

The title of our book is a great summary of all its content. Dom Augustine does a real service to monks and nuns, to the religious of many Orders by this treatment of the vows. Our commitment to the Lord Jesus is all about responding to a personal call that guides us to walk in Christ's footsteps.

I hope that you were able to read through the pages assigned for today's class and have also read through the summary of Fr Augustine Robert's book **FINDING THE TREASURE: LETTERS FROM A GLOBAL MONK**. This gives you an overall picture of the author's life and interests. Certainly, he is a person of wide experience and outlook on religious life. He brought all this to his summary of what the vowed life looks like.

At the he has **end of each chapter, some helpful questions** that I would encourage you to look at and answer for yourself. They will certainly stimulate your own thinking. Also, he has some excellent references for doing further reading that may also be useful to you.

So let us jump in considering a couple things said in the Foreword by Bernardo Olivera, one time the Abbot General of our Order. Bernardo points out that Augustine Roberts drew heavily on the work of Thomas Merton or our Fr Louis who wrote some very fine commentary on the meaning of the Vows and is now published in the Monastic Wisdom Series. He also comments on the work of St John Paul II called **VITA CONSECRATA** which I would highly recommend that you read as time allows.

Bernardo points out the central themes of Augustine's book that went through successive editions. Let's read the last paragraph on p. XIII: "Many Central Themes...and the common bonds between Benedictines and Cistercians." In a way the monastic commitment is all summed up in the vow of *Conversation morum* which is simply translated as conversion of manners. What our life is about is conforming ourselves to the life of Christ, moving from a worldly way of living to allowing Christ to live in us in all that we want, say, do or think.

As Dom Augustine points out there were two important events that moved him "to reformulate the meaning of monastic profession and to express several of its elements in anew way. The first event was the appearance in 1996 of the

Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, on the consecrated life and its mission in the Church and in the world. The second circumstance is the double process of post-modernism and secularization taking place in the contemporary world.” This document on the consecrated life is available here if anyone wants to spend time with it. Also, the fact of post-modernism and secularization is familiar to you all. We are deeply influenced by the media we are exposed to. One can become easily engaged by modern news and all kinds of perspective about what’s going on but where it incorporates gospel values is difficult to discern. We have to be really careful about what we read or watch on the computer screen.

One of the outstanding paragraphs I found in Augustine’s preface is **on page XVI and let’s read it**” The net result...Gospels...” Jesus himself is the founder of our way of life since we only have it because our early monastic guides were inspired by the Holy Spirit to pursue and write about this way of life. This is especially so when lived in community as Jesus did himself. And as Augustine brings out, the “model of profession is not merely Christ’s external way of life but, even more, his continual inner experience—as man—of total love, radical dependence and constant docility to the Father in the Holy Spirit.” Our life is profoundly relational and is to reflect the very life of the most holy Trinity. I don’t think this can be kept in mind enough as we are going through this book, the way our study of the vows, of our commitment to monastic life is grounded in the life and person of Jesus Christ. It is his continual invitation all through our day that enables us to be true to our divine calling.

I found it interesting that Augustine Roberts points out how St Benedict avoids “any hint of the Arian heresy, in which the Son’s equal standing with the Father was denied.” One can say that St Benedict falls short in giving due respect to the humanity of Christ. I never realized that the name “Jesus” never appears in the Rule. In a Rule that puts so much emphasis on humility, one would think it would quote Christ’s invitation to learn of him because he “is meek and humble of heart.” Nor is there any mention of Mary, the mother of Jesus so that I would if this isn’t why the early Cistercians developed such deep devotion to Mary and the humanity of Christ? Let’s **read the last paragraph on p. XVII: “In our time... in that direction.”** I have often used a quote from

Meister Eckhart to the effect: “We are all meant to be mothers of God for God is always needing to be born.” Ronald Rolheiser, the well know spiritual writer of our own time, has commented often on how the Incarnation has come to be understood as including a wealth of human experience we are only beginning to appreciate.

To conclude the Preface let us **read part of the first paragraph on p. XIX:** “the monk’s life can best be understood... clearly contemplative.” “The innate human desire for community and the equally constant search for personal union with the Eternal” go hand in hand. The deeper T. Merton entered the contemplative experience the more he found himself a part of the whole human community.

**CHATPER ONE: ENTERING THE MONASTERY:** In the **second paragraph, Augustine writes: For the newcomer...with the Savior.**” Again, we see how the whole life **of the monk is all about the experience of a personal encounter with the living and life-giving person of Jesus Christ.**

We are not going to be able to cover all the insights of this first chapter but let’s see how far we can go. I will leave these notes for further reflection on them if you want to do this. In **the 3<sup>rd</sup> paragraph**, Augustine Robert tells of how “In every generation...in the service of God.” Jesus had an unusual ability to touch the hearts of those to whom he spoke, and it is this that continues to touch those seeking integrity today.

**On p. 3 the 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph is worth reading.** “There was even more...the Son of the living God.” There was “This inner energy of Jesus [that] challenged, purified and taught them, often with out words... Living with Jesus was gradually transforming them into new, true persons. The result was that the existence of these men and women was totally centered on Christ.” Jesus has a way of captivating our hearts, calling us into a way of life that makes us what we hardly ever believed we could be. Again, this paragraph summarizes the whole meaning of our commitment to a religious vocation.

The early follower of Christ formed a strong community bond, developing into what we now call the Church. **P. 4 the first paragraph should be read starting with “They received special instructions...Church has looked.”** Augustine sees this Church gradually formed out of three states of life. Read

**the 1<sup>st</sup> paragraph on p. 5 where it mentions the laity, religious and clergy.** “From the beginning of the Church...pastoral care.” Augustine Roberts does well to show the different vocations within the life of the Church. Various gifts are given but all destined to build up the Body of Christ, to form community that is supportive of the true longings of the human heart.

The consequences of this early formation of the Church are many and Augustine lists five of them. **Let’s look at pp. 6-8**, at parts of the five consequences he lists.

Augustine Roberts then gets into what he calls **PROFESSION THROUGH THE CENTURIES**. The **2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph on p. 9 is a good summary**. Beginning the novitiate and then our simple profession ceremony is simple, the reading of a text in the chapter room and then receiving the habit or black scapular. It is worth seeing, however, how these ceremonies developed over time. Some of these were influenced by the secular culture of the time.

As we came out of the Middle Ages and New Understanding of the whole matter of profession came to light. **Read 1<sup>st</sup> paragraph on p. 13. The real meaning of profession or the taking of vows is the “simple, radical following of the Lord Jesus according to the shared charism of the community.”**

What is really to take place is nicely described **on p. 14** so let’s read this as the final word. Start where it says: **“The contractual obligations.... with the Holy Spirit.”**

Our profession or vows are to immerse us into the life of Jesus so that we allow ourselves no longer to live, as St Paul said of himself, but that it is Christ who lives in us.

