

Religious Life



A NECESSARY VOCATION

By Rev. Brian Mullady, O.P.

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INSTITUTE ON RELIGIOUS LIFE

P.O. Box 7500

Libertyville, Illinois 60048

847-573-8975 • ReligiousLife.com

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Cover Image: The *Apparition of the Virgin to St. Bernard* or the *Vision of St. Bernard* is a Renaissance painting by Filippino Lippi (c. 1485). It is located in the Church of the Badia, one of the oldest churches in Florence. This painting depicts a visit from the Virgin to Saint Bernard as he writes about the Annunciation—it is an annunciation in itself, but with Mary visiting the Saint to “announce” God’s plan of salvation.

Signs & Witnesses to God's Grace

A number of years ago, Fr. Richard Butler, O.P., wrote a book called, *Religious Vocation: An Unnecessary Mystery*. This book has been reprinted and, though written fifty years ago, addresses an issue that is still current regarding the whole idea of priestly and religious vocations. Father Butler's thesis was a critique of a position which maintains that the call to religious life involves some esoteric experience of God much like a private revelation and that the discernment of this call demands a long and exhausting personal analysis of one's psychology. Some authors today are "guilty of promoting an unnecessary mystery. The specific crime is that of relegating religious vocation to the realm of Gnosticism, making of it an esoteric private revelation."¹ If this attitude were not a matter of concern before Vatican II, it has certainly become one now when so few people are entering religious life.

It seems important to examine the exact nature and practical tools for the discernment of a religious vocation in order to encourage young people to consider entrance as an ordinary expression of the Christian life of grace. Father Butler uses St. Thomas Aquinas' analysis, which is still perceptive, to encourage people to know that this vocation is not some strange and unique call given to only a very few privileged souls. "Religious life is not an extra, a luxury, not a peculiar path for exceptional souls in pursuit of Christian perfection. It is necessary for the apostolic work of the Church and for the personal salvation of some of its members."²

Vatican II Debate

Interestingly enough, there was a long debate during Vatican II about the exact place of religious in the Church which addressed this very problem. This debate took place during Vatican II in discussions about the order of the chapters in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*. The question was how best to place the treatment of religious life in relationship to the general discussion of the universal call to holiness, a discussion which was very important to the underlining principle that there were not two spiritualities in the Church, one of which was perfect and the other of which was imperfect. One side favored treating religious life together with the universal call to holiness in one chapter. This method of proceeding had the advantage of clearly stating that religious life was an eschatological sign of the next life

within the Church herself and was a charism that would always exist in the Church and proceed from the essence of the society of the Church.

There were three reasons that some of the Council Fathers gave for favoring one chapter. The first was theological: The distinction between clergy and laity is essential to the existence of the Church as a society. This was clearly demonstrated in chapters 3 and 4 of the document. Religious life, on the other hand, is a structure in the Church that was instituted by Christ for the perfection of the action of the Church, not the existence of the Church. The second reason was pastoral: Many Catholics thought at one time, and still seem to think, that religious have some sort of monopoly on the life of perfection in charity. Instead, these Council Fathers wanted to emphasize that religious life is part of the more universal call to holiness which is based on the gift of sanctifying grace and the character of Baptism. The third reason was an ecumenical one: Many of the Protestant reformers rejected religious life because it seemed to set up an impenetrable wall between religious and the ordinary faithful, as though there really were two sanctities, one contemplative and the other active.

The other group, whose view ultimately prevailed in *Lumen Gentium*, was afraid that treating religious together with the universal call to holiness would suggest that the religious did not have a special place in the Church and it would erode religious vocations. They also thought that the logical order of the first part of the document, regarding the existence of the Church, in which the Church was generally treated as the People of God and then specifically treated as clergy and laity, should be followed in that part of the document which talked about holiness. So, the order used was first to discuss the universal call to holiness, which is founded on the grace and character given in Baptism, and then treat the special way that religious implement this call. “The state of life, then, which is constituted by the profession of the evangelical counsels, while not entering into the hierarchical structure of the Church, belongs undeniably to her life and holiness.”³

Our Lord founded religious life to give religious, whether clerical or lay, the munus (office) of being a sign and witness to the life of grace as a preparation for the life to come. Grace is the means by which we pursue this life to come. In order that the life of grace might be more vibrant, Christ foresaw the necessity of the life of the profession of the evangelical counsels. So the correct idea of the life of the profession of the counsels must be founded on a correct understanding of the life of grace.

New Theology of Grace

After Vatican II, in universities and seminaries there was a new theology of

grace proposed, in which there was basically no difference between the world and God. In such theology the distinctions within the Church between clergy and laity seemed to be at best cloudy if not completely denied. A similar fate beset religious life in which religious became indistinguishable from lay people who had some religious affiliation. Instead of a kind of being in which all participate in the life of the Trinity, grace became some peculiar indefinable experience. This has led to a crisis in religious life in which many have left and few are entering. Sadly, religious often contribute to this malaise by making the requirements for entrance very difficult and the discernment quite esoteric. Some even suggested: “The Spirit is calling religious to something. Maybe to the end of religious life.”²⁴

In synod and apostolic exhortation, the Church has responded specifically to this devaluing of the necessity of religious life for the Catholic Church. “Its [religious life’s] universal presence and the evangelical nature of its witness are clear evidence—if any were needed—that the consecrated life is not something isolated and marginal but is a reality which affects the whole Church. The bishops at the Synod frequently reaffirmed this: ‘*de re nostra agitur*,’ ‘this is something which concerns us all.’ In effect, the consecrated life is at the very heart of the Church....”²⁵

In light of this clear and positive affirmation of the necessary nature of the religious vocation to the Church’s mission of holiness and sanctity, one may well ask how it is possible that the notion has grown up that very few chosen souls are called to this. Further complicating this is the idea that those chosen souls must experience some very individual particular call. If many religious and theologians seem confused by this, it must be doubly confusing to the prospective vocation when trying to discern entrance.

The “Feel Good” Fallacy

Modern people absolutely love very introspective self-analysis. Modern philosophy has generally rejected objective knowledge in favor of subjective need. Emotion is often the measure by which one judges truth. Grace even can become a feeling. This affects all vocations in the Church. People in marriage are afraid to commit for years because they feel this might not be the right person. Of course, “trial marriage” or living together is recommended by our society today as a responsible method of discernment and people seem to think that the love of marriage should render youthful storms of emotion permanent and that one should never be bored or feel hemmed in by a given person or vocation. In marriage, the death of the emotion, and the boring and sometimes crucifying nature of the relationship, can be considered by our excessively self-absorbed culture as a basis for divorce.

When one enters religion, it seems for some communities that vocation discernment is reduced to that of a recruiting sergeant promising unrelieved good feelings but never mentioning that membership in the Army demands a willingness to go to war. As one formation superior put it: “Live your dreams. Just decide what you want including travel and constant excitement and the community will give it to you.” One vocation director made it almost impossible for prospective vocations to contact him, and then seemed to have no clear picture of how to judge their worthiness except that they needed to feel good with the people in the community. It is no wonder that this order has few vocations.

On the other hand, traditionally the desire to enter was considered enough because it was presumed that people came from stable families where they had not only matured in the Faith, but also matured as human beings in the natural give-and-take that family life demands—and that is so essential to a normal community life. It has become clear that in the last thirty years great discernment is needed of a person’s personal maturity, at least in Western culture. This is because of the breakdown of the family and excessive materialism. Many who enter simply do not seem to have the ordinary human maturity which would be necessary for either marriage or religious life. After beginning with good desires, they easily lose interest when confronted with challenges and loneliness and they sometimes develop real psychological problems, which burden themselves and others in the community.

There is no easy solution to these problems. Several things are abundantly clear though. One should never make entering the religious life so difficult or uncertain as to suggest that it is the lot of only a few strange people who have had almost a mystical emotional attraction to it.

The charism of the institute should be clear enough that the prospective vocation can actually identify the community as a specific example of the life of the evangelical counsels lived in grace according to the understanding of the Church. One is not entering a fraternity or sorority. Also, at least in Western culture, one cannot presume that a person has the necessary maturity to make a free choice without some measure of observation and knowledge of the family life from which the prospective religious comes. In short, religious life obeys the same demands as other vocations in the Church. It is founded as an ordinary gift to the Church by the Lord. The person embracing it must use ordinary means of discernment as one would use in marriage. This includes normal emotional maturity, not mystic visions. Grace perfects nature.

¹ Richard Butler, O.P., *Religious Life: An Unnecessary Mystery* (Rockford, Illinois: Tan Books, 2005) p. 7; ² *Ibid.* ³ *Lumen Gentium*, no. 44. ⁴ Sr. Sandra Schneiders, *St. Louis Review*, Oct. 20, 1995, quoted in Ann Carey, *Sisters in Crisis* (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 1997), p. 302; ⁵ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, no. 3.

The Subjectivist Idea of Vocation

Since Vatican II, there has been a great lack of vocations in places which were formerly replete with them. This can be attributed to many factors, not least of which is the very fact that in Europe and America, Catholics are having many fewer children than they did before. Yet one undeniable cause is also the fact that many Catholics see religious life as a vocation to which very few people are called. This attitude not only causes a difficulty for the mission of the Church, but also seems attributable to a subjectivist idea of vocation which has become common today. This attitude has led many to recommend that one should not enter religious life without a prolonged search and absolute subjective certainty that one is called to this life.

Seeking Perfect Charity

Religious life is objectively a better way of life when it comes to removing the impediments to perfect charity. This truth was taught by the Council of Trent and has been reaffirmed by John Paul II: “The Church has always taught the pre-eminence of perfect chastity for the sake of the Kingdom, and rightly considered it the ‘door’ of the whole consecrated life.”¹ Objectively speaking then, it is to the advantage of the mission of preaching the Kingdom of God that there be an abundance of those professing this perfect chastity and the other counsels, that the life of holiness in the Church may flourish.

The subjectivist attitude and quest for absolute certainty finds its origin in European philosophy of the last four hundred years. As is well known, since the philosopher Descartes “turned to the subject” to solve his methodical doubt concerning the possibility of truth being derived from common, ordinary sense experience, modern philosophers have turned more and more to a denial of real objective universal truths. In the more contemporary world, this denial has become so subjective that the very intellect itself has become suspect as to being able to know objective truth. Truth is reduced to how one feels about it. People today are encouraged to approach life from basic doubts about the truth of the most obvious things and to demand a certitude about human life which many human matters cannot provide, especially when one is dealing with creating the truth from one’s inner subjective needs.

This is shown in marriage. Many couples do not get married or live together because they doubt that they could ever commit to a lifelong relationship. They also substitute feelings of “being-in-love” for more objective goods which traditionally were attached to marriage, such as fidelity, fecundity and friendship. C.S. Lewis reflects on this subjectivist trend when he has a senior tempter in hell, Screwtape, say to a junior tempter on earth: “They [the humans] regard the intention of loyalty to a partnership for mutual help, for the preservation of chastity, and for the transmission of life, as something lower than a storm of emotion.”²² A similar thing seems to be happening in the consecrated life. The traditional motives for seeking the perfection of charity seem to be subordinated to whether one feels at home in the given institute or whether one really feels with all the fiber of one’s being that God has called him or her.

Because of this passion, a lack of objective certainty in the face of constant subjective feelings of doubt deters many from entering religious life for a long period of time, if they enter at all. Sometimes institutes contribute to this by substituting the entrance process for what should normally occur in the postulancy or novitiate. This is to suggest that religious life demands a heroic sacrifice just to enter and seeks to treat the neophyte as though he or she should already be a perfectly formed and mature religious.

Postponing Prospective Religious

On the other hand, because of the problem of dysfunctional and materialist families, especially in the West, the tendency of communities at least to postpone the postulancy or novitiate, until the community can know something about the family background and emotional maturity of prospective religious, seems prudent and advisable. Still, this should not be carried to an extreme.

St. Thomas Aquinas has some helpful things to say about this. He had personally experienced opposition to his entrance, and from those who thought he was making a mistake. In the *Summa* he asks: “Is it praiseworthy to enter religion without taking counsel of many, and previously deliberating for a long time?”²³ His advice in this may be illuminating to the present dilemma.

His principle is that one need take long periods of counsel only in matters which are not certain and fixed. As usual, Saint Thomas does not answer yes or no but makes a distinction based on the principle. Religious life may be considered from three aspects.

First, entering religious life may be considered in itself. As such, according to the words of Christ it is a greater good and to disparage it would be contrary to the words of Christ.

Second, entering religion can be considered from the point of view of the subjective nature of the person who wishes to enter. Saint Thomas maintains that if it is a question of the strength of character necessary to live the vows, no one should dissuade a person from entering. The reason is, as Christ makes clear regarding the counsel of poverty: “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Mt 19:26). No one can live this life relying on his own strength. “Those who enter religion trust not to be able to stay by their own power, but by the assistance of the divine power.”⁴

Saint Thomas is aware that there may be special difficulties that attach to the subject which are external to the subject’s intention, such as “bodily weakness, burden of debts, or the like.”⁵ By implication this would also include today those interior difficulties which might come from a person being unable to live the demands of community life because of a certain emotional immaturity or even emotional illness. These could make his or her intention almost impossible to realize. In fact, if physical difficulties make realizing such an intention very difficult if not humanly impossible to realize, then by implication emotional difficulties might make it even more so.

Today the problem of debt is an especially acute one in convents or monasteries where it is customary for people to enter after having obtained a college degree. Many institutes resolve this in various ways. Some require the person to work for a time in the institute’s apostolate to justify the resolution of the debt by the institute. Others require the person to wait until final profession or even ordination before resolving the debt. What seems prudent in this course is that the debt not simply be paid on entrance, as some will use this as an excuse to enter religion and then leave as soon as the debt is resolved. On the other hand, Saint Thomas is of the opinion that matters like this should be resolved in consultation with holy people who understand religious life and, more to the point, that they “should not take long deliberation.”⁶

Removing Obstacles

In many institutes today the delay in entering is too long and prospective novices become discouraged. The attitude of some institutes, that if people have a vocation they will not mind waiting, certainly has merit, but the question becomes how long the desire to enter will burn if too many impediments are put in the way? If religious life is a necessary vocation for the Church, then with Saint Thomas the weight should be put on removing what obstacles can realistically be removed as soon as possible to allow this life to flourish.

Also, time and manner of entering as well as the order which will most fit the temperament of the prospective novice is a matter about which a

person should take counsel. But, again, such counsel should be taken from people who will not be continually creating obstacles to entering.

The one thing which is clear in Saint Thomas, and should act as a guide for determining the difficulty with which a vocation is to be pursued, is that, recognizing the physical and emotional requirements for entrance, the proper place to test a vocation is not in the entrance process but in the postulancy or novitiate. “The saying: *Try the spirits, if they be of God*, applies to matters admitting of doubt whether the spirits be of God; and thus those who are already in religion may doubt whether he who offers himself to religion be moved led by the spirit of God, or be moved by hypocrisy. Wherefore they may try the postulant to see if he be moved by the Divine spirit.”⁷

One might say that the entrance process should lead the community and the person objectively to examine whether the candidate has the human qualities needed to live the life. The testing period in the community should regard the supernatural intention to live the life. In either case, this should be based on the objective importance of the religious state both for the candidate and the Church, and not on some vague doubt or need for an absolute certainty which is not possible about human actions and intentions.

Just because some leave after they enter does not mean that their entering religion was not of divine design. Those who leave during the testing period needed to discover what their true vocation was. So, “the purpose of entering religion need not be tried whether it is of God, because it requires no further demonstration.”⁸

¹John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, no. 32. Cf. Ecumenical Council of Trent, Session XXIV, Canon 10: DS 1810; Pius XII, *Sacra Virginitas* (March 25, 1954): AAS 46 (1954), p. 176; ²C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, Letter p. 18; ³Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 189, 10; ⁴Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, 189, 10, *ad corp.*; ⁵*Ibid.*; ⁶*Ibid.*; ⁷Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, 189, 10, *ad 1.*; ⁸*Ibid.*

The Grace of Perseverance

There was a pious elderly Jesuit who had spent most of his later life hearing confessions in a large parish church in a major city in the United States. As he lay dying, his community gathered around his bed. The Jesuit superior asked him what was the greatest gift he had received in his life. He looked around at the assembled younger priests by his bedside and answered: “The greatest gift I have received in my life is perseverance.”

Some think that since Vatican II the story of the religious life has been that of a “lost vocation.”¹ They feel that the problems of perseverance in such a vocation are so great today that only a few heroic souls can embrace them. Vocation talks are rare today and when they occur they often emphasize only these problems of perseverance. This is hardly an encouragement to young people to enter. In addition, many institutes seem to want candidates to be already perfect in the practice of the counsels before they enter. Some seem to have forgotten that the religious life, like all Christian life, is primarily a grace.

The Cause of Grace

No examination about the necessity of the life of religion for the life of the Church would be complete without a brief examination of the cause of grace in the Christian soul and a brief application of this to the problem of the effect of perseverance in grace. As a preamble to this examination it is important to distinguish three basic kinds of grace.

God’s grace is His special love as experienced by man. God’s love is like man’s love in the sense that it is an affirmation of the will of a good. It is unlike man’s love in the sense that man’s love merely finds a good present and approves the already existing good by experiencing a likeness in being to the beloved. God’s love creates the good of likeness in the thing loved. This is at the basis of the existence of everything. God loves things into existence. The most basic likeness, or comparison, that all things have to God is that they exist.

In addition to this love, God makes human beings like Him interiorly by giving them a participation in His nature through the action of the Holy Spirit dwelling in the soul of the holy Christian. This is called *sanctifying grace* which is found in every Christian in the state of grace. This grace involves a true addition to the very soul itself of union in likeness with the Trinity. This

is begun on earth through love and completed in heaven. This grace makes the person himself holy.

The second grace is the grace described by Saint Paul, which involves all the charisms in the Church. This grace, like sanctifying grace, is without personal merit and is freely given by God but, unlike sanctifying grace, it does not make the person possessing it holy. It is rather given for the upbuilding of the Church and enables one member of the Church to help another to receive or persevere in grace. Examples are infallibility of the pope, preaching, speaking in tongues, healing, etc.; a person would possess such a grace and be in the state of mortal sin. Such charismatic grace is given for the holiness of others. God is never frustrated in giving His gifts so He gives these gifts without regard to the personal holiness of the instrument.

The third kind of grace is God's aid. He enlightens the intellect and strengthens the will to live His divine life either by initial conversion to Him, or perseverance in the life of conversion. This is called *actual grace*. This is not a change in the life of the soul, nor is itself a participation in God's nature, nor is it given for the perfection of others. God merely aids the person to either come to His life or live His life already possessed.

A Supernatural Mystery

Since grace is a supernatural mystery by which man participates in the very life of God, only God can be the sufficient cause of grace. The gift of *sanctifying grace* "surpasses the capability of created nature, since it is nothing short of partaking of the Divine nature, which exceeds every other nature. And thus it is impossible that any creature should cause grace."² Of course, now Christ and His human nature participate in God's bringing us grace because His sacred humanity is a tool for His divinity. In fact, the invisible mission of the Holy Spirit to the world now necessarily entails the visible mission of the Son, which includes the visible Church.

Though God is the only sufficient cause of grace, God never acts in something contrary to its nature. Man is by nature free. To receive sanctifying grace, some preparation on the part of man is necessary. "Taking grace in the sense of an habitual gift of God, a certain preparation for grace is required."³

But if one is speaking of grace as actual grace (which is help from God) there is no preparation needed; indeed, actual grace exists to help prepare man to receive or to live grace. "Every preparation in man must be by the help of God moving to good."⁴

God necessarily imparts His grace to those who are prepared by being open to receive Him. This is not because He is bound in justice to do this,

but because God has infallibly promised that He will give His grace to one whom He finds so prepared. God does not depend on man's free will for this because He is infinite and can instantaneously accomplish the preparation of the free will at the same time He imparts grace. "God sometimes moves a man suddenly and perfectly to good and man receives grace suddenly as happened to Paul, since, suddenly when he was in the midst of sin, his heart was perfectly moved by God to hear, to learn, to come; and hence he received grace suddenly."⁵

Signs of Heavenly Life

Perseverance in grace is a power which is given to us when we first receive the grace of Baptism. By implication this would mean that whatever state God calls a person to which he is connected to Baptism is a state for which God also imparts grace sufficient to persevere in this. However, because this is a supernatural condition, that we actually persevere requires that we depend constantly on God's aid. There is no way a man can merit perseverance in this life in grace, even the grace of religious life, as this depends on God's divine life; indeed, it is a life described as an eschatological sign, a participation in the future life of heaven. Religious are to be signs of the life of heaven on earth and to encourage men to desire heaven even though they are not in heaven yet. John Paul II emphasized that the life of virginity is continence *for* the Kingdom of Heaven and not *in* the Kingdom of Heaven.

Lack of perseverance in the religious life, either in entering or remaining, is due to not receiving the Divine aid necessary to persevere in this grace. But this is not because God does not wish to give this help. It is rather because the recipient refuses by his free will to allow himself to be prepared to receive it. Fr. Richard Butler has well enumerated some of the causes for this lack: (1) not giving the life a fair trial and so being quickly overcome by the personal defects of self or others; (2) suffering from some canonical defect such as ill health or family need; (3) entering an order unsuitable to one's temperament; (4) seeing that one is unsuited to the religious life either physically, mentally, emotionally or morally; (5) lacking a right intention and just being drawn to the romance of the whole thing; (6) failing to cooperate with the grace of the state or the direction of one's superiors.

The Need for Prayer

Each of these conditions can cause a situation in which a religious is not easily open to the grace of God that is required to persevere in this or any Christian life. In the present culture where subjective personal reaction is

emphasized so much and many children do not act like children, where the parents are afraid to discipline their children or where children are formed to desire only the latest material experience, it is more difficult for those who enter religion to realize that their vocation is primarily one from God. People try to persevere by their own power or become worn out trying to “call all the shots” in their lives and they easily surrender the practice of prayer. This last is the reason perhaps so many find theirs a lost vocation.

Though one cannot merit final perseverance one can pray for it. Prayer for actual grace is essential for perseverance and this on a daily basis. The fathers of the desert used to have such a prayer drawn from the Psalms that they would recite all day, praying for the actual grace of perseverance: “O God, come to my assistance.” “Lord, make haste to help me.”

¹Butler, p. 83; ²Aquinas, *ST* I-II, 112, 1, *ad corp.*; ³Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, 112, 2, *ad corp.*; ⁴Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, 189, 10, *ad corp.*; ⁵Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, 112, 2, *ad 3.*

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

Signs & Witnesses to God's Grace

1. What three reasons did some of the Vatican II Fathers have for wishing to treat religious life in one chapter together with the universal call to holiness?
2. What does the eventual decision of the Fathers to treat religious life in a separate chapter tell about the necessity of this vocation to the life of the Church?
3. How did a mistaken theology of grace after Vatican II contribute to the idea that religious life is superfluous to the life of the Church?
4. Of what importance is the munus (office) of religious life as a witness to holiness?
5. What are the ordinary means for discernment of religious vocation?

The Subjectivist Idea of Vocation

1. How does the subjectivist idea of vocation and quest for absolute certainty in modern European philosophy affect the idea of religious vocation?
2. How does this same quest for subjective certainty compromise marriage?
3. What middle ground is there between an entrance process which requires absolute certainty of prospective vocations and perseverance from the outset, and one which just assumes it would happen without any scrutiny?
4. Why does St. Thomas Aquinas think one should not unduly postpone pursuit of a religious vocation?

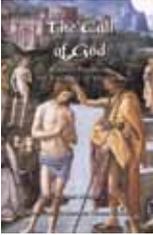
The Grace of Perseverance

1. What is the difference between sanctifying and charismatic grace?
2. What is actual grace?
3. Though God is the only sufficient cause of grace, why is man's cooperation important for perseverance in grace?
4. How does this affect the grace of a vocation?
5. What are some of the causes Fr. Richard Butler enumerates for lack of perseverance in religious life?
6. Should uneasiness about these cause a person not to enter religion?

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—Pope John Paul II

A number of years ago, the book, *Religious Vocation: An Unnecessary Mystery*, addressed an issue that is still current regarding the whole idea of priestly and religious vocations. Its main thesis was a critique of a position which maintains that the call to the consecrated life involves some esoteric experience of God much like a private revelation. Also that the discernment of this call demands a long and exhausting personal analysis of one's psychology.

Given the current climate within the Church and the world, it seems important to examine the exact nature and practical tools for the discernment of a religious vocation in order to encourage young people to consider entrance as an ordinary expression of the Christian life of grace. By using St. Thomas Aquinas' analysis, which is still perceptive, we ought to be encouraging believers to know that this vocation is not some strange and unique call given to only a very few privileged souls. In this way they will come to recognize its necessity for the apostolic mission of the Church and for the personal salvation of some of its members.

In this short treatise, *Religious Life: A Necessary Vocation*, Fr. Brian Mullady, O.P., tackles the subjectivist idea of vocation which has become far too common today. He also provides a brief examination of the cause of grace in the Christian soul and a brief application of this to the problem of the effect of perseverance in grace in regards to the fulfillment of one's vocation. Such an examination serves to provide a deeper understanding of and appreciation for this sublime vocation so badly needed in the Church today.



INSTITUTE ON RELIGIOUS LIFE

P.O. Box 7500

Libertyville, Illinois 60048

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