to maturity their personality and make a decision for Him" (*Propositions*, 13).

(33) *IL*, 55.

(34) *Sacrosanctum concilium*, 10.

(35) Cf *Veritatis Splendor*, 23-24.

(36) Cf *Lumen gentium*, chap. V.

(37) Cf *Propositions*, 16.

(38) Rite of Confirmation.

(39) Cf *Propositions*, 35.

(40) *Lumen gentium*, 1.

(41) Cf *Propositions*, 21.

(42) The Epiclesis.

(43) *DC*, 18.

(44) *DC*, 13.

(45) *Propositions*, 28.

(46) This is part of the consistent teaching of John Paul II in the Encyclical Letters *Slavorum Apostoli* (1985) and *Ut unum sint* (1995) and in the Apostolic Exhortation *Oriente lumen* (1995).

(47) *IL*, 58.

(48) John Paul II, *Christifideles laici*, 55.

(49) John Paul II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, 15.

(50) "In the specific pastoral care of vocations a place should be given to the vocation of the permanent deacon. Permanent deacons are already a valued presence in various parishes and it would be minimalistic not to include them as new vocations of the new Europe" (*Propositions*, 18).

(51) *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10.

(52) "In laudibus Virginis Matris", Homilia II, 4: *Sancti Bernardi opera*, IV, Romae, Editiones Cistercenses, 1966, p. 23.

(53) "In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus VIII, 9: CCL 36, p. 87.

(54) Address of John Paul II to the participants in the Congress on the topic: "New vocations for a new Europe" in "L'Osservatore Romano", 11 May 1997, n. 107.

(55) *DC*, 5.

(56) The expression is in the Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul, *Pastores dabo vobis*, n. 34. In the same document the basic motives that intimately connect pastoral work for vocations with the Church are well laid out.

(57) *Ibidem*.

(58) *Ibidem*.

(59) *IL*, 58.

(60) The expression "*Christian community*" is, in itself, a generic expression that indicates a particular or local Church, or even a parish. It is equivalent to a group of Christians living in a place and representing the Church in a real way, when it gathers together to pray and serve, to bear witness to the love and presence of Christ among them. The expression "*ecclesial community*", on the other hand, has a more considered meaning, because it highlights the presence of the elements that constitute the Church, beginning with the centrality of the Eucharistic mystery; properly it is applied to dioceses and parishes that are Eucharistic ecclesial communities thanks to the presence of the ordained minister; the others are so by extension of meaning. Cf in this regard *DC*, 13-16.

(61) John Paul II, *Discourse to the VI Symposium of European Episcopal Conferences*, 11.10.1985.

(62) *Pastores dabo vobis*, 34.

(63) *Ibidem*, 35.

(64) *Ibidem*, 41.

(65) Cf *Ibidem*, 41.

(66) *Ibidem*, 38.

(67) *Vita consecrata*, 64.

(68) *Ibidem*.

(69) *IL*, 59.

(70) Cf *Declaration*, 26.

(71) Cf *Propositions*, 25.

(72) Cf *Vita consecrata*, n. 70.

(73) *Propositions*, 4.

(74) *Propositions*, 13.

(75) Cf *Propositions*, 10.

(76) Cf *Propositions*, 10.

(77) "The liturgy by its very nature is an appeal. It is the privileged place where the whole People of God finds itself gathered in a visible way and where the mystery of faith is realised" (*Propositions*, 13).

(78) *Dei Verbum*, 25.

(79) "The first place of witness is the life of a Church that rediscovers 'communion' and where the parishes and associated bodies are lived as a communion of communities" (*Propositions*, 14).

(80) *Propositions*, 21.

(81) *Vita consecrata*, 64.

(82) Cf *Lumen gentium* 12; 35; 40-42.

(83) Cf *Catechesi tradendae*, 186.

(84) *Propositions*, 35, where Bishops are again reminded of the great opportunity offered by the celebration of Confirmation for "calling" the young people receiving the sacrament.

(85) *Propositions*, 10.

(86) *Propositions*, 11.

(87) *Propositions*, 10.

(88) *Pastores dabo vobis*, 41.

(89) Cf the wise suggestions in this regard in the *Conclusive Document* of the Second International Congress of 1981, *DC*, 40.

(90) Cf *Optatam totius*, 2; *DC*, 57-59; cf also *Developments in pastoral care*, 89-91.

(91) Cf *Propositions*, 10.

(92) It was observed at the Congress: "At times a certain strain in the relationship between the local Church and religious life was reported. It is important to overcome a functional view of religious life itself, even if already we can see signs of a new orientation after the Synod on the consecrated life. The same is true for secular institutes" (*Propositions*, 16).

(93) "In a religious and cultural situation which is rapidly changing, the initial formation of promoters becomes essential: catechists, pastors, deacons, consecrated men and women, bishops, as does their ongoing formation" (*Propositions*, 17).

(94) Cf *Propositions*, 29 where, speaking of this European centre for vocations, it expresses the desire that, as a gesture of charity and exchange of gifts, it "provide a «bank» of people qualified to collaborate in the formation of formators". There is also a request for the establishment of such an organisation in the *Instrumentum laboris*, 93 and 90h. In Latin America for some years now there has been such a positive experience. In Bogotá (Colombia), at the *Consejo Episcopal Latino Americano* (CELAM), there is the *Departamento de Vocaciones y Ministerios* (DEVYM). This organisation was also the point of reference for the preparation and celebration of the First Continental Congress for Latin America, held at Itaici (Sao Paulo of Brazil) from 23 to 27 May 1994.

(95) *IL*, 86.

(96) 3 Cf *Propositions*, 9.

(97) Paul VI, *Look at Christ and at the Church*, Message for the XV World Day of Prayer for Vocations (16IV1978), in "L'Osservatore Romano" (English edition) of 13IV1978.

(98) *Propositions*, 15.

(99) *Propositions*, 9.

(100) *Propositions*, 22. In addition: "the growth of interest in the Gospel and in a life radically dedicated to it in consecration, depends to a great extent on the personal witness of priests and religious who are happy with their lot. The majority of

candidates for the consecrated life and priesthood tell that they attribute their own vocation to an encounter with a priest or consecrated man or woman" (*ibidem*, 11).

(101) *Propositions*, 12.

(102) *Proposition* 23 states: "It is important to underline that young people are open to challenges and strong propositions (that are 'superior to the mean', that offer something 'more!').

(103) That returns in the form of a provocation in the words of Paul to the Corinthians: "What have you that you did not receive?" (1 Cor 4, 7).

(104) *IL*, 55.

(105) *Propositions*, 27.

(106) *Propositions*, 25.

(107) Cf *Propositions*, 25.

(108) Cf *Propositions*, 14.

(109) *Pastores dabo vobis*, 11.

(110) Cf Jurado, *Il discernimento*, 262. Cf also L.R. Moran, "Orientaciones doctrinales para una pastoral eclesial de las vocaciones", in *Seminarium*, 4 (1991), 697-725.

(111) We are speaking here of a basic affective-sexual maturity, as the condition necessary for admission to religious vows and the ordained ministry, according to the two ways of the Catholic Churches of Europe, to the celibate ministry (Western Church) and to the married ministry (Oriental Churches). It is important that, from the pastoral work for vocations to formation proper, the pedagogical programmes be coherent and well thought out, so that the preparation for the ordained ministry might be appropriate in each case, especially on the level of affective well-being, and the exercise of the same ministry could then attain its objective of proclaiming the love of God as the beginning and end of human love.

(112) See in this sense the recommendation of *Potissimum Institutioni*, about homosexuality, to reject not those who have such tendencies but rather "those who cannot manage to control such tendencies" (39), even if this "controlling" is understood — we maintain — in the full sense, not only as an effort of the will, but rather as a progressive freedom in relation to these very tendencies, in the heart and in the mind, in the will and in desires.