

the elements of the bread and wine. And stemming out from that all the circumstances of our lives are shot through with the presence of Christ.

There has stood in the midst of you one whom you know not. But there are simple conditions for knowing him. 'And to them that received him, he gave power to be made the sons of God, to them that believe in his name, who are born, not of the will of flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.' The power does not come from our own nature, from our flesh, nor does it come from any other human being, but from God alone, from God made man. 'And of his fullness we have all received, grace for grace.'



## VOCATIONS AND THEIR RECOGNITION—II

COLUMBA RYAN, O.P.

IT has been seen in the previous article that there are three aspects under which we may approach the analysis of a vocation. Within the vocation itself there is the divine call and the ecclesiastical call. External to it, but as its necessary condition, there are the appropriate gifts and qualities in the recipient. We have seen that the divine call is a grace communicated to the soul. From the side of God we have seen that this grace is offered not as a matter of precept, but of counsel; to resist it, or rather to fail to receive it, is not necessarily sinful since its acceptance is left to our free, prudential choice; but this is not to say that it may not be sinful. For there are other sins than those of formal disobedience to a precept; there is the sin of rashness, against prudence. And failure to accept the grace offered may be just such a sin.

So far then, the grace has been considered as uncreated, in God; as that in him which we have called his *voluntas signi*, his 'will' signified to a man by some sign, in this case the counsels as they seem to a man to be bearing in upon his own life.

We have now to examine the grace as received in a man's soul, the created counterpart to God's favour. And the question already formulated in the previous article was how we may know its presence; how do we recognize a true vocation in this, its fundamental aspect?

The first thing to insist upon is that this grace like any other, being supernatural, beyond the reach that is of any natural capacity, is invisible, and strictly incomprehensible, an object of faith. 'It is strictly speaking impossible to be aware of it as such in the consciousness. It is the object of faith, like the real presence and the holy Trinity.'<sup>1</sup> The most that can be done is to detect it by signs of its presence, by the outward effects that it produces. Even here however there can be no certainty, for the signs may be, and often are, counterfeited—and this more usually unconsciously than consciously. Nor are the signs themselves such as can be exactly laid down, nor invariable. The way God deals with each infinitely discriminated personality, and the effects that his dealing produces in them, are not liable to classification or rule. One can only indicate 'classic' signs, and warn against their more usual counterfeits; but everything that follows must be modified by the prudent judgment of each case on its merits.

The signs I should choose to notice are: a conscious and felt attraction to religious or priestly life; an obscure drawing towards it, perhaps with a sense of duty attached, but without attraction; such a drawing, accompanied by positive repugnance for the life in question; a calculation, from the recognition a man may have of his whole providential setting, that he ought to follow such and such a life; the sense of the emptiness for him of any other life. Any one of these signs, or several together, or none of these but some others, may be the effects in a person of the grace of vocation. They serve as an indication, but not more; they are not a proof, and there can be no proof but in the venture itself and in its successful achievement (the proof of the pudding is in the eating). But equally any one of these signs, or all of them, may be present without the grace of vocation. Such are what I have called counterfeit signs. And experience shows that it is all too often when aspirants can be seen by other indications (the absence of the necessary qualities, or of an ecclesiastical calling) to have no vocation, that they claim to experience the most desperate and insistent attraction for religious or priestly life!

Not that such counterfeit signs are usually established by any conscious deceit in the person who manifests them. It is most often unconscious, and very often perhaps the result of faulty

<sup>1</sup> A. Bonduelle, O.P. *The Recognition of Vocation*, in the volume 'Vocation' previously referred to, p. 45.

motives and mistaken ideas about vocation. It will be useful to call attention to some of these faulty motives. There may be an unwillingness to admit himself inferior to others, as if not to have a vocation must mean a lower degree of holiness. There may be an egocentric desire for self-perfecting, as if the primary aim of religious life were not simply God loved. There may be a false sense of duty, the fear that any other life must needs be somehow sinful, imperfect. There may be an exaggerated fear of losing his salvation. Less worthy motives may be the desire to attain the social standing that goes with the clerical life in this country; or a fear of the world's ways, some inferiority complex about facing life; or an admiration and hero-worship felt towards some religious or cleric, with the desire to imitate his way of life, or be in his company. Any one of these motives, or several together, may produce one or other of the signs already mentioned, and the modern psychologist could no doubt name others seated in the unconscious proper.

If we recognize these possibilities it will be seen to be prudent, in practice, for the detecting of true from counterfeit vocations, to take precautions against the interference of such motives. For these reasons, I should insist very strongly, in speaking to anyone who thought that he had a vocation, on the God-given character of any vocation, meaning by this positive assertion to eliminate any self-seeking, egocentricity, or disguised worldly motive. And then, to eliminate fear, it seems desirable to emphasize the perfect freedom of choice left by the offer of a vocation, and the fact that to reject it is not necessarily evil, not a rejection of God, even allowing for the danger of rashness. I should besides inculcate the single aim of a vocation, not the making perfect of self (which is the most widespread idea, and is an upside-down approach) but the perfect love of God; otherwise the boggy of a false 'duty' too easily haunts the conscience. To eliminate this still further, and to exorcise any spirit of legalism, I should dwell upon the personal character of the divine invitation, that it is an invitation to 'Follow me' delivered from a person to a person, invoking loyalty and generosity. And it is important always to make clear that though the vocation to religious life is to 'the perfect life', this is an abstract assessment and in no way means that the perfect life for any individual will be found there; his perfect life may be in marriage, and commerce.

All these are ways in which to correct tendencies from faulty motives; I would even go so far as to be chary of *suggesting* to any *individual* that he or she might have a vocation, unless I felt the strongest possible conviction of this and could find some reason for supposing he was hiding from it. To suggest, in other circumstances, is so easily to put a man-made idea, where the essential is God's call. This is not to rule out secondary causality in the making of a vocation; and there are many ways in which vocations may and ought to be brought to the minds of our Catholic people—sermons, exhibitions, perhaps advertisements. These are general means that may be used by the Holy Ghost as his instruments. The danger of the individual suggestion to the individual, except in the rare instance, is that one may too lightly take upon himself the instigation that is proper to God.

When all this had been said, however, we have to go on to notice that the presence, or the declaration, of these and other faulty motives is by no means an argument that should make one at once conclude that a given vocation is necessarily spurious. For there are, in this, two possibilities both quite compatible with the presence in a soul of the grace of vocation. In the first place, it must be remembered that God leads souls according to their actual state. He may very well, and often does, use our imperfect and even wrong motives to lead us through to the true thing. Thus not only may there be (how often does there fail to be?) a mixture of bad with good motives, but imperfect motives may contain the germ of the perfect motive. It is here that the Holy Father's reminder of the gradual unfolding of a vocation finds application to the divine call as it is received in the recipient. One might perhaps draw a parallel between such gradual development of a vocation in a soul and the gradual unfolding of God's revelation under the Old Covenant. Certainly, the divine vocation, like divine revelation, is, on God's side, perfect from the start. But its deployment in the soul, like the expression that God's revelation found in his people and in the prophets, is by stages; at first, perhaps, crude, according to the crude receptive capacity of the human medium in whom it finds realization outside God. Grace builds upon nature, and the first appearance of the building is in the rough shape of foundations. The importance of this is that those charged with the fostering or recognition of vocations should not be too exacting from the outset. It may

be sufficient, indeed it usually is sufficient, that an aspirant enter an order or a seminary with quite inadequate, and to some extent even erroneous, motives. Perhaps one classic example of this is St Theresa of Avila, whose first introduction to religious life was with not a little reluctance, and with little understanding of the true character of a Carmelite vocation. It would be difficult to deny, in the light of what came after, either that she had a true vocation or that she began it with anything but inadequate motives. With a religious, it is the novice master's task to see that he has a true motive by the time of his profession; he may remain very inadequate throughout his novitiate, and yet not be therefore suspected of having no vocation. Possibly the characteristic virtue demanded of novice masters and mistresses is patience.

In the second place, when one is confronted with the expression, by an aspirant, of faulty reasons for his vocation, there is always the possibility, not to say the probability, of a simple shyness or ignorance of how to express something that he does not fully understand. This will happen especially in the case of someone being obscurely drawn, he hardly knows how, by God's grace, to a way of life that he cannot express (the grace is indeed inexpressible). He feels, perhaps, that he must say something, and is led into giving as a reason for what he wants a wrong reason in spite of his fundamental rightness. The parallel here is between him and a mystic attempting to express, and finding no words in which to express, the ineffable dealing of God with his soul. The mystic easily, in the attempt, interprets; forced to confine himself to the tawdriness of his human language and experience, he may misinterpret. So, with the religious aspirant, particularly one untrained in religious self-expression, one should not take at its face value the reasons and motives he himself assigns to his pursuit of a vocation. He may do himself (and of course God) less than justice.

There are, of course, those who 'know the drill'. They will give exactly the right answers, and behave in exactly the right way expected of one in whom God's grace of vocation is present. The danger is that there is a class of persons who easily assimilate religious jargon. It would be as much a mistake to accept these as it would be to reject the former. They are not an uncommon phenomenon amongst the more pious aspirants to acceptance by

religious orders or seminaries. But they are fairly easy to see through.

It may seem from all this that there can be no signs of the presence in a soul of the grace of God's calling to religious or priestly life. Everything, it seems, may equally well be a sign of a vocation or of a pseudo-vocation. The answer is that there is in all this not a denial that there are signs, but only an insistence that it takes delicacy and prudence (engendered of a slow and hesitant experience) to recognize the probable presence of a vocation. It should at least set us on guard against rash assertion one way or the other. And, from the aspirant's point of view, it is fortunate that there is, besides the divine call in a vocation, the other element of ecclesiastical call. That, and the gifts and qualities that must be found in the recipient of a vocation, remain to be considered.

(to be concluded)



## THE BATTLE AGAINST PRESENT-DAY RESTLESSNESS\*

FRANZ HILLIG, S.J.

**N**OISE and haste brand our times. . . . No novel statement, this: we have all heard it in some form or other, and most people, at least in the Western world, surely agree. We are slaves—the very watch on our wrist a sign of servitude—we have ‘no time’, ‘no rest’; ‘Angina Temporis’ (as Dr Bramesfeld terms it) is a common disease. It is a fact that, even if a few free days do come our way, we are no longer capable of relaxing; restless activity holds us entirely in its power. Man, his nerves tense and his mind fuddled, finds no shelter of peace awaiting him when he is ejected nightly from office or factory; wearily he reaches home, only to plunge himself into so-called amusements. His money is taken from him and in return he becomes momentarily intoxicated with unhealthy, forced excitement, but there is neither peace nor lasting satisfaction in it.

\* Freely translated and adapted by Sister M. Nicolas, O.P., from the German: *Gegen die Unrast der Zeit*, in the March number of *Die Stimmen der Zeit*, Herder.