



The Harvest is Plentiful

Module 1

Vocation Promotion Teams



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VOCATION PROMOTION TEAMS



ORDER OF AUGUSTINIAN RECOLLECTS

SECRETARIAT FOR VOCATIONS AND YOUTH

VOCATIONS SECTION

2018

Introduction

Throughout the Order, attempts have been made to create a true culture of vocation. We hope that the implementation of the **Augustinian Recollect Vocation Itinerary (IVAR)** will be of help to bring this to reality. In all our ministries we have begun a process that involves three fundamental actions: PLOW, SOW and CULTIVATE.

This process counts on the valuable and irreplaceable contribution of the laity, especially those who assume the commitment of collaborating with the promotion of vocations. The **Training Manual** that we are now presenting is directed especially to them and also to the religious committed to this task.

Grateful to the Lord for the creation of the **Vocation Promotion Teams (VET)**, we want to offer a thematic guide that clarifies the formation process.

The themes offered will help our vocation directors and the lay people who make up the VET to be introduced to themes of vocation promotion that refer to the pedagogical orientations and actions proposed in the three phases of the IVAR mentioned above: ploughing, sowing and cultivating, whose three axes are respectively the culture of vocation, the vocation kerygma and vocation accompaniment.

Each topic presents, in addition to its development, an objective and questions to work on personally and in groups. The *themes*, as a whole, follow a *plan*, but are presented in *modules* subdivided into *thematic areas*, so that they can be worked on with sufficient freedom, that is, at the times and in the ways that are appropriate, keeping in mind the reality of each ministry.

We hope that this TRAINING MANUAL will become a useful tool to achieve a full training of the pastoral agents of our Order in order to guarantee the generation and rooting of a fruitful vocation culture.

Secretariat for Vocations and Youth
Vocations Section

Theme development plan

Module I

Bible - oriented topics

1. The vocation stories of the Bible
2. Discipleship

Anthropological orientation issues

3. Anthropology and Vocation
4. Vocation Culture

Theologically oriented topics

5. Vocation Theology: The God Who Calls
6. Christ, reason and model of every vocation

Topics of pastoral orientation

7. Vocation Promotion/Vocation Coach
8. The Vocation Community

Module II

Bible - oriented topics

1. Biblical figures: Abraham and Moses
2. Biblical figures: St. Paul

Anthropological orientation issues

3. I want
4. Meaning of life

Theologically oriented topics

5. The Spirit and vocation spirituality
6. The Church, mother of vocations



Topics of pastoral orientation

7. The vocation kerygma
8. Vocation Accompaniment

Module III

Bible - oriented topics

9. Following Christ
10. Maria

Anthropological orientation issues

11. Teenagers/Young People
12. Life Project

Theologically oriented topics

13. States or forms of life
14. Mission and Vocation

Topics of pastoral orientation

15. Vocation guidance
16. World Day of Prayer for Vocations



MODULE I

THE VOCATION STORIES IN THE BIBLE¹

Objective

We will dedicate ourselves to writing down what would be the essential moments of every vocation process, based on the biblical narratives of vocation. It is curious how in the Bible there never appears a definition or explanation of what vocation is; there appear, however, many texts that “narrate” vocation experiences for us.

Development of the theme

1. Choice

Every vocation begins as a choice of God. And every choice of God is always a grace. This experience of feeling oneself chosen by God from the beginning is evident in Jeremiah's experience: “*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you came out of the womb I consecrated you*” (cf. Jeremiah 1:5). Election is eternal in the mind of God.

1. *The initiative is God's.* It is he who chooses. Unlike in the case of a profession, which we choose for some personal taste or interest, in the case of a vocation it is God who chooses us. It remains for us, however, to accept or reject that choice or election.
2. *Election is a grace,* a gift of God for the chosen one, and in him, for all the people. In each person who experiences God's election, he manifests to us his love and predilection. This is beautifully expressed in Mary's vocation story: the angel greets her with this very word: “*Rejoice, O full of grace*”. (Lk 1:28).
3. *The experience is a mystery.* Often the chosen ones ask themselves why me and not someone else? Such is the experience of Moses: “*Alas, Lord, send anyone else*” (Ex 4:13). The only explanation is that God is free and that, with his freedom, he does what is best for us. He does it because He wants to; we, men, cannot give another explanation.
4. *God chooses the humble.* Many times God's choice falls on the humble and simple, on those who apparently have no qualities. This is the experience of Moses, who is a stutterer (Ex 4:10); Jeremiah, who is a child (Jer 1:6); Mary, who is poor and humble (Lk 1:48); Paul, who is a persecutor of Christians (Heb 9:1-2) and many others.
5. *Election qualifies for mission.* But this choice of God does not mean that he demands from us something that we will be unable to realize. The choice does not fall on this or that person because they have more qualities or because they are better than others. God will be with the one chosen to carry out the mission entrusted to him. The words of Augustine may come to mind:

¹ G. VARELA ALVERIÑO, *LOS LLAMADOS. APUNTES PARA UN PASTORAL VOCACIONAL*, ED. SAN PABLO, 1994.

"Give what you command and command what you will." (St. Augustine, Confessions X,40).

2. Vocation

When the choice of God becomes word, then comes great moment of every vocation: the call. God calls through his word. The very word of God is already a call in the sense that it seeks to awaken in us a response. Today, God calls us in a very special way through Christ, the incarnate Word of the Father.

1. *God calls by name.* This is how Abraham (Gen 22:1), Moses (Ex 3:4), Mary (Lk 1:30), Paul (Heb 9:4) have experienced it... The name means for the biblical mentality the very essence of the person. When God calls by name he refers to the totality of the person: what he is in himself and the circumstances that surround him.
2. *Under specific circumstances.* God's call does not separate us from the reality we live, but precisely in order to transform it. That is why God's calls in the Bible happen in the most daily activities of life: Moses was shepherding his father-in-law's flock (Ex 3:1); Peter and Andrew were casting the nets (Mt 4:18); James and John were repairing the nets (Mt 4:21).
3. *Through many mediations.* Vocation is discovered through mediations: events, persons, experiences... It is the case of Moses, who has an angel appearing to him as a flame burning in the bush (Ex 3:2); Mary, who also receives the angel Gabriel (Lk 1:26). Even some apostles act as mediators in the vocation of others: Andrew does it in the vocation of Peter (Jn 1:41-42), Philip in that of Nathanael (Jn 1:45)...
4. *Despite objections.* To object to God's call is also typical of biblical vocation stories. It expresses the feeling of not understanding the meaning of the call and at the same time not feeling qualified to respond. We can quote Abraham again: "Lord, why should you give me anything if I am going to die without children? (Gen 15:2); Moses: "*But, Lord, I am not a man of easy speech...*" (Ex 4:10); Jeremiah: "*Lord, I do not know how to speak, for I am a child*" (Jer 1:6); Mary: "*How can this be if I am a virgin?*" (Lk 1:34).
5. *The response is on the part of the caller.* But for that call to become a reality, the human response is necessary. Until now, everything consisted of knowing how to listen to God, to his word. But now the word of the one called is also necessary. This response is expressed in the biblical accounts in an affirmative way, assuming in one's own life the call of God responding to it either in gestures or words as did Abraham: "*Abraham departed as the Lord had told him*" (Gen 12:4); Moses: "*Here I am*" (Ex 3:4), or Mary: "*Here is the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me according to your word*". (Lk 1:38).

3. Mission

The deepest meaning of every vocation is given by the mission; it is the one that, in the end, underpins the call. God does not call for the sake of calling, he calls for something. In the stories presented, the mission appears in a clear way. The mission of Abraham consists in being the father of a great people: *“I will make of you a great people”* (Gen 12:2); that of Moses is to liberate the chosen people from the slavery of Egypt: *“I have seen the affliction of my people...I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people out of Egypt”* (Ex 3:7.10); Jeremiah has the mission to be the prophet of the nations: *“I made you a prophet of the nations”* (Jer 1:5); Mary is called to be the mother of the Messiah: *“You will conceive and bear a son... he will be called the son of the Most High”* (Lk 1:31-32); the apostles to be with him and to continue his mission: *“He appointed twelve, whom he called apostles, to be with him and to be sent out to preach”* (Mk 3:13) and Paul's mission will be the proclamation of the Gospel among the Gentiles: *“Go... to bear my name to all the nations, to their rulers, and to the people of Israel”* (Heb 9:15).

Number 77 of Benedict XVI's exhortation *Verbum Domini* can serve to close this theme and conclude that the Word of God is a privileged means to discover ourselves as called:

“(...) that this word calls each one of us personally, revealing that life itself is a vocation from God. In other words, the more we grow in our personal relationship with the Lord Jesus, the more we realize that he is calling us to holiness in and through the definitive choices by which we respond to his love in our lives, taking up tasks and ministries which help to build up the Church”.

Questions for personal and group reflection



1. ¿How do I discover in my own life the elements of every vocation?
2. Which vocation narrative from the Bible strikes me most? Why?

DISCIPLESHIP²

Objective

Recognize that behind every vocation there is an invitation to be part of the discipleship of Jesus and to know its main characteristics.

Development of the theme

1. Introduction

We want to *study the first experience of Christian discipleship, that is, the way of life that Jesus of Nazareth proposed to his closest followers.*

2. Discipleship in Jesus' time

Throughout the history of Israel, the master-disciple relationship had been cultivated in the circles of the wise (cf. Prov 2:1) and among the prophets (cf. Is 8:16). The *discipleship proper to the wisdom circles* had as its object the transmission of the wisdom acquired from experience, while the prophetic discipleship was centred on the adherence to the prophet and the message he transmitted on behalf of God. These two basic forms of discipleship survived in Jesus' time.

The kind of relationship that the wise men established with their disciples is similar to that which the scribes and teachers of the law established with their own. The relationship between teachers and disciples was highly valued among them and was the pillar on which the rabbinical tradition that would later give rise to Judaism as we know it today was based. The main objective of rabbinical discipleship was to teach the Law and its correct interpretation. Normally it was not the teacher who chose his disciples, but they were the ones who would request for his instruction (cf. Mk 12:28-34).

Prophetic discipleship, represented in Elijah's relationship with Elisha (1 Kings 19:19-21), continued to be practiced in the movements of renewal brought forth by the prophets and leaders who awaited God's imminent intervention. John the Baptist was the driving force behind one of these movements, and what we know about him gives us an idea of what these prophets called their disciples.

Jesus' relationship with his disciples took on features of these two types of disciplinary relationship. On the one hand, Jesus and some of his disciples were for some time disciples of John the Baptist (cf. Jn 1:27; Mk 1:7; Jn 1:35-42) and in the new group formed by them some of the traits of this type of prophetic discipleship survive. On the other hand, Jesus had a great interest in instructing his disciples and he did so using forms and resources from the wisdom tradition.

² This theme is fundamentally taken from S. GUIGARRO PORTO, "Discipleship", in: E. BORILE, L. CABBIA, AND L. MAGNO (DIR.), *Diccionario de Pastoral Vocacional*, Salamanca 2005.

3. The discipleship of Jesus

Our main access to the discipleship of Jesus is the Gospels. But the gospels are, at the same time, windows that allow access to Jesus and mirrors that reflect the situation of the communities in which they were written.

The discipleship of Jesus has *three moments* or stages that are related to each other: the call, the follow up and the sending. This relationship appears in Jesus' invitation to two of his first disciples: "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men" (Mk 1:17). To know the discipleship of Jesus it is necessary, therefore, to know in more detail these three stages:

a) The Call

Jesus' call to his disciples has an important place in the Gospels. It appears explicitly in the so-called vocation stories and implicitly in many other passages, which speak of the decision to follow Jesus. Here we will study only the *vocation stories*, which gather in a synthetic way the experience of the call. We will now focus on Mark and John.

Mark's accounts (cf. Mk 1:16-18,19-20 par.; Mk 2:14 par.) are set in Galilee at the beginning of Jesus' public activity. In them the identity of those who are called is revealed. The initiative comes from Jesus. He chooses those he wants and demands a radical break with their families. The purpose of the call is twofold: to follow Jesus and to collaborate in his task (to become "fishers of men"). Finally, the response of the disciples is immediate and exemplary.

In the accounts of John's gospel (cf. Jn 1:35-42,43-51) the call is set in Judea and has as its vital context the group of the Baptist and his disciples. The initiative is not normally taken by Jesus or by those who want to follow him, but by others who bear witness to Jesus (the Baptist, Andrew and Philip). Only after this testimony is there an approach to Jesus and an encounter with him. In this kind of story the demands of following are of little importance.

Vocation stories differ in their geographical and chronological setting, in the description of the recipients, in the role they play, in the purpose and demands of the call, and in the importance given to their response. There is, however, a *fundamental coincidence*, which serves as a starting point for accessing the historical experience of Jesus' call: *all these accounts recognise that the relationship of Jesus with his disciples was determined by an initial meeting in which they were invited to follow him*. The verb "to follow" (akoloutheô) occupies a central place in all cases and is used to designate the relationship of the disciples with Jesus after that initial encounter.

Now, let us look at the features of Jesus' call:

First, the various traditions agree that *Jesus called his disciples with an uncommon authority*. By doing so, Jesus places himself in the place that God occupied in the Old Testament accounts of vocation. In these stories it was God

who directly called the leaders and prophets of the people, to entrust them with a mission. Jesus acts in the same way and also asks his disciples to adhere unconditionally to his person. This self-understanding of Jesus has to do with his awareness of his sonship, which is manifested in his particular way of addressing God (*abbâ*) and in his teaching on prayer. This means that Jesus' call to his disciples is born from the experience of his relationship with God.

Secondly, *it seems that it was Jesus who chose his disciples*. Although the various types of stories do not coincide, it is most likely that the initiative came from Jesus. Mark expresses it with a lapidary phrase: "He called those he wanted" (cf. Mk 3:13). Jesus had a program and to carry it out he needed people with certain qualities.

Thirdly, the oldest traditions show that Jesus imposed conditions of extreme radicalism on his disciples. The most important of all was, without a doubt, the break with the house, which was the main social institution in the Hellenistic-Roman world. This is the framework in which the invitation to leave the nets, to abandon the father, to leave the boat, to get up from the tax counter, to sell the property or to stop burying one's father must be placed. This break with the family does not have an ascetic motivation, but it is a function of the mission that Jesus wanted to entrust to them. By breaking their social ties they were free to help Jesus in his mission.

Finally, *Jesus called his disciples for a specific purpose*. According to Mark's expression, "to be with him and to be sent out to preach" (Mk 3:14). He called them, first of all, to establish a new relationship with him, a relationship that implied not only learning his doctrine, but imitating his lifestyle and identifying with his destiny. Secondly, he called them to be sent to announce and make present the reign of God. The spread of this announcement is urgent, and for this reason he wanted to surround himself with a group of disciples who would help him in his task. He chose them carefully and spent much time instructing them by his word and by his life.

b) Following Up

Jesus' call to his disciples was, first of all, an invitation to follow him. *Jesus addressed this invitation to various groups of people, who formed three concentric circles around him*. In the first we find the group of the Twelve. The second includes other followers who were accompanying him assiduously. The third, finally, was formed by those who accepted his message and tried to live it without abandoning their families and their occupations.

Many of Jesus' teachings on discipleship are valid for these three groups, but there are some that are addressed only to his closest followers. It is in the latter that the originality of Jesus' discipleship and the profound meaning of this way of life is best perceived. According to these teachings, to be a disciple of Jesus means, first of all, "to follow him" (Lk 9:60; Mk 1:18; 10:28), "to go after him" (Mk 1:17,20). These expressions have a triple meaning in the traditions on discipleship.

They refer, in the first place, to the physical following, which consists in going after Jesus in order to learn from him. They also describe a vital attitude that consists of sharing his lifestyle. And finally they contain a life project, which is characterized by sharing the destiny of Jesus.

The first aspect of follow-up appears continually in the Gospel accounts. The discipleship of Jesus, unlike other forms of discipleship at that time, implied *continuous living together*, because the disciples not only had to learn some teachings, but also had to be witnesses of the actions in which what Jesus had announced was carried out.

The second dimension of discipleship concerns the lifestyle of the disciples. Following Jesus meant *sharing his lifestyle*. The Gospels have preserved some features of this style of life, which provoked scandal and rejection by his contemporaries: conflict with his own family (cf. Mk 3:20-21. 31-35), his itinerant lifestyle, without a fixed abode (cf. Lk 9:58 par.), his meals with publicans and sinners (cf. Mk 2:15-17), his disrespectful attitude towards certain religious norms and practices, such as the observance of fasting (cf. Mk 2:18-20), sabbatical rest (cf. Mk 2:23-28), or certain norms of ritual purity (cf. Mk 7:1-15).

Jesus' actions and the reactions to his lifestyle give us an idea of what it meant to be his disciple, for those who followed him lived as he lived. They had abandoned their relatives and their occupations to follow him (cf. Mk 1:18,20; 2:14); they accompanied him at meals with publicans and sinners (cf. Mk 2:15); and they transgressed, like him, the Jewish rules on certain religious practices (cf. Mk 2:18,23-24; 7:2,5). This way of life, which went against social norms, provoked rejection and opposition.

The third dimension of discipleship goes beyond the two previous ones, because it determines the life project of the disciples. Following Jesus ultimately meant *sharing his own destiny*. In reality, this third dimension of discipleship is a consequence of the previous one, since by assuming the lifestyle of Jesus the disciples assumed the social rejection that this behavior provoked. The disciples experienced the same rejection as Jesus did by living as he did. This lifestyle led Jesus to the cross, and it was foreseeable that the same thing would happen to the disciples.

The disciples of Jesus refer to this destiny of death that Mark placed after the three announcements of the Passion (cf. Mk 8:34-38; 9:35-37; 10:41-45). In them, together with the exhortation to become the servant and slave of others, there is talk of losing one's life and taking up one's cross. The last of these sayings explicitly relates both things, explaining that the greatest service consists in giving one's life for others: "*For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his own life as a ransom for all*" (Mk 10:45).

Jesus' discipleship was, at the same time, *a concrete way of acting, a lifestyle and an existential project*. This form of discipleship was characterized by an intense relationship with Jesus and by its group character. The centrality of the relationship with Jesus appears already from the moment of the call (he is

the one who calls, and calls whom he wants) and is present in the instructions on discipleship, which consisted in going after him to live like him by sharing his destiny. But at the same time Jesus invited his disciples to live this relationship with him together with others and he gave much importance to relationships within the group formed by his disciples. Therefore, by responding to Jesus' call, the disciples became part of this group, in which they were to live according to the criteria of God's sovereignty. In this way they became a foretaste of the kingdom of God that they were announcing.

c) *Sending*

Jesus called his disciples to follow him and to become fishers of men (cf. Mk 1:17). This means that both *the call and the following were oriented towards mission*. Jesus' intention in calling his disciples was to gather around him a group that would help him in the task of announcing and making present the reign of God.

But Jesus not only asked them to make him present, but sent them to announce his arrival. Moreover, the invitation to make him present within the group he formed with them had as its ultimate purpose this sending. Therefore, in order to properly understand what Jesus' discipleship means, it is necessary to know how he understood the mission entrusted to his disciples.

The idea that Jesus had of this mission can be perceived through the terms with which he designated those sent, the images with which he described the mission and the recipients of that mission.

The *terms that* Jesus used to refer to his envoys did not come from the religious or civil offices of the time, but from common offices. The disciples were called to be fishermen, laborers, or shepherds. Some of these offices even had negative connotations in Jesus' culture. The day laborers, for example, belonged to the lowest stratum of the peasants; they had no land and had to offer themselves as seasonal workers to the owners of the large estate (cf. Mk 20:1-16).

This same temporariness appears in the intense eschatological connotations of the *images* used by Jesus to refer to mission. The image of the harvest is perhaps the clearest of all (cf. Mt 9:37f = Lk 10:2). In the prophets of the Old Testament, this image evokes the definitive intervention of God at the end of history to judge the actions of men (cf. Mt 13:24-70; Rev 14:15). The image of fishing (cf. Mk 1:17) also has connotations of judgment in the OT (cf. Jer 16:16). The same can be said of the promise of a shepherd whom God will raise up to lead His people (cf. Ezek 34:23; 37:24), although this image can be applied better to Jesus than to the disciples (cf. Mt 9:36; Mk 6:34).

All these images speak of an urgent mission, which has as its horizon the definitive intervention of God in history. Jesus announced the beginning of this intervention when he proclaimed: "The kingdom of God has begun to come" (Mk 1:15). The images used to refer to mission are, therefore, consistent with the

central content of Jesus' message. It is not a long-term action, but an urgent task for which there is hardly any time.

4. Guidelines for the pastoral care of vocations

Vocation ministry must be inspired by the discipleship of Jesus, because it is a continuation of that first call to discipleship and mission. Therefore, a better knowledge of the original experience that shaped the relationship of Jesus with his disciples can offer an invaluable contribution to vocation ministry.

In conclusion, we will present some of these traits by suggesting how they might translate into vocation work today:

1. *Jesus' call is part of a larger project: to announce the coming of God's reign. The starting point of that call was a new and intense experience of God, and the goal, to make others participate in this good news. This fact brings us back to the context, to the "from where" and the "for what" of vocation ministry. If it is not born of a deep spiritual experience and does not have a project to propose, it will remain closed in on itself in a narcissistic circle.*
2. *The call of Jesus is directed only to those he wanted, and he did it with a very precise criterion, since he chose people who could carry out the task he wanted to entrust them with. This fact invites us to move from a passive vocation ministry, which focuses all its energy on welcoming those who come, to an active vocation ministry.*
3. *Jesus' call was an invitation to follow him. This following entails being with Jesus to share his lifestyle and his destiny. The most characteristic of this form of discipleship is, therefore, the personal relationship with Jesus. It is, as we have seen, a relationship that aims at sharing his own mission.*
4. *The call of Jesus to follow him lead towards the mission. The relationship of the disciples with him as they followed him was in preparation for the sending. The horizon of the mission is absolutely necessary for any vocation ministry.*

All these elements are related to each other. In order to carry out the mission of announcing and making present the reign of God, a process of formation centered on a personal relationship with Jesus Christ is necessary.

We close this theme with a quote from Pope Francis inspired by the Aparecida Document:

"Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are "disciples" and "missionaries", but rather that we are always "missionary disciples". If we are not convinced, let us look at those first disciples, who, immediately after encountering the gaze of Jesus, went forth to proclaim him joyfully: "We have found the Messiah!" (Jn 1:41).

The Samaritan woman became a missionary immediately after speaking with Jesus and many Samaritans come to believe in him “because of the woman’s testimony” (Jn 4:39). So too, Saint Paul, after his encounter with Jesus Christ, “immediately proclaimed Jesus” (Acts 9:20; cf. 22:6-21). So what are we waiting for?” (Evangelii Gaudium, 120).

Questions for personal and group reflection



1. After what you have read, what do you think being a disciple means?
2. How can we propose to today’s young people the discipleship of Jesus as a way of life?

ANTHROPOLOGY AND VOCATION CULTURE³

Objective

To respond to the need for a certain degree of knowledge about Christian anthropology needed for the task and undertakings of the vocation promoter.

Development of the theme

Pastoral work for vocations, which seeks to promote an ever more adequate and mature response of the person to God's call in Christ, must always be attentive to integrating, as effectively as possible, the proposal of life that comes from God and the existential situation of the person to whom that proposal is addressed.

To achieve this, *pastoral work for vocations needs to have a clear Christian anthropology of reference*, capable of integrating all the useful knowledge about the person coming not only from *Revelation*⁴ and *theological reflection*, but also from the human sciences.

There is a need for an anthropology of the Christian vocation that allows for an understanding of the dynamics of the person who wants to embrace the consecrated life or simply seeks to assume fully his or her Christian life project.

1. Anthropology and Vocation

Vocation is a key term in Christian anthropology. Human life must be conceived as a vocation but, in order to make this possible, two aspects must be deepened:

1. The **call** of God in Christ, which we know through revelation, through the texts of the ecclesiastical magisterium which interpret it with authority, and through theological reflection;
2. The human **dispositions** that favour or condition the reception of that call and the response to it: intelligence, freedom, sin, responsibility, conscience. In the first part of *Gaudium et Spes*, the Second Vatican Council points out the advantages of this second aspect. And it recommends *that the human sciences be sufficiently known* to lead the faithful "to a life of purer and more mature faith.

The study of *human dispositions* implies the study of man's *motivation* as well. An existential and free response to God presupposes that in the motivation of human action there is a point of contact between the call and the response. Only

³ This theme is fundamentally taken from C. BRESCIANI, "Anthropology", in: E. BORILE, L. CABBIA, AND L. MAGNO (DIR.), *Diccionario de Pastoral Vocacional*, Salamanca 2005.

⁴ Revelation" means all that God has revealed of Himself to humanity through Sacred Scripture and the living Tradition of the Church.

in this way can human freedom be conceived in the response to God's vocation. The reason for following God's will can be none other than a disinterested and unconditional love for him (cf. Mt 22:37-40), a love which is free, as far as possible, from utilitarian and defensive motivations.

2. Orientation of the person at the end

A fundamental fact of Christian anthropology, especially if it is considered in the light of the vocation in Christ, is that *people, in themselves, have an orientation to the end* (Alfaro, 1973). In order to know who man is, one must start from the end to which he is oriented from his deepest being. To the question of who is man, *Gaudium et Spes* responds by referring to his vocation: "*Man was created 'in the image of God', capable of knowing and loving his Creator*" (no. 12). He was created by God in Christ and with a view to Christ so that he might know and love the Father in him.

In the mystery of the Incarnate Word, Christian anthropology finds a new light to understand the mystery of man: "*Christ, the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, fully reveals man to himself and reveals to him the greatness of his vocation*". Consequently, anthropology can only be *Christocentric*.

Man is, by his existential condition, a called being. And the call inscribed in his nature is what guides him to the realization of his end as a creature. "God created man in his image and *likeness*. In calling him into existence out of love, he has also called him to *love*". Christian love is at the same time and inseparably love of God and love of neighbor, and it demands from man a permanent self-transcendence. By transcending himself in love, he fully realizes not only his Christian being, but simply his *human being*.

In other words, the Christian is called to holiness, to live in union with God, imitating Jesus Christ in order to obtain the eternal glory he has promised to those who carry his cross and follow him on the path of charity.

It is impossible to conceive of the person from a Christian perspective if one excludes that he is *ultimately destined for the resurrection*. The person's vocation to life, to communion with God through Christ in the Holy Spirit through the Church, will be consummated and fully realized in his or her participation in the eternal glory of the Trinitarian communion.

3. The meaning of life

The question about man is posed to himself as the question about the meaning of life. And he does so with questions like these: Is life worth living, is it worth taking life seriously, living for what, for what reason, what justifies *taking life seriously*, and *what is the future that it announces to me?* These questions demonstrate not only the need to give meaning to human life in order to live it humanly, but also that

the primacy corresponds to the future, to the purpose. These questions can be answered because human life *already* has a *meaning*. Man can only make his life fully meaningful if he discovers the meaning that has already been given to it in God's creation.

4. The unity of the person

For a person to realize himself, he must obey a truth that transcends the person himself, but is hidden within him. Obeying his personal structure as a creature, which is at once - and inseparably - *bodily and spiritual*. When this obedience is lacking, the person disintegrates into an unconnected and manipulable series of partial drives towards particular goods that are not harmoniously interwoven in a significant life project⁵.

5. Basic anthropological stress

Man's life is characterized by a basic tension, for he is a *being that is contradictory and divided in itself*. The final orientation to self-transcendence in the gift of self is inserted into the concrete reality of man, marked by a series of profound imbalances due to concupiscence, the inheritance of sin. There are many contrasting elements in man. Weak and sinful, he often does what he does not want and does not do what he wants, so he is divided within himself.

This contradiction is not due to environmental conditioning, but is intrinsic to human nature. Man is born already divided, and therefore this division is not due to society, nor to education, nor to the environment. There is in him a desire for infinity to which he tends with his ideals, but he is also attached to the immediate finite reality.

There's in it:

a *self* that gives itself to others, that rejoices and suffers for them,
and another *me* stuck to himself who only cares about himself.

In the person there is interaction but also conflict between these *two aspects of his or her self*: the self-centred self and the self that transcends itself.

6. Freedom

Human freedom is a *freedom situated in the midst of a series of conditions internal and external to the person*. The human sciences can contribute to understanding the freedom of the person, but Christian anthropology cannot forget that it is a *liberated freedom that needs to be continually liberated through a life of charity*. Human life cannot be conceived as a vocation without deepening the action of the Spirit who gives freedom.

⁵ There will always remain, in his heart, that yearning to be that has not been satisfied, because he will feel himself to be a fraud, with failures, incomplete.

The relationship between the divine action of the person and human freedom has always been an object of reflection in Catholic theology since St. Augustine. It is the relationship between nature and grace. In the disputes that have taken place in the history of theology, the magisterium of the Church has always defended *freedom as an essential element of human nature* -even in the state of fallen nature due to original sin-, *although without denying its weakness*.

Due to the conditions in which it is situated, we have, on the one hand, the *essential freedom* as a person's original datum. This freedom refers rather to the inner act of will that chooses a certain goal because the person decides that way. And, on the other hand, *effective freedom*, which is the capacity that one really has to carry out the option that has been made, and which can be hindered or diminished by conditions internal or external to the person. This applies to any option. It can be influenced, diminished or blocked by various factors, guilty or not.

The most important of these are: *objective knowledge* and possession of Christian values; the *capacity of the person* to allow himself to be attracted by them; possible psychopathological or characterological limits; unconscious psychological conflicts that operate in fact in an unconscious way in the person and that induce him to interpret reductively the integral vocation to love and the commitments inherent in the Christian life; the very *corporeal structure of man*; the *pressures of the persons* or groups in which the person is inserted.

If there is no freedom to transcend in the concrete choices, it is impossible for the person to live his or her dedication to God in his or her real attitudes and behaviour. This leads to the affirmation that the full realization of the Christian vocation depends on the effective freedom of the person.

7. Social dimension of the person

Christian anthropology maintains that man is a *social being*. Human life not only has an intimate dimension, but also - and essentially - a social, community, and ecclesial projection. The person grows in all his dimensions and responds to his vocation through his relationship with others, his mutual duties and his dialogue with his brothers and sisters.

Charity is the law of the new people, gathered by the love of the Father. Man is called to love and to love his neighbor. Thus, while realizing his personal vocation, he builds the community of persons. His spirituality can only be communitarian and ecclesial.

From the social character of the person it is clear that the response to a personal vocation cannot be independent of the call to be a people. This is why Lumen Gentium says: "God wanted to sanctify and save people, not individually and in isolation, without any connection between them, but to make of them a people that would truly recognize him and serve him with a holy life".

An individualistic anthropology is unfounded if life is conceived as a vocation in Christ to the love of God and neighbor in accord with God's commandment.

8. The person called to continuous conversion

Man's growth in Christian maturity requires moving from a self-centered system of motivation (selfishness and sin) to one that is open to transcendence in the gift of self. This happens gradually within the framework of personality development and requires personal commitment in placing one's action under the influence of the grace that calls for conversion (intellectual, moral, religious conversion).

We conclude with a text to close this theme and to finish understanding the importance of Christian anthropology - knowing what man is according to the design of the Creator - for the pastoral care of vocations:

"The anti-vocation anthropology of man without vocation gives reason for the urgency of recreating a vocation culture. And it is important to think that the problems of pastoral work for vocations are not only problems of the Church without priests and consecrated persons. It is a problem of man and of the conception of man! For this reason it is important not to develop a vocation ministry that simply seeks to fill the seminaries and novitiates. No. Properly, pastoral work for vocations is the vocation of pastoral work today, since it is a question of modifying this anthropology and deactivating this conception that places man himself at the centre of life. It is about understanding that man has been called, and has been called by the Other - who is God - who puts himself at the centre of life and who is the only one who can call... and in fact is the one who has called me to life"⁶.

Questions for personal and group reflection



1. So why is knowledge of Christian anthropology necessary for vocation ministry? Can you explain it in a simple way?
2. How do the young people you know understand the concept of freedom? How do the adults understand it? What can the Christian vision of freedom bring?

⁶ J. C. Martos, *Open your heart. Vocational promotion in difficult and formidable times*, Claretian Publications, Madrid 2007, 32.

VOCATION CULTURE⁷

Objective

To approach, as pastoral agents, the concept of “vocation culture” so important in the Vocation Ministry proposed by the Magisterium of the Church and which constitutes a key element of IVAR.

Development of the theme

Evangelization and vocation are two inseparable elements. Moreover, the criterion of authenticity of a good evangelization is the capacity to raise up vocations, to bring to maturity of evangelical life those introduced to it, making those who are evangelized participate completely to the point of making them disciples, missionaries, witnesses and apostles. We feel today, more strongly than ever, the challenge of making ecclesial pastoral work truly vocation-oriented, thus promoting a “culture of vocation”, that is, a way of conceiving and facing life as a gift received freely from God for a project or a mission, according to his plan (Cf. Pascual Chávez Villanueva, sdb).

1. “Culture”

The Second Vatican Council, in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church, *Gaudium et Spes*, gave a description of *culture* in number 53, referring to it as everything with which man sharpens and develops the many spiritual and bodily qualities that enable him to attain a full and true humanity. Pope Paul VI in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* took a step forward, calling on the whole Church to face the task of evangelizing culture and cultures.

The concluding document of the Third General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean in Puebla (Mexico) took up the ideas of *Gaudium et Spes* and the question of Paul VI, and in number 386 described the word culture as “*the particular way in which, within a people, men cultivate their relationship with nature, with each other and with God, so that they may reach a true and fully human level*”. The same idea was taken up again in the *Aparecida Document*, in number 476.

Therefore, culture is formed and transformed based on the continuous historical and vital experience of the people; it is transmitted through the process of generational tradition. Man, then, is born and develops within a given society, conditioned and enriched by a particular culture; he receives it, modifies it creatively and continues to transmit it. Culture is a historical and social reality (cf. *Puebla Document*, 392).

⁷ This topic is an extract from the article of Br. Fabián López Martín OAR, “From the ‘Vocation Promoter’ to the ‘Vocation Community’”, in *Recollectio* 38 (2015) 255-277.

Culture is therefore a whole complex that includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, laws, customs and all other dispositions and habits acquired by man as a member of a society (E. B. Tylor). Culture entails knowledge, but, above all, it has to do with the way in which a society places itself in the world and in a given era; that is, it has to do with a style of being a person, with the selection of certain values of self-realization (in other words, prioritizing and making flesh those values), with the meaning given to existence (Javier Garrido, ofm).

From these descriptions of *culture* we can distinguish at least four key elements to be taken into account.

Culture:

1. **is** a production of human interaction and is made concrete in the mode and style of a specific community, with its legends, myths, rites, traditions, etc.
2. **functions** as a frame of reference that allows for the ordering of life and the interpretation of the different human experiences of peoples.
3. **is not** a static reality, but a dynamic one, since human beings create culture, interpret it, feed on it, transmit it and enrich it over the years.
4. **It entails** a strong personal involvement to live according to the way one believes and on which everyone more or less agrees.

It is this concept of culture that we want to assume in order to speak of “culture of vocation”. Therefore, we can already indicate that the “*culture of vocation*” is *not a culture parallel to the present culture*, but a proposal, certainly cultural, but that is proper to the Gospel. The culture of vocation proposes the Gospel to the historical-sociological culture within the perspective of vocation.

The dynamic that unleashes this culture of vocation is the same that unleashes the divine Word which, like a seed placed in the heart of human civilization, unfolds and expands man’s culture and directs it towards its best possibility; it makes it a culture of love. The “culture of vocation” places this seed of love in the heart of man, which leads him to set out on the path of fullness. Thus the “culture of vocation” proposes living in God, who is love.

2. What do we mean when we talk about “culture of vocation”

Starting from the II Latin American Congress on Vocations, the expression “culture of vocation” was fixed, principally, in three dynamic nuclei: a vocation mentality or intellectual component, a vocation sensitivity or affective component, and in a vocation praxis or style of life. The vocation *mentality* refers to the theological truth of vocation (*logos*), the vocation *sensitivity* to the subjectivity of the call (*pathos*), and the vocation *praxis* to the gestures that make it credible and sustain it in space and time (*ethos*). To the first nucleus corresponds the theology of vocation, to the second vocation spirituality and to the third vocation pedagogy.

2.1. Theology of Vocation

Vocation theology, then, refers to reflection on man on the basis of the faith contained and expressed in the Scriptures and in the tradition of the Church. This believing reflection on man assumes that he does not give himself life, but that Someone thought of him and loved him, and, because He thought of him and loved him he came into existence. And by the simple fact of his existence, he has a very personal and untransferable mission in this life. And it is in discovering it and in orienting himself towards it that his true happiness depends:

“[...] man will be happy and fully realized by being at his post, accepting the divine educational proposal, with all the fear and trembling that such a demand arouses in his heart of flesh” (In verbo tuo, 16).

Life, from this point of view, is a gift of God which, in order to be fully realized, has to unfold into a good that is shared and given to others with the same logic with which God gave it: that of gratuity and gratitude. Therefore, a vocation is a free call, open to gratuity and to the fullness of the person. And the human being does not reach his fullness here in this way of existence, however good it may be, until he reaches the place of his definitive rest, there where God invites and attracts him while he exists - the happy life beside Him:

“Lord, You have made us for You and our heart is restless until it rests in You” (St. Augustine, Confessions I, 1,1).

2.2. Vocation Spirituality

By vocation spirituality we refer to the sensitivity of faith that triggers the understanding of vocation theology. If the theology of vocation starts from life as a gift, vocation spirituality returns to life and its interior dynamic where that gift is recreated, appreciated, celebrated and communicated to others. The Christian life is directed towards the person of faith encountering personally the living and true God, made flesh, word and face in Jesus Christ, and with him initiating a relationship of friendship and responding freely to the particular call that he addresses to him.

2.3 Pedagogy of vocation

The pedagogy of vocation is related to the centrality of faith journeys in Christian initiation, evangelization and vocation promotion. The concept of “itinerary” refers above all to the sequence, ordered and successive, of stages and strategies which, at least as a hypothesis, ensures the attainment of a given goal. The journey is the complete project of the dynamism of life and of life as vocation⁸.

⁸ Project understood as a plan that awaits execution. It is NOT a possible idea, but it implies “a way of doing things” to correspond to the mission.

3. Conditions for the possibility of “vocation culture”

3.1. What you need to know (the vocation kerygma)

In his message for the 15th Day of Prayer for Vocations, Pope Paul VI said: “Let no one, through our fault, be ignorant of what he must know, in order to guide his own life in a different and better direction”. This is the delicate point in the work of vocation promotion, since the Church, Mother and Teacher, in the service she gives to evangelisation, must seek various ways of respectfully indicating to the people of today what they need to know, in order to be able to make the important decisions of life in the exercise of their own freedom (cf. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 80). This is basically what the vocation proposal or proclamation of the vocation kerygma consists of.

The *kerygma* of vocation lies in the integral **announcement of** God's call as a work that he carries out in us and, from faith, it is addressed to all people and, in particular, to young people, as Good News capable of giving meaning to their lives and opening up horizons of freedom. It includes the proposal of an interpretation of his existence and of new attitudes that each one in his circumstances has to put into practice.

The concrete content of the vocation kerygma can be summarized as follows: “Your life is not the result of chance or error, it has originated in love and has been created by God. Therefore you can be sure that you are unconditionally and definitely loved. This original love has sealed your existence with an order in accord with the model of Christ. Your life has an objective meaning that you need to discover little by little. It is a gift that does not get exhausted in yourself, because it flows into others. Developing that gift is your task. When you assume this design and this direction, your freedom acquires a new, absolutely original meaning”⁹. This is, in short, the proposal that is announced in vocation promotion as Good News that gives a definitive direction to life.

Pope Benedict XVI, in his first encyclical *God is Love*, pointed out in this regard that “one does not begin to be a Christian by an ethical decision or a great idea, but by the encounter with an event, with a Person, which gives life a new horizon and, with it, a decisive direction. What is fundamental, then, is to know and be able to come to love God, with all one's heart, with all one's soul, with all one's strength (*Deut 6:5*). Those who make room for Jesus Christ in their lives find the strength and deep motivation to make courageous decisions, and can open themselves up to the future with hope.

In short, the aim is to present the Good News that gives life and hope to the man of all times; a Beautiful News that is capable of filling his heart and opening up new horizons.

⁹ E. LAVANIEGOS GONZÁLEZ and R. BARRÓN PORCAYO, *El Kerigma vocacional. Materials for a first announcement of vocation*, Mexico, 2009.

3.2. To whom should the vocation kerygma be made known

Therefore, we know what is necessary to know in order to awaken, discern, cultivate and accompany vocations in the Church. But who are the recipients of this Good News that brings joy and happiness? Let us think of the group that is most directly the target of vocation work: adolescents and young people. Who are the young people?

There are several sociological analyses of young people carried out by very competent people. However, any detailed analysis of the reality of youth falls short of approaching the specific young people we meet along the way who come to our churches. Even for the “culture of vocation”, I dare say that more than knowing about youth, one must *know how to deal with young people*. What makes the difference between “knowing about young people” and “knowing from young people” is the quality time we spend listening to them and meeting them.

In this regard, Miguel Marquez Calle, O.C.D., says the following: *“It is not easy to approach the world of young people and offer to accompany and illuminate their inner search. Who dares to walk with them on the path of exploration, of doubt, of chaos, of not knowing, of disappointment, of discovery? Who will cross with them this rocky terrain and so many times without answers to arrive at the shore of their own discoveries, of themselves, of God, of life? Where are the teachers who dare this undertaking? We need mystagogues - those who introduce us to the Mystery of God -, vital initiators on the complex, unfathomable path of the inner search”*.

A key aspect in the “culture of vocation” is the necessary articulation that must exist between vocation ministry and youth ministry, in such a way that all the efforts of youth ministry must converge in orienting the young person towards an option for Christian life in a specific vocation of service in the Church. Youth ministry is in itself vocation and vocation ministry cannot exist on the fringes of youth ministry. From this point of view, the horizon of our occupation is the pastoral care of young people for vocations. Although we can say it with complete confidence, the pastoral care of vocations is a specific task, whether or not it is linked to the pastoral care of young people.

Since this approach to pastoral practice is the ideal, the truth is that the reality of youth slips through our fingers very easily, because precisely young people are the way they are, it is not easy to make them the recipients of what we know and what we believe to be significant news for them. This is the crux of the *matter*: to make them recipients of the Good News of God’s love that awakens them to joy.

Pope Francis gave a nod to youth ministry in the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the new evangelization, *Evangelii gaudium*. He acknowledges that it is not easy to approach young people, but points out that they are precisely the “street people of the faith” because of the ease with which they create strong bonds of fraternity, show solidarity with the evils that afflict our world and embark generously on works of charity. And, says Francis, it is urgent that they be given

more prominence in the believing community, for young people are “happy to bring Jesus Christ to every corner, to every square, to every corner of the earth.”

If trust in God who calls functions as a lung that oxygenates the pastoral care of vocations, the other lung is trust in the generous heart of young people:

“Youth is the window through which the future enters the world. It is the window, and therefore it imposes great challenges on us. Our generation will live up to the promise that is in every young person when it knows how to offer them space” (Pope Francis).

Questions for personal and group reflection



1. Do you clearly find elements of a vocation culture in your social environment?
2. What actions can be done to enhance the PLOW (ARAR) phase of our IVAR?

VOCATION THEOLOGY: THE GOD WHO CALLS¹⁰

Objective

To deepen the first basic element of every theological foundation of pastoral work for vocations: that God the Father is the origin of every vocation and man is the being capable of responding to it.

Development of the theme

The theme of vocation takes shape from the original experiences of the encounter between God and man narrated in the Bible. The human being recognizes himself in the acceptance - or fails when he tries to affirm himself in his denial - of the encounter with God that precedes him and challenges him. The theme of vocation indicates not only the primacy of God in the existence of the person, but in the way in which a person affirms himself, makes himself experienced, suggests himself, seeks himself and provokes a response from the person himself.

It affirms all this through the metaphor of the call: a simple form of experience capable of marking style and symbolizing non-univocal existential itineraries.

1. God Speaks and Calls: Facts from the Bible

a) Old Testament

The theme can be recognized in the OT either from specific episodes or from the verb *qr'* (*to shout, to call*), including the sense of calling by name, of giving a name. It is considered a vocation when the Lord calls someone. This vocation is a choice, temporary or permanent, for a task, for a mission. After the exile the theme applies to all of Israel.

The community *called* to worship is designated as *miqra* (from the verb *qr'*), the (holy) convocation: in this direction will be the Church (*ekklésía*). The election of the people, their call to a covenant, which is gladly spoken of in spousal terms, opens up the idea of the gratuitousness of the vocation to holiness, a theme which will prevail in the NT. Both the relationship of *people to individuals* and that of *mission to holiness* are decisive for any theology of vocation.

Divine vocation is creative. The story of the Exodus (*"I have called my son out of Egypt"*: Hos 11:1) shows how God makes a non-people become a people, whose existence is due to the act of ownership by God claiming it for his own as "his" people. The creation of the world is also the fruit of the word of God who commands creatures to exist, ready to obey his call (cf. Bar 3:33-35). The divine vocation opens up a future for human beings by giving them a name, like Abraham, Sarah, even John and Jesus, and later Peter.

¹⁰ This theme is fundamentally taken from T. CITRINI, "Vocation (theology of)", in: E. BORILE, L. CABBIA, AND V. MAGNO (DIR.), *Diccionario de Pastoral Vocacional*, Salamanca 2005, 114-1150. 35

b) New Testament

The NT knows a wide range of very original vocation stories: stories that, by their very clarity, are exemplary. Especially clear are those in which the protagonist is Jesus himself, in whom the voice of God who calls finds its maximum expression and immediacy. The Gospel stories present unanimously, although in different ways, the call of the first disciples of Jesus, and later that of the Twelve; other stories are also presented at successive moments of their ministry.

It is true that none of these vocations could be consolidated without the experience of Easter (passion, death and resurrection). This means that the clarity of the vocation experience of the first called must be understood within the history of their faith. Since discernment and interpretation of the person of Jesus are indispensable for the faith of all, the difference between the vocation experience of those and ours must be placed in the original relationship that had in them the recognition of Jesus and that of their own vocation and mission.

c) The vocation of Jesus

Biblical research has recently highlighted another decisive moment in the theology of vocation in the NT: that of the vocation of Jesus in the context of his baptism in the Jordan.

The NT presents Jesus as the *bearer of a vocation centred on the realisation of the will of the Father*; his filial obedience, his listening to the heart of the Father, and his effective dedication out of love for mankind are the clearest testimony that his life was marked by a call and a response, by vocation and mission.

To this we must add that Jesus himself *awakens the consciences of many Jews around him to a life understood as a vocation*. His call to follow him resounds in the Gospel as a new form of discipleship: now the true Master asks for complete availability and dedication, not to a doctrine, but to his own person¹¹.

2. The person called

All that has been said up to now, and what will be said in the future, presupposes the dynamic character of the concept of “vocation”, which is intrinsically founded on the express act of the verb *vocare*, to call, which, as such, presupposes someone who calls and someone who is called. Therefore, if every vocation in the active sense is of God, in the “recipient” sense (if we do not wish to speak of the passive sense) it is the vocation of the person called.

“Vocation starts from a You and not from the qualities or character of the subject, much less from his aspirations. The ‘you’ takes the initiative and goes out to meet an ‘I’, located in history, which moreover does not have the necessary means to carry out the mission to which it is called. The vocation in the Bible has its roots in the dialogical experience between a “you” that calls and an “I” that

¹¹ Cf. X. LEON-DUFOUR, “Vocation”, en: *Diccionario de vocabulario bíblico*, Barcelona 2001.

responds. It cannot be confused with the natural inclination or attraction of the person, even if it is sometimes a sign and a point of departure. In the horizon of biblical faith, vocation is born of the encounter between divine freedom and human freedom; and it develops as communion and mutual self-giving"¹².

3. *Vocation, communion, mission*

Communion and mission, essential dimensions of the mystery of the Church, are intimately involved in every vocation.

God's covenant with the *ekklesía* (church) of those he calls is confirmed and renewed. Every believer, however, can recognize a personal vocation within a mission that belongs to all: the Spirit given to all multiplies the charisms for the evangelization of humanity and for reciprocal *diakonia* (service). God always calls to send; this affects everyone. Some vocations engage in ministry, others seem like the cascading of the same. They are likewise fruitful but not as emphasized and urgent. Both imply dedication to God and fruitfulness in favor of the neighbor, the Church, the mission, and, as such, are essential.

4. *The God who calls*

The theology of vocation is nothing more than the reflection on the mystery of a God who calls, an Eternal God who calls, and at the same time, it is an approach to the mystery of man as a being called, summoned by the voice of the Eternal who spoke definitively in Christ, the first call.

We can close this theme with three texts from the II Latin American Continental Congress on Vocations that refer to vocation theology:

"God calls because he loves, he calls loving and when he is calling he loves. Consequently, vocation is a revelation of the love of God, from which it follows that there is no vocation without God and without love and that only from this God who loves and calls can one give what He only gives: love" (54).

"The God revealed in the Holy Scriptures is the one who "eternally calls". We believe in a God who calls in a movement inherent in his identity as God of Love, manifested in the Word and his action. Vocation, then, is a manifestation of the divine identity, a theophany, and an invitation to live it in Jesus Christ; a revelation of God that must be respected, valued, and accepted, through a theological word that comes from Him, as a call, and an anthropological word that depends on man, as a response. It is the dialogue between the freedoms of the Creator and the creature" (55).

¹² A. BRAVO, Follow Christ. *De la vocación a las vocaciones*, Salamanca 2009, 13.

“Vocation theology is Trinitarian in the sense that the Father calls for the realisation of a human and historical project on the triple relationship of origins (creation): theological, fraternal and apostolic; the Son calls to a missionary discipleship that converts the following into the announcement of his redemptive mystery; the Holy Spirit enables us to love as God loves” (56).

Questions for personal and group reflection



1. Is it clear from the text read that every vocation must be considered from a theological point of view? If you had to explain it as you have read it, how would you explain it?
2. If you don't understand it, ask yourself how you can better understand it. Would you talk to someone, look up for more information in a good book or on the Internet?
3. What role do you think the Bible and the Church's Magisterium play in the formation of vocation ministers?

CHRIST, REASON AND MODEL OF EVERY VOCATION¹³

Objectives

Approaching the figure of Christ, both as a call from the Father and as a model of every vocation, recognizing that every Christian vocation is only lived out through a special relationship with his person.

To deepen the most important features of Christ's way of life: chastity, poverty and obedience, since every vocation minister must understand them and make them known.

Development of the theme

1. Understanding the vocation of the person

One of the greatest problems of man today, despite the key position he holds in the scientific world, is the search for his identity in the face of the loss of meaning in his life. That man has lost his identity must be related to the loss of the meaning of life that his "vocation" contains.

In *biblical anthropology*, the understanding of the person has an indispensable vocation accent that is due to the creative action of God through the "Word". The human being is not only created, like all things, "with" the Word, but is created as an "interlocutor" of the Word. The vocation element is part of him from the first moment he comes into existence.

Man appears, then, as the privileged being whom God "calls" to life, to whom he "addresses the Word" and from whom he expects an answer to this Word.

Man is "called to life" to live in communion with God (GS 21). For this reason he is trained to dialogue with him (GS 19), to respond consciously and freely (GS 17), to collaborate and be creative (LG 62; AA 16). Man has in himself the orientation that constitutes his human growth and forms with all other men and women a single family for the promotion of one another through dialogue and self-giving (GS 24-26).

In the search for his own identity and in a better understanding of himself and the meaning of human life, the role of Christ seems to be increasingly decisive. For in him, and in him alone, as *Gaudium et Spes* says, "the mystery of man is made clear... Christ, the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father, fully reveals man to man himself and reveals to him the greatness of his vocation" (n. 22). This new vocation understanding of the person in the light of the revelation of Christ is realised above all in knowing *Christ as called and sent by the Father*.

¹³ Este tema está fundamentalmente tomado de M. BORDONI, "Cristo", en: E. BORILE, L. CABBIA, Y L. MAGNO (DIR.), *Diccionario de Pastoral Vocacional*, Salamanca 2005.

2. *Christ, the first call*

We can say that the fundamental text of the call of Jesus as Son and Servant in view of his mission to evangelize the world is, for the Synoptics, the passage of baptism (Mk 1:9-11; Mt 3:13-17; Lk 3:21-22).

The Gospel account of the baptismal vocation of Jesus, which takes up the old models of prophetic vocations, contains absolutely new features, in the sense that the “beloved” Son himself is the one “called” and “sent” by the Father as a witness to an infinite and merciful love for the world, and animated and guided by his Spirit of peace (the symbol of the dove, Mk 1:10). This baptismal vocation expresses and anticipates the full meaning of Jesus’ mission, which the Baptist defines as a baptism in the Holy Spirit (cf. Mk 1:8). In the Gospel of John, Jesus is also presented as called and sent. Jesus himself is defined as the one “chosen by the Father to be sent into the world” (Jn 10:36).

Now, what is the mission of the “sent” Son? What is the objective of this “personal vocation” that is fulfilled in the mission of the incarnation of Jesus? The mission of Jesus is to bring God, as Father, closer to people. He comes to reveal the face of the Father, bringing him close to them as a person who makes them feel his *call*, his *filial vocation to love*. In short, with the incarnation and all his loving self-giving, Jesus seeks that men and women discover their vocation as sons and daughters in the Son.

3. *Chastity, obedience and poverty in Jesus*

There are three important dimensions of Jesus’ life. For these are not merely the stereotypical behaviour or conduct of the Master of Nazareth, but *three aspects of his personality and his way of life which have made his life have a clear and transparent loving orientation to God, his Father, and to men, his brothers*.

Consecrated life in particular, a specific vocation in the Church over the centuries, has seen in these three dimensions a way of making a permanent memory of His style of life within the Church and a way of living the total following. We are referring to chastity, poverty and obedience.

Now, all believers should know how and in what way Jesus lived these three special dimensions of his life. Lay people, consecrated persons and priests cannot help but wonder what is special about these three dimensions of life when they are offered to God and are a sign of total surrender to Him.

Now, let us see how these three notes are present in the life of Jesus:

1. *Jesús Jesus is chaste, his body and his heart are for the Father and for the mission.*

Jesus’ celibacy is not an anecdote of his life nor a mere moral virtue, even in his time it was far from it. Nor is it a rejection or contempt for married life. In the Gospels it is easy to notice that Jesus decides that his whole life, body and

soul, should be oriented, or rather polarized, towards mission, evangelization. The world of his emotions and affections is not annulled, far from it, but all of him, all his energies and desires, are redirected from a deep experience of choice and indescribable filial love. The virginity-chastity of Jesus is an affective and effective love for his Father and the mission; a compassionate and prophetic passion for the Kingdom.

2. Jesus is poor, he has stripped himself of everything unnecessary to enrich us with his love.

Jesus' austere and sober life and his option for the poorest in his social environment are the most transparent sign of his self-divestment and abasement (cf. Phil 2:5-11). Being a servant is God's way of becoming poor and coming to redeem what seemed insurmountable. His poverty is the greatest wealth of humanity (cf. 2 Cor 8:1-15). Hence, poverty, insofar as it deprives Jesus, is a way of salvation forever. Only this way is there space for the desire and the will to reassess our relationship with material goods and the goods of the heart.

In turn, those who follow him must walk a path of radical renunciation¹⁴. "Jesus "opts" to need the apostles, leaving it to them to continue his ministry. In this way, he himself continues to lead a path of poverty by accepting to live "exposed": the words and gestures of the Twelve, their proclamation and their relationships can certainly confirm or deny what he is or what he announces. But on this point, Jesus does not seem to hesitate at all: at the time he had "established" the Twelve; now he sends them as his representatives, poor among the poor, without sparing them the demands of a journey of maturation that will have as its goal their full configuration with him in the extreme and yet fruitful nakedness of Golgotha"¹⁵.

3. Jesus is obedient, his whole life was one of continual listening to the voice of the Father and seeking to assert himself in his will.

Obedience is, first and foremost, listening, not submission. If Jesus is a model of obedience, it is because he has known how to listen to the voice of the Father and to decipher it even in moments of pain and suffering (cf. Heb 5:8). Jesus' obedience is the greatest testimony to his fidelity to God's plan and to the rescue of mankind. That is why there is no obedience without listening and without this double fidelity.

These three aspects of Jesus' life, for some, are the most convenient way to realize themselves as persons and offer a service of love to humanity. Whoever discovers that his heart is made for God and for service, can also recognize in this choice of love that involves being chaste, poor and obedient, the lifestyle that frees him to be happy and to make others happy.

¹⁴ It should be made clear that this is not dispossession for the sake of misery. Rather, it is the decision to live without needing anything that implies power; in this way, Jesus is also recognizing God as the One who will give his children everything they need at the moment they need it because of his great provident love.

¹⁵ G. PEREGO, *New Testament and Consecrated Life*, Ed. San Pablo, Madrid 2010, 193.

"It is the Spirit who arouses the desire for a full response; it is He who guides the growth of such a desire, bringing the positive response to maturity and then sustaining its faithful realization; it is He who forms and shapes the spirit of those called, configuring them to Christ chaste, poor and obedient, and moving them to accept his mission as their own. By allowing themselves to be guided by the Spirit on an unceasing path of purification, they become, day after day, Christian persons, the prolongation in history of a special presence of the Risen Lord" (Vita Consecrata, 19).

Questions and points for personal and group reflection



1. Toda Every person is called to life and only his reason for being is explained in the light of Christ, the Incarnate Word.
2. Have you ever heard of Christ's "first call"? What does it mean to be people baptized in His Name?
3. Did you know that Jesus lived as a celibate, poor and in total availability to God by being obedient? How does knowing this help you to live your own vocation?

VOCATION PROMOTION AND THE FIGURE OF THE VOCATION PROMOTER¹⁶

Objective

To deepen the concept of promotion and vocation promoter in order to develop an effective work in our Vocation Promotion Teams.

Development of the theme

1. What is vocation promotion?

a) The figure of vocation promotion

Promotion refers above all to the action with which one tries to give a soul (*animate or give life*) to something in general or to someone.

Vocation promotion" can be defined as *an ecclesial action which seeks to highlight the call which God, in Christ, makes to every person.*

Then we must add that in vocation promotion multiple processes converge that can be read from different and complementary perspectives. Above all, it will be necessary to capture and highlight the vocative action (promotion) of God. And, in so far as this same action is expressed in the reality of the Church, vocation promotion will be the object of specific consideration in the sphere of pastoral praxis, coming also to make use of a series of competencies of a scientific character, such as psycho-pedagogical techniques of promotion¹⁷.

b) Promotion in a theological-spiritual sense

We can distinguish between two complementary levels of promotion: *spiritual promotion*, which describes the creative and foundational action of the Spirit of Jesus, and another of *pastoral promotion*, through which the believer allows himself to be configured and led by that same Spirit. In this way it becomes evident that the Holy Spirit, who always animates the believing community, sets in motion a primary vocation promotion. To reach this primary level of vocation promotion means, then, to grasp the value and the limits of a consequent vocation ministry.

A properly animated pastoral work for vocations will never have the competence to call, which is something proper of the Spirit (Jn 3, 8), but to be at the service of His *action as a voice, in the sense of continually re-claiming* believers to Him, thus allowing His voice and His Word to resound unceasingly. This is the place where every work of promotion is situated.

¹⁶ This theme is fundamentally taken from W. MAGNIN, "Vocation Promotion" and MAGNIN, W. "Vocation Promoter", in: E. BORILE, L. CABBIA, AND L. MAGNO (DIR.), *Diccionario de Pastoral Vocacional*, Salamanca 2005.

¹⁷ Even of techniques and resources of the ludia, since who plays, enjoys; and who enjoys, feels in the body that he is looking for something real, not passing. For example: to see that a vocation lived, is enjoyed to the full, makes you personal integral.

c) *Psycho-pedagogical techniques of promotion*

Promotion has its roots in all acts whose purpose is to give life and soul. For this reason, the word “promotion” can have very different uses: theatrical promotion, cultural promotion, promotion of leisure and free time, promotion as a set of techniques and instruments for group work.

Vocation promotion in the pedagogical sense is directed in principle to all age groups, although it is true that its main field of action is boys or girls, adolescents and young people, trying to place the young person himself, with all his wide range of potential, at the center of the action, following a pedagogical line.

d) *Vocation promotion in the documents of the Magisterium*

In the Council documents we find the expression *Christian promotion* to ask for a more lively presence of the laity in temporal realities. On the other hand, in some documents of the Holy See, the verbs favor and promote or coordinate vocations are preferably used. They are also used: *increase, cultivation, awakening, care of vocations*.

It should be added that the changes in the way this sector is called often correspond to a change in the contexts in which it operates. As Fr. Fabián López Martín says:

“It is not strange that the concepts of “vocation promotion”, “vocation promoter”, tend to be substituted by other concepts, such as: “vocation coordinator”, “vocation promoter”, “vocation promotion agents”, etc. In this way the rupture between a specific way of understanding the service of vocation promotion and a new model that is emerging strongly is made clear.

With this replacement of the models of vocation promotion, while appreciating the efforts of so many “vocation promoters” who have given themselves fully to this work, a dynamic relief is joyfully assumed in this great service in the education of the faith. Such a replacement of a previous scheme of work by a new one does not pretend to be the beginning of a better style, but simply tries to be aware of the new circumstances in which we live today and to which we try to offer an adequate response”¹⁸.

e) *Vocation promotion in pastoral practice*

How does vocation promotion fit into pastoral practice? The main target of vocations ministry is almost always the young, who tend to unify in general a large part of the evangelizing action of the particular Church. For this reason it is necessary to create unity in pastoral action so that, through articulated and continuous paths, it contributes to the maturing of the personal vocation. This

¹⁸ LOPEZ MARTIN, F., *New approach to vocational promotion*.

requires starting always from the concrete situation of boys and girls, and of young men and women, tracing a gradual and specific path that allows the word that God has always spoken about them to be realized in the person concerned (Lk 1:38).

Thus we can try to describe the fundamental stages of pastoral work for vocations, in which vocation promotion - as *the phase of solicitation and initial discovery of what God wants for each one* - is something primary and decisive. It is a moment entrusted above all to the Christian community and to the many occasions offered by ordinary pastoral work, in order to encourage an encounter with the different vocation perspectives present in that Christian community.

At this first level, the vocation specification remains still implicit, but it is fundamental to help the young man or woman and the young man or woman to understand that in the Church all are called. It is the moment to discover Christ in a special way, to approach personal and community prayer in the context of a more intense liturgical and sacramental experience, to become aware of the missionary character of the universal and local Church and of the multiplicity and specificity of gifts and vocations, to become sensitive to the needs of the environment in the search for adequate responses. The stage of vocation promotion will be followed by that of guidance, accompaniment and specific vocation formation.

f) New perspectives of vocation promotion

It is important, however, to recognize the weight and conditioning that certain cultural models have even in the most committed experiences of faith, such as in the area of vocation. Only if the Christian community carries out the complex work of vocation promotion will it be able to continue to propose convincingly the Christian following of today's young people.

Two examples:

- Let us think about what it means to propose to the boys, girls and young people of today a new way of understanding the sequela Christi, not as an escape from the world, but as a radical immersion in it.
- Let us think about the capacity of the Christian faith to create authentic forms of belonging, even knowing that we live immersed in a culture of weak, selective and fragmented belonging.

On the other hand, *ordinary life brings with it* a series of dynamics and demands that end up raising issues that have little to do with those that for a long time laid the foundations of Christian spirituality. Let us think, for example, of the rediscovery of subjectivity, of attention to the values of friendship, of corporeality, of the celebrations, of happiness, etc.

There are very concrete situations that belong to the culture in which young people are immersed, such as temporariness, relativity, problematicism,

awareness (resigned or exalted) of one's own finitude as a truth of oneself. Vocation promotion must also face up to these situations today, being very aware of the great ambiguity that permeates these dimensions of today's culture.

2. Who's a vocation promoter?

a) The figure of the vocation promoter

We can advance a sort of definition taking into account everything that was said before about the concept of vocation promotion: *"it is that which carries out in the Christian community its task according to the style and method of vocation promotion"*.

b) Description of the figure

What is generally understood by the term vocation promoter? It is generally understood as an adult believer¹⁹, man or woman, priest, religious or lay faithful. All the baptized are, by definition, potential vocation promoters, although, precisely in virtue of baptism, this service (ministry) can fall, according to the case and in a specific way, to parish priests, parents, catechists or educators to whom the Christian community recognizes or entrusts this task. Whether recourse is had to a vocations promoter or to a vocations team depends on special situations, although all of them can be reduced to the shortage of certain vocations in the Christian community or in institutes of consecrated life.

c) Specific operational contexts

The vocation promoter must be prepared to be a promoter of promoters, because his role is not reduced only to being an agent of vocation ministry, but to sensitizing the community and preparing other pastoral agents to feel a sense of vocation responsibility.

The vocation promoter, endowed with a great capacity for communion, is inserted into the pastoral activities of his parish or school, ensuring that the pastoral action of his community, both as a whole and in the specific interventions of those who work in it, normally takes into account the vocation aspect.

d) At the service of a new vocation culture

The theme of the pastoral care of vocations that affects the very life of the Church today consists basically in making every *believer aware that he is the subject of a vocation response*. It is here that the prophecy of the vocations promoter should be reviewed above all.

¹⁹ Why an adult? Maturity, life experience... is what allows us to encourage, to give life. It is necessary to have "grown up" opportunely and faithfully in order to become a vocation promoter. This does not imply perfection, but a mature disposition towards service.

What interventions could be useful and meaningful? The first element that a vocation promoter should keep in mind is what *language* to use when proposing a vocation today. In the age of typical media manipulation it is not difficult for a kind of “panic of manipulation” to appear even in the activity of the vocation promoter. Because, in the face of the decline of priests and religious, and in the face of the failure of many marriages, it is necessary that someone take charge of doing something, of saving the salvageable. This reasoning reduces the options of life to something purely instrumental. Therefore, new words must be found to speak in a new way about Christian poverty, obedience and chastity, and also about marriage and the mission proper to the Church.

As if to summarize what has been said regarding both the vocation promoter and the task of vocation promotion, let us read the following orientation:

“Without a real change in the mentality of the ecclesial community, the promotion and cultivation of vocations will not prosper as it should. In fact, if every Christian does not live his existence as a vocation, the pastoral care of youth and vocations lacks the necessary support to produce the desired fruits. Without doubt there are currently praiseworthy initiatives and actions to propose to young people a vocation to the consecrated life or to pastoral ministry, but why are they so unfruitful? The answer to the question is complex and cannot be simplified, since many different dimensions come into play; nevertheless, one observation is significantly important for our consideration: the whole People of God does not seem to feel responsible for the vocation concern. This, then, is the urgency that pastoral action must address: to imbue Christian existence with the seal of vocation”²⁰.

Questions for personal and group reflection



1. Can you define in brief words the task of vocation promotion and share it with someone else?
2. Do you consider yourself a vocation promoter? According to what you read, how can you improve your service and in what concrete way?

²⁰ BRAVO A., *Seguir a Cristo, de la vocación a las vocaciones*, Ed. Sígueme, Salamanca 2009, 133.

VOCATION COMMUNITY²¹

Objectives

To generate awareness of the need to form living communities that foster an authentic vocation culture without demanding isolated efforts from a vocation promoter who usually works alone.

Development of the theme

1. Vocation-wise active community

In the Christian and religious community, we should all be vocation promoters. However, the “culture of vocation” remains a pending subject today. The little or medium involvement of the laity and religious in the task of vocation promotion indicates to us that we cannot take the “culture of vocation” and its concrete repercussions in pastoral work for granted. Therefore, it is necessary to continue insisting on it, so that it can be taken one step further in our communities.

The focal point of the concrete commitment of the Christian community and the religious community to the “culture of vocation” lies in the renewal and revitalization of community life. In those communities in which it is possible to discover, live and celebrate intensely one’s own vocation, the life of prayer, fraternal relationships, commitment to the mission, vocation acceptance, will be those in which genuine vocations can emerge.

Pope Francis has placed the Church in an exodus, a church that “goes forth, to go to the peripheries, where life cries out and where the healing balm of the Gospel can cure wounds, mend broken hearts and bring life and hope to the lives of peoples. The *Christian and religious community* will be relevant, a true yeast, when it is attentive to the signs of the times and captures and attends to the real needs of the people around it, and does not wait in the sacristy in endless waiting. We must not spare energy in the task of rediscovering evangelizing initiatives that will put the community in authentic mission.

2. Distribution of tasks in the vocation community

- a) *Equipos Vocation Promotion Teams (VPT's)*. Some of the vocation promotion teams have been functioning in various parts of our Order for almost 20 years; in other parts less and in some there are not yet any. We have to recognize and be grateful that these teams have developed various initiatives in several of our ministries, in spite of the fatigue and wear and tear of the years; it is noteworthy to mention the enthusiasm they have to be at the service of vocation promotion. The next few years will be key to strengthening and expanding the number of well-functioning team members, and creating them where they do not exist. It will also be necessary to offer these teams a formation that is up to the demands of our time.

This structure of shared mission with the laity through the vocation promotion teams is what we Augustinian Recollects have given ourselves in many of our ministries.

²¹ This topic is an extract from the article of Br. Fabián López Martín OAR, “From the ‘Vocation Promoter’ to the ‘Vocation Community’”, in *Recollectio* 38 (2015) 255-277.

Are there other alternatives of shared mission in vocation ministry? Possibly yes. In fact, the structures can change. What stays always is the co-responsibility of all of us who form the Church in the commitment towards vocation promotion, even though there are always people more directly involved in the coordination of this service.

- b) *The work of the guidance counselors.* The role of the vocation minister is quite worn out or distorted among the religious. It is necessary to pray not only for vocations but also for vocations to vocation promotion. I dare say that what will make the difference in vocation promotion will be the service that the vocation director provides in convoking and forming the vocation promotion team, praying and reflecting together, proposing initiatives and programming them.
- c) *Incorporation into the Departments of Vocation Ministry of the dioceses.* This is not an emergency at the moment, but a characteristic note of the “culture of vocations”: vocations are for the Church, and the Spirit gives them to those He wants and how He wants them, beyond simple vocation proselytism. Therefore, we must “fish” in a net or we must “get tangled up” in order to fish. The more relationships with concrete persons committed to the pastoral care of vocations, the more the horizon of the “culture of vocation” will be extended and the more we will open doors to ourselves. In many parts of our Order it is still a pending matter to link ourselves to these vocation ministry teams.
- d) *To offer places of reference for prayer, accompaniment and vocation discernment* it is necessary, as St. John Paul II so often insisted, to propose a “vocation culture” that knows how to recognize and welcome that profound inspiration of man, which calls him to discover that only Christ can tell him the whole truth about his life. In this sense, the centers of spirituality are a suitable space and atmosphere for the formation in the faith and evangelization. Moreover, they can become places which can lead one to the encounter with God and with oneself.
- e) *To invest human and material resources in the training of vocation promotion agents.* It is an ever more urgent need to be able to count on religious and lay people who are professionally trained to produce quality materials related to youth and vocation ministry, to be on the web and social networks in a meaningful way, to carry out vocation accompaniment and to run schools of prayer.
- f) *Web and social network presence.* We must tend to be increasingly present in the social media, like any other group that seeks to offer something meaningful to society. In our case, we are talking about proposing the Good News that awakens a life of relationship with God and that, in turn, makes it possible to respond to God’s call. In this sense, it would be good to be able to count on specialized persons. Moreover, it is demanding to have and maintain a quality presence in the network, so it is key to provide material means to make them attractive.
- g) *The “vocation culture” among the simple professed.* One area in which we are playing a great role with regard to the “culture of vocation” is that of the formation of the professed in this new paradigm of the culture of vocation. If they are convinced of this new style of vocation promotion, this service will, in principle, be on track in the years to come. Although, I insist, it is good to seek their specific formation for a good training in this area.
- h) *Vocation accompaniment.* With the service of this ministry, we seek to help and stimulate each believer to become aware of the gift received and the responsibility that the gift brings with it.

3. In the vocation community we all pitch in

We now point out some initiatives and attitudes in which the whole Christian community and the religious community can be involved beyond age, abilities, style and pastoral sensitivity:

- a) The foundation of all vocation promotion, the heart of this service in the Church, is the insistent prayer to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest (Mt 9, 38). Prayer is the first and the most proportionate means for the pastoral care of vocations.
- b) Nothing is more pro-vocation than the passionate witness of the vocation that God gave to each one; only in this way can the one who is called unleash, in turn, the call in others (Cf. *Perfectae caritatis*, 24). "The example of one's own humble, industrious and penitent life, carried out with joy, is the best presentation of the Order and the best invitation to embrace religious life in it" (OAR Constitutions, 158). This will be the way in which our vocation will be a response to the search for meaning and foundation of the young people who know us.
- c) The testimony of the community to a life lived according to the Gospel is also very important. Fraternal life in community makes it clear, in language that is easily understood, that several brothers meet daily in Christ and with Christ, pray, share their lives and put themselves at the service of others.
- d) The young people understand the strength or weakness of our fraternal bonds. The quality of our community life will be one of the doors through which they will call for possible vocations of special consecration.
- e) We can all be involved in the task of vocation promotion in a personal and community way, being open to welcome warmly in our communities possible vocations.
- f) Both the religious and the lay members of vocation promotion teams must always be ready to give an account of their calling (1 Pt 3, 15), by giving adequate catechesis which will guide the new generations in the search for God and which will underline the beauty of the following of Christ with an explicit proposal: "Come and see" (Jn 1, 46). In the commitment to vocation promotion it is important that we take up again the vocation structure of human life and announce life as a vocation.
- g) In our communities one can appreciate a particular moment of synthesis: predominantly older religious with some young people. Older religious can help a lot in vocation promotion. Most of them are true wise men who have come to discover what really counts and matters; they are a gift of God to our communities. When they come into contact with young people they can do a wonderful job in spiritual accompaniment and vocation discernment.
- h) For those of us who have faith - and vocation promotion requires a strong faith - we know that history is in God's hands and that it is a history of love and salvation. This basic confidence will allow us to take the step from tiredness and resignation for the few fruits, to a new impulse that will make transparent the beauty of our own vocation.
- i) Let us trust in the "actuality" of the charism of our religious family; St. Augustine and the Recollect inspiration are alive, thanks to God, in us. For this reason the last General Chapter of the Order of Augustinian Recollects celebrated in Rome in 2010, proposed to revitalize the Order from its own charismatic identity, to better fulfill

its evangelizing mission. This objective is borne of gratitude for the richness of the charism of our religious family, a precious gift that God gave to his Church and the world. Hence, we must seek ways to make visible the goodness of our charism, only in this way will our communities be meaningful presences in the local churches.

Let us close this theme with a phrase of Pope Francis that undoubtedly challenges all communities:

“In many places vocations to the priesthood and to the consecrated life are scarce. This is often due to the absence in communities of a contagious apostolic fervor, which neither excites nor arouses attraction. Where there is life, fervor, a desire to bring Christ to others, genuine vocations arise. Even in parishes where priests are not very dedicated and joyful, it is the fraternal and fervent life of the community that awakens the desire to consecrate oneself entirely to God and to evangelization, especially if that community lives by praying insistently for vocations and dares to propose to its young people a path of special consecration” (Evangelii Gaudium, 107).

Questions for personal and group reflection



1. Which points in the text caught your attention the most? Which ones would you like to share?
2. Is the Vocation Promotion Team you belong to a real “team”, a community where everyone pitches in?



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