

Religious Vocation: An Unnecessary Mystery

By Fr. Richard Butler, O.P.

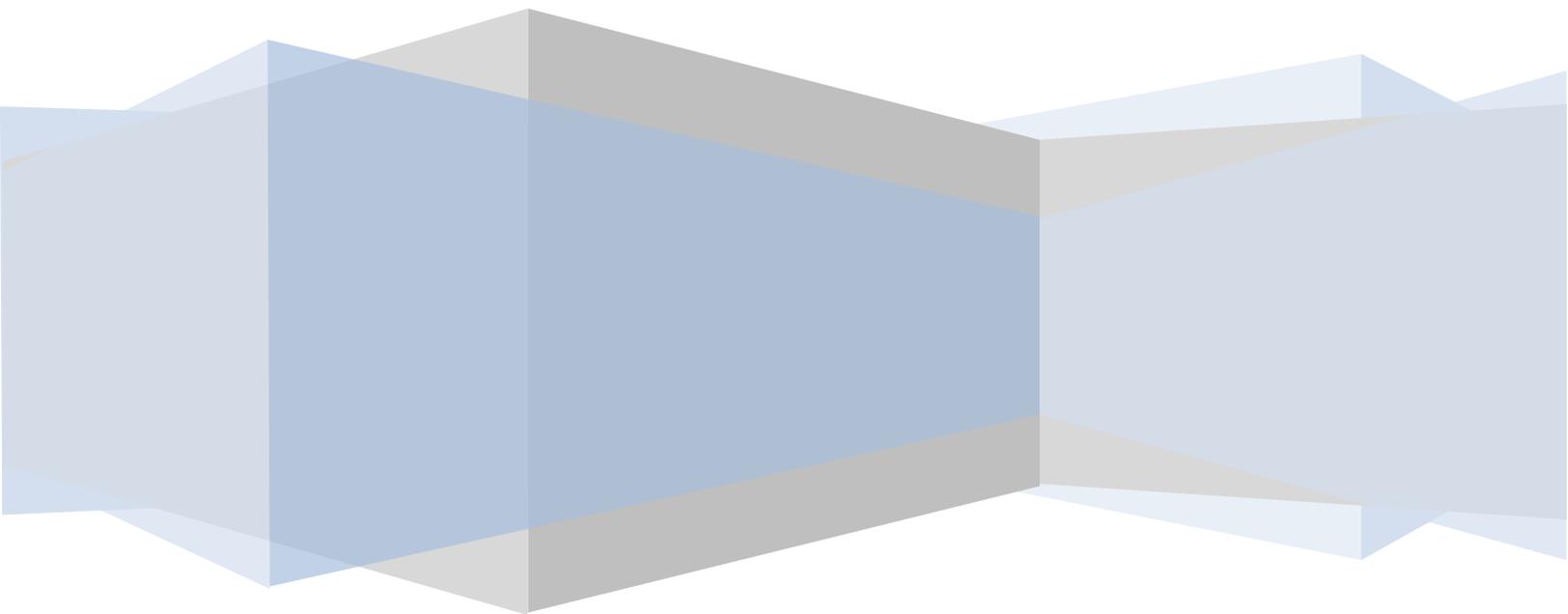
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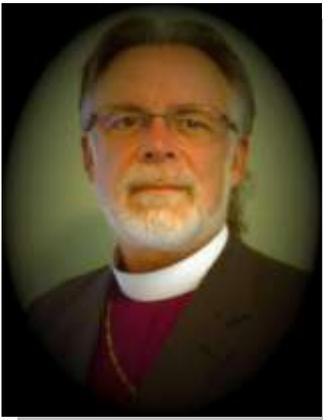
The information below is directly quoted from the text with comments on the side by various Cistercian Monks of the Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross.

May 2010

God has invited everyone to perfection.

Do you have the courage and charity to accept?





Abbot Oscar Joseph says:



Greetings dear aspirants to the life of perfection:

I read this book out of frustration. For years I have helped men and woman overcome their hesitancy to enter into religious life. Traveling this journey with them was exhausting and often fraught with pointless rabbit trails. I was constantly asking myself, “why all the fuss?”

For me, being a monk is a logically practical application of the call that Christ has given to us all, “come follow me.” There was no mystery to overcome or the necessity of a divine call specifically given and hand delivered by Gabriel himself. The call to perfection has been given to every Christian.

The only “issue,” if there was an issue at all, was how I was to play this out. I studied the various traditional religious orders. The Rule of St. Benedict found its way into my heart. It was universal, kind, practical, orderly, and very specific. I liked that.

Next, I inquired with several established religious groups. Finally, and really without anguish, I happily joined the Cistercian Order. Years have passed and here I am still. Happy, more mature, and hopefully more perfected.

Fr. Richard Butler, O.P., quotes many of the church fathers. Guess what? They say what I have been saying all along. The call is for everyone. We are supposed to do this. No special telegram from on High is needed. WOW!!!

When I read ***Religious Vocation: An Unnecessary Mystery*** I underlined and marked various sections that seemed important to me and perhaps to you also. These sections you will find below. Our Cistercian commentators will further discuss the marked **red words** in the text. These are my markings.

I truly hope that this discussion will help you follow the invitation that has already been given to you.

Blessings

Religious Vocation: An Unnecessary Mystery

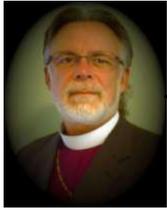
By Fr. Richard Butler, O.P.

I deliberately speak of *means* because observers, both in and out of the Church, often view **poverty, chastity and obedience** as the ends or goals of religious life. These practices are, as will be emphasized later, only means and not ends in themselves. **They are the best possible means for attaining the common Christian vocation of perfection in charity.**

But there are also too many within the Church who shy away for other reasons. Rather than look askance, they exalt religious life to a super-mysterious level which is altogether unnecessary and definitely undesirable. As a matter of fact, their interpretation, or lack of it, of religious vocation is detrimental to the further increase or success of these vocations. They make religious life as unnatural as the secularist does, perhaps more so. They fail to understand the supernatural and distort, by divorcing, its relation to the natural. They are guilty of promoting the unnecessary mystery.

The specific crime is that of relegating religious vocation to the realm of Gnosticism, making of it an esoteric private inspiration. At least that is the unmistakable tone of their conversation and propaganda on the subject. The general offense, and it is a popular fault, is a lack of clarification in a matter which requires theological precision. And this is a grave matter, directly affecting the salvation of souls. Religious life is not an extra, not a luxury, not a peculiar path for exceptional souls in the pursuit of Christian perfection. It is necessary for the apostolic work of the Church and for the personal salvation of some of its members. The mystery, and consequent confusion, which has been added to the essential notion of religious vocation is unnecessary and dangerous.

We can destroy the gratuitous and dangerous notion that religious vocation is a rare gift and



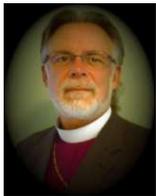
Abbot Oscar Joseph says:

Cistercians have vows of Obedience, Stability, and Conversion.

Poverty means simplicity and generosity, chastity means to one's state in life, purity in sexual matters.

For more information see my videos at:
[Video.yahoo.com/people/6378310](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6378310)

Notice that the goal of all this is perfection in charity.



Abbot Oscar Joseph says:

This is my point exactly. Boy am I fired up. You bet it is not an extra. It is the invitation given by Christ himself to everyone.



Rev. Prior Rommel says:

Indeed, religious life has "suffered" tremendous losses to the detriment of the Church. By demystifying it, more people will realize its relevance today. With the increase of religious vocations we will see a revitalized Church, moving in the power of the Holy Spirit and on the cutting edge of societal change.



Abbot Oscar Joseph says:

I constantly hear from the ill-informed that the Bible says we should not judge one another. I wish they would read the book. In doing so they would see exactly what that quote says and notice all around it a judgment is being placed on others. It means, rather, that we should be slow and kind in our judgment. The Bible clearly says to judge others' behaviors. What the sin is here is the lack of love that we give to one another. Indeed perfection in charity is the real issue.

esoteric in its realization. We can also discover, in this part of theology, certain normative principles to apply personally to the aspirant to the religious state of life.

When asked what was the greatest commandment, Our Lord immediately enunciated the precept of charity, to love God above all and one's neighbor as one's self. Perfection in charity is, without question, the primary precept and common goal of the followers of Christ.

There is even the failure to distinguish carefully between sacerdotal vocation and religious vocation – that is, between a priest's vocation and vocation to the religious state of life. I intend, by the way, to confine my concern to religious vocation only, with merely by-the-way reference to sacerdotal vocation.

We now have a maze of conflicting theories, all of which are deficient and misleading. Lined up they can be categorized as follows: (1) Vocation properly consists in a mystical attraction, an inner compulsion, felt in the depths of the soul. (2) Vocation properly consists in the call of an ordaining bishop or, in the case of religious, admittance by a legitimate superior. (3) For some there is a special vocation through special gifts of grace; for others the general call of the counsels, without particular grace, suffices for entrance; the grace of perseverance comes by the petition of prayer. (4) All that is necessary for a religious vocation is general grace, harnessed, as it were, by the human will to the pursuit of this goal; the resolve of the will is antecedent to any divine decree and particular grace.

These are the erroneous opinions- which we will avoid. Let us return to the sound doctrine of the fathers and doctors of the Church. We have dealt with confusion long enough. We only wanted to show you how it happened, how a clear idea became confused in the popular mind. The time has come for clarity, for a re-examination of



Abbot Oscar Joseph says:

I grew up with these false notions. I bet you have also. Indeed let us go to the church fathers and doctors of the church.

traditional sound doctrine on the nature of religious vocation.

Let's make a fresh – which in reality is an old – approach to the understanding of the concept of religious vocation. In this way we can dispel the unnecessary mystery which we have inherited from modern controversialists.

There is no simple formula for religious vocation in the official teaching of the Church. As a matter of fact, the two key words, “religious” and “vocation”, have different points of reference and never appear together in Sacred Scripture, in the commentaries of the Fathers, in the theology of the Doctors, or in the law of the Church.

Indeed, the term *religious* refers to a state of life. A state of life, according to St. Thomas, implies a fixed establishment in the spiritual life, with reference to some solemn obligation, and is properly applied to the state of perfection. Those, he says, who have a special obligation to tend to spiritual perfection are thereby in a state of perfection. In this state, however, he includes only religious, those under perpetual vows, and bishops, by the nature of their office.

“A state wherein one makes profession of tending to perfection – a form of life, wherein some of the faithful, joined in a society, establish themselves in order to tend to perfection by means of the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, which they make according to a Rule.”

The essential idea, therefore, is that religious are those in the religious state, and assume a special obligation to tend towards Christian perfection by means of the vows of religion.

The word “vocation,” as it is used in the phrase “religious vocation,” presents much more difficulty; in fact it is of the essence of the problem.

Etymologically, the word vocation is derived immediately from the Latin *vocare*, to call or to summon. In a less imperious sense it may mean to



Abbot Oscar Joseph says:

Joined in a society does not always mean living as a community within the walls of a monastery. The Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross is a society. Remember our vows are obedience, stability and conversion. Our Rule is The Rule of St. Benedict.



Rev. Dean Columcille says:

The Divine call and human response is nowhere better illustrated than with the Annunciation. Mary is asked to place her ultimate trust in a loving God. She answers. The circumstances may differ, but the choice remains the same. When invited we also must respond.



Rev. Prior Rommel says:

The call to a religious vocation is a "graced" calling. Whom God calls to this life is graced to respond in love and submission



Abbot Oscar Joseph says:

This is the cause of my frustration. Aspirants want to know "for sure." Well there is no "for sure" except what we find in Scripture and is supported by tradition. What makes us so special that the Creator of the universe is going to give us a personal message?

I believe that the issue here is sloth. We want the short cut, the easy way which only creates confusion. I find this with my counseling clients as well. Their search for God's will is fraught with emotionalism rather than intellectual pursuit and prayer.

They erroneously believe that emotional peace is the signal that they have found the truth. Now there is a lie from hell.

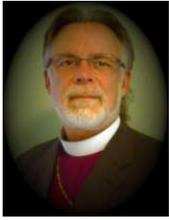
invite or to name. Hence a vocation is a bid or a summons, an invitation or a naming; and it is always expressed in some way because it is "voiced" (vox). An ordination to this term is implied in historical usage; giving the word the connotation of "Come here." This ordination is expressed and may be either mandatory or invitatory, manifesting the will of the speaker to another. **More specifically, and properly, therefore, the word vocation means a manifestation or expression of another's ordination. And we do think of it in this proper sense when we now speak of religious vocation.**

By anticipation let me say that there are two essential notes in a religious vocation: a divine invitation and a human acceptance or response. Because of man's necessary dependence in every motion, however, God not only invites but also moves the subject to respond. He does so without violence to the freedom of human action, in both the natural and the supernatural orders.

The theological difficulty here is that God's will cannot be known directly, in itself. For God is utterly simple; that is, divisible only analogously and necessarily by the finite human mind probing divinity. God and His will are identified. So to know God's will directly is to know God directly. This kind of knowledge is possible only in the beatific vision, and when that is attained the problematic choices of this life are over.

Yet there are many who seem ignorant of this irrevocable fact. In their agonizing scrutiny, and this is especially true of some aspirants to religious life, they insist on "knowing for sure." The implication is that they must see the divine decree in their regard. This shows at least ignorance, at most presumption. We can know the eternal will of God only through its effects in time. On this important point all sincere Christians should be well-informed.

More important to us practically, and more familiar to us, is the expression of the divine will which we



Abbot Oscar Joseph says:

God manifests His will in Scripture and tradition. That includes the teachings of the Church. Frequently that will is expressed through the bishops. In the case of the Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross that is me. I do realize the awesomeness of this responsibility and am humbled by it but not hesitant to express His will for our Order.

Chronic unrepentant serious sin stops us from responding to God's invitation to perfection. It also prevents Him from protecting us. The formula then is God first, neighbor second, self last. If we are so caught up in the "self" how can we possibly respond to God? There is no charity there is only self.

A sure sign of the truth of that is when I correct someone or say "no" to them they get angry with me and soon enough quit the Order.

The word counsels in this article means the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Recall what I said earlier that for us and the Benedictine/Cisterican tradition our counsels are stability, conversion, and obedience.



Rev. Prior Rommel says:

No other than Christ himself mandated for us to be perfect. This perfection is in fact, perfection in love; love for God and for others. As a precept, all followers of Christ must commit themselves to obey.

can recognize. God does manifest His will, instructing us as to what we should do. Before we act He reveals His will with regard to the evils we will face in the future and He prohibits them. Thus God clearly commands us to avoid the common obstacles to fulfilling the primary precept of love of God and neighbor. Hence there are prohibitions of evil, which impedes our vocation to perfection in charity, and precepts which command us to do what is good, primarily to love God and our neighbor wholeheartedly. The precepts tell us what we must do; these are not a matter of choice or preference. They are minimum requirements.

The rich young man put the question bluntly, "What...shall I do to have eternal life?" Christ replied with the minimum requirement – "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." The youth presses further: "All these I have kept; what is yet wanting to me?" Then Our Lord adds something more, a certain detachment and emptying of self which characterize His counsels. As we have said before, such a pure religious spirit is required in some degree of all Christians; to those who will accept it He asks for a literal and absolute practice of these counsels.

Because these three counsels are dispositions for, and in practice, signs of, perfection, those who bind themselves to these counsels by vow are said to be in a state of perfection and in a state of life which is fixed by solemn and public obligation.

Christian perfection in itself is not a counsel but a precept. "You therefore are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matt. 5:48) This perfection essentially consists in matters of precept, for the primary precept is commanded without measure: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole strength, and with thy whole mind; and thy neighbor as thyself." (Luke 10:27) Therefore, says St. Thomas, the perfection of charity falls under precept as a good that must be pursued.



Rev. Dean Columcille says:

Knowing that the aspiration to undertake monastic life comes from God, it must also be clear to the aspirant that the grace and tenacity with which we are to fulfill our vows will also be found in God.



Rev. Prior Rommel says:

Here again, we are reminded that the religious life is a "graced" life. It is primarily the work of grace in our hearts. God calls. We respond, but only so by the grace of God.



Br. Mario says:

God is ready to give the grace of response to those who **want** it: There were many saintly religious who entered religion not for the right reason and not with the best of intentions. However, when they complied with the will of God and with the observances of religion, and tried their best at it, then God did not deny divine assistance to them, on willing to do their part, in the religious state. Holiness is achieved by actuating the will of God in one's life and state of life.

Hence, says St. Thomas, "the religious state was instituted principally for the pursuit of perfection through certain exercises by which impediments to perfect charity are removed." St. Thomas describes the counsels as "instruments for attaining the perfection of charity," as "impulses to perfection and restraints from sins;" observance of the counsels "prepares the way for a safer and more perfect observance of the divine precepts."

Following his doctrine we can therefore propose a universal invitation to the practice of the particular counsels proposed by Our Lord. **Who are invited to enter the religious state? All!**

In his Scriptural commentaries, St. Thomas explains the passage in this way: **This counsel is given by God to those who ask for it and are willing to work for it. Not all take it because not all have the strength ... not that any have such a strength in themselves, but by a gift of grace. It is not by natural power that this ability to accept the counsel arises; for if one depended on natural power alone, no one could take it. But, says St. Thomas, if this strength is from grace then anyone can; for Christ said: "Ask and it shall be given to you." (Luke 11:9) And so, he concludes, by the grace of God all can take this counsel.**

For God is ready to give the grace of response to those who want it. And a generous soul, sincere in his intentions, can proceed unafraid.

While *quibus datum est* (those to whom it is given) refers to the necessary help of grace, a gratuitous gift of God, yet **this divine assistance will not be denied to those willing to do their part. The dictum "Do your best and God will do the rest" surely applies to the aspirant timidly approaching the demands of religious life. What is required is a sincere disposition of will, as well as a clear understanding of what these demands are and how they can be met.**

St. Thomas always speaks of a universal vocation to the religious state from a purely objective point



Rev. Dean Columcille says:

Having then accepted the call, one cannot continually look for affirmations of the decision well made. Faithful application to the task at hand belies a trust in God's eternal perspective and the Rule under which one lives.



Br. Mario says:

This is an act of the will, a deliberate choice and resolution, consequent upon intellectual consideration of the object willed. What is required is a sincere disposition of the will. Our object of study here is the will. God will make a way where there seems to be no way. A genuine potential vocation must always be accompanied by the possibility and the means to actuate it. Otherwise it makes no sense.



Abbot Oscar Joseph says:

This is a very important point. All too often we make a decision based on a feeling and then often regret them.

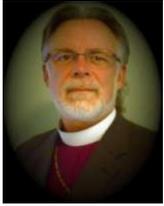
of view. He must, for in any particular case a candidate has to consider his personal disposition and situation and circumstances in relation to this objective norm. While it is true to say that Christ invites all to the better means of observing the precepts by practicing the counsels, the fact is, that God does move some to respond and others He does not. For in every inducement to the practice of the counsels "such a suggestion has no efficacy unless one is drawn interiorly by God...and so the religious resolve, by whomever it is suggested, is from God." Jesus said: "No one can come to me unless the father who sent me draw him." (John 6:44) In any case, exterior or interior, whether the very challenge of Scripture incites or the Holy Spirit more directly inspires, God must move man to accept His invitation.

Ordinarily, however, the movement of grace in religious vocation is neither rare nor exceptional.

With remarkable brevity, St. Thomas refers to this act of acceptance as *propositum religionis*, the simple resolve to enter religion, or the religious state. This is an act of the will, a deliberate choice and resolution, consequent upon intellectual consideration of the object willed.

Contemporary vocational terminology often includes such words as "desire" and "feels," implying definite sensible affections. Yet there is no influence upon the religious resolve which necessarily conjoins an emotional element. It may be there, but it doesn't have to be. One ordinarily does not feel grace, or the operation of the virtues, or the movement of the rational will. If a subject is sensibly affected in supernatural action this is accidental, a result of divine condescension of encouragement or consolation, or of the natural connection between the sensitive and rational powers.

Nor does the Church, in her legislation and practice, seek any extraordinary supernatural gift in those who seek admission into the religious state.



Abbot Oscar Joseph says:

In my instructions found in the required video for Spiritual Directors they are told NOT to discuss religious vocations with the directee for this very reason. It is all too popular an idea to search within yourselves. Why search in emptiness to find the truth when it is expressed so clearly in Scripture and tradition?

A good point is made here. Often the aspirant thinks that being a monk is a completion rather than a process. So they often misinterpret a failure or a weakness as a sign of lack in their call to be a monk. It is best to see things as process of perfection not reaching perfection.

I often find encouragement in what God starts He will finish. Relying on Him is the key here. I do my best He does the rest.

If I need to consult others I am going to choose those who know me well and know what they are talking about. Frankly, there are not too many of those people around. People have strong opinions but most of those opinions are not rightly founded.

If someone says such and so ask them why they believe, not feel, it to be true. What supports can they give for their thinking outside of their own judgment? Watch how fast their opinion will fail.

See my videos on *Protecting Your Vocation, Gold Medal Monk*, and video to the Spiritual Directors.

For more information see my videos at:
[Video.yahoo.com/people/6378310](https://www.youtube.com/people/6378310)

Only an unwitting, and untheological, counselor would advise an aspirant to search within himself for some special sign.

Furthermore, the very relation of counsel to precept and perfection, as shown, opposes any notion of some uncommon, reserved or extraordinary grace in religious vocation. The sincere disposition of the faithful Christian, cooperating with the daily graces offered him, can prepare for that series of graces which culminate in the vows of religion. While the gift of perseverance in the religious state is likewise a gift from God, it is the ordinary fulfillment of all that has preceded if the religious does not oppose the graces of his state.

St. Thomas says, "Those whom God chooses for something, He prepares and disposes so that they will be found fit for that for which they are selected."

When asked whether one should seek much advice and spend a long time deliberating over entering religion, he answered in the negative. For, of itself, entering religion is a better good to perform and we deliberate only over questionable goods! As for the aspirant, he need not worry about his ability to fulfill the obligations of religious life because he will trust not in himself, but in divine help. Finally, St. Thomas says, one needs advice only if a grave impediment stands in the way, or if the aspirant is undecided as to where and how to enter. And in such a case, he says, one should consult only those who will not prevent his entrance. Certainly St. Thomas showed no concern for a search for some-special-something.

Anyone familiar with the life of St. Thomas, and knowing his experience of family opposition to his vocation, will understand his almost bitter estimation of family advice in such matters. He remarks that if advice is necessary, stay away from worldly people, "among whom the wisdom of God is considered foolishness;" and family or relatives who "in this proposal are not friends but enemies." "In This case," he says, "the advice of family or relatives especially should be avoided." This



Rev. Dean Columcille says:

For Cistercian monks, the concept of “deliberate resolve” is raised to the level of a vow, the vow of stability. The strength of character and determination required to hold a man to one house of an order is tested repeatedly. This challenge must be met with faith and overcome by love of the Lord.



Rev. Prior Rommel says:

By deliberate resolve, I take the necessary step. I join God in his call to perfection. I take responsibility for my decision to follow. To sustain this resolve, one must employ all the means necessary afforded by the religious life. Again, everything becomes possible through the grace of God working in cooperative hearts.



Br. Mario says:

We join religion (as a means) to become holy. We do not join religion because we are already holy. In religion we walk together towards our destination: our heavenly Jerusalem. Essentially what is required is a sincere and deliberate resolve to seek perfection in charity according to the rule and constitutions of the Order. Hence a true understanding of the nature, especially the sacrifices, of the religious state is necessary, along with an unconditional and unwavering will to use the necessary means provided to obtain the end of religious life.

passage should be read in the context of his time and his own experience; but today, unfortunately, many aspirants to religious life, particularly among women, face their fiercest opposition from their own families.

St. Alphonsus does not hesitate to teach that anyone, and especially parents, who impede a religious vocation, even by mere persuasion or promises, commits a grave sin.

The difficulty is not so much in the determination of what a right intention is but in the judgment of whether or not this particular candidate has it.

Essentially what is required is a sincere and deliberate resolve to seek perfection in charity through the religious state of life, according to the rule and constitutions of a certain religious institute. In other words, St. Thomas’ terms, a right *propositum religionis*.

Hence a true understanding of the nature, especially the sacrifices, of the religious state is necessary, along with an unconditional and unwavering will to use the means provided which are necessary to obtain the end of religious life.

Cardinal Cajetan, commenting on St. Thomas’ teaching that one need not doubt his own strength to undertake the rigors of religious life, because that strength comes from divine assistance, says that we should diligently observe here that the absence of any impediment and the presence of a right disposition are presupposed. And, he says, honestly placing his trust in God to sustain him in the religious state and doing what he can to fulfill its observances.

The importance of a right intention, a proper religious resolve, can not be over-emphasized. Yet it does not matter whence this proposal arises.

And so it is possible for someone to enter religion without a right intention, even without knowing it, and then acquire a true and firm resolve after entrance. The opposite intentional process, of course, is also possible.



Br. Mario says:

One enters the religious state to become holy. Life in religion is best defined as the pursuit of perfection in charity. It is a school of love in the lord's service. In fact: one is morally suitable for admission, if he manifests both natural and religious virtues to a sufficient degree and has a sincere desire to perfect himself by using the means provided. The Rule of St Benedict is a very efficient means in this regard. St Benedict dedicates entire Chapters speaking on (the ladder of) virtue. Humility and Obedience are primary virtues.

The legal qualifications for entrance include, finally, a fitness to bear the burdens of religious life. Here again the constituted authority, the superior of the institute, must exercise a prudent judgment.

Moral fitness does not mean an attainment of perfection before entrance, for this is the very purpose of religious life. **One doesn't enter the religious state because he is holy but because he wants to become holy.**

On the other hand, superiors must safeguard the community and its reputation. Hence habitual moral deviates or public sinners or known criminals are not considered fit subjects for the religious state.

The Church officially manifests her mind in the matter of vocation in other ways. Because of the responsibilities of the priest as and *alter Christus* in the world and an instrument of God in the dispensation of the fruits of the Redemption for the salvation of souls, the Church expresses more concern over sacerdotal vocation than vocation to the religious state.

There is a marked difference between these two, and the difference must be borne in mind. Primarily, the priesthood is for others, to provide for the supernatural life of souls under the ministry of the particular priest; whereas the religious state primarily is for one's own sake to provide for the individual religious in his pursuit of perfection in charity. .

The principal difficulty is in determining the presence or absence of a right intention, and then judging personal fitness. Right intention and character are internal factors; we can only observe external behavior as an expression of man's spiritual nature. Deliberately or not, the true mind and habits of will in a man can be covered and remain hidden. They can be ascertained with no more than moral certitude, even by competent ecclesiastical superiors. **That certitude, however, joins strength and assurance when residing in proper authority, in those who have the grace of**



Abbot Oscar Joseph says:

The aspirant can find great comfort and assurance of their call when the Abbot General confirms this call and the community recognizes the call.

office to make such judgments which so strongly affect the good of the Church. Thus the accepted candidate has reason to be assured of the rightness of his action insofar as he can, excepting always a direct divine revelation.

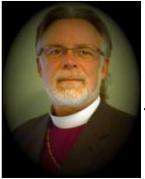
St. Augustine, in his Rule, says that such a type is unsuited for religious life:

One who is quick to anger, but prompt in asking pardon of the one whom he has offended, is better off than one who is slower to anger and slower to seek pardon for his offense. Moreover, one who never begs pardon of anyone, or who does it only begrudgingly, has no business in religious life, even if the superiors do not dismiss him.

Montalembert, in the introduction to his *Monks of the West*, gives three classic traits which indicate a healthy religious personality: simplicity, benignity, and a sense of humor.

Simplicity is a necessary quality of religious who are called to be of one mind and heart in taking on, as it were, the personality of Jesus Christ. Affection, egotism, eccentricity are unhealthy signs of selfishness which signal an imbalance of personality. Benignity is expressed in kindness and patience, in supporting, according to St. Paul's injunction, one another's burdens with true charity and generosity of spirit. Humor is based on man's reasoned perception of incongruities. A lack of a sense of humor indicates a defect of the practical reason, symptomatic of nearly every form of derangement. Because of the religious man's recognition, naturally speaking, of the implicit incongruity of man's ascent to God, he must learn to laugh at his own nothingness before the august presence of God – He who is, while we who are not. A sense of humor combats the thousand petty afflictions of a confined community life in the religious state.

One is morally suitable for admission into religious life who manifests both natural and religious virtues to a sufficient degree and has a sincere desire to



Abbot Oscar Joseph says:

I really like what is said here.

Although we are not necessarily living behind the walls of a monastery building we are a community and we do affect each other.

If we can "play" well with others and laugh that is a good sign. When Benedict says that a monk should not laugh he is addressing gross, rude humor not a sad disposition.

"Beware of a monk who does not laugh."



Rev. Prior Rommel says:

I like the phrase “docility for direction”. I believe it is the mark of true humility and possession of a teachable spirit. This is necessary to be perfected in charity.

perfect himself in this state of life by using the means provided. The indispensable natural virtues required, according to Father Philippe, are: a right conscience, a profoundly honest character, sincerity and sociability. The required religious virtues are: true piety, docility for direction, a spirit of penance to accept the renunciations required, the practice of chastity, and true devotion to a way of life dedicated to the service of neighbor for the love of God.

There are many who enter religious life and then leave it. Those who leave during the trial periods – the postulancy or novitiate – and these are the majority, usually return to the ranks of the laity vocation.” because of “lack of Those who make profession of vows and live the regular religious life for some time, and then leave at the expiration of their vows or seek dispensation from them, speak of a “loss of vocation.” Are these accurate expressions? Can one really be lacking a religious vocation? Can one actually lose it?

Again we have to go back to that mysterious “it” – the sense of vocation.

Antecedently, or abstractly, God generally invites all to the practice of the evangelical counsels in the religious state. Consequently, or concretely, he prepares and moves some to respond to this invitation and become religious. He prepares those who are chosen to serve Him in this state of life by providing them with certain suitability, by nature and by grace, and assists them in wanting to life such a life.

God acts upon us and aids us, on both natural and supernatural levels of operation, but He does not force us and leaves the free will inviolate. He very literally cooperates with us, operatively in our good actions and permissively in our bad actions.

The person, therefore, who departs from religious life after trying it, either lacked a fitness for the life in the first place, or did not cooperate with the means of grace, necessary for perseverance, which God provides through this state of life. I am



Abbot Oscar Joseph says:

It gets difficult for me to believe that once someone gives an effort at postulancy and cooperates with the tools we have given to him then says that he does not have a call difficult to believe. Rather this individual has not truly put forth the effort or has entered for the wrong reasons.

It is the role of the Novice Master to help the aspirant figure this out.



Rev. Prior Rommel says:

I perfectly agree that one cannot lack or lose a vocation. The one who is called is called whether he responds to the call or not. But the vocation is "incomplete" until the one called actually responds to it.

excluding from consideration those who may incur some prohibitive impediment, such as poor health or family needs, which makes their departure necessary and proper, especially in the early stages of religious life.

Strictly speaking, one cannot lack or lose a vocation, if we see the meaning of vocation in the divine decrees which God efficaciously executes. What we do does not change the will of God but fulfills it. After the fact we can very well say that "such is God's will." But we must avoid an implication of divine determinism, or fatalism. We are inviolably free in all our choices. We could choose other than we do. Perhaps this particular person could have persevered in the religious state if he had wanted to. By "wanting" I mean an efficacious willing; and this involves a use of ordinary means, not a "wishing" to accomplish some end while neglecting the necessary means to attain it.

Surely God does give this gift of the grace of perseverance to those who do not change their resolve, their firm determination, their holy confidence, and who dispose themselves by generously fulfilling the obligations of their state of life. St. Thomas even says: "It is better to enter religion with the purpose of making a trial than not to enter it at all, because by so doing one disposes oneself to remain always."

Religious vocation is a divine invitation, extended to all by Jesus Christ, to the practice of the evangelical counsels in the religious state, to which a capable subject, under the impetus of grace, responds through generous devotion.

The writer or speaker discussing religious life, therefore, should make his general appeal and objective. His approach should **not** be: "Is God calling you – look into your heart of hearts, etc." Rather, **the approach should be** the Christ like challenge to all, appealing to personal courage and generosity to effect a response: **"God is calling**



Rev. Dean Columcille says:

In his Rule St. Benedict translates these qualities into the rungs of a ladder that each monk must climb to reach perfection through unity of his will with the will of God.

you, daring you to follow Him. Are you generous enough, etc.?" To insure a true response, founded upon more than emotional reaction, the religious state, the object of their consideration, should be presented as it really is. Our purpose should be to inform the intellect, illumined by faith, so that a true object is presented to the rational will, eliciting a deliberate act of virtue.

St. Thomas describes the qualities of a magnanimous person, and one can readily understand their need in religious life. He says that a magnanimous person will manifest a generosity of soul in his love of God and desire for virtue, social generosity in dealing with others, frankness and lack of pretense or deceit, moderation in accepting honors, a balanced appreciation of all God's creatures, and an absence of precipitous or presumptuous efforts.



Rev. Prior Rommel says:

The real challenge for all of us is whether we are paying attention to God's call and generous enough to join him and to jump into what he is doing. Such is the thrill of the religious life. It means having to keep in step with a dynamic God



Abbot Oscar Joseph says:

I want to thank Rev. Dean Br. Columcille, OCCO, Rev. Prior Rommel, OCCO, and Br. Mario, OCCO for their important contributions to this work and efforts and encouraging us in responding to the invitation Christ has given to each of us.

Each of these fine monks has helped others in their response to the invitation and I was confident they would have important things to say.

May our Good Lord grant us the necessary courage and charity to press forward in His perfection.



Rev. Dean Columcille says:

While I clearly see the need for the virtues of charity and courage in any candidate for the religious life, I also see that he should possess the humility to accept *charity*. Is it not charitable of God to have put forth this invitation? Must the established brothers not show tender charity in teaching and guiding the postulant/novice? Reliance upon God and community are vital to success in religious life. None need go it alone. Courage is gained from this security, and life under a Rule polishes to perfection the raw material that God instilled originally in the monk's personality. We live this life for the sake of God, but it is God that does the bulk of the work!

My decision to enter the religious life was on my part, greatly shaped by my desire to be united to God whom I love. Little did I realize then that this call to perfection is indeed Christ's mandate to all his followers.

I have been through various religious groups that were supposed to provide the stimulus for real Christian growth and most especially, perfection in charity. A lot of these groups espoused what I will call "fads and passing fancies" until I came across the Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross. Looking deeper into the Benedictine-Cistercian tradition, I find the Rule of St. Benedict and the statutes of the Order as the most realistic applications of the Gospel.

Yet, it is not that easy to respond to God's call. It takes a firm resolve, much courage to embark on an unknown territory and generosity of heart to respond freely and lovingly.

In all these, there is one thing that I realized when I took the "jump". It was grace that called me, grace that imbued me with courage to take the "jump", and it is grace still that fortifies my will to be perfected in charity. I owe everything to God's magnanimous grace alone.

I always wanted to become a religious. I always knew this was my vocation and always wanted to pursue it with all my strength and at the best of my ability. I always wanted to offer something beautiful to God above: I always wanted to offer him all my love. Joining religion was so natural, so effortless. Joining religious life is an act of charity and courage in itself. When one joins, one makes a blind leap of faith. One risks. However, if one is generous with the Good Lord; if one does his best, is faithful to his calling, and reciprocates God's call to love with an abundance of love and joy in his heart; then God surely will help and give the candidate all the strength and qualities and dispositions needed to make the most out of the religious state.

God freely gave to me....
..... and I freely give back to him.....



Rev. Prior Rommel says:



Br. Mario says: