

A STUDY GUIDE

for the film

FOR LOVE ALONE



THE STORY OF WOMEN RELIGIOUS:

Giving their lives, for love of Him.



Photography by Jeanine Roufs

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SCENES

Are any of these young sisters actresses?

The scenes taken at the Motherhouse of the Dominican Sisters of Saint Cecilia in Nashville, Tennessee are impressive. Over 200 sisters are gathered together. These images have provoked the question as to whether or not the sisters are “real.” They are very real, indeed. There were no actresses employed in the making of *For Love Alone*.

Religious life is alive. There are women experiencing a call and entering communities all over the United States every single year!



ABOUT THE VIDEO

What is the purpose of the film For Love Alone?

For Love Alone was created to share with the world the beauty of being called by God to be a religious sister.

Who is the target audience?

For Love Alone was made for the whole Church and beyond! Religious sisters exist for others. That is the meaning of the public profession of vows. *For Love Alone* is more than just a vocation video, it is sign of hope for those who pray for vocations and a glimpse of the new springtime that awaits the Church.

To which communities do the sisters in the film belong?

The careful viewer can spot fourteen religious institutes in the film: Apostles of the Sacred Heart of Jesus; Carmelites of the Most Sacred Heart of Los Angeles; Daughters of Saint Paul; Dominican Sisters, Congregation of St. Rose of Lima; Dominican Sisters of Saint Cecilia; Franciscan Sisters of the Eucharist; Franciscan Sisters of the Renewal; Handmaids of the Heart of Jesus; Little Sisters of the Poor; Missionaries of Charity; Poor Clare Missionary Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament; Religious Sisters of Mercy, Alma; Servants of the Lord and the Virgin of Matará; and the Sisters of Life. These fourteen religious communities are meant to be representative of all women religious. The decision not to include community names or individual sister's names was deliberate. A technique was used in making the film in which one speaker is followed quickly by another, sometimes before a sentence is even completed. Rather than spotlighting any individual sister, this is meant to convey the common elements of the very personal experience of what it is like for a woman when she is called by God to the religious life.

What is the significance of the Scripture text that threads through the film?

The Scripture that threads through the film is from the 14th chapter of Mark's Gospel. It is the scene in which a woman anoints Jesus and goes to the point of breaking the alabaster jar as she pours every last drop of the expensive ointment over Jesus' head. The woman makes a lavish gesture, an extravagant gesture, a gesture that has been compared to that which a woman religious makes as she gives all in the following of Christ. Like the woman in the Gospel, this offering is often questioned by those who do not understand it. Sometimes people feel that a woman religious is wasting her gifts and talents or even wasting her life. To this, Jesus says, "Leave her alone." What could be more valuable than returning one's life to the Giver of life? Returning one's talents to the Giver of talent? Returning love for Love the Scripture says that the fragrance filled the whole house. This can be understood as the beautiful fragrance of her self-gift having implications for the whole Church, the household of God. For the religious sister, her gift of self poured out is shown by her loving service, whether that is teaching, nursing, counseling, caring for the needs of the poor, or accompanying the most vulnerable.

Why did the film seem to emphasize the care of the elderly over other works? What other things do sisters do that were not shown in the film?

Women religious, by the fact of their consecration, share in Jesus' own mission of bringing about the salvation of the world. To that end, sisters do a wide variety of works. The viewer catches a glimpse of many apostolates as the film unfolds. We sought to capture the common thread uniting the various apostolates of all religious sisters. This common thread, to use a phrase of Pope Francis, is the "accompaniment of the

human person.”¹ Whether that is the accompaniment of the unborn child and the mother vulnerable to abortion or the accompaniment of children in their formative years through teaching, whether that is the accompaniment of the poor or the elderly or the sick and dying, the religious sister accompanies the person through life.



With the obvious limitations of a short film, we decided to feature one apostolate in more length. We chose to feature sisters ministering to the elderly because in seeing a person loved and cared for at the end of their earthly journey implies the sum total of a life well lived in the accompaniment of the Church. The other reason we chose to feature the care of the elderly poor is because of the current cultural trend toward euthanasia and assisted suicide. We wanted to present the beauty of being cared for not as a burden, but as a blessing, and to portray dying a holy death in the arms of the Church. Other works of the apostolate in which sisters have long served, but which we were not able to feature in the film include: missionary work of proclaiming the Gospel in foreign lands, evangelization through the media in all forms, care of the sick through medical ministry to the highest levels (yes, you can be

1. Cf. Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 169–73. http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html (accessed September 27, 2017).

a doctor and a sister!), retreat work, spiritual direction, campus ministry, ministry to prisoners and prostitutes, and working to end human trafficking. There are also academic apostolates to the highest levels, with religious sisters even represented on the Vatican's International Theological Commission. This list is not exhaustive, but it shows that within our common mission, the salvation of souls, there are many worthy ways to be a "laborer in the vineyard."

There were many images of sisters in the chapel. What is the prayer life like for sisters?

Prayer is central to the life of all religious sisters. Religious communities are committed to personal, communal, and liturgical prayer. Prayer is the means by which the religious stays in intimate connection with God. There are a variety of ways religious pray each day. Of primary importance is the Holy Mass. Sisters reside in a convent and are blessed to have the Holy Eucharist present in their own convent chapels or oratories. In addition to Mass, most communities gather to pray the Liturgy of the Hours at least twice a day—for morning and evening prayer—but many also pray midday or night prayer together. Community prayer may also include periods of silent meditation, Eucharistic adoration, *lectio divina*, the Angelus and rosary, and usually other prayers particular to each religious community.

There were several images of the Blessed Sacrament. Why is that?

The Eucharist holds a central place in the whole Church, since Jesus Christ becomes present body, blood, soul, and divinity at the consecration in every Mass, and he remains present in the consecrated hosts. Religious sisters are dedicated to following Jesus Christ more closely and bound to Him in a spousal relationship through their vows. Therefore, prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, where Jesus is present in a special way, is vitally important in the life of a sister. Receiving

Holy Communion at Mass and praying together in Christ's presence strengthens the ties of charity between the sisters in a community; and spending time in Jesus' presence deepens each sister's love for Him, assists her in overcoming difficulties, and helps her to be aware of God's guidance in her daily life.

In one scene, seven Dominican Sisters laid down on the floor of the chapel. What was going on?

Laying down, face to the floor, is a gesture of profound humility. This liturgical gesture is called a prostration. It happens rarely in the liturgy, at priestly ordinations, and at the profession of perpetual vows. During the prostration in the liturgy for the profession of perpetual vows, the Litany of the Saints is sung by the whole assembly, asking the prayers of the saints for these sisters making a life-long commitment to Christ, in his Church within this religious family. This gesture signifies very vividly the laying down of one's whole life for Christ.



Why did they flip that piece of fabric over their faces?

The sisters in this community wear a white scapular, which is symbolic of being under Our Blessed Mother Mary's protection. There are two times when the cloth of the white scapular will shroud the sister's face: once at perpetual profession (as seen in

the film) and again at the end of her life. When she dies, the scapular will be placed over her face just before her coffin is closed, signifying her death to this world and the life to which she will awaken in Christ.

In another scene a Franciscan sister was getting her veil changed and being crowned with roses. What was the meaning of that?

This scene was the first vows ceremony of the Franciscan Sisters of the Renewal. The viewer catches an up close glimpse of a white-veiled novice receiving her black veil. White symbolizes virginal purity as well as “newness” and has traditionally been worn by novices: new sisters, just starting out. Black symbolizes penance and renunciation of the world, and has traditionally been worn by professed sisters. However, this is not the case in every community. Some sisters wear a white veil in profession as well as novitiate. Customs vary widely, community to community.

The crown of roses is an adornment similar to what a bride might have on her wedding day. The profession is very much like the wedding day for a religious sister. This is especially true of perpetual profession, which is a liturgy of rich solemnity. All the family and friends of the sister are typically invited to celebrate with the community, with associates and with coworkers of the newly professed...much like a wedding!



The theme of family is very present in the film. How is a religious community like a family?

The human person is created for communion.² God Himself, a Trinity of Persons, is communion, and he invites men and women to share in His own communion through Baptism and the gift of sanctifying grace. All the members of the Body of Christ are called to communion with Christ and one another in the Church. The unity of the spouses within marriage and the community of the family is rooted in self-giving love, and ultimately aims at the sanctification of souls. Religious are not called to marry and found a family in the natural way, but religious too are called to live in communion. In fact, the Church calls religious to be “experts in communion.” As a religious family bound together by their vows within the same charism, a community of sisters is meant to put into practice self-giving love, first for their sisters in community and then for those whom they serve in the apostolate. Praying together, sharing daily life together, and serving together are ways in which a religious community builds up its fraternal life (life as sisters in the same religious family). Yes! Married or celibate, “family life” is for us all.

One sister says, “If you are not at all interested in being a wife and mother, you probably wouldn’t make a good sister.” What is the connection between being called to be a wife and mother and being a sister?

All women are created for spousal intimacy and for motherhood. While a religious woman freely renounces a husband and children in the natural sense, she still finds her fulfillment in making a total gift of self to God alone. Then, because she loves Jesus Christ, she loves all those whom He loves. The love

2. Cf. *Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Fraternal Life in Community*, n. 9. http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccsclife/documents/rc_con_ccsclife_doc_02021994_fraternal-life-in-community_en.html (accessed September 27, 2017).

of a religious woman is meant to be spent on those whom God gives her to love, the people to whom she ministers. In this way her maternal gift, the key to her identity, is brought to fulfillment and put to the service of souls.

What do the different outfits in the video signify?

The outfit is called a habit. The purpose of the habit is to allow the sister to be a public witness to Christ and His Church. Each religious institute has a distinct habit or way of being identified, which usually has a history dating back to the founder or foundress.

What does the sister mean when she says, “When we make vows, we make them for our children?”

The motherhood of a religious sister is spiritual. She gives her life through the evangelical counsels (poverty, chastity, and obedience) in union with Jesus for the salvation of souls. Because of her “Yes” she shares in Jesus’ saving mission. The “children” of a religious sister are the souls strengthened as a result of her “Yes” to God.

There were different images in the film of sisters from various communities together. Do communities “hang out” with each other?

The production of the film *For Love Alone* was a joint project among many religious sisters coordinated by the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious (CMSWR). Each community has its own particular charism and mission, but we share in many collaborative projects—and yes, we even find time to have fun together on occasion, too!



— QUESTIONS ABOUT RELIGIOUS LIFE —

What is the process to enter a community?

The first stage is discernment, which is an intense time of prayer and seeking the will of God. It usually involves getting to know the community through visits and other communication, not unlike dating! The application process follows. It can include interviews, evaluations, and assessments of personal health. At the end of the application procedure, a woman may be accepted into the pre-novitiate if the community discerns that she may be called to join them. The time before novitiate varies widely from community to community. Some communities call this time aspirancy, some candidacy, some postulancy. The length of time also varies widely, typically anywhere from six months to two years. The purpose of this time prior to entering the novitiate is to adjust to a new way of life, without many of the comforts and conveniences of the world, and to begin to be integrated into a communal way of life according to the charism of the institute.



What are the stages that lead to final vows?

When a woman enters the convent she is not immediately ready to make the definitive commitment of her whole life in final profession of vows. She will go through a process of

formation, during which she will learn what it means to be a member of her community and will develop the habits of prayer and virtue that are necessary to live as a religious sister. There are between seven and ten years of formation before becoming finally professed.

In the pre-novitiate stage, the woman is questioning whether this is the life God is calling her to and whether this is the community to which He is calling her. This stage varies for each community but can last anywhere from six months to two years. If the woman believes that God is indeed calling her, and the community agrees, then her next step is to enter the novitiate.

Once she enters the novitiate, the woman is formally a part of the community. Typically, as a novice, the woman will receive the religious habit, her religious name, and a white veil, although these customs vary widely among communities. This stage lasts from one to two years.

The next stage is professing temporary vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Although the temporary vows are made for a specific period of time, the sister approaches them with the intention of giving herself totally to Christ, her Spouse. The sister will renew her temporary vows according to the customs of the community, for no more than nine years.

Finally, she is ready to profess final vows and make a life-long commitment to God as a religious sister. This is called perpetual profession.

Does a young woman need to be absolutely sure that religious life is for her, to enter a community?

Entering a religious community, so as to experience the life first hand, is a necessary step to growing in certainty about a call. A call will be tested and confirmed in many ways. The community, too, is engaged in the discernment process. The

woman seeks to know if the community is right for her, and the community needs to feel that she is right for the community. It is a mutual discernment, guided by the Holy Spirit.

How can you know if you are called?

When a woman begins to feel the first tugging on her heart toward religious life, until she professes her perpetual vows, she is in a discernment process. In the beginning, it can be rather intense and even agonizing to struggle with fears and desires, hopes and dreams. A commitment to regular prayer is necessary for hearing the Holy Spirit's guidance. Receiving the Eucharist, going frequently to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, and reading Scripture are all helpful for the discernment process. A greater certitude of God's call for her life comes with each step and deepening commitment that a woman makes throughout the process of religious formation.

At one point a sister says, "The Church needs mothers." How are sisters mothers?

Motherhood is the defining characteristic of femininity. Every woman has been entrusted with a life-giving capacity to nurture life within the other. For the religious woman, her maternal gift is meant to nurture the life of Christ in others. There can be no unwanted person in the world as long as there are religious sisters.

What advice would you give a young woman who thinks she is experiencing a call?

When a young woman feels the first stirrings of a call within her heart there are five things she should do: First, discernment flows from a trusting relationship with God. It's essential to continue to deepen that relationship through prayer, including

Mass, Reconciliation, and Eucharistic adoration. Second, dating is not recommended. Third, get a spiritual director or someone trustworthy and knowledgeable to speak with. Fourth, take action! Discernment should lead to decision. And fifth, don't try to discern a dozen communities; pick a few which you really find attractive.

Is there an age limit?

Most communities accept candidates between the ages of 18 and 30 years old. Each community has a different policy regarding acceptance, however, and some communities are open to accepting older candidates.

What is a spiritual director? Do you need to have a sister?

A good spiritual director is a person who is of deep personal faith and practice and usually trained in the art of spiritual direction. He or she helps you to recognize how God is working in your life at the present time and makes suggestions for how you can most effectively grow in your response to God through your prayer and the practice of virtue. It is not necessary to have a sister as a spiritual director; however, if you are discerning the religious life it is helpful to have a sister with whom to speak.

What is a charism?

A charism (also called the spiritual patrimony of a community) is a gift given by the Holy Spirit to a founder or foundress of the institute, for the good of the whole Church. It is the guiding inspiration that all successive generations of sisters embody and strive to live faithful in their own time.

What does a typical day look like?

Prayer, work, recreation, and study are the mainstay of religious life. Each community will order their day slightly differently, but those components will be present in some form. Sisters rise early, often between 5:00 and 5:30 am. The day begins in prayer (usually Morning Prayer, meditation, and Holy Mass). Following Mass is breakfast, after which the sisters leave for their apostolates, if they travel outside their convent to work; other sisters work from the convent where they reside. The postulants and novices usually take classes and have some sort of duty around the convent. In many communities, sisters gather for MIDDAY PRAYER before eating the noon meal. The afternoon could consist of more apostolic work, recreation, study time, or other duties. In the early evening, the sister pray Evening Prayer (many communities might have a Eucharistic Holy Hour at this point, or at another point of the day) before enjoying the evening meal. Either at dinner or at another recreation period, sisters come together to share about their day. There may be time for the sisters to study, to prepare for their apostolate for the next day, to exercise, etc. After Night Prayer, the convent is hushed in a silence (often called Grand Silence) that will last until the next morning. This quiet allows the sister to enter more fully into communion with the Lord in prayer.



What are the initial indications that you are called?

Usually the first indication is a sense of being chosen by God. A strong life of prayer, a desire to commit oneself to God and to the Church, and a longing for a life of greater virtue are all good indicators that you may be experiencing a call. Some may feel they are being called to give their lives in service to God's people within the context of religious consecration. Each sister has her own unique story of how she first began to experience this, in the secret of her heart.

Why are some people afraid to speak about discerning a vocation?

Since a vocation to the religious life is not common, many people fear their discernment journey will not be understood, supported, or encouraged by friends and family. In the early stages of discernment, talking with a spiritual director, a confessor, or a religious may help you express your questions and fears regarding your discernment.

What is an apostolate?

The word *apostolate* is derived from *apostle*, the twelve men Jesus chose and formed and sent forth to continue His mission throughout the world. An apostolate is a kind of work or mission carried out by a religious community in the name of the Church according to the inspiration of their founder or foundress. Just as the apostles were sent out to spread the Kingdom of God, the sisters are sent out to spread the Kingdom through their various works, all of which ultimately aim at bringing people to faith and salvation. The first apostolate of religious sisters is actually their witness of consecrated life, even before any other type of work they do. The primary apostolate of contemplative sisters who do not leave their monastery is that of praying for the Church and the world and of inspiring others through their example of loving God above all else.

Why is there such a separation from family, unlike the norm for priests?

The adjustment from living a “normal” life in the world to living the religious life in a convent is huge. The person is moving, saying goodbye to friends and family, and embarking on a new way of life which will affect every aspect of her life. Although it can be difficult, it is also a time marked by tremendous joy! The peace that comes from moving forward and following Christ is beyond understanding. The joy of being exactly where you feel God wants you to be defies description.

What do you say to someone who may be too immature to be discerning religious life?

When it seems that a young person is rushing into discerning a religious vocation, it could be that the person is using discernment as an escape from something unpleasant in her life, or perhaps is new in the practice of the faith. It is usually a good idea to help her strengthen her personal relationship with God first, before she tries to discern whether or not she is being called to religious life. A recommendation would be to get a spiritual director, develop a committed prayer time, and become steeped in the Sacramental life: Holy Mass and Confession.

What is the difference between a nun and a sister?

A nun does not leave the convent to go out to an apostolate, but she remains within the convent or cloister. Her main apostolate is prayer. A sister is one who goes out into the world to help spread the Gospel message. Prayer is still the central focus of her life but she will have an apostolate other than prayer and intercession. People typically use the words nun and sister interchangeably even though there is a technical difference. All sisters would respond to both.

How do sisters and those living the consecrated life evangelize, or live out Jesus' call to "make disciples of all nations?"

Sisters are prophetic witnesses to the love of Christ. This is expressed by each community in different ways. Religious sisters witness to the Gospel by their life in common, in community. Other consecrated persons may be stationed individually, living alone, but seek to imitate Christ more closely as the leaven of the Gospel in society (secular institutes, consecrated virgins.) All religious sisters are living signs of the heavenly Kingdom because their vows dedicate them to Christ in a special way. They point others to Christ through their service to the poor, the elderly, and the sick; through education; and through other ways of expressing God's mercy. This is signified by the wearing of religious garb, i.e., the habit. Each sister brings her unique gifts to God's people. As she creatively incorporates her community's way of life into her own decisions and actions, she becomes more and more conformed to Christ, and thus becomes a more powerful witness to Him.



Do you have to earn a college degree to enter a community?

Not necessarily. For some communities a college degree is required while for others it is not. However, every community requires a high school diploma.

Why is there such a separation from family, unlike the norm for priests?

Unlike diocesan priests, religious sisters profess vows within the context of a religious community. Although the community does not replace a sister's family of origin, the sister gives first priority to time spent with the community. This is because her life with the other sisters in her community supports a sister's fidelity to her vows and dedication to God.

There are similarities between a sister's relationship to her family and that of married couples. A married couple's first commitment is to each other rather than to their own families of origin. Just like other wives, a sister's first concern is for her Spouse—in this case Jesus Christ. Her wholehearted consecration to God does require a separation from family, but the sister is not abandoning her family. In reality, the spiritual bonds between a religious sister and her family can remain very strong, and even grow over time. Furthermore, just as God has a special call for each sister, He has a special call and blessings for her family. Her prayers for her family become an important part of how God has chosen to unfold His blessings in their lives.

There are so many different communities. How does one go about choosing one of them?

The variety of communities in the Church is a reflection of the infinite love of God for the world. A good place to start in the discernment process is with one or two communities that God has brought into your path that you feel attracted to. It is not unlike dating. You don't date all the boys at school; you date the one you are interested in and attracted to. If you've never met a religious sister and there are none near you, you might visit www.cmswr.org for a list of communities. You might look through the list to see if one or two communities attract your attention based on their mission or their daily schedule. Start by simply putting in a phone call!



GOING DEEPER

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR DISCUSSION

What is the definition of religious life?

Religious life is a type of consecrated life. It takes its name from the word *religion*, according to St. Thomas Aquinas, which is key to understanding this state of life.³ Religion is a *virtue* that falls under justice, because it is just for all men to give something back to God as his creatures. As human beings, both body and soul, we offer our things and ourselves to God through sacrifices, signs, and worship. A person who has the virtue of religion *habitually* offers God proper signs of sacrifice and worship. Doing so perfects the human person. The virtue of religion is, therefore, the equivalent of holiness.⁴ Christ's holocaust offered to God on the cross was the perfect act of the virtue of religion: the perfect sign, sacrifice, and worship.



By vowing poverty, chastity and obedience, a woman lovingly offers God her possessions, her body, and her soul in imitation

3. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica: Complete Edition in Five Volumes*, translated by Fathers of the Dominican Province, (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1948), II-II, q. 81, a. 1, *corpus*.

4. *Ibid.*, aa. 1-2, 8.

of Christ. Like Christ and in Christ, her *whole person* becomes worship, sign, and sacrifice to God by the vows.⁵ For this reason, vowing the evangelical counsels is the act of the virtue of religion *par excellence*, according to Saint Thomas.⁶ That is how religious life gets its name, and why we say it is a sure path to holiness.⁷ This is also why the Eucharist, as a participation in Christ's perfect worship and sacrifice to God, is central to religious life.

Because of the totality of the loving gift of self to God by religious vows, the Church calls this relationship to God "spousal," and considers it a sign of the future age.⁸ The initiative in religious life comes from God, who invites a woman to bind herself to Him with the help of His grace. The vows are her free and loving response.

Religious life is set apart from other forms of consecrated life because it is defined by taking *public* vows. Public does not mean made in front of other people, but it means that the vowed life of the religious person becomes, in a sense, ecclesial "property," that is, her life as worship, sign, and sacrifice in imitation of and participation with Christ is simultaneously for her own sanctification and happiness, and for the whole Church. *Religious life, therefore, is chiefly constituted by the profession of public vows, forming a spousal relationship with Christ for the good of the person vowed and the life and holiness of the whole Church.*⁹ From her public vows flow the

5. *Code of Canon Law*, 607 § 1. http://www.vatican.va/archive/eng1104/_index.htm. (accessed September 27, 2017).

6. *The Summa Theologica*, II-II, q. 186, a. 1.

7. Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: Lumen Gentium*, n. 43. http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html. (accessed May 16, 2017).

8. *Code of Canon Law*, 607 § 1.

9. Sacred Congregation For Religious And For Secular Institutes, *Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching on Religious Life as Applied to Institutes Dedicated to Works of the Apostolate*, (Boston, MA: St. Paul Editions, 1983), n. 7–8.

other essential elements of religious life, namely, communion in community, evangelical mission, prayer, asceticism, public witness, relation with the Church, ongoing formation, and a structure of government.¹⁰

What is the meaning of being consecrated?

In the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, consecration is the divine action whereby God sets apart persons, places, and objects, usually through a liturgical or sacrificial rite.¹¹ Once consecrated, persons or things are to be used for only one purpose: to give glory to God. They are thereby associated with the holiness of God. Those consecrated are not, however, holy in the same way that God is holy. Rather, they are reserved for Him, becoming exclusively His.

Being consecrated still carries this essential biblical meaning. This is true for the baptized and those in consecrated life. *Lumen Gentium* states:

The baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, in order that through all those works which are those of the Christian man they may offer spiritual sacrifices and proclaim the power of Him who has called them out of darkness into His marvelous light.¹²

Being consecrated still carries this essential biblical meaning. This is true for the baptized and those in consecrated life. When we speak of the consecrated life, we mean a further consecration or setting apart, rooted in the consecration of Baptism. In Canon Law, consecrated life is designated by the profession of the evangelical counsels as “a stable form of living

10. Ibid.

11. “Holy.” Xavier Léon-Dufour, *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 2nd ed. (Frederick, MD: The Word Among Us Press, 1988), 237.

12. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 10.

by which the faithful, following Christ more closely under the action of the Holy Spirit, are totally dedicated to God who is loved most of all.” Further, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reads: “Already dedicated to Him through Baptism, the person who surrenders himself to the God he loves above all else thereby consecrates himself more intimately to God’s service and to the good of the Church.”¹³ Consecrated life is not exactly the same of religious life, but includes more broadly any form of life based on vows or other sacred bonds.¹⁴

What is a vocation?

“Vocation” has two meanings that are interconnected. First, the fundamental or baseline meaning is the “calling or destiny”¹⁵ each person has “to serve and love God and to offer all creation back to him.”¹⁶ This sense of vocation corresponds to the universal call to holiness by participation in the Church of Christ. It also permeates the writings of the New Testament, especially the letters of Saint Paul (Rom. 1:1,7; 1 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 4:1-6). Based on Scripture, therefore, one may assert that “[t]he Church in its infancy at once recognized that the Christian is one who is called”¹⁷; this call is to belong to the Body of Christ and to live out one’s new life in Christ. The second meaning, related to the first, is the calling to a particular state of life within the Church. Those called to the states of Holy Matrimony, Holy Orders, and consecrated life work within the Church to build up the Body of Christ, each state in its own way. Additionally, these vocations have corresponding rights

13. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed., (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2000), n. 931.

14. *Code of Canon Law*, 573 § 1-2.

15. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 358.

16. *Ibid.*

17. “Calling.” *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 66.

and obligations. This second and more specific meaning of vocation is powerfully captured by the Old Testament stories of Abraham, Moses, and Isaiah, to name a few; in the New Testament it is manifest in the calling of the apostles. The person called is invariably given a mission, and the voluntary consent of the person is a necessary part of the dynamic of a vocation.¹⁸



18. *Ibid.*, 65.



— OTHER RESOURCES —

- *Discerning Religious Life*, by Sr. Clare Matthias, CFR. Available through Vianney Vocations at VianneyVocations.com
- **ForLoveAlone.net**—where to go to get additional copies and great ideas for film screenings, lesson plans and more
- *“To Wake up the World”: Religious Life as a Prophetic Witness Symposium Proceedings*, by Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious. Digital and hard copies are available at CMSWR.org
- *The Foundations of Religious Life: Revisiting the Vision*, by Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious. Available for purchase through Amazon or CMSWR.org
- *Vocations Directory*. Available to download on our website at CMSWR.org
- **Women Religious App**, available for download on iTunes and Google Play
- **Facebook** @CMSWR
- **Instagram** @womenreligious
- **Twitter** @womenreligious
- **YouTube** @CMSWR
- **Additional copies of the film** are available at VianneyVocations.com, Amazon.com, iTunes, and Google Play.



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