

# The Call to Holiness and Personal Vocation

Germain Grisez, Ph.D. — *Flynn* Professor of Christian Ethics  
Mount Saint Mary's University — Emmitsburg, Maryland

## 1) Because of God's traits, holiness connotes moral excellence.

We do not call people *holy* unless they are outstanding morally. Originally, however, the word *holy* signified the mysterious and awesome reality of the divine. We use the word in that sense in the Gloria: "You alone are the Holy One." But even those who believed in gods that were anything but morally excellent thought of them as holy. Taking *holy* to mean the mysteriousness and awesomeness of the divine, people of every religion also used the word to refer to things related to the divinity they worshipped. We too speak of holy pictures and holy water, things incapable of the moral qualities and great charity of a Thomas More or an Angela Merici.

How, then, did *holiness* come to connote moral excellence? In his relationship with Israel, God manifested fidelity and loving kindness, righteousness and compassion (see Ex 34.6–7). And he directed Moses to teach the Israelites to imitate his holiness: "Say to all the congregation of the people of Israel, You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy" (Lv 19.2). Because Yahweh not only is mighty and terrible but loving and faithful, his chosen people must walk in his ways, love him, and keep his commandments—which he gives them *for their own good*. Insofar as God's people sin, they will not be holy but unlike him and alien to him.

The New Testament presupposes the Old Testament's teaching that God communicates holiness to human beings. The new covenant's communication of holiness, however, is far more profound, for Jesus is the one "called holy, the Son of God" (Lk 1.35). By perfect obedience to the Father, he frees humankind from sin and radically transforms those who believe in him, so that he can present them to the Father: "holy and blameless and irreproachable" (Col 1.22). Thus, moral excellence is not only required of Christians (see, Rom 6.15–23, 8.1–17, 12.1–2; Gal 5.13–6.10) but realized in them as the fruit of charity—of the love of God poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given them (see Jn 13.34; 14.15, 21–24; 15.9–14; Rom 5.5; 13.8–10; 1 Cor 13; Gal 5.13–16).

## 2) All the baptized are called and empowered to pursue perfect holiness.

Vatican II begins its chapter, "The universal vocation to holiness in the Church" (LG 39–42), by explaining the Church's unfailing holiness. Jesus, the Son of God, "loved the Church as his spouse and gave himself up for her that he might sanctify her (see Eph 5.25–26)" (LG 39). The Council immediately draws the conclusion that every member of the Church is called to holiness, and supports that inference by quoting Paul, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification" (1 Thes 4.3), and citing Paul's teaching that God chose the Church's members in Christ so that they "should be holy and blameless before him" (Eph 1.4).

The Council emphatically teaches that Jesus, the teacher and model of perfection, preached "holiness of life to each and every one of his disciples of every condition whatsoever: 'You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Mt 5.48)" (LG 40).

But is that really possible? The Council points out that Jesus empowered his disciples to love all-inclusively: to all of them he sent the Holy Spirit to inspire them to love God perfectly and to love one another as Jesus loved them (see LG 40). Due to God's graces, Christians have been reborn in baptism as God's children and called to follow Jesus: "Hence they must by God's grace cling to and complete in their living the holiness they have received" (LG 40). The Council concludes that all the Christian faithful, regardless of their role in the Church, are called to use the opportunities Jesus gives them so that, "following in his footsteps and becoming conformed to his image, they may wholeheartedly devote themselves to the glory of God and the service of neighbor, doing the Father's will in all things" (LG 40).

Since God is love (see 1 Jn 4.8) and his will is perfectly loving, doing the Father's will in *all* things is the key to holiness, the perfection of charity. It depends on more than religious activities, such as praying, receiving the sacraments, engaging in Church ministries, and doing occasional works of mercy. Christians become holy only by using their gifts to do God's will not only in their specifically religious activities but in every area and every moment of their lives. As Jesus says: "Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Mt 7.21). The Council sums up:

All Christ's faithful, therefore, will grow in holiness day by day in and through all the conditions, duties, or circumstances of their life if they accept all these with faith from the heavenly Father's hand and cooperate with the divine will, manifesting to everyone by their temporal service itself the charity with which God loved the world. (LG 41)

If we accepted with faith all the sufferings God allows to befall us and used all his gifts in loving service to him and to our neighbors, we would cooperate fully with his plan and will, and so we would grow in holiness day by day.

### **3) Pursuing holiness organizes one's entire life as an answer to the Father's calling.**

Commenting on Vatican II's teaching on the perfection of charity, John Paul II links holiness to the vocation of each individual: "As the Council itself explained, this ideal of perfection must not be misunderstood as if it involved some kind of extraordinary existence, possible only for a few 'uncommon heroes' of holiness. The ways of holiness are many, according to the vocation of each individual."<sup>1</sup> Though many, all the ways of holiness are alike in organizing one's entire life in response to the Father's calling—in response to one's unique, personal vocation. But the lives of many Catholics are not organized in that way.

Children begin making choices before they can grasp the ideas of accepting everything with faith from the Father's hand and using all their gifts in service. Good children obey their parents and teachers but otherwise, if left to themselves, do as they please. So, since most children are never taught about personal vocation and holiness, they develop many interests unrelated to their faith and its practice. Hence, in seeking their fulfillment, they seek many things without reference to the kingdom of God.

What happens to those children as they grow up?

Some are so poor that they lack many of the necessities of life. If they see no prospect of bettering their condition, they are motivated not to look ahead, and so are unlikely to consider

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1. *Novo millennio ineunte*, 31, AAS 93 (2001) 288, *L'Osservatore Romano* (Eng.), 10 Jan. 2001, VI–VII.

their lives as a whole. They try to survive from day to day and are strongly tempted to seize every chance of momentary enjoyment.

Others are better off, and in most cases their parents and teachers encourage them to look ahead, consider their possibilities, get clear about what they want out of life, and develop a personal agenda. The agenda requires them to work toward goals far in the future. When that becomes burdensome, young people are tempted to take breaks, as do many students who work hard on weekdays but get drunk and “party” on weekends. When undertakings are unsuccessful or results disappointing, a career or even a marriage may be abandoned as unsatisfying or “broken down” to make way for a fresh start.

Both poor and better off young people may continue, more or less, to practice their faith and to try to avoid mortal sins, at least the sins they feel are *really bad*. The more kindhearted may include in their agenda promoting social justice, and find it gratifying to spend some time in service projects. But even if they think they might have a “vocation” to the priesthood or religious life, they are likely to think of that as a possible agenda item. That way of thinking about vocation is entirely different from the way the Bible teaches us to think about it.

Abraham learned of his vocation when God appeared to him and said: “I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.’ Then Abram fell on his face” (Gn 17.1–3). Moses, despite his seemingly reasonable objections, was drafted to lead the Israelites out of Egypt (see Ex 3.1–4.17). The young Samuel did not realize that the Lord was calling him, but the call was repeated until he replied: “Speak, for thy servant hears” (1 Sm 3.10). Isaiah volunteered for his prophetic service (see Is 6.8), but he seems to have realized that he had been formed for it from the womb (see Is 49.1–6). Jeremiah also was formed and consecrated for his role, but found himself drafted for it despite his misgivings (see Jer 1.4–10); only after committing himself did he learn that his prophetic task required him to remain celibate (see Jer 16.1–4).

John the Baptist was destined before his conception for his important but subordinate role, which he accepted and heroically fulfilled (see Mt 14.1–12; Mk 6.14–19; Lk 1.5–25, 3.1–20, 9.7–9; Jn 1.15, 19–35; 3.25–30). Angels told Mary and Joseph that they would be Jesus’ parents, and they submitted to the Lord’s plan for them (see Mt 1.18–25, Lk 1.26–38). Jesus called the men who would become the Twelve to drop what they were doing, leave everything behind, and follow him (see Mt 4.18–22, 9.9–13; Mk 1.16–20, 2.14; Lk 5.1–11, 27). The youthful Paul was sure he was doing God’s work until Jesus blinded him into seeing his error and becoming Jesus’ chosen instrument for opening the Gentiles’ eyes (see Acts 9.15, 26.9–18).

In all these cases, God’s agenda was the source of vocations. The Lord had his plan, and he assigned those he chose their unique roles in carrying it out. He prepared them in advance and expected them to cooperate. Cooperating never allowed them to pursue agendas of their own. God took over their entire lives.

#### **4) Both Jesus and Paul taught clearly about personal vocation.**

With revelation’s completion in Jesus, how God’s People received their vocations had to change. Before that, God’s will, which was revealed to all in the law, sufficiently guided most people, while those prepared and called for some special role in God’s redemptive work received their vocations as a fresh divine revelation, as a new truth of faith. After the revelatory calling of

Paul, believers would receive their vocations in a new way. Thus, the New Testament includes teachings, unprecedented in the Old Testament, about the personal vocations of Jesus' disciples.

Jesus lays the foundation. Drawing on previous revelation, he commissions all his disciples to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (see Mt 5.13–16). He teaches them to trust the Father for necessities, and to focus on seeking his kingdom and righteousness (see Mt 6.24–34). By the simile of the vine and the branches, he teaches them that disciples must abide in him and bear fruit, lest they be pruned off and discarded (see Jn 15.1–11). Jesus teaches that disciples must offer their personal witness and be ready to sacrifice life itself in doing so: “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Lk 9.23; cf. Mt 16.24, Mk 8.34). When a rich man asks what he must do to have eternal life, Jesus makes it clear that, while keeping the commandments is necessary, it is imperfect. One also must follow Jesus and give up everything that would prevent doing so.

With the description of the last judgment Jesus teaches them that loving service that meets others' genuine needs serves Jesus himself, while neglecting the needy neglects him (see Mt 25.31–46). With the parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus teaches that the commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself requires more than the fulfillment of specific duties to particular people—that everyone in need is to be treated as a neighbor (see Lk 10.25–37). By the parable of the talents Jesus teaches his disciples that different servants of God receive different resources with which to promote his kingdom and that those, even if otherwise blameless, who fail to do what they can with what they are given will lose their opportunity to share in the kingdom (see Mt 25.14–30, Lk 19.11–27).

The implication of these teachings is that disciples must do the Father's will, as Jesus himself did, by obeying not only the commandments that specify obligations everyone must fulfill but the commandment to love, which requires them to bear witness by their entire lives to the truth of God's revelation and to use their particular God-given abilities and resources to meet others' genuine needs. Only such a life serves Jesus himself, effectively promotes God's kingdom, and prepares one to share in it forever.

Paul instructs Christians to offer their bodies—their very selves—as a living sacrifice (see Rom 12.1). Regarding the surrounding non-Christian world as the decadent residue of the age that is passing away, he encourages forward-looking thinking: “Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove [Gk. *dokimazein* = discern] what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12.2). All Christians are to recognize and accept their limited roles and each is to use his or her special gifts in building up the one body. Paul also makes it clear that each Christian ought to live his or her entire life in response to God's call: “Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col 3.17).

How such a eucharistic life responds to God's calling of each person is most clearly articulated in the letter to the Ephesians. That letter begins by summarizing the calling of Christians to holiness, their predestination to adoption, their redemption from sin by Jesus' blood, their insight into God's plan to gather up all creation in Christ, and their assignment to live for the praise of God's glory (see 1.3–14). Having been dead in their sins, Christians were nevertheless loved by God, who, being rich in mercy, raised them to life with the Lord Jesus, so as to manifest his infinite goodness (see 2.1–7). Salvation, then, is entirely the fruit of God's grace, not of human

works: “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (2.9–10). Christians have been recreated in Jesus for the sake of their good works, which God prepared for them and gives them to live out.

Paul goes on to summarize his own vocation, the life of good works the Lord had given to him (see 3.1–12), and then, after praying for those to whom he is writing (3.14–19), he begs them “to live a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called” (4.1), a personal calling to each of them to live his or her unique life of good works, because “grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (4.7). Diverse graces were given to individuals to make their different contributions to building up Christ’s body (4.8–12) until all attain together to holiness—to “mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (4.13).

In sum, everyone is called to be a saint, and not some generic sort of saint but a unique saint. Just as Mary was called to be the saint she became by living her life, each of the saints we know and love came to be the saint he or she is by living his or her particular life. Holiness is realized only by responding to one’s personal vocation.

God calls and sets apart each of us for a special relationship with himself and special role in his plan. He takes the initiative; vocation is first and always his idea and his gift. That one-of-a-kind gift includes all the abilities and resources one has, one’s awareness of God’s call, and one’s ability to respond to it. One can refuse. But if one accepts one’s unique vocation, the good deeds that will carry it out become one’s personal, rational worship, holy and acceptable. For those who accept the gift, the whole, living relationship is a great blessing, a singular covenant of love and of working together for the kingdom.

### **5) Several factors explain most Catholics’ ignorance of personal vocation.**

Given the importance of personal vocation, one wonders why the Church has not taught explicitly about it until recently and why that recent teaching has hardly begun to take hold. Several factors help explain why.

One factor was that Martin Luther, reflecting on the New Testament, developed a very complete account of personal vocation. Unfortunately, Luther dealt with it in the context of his polemic against Catholic teaching and practice regarding the monastic life and ordained priesthood, not least with respect to celibacy and virginity for the kingdom’s sake. Moreover, in holding that every Christian has a vocation, a role to play in the earthly kingdom, Luther denied that any sort of vocation is superior in God’s eyes.<sup>2</sup> Hence, attitudes characteristic of the Counter-Reformation helped to prevent until Vatican II any development of Catholic theology and doctrine on personal vocation.

But probably the most important factor is legalism—the notion that God’s plan is like human law and that his will is like a human lawmaker’s will. Human lawmakers are not concerned about many things that are important to us and they make heavy demands for purposes and projects we care little about or even oppose. So, we reasonably ignore what human

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2. See Karlfried Froehlich, “Luther on Vocation,” *Lutheran Quarterly*, 13 (1999): 195–207.

lawmakers want unless they threaten us with penalties, and as citizens we are jealous of our rights and the freedom to pursue our own agendas.

Consequently, in times past, many pastors and theologians, imbued with legalism, focused on avoiding mortal sin and regarded the pursuit of holiness as an optional extra. Little wonder, then, that most who hold fast to classical theologies have paid little attention to recent Church teachings regarding the universal call to holiness and personal vocation. At the same time, those most enthusiastic about updating other things in the Church also remain legalists. They have spent a great deal of time and energy trying to lighten the burden of unpopular Catholic moral teachings regarding sex and other matters.

Moreover, since Vatican II, even those theologians and pastors who have thought about what the faithful ought to be doing have often overlooked the Council's teaching about holiness and personal vocation, and focused instead on promoting ecclesial ministries (distributing Communion, participating in RCIA, and so on) and/or on social activism (famine relief in Africa, helping victims of AIDS, stopping global warming, and so on). Worthwhile as ecclesial ministries and social activism can be, they are only a small part of most Christians' vocations and have no place at all in some vocations.

Legalism's remarkable persistence is partly explained by the sinful selves we've not entirely put off. For those selves, God's plan and will remain alien, while clarifying our values and going after what appeals to us seem essential to adult identity.

Consequently, growth toward holiness must begin with purgation, a more thorough putting off of the old person. Purgation alone leads to illumination: transformation by the renewal of a mind that has learned from Jesus and unmasked the rationalizations that had played the role of conscience. And illumination alone leads to union: a heart synchronized with Jesus' heart so that even suffering is welcomed as the Father's gift and nothing is more enjoyable than pleasing him. When saints reached that union of wills with God, they had found and accepted their vocations.

St. Thomas Aquinas was no legalist, but his theology of the ultimate end of human life paradoxically lent aid and comfort to legalism.

Thomas argues that nobody can make any free choice without intending some ultimate end, holds that people expect complete fulfillment from whatever they take as an ultimate end, and concludes that at any given time a person's will cannot be directed to more than one ultimate end.<sup>3</sup> He also holds that every child, in his or her very first free choice, either takes God as the ultimate end or commits a mortal sin.<sup>4</sup> So, if children are not living in mortal sin, they cannot act for anything but God as an ultimate end except by committing a mortal sin.<sup>5</sup> It follows that remaining in the state of grace is of itself sufficient to integrate all one's actions toward God.

The logic is sound. If it were true that at a given time one must have the same ultimate end in everything one does, and if one took God as that end, then remaining in the state of grace would organize one's whole life around God. Unfortunately, Christians in the state of grace can and do act for many ultimate ends without reference to God.<sup>6</sup> Catholic children and young

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3. See *S.t.*, 1–2, q. 1, a. 5 (read in the context of the question as a whole).

4. See *S.t.*, 1, q. 89, a. 6.

5. See *S.t.*, 1–2, q. 72, a. 3.

6. See Peter F. Ryan, S.J., "Must the Acting Person Have a Single Ultimate End?" *Gregorianum*, 82 (2001): 325–56.

people regularly construct agendas without reference to their faith, with the result that many Catholics' faith and even the devout and regular practice of it remain isolated in a compartment and make little or no difference to the rest of their lives. Faith and its practice can make the difference they should only if one finds and follows one's personal vocation. Thus, the faithful must be taught to do that. Although necessary, it is insufficient to teach them to avoid mortal sin.

Another factor that helps explain why the Church's current teaching on the universal call to holiness and personal vocation has not taken hold is the conviction of many a spiritual director that the faithful who earnestly desire to grow in holiness can do so only by setting out on the purgative and illuminative way toward union with God by mystical espousals—the way best mapped by St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross.

Of course, every Christian, in being called to holiness, is called to become, in a true sense, a mystic. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2014, teaches:

Spiritual progress tends toward ever more intimate union with Christ. This union is called “mystical” because it participates in the mystery of Christ through the sacraments—“the holy mysteries”—and, in him, in the mystery of the Holy Trinity. God calls us all to this intimate union with him, even if the special graces or extraordinary signs of this mystical life are granted only to some for the sake of manifesting the gratuitous gift given to all.

Moreover, participation in the liturgy is not enough; personal prayer also is essential.

However, while every Christian must pray, St. Teresa makes it clear that not everyone is called to be a contemplative of the sort that she herself is. Addressing Carmelite nuns, she says: “Not because all in this house practice prayer must all be contemplatives; that's impossible.”<sup>7</sup> She also explains that even spiritual marriage, the summit of mystical prayer, is for the sake of loving service: “This is the reason for prayer, my daughters, the purpose of this spiritual marriage: the birth always of good works, good works.”<sup>8</sup> Like Vatican II, Teresa teaches that perfection is in the conformity of one's will to God's will:

The highest perfection obviously does not consist in interior delights or in great raptures or in visions or in the spirit of prophecy but in having our will so much in conformity with God's will that there is nothing we know he wills that we do not want with all our desire, and in accepting the bitter as happily as we do the delightful when we know that His Majesty desires it.<sup>9</sup>

While much of the teaching of St. John of the Cross seems to support the idea that the path he maps is the only way to holiness, the heart of his teaching agrees with St. Teresa's and Vatican II's: holiness grows by doing the Father's will in all things and accepting everything from his hand with faith. John holds that the union with God that constitutes perfect holiness “exists when God's will and the soul's are in conformity, so that nothing in the one is repugnant to the other. When the soul completely rids itself of what is repugnant and unconformed to the divine will, it rests transformed in God through love.”<sup>10</sup>

7. St. Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*, XVII, 2, in *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D., and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D. (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1980), 2:99.

8. St. Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*, VII, 4, 6 (in the edition cited, 2:446).

9. *The Foundations*, 5, 10 (in the cited edition, 3:120).

10. *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D., and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D. (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1979), 116 (*The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, II, 5, 3).

The translators of John's collected works considered trustworthy, and so included among them, a remarkable reported statement of the saint:

Once being asked how one becomes enraptured, the Venerable Father Fray John of the Cross, replied: by denying one's own will and doing the will of God; for ecstasy is nothing else than going out of self and being caught up in God; and this is what he who obeys does; he leaves himself and his desire, and thus unburdened plunges himself in God.<sup>11</sup>

John here implies that the summit of contemplation is nothing but complete conformity to God's will. Everyone is called to that, and anyone can reach it—by undertaking the purgative and illuminative way that ends in discerning and faithfully fulfilling his or her personal vocation.

Still another factor—and a very important one—that helps explain why the Church's teaching on the universal call to holiness and personal vocation has not taken hold is a theological error that has been tightly tied to a truth of faith.

Since human life, marriage, and parenthood belong to God's good creation, human death, incapacity for sexual intercourse, and sterility are privations of those goods, and so are evils. Still, just as laying down one's life for the kingdom's sake, as Jesus did and Christian martyrs do, is not only good but even better than living a devout life to its natural end, so—and this is the truth of faith—forgoing marriage and parenthood for the kingdom's sake, as Jesus did and Christians who rightly embrace celibate chastity do, is not only good but even better than marrying sacramentally and procreating for Christ and the kingdom.

Jesus suggests the superiority of celibate chastity when he counsels anyone who can receive his word about making oneself a eunuch for the kingdom's sake to do so (see Mt 19.10–15). Paul explicitly affirms the preferability of celibate chastity to marriage when he says: "I wish that all were as I myself am" (1 Cor 7.7a). For his preference, Paul argues that the unmarried will be free to focus on the Lord's affairs and on pleasing him while the married will be divided, since they will have pressing responsibilities to their spouses, which will distract them from the Lord's affairs by involving them in worldly affairs (see 1 Cor 7.32–36). Still, Paul recognizes that not all have the charism for celibate chastity and that some are called to marriage: "But each has his own special gift from God, one of one kind and one of another" (1 Cor 7.7b; cf. 7.9).

Jesus' and Paul's teachings make it clear that when those with the charism for celibate chastity make themselves eunuchs for the kingdom's sake, their accepting the privation of marriage and parenthood, like the martyrs' accepting death, bears witness to the supreme worth of God's kingdom. They are free to collaborate closely with Jesus in his ongoing salvific work, to apply themselves to pleasing him, and to cultivate their relationship with this best of all friends. Insofar as the behavior that fulfills their commitment differs markedly not only from that of nonbelievers but even from that of devout married Christians, the lives of holy, celibately chaste Christians clearly manifest God's grace. Living miracles, such holy lives provide for nonbelievers powerful evidence of the Gospel's truth and for fellow Christians attractive models of vocational fidelity.

The preceding truth, which undoubtedly pertains to Catholic faith, unfortunately became host to a parasitical error, namely, that celibate chastity is objectively holier than marriage, because marriage, though morally acceptable in itself, impedes growth in charity, while celibate chastity facilitates it. The truth is that growth in charity depends, not on what God calls one to

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11. *Ibid.*, 654 (considered trustworthy) and 680 (the maxim).



do, but on the wholeheartedness and generosity with which one does it. That wholeheartedness and generosity is the fruit of grace, and it is obvious that the Holy Spirit does not always give more wholeheartedness and generosity to those called to celibate chastity than to those called to marriage.

Moreover, not only celibate chastity but every element of every vocation, including marriage, facilitates growth in charity for those called to it, because undertaking and faithfully carrying out any element of one's vocation is doing God's will, and doing God's will always contributes to growth in charity and never impedes it. Thus, the error that marriage impedes growth in holiness and that celibate chastity is therefore objectively holier than marriage implicitly contradicts the truth that everyone is called to grow in holiness by finding, accepting, and faithfully fulfilling his or her personal vocation.<sup>12</sup>

Still, several Church Fathers energetically though fallaciously argued that celibate chastity is objectively holier than marriage, and that false proposition became part of our theological tradition. Handed on by St. Thomas as though it pertained to sacred doctrine, the proposition was strongly asserted by Pius XII, and it taints even the teaching of Vatican II and John Paul II on priestly celibacy and consecrated life.<sup>13</sup>

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12. The error and its effect on the theology of vocation will not die easily. More than a decade after Vatican II, Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life*, trans. Mary Frances McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 421 (published in German in 1977) wrote: "No sound and balanced Christian will ever say of himself that he chose marriage by virtue of a divine election, an election comparable to the election and vocation experienced or even only perceived by those called to the priesthood or to the personal following of Christ in religious life. One who chooses marriage simply has *not* experienced that special election in his soul; he does so, therefore, with the best conscience in the world and without imputing to himself any imperfection, but he does not, for that reason, claim that he is following a way specially chosen for him by God. He is but obeying God's general will for his creatures."

13. See St. Jerome, *Against Jovinian*, lib. 1; St. Augustine, *On Holy Virginity*, especially 14–22; St. Thomas, *S.t.*, 2–2, q. 152, a. 4; Pius XII, *Sacra virginitas*, AAS 46 (1954) 168–78, *The Papal Encyclicals (1939–1958)*, ed. Claudia Carlen, I.H.M., 248:20–43. The division St. Paul is concerned with in 1 Cor 7.32–36 is inevitable for married Christians. Therefore, the influence of the traditional theological error is clearly manifested by the statement that celibate chastity enables some "more easily to devote themselves to God alone with an undivided heart (see 1 Cor 7:32–34)" (Vatican II, LG 42 [*italics mine*]; cf. PC 12, OT 10, PO 16). The adverbial *more easily* suggests that even the upright love of a spouse impedes loving God wholeheartedly, and that the two loves are alternatives just as becoming involved in worldly affairs in fulfilling marital responsibilities is an alternative to focusing exclusively on the Lord's affairs. But, John Paul II teaches: "If God is loved above all things, then also man loves and is loved with the fullness of love accessible to him" (Homily at Mass for the Family [12 Oct. 1980], 6, *Insegnamenti*, 3.2 [1980] 847, *L'Osservatore Roma* (Eng.), 20 Oct. 1980, 4). Nevertheless, the statement I quoted above from Vatican II, LG 42 is quoted by John Paul II in *Pastores dabo vobis*, 29, AAS 84 (1992) 703, *L'Osservatore Romano* (Eng.), 8 Apr. 1992, VII. Moreover, he claims that "the Church always has taught the pre-eminence of perfect chastity for the sake of the Kingdom"—*Vita consecrata*, 32, fn. 63, AAS 88 (1996) 406, *L'Osservatore Romano* (Eng.), XXII—and to support that claim he cites, from within the part of *Sacra virginitas* I cited above a briefer passage (AAS 174–75, Carlen, 32–36) in which Pope Pius claims that "the excellence of virginity and of celibacy and their superiority over the married state was . . . revealed by our Divine Redeemer and by the Apostle of the Gentiles" and that it was "solemnly defined as a dogma of divine faith by the holy Council of Trent." Both Pius XII's fn. 57 and John Paul II's fn. 63 refer to the tenth of Trent's canons on the sacrament of matrimony (DS 1810/980): "Si quis dixerit, statum coniugalem anteponeendum esse statui virginitatis vel caelibatus, et non esse melius ac beatius, manere in virginitate aut caelibatu, quam iungi matrimonio, anathema sit." Trent thus condemns the conjunction of two propositions: (1) The married state

The handing on of this error by so many excellent Church teachers surely is due mainly to confusion between the false proposition and the truth of faith on which it is parasitical. But vocations that include celibate chastity usually involve the focus on the Lord's affairs of which Paul speaks. Thus they provide more separation from the profane than is possible with vocations that include marriage, which involves spouses in worldly affairs. Thus, the handing on of the error is partly due to confusion between holiness in the primitive sense (separation from the profane) and holiness in the relevant sense (the perfection of charity and its fruit of moral excellence).

Also contributing to the error's transmission has been the idea, derived from Greek philosophy, that the human soul progresses toward the intelligible world of the divine, which is purely spiritual, by withdrawing as much as possible from the material things of the sensible world. Although the Incarnation of the Word, the sacrament of the Eucharist, and the resurrection of the body are at odds with that Greek idea, it nevertheless provided the premise for a fallacious argument of St. Thomas for the true proposition that the new law fittingly proposes counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience.<sup>14</sup>

Consequently, while vocations including celibate chastity truly are preferable to and better than those involving marriage in the ways that Jesus suggested and Paul explained, every Christian is called to holiness, and no one is impeded from attaining it by undertaking what God asks him or her to do.




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should be preferred to (set before) the state of virginity or celibacy, and (2) it is not better and more blessed *to remain in* virginity or celibacy than to get married. One plainly does not affirm either of those condemned propositions by holding, as I do: (1) the state of virginity or celibacy is preferable to the married state in the way that Jesus suggested and Paul explained, but neither state is objectively holier than the other; and (2) it is better and more blessed for every Christian "to live the life that the Lord has assigned to him" (1 Cor 7.17). So, it is better and more blessed for those who have the charism for virginity or celibacy and have entered that state *to remain in* it than to get married (see 1 Cor 7.38). But it is better and more blessed for those who lack the charism for celibate chastity and are called to marry to do so (see 1 Cor 7.2, 9).

14. See *S.t.*, 1–2, q. 108, a. 4.