



# FAITH & REASON

THE JOURNAL OF CHRISTENDOM COLLEGE

Summer 1991 | Vol. XVII, No. 2

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## CONSECRATED LIFE IN THE ECCLESIOLOGY OF VATICAN II

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*In this his first essay for Faith & Reason, Fr. Ihnatowicz demonstrates clearly how confusion concerning the significance of the profession of the evangelical counsels has led to an even greater confusion within the Church. He makes use of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council to show how the consecrated life is a special charism (in the Pauline sense) through which God calls and consecrates certain members of the faithful to a special form of life for the entire Church.*



CONFUSION ABOUT THE NATURE AND ROLE IN THE CHURCH OF THE CONSECRATED life, i.e., life based on the profession of the evangelical counsels, affects more than religious themselves. It influences the laity's attitude to religious life, and thus often becomes a negative element in the contemporary crisis of vocations: parents will not encourage their children to embrace religious life, they will even make every attempt to dissuade them from such a decision.

This by itself would be bad enough. But even more is at stake. The presence of the three states, laity, ordained priesthood, and consecrated life, is essential for the perfection of the Church, for her dignity and her beauty, as St. Thomas Aquinas put it.<sup>1</sup> If this be so, one cannot understand the meaning of any of the three without some understanding of the other two. And thus without an adequate vision of the consecrated life, the whole people of God, priest, religious, laity, will be poorer in the understanding of the Church, and of their own vocation.

### ECCLESIAL NATURE OF CONSECRATED LIFE

It is my belief that Vatican II has opened a new perspective on "life consecrated by the profession of the evangelical counsels" (*Perfectae caritatis* 1d).<sup>2</sup> The Council did this not by rejecting the earlier doctrine, but by giving it a new context: making it an essential part of its ecclesiology.

### THE WAY OF THE COUNSELS: A PATH TO HOLINESS

Gustave Martelet observed that between the sixteenth century and Vatican II, theologians, with the notable exception of Charles Journet, did not discuss the place of religious in the Church.<sup>3</sup> The counsels were considered almost exclusively as a means of personal asceticism, as a privileged way to perfection.

There was a certain aura of obviousness about such a way of seeing them. An ascetic motive, a desire to attain sanctity, does play an important role in a person's decision to embrace the life of the evangelical counsels. Constitu-

tions of religious orders give sanctification of members as their primary purpose. The monastic tradition presents the life of a monk as the expression of a desire to seek God, to live the Gospel literally, to obey the Lord's invitation to the young man: "If you would be perfect, go sell what you possess and give to the poor ... and come, follow me" (Matthew 19:5).<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, the counsels are a specially effective means of attaining holiness. Observance of the evangelical counsels frees the human heart from attachments to worldly things, and therefore constitutes a particularly effective means of attaining that perfection of love in which Christian perfection consists.<sup>5</sup> Commitment to the life of the counsels is both a declaration of the will to seek perfection and a means of achieving it. The Council of Trent anathematized anyone who would deny that it is "better and happier to remain in celibacy or virginity than to be joined in matrimony."<sup>6</sup>

Nor did Vatican II distance itself from this view. It embraced it, indeed, perhaps even strengthened it, giving it a Christological focus: the way of the counsels, it proclaimed, represents a clearer and more complete way of being conformed to Christ (*Perfectae caritatis* lb, *Lumen gentium* 42b). What more could be said?

Yet the problem remains, Why only a few choose what is better and happier?

If Christ proposes the way of the counsels to all the faithful, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that choosing not to embrace it is, at the very least, a sign of lesser zeal. A lay person, simply by remaining lay, fails somehow to seek perfection; an idea not uncommon among monastic writers, but firmly rejected by the Magisterium.<sup>7</sup>

But perhaps this form of life is not proposed to all Christians? Here an appeal to vocation is made. "Not all can accept this but only those to whom that is granted" (Mt 19:11), "each has his particular gift from God" (1Cor 7:7). The question, then, becomes: Why does God call some to this "better" path and not oth-

ers? Does he play favorites?

Trying to answer this question, the older theology often found itself in something of a quandary. Vatican II suggests an answer, by giving the vocation of the life of the counsels an ecclesial context and function.

## UNIVERSAL VOCATION TO HOLINESS IN THE CHURCH

"Vocation" is one of the fundamental notions of Scripture and Christian tradition. It is also a key concept in the Council's ecclesiology, or more generally, of its anthropology.<sup>8</sup>

Scripture has two related concepts of vocation. There is the "absolute" vocation, the divine call to all human beings to enter into communion with Him. From this universal vocation, and in the service of it, flow vocations involving a "calling out": an individual or a group is chosen from among others, distinguished, given a special mission and destiny.<sup>9</sup>

There are several stages in this process. First, there is election: God chooses a person or group. Then comes vocation, the actual call; God's choice is made known to the chosen one, he is confronted, challenged to submit to the divine will expressed in the call. When the human "yes" is given, God consecrates the chosen one, and empowers him to the task involved. God's call is not a simple proposal, an invitation to a task; it is a grace. God empowers us to perform what he desires of us. Finally, but this is in fact the original purpose of the whole process, a concrete mission is conferred. One is called in order to be sent; God calls because he wants to send.



*The Sister of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration*

In the documents of Vatican II "vocation" retains all its biblical richness. Creating us, God calls each of us to a "most high vocation" (*Gaudium et spes* 3b); this vocation is the source of our human dignity (*Gaudium et spes* 12b). "The dignity of man," says the Council, "rests above all on the fact that he is called to communion with God" (*Gaudium et spes* 19a). It is in the con-

text of this common vocation of humanity that Vatican II sees the role of the Church. “In manifesting Christ, the Church reveals to men their true situation and calling” (*Ad gentes* 8). The Church serves this universal vocation; in this sense the Church is “for the world”: her role is to lead humanity to that communion with God which is their vocation. This is the vocation of the Church as a whole and of every Christian. One is called to the Church to participate in her mission.

Those whom God calls, he also consecrates. Baptism is the consecration of those called to the Church (*Lumen gentium* 10a, 44a). For this reason all the baptized possess “a common dignity of members deriving from their rebirth in Christ, a common grace as sons, a common vocation to perfection, one salvation, one hope and undivided charity” (*Lumen gentium* 32b).

This universal baptismal vocation is a call to apostolate (*Lumen gentium* 17; *Apostolicam actuositatem* 2; *Ad gentes* 1), but also, indeed primarily, a call to holiness (*Lumen gentium* 39).<sup>10</sup> Without holiness the apostolate would not bear fruit. Christian witness can only be given by personal holiness. The sign must contain what it is to signify. Because the Church is “unfailingly holy ... all in the Church are called to holiness” (*Lumen gentium* 39).

## DIFFERENT VOCATIONS IN THE CHURCH

This “common vocation” to personal holiness does not negate differences in the Church. “All are called to sanctity and have obtained an equal privilege of faith through the justice of God,” but “not everyone marches along the same path” (*Lumen gentium* 32c). There is “a wonderful diversity” in the Church (*Lumen gentium* 32a) of natural and supernatural gifts, of graces and charisms (*Lumen gentium* 41, *Gaudium et spes* 29). This variety of gifts corresponds to a variety of vocations.

Among them three are special: to the priesthood, to the consecrated life, to lay life or marriage. Because they are constitutive, they are also mutually irreducible; each has its own purpose and its own *modus operandi* (*Lumen gentium* 13c).

The state of the counsels, the consecrated life, is not “a kind of middle way between the clerical and the lay conditions of life” (*Lumen gentium* 43b). We are dealing with two separate distinctions. One rests on the call to different “duties”: some are called to be “teachers,

dispensers of the mysteries and pastors for the others” (*Lumen gentium* 32c), and they are “endowed with sacred power” for that purpose (*Lumen gentium* 18a). The other distinction relates to differences in the “manner of life”: “Some Christians, both clerical and lay, are called by God that they may enjoy a special gift of grace in the life of the Church” (*Lumen gentium* 43b).<sup>11</sup>

Both the ordained priesthood and the state of the counsels serve the whole Christian people, but serve in a different way and on a different level. Their presence is necessary if the catholicity of the Church is to be fully realized.<sup>12</sup> So Vatican II teaches:

In virtue of this catholicity each part contributes its own gifts to other parts and to the whole Church, so that the whole and each part individually receive increase through the mutual sharing by all ... so that the whole and each of the parts are strengthened by the common sharing of all things ... Hence it is that the People of God is not only an assembly of various peoples, but in itself is made up of different ranks (*ordines*). This diversity among its members arises either by reason of their duties (*officia*), as some exercise the sacred ministry (*ministerium*) for the good of their brethren, or by reason of their condition or way of life, as many enter the religious state and, pursuing sanctity by the narrower path, stimulate their brethren by their example (*Lumen gentium* 13b).<sup>13</sup>



## CONSECRATED LIFE AS A CHARISM

The practice of the counsels is undertaken in response to a divine call (*Perfectae caritatis* 1c, 5a), under the influence of the Holy Spirit (*Lumen gentium* 39). It is a personal gift, but one that is ecclesial in scope and character. The evangelical counsels are a “divine gift” for the Church (*Lumen gentium* 43a), granted so that the Church might be adorned by the gifts of her children (*Perfectae caritatis* 1b). They are a charism in the strict biblical sense of the word: a gift bestowed on some of the faithful “making them fit and ready to undertake the various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the

Church” (*Lumen gentium* 12b).<sup>14</sup>

A document issued by the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes in 1983 summarizes this teaching well: “The gift of religious vocation is rooted in the gift of baptism but is *not given to all the baptized*. It is freely given and unmerited; offered by God to those whom He chooses freely from among his people and *for the sake of his people*.”<sup>15</sup>

This is, then, the Council’s answer to the question: Why only some follow the path of the counsels? The consecrated life as a necessary service in and for the Church. It springs not from the decision of some to seek holiness by “the narrower path,” though seeking holiness is an essential element of this vocation, but in God’s raising some from among the people for the sake of the Church. For this reason the consecrated life “while not entering into the hierarchical structure of the Church, belongs inseparably (*inconcusse*) to her life and holiness” (*Lumen gentium* 44d).<sup>16</sup> Because vocation to the consecrated life is a charism, remaining in the lay state is not of itself a sign of lesser zeal and devotion.

## PROFESSION OF THE COUNSELS AS A CONSECRATION

This charism is of a special order: it is ordained not towards some particular actions or tasks for the Church, but towards a permanent form of life. St. Thomas Aquinas saw in the act of religious profession an objective consecration of a person, analogous to, though not identical with, the sacramental consecration in episcopal ordination. Unfortunately he found no one to share his vision. Already at his time another understanding of religious profession was gaining ground; by the sixteenth century it became practically the only one. Religious profession was seen as an act of self-donation to God, which when approved by a qualified representative of the Church, established a person in a canonical state.<sup>17</sup> In this sense, the liturgical ceremony was simply a ritual confirmation of the personal decision. This made it external to the act of commitment itself, and ultimately unnecessary. More importantly, it led easily to a purely ascetical vision of the counsels themselves.

Vatican II returned to St. Thomas’ position. Even if the texts of conciliar documents could be interpreted differently, explanations given in the synodal aula during the Council, and official interpretations after the Coun-

cil, leave little doubt that this was what the Fathers of Vatican II meant to teach. Religious profession is consecratory in nature. The Preface for the Mass of Religious Profession says this: “[Christ] consecrated more closely to your [God’s] service those who leave all...” This teaching is summarized in *Essential Elements in the Church’s Teaching on Religious Life*: “Consecration is the basis of religious life. By insisting on this, the Church places the first emphasis on the initiative of God and on the transforming relation to Him which religious life involves. Consecration is a divine action. God calls a person whom He sets apart for a particular dedication to Himself.”<sup>18</sup>

How is this consecration related to baptism? Unlike marriage and priestly ordination, the other two consecrations instituting Christians in an ecclesial state, the profession of the evangelical counsels is not a new sacrament. The Council teaches “[profession] constitutes a special consecration [of religious], which is deeply rooted in their baptismal consecration and is fuller expression of it” (*Perfectae caritatis* 5a). This consecration lies in a different line from priestly ordination and the consecration through the sacrament of marriage, though all three are rooted in the baptismal consecration. Unlike the other two, it does not give new special powers in the Church, but it actualizes in an explicit manner that vocation to which all are called by virtue of their baptismal consecration (cf. *ad gentes* 18). This is, most probably, the reason why it need not be a separate sacrament.

## ROLE OF CONSECRATED LIFE IN THE CHURCH

“The profession of the evangelical counsels, therefore, is a sign that can and ought attract all members of the Church to a prompt and effective fulfilling of the duties of their Christian vocation” (*Lumen gentium* 44c).<sup>19</sup> For this reason: “Christian holiness is fostered by the [evangelical] counsels” (*Lumen gentium* 42b).

These texts stress the twofold role of the consecrated life. It has an epiphanic function (it shows, manifests); it also has an effective function (it stimulates, prompts, fosters). They are not two separate, mutually independent functions. The latter depends on the former. Consecrated life fosters holiness by manifesting it.

This double task is accomplished by “pursuing sanctity.” It is however not the “pursuing” itself that specifies the special mission of the consecrated life, for

all the faithful are equally called to seek sanctity, but the fact that it is done by “the narrower path,” by the profession and practice of the evangelical counsels. All the faithful are called to perfect sanctity, though “not everyone marches along the same path” (*Lumen gentium* 32c). The way of religious, and other Christians committed to the practice of the evangelical counsels, is called the “narrower path” not because it leads to a higher degree of sanctity, but because it calls for the acceptance of renunciations not demanded from all the faithful.

## CONSECRATED LIFE AS EPIPHANY

What does the consecrated life “show”? Vatican II refused to accept without qualification an opinion, common among spiritual writers, contrasting marriage and the state of the counsels simply and exclusively along the incarnational eschatological polarity. According to that view the consecrated life is a proleptic sign of the eschatological condition of humanity, while marriage gives witness to the incarnational aspect of salvation. Such an opposition between the role of these two constitutive states in the Church contains a dangerous oversimplification.

Vatican II has reminded us that the whole Church and every Christian, each in his own way, are called to be a sign of the coming Kingdom and to witness to the incarnational presence of the Word in the world (*Lumen gentium* 8a, d, 48; *Gaudium et spes* 1, 22).<sup>20</sup> Consecrated life does have an eschatological aspect, but the laity are also “heralds of the eschatology.”<sup>21</sup> Hence the proper distinction is not one between incarnational and eschatological witness, but between two different ways of manifesting the tension between the Kingdom to come and the Kingdom already present in the Church.

The consecrated life points towards the eschatological fulfillment because the Church is the sign of that fulfillment and the consecrated life manifests something of the nature of the Church. A narrowly eschatological perspective has been replaced by an ecclesial one. This

widening and deepening of vision is made clear by the succeeding revisions of the conciliar text. Just one example will suffice. Where the 1963 draft had “testimony of the universal vocation to the Heavenly Kingdom,” the final text reads, “This practice of the counsels ... gives and should give a striking witness and example of that holiness” (*Lumen gentium* 39).<sup>22</sup> (“That holiness” refers to the holiness of the Church, the subject matter of this paragraph.)<sup>23</sup>

There is a new focus in the final text: it is no longer centered on the eschatological vocation, but on the present reality of the Church. This ecclesiological focus is strengthened by another sentence, immediately preceding, introduced into the text: “This sanctity of the Church ... appears in a certain way of its own in the practice of the counsels which have been usually called ‘evangelical.’”

## SIGN OF THE HOLINESS OF THE CHURCH

The text of the Constitution makes a distinction between the holiness of the Church and the holiness in the Church, between the holiness of the Church as a supernatural reality and the holiness demanded from individual Christians. It roots the latter in the former: holiness of the faithful is the consequence and the epiphany of the holiness of the Church. They are called to be holy, because the Church, whose members they are, is “unfailingly holy”; the Church is holy, because Christ who “alone is holy ... joined her to himself” as his Body and his Bride (*Lumen gentium* 39).

This holiness “appears in a certain way of its own (*proprio modo*) in the practice of the [evangelical] counsels.” This does not mean simply that religious are examples of personal sanctity, but that the basic parameters of the consecrated life manifest the parameters of Christian sanctity; “through the deeper consecration made to God it clearly shows and signifies the intimate nature of the Christian vocation” (*Ad gentes* 18a).

The consecrated life manifests what Christians,



*“The way of religious, and other Christians committed to the practice of the evangelical counsels, is called the ‘narrower path’ not because it leads to a higher degree of sanctity, but because it calls for the acceptance of renunciations not demanded from all the faithful.”*



The consecrated life manifests what Christians, in virtue of their baptism, are, and what they should become. Thus *Lumen gentium* first describes the general characteristics of Christian perfection (n. 40), and then traces the essential aspects of the consecrated life much along the same lines (n. 44). Even if the language of the two sections differs somewhat, explanations given by the Relators of both sections make it clear that a parallel was intended by the Commission. Both Christian sanctity in general and the consecrated life are: theocentric, eschatological, christological.<sup>24</sup> The consecrated life has these three aspects, because Christian holiness must have them.

(1) *Theocentric*. Of primary importance is the theocentric aspect. Vatican II sees Christian holiness, or the “fullness of Christian life” to which all are called, as consisting in the perfection of love (*Lumen gentium* 32b; 40b).<sup>25</sup>

Love is perfect when it observes the proper order of charity. This order is founded on the absolute primacy of the love of God above all things. This is why Vatican II describes sanctity in terms of the observance of the double commandment of love: to love God with their whole heart and love one another as Christ loved us (*Lumen gentium* 40a). All Christians should “wholeheartedly devote themselves to the glory of God and to the service of their neighbor” (*Lumen gentium* 40b). The first commandment is truly the first.

To be a true sign of sanctity, the consecrated life must reflect this order of charity. When Pope Paul VI said that religious life witnesses to the primacy of the love of God, he surely expressed the teaching of Vatican II.<sup>26</sup> The state of the counsels is embraced “under the impulse of love, which the Holy Spirit pours into their hearts” (*Perfectae caritatis* 1c); it is the believers’ response to God who loved them first (*Perfectae caritatis* 6a). Such people, says the Council, dedicate themselves totally “to God loved above everything” (*Lumen gentium* 44a).<sup>27</sup> They profess the counsels in order to live for God alone (*Perfectae caritatis* 5a; 6a).

The evangelical counsels do not call for some merely symbolic, liturgical actions; they demand actions

that have real effects, for they demand surrender of some of the rights and goods proper to human happiness, for the sake of entering into a specially intimate and exclusive union with God. They serve this union, for they have the capacity to free a person from “hindrances that could hold him back from loving God ardently and worshiping him perfectly” (*Lumen gentium* 44a), and for that reason, the counsels are helps in advancing in love (*Lumen gentium* 43a; cf. 44b).



But the importance of the evangelical counsels goes beyond this medicinal role. Their exigencies define a form of life where the love of God holds absolute primacy, and “they continually stimulate one to ardor in the life of love” (*Lumen gentium* 46b).

(2) *Christological*. Jesus is the primary example of perfect love. For this reason, Christian perfection must involve an imitation of Jesus, and the three evangelical counsels define the life of Christ “who, virginal and poor, redeemed and sanctified men by obedience unto death on the cross” (*Perfectae caritatis* 1c). This role of the counsels Vatican II considers to be of special importance: “Above all (*praesertim*) they have the power to conform the Christian ... more fully to that kind of virginal and poor life which Christ the Lord chose for himself and which Virgin Mother embraced also” (*Lumen gentium* 46b).

In developing this teaching, Vatican II draws a strict parallel between Christ and the consecrated person in the case of poverty (*Perfectae caritatis* 13) and obedience (*Perfectae caritatis* 14). The treatment of “chastity for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” is a more complex matter. We are not told that, because of their celibacy, religious are like the virginal Christ, but that “for all Christ’s faithful [they] recall that wonderful marriage made by God, which will be fully manifested in the future age, and in which the Church has Christ for her only spouse” (*Perfectae caritatis* 12a). *Lumen gentium* says more simply that in consecrated life “Christ joined to his Bride the Church by an indissoluble bond is better represented” (*Lumen gentium* 44a).

This way of speaking makes it clear that celibacy defines the consecrated life in a special way. Virginal chastity is not merely an imitation of the virtues of that

Christ; it makes the consecrated life a symbol of the saving mystery present and hidden in the Church. It is here that the ecclesial role of the consecrated life is focused. This explains why the Magisterium rebuffs all attempts to redefine religious life in terms that would open it equally to people living in marriage, but has approved forms of the consecrated life, such as virginity lived in the world, where no explicit profession of poverty and obedience is involved (Can. 604).

This reference to the bond between Christ and the Church explains also why any description of the consecrated life merely in terms of observing the evangelical counsels is not sufficient. Many people actually live according to those demands, by necessity (e. g., a deserted spouse), or because the demands of some work or apostolate make it necessary for a time (e. g., lay missionaries). But this practice does not bring them into the consecrated state. Nor are such practices capable of being the sign of Christian sanctity, for they cannot represent the indissoluble bond by which Christ is joined to his Bride the Church.

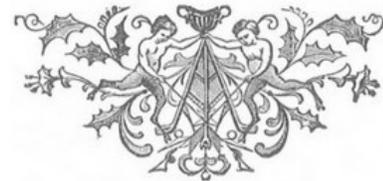
Here we touch the fundamental characteristic of the consecrated life. The consecrated life is a vowed condition: at its root lie “vows or other sacred bonds of a similar nature” (*Lumen gentium* 44a). It involves an absolute, fundamentally irrevocable commitment.<sup>28</sup> Not the practice of the counsels, not even the state of virginity by itself, constitutes the essence of the consecrated life but the act of total self-donation to God (*Lumen gentium* 44a; cf. *Perfectae caritatis* lb). Not merely imitating Christ is involved, important as it is, but joining oneself to Christ by the gift of one’s whole life (*Perfectae caritatis* lc). God receives this surrender and consecrates the one who makes it for his service. This consecration establishes that spousal bond between a Christian and Christ which constitutes the essence of the consecrated life.

The spousal character is essential to its very mission, and this is the reason why consecrated life demands the renunciations of the evangelical counsels, and specially why renunciation of marriage is necessary. Consecrated virginity demands a gift of self so complete that there is no room for any other union, however good in itself.<sup>29</sup> Celibacy is a resignation from one form of love and union; yet it is not a choice against love, but for another more overwhelming love.

Because it is spousal in character, the state of

the counsels can be an image of the union between Christ and the Church. For the same reason a true consecration must be involved (*Lumen gentium* 44a). This new consecration binds a Christian to the Lord more directly and more exclusively, but also more securely; the bond no longer depends merely on a believer’s self-oblation, but on the gift that Christ, the Bridegroom, makes of himself to that believer. These “stronger and more stable bonds” are the reason why in this form of life “Christ joined to his Bride the Church by an indissoluble bond is better represented” (*Lumen gentium* 44a).

Thus consecrated life is the sign of that union of the Son and humanity of which the Church is a sacrament - a union based on the Son’s total gift of himself to humanity in the Incarnation and Redemption. At its very foundation lies an action of Christ who chooses, calls, and consecrates a person. It is spousal in character in order that it may manifest the exclusivity and personal nature of the love of the Son who “by his incarnation ... in a certain way united himself with each man” (*Gaudium et spes* 2b). Because it involves a true consecration, consecrated virginity becomes the image of the unchanging love that Christ has for each human being. Because it demands a vow binding irrevocably, it can represent that total surrender to God in love which is the essence of sanctity and the very being of the Church: the Bride perfectly submitted to her Spouse.<sup>30</sup>



Vatican II adopted the traditional vision of consecrated virginity as involving a marital union with Christ, but it also gave it a new, more communal and ecclesial, interpretation. The traditional presentation focused on the personal union of the virgin with Christ, analogous to the relationship between husband and wife, making it rather awkward to apply this concept to men.<sup>31</sup> Vatican II offers a restatement of the teaching that does not suffer from this embarrassment. The consecrated person is not simply presented as a bride of Christ, but the state of the consecrated person, male or female, is a sign, an epiphany of the marital union of Christ and the Church.<sup>32</sup>

Those who embrace it do not represent the Church because they are brides of Christ; because they live *in persona ecclesiae sponsae*, their life has a bridal character. Hans Urs von Balthasar describes this well: “It is the

primary function of one in the state of the counsels. .. to represent the body, the Church-Bride ... It is his task to assimilate the 'yes' of the whole Church to the 'yes' of Mary, whose model is her Son."<sup>33</sup>

This is why the demands of the evangelical counsels described the life of Mary, as well as that of Jesus (*Lumen gentium* 46b), and why the consecrated life is Marian in character.

(3) Eschatological. Also the eschatological aspect of the consecrated life must be considered in an ecclesial context. The Council's description has a twofold perspective: what is possessed already and what is hoped for. The consecrated life "reveals more clearly to all believers the heavenly goods which are already present in this age, witnessing to the new and eternal life which we have acquired through the redemptive work of Christ and pre-luding (*praenuntiat*) our future resurrection and the glory of the heavenly kingdom" (*Lumen gentium* 44c). (It is in this sense that *Perfectae caritatis* must be understood when it calls the life of the evangelical counsels "a clear symbol of the heavenly Kingdom" [a].)

Consecrated life has an eschatological orientation because "the Church, to which we are all called, and in which by the grace of God we acquire holiness, will receive its perfection only in the glory of heaven" (*Lumen gentium* 48a). It is in this sense that Mary is the prototype of the heavenly Church, not only its first member, and the model of the perfection of each Christian, for "in the most Blessed Virgin the Church has already reached that perfection whereby she exists without spot or wrinkle" (*Lumen gentium* 65).

The life of those consecrated by the profession of the evangelical counsels is a proleptic sign and model of the Church in her perfect holiness; while at the same time it is most profoundly Marian in role and character.

This is why celibate chastity is an essential element of the consecrated life. Already in the New Testament it is presented as a foreshadowing of the life of the risen (cf. Luke 20:34-35). For the same reason, the indissoluble bond is necessary: through this very indissolubility the security of the Church in patria is manifested.

Hans Urs von Balthasar admirably summarized Vatican II teaching on the role of the consecrated life: "To live according to the counsels is far less a means of attaining the personal goal of the individual who strives

for 'perfection' than an expression of what the Church must be and do in purity if it is to receive as perfectly as possible ... what has been promised it."<sup>34</sup> Thus an analogy may be drawn between the role of the Church in the world and the role of the consecrated life in the Church. As the Church reveals to all human beings "their true situation and calling" (*Ad gentes* 8), so the state of the counsels reveals the nature of the situation and vocation of the baptized.

## SACRAMENTAL ROLE OF THE CONSECRATED LIFE

This analogy suggests another aspect of the consecrated life. The Church is "the universal sacrament of salvation" (*Lumen gentium* 48; *ad gentes* 1a), a sign and instrument of that communion with God to which all are called (*Lumen gentium* 1; cf. *Unitatis redintegratio* 2c). All the baptized must share in some fashion in this sacramental nature of the Church. "All members, pastors, laymen and religious, each in their own manner, share in the sacramental nature of the Church," but the consecrated life "is a special way of sharing in the sacramental nature of the People of God."<sup>35</sup> This last statement is explicitly derived from the teaching of *Lumen gentium* that "the evangelical counsels unite those who practice them to the Church and her mystery in a special way" (n. 44b).

The consecrated life is not merely an image of the bond between Christ and the Church, it involves a real spousal bond between a Christian and Christ. It contains the grace it signifies. It seems that the expression "continually represents" (*perpetuo repraesentat*) in *Lumen gentium* should be taken in the strong sense: the state of the counsels makes present the form of life which Christ embraced coming into this world. Christ's own form of life is not merely recalled, or imaged by those in the consecrated life, it is truly made present and thus available in the Church by them and in them (*Lumen gentium* 44c).

The Council's teaching that "the Church's holiness is fostered (*fovetur*) in a special way" by the evangelical counsels, among which "that precious gift of divine grace" in virginity or celibacy is specially eminent (*Lumen gentium* 42b), should not be understood in a merely psychological or moral sense of giving encouragement, or good example. Consecrated life is truly a means of Christ's saving action. Christ calls and consecrates some to use them for the upbuilding of the Church (Ephesians 4:12). And this is the ultimate reason why God calls some believers to the life of the counsels.

## NOTES

1 *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q. 183, art. 2, in corp.

2 Unless otherwise stated all Vatican II documents are quoted after Austin Flannery (gen. ed.), *Vatican II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, 1988 Revised Edition (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Co.).

3 Gustave Martelet, *The Church's Holiness and Religious Life* (St. Mary's, KS: 1966), p. 4.

4 See *Rule of St. Benedict*, 58, 7; St. Athanasius, *Life of St. Antony*, chapters 2 and 3.

5 See e.g., St. Thomas Aquinas, ST 1-2, 108, 4c; 2-2, 189, 4c; 184, 3, ad 1.

6 Sessio XXN, Can. 1 (DS 1810).

7 See, e.g., Pius XI *Rerum omnium*, AAS 15 (1923), 49. His discourse of January 8, 1933 (*Osservatore Romano*, January 9, 1933).

8 *Vocatio* appears 116 times, the verb *vocare* 113.

9 See, e.g., Xavier Leon-Dufour, *Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Terrence Pendergast (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), s.v. vocation, election, pp. 422, 174, resp.

10 *Mutuae relationes*, n. 4, offers a good summary of the Council's teaching.

11 The Council's careful use of "ministerial" language should be noted. Vatican II uses ministerium as a synonym of officium, to denote a service where, if not ordination, at least official delegation is necessary. For other kinds of service in the Church the term ministratio is preferred (10 times in various documents). See LG 4, 7, 21, 30; PO 2; AG 4. See P. Erdo, "Ministerium, munus, et officium in Codice Iuris Canonici," *Periodica* 78 (1989), 418-425.

12 See A. Schleck, *The Theology of Vocations* (Milwaukee: 1963), pp. 87-88.

13 My translation.

14 Though Vatican II did not use this term in connection with the consecrated life, recent popes do. E.g., Paul VI, *Evangelica testificatio* n. 11; John Paul II, *Allocution to male religious in Sao Paulo*, July 3, 1980, *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, v. 3, 2, p. 91.

15 *Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching on Religious Life as Applied to Institutes Dedicated to Works of the Apostolate*, III, I, #2. Emph. added.

16 Translation Flannery, adjusted; his "undeniably" seems too weak. Cf. *Relatio* de n. 44, "D" (*Acta Synodalia* 3/1, p. 318).

17 See J. de Finance, "Consecration," *Dictionnaire de Spiritualit*, 4, v. 2, col. 1580-1583.

18 *Essential Elements*, n. 5. John Paul II, *Redemptionis donum* n. 7; his speech to the American bishops, September 19, 1983, *L'Osservatore Romano* No. 216 (19-20 Sept 1983), p. 4. See also Angel Padrilla, "Theological Identity of Religious Life," *Consecrated Life* 12 (1975), 252-254.

19 My translation. See *Relatio* to n. 44, *Acta Synodalia*, 3/1, p. 317.

20 See Paolo Molinari, "Caractere eschatologique de l'Eglise peregrinante et ses rapports avec l'Eglise celeste," ed. G. Barauna and Y. Congar, *L'Eglise de Vatican II*, coll. Unam Sanctam 51c (Paris: 1966), pp. 1194-1203.

21 See V. Truhlar, "Laicat heraut de l'eschatologie," *Laicat et saintete*, v. 2, *Saintete et vie dans le sikle* (Rome: 1965), pp. 257-264.

22 *Acta Synodalia* 2/1, p. 269.

23 This interpretation is confirmed by *Relatio* in n. 39 "C", *Acta Synodalia* 3/1, 301.

24 See *Relatio* de n. 40, olim n. 29 and *Relatio* de n. 44, olim n. 33, D; AS 3/1, pp. 302-303, and 317 respectively.

25 Both the constancy of the theme of love as the goal, and the different formulations of this teaching in successive versions of *Lumen gentium* and *Perfectae caritatis* are of interest. (See *Acta Synodalia* 1/4, p. 35; 3/7, p. 764, 85, 86.) The latter document is specially significant. An earlier (1964) version described the goal of consecrated life as "pursuit of sanctity"; that was changed to "pursuit of perfect charity" in the final text to bring it in line with the teaching of the Constitution on the Church. (See *Acta Synodalia* 4/3, pp. 512, 584.)

26 *Evangelica testificatio*, 1.

27 My Translation.

28 See *Relatio* de N. 44, olim n. 33, (B), *Acta Synodalia* 3/1, p. 317.

29 In Mt 19:12 the question is not simply of not being married, but of becoming incapable of marriage.

30 We are not denying the right of the Pope to dispense from such vows, but stress the fact that when the vow

is made, it is in intention perpetual. The gift in intention is irrevocable.

31In a slightly different context A.-M. Henry provides an example of how awkward theologians felt about it. Speaking of marriage symbolism applied to baptism, he says: “Although every soul is spiritually a bride of Christ, yet only woman is a bride by nature and is able to signify, to represent the mystery of marriage which the Christian contracts in his soul.” “The Mystery of Virginity,” *Chastity*, trans. Lancelot C. Sheppard (Westminster, MD: 1955), p. 83.

32This is one reason why Vatican II can appeal to the same passage in Ephesians as describing the role of marriage (cf. LG 11b; AA 11a; GS 48b) and to the consecrated life.

33Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Christian States of Life*, trans. by Sr. Mary Francis McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), p. 278.

34*The Christian State of Life*, p. 278.

35*Mutuae relationes*, n. 4 and 10, AAS 40 (1978), 476, 480. ET A. Flannery (ed.) *Vatican Council II* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1982), vol. 2, p. 212, 217.

