

Called to Life

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To my family.

To my brothers and sisters of the Beatitude Community.

*I thank all the people whose comments and encouragement
helped me in the writing of this book, in particular:*

*Xavier Lacroix, Jean-Claude Sagne,
Sr. Déborah, Sr. Catherine of Siena,
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INTRODUCTION

How do I find fulfillment in life? How do I obtain happiness? How do I fully become a man or woman? These perennial questions are increasingly asked in today's directionless world, where no one accepts ready-made solutions and people must find answers on their own. Resistant to standards imposed from outside, most people in practice try to make the most of life and construct happiness according to their own understanding of it. The ideal of happiness comes from their own education and experience, but, whether they notice it or not, is also strongly shaped by mainstream culture and the media. Usually such happiness is fragile—unable to stand up under sicknesses, failures, separations, and the various trials we all encounter. Then life seems not to have kept the promises it made us in our youth.

Yet, I believe human life is a marvelous adventure. Despite the burden of sufferings and disappointments, it offers us means to grow in humanity, freedom, and interior peace, while exercising our entire capacity for love and joy.

There is, however, one condition. We must give up our own agendas and allow ourselves to be led by life, in happy events and difficult ones, while learning

to recognize and accept the calls addressed to us day by day.

“Call” is the keyword of this book. The idea, simple but very meaningful, is absolutely fundamental to our temporal and spiritual plans. Human beings cannot attain fulfillment solely by carrying out their own projects. These projects are legitimate and necessary, and we must bring our intelligence and energy to bear on accomplishing them. But that’s not enough, and in the event of failure it can lead to disillusionment. Another attitude, one in the end more decisive and fruitful, must accompany our initiating and carrying out of projects: that of listening to the calls, the discrete, mysterious invitations that come to us continuously throughout life. This attitude of listening and availability takes priority over even the projects themselves. I believe we can be fulfilled as human beings only to the extent that we perceive and respond to the calls life addresses to us day in and day out: calls to change, grow, mature, enlarge our hearts and our horizons, and leave behind hardness of heart and narrow-mindedness in order to welcome reality in a larger and more confident manner.

These calls come to us in many ways. Sometimes they come through experiences or by the example of others who touch us, sometimes from desires that arise in our hearts or requests from people who are close to us, often from Holy Scripture. They originate from

God, who gives us life, never ceases to watch over us, and wants tenderly to lead and constantly intervene for each of his children in a way that is discreet, often imperceptible, yet efficacious. Although many are, unfortunately, unaware of this presence and action of God, they reveal themselves to those who know how to place themselves in the attitude of listening and availability.

God is the God of the living, not the dead. He reaches out to us continually, mysteriously but certainly, infusing our lives with value, beauty, and fruitfulness beyond our imagining. As St. Paul said:

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen. (Eph 3:20–21).

How sad it would be to cut oneself off from God's action and bury oneself in the narrow, illusory world of one's own projects.

Behind the many calls addressed to us in life there is but one call—God's. It takes its fullest and most luminous form in the mystery of Christ. In perceiving and responding to this call, human beings realize their humanity and discover authentic happiness, a happiness that will be fully theirs in the glory of the life to come. In his letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul speaks of

the extraordinary hope that God's call in Christ opens to us:

I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe, according to the working of his great might (Eph 1:16–19).

In the pages that follow I mean to show the importance and fruitfulness of this idea, then to discuss some areas where divine calls are frequently encountered: major events of life, the Word of God (subject of a long chapter), and the desires that the Spirit awakens in our hearts.

I shall insist that any call from God is a call to life. Our first vocation is to live, and a call cannot be from God unless it leads us to live in a more intense and beautiful way, engaging human life as it is with more confidence, in all its aspects: physical, psychological, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual.

But let me conclude this introduction by speaking of the potential reader of this book. I treat the idea of

being called in a Christian context and with a Christian vocabulary because I am convinced that the most profound and enlightening words ever pronounced on the human condition can be found in the Bible and especially in the Gospels. But anyone will find here much that is valuable. To be called is fundamental to the human condition.

Finally, a word about *responsibility, freedom, desire*.

Responsibility presupposes the existence of a call, of a duty. To take responsibility for one's actions is not only to accept responsibility for their impact on others, but to acknowledge that one had several options—good or bad as the case may be—before choosing and acting. Even so, to give the idea of *freedom* real weight requires recognition of some kind of call. The exercise of human freedom is arbitrary and trivial unless it is a response to an invitation from something that transcends it. As for *desire*, it becomes a mere psychological construct, a product of the alchemy of impulse unless understood at the deepest level as a call. Beneath the often contradictory desires of the human heart lies a single desire—for fulfillment, for happiness. To show it respect as something serious, something fully human, and not simply one more craving or impulse, we must see in it the traces of a call that comes from beyond ourselves.

Humanity cannot be understood apart from a call to become more human. Where does it come from?

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What is its source? This is the fundamental question of life. I take my stand in the Christian camp, but I believe the following reflections have something to say to any person of good will.