



# Humanum

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## Being Willing to Give Ourselves Away: The Vocations Issue

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What does it mean to be an adult? Some think of maturity in terms of self-possession. But what if adulthood is actually the condition in which we realize that we do not, in fact, “possess” ourselves? What if being truly adult means being ready and willing to say “I do,” to give ourselves away—wholly and irrevocably—to another? Adulthood has to be more than just a verb: “adulthood” here and there, once in a while, when it suits us. To mature as a human being implies a certain “ripeness,” the ability to bear fruit. But we can only do that when we have made a complete gift of self to another (or Another). That is why we possess ourselves in the first place, to have something to give.

Is it really possible to bind ourselves for a lifetime? Isn't this antithetical to freedom? Are we really capable of making a commitment which involves suffering through thick and thin or in sickness and sorrow? *Benedict XVI* was acutely aware of these questions and the objections behind them: “Man's refusal to make any commitment . . . is becoming increasingly widespread as a result of a false understanding of freedom and self-realization as well as the desire to escape suffering.” Yet, he noted that this refusal “means that man remains closed in on himself and keeps his ‘I’ ultimately for himself, without really rising above it .... The key figures of human existence likewise vanish: father, mother, child—essential elements of the experience of being human are lost.” The solution, according to *Benedict*, lies in the preparedness we are examining in this third issue: “Only in self-giving does man find himself, and only by opening himself to the other, to others, to children, to the family, only by letting himself be changed through suffering, does he discover the breadth of his humanity.”

This issue, whose central focus is on what it means to *love God* (just as the second issue focused on what it means to *know God*) therefore looks not just at the vocation to marriage, but at all the primary paths to the “discovery of the breadth of our humanity.” We explore the irrevocable commitments that follow that “I do.” The various states of life that we find ourselves in, or that we aspire, as young adults, to enter into.

And so, just as the Church is hanging its head in shame about the failures of priests and bishops to live out a mature commitment to their own calling, *Humanum* is asking about the

deepest nature of this state of life. What if the solution to the current crisis lies not in tinkering with structures of power and decision-making, but rather in understanding better what the nature of the gift of priestly consecration truly is? We feature four examples of priests whose authority on the self-gift of the priest, rooted in both celibacy and prayer, rests on their lives as *spiritual fathers* to so many: Bishop Barron, Bishop Massimo Camisasca (founder of a priestly missionary fraternity), Fr. Carter Griffin (rector of the John Paul II Seminary in Washington DC) and the late Raymond Gawronski S.J. (spiritual director at several seminaries during the course of his life). Each of these men, in his own way, offers an answer to the question about the cause of the recent scandal and the way out of it.

A crisis has been building up in the complementary arena of marriage as well. Where one vocation finds itself in trouble, other vocations will follow suit, because the root problem is a crisis in the very understanding of vocation itself. Social structures in our time militate against the possibility of hearing the “call” (*vocare*) to self-gift. The separation of the home from public life, the corresponding evacuation of the home and the devaluation of the activities that take place in it as well as of masculinity itself, all tend to obscure the essential transformative nature of marriage and family life as a life-affirming process for the maturing individual. Sophie Caldecott handles this masterfully in her witness to the process whereby a young woman who loved writing, but did not feel drawn to maternity, discovered that both could co-exist in a way she would not have predicted when she fell in love with her husband. Then there is also the vexing problem of actually finding a mate. Apart from the periods following the two world wars, perhaps, this aspect of the cultural crisis is unprecedented. Why is this? We seem to have lost sight of the culture of courtship, which is designed to help young adults find each other in ways that are both wise and humane, with the protections that chastity makes possible. Yet nature, as we know, abhors a vacuum. *Modern Romance* by Aziz Ansari offers an illuminating view on what rushes in to replace the old structures. How is it that a culture no longer takes interest in one of the things that, until recently, was one of its principle interests all over the world? Carly Henderson takes up this question as she looks at the inevitable influence of the modern conception of freedom on the animating principle of a courtship culture: the ontological desire to love and be loved forever. Whilst we have to face the damage done by the spiritual warfare of our time, the solution, as Henderson says, is not to stifle this desire; nor is it to put a false “Christian” balm on it. Rather we have to *face* it, in the knowledge that it is after all Christ who is the ultimate object of that desire. Marcie Stokman’s response to Emily Esfahani Smith’s *The Power of Meaning: Finding Fulfillment in a World Obsessed with Happiness* reminds us that we need to incarnate this disposition in our everyday lives, if we are genuinely seeking to become mature human beings.

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