

# **“TO WAKE UP THE WORLD”**

**RELIGIOUS LIFE AS A PROPHETIC WITNESS**

**Symposium Proceedings**

**Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious**



Symposium “To Wake Up the World”

Religious Life as a Prophetic Witness



# Symposium “To Wake Up the World” Religious Life as a Prophetic Witness

## Symposium Proceedings

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Finally, we would like to thank all our contributing authors, homilists, attending clergy and religious, whose rich reflections on the topic of religious life as a prophetic witness continue to edify and enrich us all.

*“Religious life ought to promote growth in the Church by way of attraction. The Church must be attractive. Wake up the world! Be witnesses of a different way of doing things, of acting, of living! It is possible to live differently in this world. We are speaking of an eschatological outlook, of the values of the Kingdom incarnated here, on this earth. It is a question of leaving everything to follow the Lord. No, I do not want to say ‘radical’. Evangelical radicalness is not only for religious: it is demanded of all. But religious follow the Lord in a special way, in a prophetic way. It is this witness that I expect of you. Religious should be men and women who are able to wake the world up.”*

Pope Francis, “‘Wake up the World!’ Conversation with Pope Francis about the Religious Life,” trans. Fr. Donald Maldari, S.J.  
in *La Civiltà Cattolica* I (2014): 3-17.

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## *Abbreviations*

CCC - Catechism of the Catholic Church, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993.

CIC - Code of Canon Law (*Codex Iuris Canonici*) Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1983.

EE - *Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching on Religious Life as Applied to Institutes Dedicated to Works of the Apostolate*, Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes (SCRIS) (May 31, 1983).

LG - Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (November 21, 1964).

MD - John Paul II, Apostolic Letter on the Dignity and Vocation of Women, *Mulieris Dignitatem* (August 15, 1988).

PC - Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life, *Perfectae Caritatis* (October 28, 1965).

ST - St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*

VC - John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata* (March 25, 1996).





## *Foreword*

The theme of the St. Louis Symposium on Religious Life was inspired by Pope Francis, who called consecrated persons to reflect on their vocation in the Year of Consecrated Life as authentic prophetic witnesses in the contemporary culture.

How are we to understand our prophetic witness? How does the Church understand religious witness from the perspective of two thousand years of witness, encompassing periods of Christian martyrdom and persecution, and eras of peace? Is the prophetic witness any less a prophetic witness whether through one apostolate or another; or whether visible to the public or behind the walls of the cloister? It is precisely these questions that found answer as speakers considered religious life as prophetic witness in its historical, biblical, theological, and apostolic dimensions.

The Symposium brought together religious women and men; scholars; thinkers; practitioners; and seekers of the Lord - to ponder and deepen our reflection through dialogue on the prophetic nature of religious life as it has been lived in the Catholic tradition. The presentations and ensuing conversations provide a springboard for a greater understanding of prophetic witness within our Catholic heritage and in contemporary settings: deeply rooted, marvelously radiant, evangelically rich.

This collection begins with the incisive address of Archbishop J. Augustine Di Noia, O.P. His personal and scholarly reflections here (and throughout the years) have enriched the international dialogue on the prophetic witness of consecrated life. In this address, His Excellency first anchored us in an understanding of witness in the teachings of the Angelic Doctor; then he shared his own mature

reflection on the nature of grace and its real operation in the lives of those consecrated.

We do well to recall this mystery of God's action in us as we face an increasingly secular world and respond to the cries of our brothers and sisters. By ourselves we are powerless; by grace we are made sharers in the divine mystery. We are encouraged always by the life that is within us - namely, Jesus Christ - who desires to shine through us so as to "wake up the world" to the good news of salvation He won for us.

It is the very nature and reality of consecrated life, as set apart for the Lord, that is itself prophetic. Upheld and strengthened by our relationship with Jesus Christ, fortified in the knowledge of being chosen by Him to be holy, aided by the profession of the evangelical counsels, living in the strength of community, and serving according to the charismatic gifts of our founders and foundresses - this is how religious bring hope to the world. By a graced witness to the power and presence of Jesus Christ, we have the opportunity to draw many souls to a happiness for which all are called and destined: life with God, for all eternity.

Together, let us "wake up the world" and allow the joy of Christ to radiate in our hearts, in our communities, and in our apostolates. Let us take up this challenge to bring Christ to our contemporaries by the simple life of grace lived well and in fidelity: to His teachings, the constitutions of our religious institutes, and the individual inspirations that we receive each day; and in this way courageously accompany our brothers and sisters on the path of faith.

May the faithful witness of consecrated persons be a leaven for the new evangelization. May Christ reign in all hearts and in our societies. And may the pages of these proceedings confirm and strengthen all who read them: our consecrated brothers and sisters,

bishops, clergy, and the faithful - all witnesses with us to the goodness of the Lord.

Mother Agnes Mary Donovan, SV

August 28, 2016

Feast of St. Augustine

Suffern, New York



# Life on High in Christ Jesus: The Prophetic Dimensions of Religious Life

ARCHBISHOP

J. AUGUSTINE DI NOIA, O.P.

## Introduction: God's Heavenly Call (Life on High) in Christ Jesus

For much of Christian history, the prophetic charism has been attributed to particular monks, friars, and nuns rather than to religious life as such. But the personal experiences of these religious have much to teach us about how the charism of prophecy can be a corporate dimension of religious life.

Take for example St. Hildegard of Bingen - arguably, apart from St. Scholastica, the most famous Benedictine nun who has ever lived. Hildegard was an abbess, author, composer, poet, philosopher, and mystic who also found time in her eighty-one years of life to write extensively on botanical and medical topics. She has even had a minor planet - 898 Hildegard - named after her. This very interesting nun interests us this evening because she clearly possessed a prophetic gift that was recognized in her lifetime. People called her the Sibyl of the Rhine and the Teutonic Prophetess. In 1148 at the Council of Trier, Pope Eugenius III gave his blessing to the publication of her visionary experiences. And so it happened that over the following years, St.

Hildegard composed a remarkable series of works in which she described her visions and interpreted their meaning. What she produced has come to be regarded as a comprehensive visionary theology covering the whole history of salvation, and the moral and spiritual life. Not for nothing did she win the title Doctor of the Church. St. Hildegard's visions contained a message that she felt compelled to communicate. Having the approval of the Church gave her the confidence to do so, and assured her listeners of the supernatural character of her experience and the doctrinal integrity of her message.

The prophetic charism as a dimension of religious life as such is characterized by the same essential features as the personal prophetic charisms we discern in St. Hildegard and many other religious in history like St. Vincent Ferrer, St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, St. Faustina: a prophetic message that is authenticated by the Church's pastors.

What is the content of this message? Nothing less than the fullness of Christian life so eloquently described in the third chapter of St. Paul's letter to the Philippians: "Whatever gains I had," Paul writes, "these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him ... I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained this, or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of

God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:8-14). Religious institutes and communities by their very nature embody a prophetic message that expresses the fullness of the Christian life.

## I. Prophecy: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives

### *The Charism of Prophecy in Catholic Tradition*

A properly theological understanding of the prophetic dimension of religious life must be rooted in Sacred Scripture. Since Mother Mary Timothea Elliott will present a session on the “Scriptural Foundations for the Prophetic Witness of Religious Life,” I will treat this matter only very briefly.

In chapter 12 of 1 Corinthians, St. Paul lists prophecy among the varieties of gifts or charisms given by the Holy Spirit “for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses” (1 Cor. 12: 4-11). There are other lists as well in Romans (12:6-8) and Ephesians (4:11) for example. These lists are neither taxative nor precise. It is understood that the Holy Spirit is at work in manifold ways, providing overlapping types of assistance to the Church that are not easy fully to define or classify. Charisms are understood to be extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit given to individual Christians for the good of the Church.



Prophecy is one of these gifts, and, considered within the context of the whole history of salvation, it emerges as one of the most important of these gifts. For through the instrumentality of this charism, God makes known the deepest mystery of his plan of salvation that involves nothing less than the participation in divine life and communion with the Blessed Trinity.

Christian life is a supernatural life that can be known about and lived only by grace. To the prophets of the Old Testament, God entrusted the communication of divine revelation to lead others to faith and, through admonition, to form their consciences. The prophet's teaching function may also include interpretation, discernment and prediction. St. John the Baptist - the greatest of the prophets - is the precursor of the Messiah and plays an important role in providing the vocabulary that the Messiah himself will take up: faith, repentance, penance and baptism.

Our Lord allowed himself to be called a prophet even though he was "more than a prophet." For Jesus Christ, as the Word Incarnate, is God himself speaking to us and thus the definitive revelation. Everything that God wanted to reveal to us for our salvation has been communicated, even though our understanding of divine revelation continues to deepen over time. It is for this reason that the Church understands that public revelation concluded with the death of the last apostle.

### *The Charism of Prophecy within the Theology of Grace*

The locus for a properly theological understanding of the charism of prophecy lies within the theology of grace. "Grace is first and foremost a gift of the Spirit who justifies and sanctifies us. But grace also includes the gifts that the Spirit grants us to associate us with his

work, to enable us to collaborate in the salvation of others and in the growth of the Body of Christ, the Church.”<sup>1</sup>

In the Catholic tradition, this key distinction was secured by the terms *gratia gratum faciens* and *gratia gratis data*. *Gratia gratum faciens* refers to the grace through which the Holy Spirit sanctifies the person who receives it. Principally, this is sanctifying or habitual grace, the constant supernatural quality of the soul that transforms our being and gives us a participation in the divine life. It also refers to all the many actual graces that stir us to actions that deepen the life of grace within us. Although every grace is a free gift of God, the term *gratia gratis data* - sometimes translated by the term “social grace” - refers to every grace that the Holy Spirit gives to particular persons for the salvation of others. These include extraordinary gifts of grace such as the charisms (or charismata), the priestly power of consecration, and the hierarchical power of jurisdiction.

While we speak of the charisms as gifts of the Holy Spirit, the seven *Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (wisdom, knowledge, understanding, counsel, fortitude, piety, and fear) properly so - called belong to the perfection of the grace by which a particular person is sanctified. For our purposes this evening, the distinction is really very simple: a *gratia gratum faciens* is a grace given for the salvation of the person who receives it, while a *gratia gratis data* is given for the salvation of others.

According to this distinction, then, the charism of prophecy is a *gratia gratis data*, a social grace freely granted for helping others come to God. The specific nature of the help that comes through prophecy is that it communicates revealed truth to us. Other charisms - like speech, tongues or the working of miracles for example - hand on that truth or make it effective and convincing.

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<sup>1</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), n. 2003.

The prophets of the Old Testament possessed this charism to an extraordinary degree as the ones chosen to receive and communicate divine revelation to the people of Israel and then to the Church. After a pause of about two hundred years, the mantle of prophecy was taken up again by St. John the Baptist. In the teaching of Christ, continued through his chosen Twelve Apostles, all prophecy finds its climax and completion. The era of public revelation comes to an end with its consummation in the Only Begotten Son who is the Incarnate Word of God. Catholic teaching recognizes that the Holy Spirit continues to be active in the Church through the charism of prophecy but distinguishes the messages that may come through this charism after the death of the last apostle as private revelations. Over the course of the centuries, the magisterium and theological wisdom have developed a body of principles for discerning the authenticity of such private revelations in clear distinction from public revelation.

With this biblical and theological framework in place, we can now turn to a discussion of the prophetic dimension of the religious life.

## II. The Prophetic Dimension of Religious Life

### *The Emergence of the Theme in the Post - Vatican II Era*

The presence of prophetic gifts in individual religious has been recognized throughout Christian history, as we have noted. That these gifts should be recognized in religious life as such was a more recent development prompted mainly by the teaching on the Church of the Second Vatican Council.

While a thorough magisterial discussion of the prophetic dimension of the religious life would not be forthcoming until the

apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (1996), this discussion was itself solidly grounded in two principles reaffirmed in the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*. The first principle concerns the prophetic element within the Body of Christ: "The holy people of God shares also in Christ's prophetic office: it spreads abroad a living witness to him, especially by a life of faith and love and by offering to God a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips confessing his name" (cf. Heb. 13:15). The second principle involved a recovery of the Church's teaching on the charisms. Moreover,

It is not only through the sacraments and the ministries of the Church that the Holy Spirit sanctifies and leads the people of God and enriches it with virtues, but, "allotting his gifts to everyone according as He wills, He distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts He makes them fit and ready to undertake the various tasks and offices which contribute toward the renewal and building up of the Church ..." (1 Cor. 12:11). These charisms, whether they be the more outstanding or the more simple and widely diffused, are to be received with thanksgiving and consolation for they are perfectly suited to and useful for the needs of the Church.<sup>2</sup>

These two principles encourage us to discern in religious life elements that are common to the Church universal, taking account of the nature of religious life as a form of consecrated life in the Church - to recognize, in other words, the many prophetic and charismatic elements present there.

The writings of one influential author in this area (Sr. Sandra Schneiders), while extensive, do not help us to form a comprehensive

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<sup>2</sup> Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (November 21, 1964), n. 12. Hereafter, LG.

picture of recent developments in the teaching of the magisterium on the prophetic dimension of religious life. Their focus is limited to “prophetic obedience” with little attention to the prophetic character of the other evangelical counsels or religious life as such. There is little room for discussion of the centrality of the communication of divine truth that essentially characterizes the prophetic charism in the Catholic tradition. In addition, the categories of the feminist critique of patriarchy yield a somewhat adversarial account of the relations between religious and ecclesiastical authority. Here it is preferable to follow the lead of *Vita Consecrata*:

A distinctive aspect of ecclesial communion is allegiance of mind and heart to the Magisterium of the Bishops, an allegiance which must be lived honestly and clearly testified to before the People of God by all consecrated persons ... Because consecrated persons have a special place in the Church, their attitude in this regard is of immense importance for the whole People of God. Their witness of filial love will give power and forcefulness to their apostolic activity which, in the context of the prophetic mission of all the baptized, is generally distinguished by special forms of cooperation with the Hierarchy.<sup>3</sup>

### *Key Aspects of the Prophetic Character of the Consecrated Life*

When we want to identify what makes Dominicans different from Jesuits, or Sisters of Mercy different from Sisters of Saint Joseph, we commonly refer to their distinctive charisms. *Vita Consecrata* underlines the need that each religious institute has for “fidelity to [its] founding charism and ... subsequent spiritual heritage. It is precisely

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<sup>3</sup> Pope John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata* (March 25, 1996), n. 46. Hereafter, VC.

in this fidelity to the inspiration of the founders and foundresses, an inspiration that is itself a gift of the Holy Spirit, that the essential elements of the consecrated life can be more readily discerned and more fervently put into practice.”<sup>4</sup>

The particular charism of a religious institute is first of all a gift of the Holy Spirit to the founders of these communities. To employ the classical terminology, this charism may be considered by extension a kind of *gratia gratis data*, a gift which the founders received in order to help others to seek the things that are above and, through their apostolates, to serve their neighbor through prayer, teaching, preaching, health care, and so on. The Second Vatican Council did not use the word charism to refer to the vocation to religious life, preferring such expressions as a “special or exceptional grace” (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 12; *Perfectae Caritatis*, n. 12<sup>5</sup>) or simply “gift” (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 9<sup>6</sup>). However, both Pope Paul VI and Pope St. John Paul II regularly used the term charism to describe religious life. It does not seem inappropriate to understand the significant use of the term in *Vita Consecrata* as at least having in view a gift of the Holy Spirit granted to religious founders and foundresses for the sake of building up the Church and sanctifying others - in this sense, then, as an instance of a *gratia gratis data*. Pope John Paul II stated that,

... charisms can in fact be individual or collective. Individual charisms are amply distributed in the Church ... Collective charisms, generally, are granted to men and women destined to establish ecclesial works and especially religious institutes which receive their distinctive

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., n. 36.

<sup>5</sup> Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life, *Perfectae Caritatis* (October 28, 1965). Hereafter PC.

<sup>6</sup> Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (December 7, 1965).

characteristics from their founders, live and function under their influence and, to the extent of their fidelity, receive new gifts and charisms for each individual member and the whole community. The charism can thus prompt new forms of activity according to the needs of different times and places, without diminishing the continuity of development with the founder, and easily recovering the [original] identity and dynamism [of the institute].”<sup>7</sup>

The founders sought to embody the charisms they received in the recognizably distinctive forms of Christian life for which they sought and received the ecclesiastical approval that would ensure their future as particular religious institutes.<sup>8</sup>

In these institutes, the fullness of the following of Christ can be found and pursued. Thus we can say that being a Dominican or being a Franciscan is not something in addition to being a Christian; it is a way of being a Christian. The respective charisms capture all of the essential elements of the Christian life, but are shaped according to the distinctive grace, vision, genius and example of the founder or foundress. By giving her approval to a religious institute, the Church in effect guarantees that whoever is called and subsequently undertakes to follow Christ in this community will find the way well, but distinctively, marked out. In this way the religious charism, by fostering - though *not* causing - the sanctification of the persons called by God to the particular institute serves the *gratia gratum faciens* that religious received in the sacraments of initiation, in the other sacraments, in the actual graces of daily life, and in the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The distinctive charism of a religious institute is a *spiritual* reality, but not an *invisible* one. Thus we can say that the charism

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<sup>7</sup> Pope John Paul II, General Audience, September 28, 1994.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. VC, n. 93.

continues to function as a *gratia gratis data* for the sake of the salvation of others who are not members. The charism of the community is embodied in the life and teachings of its founders, in its rule and constitutions, in its embrace of the evangelical counsels, in its institutions and apostolates, in its characteristic garb and observances, and in the exemplary lives of its saintly members. The visible form of life in religious communities, by its witness, confirms what revelation teaches about the *sequela Christi*. In this way, religious life constitutes an authentic prophetic witness for others who are not members of the institute - a confirmation of the faith of fellow Christians and a proclamation of the faith to non-believers. Thus, what we have seen to be a fundamental element of the charism of prophecy - a message expressed in their visible forms of life and communicated to others for their salvation - is present in the collective witness of religious institutes.

“If you have been raised with Christ,” as Colossians has it, “seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col 3:1-4). The prophetic witness of the religious life is precisely to communicate in a public and authorized institutional form this seeking of the things that are above that is at the heart of life on high in Christ Jesus and to which all Christians, and indeed all people, are called. In the words of *Vita Consecrata*,

The prophetic character of the consecrated life ... takes the shape of a special form of sharing in Christ’s prophetic office, which the Holy Spirit communicates to the whole People of God. There is a prophetic dimension which belongs to the consecrated life as such, resulting from the radical nature of the following of Christ and of the



subsequent dedication to the mission characteristic of the consecrated life. The sign value ... is expressed in prophetic witness to the primacy which God and the truths of the Gospel have in the Christian life.<sup>9</sup>

This prophetic witness is particularly necessary today. Where the primacy of God and the transcendent destiny of human beings are obscured in modern culture, religious life testifies to the glory of God and the love of others. "The fraternal life is itself prophetic in a society which, sometimes without realizing it, has a profound yearning for a brotherhood which knows no borders."<sup>10</sup>

### *Confronting the Challenges through Observance of the Evangelical Counsels*

According to *Vita Consecrata*, the observance of the evangelical counsels plays a critical role in facing the challenges that modern culture poses to the Church herself. These challenges impel the Church and consecrated persons "to clarify and testify to the profound anthropological significance of the counsels."<sup>11</sup>

The prophetic witness of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience directly confronts the massive cultural challenges posed by a materialistic pursuit of wealth and possessions, by hedonistic sexual attitudes and practices, and by notions of freedom detached from truth and moral norms. In a hugely important series of paragraphs on the prophetic witness of the evangelical counsels,<sup>12</sup> *Vita Consecrata* insists that "[the] decision to follow the counsels, far from

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., n. 84.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., n. 85.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., n. 87.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., n. 87-92.

involving an impoverishment of truly human values, leads instead to their transformation. The evangelical counsels should not be considered as a denial of the values inherent in sexuality, in the legitimate desire to possess material goods or to make decisions for oneself.”<sup>13</sup>

Weakened by original sin, human beings can fail to choose the good to which these natural inclinations point us, and risk acting on them in an immoral way.

The profession of chastity, poverty, and obedience is a warning not to underestimate the wound of original sin and, while affirming the value of created goods, it *relativizes them* by pointing to God as the absolute good. Thus, while those who follow the evangelical counsels seek holiness for themselves, they propose, so to speak, a spiritual “therapy” for humanity, because they reject the idolatry of anything created and in a certain way they make visible the living God. The consecrated life, especially in difficult times, is a blessing for human life and for the life of the Church.<sup>14</sup>

Since the prophetic witness of evangelical poverty attests “that God is the true wealth of the human heart,” it “forcefully challenges the idolatry of money, making a prophetic appeal ... to society.”<sup>15</sup> To the sexual hedonism of modern culture, “the reply of consecrated life is above all in the joyful living of perfect chastity, as a witness to the power of God’s love manifested in the weakness of the human condition.”<sup>16</sup> In imitation of Christ’s obedience to the Father, the evangelical counsel of obedience shows that there is no contradiction between freedom and

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., n. 87.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., n. 87.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., n. 90.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., n. 88.

obedience, and that free obedience to the moral law fosters the human and supernatural flourishing of the person.<sup>17</sup>

## Conclusion

Prophetic elements are evident in many other aspects of the religious life. Indeed, they are like threads woven into its very fabric. Following the lead of *Vita Consecrata*, we can say that the very depth of the spiritual life of a religious community gives rise to an “apostolic fruitfulness, generosity in love for the poor, and the ability to attract vocations among the younger generation ... It is precisely *the spiritual quality of the consecrated life* which can inspire the men and women of our day, who themselves are thirsty for absolute values.”<sup>18</sup> A spirituality that is fed by meditation on the Scriptures and on the mysteries of Christ, by the communal celebration of the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours, and the frequent encounter with God’s mercy in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation - such a spirituality cannot fail to bear fruits in the apostolates of education, evangelization, social communications, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, and the generous service of others that energizes a vibrant prophetic witness.

In short, everything in a religious institute that is directed toward the sanctification of its members can communicate a prophetic message to others - to those who are not Christians, a revelation, while to those who are, an encouragement and confirmation of their faith. It is in this way that the prophetic charism is active in religious life, for it is a grace leading others to seek salvation and a life of holiness - to seek, in the words of St. Paul, life on high in Christ Jesus.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., cf. n. 91.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., n. 93.

The Evangelical Counsels  
and the Salvation of the World:  
How the Prophetic Witness of the Consecrated Life  
Has Always Served the Renewal  
of the Church

BISHOP ANDREW H. COZZENS

I want to begin by expressing my gratitude to our Holy Father for declaring a Year of Consecrated Life in which we have had the opportunity to hold up for the whole Church the value of consecrated life. When we hold up the beauty of consecrated life for all to view, we are reminding the Church and the world about the fundamental vocation to holiness for everyone, including priests. Let me give you an analogy: historically Catholics always wanted the steeples of their church to be the tallest building in town, not for pride, but as a constant reminder. This way, no matter where I am in the town or in the country, I can see the church building. The building serves as a reminder to me that I am called to something greater, that I am not living for this life alone, and that God is in the midst of our world. It is a reminder about a “life on high in Christ Jesus” as Archbishop Di Noia mentioned in his talk. When consecrated persons live their life authentically, they provide this important prophetic witness in the midst of our world. I see a sister walking down the street in her habit, and I, as a lay person or as a priest or even as a bishop, am reminded

that I am called to something greater, that I'm not living for this life alone, that God is real and dwells in our midst. This is a prophetic witness especially in our day. I want to especially thank the CMSWR communities for this witness which is having a profound impact on our Church.

Why is consecrated life such a prophetic witness? It is because it is a life which is totally given to the Lord. Practically speaking, how is the life of a consecrated person totally given? This happens through the evangelical counsels. Through living the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience, the consecrated person reminds us how we all are called to order our lives according to our state in life, towards God and towards eternity. The evangelical counsels have always been a prophetic witness, witnessing to the primacy of God, witnessing to the redemption of human life, witnessing to the supernatural life of heaven, where we all hope to live forever with God and where all will live in poverty, chastity, and obedience. In the course of this talk, I would like to explain this prophetic witness through a brief theology of the evangelical counsels which show their foundation in the life of our Lord, as well as how they allow a person to make a total self-gift. Then, I would like to give a few brief examples of how this prophetic life of total self-gift influenced the Church throughout the ages and is needed today for both priests and laity. Archbishop Di Noia spoke about confronting cultural challenges and transforming cultural values. I propose to expand upon this showing the redemptive value of consecrated life. As Archbishop Di Noia mentioned, St. John Paul II said that the evangelical counsels propose a spiritual therapy for humanity; that is, the counsels bring healing to all of humanity.

First, let us do a brief theology of the evangelical counsels, seeing how the evangelical counsels come from God and lead us to God. We begin with the fact that the evangelical counsels were the form

of Christ's own life. Christ not only exemplified these counsels in His own life, but in fact they defined His way of life; He was the poor one, the chaste one, and, most of all, the obedient one.

It is worth asking, did Christ have to live this way? Could Christ have had a wife and children? Could He have lived a rich and affluent life? Could He have followed his own will each day? As soon as you ask these questions you see that they are kind of ridiculous. Although Christ as fully human was certainly fully capable of being married, it is impossible to imagine that Christ would have His own wife and family because His mission was to give His life completely for His Bride the Church and to found a spiritual family. He consistently pointed this out when people commented about the importance of his human family: "Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Mk. 3:35; cf. Lk. 11:28). We see the same in the finding at the temple, where Jesus points out that His first duty is to His Father. What we see is that Christ came to form a spiritual family, not a human family; this spiritual family includes everyone. Jesus' chastity was essential to His mission. He could not be the Bridegroom of the Church as a married man. In other words, He could not found a spiritual family through His total self-gift on the Cross, if His first responsibility was to a human family. Hans Urs von Balthasar points out that the Eucharistic self-giving of Christ would be incompatible with human marriage.

The same can be said about Christ's poverty and obedience. Given who Jesus Christ is, He must be completely given to His mission. He cannot build up and care for earthly possessions as He gives Himself completely to His mission: "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head" (Lk. 9:58). He is most clearly a man of obedience: obedience defines His whole mission. As He says, "I can do nothing on my own authority; as I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of

him who sent me” (Jn. 5:30). The counsels were not ‘optional’ for Him, but at the very essence of His mission. They expressed who He was as the Word Incarnate; the form of His mission as self-gift.

The essential nature of the evangelical counsels for Christ and their beauty in His life are seen most clearly at the summit of His life, in the total self-gift of the Cross. The gift of Christ’s life on the Cross, reveals His whole mission to make a gift of Himself for us. As He explains in the Eucharist, the Cross is the giving over of His body for us and the pouring out of His blood for us. He gives Himself to share His life with us. This total self-gift can only be lived in poverty, chastity, and obedience. This is why St. John Paul II says that on the Cross we behold poverty, chastity, and obedience in their perfection as the means of Christ’s redemptive love: “There his virginal love for the Father and for all mankind will attain its highest expression. His poverty will reach complete self-emptying, his obedience the giving of his life.”<sup>1</sup> So we see that the Cross is the icon of the life of the counsels.

It is also worth pointing out that the counsels are the essence of the *Sequela Christi* (the following of Christ) to which Christ invited His closest disciples in the Gospels. When you study the Scriptures, you realize that Jesus called some people into a special relationship with Himself with the invitation “follow me.” It is an imperative command which shows up in all four Gospels and always has the same meaning.<sup>2</sup> It is a special command given to a few, not to all. We notice that Jesus never said this to crowds; He always said it to an individual. It was a special invitation into an intimate relationship with Jesus, an invitation to leave behind a former way of life and enter into a new way of life with Jesus. It is an invitation to live Jesus’ own way of life and to be with

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<sup>1</sup> VC, n. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Mt. 4:19; Mt. 8:22; Mt. 9:9; Mt. 19:21; Mk. 1:17; Mk. 2:14; Mk. 10:21; Lk. 5:27; Lk. 9:59; Lk. 18:22; Jn. 1:43; Jn. 21; 19, 22.

Him always. It is an invitation that Jesus gives to some and not to all.<sup>3</sup> This is always a mystery and sometimes we ask ourselves, “Why me?” When Jesus invites someone to follow Him, He is inviting that person to enter into His own mission and life in a very special way. This is evidenced by the fact that whenever you see the command, it almost always describes what happens immediately afterwards, e.g. when Jesus says to Matthew, “follow me” the Scriptures say, “Leaving everything behind, he got up and followed him” (Mt. 5:28).

There is only one exception to the rule, and it is noteworthy: the story of the rich young man.<sup>4</sup> He goes away sad. We could ask ourselves if he lost his vocation here. Immediately following this sad story Peter says, “Behold, we have left everything and followed you” (Mk. 10:28). It seems that what defines Christ’s closest disciples is this fact, they have left everything and followed Him. They share His own way of life, a way of poverty, chastity, and obedience. It is noteworthy that in the same passage in Matthew’s Gospel (cf. Mt. 19:10-12), the Lord speaks about being a eunuch for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. Scholars think that Jesus chose to use the derogatory word *eunuch* because that is how His contemporaries mocked Him. The counsels were Christ’s way of life, the way of total self-gift, to which He invited His closest disciples.

How is it that the counsels are the way of total self-gift? Simply put, when one embraces the counsels one offers everything one has to God. As von Balthasar says, “Together they so completely exhaust the possibilities of what can be given that they are in no way subordinate to any of Jesus’ other counsels.”<sup>5</sup> This is actually a great grace because

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<sup>3</sup> See for example the story of the Gerasene demoniac, Mk. 5:18-20, Lk. 8:38-39.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Mt. 19:16-21; Mk. 10: 17-31; Lk. 18:18-30.

<sup>5</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life*, trans. Sister Mary Frances McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 14.



the heart of the religious desires to give all, and there is a way to do that. The image that St. Thomas used to describe the counsels was an Old Testament image - the “holocaust.” In the Old Testament the “holocaust” was a sacrifice where everything was totally consumed. St. Thomas defines a holocaust as “offering to God all that one has.”<sup>6</sup> As he explains:

Now man has a threefold good, according to the Philosopher (*Ethic.* i. 8). First, the good of external things, which he wholly offers to God by the vow of voluntary poverty: secondly, the good of his own body, and this good he offers to God especially by the vow of continence, whereby he renounces the greatest bodily pleasures: the third is the good of the soul, which man wholly offers to God by the vow of obedience, whereby he offers to God his own will by which he makes use of all the powers and habits of the soul.<sup>7</sup>

In other words, what else is there to give to God? One way to speak about this is in terms of concentric circles. The external circle of my life is my possessions, then my own body and its noblest function - that of passing on life. Then there is my innermost sphere - my will, my heart, my place of choice: poverty, chastity, and obedience. Here you can also see the ordering of the three counsels. What is the entrance to the counsels? Poverty. Which will be the highest and most important of the counsels? Obedience. Chastity is in some ways the heart of the counsels, their most distinctive feature and the one that really causes people to pause.

Since they were enumerated, the counsels are often cited as the means to counter what the tradition calls the “threefold lust” in our

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<sup>6</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II-II, 186, a. 7, corpus. Hereafter, ST.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

fallen nature: “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world” (1 Jn. 2:16). Pope St. John Paul II explained the purpose of the three-fold consecration to counteract this three-fold lust:

Against the background of the phrases taken from the first letter of St. John, it is not difficult to see the fundamental importance of the three evangelical counsels in the whole economy of Redemption. Evangelical chastity helps us to transform in our interior life everything that has its sources in the lust of the flesh; evangelical poverty, everything that finds its source in the lust of the eyes; and evangelical obedience enables us to transform in a radical way that which in the human heart arises from the pride of life.<sup>8</sup>

There is an anthropological significance here - you also see the universal application of the counsels, how in some way everyone must live the evangelical counsels, at least in spirit, in order to be saved. No one of can live a life dominated by lust, material possessions, or self-will and expect to get to heaven. All of us must chasten these areas in order to live in communion with God in this life and the next.

Some theologians argue about the redemptive nature of the counsels: they see the counsels in light of the theology of redemption. Christ’s living of the evangelical counsels heals these three areas of sin and restores humanity to a life in relationship with God, that is, the way human beings would have lived in the Garden of Eden and the way they will live in heaven. It is very clear that all of us will live the evangelical

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<sup>8</sup> Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptoris Donum* (March 25, 1984), n. 9. St. Thomas speaks about the same three-fold lust in ST I-II, 108, a. 4, corpus, and about three kinds of attachments corresponding to the three vows in ST II-II, 196, a. 7, corpus. See also CCC, n. 377.

counsels in heaven. The Lord clearly states there will be no marriage in heaven (cf. Mt. 22:30), and there will certainly be no possessions and no self-will. In the purity of heaven, it will be a delight to live the total self-gift of the evangelical counsels.

Von Balthasar makes a strong argument that the evangelical counsels would have been lived in the state of original justice in Eden.<sup>9</sup> Now to be honest, some see this as problematic. How could Adam and Eve, our first parents, be called to chastity? I don't have time to go into all the arguments here.<sup>10</sup> His argument, although considered controversial today, does show the connection between the counsels and the redemption of humanity. Balthasar uses the Fathers to show how original sin brought about disobedience, un-chastity, and covetousness, showing just as St. John does in his letter, how these three

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<sup>9</sup> See von Balthasar, *Christian State of Life*, chap. 2, "From the Original State to Final State," 67-119.

<sup>10</sup> Von Balthasar, *Christian State of Life*, 120 f. At the very least, St. Thomas will say that in the state of original justice Adam and Eve could have lived the perfection of chastity even as they were married, by having intercourse without any "deformity of excessive concupiscence" (ST I, 98, a. 2, corpus). But the Fathers of the Church went a step further. Balthasar gives extensive references to show that the Fathers were in fact almost unanimous that in Eden there "could be no *corruption* in man's virginity," and yet they were "also convinced that man would have 'increased and multiplied' even in his paradisaal state" (*Christian State of Life*, 95). Even St. Thomas, who readily admits that there could have been intercourse in the state of original justice, also argues with the help of St. Augustine (*De Civitate Dei* 14, 26 [CCSL 48, 449]) that this intercourse would not have destroyed virginal integrity (ST I, 98, a. 2 ad. 4). Balthasar points out the Fathers defended virginity in the original state based on the conviction that in the original state there was somehow a "synthesis between the married state and the state of virginity" (*Christian State of Life*, 95). So the Fathers were convinced there could be intercourse without a violation of chastity. There was a unity to sharing of life which was present and will be restored. The Fathers offer many different explanations, some of which would seem problematic to us today, all for the purpose of defending what was for them a central truth: "their unanimous conviction of the unity that must have once existed [in original justice] in the states of life [i.e. marriage and the consecrated state] that today are so diverse" (ibid., 96, original emphasis). See Balthasar's many references to the Fathers including St. Augustine, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. John Chrysostom, St. John of Damascus, St. Jerome, in *Christian State of Life*, 95-103.

are inseparable consequences of the fall. What is key for von Balthasar and the Fathers is that there was a mysterious unity in all vocations in Eden, a unity which will be restored in heaven. This unity, which pointed to the true meaning of marriage, is what was destroyed by original sin. Christ lives in perfect poverty, chastity, and obedience to redeem fallen nature and to witness prophetically to the deepest (and the most original!) vocation of all. Now everyone is called to the wedding feast of the Lamb. I invite you to see your role here as a witness to redemption; the deepest vocation of all in making a total self-gift to God. You witness to all what they are ultimately called to be: completely given to God.

In this, Christ begins a state of life to which He also calls his mother and all those called to the more radical following of Christ. By living in this new state of life, the state of heaven, the state of poverty, chastity, and obedience, these radical followers of Jesus become a prophetic witness, pointing to the true vocation of every human being because every human must, in some way, embrace the counsels in order to be redeemed. As von Balthasar says, “Man will not be admitted to the Kingdom of Heaven until he has learned in the anteroom of heaven to renounce every will of his own, every desire, all personal autonomy that would oppose itself to the will of God as an independent authority.”<sup>11</sup> Your life points to the fullness of redemption: what we

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<sup>11</sup> Von Balthasar, *Christian State of Life*, 124. Ghirlanda makes the point that at least in death every Christian must become poor, chaste, and obedient when speaking about baptismal consecration: “In death the Christian realizes fully the spirit of the beatitudes according to which he should have conducted his whole life, to consecrate himself to the Father in response worthy of the consecration he received; and it is in death that the spirit of the beatitudes comes to be lived by every Christian in a real poverty, obedience and total and exclusive love of the Father. It is through this realization of the spirit of the beatitudes according to the evangelical counsels, at least in the moment of death, that every Christian is lead to the perfection of Charity, in Christ, and becomes a Eucharistic offering to the Father.”

were created for. Thus some are called to the prophetic witness of a complete embrace of the counsels to remind the rest of the Church that they must also redeem their whole lives through submitting their possessions, their bodies, and their wills to Christ, in accordance with their own state. They must seek to imitate the life of the counsels, now since it is the life we are all called to live together in heaven.

It is precisely this role of prophetic witness that has been a constant source of renewal of Christian life with religious in the history of the Church. One doesn't have to summarize the whole history of the Church to see that at certain key moments, when a spirit of worldliness threatened to weigh down the Church, the Lord raised up new movements of consecrated life to remind the Church what the Christian life really is. This was the source of some of the earliest movements of consecrated life in the Desert Fathers (and Mothers). Clearly, this is what happened in the 12<sup>th</sup> century when God raised up St. Francis and St. Dominic to witness prophetically to a life totally given in the service of God. It continues to happen today.

In addition, especially when you look at the history of consecrated life and the priesthood a little more deeply, you see a simple fact. Whenever the Church wanted to renew the priesthood, she always invited priests to imitate those in consecrated life. History shows us that the distinctions we know today between diocesan priests and those in religious life were not always so clear in the first millennium.<sup>12</sup> For example, St. Augustine required all the priests of his

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Gianfranco Ghirlanda, S.J., *Il diritto nella Chiesa: mistero di comunione* (Milan: San Paolo, 1993), 89-90.

<sup>12</sup> One of the most interesting studies is by Ludwig Hertling, S.J. ("Die Professio der kleriker und die entstehung der drei gelübde," *Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie* 56 (1932): 148-174). Hertling points out that in the first millennium of Christianity, at least from the 5<sup>th</sup> century on, the distinctions between consecrated life and the priesthood were not as clear as they became in the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium. All three groups - the monks, the virgins, and the clerics

diocese to live in community with him and to renounce all private possessions. We actually have two sermons from St. Augustine where he had discovered the scandal that two of his priests owned property. In a move that would have made modern press agents proud, he called the whole community together and told them the scandal in complete transparency, setting the record straight that no priest in his diocese would own property.<sup>13</sup> This was a pattern of life he felt inspired to imitate which he learned from the monks of his day. This was not entirely exceptional either. In the first millennium most of those whom today we would call diocesan priests, also lived in community with their bishop and lived a rule of life according to *canons* which often included some renunciation of possessions.<sup>14</sup> This sheds particular light on the reform movement of the canons regular which happened

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- were often seen as united but each had its own *professio*. His study shows that “the three Church states: cleric, monk and virgins were valued equally in the general sense, that all three meant a commendation of the person to God and an irrevocable adoption of holy obligations, that all three contained something that we would today theologically describe as vows (153). In general at the end of the first millennium there were seen to be two states of life, one state being the laity and the other, all those called to the special vocation marked by vows. An example of this can be seen in the *Decretum* of Gratian (c. 1150): “Duo sunt genera Christianorum. Est autem genus unum, quod mancipatum divino offitio, et deditum contemplationi et orationi, ab omni strepitu temporalium cessare convenit, ut sunt clerici, et Deo devoti, videlicet conversi ... Aliud vero est genus Christianorum, ut sunt laici. Laos enim est populus. His licet temporalia possidere, sed non nisi ad usum ... His concessum est uxorem ducere, terram colere, inter virum et virum iudicare, causas agere, oblationes super altaria ponere, decimas reddere, et ita salvari poterunt, si vicia tamen benefaciendo evitaverint” (Decreti, p. II, c. XII, q. 1, c. 7 [Edition Friedbergs I, 678]).

<sup>13</sup> See George Lawless, O.S.A., “A Breach of Monastic Poverty in the Fifth Century: Augustine’s Sermon 356,” in *Studia Abbati Carolo Egger a Confratribus Oblata* (Abensberg: Verlagdruckerei Josef Kral, 1984): 47-60.

<sup>14</sup> There was not the idea of “secular” priests but rather those who lived as monks and those who lived as priests who lived according to the *canones*. The *canones* were Church discipline at the time that ruled the life of the clergy. The clerics’ standing to the *canones* was generally considered to be the same as the monks’ standing with the *regula* (see Hertling, 163). See the historically exhaustive work on this topic by Jerome Bertram, *Vita Communis; The Common Life of the Secular Clergy* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2009).

in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. As Pope St. Gregory VII, St. Peter Damien, and others saw the need to reform the clergy, they encouraged what would seem to us today to be “monastic” movements among the clergy. Priests were encouraged to live together under a rule of life which included the evangelical counsels.<sup>15</sup> In fact, it is most interesting to note that the very first group ever to explicitly take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience were the Canons of St. Genevieve in 1148. These canons certainly lived a life that today we would call religious life, but they were in fact a movement of reform for diocesan priests.<sup>16</sup> One cannot help but think of the influence of St. Francis and St. Dominic on these reform movements.<sup>17</sup>

It is no wonder then in our own day when Vatican II and subsequent popes have desired to strengthen the priesthood, they have explicitly stated that diocesan priests are called to live the evangelical counsels.<sup>18</sup> But according to Vatican II, it is not just diocesan priests

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<sup>15</sup> Hertling points out that “the origin of the regular canons in the second half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century should not be imagined as if at this time Secular Clerics had congregated into an order to make vows in the manner of monks” (164-165). There were no “secular clerics” at the time, at least not *de iure*. Every cleric was *Deo devotus, religiosus, sub sacra professione vivens*. The intention of the reform of the clergy in the 11<sup>th</sup> century was not to create something new, but to highlight the old interpretation of the status of the clerics, in its complete circumference, as a holy status, especially through the revival of the old *canones*.

<sup>16</sup> Basil Cole, O.P. and Paul Conner, O.P., *Christian Totality: Theology of the Consecrated Life*, revised edition (Mumbai, India: St. Paul’s, 1997), 60.

<sup>17</sup> A history of the evangelical counsels and the diocesan priesthood needs to be written, and especially interesting would be the history of the commitment to poverty (see Hertling, 161-162 and Cole and Connor, 126). If preliminary research is correct, it would show that in the first millennium there was not always a clear distinction between “diocesan” priests who did not take vows and religious priests who did. It would also show that the reform movements for so-called “secular” clergy have always pushed them towards the evangelical counsels and community life, which today are associated with religious life.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 15, 16, 17; John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (March 25, 1992) n. 27-30; Congregation for the Clergy, *The Directory for the Ministry and Life of Priest* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013) n. 56-57 and 79-83.

who are meant to be inspired to an embrace of the counsels, but in fact also the laity. This is why *Lumen Gentium*, immediately after the section calling everyone to holiness,<sup>19</sup> speaks about the special role that religious have in the Church of prophetically witnessing to this universal call to holiness through the evangelical counsels.<sup>20</sup>

If I had to define the specific prophetic witness given by those in consecrated life, I would define it as a life totally given. It is very important when trying to live the evangelical counsels that we see them as a unity. Living poverty, chastity, and obedience is not making three separate gifts to God. Rather these are three aspects of one total self-donation: a single self-donation which is concretized in three areas of human existence. This is perhaps best seen in the life of Our Lady. Mary, the mother of Jesus, our model and help, clearly lives the evangelical counsels in her life because she places her whole being at the service of Christ and his mission. The gift of herself, lived in poverty, chastity, and obedience, is a gift that is expressed in the moment she surrenders her whole being to the mission of the Redeemer when she says “fiat” to the angel Gabriel. Mary is dispossessed of self and she allows her life to be given. Von Balthasar explains:

The Marian *availability* is so indivisible and comprehensive that it is pointless and impossible to distinguish within it the elements of virginity, of poverty, and of obedience. They are integrated in the fundamental act to the point of mutual compenetration ... Mary might, for example, have said: ‘God can have everything but my body,’

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. LG, n. 39-42.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. LG, chap. 7.



on the grounds that the she was already promised to the man named Joseph; but she makes no such reservation.<sup>21</sup>

This total gift of self will always be the norm of the counsels, the central movement which makes them one. This is the attitude of Christ, a heart that wants to be given. The counsels are meant to be a yes, like Mary's yes, that wants to give everything to the beloved in order to become totally dispossessed of one's self. Here we can see again the connection between the evangelical counsels and nuptial love. For in marriage, we also see this desire to give oneself completely. Von Balthasar says, "This attitude has only one analogy: the indivisibility and indissolubility of the yes given in marriage."<sup>22</sup>

Here we see what we might call the "nuptial nature" of the evangelical counsels. It is very interesting that when St. Thomas Aquinas comments on the annunciation he calls it a marriage.

It was reasonable that it should be announced to the Blessed Virgin that she was to conceive Christ ... in order to show that there is a certain spiritual wedlock (*matrimonium*) between the Son of God and human nature. Wherefore in the Annunciation the Virgin's consent was besought in lieu of that of the entire human nature (*loco totius humanae naturae*).<sup>23</sup>

Mary, the first member of the Church, is the bride saying yes to this spiritual marriage between God and man. In this marriage, she makes a total gift of herself in response to the total gift of God to her.

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<sup>21</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Laity and the Life of the Counsels*, trans. Brian McNeil, C.R.V. with D.C. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003), 24, original emphasis.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>23</sup> ST III, q. 30, a. 1, *corpus*.

This is also why the Scriptures use the marriage analogy to explain the covenant. The one who takes vows lives the baptismal covenant fully, a covenant of total self-gift. Saint John Paul II will argue that this is why the Scriptures use the spousal analogy for the covenant. The spousal analogy takes us further into understanding this self-gift than any other analogy used to describe the covenant. As St. John Paul II writes: “The analogy of spousal love contains a characteristic of the mystery that is not directly emphasized by the analogy of merciful love, nor by the analogy of fatherly love (nor by any other analogy used in the Bible to which we could have appealed).”<sup>24</sup> Marriage is the closest union of love that we know in human experience. It involves a total gift of self - it is exclusive because it is exhaustive. One cannot have more than one spouse because one cannot give oneself totally to more than one person. These aspects are the way we come to understand Christ’s spousal love for his Church. He in some way gives himself totally to us. Of course, we are not capable of receiving God totally. We receive God by means of participation in God. Nevertheless, God’s gift in Christ has in some sense been total. As St. John Paul II says,

the gift given by God to man in Christ is a ‘total’ or ‘radical’ gift, which is precisely what the analogy of spousal love indicates: it is in some sense ‘all’ that God ‘could’ give of himself to man, considering the limited faculties of man as a creature. In this way the analogy of spousal love indicates the ‘radical’ character of grace: of the whole order of created grace.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006), 501.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, original emphasis.

This radical, total gift of Jesus, in some way invites a radical, total response. The spousal gift which Jesus makes on the Cross demands a perfect response, at least in one person! Where do we find that perfect response? It is in Our Lady. She lives the perfect, unconditional yes. It also demands a prophetic witness of those in the Church who would imitate Mary's yes and give everything.

Here you understand why consecrated women are explicitly called brides in the Church. They represent the Church in her deepest expression. They prophetically witness to the fulfillment of the covenant that we will all live in heaven. Here you also see why you must understand yourselves as brides. Certainly you are brides of a different kind, because you are not living a human marriage. But you are called to the undivided total self-gift of love. This is the true married love which Christ lives in relationship with his Church. This love that desires to give all is your prophetic witness! It is expressed in the counsels, but lived in love. Live this love; it is what changes the world. It is a life consecrated by love. The Church needs this prophetic witness to be reminded of who we really are. By living this witness you become icons of redemption in our midst; most especially for priests, who have to live in the world but imitate your self-giving love, you become like Mary in the midst of the Apostles. Your prophetic witness inspires them to make a gift of themselves for the Church their bride in imitation of the total self-gift of Jesus Christ on the Cross. By living the evangelical counsels you are a prophetic witness for the salvation of the world.

I just want to close with one story of a man who taught me so much about this reality, what a life truly given looks like. He was not a religious but he wanted to be a priest. His name was Fernand, and shortly before he was to enter the seminary in his 20's he came down with a disease that paralyzed his whole body. The disease left him in

bed, unable to move anything except his head, for over 50 years. Fernand lives in Ghent, Belgium, and I met him through the Missionaries of Charity - he lives very close to one of their houses where I have been a few times to give retreats and seminars for them. He is the reason the Missionaries of Charity are in Belgium. When Mother Teresa came to Ghent to speak, the people asked her to send them some of her sisters. She responded, "You have no poor people here." The people took her to meet Fernand. Mother Teresa spent several hours at his bedside, despite the fact they could not speak a common language. At one point, someone pointed out to Mother Teresa that in Fernand's one room apartment there was no crucifix. Mother got very upset and said to his co-worker, "Don't you see? Fernand is the crucifix; he is hanging on the Cross."

Fernand shows us the great mystery of Christ's therapy for the world: here is a man who has become a victim soul, giving up everything so that others may be healed. He is filled with joy. The first time I met him, he told me that he is quite sure he has done more good on the altar of his bed than he would ever have done as a priest. When I get there, I celebrate Holy Mass in his room and he always tells me after Mass: "one must long for the Eucharist - as soon as you receive it once you must begin to long for it the next day." I was so surprised upon meeting him the second time, after almost two years: he remembered my name and said he had been praying for me. I thanked him and he simply responded, "This is my work." There are government workers and young people who come every day to feed Fernand and to take care of him. The sisters tell me how these young people are constantly converted by him. Belgium is a country that has basically lost the faith. In the heart of that country, there is a saint who is suffering for all of them.

It was the last visit though, that really struck me the most. I was in Belgium to lead a retreat and we went and had Mass in Fernand's room. By then, he was in his 70's and the doctors could not figure out why he was still alive. He was still joyfully offering his suffering. As I was preparing to leave at the end of our visit, he said to me, "Fr. Andrew, I am just a man with all my weaknesses, but I am burning with love." When he said this, I first thought of the burning bush - how it burned but was not consumed. Then I thought of the burning heart of Christ. I realized that I was standing in the presence of Christ's heart. Through his years of suffering and weakness in that bed, through his self-gift in suffering, Fernand had allowed his life to be completely given. He was completely given to his mission of suffering intercession. He was certainly living poverty, chastity, and obedience as one gift of love. He was still weak, but his heart had become one with the heart of Christ. My dear sisters can we say this? We ought to be able to say this too! "I am just a man, I'm just a woman with all my weaknesses, but I am burning with love. I'm burning with love because through the counsels I am privileged to live a life completely given." If we do this, it will help to save the world.

# Christological and Ecclesiological Foundations of Religious Life

REVEREND CHRISTOPHER COLLINS, S.J.

Recognizing the need for the renewal of religious life, some three decades ago, the “Essential Elements of Religious Life” described what ought to be the common characteristics of consecrated life:

... the call of God and consecration to Him, through profession of the evangelical councils by public vows; a stable form of community life; for institutes dedicated to apostolic works, a sharing in Christ’s mission by a corporate apostolate faithful to a specific founding gift and sound tradition; personal and community prayer; asceticism; public witness; a specific relation to the Church; a life-long formation; and a form of government calling for religious authority based on faith.<sup>1</sup>

This statement of religious life is descriptive of the ideal. It also served as a key framework in the recent visitation of apostolic religious communities and has provided a useful point of reference for us to examine how our own lives, our own personal lives, and our community lives and how we are living out those aspects in our own

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<sup>1</sup> Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, “Essential Elements in the Church’s Teaching on Religious Life as Applied to Institutes Dedicated to Works of the Apostolate,” (May 31, 1983), n. 4. Hereafter, EE.

unique contexts. These outward manifestations of religious life are, at the same time, all based, one way or another, on the identity and the mission of Christ's own life, which then enables us to become witnesses also to the lay faithful, as well as to unbelievers, manifesting different aspects of the life of Christ.

*Lumen Gentium* describes these aspects of the life of Christ:

... in contemplation on the mountain, in His proclamation of the Kingdom of God to the multitudes, in His healing of the sick and the maimed, in His work of converting sinners to a better life, in His solicitude for youth and His goodness to all men, always obedient to the will of the Father who sent Him.<sup>2</sup>

I'd like to examine some of the theological realities that underlie these various outward characteristics of consecrated life. In the most authoritative statement in recent history of the Church concerning the nature of religious life, the fathers at the Second Vatican Council declared, in *Lumen Gentium*, on the section on "Religious,"

The people of God have no lasting city here below, but look forward to one that is to come. Since this is so, the religious state whose purpose is to free its members from earthly cares, more fully manifests to all believers the presence of heavenly goods already possessed here below. Furthermore, it not only witnesses to the fact of a new and eternal life acquired by the redemption of Christ, but it foretells the future resurrection and the glory of the heavenly Kingdom. Christ proposed to his disciples this form of life, which He, the son of God, accepted in entering this world to do the will of the Father.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> LG, n. 46.

<sup>3</sup> LG, n. 44.

This form of consecrated life is the form of the life of Christ and that it's our participation in it that draws us into union with Him, and then also serves as a public sign to the rest of the world to draw others into that friendship, into that state of being adopted sons and daughters of the Father.

The form of life to which Jesus invites His disciples is the same form of life that He lives in relationship to the Father, united by the bond of love that is the Holy Spirit. Religious life, then, both offers a way to eternal life for those who say yes to it, and are accepted into it by their legitimate superiors, and at the same time serves as a profound aid to the whole of the people of God, who need to be reminded and encouraged of God's ultimate plan for them in eternity. In our consecrated lives, then, we find first a way toward salvation, toward our own salvation. In *The Spiritual Exercises*, Saint Ignatius of Loyola reminds us, in the principle and foundation before the exercises even begin per se, that "human beings are created to praise reverence and serve God, our Lord, and by means of doing this to save our own souls." The salvation of our own souls comes in that praise, reverence, and service of God.

The radical praise, reverence, and service of God in religious life is, no doubt, first and foremost a way to salvation for us as individuals, living in the context of communal life. But this radical way of living, for our own salvation, seeking our true end, is also, of course, a great means of evangelization. It is a sign for the whole people of God in our midst. This is our path toward salvation, primarily, but secondarily it's always good to be reminded of it – to be reminded of how powerful this witness is for those around us, whether we realize it or not. It's reminding the whole people of God, whether they are of



faith or not, that this life alone is not where our salvation is, that we are pointing beyond ourselves.

We become living icons of the presence of Christ in the world, we draw attention not to ourselves but to Christ Himself, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. As we commemorate the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council fifty years ago, it seems fitting to derive some of our reflection on the essential theological aspects of religious life from these documents. It is a time to celebrate fifty years since the Council, but it is also a time that is, perhaps, bittersweet, when considering the state of religious life as a whole. The stunning decline that has taken place since the Council could be considered, perhaps, the most devastating period in the life of the Church in this country, certainly since colonial days.

Not only have the numbers of religious declined, of course, but so too has the viability of the works that so many of our communities, and especially so many heroic religious women, founded and staffed over the generations, particularly in this country. These works, of course, were institutions that welcome, nurtured, and assimilated millions upon millions of poor immigrants from various parts of Europe, especially. When we consider the variety of crises that exist today, in the fields of health care, care for the indigent, the education of youth, and especially the poor in our inner cities, the economic gap between the rich and the poor that exists between those who have received education and those who have not, the implications of the decline certainly reach far beyond our own internal discussions within the Church. And yet, praise God there are many counter-signs of this decline present right here in this very room and in the communities that you represent.

I mention the backdrop of our gathering here for a particular reason that speaks not only to the social aspects under consideration

but because of the theological grounding for all of this in the first place; the theological reality that underlies our lives. Much of the decline in religious life, in recent years and even decades, has taken place precisely because theological considerations were not very well considered in the implementation of the renewal of the Council. The pressing questions have been social ones, not theological ones (as in the '60s and '70s and '80s). In too many cases, the turn to the modern world and the primary desire for *aggiornamento* perhaps outweighed the simultaneous call *ad fontes*. We allowed the categories of a secular reality to take primacy in our own understanding of our lives within the Church.

How are modern religious to engage the modern social problems of the day, and how are they to operate both internally, in their own communities, and also *vis-à-vis* the life of the Church? On a horizontal, social plane, how might religious life be renewed? I think, to a large degree, these were the kinds of questions that were being asked.

The theological framework was, perhaps, taken for granted. Why? Possibly this is because theology itself - in much of the training and seminaries - had been so dry in the '50s and '60s, in the lead-up to the Council. Even our own Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI laments, in his own memoirs, the aridity of much of the training that he had received in his own formation, namely what he calls the 'crystal clear logic' of much of the neo-scholasticism<sup>4</sup> of the time, which, while not in error in any way, failed, in his estimation, to carry the weight of the mystery into which we are all called as Christians. Of course there were some moments of great renewal within theology - biblical theology, in particular - and patristics, but much of it was so philosophical and so

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Collins, *God's New Man: The Election of Benedict XVI and the Legacy of John Paul II* (London; NY: Continuum Books, 2005), 146.

abstract in many ways that he describes how it failed to carry the depth of the mystery of what our whole Christian faith is all about. Therefore, even though the propositions were true, it didn't have a way of deeply forming those who were in the seminary.

Later, as a theological expert at the Council, Joseph Ratzinger expressed the desire to speak the language not of scholars but in the language of shepherds, in plain biblical language. We see a continuation of that in Pope Francis, as well.

For a variety of reasons, those implementing the reform in religious life were not all attuned to the depth of the theological reality, which grounded religious life in the first place. There is no doubt that if our communities have survived in recent decades or even show signs of thriving, it is because we have taken most seriously the theological proclamations of the Church - of the Church's faith in the magisterium. We struggle to live according to these truths revealed to us by the Lord, Jesus Christ Himself, through the teaching authority of the mystical body, the Church in which we live our daily lives. This mystical body is also visible in the Church. Although we often, at times, disfigure that visible icon by our sin, the Church is the visible and living extension of Christ in history because God has first made Himself visible in the person of Christ, from the moment He took flesh in the womb of Mary.

The Incarnation seems to be a good starting point from which to reflect on the bedrock theological reality that shapes our lives, as they conform to Christ, to God, in the flesh, who is living in history and redeeming that history from within. I would like to highlight the theological aspects that are foundational for our lives and the element of our life's visibility by considering these major aspects from within the Incarnation, the Cross, the Trinity, and Trinitarian theology and eschatology.

It is not easy to participate within the mystery of the Incarnation, individually or communally. Nor was it easy for the early Church to understand it. Debates went back and forth in the Christological controversies, over the mystery of Christ's Incarnation; emphasizing either the humanity or the divinity of Christ. It was not easily grasped how can He could be both human and divine at once. How could He be, as Chalcedon finally articulated, fully human and fully divine in one person? It's the least tenable proclamation. It's the least palatable. It's the most unsettling. But these are the great mysteries of our whole faith.

How is it that God and human can live within one subject, one person? They don't seem to go together. And yet, that is, of course, the absolute center of our faith: God assumed our humanity while remaining divine in the person of Jesus. How is this possible?

It is a question not only for Christology but a question for us, as religious, to grapple with. How is it that we are of this human order and, at the same time, very much drawn into the supernatural, the theological, the Christological, into divine life? It seems to me that it is the same dynamic as sorting out the Christological questions. How is it that that one person was both human and divine at the same time? It's not easy. It's our constant challenge; we are very much a product of our own personal and social contexts. If we remain embedded in those realities of our human natural life and we downplay the eschatological dimension of our lives, as consecrated men and women, then there's no point to it.

In other words, if we're not pointing to anything beyond, there's no point to it. On the other hand, we go to the other extreme if we find ourselves settled in to the 'otherness' of religious life and we become detached from the ordinary people around us; if we have nothing to do with their reality and we are not living as 'earth persons',

as one older Jesuit used to remind us. It's important to remember that you are also an earth person. We have to continue to live our human life as ordinary people. If we cut off or detach from the world that we are trying to be a sign for, then it's a sign that is not effective. So how do we continue to navigate these things? Our reference point must always be drawn back into the mystery of who the person of Christ is.

We can also think about the nature of the Cross as our sign within the person of Jesus and how this is manifested in our own religious life, as well. In the history of Christian art, what are the two most common icons of the life of Jesus that we have? I would say the Cross, first of all, and secondly, the Annunciation or birth of Christ. These moments represent the most vulnerable moments in Christ's life, being born as a defenseless baby and dying in humiliation and rejection on the Cross. They are also the two most common go-to icons.

The icons that we go to are those of His vulnerability. Why? Because this is the place of our hope. If God has joined Himself to us in these places of smallness, weakness and vulnerability, then these are the places that are most holy. The love that enters into those places of weakness and vulnerability turn them into places of our victory.

How does that play out in our religious life as well, in our communities? Once we enter into this life, there is a temptation to proceed as if areas of weakness and vulnerability have somehow disappeared - that is for other people. Our lives and our communities are so well ordered, they are almost impervious to the reality of great fragility in the human condition, even to the very essence of our Christological faith, too.

What would it look like to consider, in my own personal life and in the lives of our communities, that it is okay - and, in fact, it might be a place of great victory - to acknowledge the places where we are weak, where we can't manage everything so well, and allow ourselves

to be opened up to the presence of Christ in those places of weakness. We are not an effective sign of the redemptive love of Christ if those places of fragility and weakness are not present in our lives.

In consideration of the Trinitarian dimensions and the foundations of religious life, we are first and foremost made in the image of God who is triune, who is communion, who is relationship in giving and receiving love in the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. We are made in the image of communion and relationship and interdependence and we are also made to draw others into that same free set of relations in our own lives, too. There is no room within that Trinitarian framework of our religious life for jealousy, competition, and comparison. It is hard to stifle that spirit of comparison and competition or shame; that I am not living up to the other perfect sister over there, or to that ‘robo-novice,’ as we used to say in the novitiate.

All of those different sorts of dimensions can break down the sense of communion and the authenticity of our lives. What do we do personally and what do we do communally to drive out that spirit of division that can creep its way into our own communities? This is spiritual warfare taking place in very small, particular ways in our daily lives as religious.

Returning to the person of Jesus again, I found Pope Benedict extremely helpful in laying out, within his book *Jesus of Nazareth*, how it is that the center of the person of Jesus is his Sonship. The icon of Sonship is the baptism of Jesus. Before He begins His mission, He comes up out of the waters of the Jordan with nothing - Jesus has nothing in that moment. He has left His home, He has no committee, no budget for this mission, no 5-year plan for this mission. He’s got absolutely nothing except the Father saying to Him, “You are my beloved Son and in you I am well pleased.” This is all He has for His

entire mission. Everything flows from here in His mission, all the way to the Cross and beyond.

Immediately following His baptism are the temptations in the desert. What is the nature of the temptations in the desert? How is it that the enemy tempts? He tempts Jesus with good things, actually. However, the enemy tries to undercut, ever so slightly, what the Father just proclaimed at the baptism. The Father said, "You are my beloved Son," and then the enemy comes in and says, "If you are the Son," then do this and this and this. He calls it into question. There's a subjunctive mood there: if you are, then start to do this and that, apart from the Father. Give glory to your Father, but apart from the Father, or take control of this situation by yourself and then you'll glorify the Father. If you do that, then you'll prove that you are the Son of God, that you are the beloved Son. It's a temptation that seems rather appealing. I want to give glory to the Father, so I'm going to go do all these great things to prove it. It's the "if" that's the beginning of the temptation from the enemy. If you are, then prove it, by yourself. If you are the Son of God, then prove you're the Son of God, apart from the Father.

It's a very subtle temptation within the life of Christ, and I think we probably see echoes of that temptation in our own personal lives. If I'm going to be a beloved of the Father, if I'm going to be a faithful religious, if I'm going to be a sign of love and hope in the world, then I have to do this and this and this to prove it, and I have to do it better than that other sister, too. Or, I'm never going to be able to do it because that other sister is so perfect. If, if, if - the comparisons and so on. They are very subtle temptations that undercut the proclamation of the Father at the Jordan River.

What does this look like in our own personal lives and in our communal lives too? Are we hearing what the Father has to say to us? From the moment of our own baptism, the Father is saying the exact

same thing to us – “You are my beloved daughter and in you I am well pleased.” The Father doesn’t speak in the past or in the future but speaks in the present tense, and there are no conditionals in it.

I think the great challenge for our lives is to continue again and again to be drawn back into that place, joining Jesus in that river, with nothing to show for ourselves, with no accomplishments, but to just hear “you are my beloved and in you I’m well pleased,” and then let the mission take care of itself based on that proclamation of the Father. When we are able to recognize that we are valuable, that we are loved because the Father says so, not because of anything that we do, but because the Father says it, think of the freedoms that flow from that.

This is the attractiveness or the spirit of freedom and joy that has captured the attention of so many in the world with Pope Francis, of course. There’s something refreshing and attractive in him that makes other people wonder, both within and outside the Church, how do I have a taste of that freedom and joy? It comes from his knowing that he’s a loved sinner. I always think it’s very compelling to go back to his vocation story, when he went to go to confession as a young man. His life was on a trajectory but he went into a confessional that one day with that visiting priest whom he never saw again. He said something happened within that confessional. He experienced mercy in that confessional, which set him loose in a new way.

The absolute foundation of his life is, as his episcopal motto says: *miserando alque eligendo*, Jesus looked upon him with mercy and called him. The freedom and excitement that flows from that mercy, and then to live in that great spiritual freedom has a profound impact on those around us. This is one of the great gifts of religious life for the life of the Church and for those beyond, too.



# The Authority of Women Religious in the Heart of the Church

SISTER SARA BUTLER, M.S.B.T.

In her New York Times op-ed piece on Pope Francis' visit to the United States, columnist Maureen Dowd said that Francis would be "the perfect pontiff if he lived in the 19<sup>th</sup> century."<sup>1</sup> She meant, of course, that he has not caught up with the feminist movement. "How, in 2015, can he continue to condone the idea that women should have no voice in Church decisions?" As evidence for her claim that he is an old-fashioned, "macho" Latin American, she recalled that "shortly after he was elected, Francis flatly rejected the idea that the institution could benefit from opening itself to the hearts and minds of women. Asked about the issue of female priests, he replied 'The Church has spoken and says no,' adding 'That door is closed.'"<sup>2</sup>

When critics like Ms. Dowd lament that women have no authority in the Catholic Church, they have in mind the authority of office. Since ordination to the ministerial priesthood is reserved to men, the principal office-holders<sup>3</sup> in the Church - priests, bishops, and

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<sup>1</sup> Maureen Dowd, "Francis, the Perfect 19<sup>th</sup> Century Pope," *New York Times* (September 26, 2015), Sunday Review.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> An ecclesiastical "office" is, according to canon 145 §1, "any function constituted in a stable manner by divine or ecclesiastical ordinance to be exercised for a spiritual purpose." As discussed below, the canonical definition of "office" has been expanded, so that lay persons are now capable of holding some offices. Cf. Code of Canon Law (*Codex Iuris Canonici*) Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1983.

the pope - are always men. Our critics assume this deprives Catholic women of authority, partly because they limit their consideration to the authority of office, and partly because they suppose that the Church is like any other society, and that her officers function like officers elsewhere. But the authority of office is not the only kind of authority; there is also the moral authority of the rest of the faithful - the authority that comes from experience, learning, expertise, and holiness by means of which the baptized carry out the Church's mission for the salvation of souls and the transformation of society. And the Church, unlike other societies, has an "original" constitution.<sup>4</sup> The public leadership roles of priest, bishop, archbishop, cardinal, and pope are not steps on an ecclesiastical career ladder which lead to "full participation" in the Church, leaving women in the roles of clients and customers.<sup>5</sup> Our critics fail to understand that Christ entrusts to the ministerial priesthood an altogether special share in his priestly, prophetic, and pastoral ministry in order that they can make his gifts of Word and sacraments available to the rest of the baptized. Ordination to the ministerial priesthood places priests at the service of Christ's people, to sanctify, teach, and shepherd them and to equip them for mission.<sup>6</sup> The authority of office exists for the sake of those they serve, not for the clergy's social advancement, or only for his spiritual advancement. "Full participation" is the privilege of the saints.

The flawed perspective of the critics of Church authority, however, continues to dominate public discussion. Some years ago,

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<sup>4</sup> This is the expression used in Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood, *Inter Insigniores*, (1976), art. 6 (b).

<sup>5</sup> Some proponents of the priestly ordination of women make this mistake when they protest that women are barred from "full participation" in the Church.

<sup>6</sup> CCC, n. 1547, 1592.

Monica Migliorino Miller<sup>7</sup> told a nun she met on retreat that she wanted to write a book on the authority of women in the Catholic Church. The nun replied, with a laugh (I suppose), “Well, that’ll be a short book!”<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, when I mentioned to a priest on the seminary faculty that I was giving a talk on the authority of women in the Church, he immediately assumed it would be a lecture on the Blessed Virgin Mary! Evidently, there’s more than one way to look at this question!

This will be a short talk on the authority of women, and specifically of women religious, in the heart of the Church. Rather than allow the opposition to define the question, I will begin by recalling that the authority of women religious is typically associated with the influence they exert, as women, by means of holiness of life. Next, I will consider authority as a way of exercising and ordering power. Then, to address the issue raised by our critics, I will point out that the non-ordained<sup>9</sup> can cooperate in the exercise of ecclesiastical authority and that includes women religious who do exercise authority as office-holders in their religious institutes. Finally, I will comment on two trends related to this question, namely, a certain aversion to the exercise of the authority of office on the part of some women religious, and Pope Francis’ desire to provide more opportunities for the

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<sup>7</sup> Dr. Miller, a Chicago native, pro-life activist, wife, mother, and theologian, has recently published a revised edition of *The Authority of Women in the Catholic Church* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus, 2015), a book based on her doctoral dissertation at Marquette University. My citations are from the earlier edition by Crisis Books, 1997. For a full-blown development of her thesis, see *Sexuality and Authority in the Catholic Church* (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> Miller, *The Authority of Women in the Catholic Church*, 3.

<sup>9</sup> I use “non-ordained” here rather than “laity” to recall that according to Vatican II (LG, n. 32), “laity” refers to “all the faithful except those in holy orders *and those in the state of religious life specially approved by the Church.*” (My emphasis)

participation of women in decision-making in the expectation that they have a specific womanly contribution to make.

## Women and the Authority of Holiness

Do women exercise authority in the Catholic Church? I will answer “yes.” When I say “yes” I am thinking first of all of *moral* authority, which, as people often point out, is the authority of holiness. You have heard it said, I am sure: “Everyone knows who Mother Teresa of Calcutta was, but no one remembers the name of the archbishop of Calcutta!” Christian feminists like Rosemary Radford Ruether generally agree that women have always exercised the authority of holiness in the Church. Some suspect they were obliged to cultivate holiness to compensate for their exclusion from “headship” and ecclesiastical office, and others suppose that holiness has been the expression of personal charisms.<sup>10</sup> Still others, however, like Dr. Monica Miller, see women as holding a certain kind of authority in the Church because of the covenantal character of the economy of salvation. I will begin by looking at Dr. Miller’s view of the authority of women *as women*, that is to say, at feminine authority.

Taking the Latin word *auctores*, “meaning to be the author or creator of something,”<sup>11</sup> as a starting point, Dr. Miller defines as the power to give life; to be an author or creator of something. She holds

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<sup>10</sup> See *Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979). In the Introduction (19), they say: “It is characteristic of the leadership roles in Christianity claimed by women that they derive their authority from personal charism rather than from office.” And later (22) they add: “It was the authority of holiness, the authority of direct charism that was most important in compensating for their lack of recognized capacity for ‘headship’ in patriarchal society.”

<sup>11</sup> Miller, *The Authority of Women in the Catholic Church*, 5.

that authority, as the power to give life and the responsibility for bringing life to its goal, is always situated within a covenant relationship. The covenant may be between God and the chosen people, for example, or between Christ and the Church, or between husband and wife. The covenant is a freely-established relationship between two parties, each of whom exercises authority, but not in the same way. Differentiated authority is basic to the covenant. In marriage, for example, “a man and a woman give life together but in ways that are complementary and fulfill one another.”<sup>12</sup> The woman is not the passive recipient of the man’s unilateral initiative; her active consent, her free and loving self-gift, her motherhood (physical but also spiritual) is required by the covenant relationship. Without the woman, the man cannot give life.<sup>13</sup>

In an analogous way, but without any suggestion of necessity,<sup>14</sup> Christ has chosen to give life and salvation through the mediation of the Church. The Letter to the Ephesians (5:21-33) compares Christ to the Bridegroom who by freely laying down His life for His Bride establishes the new Covenant. It compares the Church to the Bride, and she (the Church, not an individual person but a collective subject, a community composed of both men and women) is called upon to make a corresponding gift of herself within this covenantal relationship. She is the recipient of the Lord’s initiative, but He gives her the grace to respond with her active consent, and to submit freely to her Head. According to the Tradition, this symbol includes motherhood, for the Church is the mother of the faithful. By Christ’s condescension to man,

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>13</sup> Pope St. John Paul develops the same idea in his Apostolic Letter On the Vocation and Dignity of Women, *Mulieris Dignitatem* (August 15, 1988). Cf., n. 24. Hereafter, MD.

<sup>14</sup> Whereas husband and wife are in truth mutually dependent in giving life, God does not, of course, stand in need of His creatures. By His merciful condescension He freely chooses to require their cooperation and by His grace empowers them to give it.

He allows the Church to give His life to the world and to participate in His authority. The Church's authority is symbolized as feminine according to the marital understanding of the Covenant.

If Christ does not choose to save us without the mediation of the Church, neither does He choose to save us without the mediation of Mary. Our Blessed Mother is the premier symbol of feminine authority because it was by her "*Fiat*," her "Let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk. 1:38) that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. By the power of the Holy Spirit, our Lord Jesus Christ was incarnate of the Virgin Mary. Mary is the mother ("source") of God's Son according to the flesh, the God-Bearer, *Theotókos*. She was not only a passive vessel in the accomplishment of this mystery. Her active consent was invited. She was given a kind of maternal authority in the economy of salvation not only by giving birth to the Lord Jesus, but also by her intervention at Cana and her co-suffering with Him at the foot of the Cross. Christ chose to save us by the mediation of a woman.

The Blessed Virgin Mary is closely associated with the Holy Spirit. She is not the quasi-incarnation of the Holy Spirit, as some theologians have suggested.<sup>15</sup> This avenue of speculation does not respect the testimony of revelation, for according to the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is the agent of the Incarnation, the one who overshadowed Mary and made her fruitful, who caused her to become the mother of our God and Savior Jesus Christ. Mary is not an icon of the Holy Spirit but the "Spouse" of the Holy Spirit. In this she is also the icon of the Church, and she exercises her authority, in Nazareth and in the Cenacle at Jerusalem, by responding to the divine invitation.

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<sup>15</sup> For example, Leonardo Boff and St. Maximilian Kolbe. See Monica Migliorino Miller, "The Gender of the Holy Trinity," *New Oxford Review* 70:5 (May 2003): 27-35.

Mary has also been called “the *Pneumatophora*” or “Spirit-Bearer.”<sup>16</sup> This title portrays her as one who actively receives and then distributes or mediates the Holy Spirit to others.

The authority of holiness in the lives of women saints follows this same pattern. We can call to mind women saints and doctors of the Church. From their example we know that the Holy Spirit provides His gifts to whom He wills, and provides - along with the vocation - the necessary wisdom and means for accomplishing His purposes. We may think of the saints and blessed women: Perpetua and Felicitas, Macrina the Elder, Monica, Elizabeth of Hungary, Bridget of Sweden, Margaret Clitherow, Elizabeth Ann Seton, Zélie Martin, and Gianna Molla. We may think of women saints and blessed who lived the consecrated life - Gertrude the Great, Hildegard of Bingen, Catherine of Siena, Teresa of Avila, the Little Flower, Mother Cabrini, Sister Faustina, Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein), Katherine Drexel, and Mother Teresa. You can add your own favorites to these catalogues. As those who read the lives of the saints know, women do not need appointments to office, diocesan or national committees, or seminary faculties to wield the kind of authority that brings about conversion of life and a foretaste of God’s kingdom. How did women like yesterday’s saint, Frances Xavier Cabrini, manage to exert such a powerful influence? What was the source of their influence - their charismatic authority - if not the gifts of the Holy Spirit?

Women religious respond to the divine initiative by making a sincere gift of self through the profession of the evangelical counsels; they do this within a covenant relationship, and the consecration of their virginity has a spousal character. As Pope St. John Paul II has

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<sup>16</sup> See Petro B. T. Bilaniuk, “The Theotókos as *Pneumatophora*,” in *Studies in Eastern Christianity*, vol. 2, ed. Isabel A. Massey (Toronto: Our Canada Publications, 1982): 21-39.

written, their vocation “cannot be compared to remaining simply unmarried or single, because virginity is not restricted to a mere ‘no,’ but contains a profound ‘yes’ in the spousal order: the gift of self for love in a total and undivided manner.”<sup>17</sup> The “order of love” lived out in their virginal consecration is made fruitful in a spiritual motherhood that takes on many forms: ministry to “the sick, the handicapped, the abandoned, orphans, the elderly, children, young people, the imprisoned, and people on the margins of society.”<sup>18</sup> According to the synthesis spelled out in the Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, consecrated women represent and express the common priesthood of the baptized in a special way. The “feminine genius” - a woman’s capacity to pay attention to the person - is a charismatic complement, in the Church, to the authority exercised by those who hold office in the ecclesiastical hierarchy.<sup>19</sup>

The virginal and maternal authority exercised by women religious is a gift to the Church. As *Lumen Gentium* teaches, religious life itself is essential to the Church. It belongs not to her hierarchical constitution but to her “life and holiness”;<sup>20</sup> and according to the theory advanced here, women’s religious life is indispensable. As icons of the Church as Virgin, Bride, and Mother, women religious invite the rest

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<sup>17</sup> MD, n. 20.

<sup>18</sup> This catalogue is from MD, n. 21.

<sup>19</sup> For the “feminine genius,” see MD, n. 30 and Pope St. John Paul II’s *Letter to Women* (1995), n. 9-12. How this works out in the family and social order requires separate treatment. It really seems necessary to identify the “masculine genius,” otherwise it would appear that the man is the normative human being, and the woman an auxiliary of some sort. See Deborah Savage, “The Genius of Man,” and Theresa Farnan, “The Dignity and Vocation of Men,” in *Promise and Challenge: Catholic Women Reflect on Feminism, Complementarity, and the Church*, ed. Mary Rice Hasson (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Press, 2015): 129-153 and 155-177.

<sup>20</sup> LG, n. 44. For more on the Council’s teaching on religious life, see my essay, “Issues in the Reception of *Perfectae Caritatis*,” in *The Reception of Vatican II*, ed. Matthew Lamb and Matthew Levering (Oxford Press, forthcoming, 2016).



of the baptized to take their part in the mystery of redemption and hold out to them the promise of “life on high in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14).

My first point is that women have their own distinct feminine authority, namely, a capacity to give life and love (the “feminine genius”), and that they exercise it within the context of a covenant relationship. In the Church, women, and women religious in particular, exercise influence by virtue of their moral authority, the authority of holiness, more than by the authority of office.<sup>21</sup> Whereas the authority of office may be exercised even if the office-holder is not holy, *the authority of holiness depends entirely on the personal authenticity of its bearer*. It may be exercised even if the holy person is not ordained and has no public status at all. According to a statement found in a document of the magisterium: “The greatest in the kingdom of heaven are not the ministers but the saints.”<sup>22</sup> The “hierarchy of office” exists to promote and serve the “hierarchy of holiness.”<sup>23</sup>

## Authority as a Way of Exercising and Ordering Power

Whereas some women religious are content to pursue the authority of holiness,<sup>24</sup> others would also like to see women hold office and contribute directly to “decision-making” in the Church. They approach the question of authority, then, from another perspective. They are concerned to ensure that women are treated as equals in the Church, and they formulate the issue in terms of the equal distribution

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<sup>21</sup> Should being a wife or a husband be seen as an “office” in the Church? This is worth exploring.

<sup>22</sup> *Inter Insigniores*, n. 6.

<sup>23</sup> MD, n. 27.

<sup>24</sup> According to the Code of Canon Law, “The first and foremost duty of all religious is to be the contemplation of divine things and assiduous union with God in prayer.” (Can. 663 §1)

of power.<sup>25</sup> Let me turn, then, to an analysis that deals more directly with authority as a way of exercising and ordering power, an analysis that prescind from taking sexual difference, or the Church, into account.<sup>26</sup>

We are familiar with the kind of authority or power that is acquired by gaining competence in some art or science or mastering a certain body of knowledge. This might be called the power of persuasion. It belongs to the specialist who has command of a certain field of study, or has a particular expertise, or whose experience and wisdom exceed that of the ordinary person. In our day, for example, most women religious need the help of an IT person. We are glad to have a nurse or doctor at hand for a medical emergency. We need to call a bi-lingual sister when someone who does not speak English arrives at the door, etc. In these and countless other ways we rely on the judgment or advice of those who have the “authority” of competence, or learning. The authority of holiness probably fits in this category, too, for it represents the fruit of virtue and spiritual experience; it is a kind of competence. In fact, people have a right to expect that Religious will be specialists in this realm, i.e., that we will

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<sup>25</sup> They maintain, perhaps on the basis of their experience and not just in theory, that men alone have power in the Church, and that they use it to exclude women and keep them in subordinate roles.

<sup>26</sup> I am borrowing some ideas from Philip W. Turner’s essay, “Authority in the Church: Excavations among the Ruins,” *First Things* (December 1990): 25-31. Turner addresses the authority of office in the Episcopal Church, but he examines it from the perspective of political philosophy. He relies in some measure on Yves R. Simon, *A General Theory of Authority* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1962). See also his essay, “Episcopal Oversight and Ecclesiastical Discipline,” in *Inhabiting Unity: Theological Perspectives on the Proposed Lutheran-Episcopal Concordat*, ed. Ephraim Radner and R.R. Reno (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1995): 111-133. The authority of office exercised in the Catholic Church and in religious life is not derived from the consent of the governed, as explained below (10 ff.). Turner’s distinctions, however, are helpful for thinking about the exercise of office in a religious institute.

not only be able to explain the Church's doctrines, practice, and devotions, but that we also have firm faith, a personal relationship with the Lord, and an authentic experience of the Christian life that will ensure that we are trustworthy guides for others. Those who have this sort of authority have real influence. While they may be able to persuade others to see things their way or accept their advice, they cannot require others to agree with them or follow their advice or accept their opinions. In other words, they may have - *de facto* - the power to influence and persuade others, but they do not have the authority of office - *de jure*.

The authority of office is a form of social control that involves the right to command and impose sanctions, on the one hand, and respect for the liberty of those for whom it is exercised, on the other. Authority is sometimes confused with power, but it is not the same. Power has been defined as the ability to achieve purpose.<sup>27</sup> It is possible to have power without the authority of office (as in the case of someone with the authority of competence, or moral authority, or of a bully!). And it is possible to have the authority of office without power (as when someone is the victim of mutiny or rebellion), but this is authority under threat! The authority of office that is exercised in a community, however, is linked with power. In fact, this authority is a way of ordering power.

The authority of office needs to be distinguished, on the one hand, from domination and manipulation, and on the other hand, from mere persuasion. Domination uses power without respect for the liberty of those it governs, and manipulation resorts to deceit to achieve its purpose. But authority also needs to be distinguished from the *de facto* power of expertise or learning, for it does not have to rely on

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<sup>27</sup> Turner, "Authority in the Church: Excavations among the Ruins," 26.

persuasion. Someone who has authority of office has the right to command and to impose sanctions. Someone with authority can require obedience from those who may disagree with those commands.

But isn't that coercion? What about people's liberty, their freedom to follow their own best judgment, and refuse to obey?<sup>28</sup> The authority of office presupposes that those over whom it is exercised are already bound together by common fundamental beliefs and a common way of life. It presupposes that they have freely agreed to accept the exercise of authority as a service, a way of ordering power, for the common good and the achievement of the community's purpose.<sup>29</sup> Authority, then, is a form of social control distinct from both domination and persuasion. Authority of office "implies both the right to command and the liberty of those to whom commands may be issued."<sup>30</sup>

There are a few additional points to consider. First, why is authority necessary?<sup>31</sup> Is it needed chiefly because we are sinners, as St. Augustine thought? Is it needed only to keep people in line and decide disputes? No. According to St. Thomas Aquinas, authority is necessary in order to assemble, empower, and direct the members of a society for the accomplishment of their common purpose. It is needed not only

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<sup>28</sup> In *Buying the Field: Catholic Religious Life in Mission to the World* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2013), 361-364, Sandra M. Schneiders raises the question of the abdication of personal responsibility in the "blind obedience" that contributed to the Holocaust.

<sup>29</sup> This coincides with Monica Miller's view that authority is always exercised within a covenant.

<sup>30</sup> Turner, "Authority in the Church: Excavations among the Ruins," 25. In "Episcopal Oversight" (123), he adds: "To have authority (as opposed to influence), one must be licensed both to command and enforce (take disciplinary action), and yet (in a way different from the exercise of raw power) the commands issued and the acts of enforcement that may follow must fall within a commonly recognized moral and legal order."

<sup>31</sup> For this question, see Benedict M. Ashley, *Justice in the Church: Gender and Participation* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 12-15.

on account of sin or a deficit of intelligence and good will on the part of the members. Even if all the members of a society have an abundance of intelligence and good will, authority is still needed, because there are many equally good ways to order the community's life and mission. If a community is to achieve its purpose, someone has to be in a position to make prudential decisions and "to further commonly held beliefs and ways of life in circumstances where unanimity lies beyond immediate reach."<sup>32</sup> Another point: in an ideal world, the one who holds office also has moral authority, i.e., is someone who is fully committed to the community's beliefs and way of life. Still another: the authority of office-holders is usually limited and regulated by law; this serves to protect the dignity and rights of those who obey. Authority that wisely orders the common life towards its common purpose enhances the liberty of all and makes use of their gifts in ways that also contribute to their personal fulfillment. Let us consider how these general principles apply to the exercise of authority by ecclesiastical office-holders and in religious life.<sup>33</sup>

## Authority of Office in the Church

### *Ecclesiastical Office and the Collaboration of the Non-ordained Faithful*

In the Catholic Church, the authority of office follows the dynamic just described. The foundational beliefs and way of life based in divine revelation are expressed in Scripture and Tradition and interpreted by the magisterium, the teaching of the Church's pastors.

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<sup>32</sup> Turner, "Episcopal Oversight," 123.

<sup>33</sup> Following the Second Vatican Council, in many religious institutes the challenge of "renewal" has exposed or given rise to a pluralism of beliefs and practices that threaten the superiors' ability to exercise authority.

The pastors, or office-bearers, must publicly profess the Church's faith and commit themselves by an oath of fidelity to remain in the communion of the Church, hold fast to the deposit of faith, and follow and foster the common discipline.<sup>34</sup> The exercise of authority in the Church, then, has limits; it operates within a divinely-established covenant of salvation. Some who misunderstand this were surprised, for example, when Pope St. John Paul II said that the Church had "no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women."<sup>35</sup>

Let us return for a moment to the objection that women have no authority in the Catholic Church. Critics complain that only *men* have authority of office in the Church. This is true,<sup>36</sup> but it is also misleading. It is more correct to say that only *clerics* have authority of office in the Church. (All clerics are men, but not all men are clerics!) The Catholic Church, as compared with other societies, has an "original" character corresponding to her purpose and the hierarchical constitution given her by Jesus Christ.<sup>37</sup> The Code of Canon Law attributes the distinction between ordained ministers and lay persons to God's will. As canon 207 §1 puts it, "By divine institution, there are among the Christian faithful in the Church sacred ministers who in law are also called clerics; the other members of the Christian faithful are called lay persons." The "sacred ministers" are those men who receive the sacrament of Holy Orders. Notice that the distinction in law is between clerics and lay people, not between men and women.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Pope St. John Paul II's Apostolic Letter *Motu Proprio Ad Tuendam Fidem* (1998) adds §2 to can. 750 of the Code of Canon Law, providing that "each and everything set forth definitively by the magisterium of the Church regarding teaching on faith and morals must be firmly accepted and held."

<sup>35</sup> Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* (May 22, 1994), n. 4.

<sup>36</sup> See, however, note 2 above.

<sup>37</sup> This point is spelled out in *Inter Insigniores*, n. 6.

<sup>38</sup> All women are lay people (as opposed to clerics), but not all lay people are women!

Since only men are eligible to receive Holy Orders,<sup>39</sup> however, people notice that women cannot assume this or that task, but fail to see that lay men are not able to assume it either. One hears complaints, for example, that women cannot preach during the Mass, as if this represents a bias against women. The fact is that men who are not ordained are not permitted to preach during the Mass either. If all Catholic women suffer an injustice over not being admitted to offices that require the character of Holy Orders, so do all non-ordained Catholic men! Women, including women religious, do have access, along with non-ordained men, to most of the public functions and offices now open to qualified members of the laity.<sup>40</sup>

In response to our critics, let me call attention to the fact that the non-ordained faithful collaborate in many ways within the ministry of the clergy.<sup>41</sup> In addition to such public ministries as catechist, director of religious education, parish visitor, parish council president, extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, and lay ecclesial minister, women and lay men are also eligible to be appointed to and hold offices in the Church, as long as these offices do not involve the full pastoral care of souls, or do not require the character of Holy Orders.<sup>42</sup> Some examples of offices would be: chancellor, vice-chancellor, diocesan finance officer, tribunal official (including judge), parish director,

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<sup>39</sup> Can. 1024.

<sup>40</sup> See Lynn Jarrell, "Women within Church Law: Shifts, Expectations, and Strategies in Current Times," in *Prophetic Witness: Catholic Women's Strategies for Reform*, ed. Colleen M. Griffith (New York: Crossroad, 2009): 55-63. The examples given here are from this essay. Women cannot be instituted in the "lay ministries" of lector and acolyte, but they can be, and often are, invited to supply their functions.

<sup>41</sup> See the *Interdicasterial Instruction on the Collaboration of the Non-ordained Faithful with the Priest's Sacred Ministry* (1997).

<sup>42</sup> See canon 274 §1. For more on this, see Anne Munley, et al., *Women and Jurisdiction: An Unfolding Reality* (Silver Spring, MD: Leadership Conference of Women Religious, 2001), 1-20.

delegate for religious, and director of Catholic Charities. When non-ordained persons occupy these offices, they exercise the authority that is attached to them. In practice, then, qualified women and non-ordained men can be called upon to cooperate in the exercise of ecclesiastical jurisdiction, that is to say, the exercise of “authority” in the Church.<sup>43</sup>

A second way in which women and non-ordained men can cooperate in the Church’s governance is by consultation. This depends on the authority of expertise or experience.<sup>44</sup> Women and men religious, along with lay people, serve on parish and diocesan pastoral councils, and on the 48-member National Advisory Council of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. The Code of Canon Law provides for lay presence on diocesan and provincial synods, and most of the USCCB committees have women, including women religious, and laymen as staff members and consultants. Over the past few decades an increasing number of women and laymen have participated in regional and worldwide synods of bishops as theological experts and auditors. This report is not exhaustive, but perhaps it is sufficient to establish the fact that women religious today have many opportunities for participating in ecclesiastical governance in positions open to qualified lay persons. Women, and women religious, however, are not

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<sup>43</sup> According to canon 129, only clerics possess this power (§1), but the non-ordained can “cooperate” with them in its exercise (§2). Some canonists maintain that certain members of the laity do more than “cooperate”; they also *de facto* exercise the ecclesiastical power of jurisdiction, and have done so in the past. For a comment on the ongoing debate about this, see Mary Judith O’Brien and Mary Nika Schaumber, “Conclusion,” in Council of Major Superiors of Women, *Foundations of Religious Life* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2009): 191-193.

<sup>44</sup> The canon (228 §2) that allows this reads: “Lay persons who excel in necessary knowledge, prudence, and integrity are qualified to assist the pastors of the Church as experts and advisors, even in councils according to the norm of law.”



singled out for special consideration in the formulation of these norms. No mention is made of their special gifts or witness.<sup>45</sup>

### *The Source and Exercise of Authority of Office in Religious Institutes*

As *Lumen Gentium* teaches, religious life belongs not to the Church's hierarchical constitution but to her "life and holiness," or what today is sometimes called her "charismatic constitution."<sup>46</sup> Non-ordained religious do not exercise the authority to teach, sanctify, and govern that is conferred by Holy Orders. They do not have the capacity to act *in persona Christi capitis Ecclesiae*. Each institute's constitutions provide, however, for the exercise of the authority of office by its superiors and, in an extraordinary manner, by its general chapter. Because religious institutes do not belong to the Church's hierarchical constitution, they have a certain autonomy.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> As regards the need to involve women, see Pope St. John Paul II's Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (December 30, 1988), n. 49-50. Other documents that urge bishops to include women religious are the Directives for the Mutual Relations between Bishops and Religious in the Church *Mutuae Relationes* (May 14, 1978) n. 49-50 and *Apostolorum Successores*, the Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops published by the Congregation for Bishops in 2004. The latter (at n. 104) urges bishops to see to it that consecrated women have sufficient opportunity to participate in diocesan councils, commissions, and delegations, and to direct apostolic and educational initiatives. See also VC, n. 62. Pope Francis seems keen to implement this.

<sup>46</sup> See n. 44 and my essay on the reception of *Perfectae Caritatis* for a review of the Council's teaching. See "Message of Pope John Paul II for the World Congress of Ecclesial Movements and New Communities" (May 27, 1998), n. 5: "there is no conflict or opposition in the Church between the *institutional dimension* and the *charismatic dimension*, of which [the new ecclesial] movements are a significant expression. Both are co-essential to the divine constitution of the Church founded by Jesus, because they both help to make the mystery of Christ and his saving work present in the world." What the Pope says of the movements can be applied to religious institutes.

<sup>47</sup> For more on this, see Sharon Holland, "Issues in the Understanding and Exercise of Authority in Ecclesial Religious Institutes," in *Light Burdens, Heavy Blessings*, ed. Mary Heather McKinnon, Moni McIntyre, and Mary Ellen Sheehan (Quincy University: Franciscan Press, 2000): 189-198.

Those who are elected or appointed to office have the right to command and to impose sanctions. The officers do not bypass the liberty of the religious under their care when they do so because the members of the institute have voluntarily agreed - by vow - to obey them when they exercise their authority according to the constitutions. All the members have freely bound themselves to observe a common rule of life. They acknowledge the exercise of authority as a service, a way of ordering power for the common good and for the achievement of the institute's purpose. They recognize that authority is needed, and that their officers have the right to make prudential judgments in keeping with their fundamental beliefs and common way of life, and according to the provisions of their constitutions.<sup>48</sup> They elect to office persons who hold their beliefs and observe their way of life, who will safeguard their charism and the dignity of the members, and who are committed to advancing the mission entrusted to the institute. When those in authority wisely order the common life towards its goal (which, for religious institutes of apostolic life, is the sanctification of their members and the fulfillment of their mission), they enhance the liberty of all and make use of their gifts in ways that contribute to the personal fulfillment and holiness of the members and to their common mission as well. The authority of office exercised in religious life, then, is not the same as "domination."

The constitutions set out the obligations members of an institute freely undertake when they are professed. A written document, however, is not a sufficient guide; the constitutions must be

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<sup>48</sup> As Pope Paul VI wrote to men and women religious in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelica Testificatio* (June 29, 1971), n. 27, "Christian obedience is unconditional submission to the will of God. But your obedience is more strict because you have made it the object of a special giving, and the range of your choices is limited by your commitment. It is a full act of your freedom that is at the origin of your present position."

interpreted and applied by a person, a living voice. The constitutions must indicate who exercises religious (or “personal”) authority and what its scope is. They must include, for example, what decisions require the consent of the superior’s council and they must describe the process for admitting new members or convening the chapter. Religious superiors are invested with personal authority in the congregation when they are elected or appointed to an office that carries it, and lose it when their term of office is up.<sup>49</sup> Their authority, in other words, is *attached to the office*, not to the person who occupies it. This is an important way in which it differs from the authority conferred by Holy Orders.

Some claim that non-ordained persons can and in fact do exercise jurisdiction in the Church.<sup>50</sup> This claim is based, at least in part, on the authority that women and men religious are now permitted to exercise as officers<sup>51</sup> in their respective institutes. For example, they can dispense from impediments to admission, grant indulgences of departure to temporary professed members and indulgences of excommunication to perpetually professed members,<sup>52</sup> and so on, without referring to higher authority.<sup>53</sup> The debate is quite complex, and I’m afraid this topic is “above my pay grade.”<sup>54</sup>

But what about the related question, namely, the source of religious authority? Do the members of the religious institute, gathered in chapter, confer authority on the officers they elect, or is the authority

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<sup>49</sup> The office is held for life only if the constitutions of a particular institute provide for that.

<sup>50</sup> See note 40 above.

<sup>51</sup> Offices in religious institutes are: the general/major superior, general councilor, treasurer, and novice director.

<sup>52</sup> Munley, *Women and Jurisdiction: An Unfolding Reality*, 6.

<sup>53</sup> See O’Brien and Schaumber, “Conclusion,” 192.

<sup>54</sup> For a detailed description and analysis, see Elizabeth McDonough, “Jurisdiction Exercised by Non-Ordained Members in Religious Institutes,” *Canon Law Society of America Proceedings* 58 (1996): 292-307.

of office conferred on them by God through the mediation of the Church? As an American, I can remember once confidently assuming that in the chapter of elections we ourselves were giving our new superiors the authority of office - the right to issue commands and impose sanctions, and more generally to assign us to our missions - and that we could hold them accountable! It came as a surprise when a canon lawyer advised me to the contrary. Only gradually, as I worked on the committee assigned to prepare our new rule and constitutions, did I come to understand the Church's role in this.

*Essential Elements*, the 1983 document that accompanied Pope John Paul II's *Letter to the Bishops of the United States*,<sup>55</sup> spelled this out clearly. The Church (in the concrete, the Church's pastors - the bishop of the diocese or the Congregation for Religious) "confers on the institute, in accordance with her own common law and with the constitutions that she has approved, the religious authority necessary for the life of vowed obedience."<sup>56</sup> The Church has a continuing relationship with the institute because it is she who "receives the vows made in the institute as vows of religion with ecclesial consequences, involving a consecration made by God Himself through her mediation."<sup>57</sup> The structures of religious institutes reflect the hierarchical constitution of the Church whose Head is Christ. According to this document, the vow of obedience which men and women religious profess "requires a particular form of religious

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<sup>55</sup> This document, *Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching on Religious Life as Applied to Institutes Dedicated to Works of the Apostolate* (EE), was drawn up by the Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes and approved by the Pope. According to Sharon L. Holland ("The Code and *Essential Elements*," *The Jurist* 44 (1984): 304-338, at 306), it was unsigned because it was meant for inclusion in the papal letter.

<sup>56</sup> EE, "Relation to the Church" n. 42. The Church's pastors confirm the charism of the founder or foundress and acknowledge its source in the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

authority. Such authority, which is particular to religious institutes, does not derive from the members themselves. It is conferred by the Church at the time of establishing each institute and by the approving of the constitutions.”<sup>58</sup> The norms that conclude *Essential Elements* reinforce this. Norm §43, citing canon 618, says that the authority to govern in religious institutes “is received *from God* through the ministry of the Church.”

Authority of office is quite evidently essential to the exercise of the vow of obedience, given the canonical definition of the vow: “The evangelical counsel of obedience, undertaken in a spirit of faith and love in the following of Christ obedient unto death, requires the submission of the will to legitimate superiors, *who stand in the place of God*, when they command according to the proper constitutions.”<sup>59</sup> How could superiors be recognized as “standing in the place of God” if their authority were not somehow traced to him? As exercised by religious superiors, then, the authority of office by which they may give commands and impose sanctions functions to maintain the institute’s charism and protect its patrimony. But it also allows the members of the institute to fulfill their vow of obedience as a means by which they imitate Jesus Christ and tend to the perfection of charity.

This is not the whole story, of course. *Faciem Tuam*,<sup>60</sup> the recent document from the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, underlines as well, the exhortations concerning the exercise of authority found in post-conciliar teaching on the subject, e.g., the importance of protecting the dignity of the person, of dialogue and mutual responsibility in the search for God’s

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., “Government,” n. 49.

<sup>59</sup> Can. 601. (My emphasis)

<sup>60</sup> Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *The Service of Authority and Obedience Faciem Tuam* (May 11, 2008).

will, of subsidiarity, of promoting community life, and of wide and patient consultation. Post-conciliar magisterial documents all insist, however, that the superior has “the final right of discerning and deciding what is to be done.”<sup>61</sup>

What this indicates, in fact, is the extent to which the superiors of men and women religious - who do not, as such, belong to the hierarchy, but who hold the authority of office in their institutes - exercise, by their decision-making and governance, a direct influence on the Church as a whole. Their authority of office serves the authority of holiness which in turn bears fruit in the mission and ministry of their members. Non-ordained men and women religious, then, are really not cut out of the loop; on the contrary, precisely as organized in approved religious institutes and by means of the witness of their lives and their corporate ministries, they make a significant contribution to the Church’s mission and, in a subsidiary way, to her governance.<sup>62</sup>

## Issues for Women Religious

As regards the authority of office in religious life, the principles apply equally to institutes of women religious and of non-ordained religious men. It remains to consider two questions particular to women religious. First, as a consequence of second-wave feminism, some women religious are tempted to qualify or even reject the authority of office in favor of a “discipleship of equals.” Second, many women religious experience a certain ambivalence in the face of Pope Francis’ desire to incorporate women more fully into ecclesiastical

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<sup>61</sup> *Faciem Tuam*, part II. See also EE, norm 49, and *Evangelica Testificatio*, n. 25.

<sup>62</sup> *Mutuae Relationes* provides guidelines for collaboration between bishops and religious superiors. There has been some talk of producing a new document like this to address our present circumstances.

“decision-making” because they disagree with his rationale, viz., because the Church needs their distinctive feminine gifts. In these trends we encounter once again the two different ways of evaluating the authority of women religious in the Church.

### *Questioning Religious Authority*

In the process of revising their constitutions, and in the ferment of change that included the influence of second-wave feminism, some women religious have been inclined to identify the authority of office with “domination” and to view the exercise of authority by the ecclesiastical hierarchy as “patriarchal” and oppressive. Even within their own institutes, they see the exercise of “personal authority” as “hierarchical,” and choose to function collegially with leadership teams. Respect for freedom of conscience, and the ecclesiology of a discipleship of equals have been proposed as reasons for failing to insist on the observance of common norms and even of the Church’s teaching and discipline.<sup>63</sup> Relying on persuasion rather than the authority of office has been identified as “women’s way of governing.” Commitment to this direction has led some women religious to minimize or even renounce religious authority as provided for in canon law, and to protest the inclusion, in their revised

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<sup>63</sup> For the importance of personal authority, see Elizabeth McDonough, *Religious in the 1983 Code: New Approaches to the Law* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1984), 61-68, and Sharon Holland, “What Is Meant by ‘Personal Authority’ of Religious Superiors?” in *Selected Issues in Religious Law*, ed. Patrick J. Cogan, Bulletin on Issues of Religious Law 1985-1995 (Washington, DC: Canon Law Society of America, 1997), 10-11. For the alternative approach that steps sidewise out of the pyramidal structure, see Sandra M. Schneiders, *Prophets in Their Own Country: Women Religious Bearing Witness to the Gospels in a Troubled Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 114ff. and *passim*.

constitutions, of the obligation to obey the Pope as their highest superior by reason of their vow.<sup>64</sup>

Some women religious have called into question the authority of the officers within their institutes and of the Church's pastors, on the grounds that "no one can stand in the place of God," or that it is "idolatry to pretend that human beings take God's place in the life of believers" or "accord to humans the obedience that belongs to God alone."<sup>65</sup> It is difficult, however, to reconcile this current of thought with the belief that the Church's hierarchy is divinely-established. These objections, unfortunately, border on a rejection of the Church's ability to mediate God's will through the ministry of the hierarchy and of the rights of those who hold office in religious institutes to fulfill their commission. In the end, those who pose these objections envision an alternative to religious life as the Church confirms and approves it.

To the extent that women religious embrace this alternative, they jeopardize their ability to exercise authority in the Church within their capacity as religious institutes. Religious institutes have a divine origin in a gift of the Holy Spirit given to their founder or foundress and they do enjoy a certain autonomy,<sup>66</sup> but the authority by which a superior governs is received from God *through the mediation of the Church* and the institute itself has an ongoing relationship with the Church's pastors.<sup>67</sup> According to *Mutuae Relationes* (1978), the service of governing "includes seeing that the institute's particular mission is

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<sup>64</sup> According to canon 590 §1, "institutes of consecrated life are dedicated in a special way to the service of God and of the whole Church [and] they are subject to the supreme authority of the Church in a special way." Part §2 says: "Individual members are also bound to obey the Supreme Pontiff as their highest superior by reason of the sacred bond of obedience." See the discussion in Schneiders, *Buying the Field*, 500-502 and 709, n. 33.

<sup>65</sup> Schneiders, *Prophets*, 97, reports this trend.

<sup>66</sup> See canon 586.

<sup>67</sup> EE, "Relation to the Church," n. 42.



‘efficiently inserted into ecclesial activity under the leadership of the bishops.’”<sup>68</sup>

### *The Special Character of Women’s Witness*

In my comments so far on the authority of office in religious institutes, I have pointed out that women religious have equal access with non-ordained men to new ways of sharing authority in the Church at large and in their religious institutes. It is time to return to the question of the differentiated authority of women and men. Why? Why is it important to track the authority of *women*? There are two competing explanations.

Second-wave feminists care about this because they want to be sure that women are recognized as having equal rights with men in the Church. They want to be sure that women are not excluded on the basis of their sex.<sup>69</sup> They want to see women admitted or appointed to positions of public leadership on the basis of their competence and they note that, given the opportunity, women can acquire this competence just as readily as men. Those of us who lived through the past fifty years know that progress on these fronts was gained incrementally. For some years, lay men and non-ordained religious men had access to educational and ministerial opportunities (e.g., theological education, positions in the tribunal, liturgical ministries) from which women *were* excluded simply on the basis of their sex. And before the Council, the clergy had a virtual monopoly on theological and (usually) canonical education, and thus ordained men - clerics - alone were able to obtain

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<sup>68</sup> *Mutuae Relationes*, n. 13.

<sup>69</sup> For an account of the feminist critique of “gender dualism” and its implications for women in the Catholic Church, see Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 47-70.

the necessary qualifications. Some years passed, but it was eventually determined that women as well as men were eligible to assume the liturgical roles and pastoral functions that could be entrusted to the lay faithful by temporary deputation.<sup>70</sup> My point is: Catholic women whose mindset was formed in this context and during this era want to be included as *equals*, as *persons* - not because they have distinctive feminine “gifts.”

But equality is not identity. A second reason for tracking women’s participation is to ensure that their distinctive feminine gifts, experience, and perspectives are represented and enlisted in the Church’s institutional life. Catholic women who consider themselves “new feminists” are inclined to value this approach.<sup>71</sup> Pope Francis wants to “create still broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the Church,” including the “possible role of women in decision-making in different areas of the Church.”<sup>72</sup> It’s important to notice that he supplies a different rationale for the agenda from that of the second-wave feminists. His focus is on the presence of women *as women*. If the pope is concerned to uphold women’s “equal rights” it is in order to see that their “special gifts” are included. He expects women called to collaborate in decision-making to contribute something distinctively feminine, something maternal. In his view, the Church is hampered in fulfilling her mission properly if women are not collaborating with men. He strongly promotes the value of sexual complementarity and he expects that women who share more directly in ecclesial decision-making will bring something different to the table.

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<sup>70</sup> See the Interdicasterial Instruction on Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of the Priest *Ecclesia de Mysterio* (1997).

<sup>71</sup> Most would agree, however, that the struggle to be acknowledged as equals is the necessary foundation for this approach. It is a second step forward, not a reversion to an antiquated estimate of women’s dignity and abilities.

<sup>72</sup> Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (November 24, 2013), n. 103-104.

What would that be? He speaks of a humanizing influence, a maternal tenderness that displays the heart of the Church, certain “skill sets” that women typically cultivate, and a capacity to pay attention to the person. (This last, of course, is what has been called the “feminine genius”<sup>73</sup>). The pope is very keen on this, and is impervious to criticism from feminists who are wary of gender stereotypes! He is wary, rather, of gender ideology.<sup>74</sup>

Women religious who want to redefine the vow of obedience as a commitment to mutual collaboration, and who distance themselves from the “patriarchal” authority the Church’s pastors exercise in their regard are not so keen on the differentiated authority of men and women. In fact, many suspect that any expression of “gender dualism” is “sexist.”<sup>75</sup> They have worked hard to gain recognition as equal partners and worry that acknowledging difference amounts to approving discrimination on the basis of sex.<sup>76</sup> Pope Francis does not question the equal dignity of women, however, and he does assign a positive value to the complementarity of the sexes. Still, he justifies his interest in providing a greater space for women precisely by appealing to his conviction that the Church needs their distinctive contribution - their feminine authority, we might say.

This brings us back to Dr. Monica Miller’s thesis concerning the differentiated authority of men and women. Drawing on the definition of authority as the power to give life, she asserts that men

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<sup>73</sup> The expression is found in Pope John Paul II’s *Mulieris Dignitatem* and in his *Letter to Women* (1995), n. 9-11.

<sup>74</sup> A short search of the internet testifies that he has addressed this on several occasions, e.g., Oct. 16, 2014; Jan. 19, Feb. 13, Mar. 23, Apr. 15, June 4, July 7, and Oct. 6, 2015.

<sup>75</sup> See Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints*, 67-69.

<sup>76</sup> For example, see Jamie Manson’s column, “Pope Francis, women, and ‘chauvinism in skirts,’” *National Catholic Reporter* (April 24, 2013), from <http://ncronline.org/blogs/grace-margins/pope-francis-women-and-chauvinism-skirts>.

need women in order to give life. This is true also in the Church. Women, and consecrated women in particular, reveal the maternal face of the Church and inspire the confidence of the faithful. But if men need women in order to give life, the converse is also true. Women need men in order to give life, to be fruitful, and to mediate the gifts of the Holy Spirit through the authority of holiness. By analogy, we could say that charismatic authority, the authority of holiness, flourishes when it has the approval and ongoing support of hierarchical authority. The moral authority of women religious depends upon and is served by office-holders within their own institutes and, though less directly, by the members of the hierarchy who have an ongoing role of oversight with respect to religious life.

## Conclusion

In sum, women have the authority to give life and women religious are called to do this by exercising the authority of holiness. They, like other qualified members of the faithful, can also exercise the authority of certain offices in the Church and can collaborate with members of the hierarchy as consultants and participants in synods and councils. Women religious who are office-holders within their own institutes exercise authority according to their constitutions; by this means they not only promote the holiness of their members according to their charism, but also direct the apostolic work confided to them and its insertion into the Church's life and mission. The authority exercised within religious institutes is conferred on them by God through the mediation of the Church; it exists to assemble, empower, and direct the members for the accomplishment of their common purpose. Women religious today are invited and even urged to do their

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part to advance the reign of God by cultivating their distinctive feminine gifts and contributing them to the Church for the sake of the new evangelization.

# The Consecrated Woman and Non-Competing Charity

FATHER DAVID VINCENT MECONI, S.J.

In *The Cruellest of All Mothers: Marie de l'Incarnation, Motherhood, and, Christian Tradition*, Dr. Mary Dunn provides an instance of the human heart torn so asunder, that a woman intent on God's will leaves her own 11 year old son on the threshold of the Ursuline Convent in Tours, France in order to pursue religious life. Dunn is adroit at trying to interpret this action as one of true love, but cannot escape Marie's mindset as she abandons her son Claude, that "God was dearer to me than all that. Leaving him therefore in His hands, I bid adieu to him joyfully."<sup>1</sup> The Christian story is full of such painful abandonments: we know St. Anthony of the Desert left his sister with a group of women ascetics so he could go off to wage hermetic battle with the enemy himself; St. Augustine allowed the beloved mother of his son, Adeodatus, to be "ripped" from his side; and when little George was only three years old, his mother, the Servant of God Catherine de Hueck Doherty was advised by Father McCabe to leave him with friends so as to follow God's call.<sup>2</sup> My purpose in recalling these incidents is not to cast suspicion on saints who appear to choose God over neighbor, but to point out how a significant strand

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Dunn, *The Cruellest of All Mothers: Marie de l'Incarnation, Motherhood, and Christian Tradition* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2016), frontispiece.

<sup>2</sup> See my *Catherine de Hueck Doherty, Essential Writings* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 29-30.

of our Christian tradition has justified a holy person's attempt to draw near to the Creator by neglecting or even destroying some part of his good creation.

The thesis I aim to lay out in the following pages consists of themes I have rehearsed in other studies, but here it is my point that in the consecrated woman, a convergence of charity should appear in a unique and unmatched way. Love should never compete against love and in her visible espousal to the Son, sisters and nuns can teach the world that one must never allow charity to compete against charity. To show how this can be, we shall proceed in three main areas. The first will be to rehearse some of the Church's misguided spiritualities that have artificially made this division between "human" and "divine" loves a desired goal for those desirous of heroic sanctity. The second section takes up a more proper theology of love's unity, while the third then turns more directly to the consecrated religious woman as a living symbol of how love of God and love of neighbor must be inseparable. In making such an argument it is not my intention to limit this convergence to the religious woman only, but to highlight how, in her, God's universal and unending love for all is instantiated in a very unique and unmatched way of life.

## The Stern-Minded

In the early part of the fifth century, John Cassian (d. 435) returned to Gaul with a first-hand understanding of how the famed monks of the East carried out their heroic lives of prayer and asceticism. He returned with many practical points as well as stories of saints meant to encourage the fledgling monastic movement of the West that was just making its way. One of the stories more indicative of Cassian's spirituality and understanding of monastic life, was told by

him with great satisfaction, because it is truly “worthy of remembrance” for the example of holy obedience it conveys.

The story involves a young father who had just lost his wife and so appears at the renowned monastery of Abbot John deep in the Egyptian Thebaid. Of all the places famous for prayer, this monastery was celebrated for its rigor and asceticism, and so Paternutus appears with his eight year old son in tow. Taken aback seeing the child at the widow’s side, Abbot John needs to test Paternutus’ obedience, so he begins to rebuke and even physically strike the young boy. Cassian praises Paternutus for remaining “unmoved” by the boy’s cheeks “streaking with the dry traces of tears” and even attributes the boy’s father’s seemingly heartless reaction to his “love for Christ.” The final test thus comes when Abbot John has those under vows hurl the boy headlong off the monastery walls into the Nile River below. Paternutus gladly welcomed this request “as if he had been ordered to do so by the Lord” himself. Cassian wraps up this narrative by relaying how Paternutus’ “faith and devotion were so acceptable to God that they were immediately confirmed by divine testimony.”<sup>3</sup>

In her rather recent opus treating theodicy, Eleonore Stump draws from this story of Paternutus to illustrate how - what she rightly calls - a “stern-mindedness” runs through much of our Christian tradition.<sup>4</sup> Stump defines this “stern-mindedness” as a misinformed belief that if one is going to find favor with the divine, one must therefore destroy all that is human. As such, the stern minded reassign their heart’s desires only to the world to come, dismissing their own wishes and the goods of creation as needless distractions.

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<sup>3</sup> John Cassian, *Institutes* 4.27; trans. Boniface Ramsey (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2000), 92-93.

<sup>4</sup> Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press Inc., 2010).



On a more personal note, a few days before my own mother died, I came into her room and her eyes were filled with tears. I asked, “Mom, are you okay?” to which she responded, “No, I know I am disappointing Jesus.” When I asked her how she was upsetting the Lord she loves so much, her response was: “I know I am hurting Him because I really don’t want to leave all of you” - referring to us, her family. We talked and prayed, and we turned to the story of Lazarus wherein even Life himself weeps over the distance death affects. But what I saw in my mother was a certain stern minded way of thinking that she could not let God know how much she loved her own children, if she were going to become eternally his daughter.

While my mother was the one who made Christ real for all of us, and for so many others, (in her 41 years of secretarial work in our small town’s Catholic school), after decades of Jesuit living, her response came to me as a shock. How so? St. Ignatius of Loyola (d. 1556) ushered in a refreshing Christian anthropology and approach to the world which serves as a perfect antidote to any stern mindedness. At the beginning of his *Spiritual Exercises*, the *Principle and Foundation* opens that we are all created “to praise, reverence, and serve God” and thereby to save our souls. So, how are we to fulfill this call? It is not by running off to the convent or seminary: it is to embrace “all things (*omnia*) on the face of this earth” as aids in our attaining the one true end for which we have been given being and life. The Lord thus employs created media as ways of uniting Himself to his faithful, with the divine humanity of his incarnate Beloved, Jesus Christ, above all. Ignatius was insistent throughout his life and spirituality that we are not to relegate the divine presence to the spiritual or the heavenly, but to find God in the very concrete and incarnate circumstances of everyday living. It is very telling that in Ignatius the phrase “God alone” never occurs, whereas in a saint a bit later than he, St. Louis De

Montfort (d. 1716), it appears over 150 times. For Ignatius, God does not want to be “alone” but wants to be found and embraced in those who allow him to draw near.

Elsewhere, I have argued that this loss of approaching God in his creatures arose with the exaggerated rigor and extreme asceticism stressed by the post - Constantinian desert movements. Such rigorism entered theology after the legalization of Christianity in 313, when the more zealous headed off into desolation; when warfare with the Roman Empire ended, some left for the desert to engage in greater battle with Satan and the wastelands of one's own soul. From here, the Church received a tradition of treating one's most precious loves as nothing more than distractions, and a new strand of trying to live as angels on earth arose.

John Climacus (d. 606) uses a young monk named Acacius as a sign of true Christian obedience. Acacius would daily submit himself to an older Abbot and emerge each morning from that seasoned monk's cell with a “black eye, or a bruised neck or head” only to hear his brothers in community shout, “Well done, well done, put up with it, and it will be for your own good.”<sup>5</sup> For almost a decade, Acacius freely underwent the beatings of this maniacal older monk, gaining for himself the admiration of all the brothers in community. Better known tales like this, tales which subordinate basic civility and the goods of the body to a Christian spirit which discards human desires and creaturely integrity, abound. We all know about Simeon Stylites (d. 459) in Syria, who lived thirty-seven years on top of a large pillar and thus became a highly popular tourist attraction. To the West, there was the Irish monk, Kevin of Glendalough (d. 618) whose outstretched arms, in

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<sup>5</sup> St. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*; trans. Colm Lubheid and Norman Russell (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1982), 115.

cruciform imitation of Jesus, gladly became birds' nests to the stupefaction of all those who came to see him.<sup>6</sup>

In such a spirituality, these men and women who long to love God wrongly think they must first eradicate the love they have for all and any creatures. Behind this type of misplaced piety is the worry that love of neighbor can only take away from love of God, and such sentiment is not limited to the early Church. For example, St. Anselm of Canterbury (1033 - 1109) writes to a consecrated sister that this world and her heart's desires should be regarded "as dung" if she is truly going to be God's spouse. Anselm accordingly teaches her that if she wills divine espousal, all her loves must be for God and for no one else: "This world is nothing to you, nothing but dung, if you wish to be a nun and spouse of God ... Do not visit your relatives, they do not need your advice, nor you theirs. Your ways of life is cut off from theirs. Let all your desires be for God."<sup>7</sup>

Closer to our own time, Raoul Plus (1882 - 1958) - a Jesuit spiritual master of the 1920s and 30s - tells very approvingly a story in his spiritual classic, *God Within Us*, that made me rethink my devotion to Fr. Plus' writings. In this recounting, Plus tells of "a pious woman" who "after many years of childlessness, gives birth to a daughter. The child is put in her arms, that she may embrace it. 'No,' she says, 'I will wait until she has been baptized.' How many mothers have such ardent faith as this?" Fr. Plus wonders.<sup>8</sup> Far from enriching, (dare we name

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<sup>6</sup> For these extreme feats of Christian other-worldliness, see Gerard S. Sloyan, "Piety Centered on Jesus' Sufferings and Some Eccentric Christian Understandings of the Mystery of Calvary," *Worship* 67:2 (1993): 98-123. For an illuminating overview of the influence of Simeon, see *The Lives of Simeon Stylites*, trans. Robert Doran (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1992).

<sup>7</sup> St. Anselm, *Letter* 405, as quoted in Richard W. Southern, *Saint Anselm: A Portrait in a Landscape* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 165.

<sup>8</sup> Raoul Plus, S.J., *God Within Us* (New York, NY: P.J. Kenedy and Sons, 1924), 30.

her?) *Mater - mutus* stands in need of correction by the wider Christian tradition. Is this not against the command to love one's neighbor and even an act of blasphemy for discounting other human persons made in God's own image and likeness because they have not yet been baptized?

I would argue that behind this deprecation of the human condition lies the heresy of monothelism, condemned in the seventh century (at the Council of Constantinople). This was the heresy which St. Maximus the Confessor (d. 662) wrote against the erroneous teaching that Jesus Christ possesses only a divine will. Instead, Maximus and the Church's Sacred Tradition insists that dyotheletism is the correct position when thinking of Christ's psychological makeup: the teaching that in Christ there exists both a human as well as a divine will. This was worked out at the Third Council of Constantinople in 681. Here the council fathers drew from Christ praying in the Garden of Gethsemane to show how he asked to align his desires with the Father's: "Not as I will, but as you will" (Mt. 26:39). This alignment of wills is of course not a matter of a sinner coming to conversion but the superhuman decision to lay down one's life freely; it is a surrender not of hesitation in affecting the Father's will, but a sign that the God-Man comes to embrace a fallen reality that itself is unnatural, the joyful acceptance of death and bodily cessation.

Let us now turn to how our Tradition seeks to unify our loves. Christianity is unique in arguing that love of God and love of neighbor are inseparable. Is it not true that we actually learn to love first by loving a creature, the face of our mothers peering over the crib's rails, the tussling of our siblings, and the strong embrace of our earthly fathers? It is here where that love begins to take root and it is here the love of God begins to happen. The consecrated woman symbolizes this unifying and uncompetitive essence of charity by her total self-gift, a

daughter of the Father, a mother of the Son, and a spouse of the Holy Spirit. Before we are best able to look at consecration, let us first set up the fullest theology of Christian charity which Christ's Church provides.

## Non- Competing Charity

As we have seen, a not insignificant strand of the Christian life has sought to impress God by destroying God's effects. It is here that the stern minded relegate the desires of their heart to the Kingdom only, dismissing this world as a distraction at best, an enemy at its worst. From this exclusive eschatology, the created order is subordinated to the point of submitting one's earthly loves to a divine will that seems to demand the extinguishing of the very loves that move us most deeply. It is as if *agape* thrives only where *eros* is dismissed.

It should not surprise us to see that St. Augustine of Hippo sets the Church on the path of unifying loves. His personal life, as well as his theology of charity, allows him to see the restless heart as the place where God first acts. Augustine's waywardness resulted in an episcopacy that was appreciative to the deepest movements of the human heart. For instance, when coming to explain how best to evangelize, Augustine simply looked for any human who knew what love truly was in order to find those most open to the Gospel: "Give me a man in love, and he will understand what I mean."<sup>9</sup>

This patristic insight is translated beautifully by the most "Augustinian" pope of modern times, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. At the risk of anachronism, listen to what Benedict had to say about the

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<sup>9</sup> St. Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John* 26.4 in *Library of the Fathers* (Oxford, UK: John Henry Parker, 1848).

unifying of loves in his first encyclical wherein he refuses to let the divine love of God and the beautiful love of creatures ever compete against one another:

In philosophical and theological debate, [the following] distinctions have often been radicalized to the point of establishing a clear antithesis between them: descending, oblation love - *agape* - would be typically Christian, while on the other hand ascending, possessive or covetous love - *eros* - would be typical of non-Christian, and particularly Greek culture. Were this antithesis to be taken to extremes, the essence of Christianity would be detached from the vital relations fundamental to human existence, and would become a world apart, admirable perhaps, but decisively cut off from the complex fabric of human life. Yet *eros* and *agape* - ascending love and descending love - can never be completely separated. The more the two, in their different aspects, find a proper unity in the one reality of love, the more the true nature of love in general is realized. Even if *eros* is at first mainly covetous and ascending, a fascination for the great promise of happiness, in drawing near to the other, it is less and less concerned with itself, increasingly seeks the happiness of the other, is concerned more and more with the beloved, bestows itself and wants to “be there for” the other. The element of *agape* thus enters into this love, for otherwise *eros* is impoverished and even loses its own nature.<sup>10</sup>

Benedict is confident enough in the power of love never to pit the movements of the heart against one another, but in fact even sees how *agape* and *eros* are intrinsically open toward one another. If this were not the case, Christianity would be distant from the kind of love

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<sup>10</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter, *Deus Caritas Est* (December 25, 2005), n. 7.

that gets most people out of bed in the morning, those “vital relations fundamental to human existence.” He therefore refuses to pit *eros* and *agape* against one another, but instead points to the common source of both love of neighbor (friend and family) and love of God.

Augustine came to stress the unity of loves as he left the confines of Neoplatonism which, although giving him a sense of immaterial reality and the beauty of the human soul, tended to deprecate the visible order along with the reliance and vulnerability this human and bodily life demanded. Recall, for example, how Plotinus defined salvation, returning to the One, as fleeing the multiple distractions of this world: “I am puzzled how I ever came down, and how my soul has come to be in the body when it is what it has shown itself to be by itself, even when it is in the body.”<sup>11</sup> For a very strong segment of the Greek tradition, to be saved is to never again look rearward to the corporeal and earthly. How “stern-minded” someone like Plotinus can sound when describing the heavenly life which seeks to abandon the travails of creation, so that if one trains one’s soul properly through philosophy, “Even if the death of friends and relations causes grief, it does not grieve him but only that in him which has no intelligence, and he will not allow the distresses of this to move him.”<sup>12</sup>

In her 2011 *Bampton Lectures*, Frances Young blamed St. Augustine and his stressing of the concupiscence and original sin of Adam’s posterity for Christianity’s unfortunate “reinforcement of personal guilty, with resultant self-deprecation masquerading as

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<sup>11</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads* IV.8 [6].1; trans. Arthur H. Armstrong, *Enneads*, vol. IV, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 397.

<sup>12</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads* I.4 [46].4; Armstrong, *Enneads*, vol. I, 185.

humility.”<sup>13</sup> While it is true that Augustine coined the term *peccatum originale*, and while it is also admittedly true that he tended to play up the inability of the human person for any autonomous good when arguing against the self-sufficient Pelagians, I want to now show how Augustine is, in fact, the perfect antidote against any stern-mindedness and in his pastoral approach can be found the perfect spirituality for all Christians, especially the consecrated woman.

Christians alone argue that God is love, for 1 John 4:8’s revelation makes it clear that *Deus caritas est*. Yet, at 1 John 4:7, we also learn that love is of God, *caritas ex Deo*. This couplet of God being love, but love also coming from God, allowed Augustine to reflect on how the processional love spoken of in 1 John 4:7 could be either the Son or the Holy Spirit. It is clear, however, that even schismatics like the Donatists have valid sacraments; even the most divisive of apostolic Christians can claim to have the Eucharistic Lord celebrated on their altars and reserved in their tabernacles, as well. What schismatics cannot claim to possess, Augustine argues, is the Holy Spirit. For the Holy Spirit’s name is not only charity but also unity and concord. Those who have freely separated themselves from Christ’s body cannot therefore boast the Spirit. In fact, these schismatics are offending the Son’s charity and mercy by willfully remaining divided and cut off from the rest of the universal ecclesia.

In the course of this ecclesial discussion, St. Augustine unabashedly inverts the Johannine insight that *Deus caritas est* to maintain just as readily that *caritas est Deus*, as well.<sup>14</sup> Why this biblical

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<sup>13</sup> Frances Young, *God’s Presence: A Contemporary Recapitulation of Early Christianity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 182.

<sup>14</sup> For more on this, see Tarcisius van Bavel, “The Double Face of Love in St. Augustine. The Daring Inversion: Love is God,” *Congresso Internazionale su S. Agostino nel XVI Centenario della Conversione, Studia Ephemeridis. Augustinianum* 26 (1986): 69-80; Roland Teske, S.J., “Augustine’s Inversion of 1 John 4:8,” *Augustinian Studies* 39:1 (2008): 49-60.



inversion is so significant has been overlooked by many scholars of late antiquity. Those who have examined this taxonomical shift, however, point to St. Ambrose of Milan who may have been the first to invert 1 John 4:8 this way when preaching on the Canticle of Canticles.<sup>15</sup> It is unfortunate that St. Ambrose does not develop the implications of this reversal, but it is intriguing to imagine the future Bishop Augustine first hearing how “love is God” from his own bishop and spiritual father while he was still in Milan.

Notable Augustine scholar, Tarcisius van Bavel, thus notes that for Augustine, “love is so entirely of one piece that it cannot be split up. It does not matter where our love begins, whether it starts from God, Christ, or our neighbor, the outcome will always be the same. When our love is genuine, we must be without fear that anything essential will be lacking, for God himself is the heart of authentic love.”<sup>16</sup> However, very early in his pastoral work, Augustine was not free enough to make the claims that one’s love really is God. In 393, as a recently ordained priest, Augustine is preaching to the North African bishops at the local Council of Hippo. His conferences here would be later published as *De fide et symbolo* (*On the Faith and the Creed*), and here the young presbyter may claim that while *Deus dilectio est*, never should a faithful follower of Christ say (*enim non ait*) that *dilectio Deus est*.<sup>17</sup> Notice how in his early zeal and perhaps inordinate care not to

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<sup>15</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Commentary on the Psalms* 118.20 and 118.39, as in *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* [CSEL] 62.92 and CSEL 62.351; see also his *Commentary on the Song of Songs* 2.28, as in *Patrologia Latina* 15.1878.

<sup>16</sup> Van Bavel, “The Double Face of Love in St. Augustine. The Daring Inversion: Love is God,” 70.

<sup>17</sup> St. Augustine’s “old Latin” New Testament read *dilectio* instead of *caritas*, but he almost never stopped to comment on any difference between the two; and even employs *amor* without distinction; see, “Love,” Tarcisius van Bavel, *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 509-516.

offend the literal meaning of Scripture, the young Augustine is still very early about equating human relationships with the love of God.

As he matured, Augustine was more free to see how lexicographical order of 1 John 4:8 was not an imprisoning element of understanding love properly. A decade and a half after his preaching on God as love at the Council of Hippo, he begins to state more openly that the faithful could certainly reverse 1 John 4:8, trusting that charity both originates and ends in God himself: “For, when the members love each other, the body loves itself ... But, if you love your brother, perhaps you love your brother and don’t love Christ? How can that be, when you love Christ’s members? When you love Christ’s members, then, you love Christ: when you love Christ, you love the Son of God; when you love the Son of God, you also love his Father. Love, then, cannot be separated.”<sup>18</sup>

This beautiful teaching that love ought never be separated (*dilectio non potest separari*), is typically Augustinian and holds out to us a place of convergence where we need no longer worry if our love of creatures is offending the Creator, or our worry if we might be loving a creature “too much” (a sentiment which seems so out of place and confused in the overall Christian narrative). What Augustine does want to hold is the indispensability and the inextricability between love of God and love of neighbor.

In fact, he is so confident in love’s unifying force that he holds that no one should “dispense himself from one love for the sake of another love. This is how love is held fast in its entirety: just as it is joined in a single unit, so all those who depend upon it make up a single unit, and it is as though fire fuses them.”<sup>19</sup> Where he is bold is in his

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<sup>18</sup> St. Augustine, *Homilies on the First Epistle of John* [Ep. Jo.] 10.3, trans. Boniface Ramsey (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2008), 149.

<sup>19</sup> St. Augustine, *Ep. Jo.* 10.3; Ramsey, *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, 149.

unwillingness to worry over how such unity comes about. What he will insist on is that even though a human person's love for another creature is usually temporally prior and emotionally formative, one's love of God must always and everywhere be ontologically prior and ultimately formative. In this way we need not feel guilty for loving a creature first but must always define such love by those guideposts in the Christian tradition, such as in 1 Corinthians 13 or through the examples laid down in Christ's own life. Love in this way is not an empty abstraction but still demands particular expressions and sure-fired attributes. So, how does the vowed and consecrated woman realize all of this in her uniqueness? We now conclude by applying the principles outlined above to the life of those brides of Christ who have laid down their lives so as to open their hearts to all.

## The Consecrated Woman

Christ teaches his Church that the heart of consecrated life is a "more intimate" union with God and his people.<sup>20</sup> The "yes" of religious life is never to cut a man or woman off from the human condition, but to enable each to delve more fully into the mystery of the heart. While it is written particularly for cloistered women, the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and for Societies of Apostolic Life's instruction, *Verbi Sponsa*, can certainly be read by situating the professed "yes" of religious women in the love of Mary and, by extension, the love of the universal Church. That is why women in vows are to:

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<sup>20</sup> CCC, n. 916.

... see themselves especially in the Virgin Mary, Bride and Mother, figure of the Church; and sharing the blessedness of those who believe (cf. Lk. 1:45; 11:28), they echo her “Yes” and her loving adoration of the Word of life, becoming with her the living “memory” of the Church’s spousal love (cf. Lk. 2:19, 51).<sup>21</sup>

The love that is affected in the consecration of a sister or nun is the love of Christ for his world through the body who is his Church. This is a love exclusive and undivided to be sure, but the espoused of that love is the New Adam in whom all other humans are found. This is where the Incarnation opens up our love and never limits it. For once God became human there is no way back to loving God now except through the human, and in her continuing the New Eve’s *fiat*, the consecrated woman must find in her heart a place and a charity for all.

For in a woman’s “yes”, she is not only configured to the spousal love of Christ but is grafted onto the very life of the Trinity itself. This is how St. John Paul II was able to pronounce that a nun or sister’s “profound configuration” to the Heart of Jesus brings about a *confessio Trinitatis*, “the mark of all Christian life” and in so doing, brings about in the world a “joyful witness to [God’s] loving concern for every human being.”<sup>22</sup> So, while all the baptized are called to be tremendous lovers, there is something unmatched in a woman’s consecration, because here the human heart can said to be most fully alive: the heart of a daughter, mother, and wife wherein Father, Son, and Spirit all enjoy a unique union. However, this mysterious “vertical” union with the divine persons of the Trinity is realized only

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<sup>21</sup> Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and for Societies of Apostolic Life, Instruction on the Contemplative Life and on the Enclosure of Nuns *Verbi Sponsa* (May 13, 1999), n. 1.

<sup>22</sup> VC, n. 16.

“horizontally” through loving service of those entrusted daily to a sister’s care. The vows are realized most authentically, then, through the religious sister’s love for her adopted brothers and sisters - or, in the words of Vatican II’s *Decree on Religious Life*:

Let those who make profession of the evangelical counsels seek and love above all else God who has first loved us (cf. 1 Jn. 4:10) and let them strive to foster in all circumstances a life hidden with Christ in God (cf. Col. 3:3). This love of God both excites and energizes that love of one’s neighbor which contributes to the salvation of the world and the building up of the Church. This love, in addition, quickens and directs the actual practice of the evangelical counsels.<sup>23</sup>

This should not reduce religious life to mere social work, but it does help us unify the loves that God insists on in the proper order: quickening and actualizing one’s love for God through loving and by caring for God’s people.

In other words, a religious woman offers herself not simply to love Christ - for that is the vocation of all the baptized - to love God “with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind” (Mt. 22:37). Consecrated women, however, are called to love God by opening their hearts not exclusively to one spouse only, but as a bride of all men and women. This is a love that is therefore truly catholic, truly universal, to be withheld from no one. This is no light call and demands the self-surrender you promised on your vow day. Recall C.S. Lewis’ words on the demand for vulnerability when one chooses to love deeply. In this “ability to be wounded,” *vulnerabilitas*, the sister thus achieves the cruciform charity of Christ and the *dolors* of Mother Mary. For only

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<sup>23</sup> PC, n. 6.

here can the world learn the true nature of love, an embrace in the woundedness and brokenness of the human condition and not just an infatuation with supposed perfection.

Love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket - safe, dark, motionless, airless - it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell.<sup>24</sup>

Hopefully in your public support of your community and in your silent relationship in your chapels, you receive the Christifying grace to allow yourself to be vulnerable. For only here in the willingness to suffer in the other can you finally know the full meaning of the Cross.

And where is that cross? It is not found only on Good Friday and it is no longer conveniently and readily identifiable on Calvary. It is in you and in your neighbor. It is here, where the world continues to cry out to the Father, from the gardens of our self-imposed alienations. As such, let me close with the words of the spiritual master Caryl Houselander (1901-1954) who never tires of stressing how this is the entire point of the Christian faith, to find God in one's neighbor:

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<sup>24</sup> Clive S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace [1960] 1988), 121.

Therefore Christ wants to be accessible: He wants to be disarmed of his glory so that the inglorious can come to him without fear ... There could not be a more ingenious way than the one he has devised, his way of hiding himself in us, revealing his presence in our necessities, so that we can only find him by obeying his commandment: "Little children, love one another!" He hides and can be found, not only in a child, but in your child; not only in a friend, but in your friend; not only in a servant, but in your servant: could there be easier access to him than your child, your friend, your servant?<sup>25</sup>

Again we see how the best of Christian theology refuses to pit loves against one another. Loving God necessarily translates into loving neighbor (cf. 1 Jn. 4:20). God therefore "hides," in Houselander's imagery, in the most mundane of our loves, thereby inviting us to see that the love of child, spouse, and friend is really how the Love of all loves gets our attention and thus woos us into greater union. The two can never be divorced.

## Conclusion

Saint John Paul II recognized in the femininity of consecration an "analogy in God's salvific economy" in that the religious woman reveals the fullness of what it means to be "virgin - mother - spouse."<sup>26</sup> A daughter of the Father, the mother of the Son, and the beloved spouse of the Holy Spirit of God means that the religious woman grows in love of God by never minimizing the other loves in her lives. If anyone should never worry about loving another "too much," it is she, for human affection should never threaten the love of God, but must be

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<sup>25</sup> Caryl Houselander, *The Reed of God* (Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics, 2006), 157.

<sup>26</sup> MD, n. 22.

gauged and grown by it. When human love for friend and family is true, true love, it is in fact God Himself. Rightly-ordered love of creatures is how and where love of the Creator happens. This is the love that renders us Godlike, the one movement of our hearts that deifies us in Christian grace, thereby only increasing our original capacity for love. As long as my love for others is Christ-centered, as long as it is patient, kind, never jealous, neither pompous nor inflated, as long as it is not rude, does not seek its own interests, is never quick-tempered, as long as it does not brood over injury or rejoice over wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth, it truly bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things (cf. 1 Cor. 13:4-7). This is perfect love. The inversion, “love is God” is not without absolutes or expectations, but it is courageous enough to see how love of God begins and is sustained through love of God’s people. And at the end of this earthly sojourn, each shall see how the loves in our lives that were patterned after and conformed to crucified Love himself, were never merely human to begin with.

It is commonplace to examine the theology of consecrated life through the lens of love, and this essay has chosen the lens of converging charities through which to see how the consecrated woman should live. In her *fiat*, she can be a richer symbol of unifying loves than most. This of course is not automatic. It must always be a collaboration between God’s grace and her own personal life of prayer and love.

Unlike some of the ancient Christian tradition wherein love of God was proven by brutally severing one’s will, or “becoming a corpse” for the sake of obedience (fueled ultimately by various versions of Platonism found in hermetic spirituality after the Constantinian conversion), the fullness of our Faith demands that love of God and love of God’s creation go hand-in-hand. In her vows and in her visible



David Vincent Meconi, S.J.

witness to the spousal love of Christ, the religious woman is uniquely poised to make this reality known in the hearts of many.

## Apostolate as Prophetic Witness

MOTHER AGNES MARY DONOVAN, S.V.

The creative apostolic endeavors of consecrated religious women and men flow from one's contemplative prayer and are the manifestation of one's union with God, thereby bearing *witness to the primacy of God*.

Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta told of the time a woman who was rescued from the gutter in a terrible condition was brought into one of the houses of the Missionaries of Charity. Mother Teresa welcomed her with great gentleness, cared for her and spent hours cleansing the festering sores that covered her body. Despite this, the woman never stopped cursing. And, Mother Teresa never stopped wiping the sweat from the woman's brow and moistening her burning lips with water. Finally the woman asked: "Sister, why are you doing this? Not everyone behaves like you. Who taught you?" Mother Teresa answered: "My God taught me." The woman then said: "Introduce me to your God." Kissing her, Mother Teresa replied: "You know my God. My God is called Love." This is the witness of "someone who knows 'Someone' and the preferred method of the new evangelization.

The works of service of a religious are rightly works of love, which overflow from the love she receives in her union with God, who is the source of her energy and generous love. In receiving that love, the consecrated religious is compelled to share it with others. The joy of a religious in the midst of the rigors of her apostolate gives evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit, and the blessedness and happiness to

be found in Christ. The joyful religious engaged in the apostolate is a sign to all that to live as Jesus Christ proposes brings fulfillment and joy.

## The Uniqueness of the Apostolate Undertaken by Religious

While government services and the apostolates of religious may serve the same end - i.e., to feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, care for the sick and dying, etc., in themselves, government programs and religious works will never be the same. For the government provides a service, while the religious enters a relationship. It is within a relationship of love that she serves the needs of the one brought to her by God.

The apostolate of religious is essentially relational, i.e., the heart of the religious seeks not so much to do a charitable work on another's behalf, but to engage the heart of the one served. For the religious is blessed to find Christ different and the same in every person. This willingness to enter into relationship with the one served *attests to the dignity of the person.*

The apostolic endeavors of consecrated religious speak in the eloquent language of sign. Without preaching or teaching, *the apostolate proclaims in action the tenets of the faith we believe*; and bears witness to the truth of the dignity of the human person. Furthermore, this apostolic witness reaches many beyond those touched by our direct service, thus becoming a powerful source of hope and animation of faith to countless people. The presence of religious women and men who have given all of their lives to the Lord is a radiant witness to faith.

## Apostolate as Prophetic Witness

SISTER CONSTANCE CAROLYN VEIT, L.S.P.

A prophet is one who is called and sent by God to proclaim something of fundamental importance to the community. She shares an intimate union with God, but she is also one with her contemporaries. She is faithful to the religious tradition while at the same time open to the signs of the times, which she views with discernment through eyes of faith. According to our specific apostolates, each community witnesses and communicates something of fundamental importance to our society, threatened as it is by the culture of death - the Gospel of Life!

We, Little Sisters of the Poor, are at the service of the needy elderly in what Pope Francis has repeatedly called a throw-away culture<sup>1</sup> - a world that marginalizes and disregards the elderly because they are viewed as useless.

Our contemporaries desperately need prophets to show them that real compassion means serving with the heart of Christ; it means accompanying those who suffer to the very end, not doing away with them. Our mission of humble service to the elderly suggests that there

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Pope Francis, Address to the Sant'Egidio Community, Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere (June 15, 2014). Available at: [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/june/documents/papa-francesco\\_20140615\\_comunita-sant-egidio.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/june/documents/papa-francesco_20140615_comunita-sant-egidio.html).

is “a different way of doing things, of acting, of living,” as Pope Francis has said, “that it is possible to live differently in this world.”<sup>2</sup>

The fact that we have devoted our whole lives to those whom many in our society consider expendable testifies, in words that George Weigel uses to describe us, that “there are no disposable human beings, that everyone is a someone for whom the Son of God entered the world, suffered, died, and rose so that we might know both the truth of our humanity and the face of the merciful Father.”<sup>3</sup> This is the crux of our prophetic witness.

The aspect of apostolate as prophetic witness that I would like to address has to do with our engagement with the world beyond the doors of our communities. Historically, the Little Sisters of the Poor has carried out its mission in a very humble, hidden way - very far from the public eye. This hiddenness is an essential aspect of our charism. But the prophet is called to be *among* the people and to *communicate* God’s message to them.

Many people who meet us tell us that they have driven past our home for years without having any idea of what goes on inside. So, like the old philosophy question about whether a tree falling in the forest makes a noise, even if no one is there to hear it, I have wondered if our mission can be prophetic if it is carried out in such hiddenness, virtually unknown to everyone except those who are its direct beneficiaries. Of course our hidden works have inestimable value in

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<sup>2</sup> Antonio Spadaro, S.J., “WAKE UP THE WORLD!’ Conversation with Pope Francis about the Religious Life,” trans. Fr. Donald Maldari, S.J. in *La Civiltà Cattolica* (2014): 3-17. Available at:

[http://www.laciviltacattolica.it/articoli\\_download/extra/Wake\\_up\\_the\\_world.pdf](http://www.laciviltacattolica.it/articoli_download/extra/Wake_up_the_world.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> George Weigel, Speech given at Little Sisters’ Amazing Grace Gala, Palatine, IL (April 19, 2015). Available at: <http://www.littlesistersofthepoorpalatine.org/c37-blog-posts/c27-blogs/amazing-grace-gala-2/>.

God's eyes - I am not questioning that - but I am talking about the ability to give prophetic witness in today's world.

Our recent experiences of being thrust into the limelight through our HHS lawsuit, together with the canonization of our foundress and all that has been learned from the communications experts who have provided assistance, have helped me to realize how important it is that we overcome our natural aversion to the public eye, and that we consistently make the effort to keep abreast of the relevant conversations going on around us in order to engage more deeply with our contemporaries using words and images that can speak to them on their terms and touch their hearts.

This point was driven home for me during our Holy Father's recent visit to the United States. As you know, Pope Francis paid a brief visit to our home in Washington, D.C., to show his support for our HHS lawsuit. This fact was made known to the public by the director of the Holy See Press Office, Fr. Federico Lombardi, S.J., that evening.<sup>4</sup> It struck me that although our Holy Father demonstrated great charity by coming to see us, it was the fact that his motivation was made known to the wider community, with all of the media coverage that followed, that made his visit prophetic. It became a sign to the people of our time.

It is not a matter of forsaking our charism of humility and hiddenness, but of humbly recognizing that God has given us a gift and a call through our love for the elderly and our convictions about the sanctity of human life. So too, He has given each of your communities special charisms and missions - for our world that is sorely in need of this prophetic witness. I believe that through the witness of our

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<sup>4</sup> As reported to the author by USCCB staff members who attended an evening press briefing by the Holy See Press Office on September 23, 2015 in Washington, D.C.

Constance Carolyn Veit, l.s.p.

apostolates, God is asking us to be prophets prepared to surprise the world with new life in the face of death.

# Prayer as Essential to the Prophetic Witness of Religious

SISTER REGINA MARIE GORMAN, O.C.D.

All nineteen presenters at today's symposium would unanimously agree that prayer is actually the cornerstone for the entire study of prophetic witness. Why? It is because prayer is the lynchpin that makes prophetic witness possible. I will offer three points that show prayer to be absolutely essential to prophetic witness. First, I will reflect on prayer as analogous to the DNA of a consecrated religious. Second, I will explore the image that St. John Paul II considered representative of consecrated persons: the image of Jesus, standing between two prophets - Moses and Elijah - and having a conversation with them. Finally, I will present prayer as our extraordinary gift and personal responsibility.

## Prayer as the DNA of a Consecrated Religious

DNA (Deoxyribonucleic Acid) is the hereditary material in humans and almost all other organisms. Every cell in a person's body has the same DNA. It contains information which carries out all the functions and characteristics of living organisms. If DNA is changed slightly, serious consequences result. If it is destroyed beyond repair, the cell dies.

Can prayer be compared to DNA? Yes. Prayer is foundational to our existence. As consecrated religious, prayer must be present in



every aspect of who we are and in all we do. Prayer is a living, breathing, honest, intimate relationship with God. St. Teresa teaches us that prayer is a loving, frequent conversation between two friends who know they are loved by the other.<sup>1</sup> This is a gift offered to every human being and it is vital to the life of every religious. If our life of prayer becomes damaged, and by our own choices and habits we do not allow our life of prayer to be restored, we die spiritually. When prayer is present in every ‘cell’ of our lives, we bear abundant fruit.

## The “Icon” of the Transfiguration in *Vita Consecrata*

With the concept of prayer as our DNA, let us now explore the scene of Jesus standing in the presence of His Father, transfigured on the mountain, and having a conversation with Moses and Elijah, two of the strongest prophetic witnesses in all of Scripture. It is significant that Pope St. John Paul II chose this “icon” to begin *Vita Consecrata*, his apostolic exhortation to consecrated religious. This image reveals a deeper understanding of *prayer as essential to the prophetic witness of religious*.

During the Synod on Consecrated Life in 1993, Cardinal Ratzinger’s intervention spoke directly to the problem of the many inadequate interpretations of the word “prophet,” and he offered a summary of responses from Sacred Scripture concerning the essence of a prophetic charism. I quote him directly:

... in the book of Deuteronomy 18:15 ff., ... Moses says to his people:  
“The Lord your God will raise up for you from your nation and from

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<sup>1</sup> St. Teresa of Jesus, *The Book of Her Life* 8,5 in *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D. and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D. (Washington DC: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1976), I, 67.

your own kinsmen a prophet like me; you will listen to him ... I will place my words in his mouth, and he will tell them all that I command him.” ... after the death of Moses, we read: “Since then no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face” ... (Deut. 34:10).<sup>2</sup>

Cardinal Ratzinger then went on to describe three elements that are essential to authentic prophecy:

- “A true prophet ... ‘speaks with God as a friend,’ knows His face.”<sup>3</sup> Only from the light of His face comes that illumination which allows one to discern the true and the false and to point the right way to men.
- “It is the role of a prophet to announce what God instructs him ...”<sup>4</sup> The true prophet agrees to make known the Will of God and to interpret the Word of God in concrete circumstances.
- The third element: “Every true prophetic action makes us see Christ and introduces us into His Paschal Mystery.”<sup>5</sup>

We can see that the three essential elements of a true prophet build on one another. First, prophecy requires prayer, coming face to face with God, speaking with Him as with a friend. Next, prayer is what makes it possible to announce to others what God instructs. Finally, obedience to the Word of the Lord is what makes every prophetic action actually reveal the heart of Christ.

We have thus far learned about prophecy from Moses. Now, let us look at Elijah. We are introduced to Elijah for the first time in 1

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<sup>2</sup> Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, “Intervention at the Synod on the Consecrated Life and Its Role in the Church and in the World” (1994).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

Kings 17:1, as he describes the Lord as the One “Before whom I stand.” To live one’s life standing before the Lord is to live a life of consecration, a life of prayer. The Real Presence is reserved in our convent chapel tabernacles; Jesus Christ physically lives with you and me. If we live our lives truly standing before the Lord, then in our noisy, restless twenty-first century, we will be radiant prophetic witnesses.

The first word of the Lord to Elijah is, “Go away from here, go eastward, and hide yourself ... You can drink from the stream ...” (1 Kgs. 17:2). This seems like a counterintuitive directive for a prophet, “Go away ... hide yourself.” When we trust the Lord, when we are obedient to Him, when we hand ourselves over to Him without reservation and without conditions, we will drink from the stream of Living Waters within us (cf. Jn. 4:14; Jn. 7:38). The transfiguration that Peter, James and John witnessed was very real. As we live our lives ever more fully in Christ, with Christ, and for Christ, our own broken and weak selves become transfigured. Our transfiguration is also very real and becomes a source of hope and light for other people.

Elijah engaged the prophets of Baal in the contest on Mount Carmel. He was not afraid to do this because he knew the Lord’s heart and he trusted that heart; he was a man of prayer. The Lord was then able to work through Elijah to turn the hearts of the people back to their true God (cf. 1 Kgs. 18:37).

## Prophetic Witness: Our Gift and Responsibility

The Lord longs to unveil His heart to us, to heal and strengthen us, to transfigure us and to speak to His people through us. The most important work that we can do is to allow Jesus Christ to

draw us into His very conversation with Moses and Elijah;<sup>6</sup> to allow ourselves to be taught by the Holy Spirit how to continually obey the words spoken by the Father at the Transfiguration: “This is my beloved Son ... listen to him” (Mt. 17:5). Then, we must claim our identity as a beloved one, and live every day as a beloved of God.

As consecrated religious, it is by living and praying in community that our prayer life and therefore our prophetic witness is strengthened, matured, and magnified. The risen Lord, who lives among us, communicates His own Spirit to us individually and communally, making the community itself a joyful witness of the resurrection.<sup>7</sup> There is no prophetic witness that commands attention more authentically than joyful religious and a joyous community.

God has a purpose for prophetic witness: to confirm His Word and thereby to confirm believers; to make His children strong in their faith in Him. Prophetic witness serves to strengthen hope and patience. It allows our hearts to expand in love: the virtue upon which our final victory depends. Prophetic witness is the gift and the responsibility entrusted to us through the profession of vows.

None of us would debate the truth that many of God’s beloved children are fast forgetting that above everything else, there is only one God and He made us for Himself. Our prophetic witness, born from our daily intimacy with Him, is meant to bring God’s beloved children back to this basic truth and help them desire to be in the presence of the living God. The religious whose lamp is burning brightly, prepares the Bride, the Church, to meet the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, face-to-face.

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<sup>6</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 313.

<sup>7</sup> Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Fraternal Life in Community* (February 2, 1994), n. 58.

There is urgency in Pope Francis' continual messages to consecrated religious. "This is the priority that is needed right now: to be prophets who witness to how Jesus lived on this earth ... a religious must never abandon prophecy,"<sup>8</sup> rather, "clothe yourselves in Jesus Christ and put on the armor of light."<sup>9</sup>

May our prayer, rising from our very DNA, individually and from within our community and among all our communities, together form a powerful symphony of prophetic witness. By God's grace, may the eloquent language of our transfigured lives be capable of truly amazing the world.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter, *To All Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life* (November 21, 2014), n. 2.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 3.

<sup>10</sup> *VC*, n. 20.

# The Evangelical Counsels and the Prophetic Witness of Poverty

SISTER CLARE MATTHIASS, C.F.R.

If the evangelical counsels are prophetic, what is the word that they proclaim to the world? If chastity is prophetic, what is the word that it speaks? If obedience is prophetic, what is its word to this generation? And poverty, what is the prophetic proclamation of poverty? Chastity says: There is such a thing as love! A love so great, so real, so unconditional that it transcends all other loves. Chastity says with St. John: “So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.” (1 Jn. 4:16). Obedience says to the world: I have a Father who is good, whose laws are good, whose will is good, and the more I nourish myself on obedience the freer I become! And our poverty says to the world: I am poor! Man is poor! God alone is rich - He is our one treasure; the world has nothing to offer.

The evangelical counsels are prophetic in as much as they are evangelical. In other words, it's the Gospel we proclaim, nothing else. It's not my poverty that has the ability to be a prophetic word to this generation, but rather it's Jesus' own poverty lived in me, in my community, in the Church, which has the power of being a prophetic gift to our contemporaries. As Pope Francis said in his letter for the *Year of Consecrated Life*, “This is the priority that is needed right now: ‘to be prophets who witness to how Jesus lived on earth.’”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, To All Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life.

In thinking about our call to be prophets, an image comes to mind. In Krakow, Poland, in the ancient and famous St. Mary's Basilica in the town center, there is a tradition dating back 800 years or more. A trumpeter appears high in the tower and with golden trumpet in hand, he plays the *Hejnal Mariacki* or in English, *Saint Mary's Dawn*, every hour on the hour. The role of the trumpeter in times past was to announce the dawn and also the dusk so that the city gate would be opened and closed. The trumpeter was also the one to keep vigil and warn of fire, invasion, and other dangers threatening the town. The trumpeter provides an image of the prophet for us.

Perhaps it was the trumpeter of Krakow that St. John Paul II had in mind when, at World Youth Day in Rome in 2000, he exhorted those gathered to be the "morning watchmen" of the third millennium citing Isaiah, "Watchman, how soon will the night end? Watchman, how soon will the night end?" (Is. 21:1).<sup>2</sup> This is the role of the prophet: to watch, to keep vigil, to warn, even at risk of one's own life. As John Paul II exhorted us in *Vita Consecrata*: "Consecrated persons are being asked to bear witness everywhere with the boldness of a prophet who is unafraid of risking even his life."<sup>3</sup>

Poverty, chastity, and obedience are the hallmarks of religious life because they were the hallmarks of the life of Jesus Christ. The evangelical counsels have a unique power to conform us to Jesus. His mission becomes our mission and He accomplishes His work in the world again through His consecrated followers in a magnified way.

As our world grows darker and our brothers and sisters stray further from all that is good and true and beautiful, our call and consecration demand of us a prophetic witness to the people of our

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<sup>2</sup> Pope John Paul II, Address at the Vigil of Prayer, 15<sup>th</sup> World Youth Day (August 19, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> VC, n. 85.

times. Each of the vows carries unique authority with them. What is the proclamation that our poor, chaste, and obedient life makes to the world now, in our time?<sup>4</sup> To a world all too ready to worship a new golden calf at any turn, be it science, technology, wealth, popularity, power or pleasure, our life points to the One True Absolute Good - God Alone, and His remedies to all the specific woes and ills of the age.

We are not without examples of this religious prophetic witness. Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta was a prophet in our time. Perhaps you recall her address at the National Prayer Breakfast during the Clinton administration when she boldly spoke of abortion as the “greatest destroyer of peace.” She further went on to invite America to give her their children. She promised that she and her sisters would welcome any child. “I want them,” she said.

What gave Blessed Mother Teresa the authority to speak this way, to speak as a prophet? Certainly her baptism, but further it was precisely the sharing in the life of Christ through the evangelical counsels. It was Mother Teresa’s vow of chastity in a particular way that enabled her to speak of our nation’s unwanted children as her own. Chastity makes our love expansive to include all, because the chastity of a religious is a sharing in Jesus’ own chastity.

The prophetic word that vowed chastity speaks to the world is: “You are infinitely loved and you are capable of loving without limits!” Looking at the example of Mother Teresa we could wonder who better than a joyful celibate religious woman or man to speak to our brothers and sisters struggling with same-sex attraction, young people struggling to live chastity, married couples trying to remain faithful and open to life. The witness of consecrated life speaks eloquently of the possibility of living the Gospel.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. VC, n. 88-91.



Even closer to current events, we have the courageous example and the prophetic witness of the Little Sisters of the Poor. Jonah had the Ninevites and the Little Sisters have the Obama Administration. The Little Sisters are holding a standard aloft for all to see and the standard reads: “We answer to an *even more* Supreme Court.” The evangelical counsel of obedience provides an unshakable foundation, for the Little Sisters (and all of us), to stand on as we defend religious freedom. Remember: in the end, the Ninevites converted.

And now we turn to the prophetic witness of poverty - so dear to our current Pope. There are three points about the prophetic witness of poverty I would like to make. Firstly, poverty speaks the truth about man. We are all poor. And our poverty is a blessing. St. John Paul II says something powerful and almost startling in his letter to religious, *Redemptionis Donum*, “... the Divinity itself could not have been adequately expressed in any created good. It can be expressed only in poverty. Therefore it can be properly understood only by the poor, the poor in spirit.”<sup>5</sup> “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Mt. 5:3) and *only* the pure in heart shall see God (cf. Mt. 5:8). Poverty is at the center of the Gospel because of the Incarnation. God became man and chose poverty in life and in death because poverty is the truth about man. We are all poor, but we do not all realize our condition. Riches can create an illusion that something belongs to us; the truth is everything belongs to God. What have we been given that we have not received? And that is the second prophetic word that our poverty speaks, the truth about God: God alone. He is All in All. He is our Only Treasure.<sup>6</sup> He is truly the “one thing” necessary (cf. Lk. 10:42). He is the “pearl of great price”!

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<sup>5</sup> Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Redemptoris Donum* (March 25, 1984), n. 12.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. VC, n. 21.

This second aspect of the prophetic witness of poverty calls to mind our very own beloved Fr. Benedict Groeschel, C.F.R. Allow me to give him as an example. In 1987, when eight Capuchin friars under Fr. Benedict's leadership (he would say "instigation") left to begin a new community, they made the decision for the community to live entirely by Divine Providence. This means trusting totally in God without a fixed, stable form of income. Wondering how this was going to work, he went to his friend Mother Teresa who was in the South Bronx at the time, and said, "I have eight men and 800 dollars. What am I going to do?" And Mother Teresa responded, "Do not worry Father; God has a lot of money."

And so, 27 years later we have discovered how generous God really is. Two communities, 18 houses, five countries, 120 brothers and 35 sisters later, we see God's generous hand in everything. Father Benedict left us a legacy of trust. Trust in God. He is worthy of trust. God loves us. He recognizes Himself in us<sup>7</sup> and He will always care for His own. And to the world, to the people of this generation, our poverty says: God is really *Our Father who art in Heaven!* Why are the flowers of the field clothed by God with such beauty? Why are the sparrows fed so faithfully by God? Because they *let* themselves be clothed, they *let* themselves be fed. This gives a prophetic quality to our poverty: poverty provokes our trust in the providence of God.<sup>8</sup> In other words, our poverty lets God *Father us* in particular way, as He so desires.

For another example of poverty provoking providence, we turn again to the Missionaries of Charity. In a recent circular letter, Sr. Mary Prema, the General Superior of the Missionaries of Charity recounts the sisters' experience in Aden. When war broke out on

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Gen. 1: 26-27.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. CCC, n. 301, 314.

March 19, 2015, the sisters chose to stay with the mentally handicapped patients in their care. After a few weeks, bread was no longer available in the stores. One morning a man came to the convent with sacks of flour to donate and for two weeks they baked bread (in their outdoor ovens), even in the midst of air raids and bombs falling. Then one evening, the superior announced to the sisters, "We have no more flour. Tomorrow morning, we will gather all the leftover flour, and bake the last bread, and surrender ourselves to the Lord. He will feed our poor people and us, his little ones." Early the next morning an elderly Muslim man brought to the sisters' gate three sacks of freshly baked bread, enough to feed the whole house, patients, workers and sisters, for two meals. He continued to come every morning at the same hour with the same amount of bread. This is a living, current story, which calls to mind the tale of the prophet Elijah and the widow of Zaraphath (cf. 1 Kgs. 17: 8-16), and every religious can tell their own stories of providence. They are not rare. They are ordinary for those who live the poverty of Jesus.

That brings us to the third aspect of the prophetic witness of our life of poverty. It is meant to be a living word, a word made flesh. The people who know faithful religious should be able to "read" the Word of God in the way they live their lives. Without ever picking up the Scriptures they will know:

"The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I lack" (Ps. 23:1).

"For everyone who asks receives ..." (Mt. 7:8).

"No one can serve two masters ..." (Mt. 6:24).

"Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' ... But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Mt. 6:31, 33). The pearl of great price is real and some have found it!

The life of a religious is an incarnation of the Gospel - at least it is meant to be and it was for the saints. When a religious lives as Jesus lived on earth, specifically through a life of joyful poverty, peaceful chastity, and loving obedience, the religious becomes a *word made flesh*, a word that the people can read, can see, can hear, can touch.

In conclusion, charged as we are to be the prophets of our own time, our witness should shine forth ever more brightly as the world around us grows darker. Our generation has made a host of idols for itself and the worship of false gods has become the accepted and protected law of the land where the one true God was once recognized and worshipped. Thinking of the darkness of our time and the task before us, not to mention how the life of a prophet typically ends (legend tells us Isaiah was sawed to death and Scripture tells us John the Baptist was beheaded), reading the headlines on any given morning could easily cause us to regret the implications of our prophetic vocation. I think of Frodo, from *The Fellowship of the Ring*, lamenting the evil of his time: "I wish it need not have happened in my time." To which his wise spiritual director, Gandalf the Grey, replies, "So do I, and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us."

Once we may have thought of persecution or martyrdom as realities in faraway lands for professing faith in Jesus Christ and in His Church; now we must be prepared for these possibilities closer to home for proclaiming even more basic truths such as, "Male and female he created them ..." (Gen. 1:27). But rejoice and be glad! If the world hates us it is because it hated Jesus before us! (cf. Jn. 15:18). We have Christ, therefore we have everything!

To return to our trumpeter in Krakow, according to legend, during an invasion of Poland in 1241, the sentry in the tower of the

Church sounded the alarm by playing the ancient song and the city gates were closed before the city could be ambushed. The trumpeter, however, was shot in the throat and did not complete the anthem. All the successive trumpeters have not only played the same song, but stopped at the same note on which that trumpeter of old ceased when he lost his life for the freedom of the city.

Jesus is the Word made flesh and this living prophetic word is alive in us. It is Jesus' life in us that is a continuous, unbroken, prophetic word to the world. Like the trumpeter in Krakow, we are continuing the same song in our age. We the trumpet - He the Song.

# Prophecy and Prophetic Way of Life in the Works of Pope St. John Paul II, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, and Pope Francis

SISTER MARY PRUDENCE ALLEN, R.S.M.

## Religious Life as a Prophetic Way of Life

It is a great joy to share with you today some thoughts about how our last three popes have described the relation of prophecy to religious life. Each one has contributed significantly to this theme. Briefly summarized, Saint John Paul II laid the foundation for principal ways that religious life manifests a prophetic way of life. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI opened up further depths of the meaning of the prophetic impulse in religious as a gift to the Church. Pope Francis is providing practical spiritual tools for self-examination to evaluate openness to the Holy Spirit's movements towards acts of prophecy as an essential characteristic of religious life. Since Sr. Sandra Schneiders, I.H.M. wrote extensively during these pontificates about religious life as a prophetic lifeform, I have included analysis of some of her thinking as well.

I would like to clarify that in this lecture I am only representing my own thinking on this topic of prophecy and not that of the International Theological Commission.

## Methodology

When beginning research for this presentation, I decided to isolate all the passages I could find in the writings of the three popes on religious life which used the words ‘prophet’, ‘prophecy’, or ‘prophetic’. My research methodology likely missed some passages on the theme. I hope that it provides a significant body of texts to open a window into the mind, spirit, and heart of each of the three popes.

## Historical Development

The historical development of the theme of religious life as a prophetic way of life begins with the Documents of the Second Vatican Council. In *Lumen Gentium* we read:

The term laity is here understood to mean all the faithful *except* those in holy orders and those in the state of religious life specially approved by the Church. These faithful are by baptism made one body with Christ and are constituted among the People of God; *they are in their own way made sharers* in the priestly, *prophetical*, and kingly functions of Christ; and they carry out for their own part the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world.<sup>1</sup>

Section VI of *Lumen Gentium* on religious life does not describe *how* religious life is a prophetic way of life. More surprising perhaps, is that the Second Vatican Council Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life, *Perfectae Caritatis*, makes no mention

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<sup>1</sup> LG, n. 31.

of religious life as a prophetic way of life. In fact, the words ‘prophecy’ and ‘prophetic’ do not even occur in it.

Nearly twenty years later, in January 1983, Pope St. John Paul II began to speak about the “prophetism of the body” in his audiences on the *Theology of the Body* especially when considering the spousal gift of self through marriage and conjugal union:<sup>2</sup>

In the prophetic texts, the human body speaks a *language* of which it is not the author. *Its author is man*, as male or female, as bridegroom or bride, man with his perennial vocation to the communion of persons ... [who are] constituted in such a way from the “beginning” that the deepest words of the spirit - words of love, gift, and faithfulness - call for an appropriate “language of the body.” ... *We know from the gospel that this point applies both to marriage and to continence “for the kingdom of heaven.”*<sup>3</sup>

From this time forward, the significance of the prophetic dimensions of religious life were elaborated on in depth, right up to Pope Francis’ statement in 2014 in his Apostolic Letter to All Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life:

I am counting on you “to wake up the world,” since *the distinctive sign* of consecrated life is prophecy. As I told the Superiors General: “Radical evangelical living is not only for religious: it is demanded of everyone. But religious follow the Lord in a special way, in a prophetic way.” This is the priority that is needed right now: “to be prophets who

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<sup>2</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, ed. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006). Hereafter TOB.

<sup>3</sup> TOB 104:7. (My emphasis)



witness to how Jesus lived on this earth ... a religious must *never abandon prophecy*.”<sup>4</sup>

## Structure

In the rest of this lecture, wherever possible, the presentation follows the chronological order of the statements made by the Holy Fathers. Pope St. John Paul II's contributions are considered in two time-frames, divided by the Synod on Consecrated Life. Pope Benedict's contributions include a first section on an important interview when he was Cardinal Josef Ratzinger. Pope Francis' contributions are considered more by theme than by date, since he is continually developing them. Sr. Sandra Schneiders' work is inserted as an interlude between Pope Benedict and Pope Francis because her writing on religious life as a prophetic life-form accelerated between these two papacies. Her writings provide some important counter points.

### Pope Saint John Paul II (1978-2005): Twenty Principles for the Prophetic Dimensions of the Female Religious Vocation *Laying the Foundations for a Prophetic Vocation in Audiences and Addresses (1978-1993)*

Adding to his preliminary work on the Theology of the Body, on May 27, 1984, Pope John Paul II spoke directly to women religious in Viterbo, Italy about the prophetic meaning of their vocation:

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<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis, To All Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life, II. 2.

I deeply wish and ask the Lord that each of you discover the splendor and the timeliness of your religious profession ...

In its humble daily realization, it can and must be *prophetic*, in the sense that it can and must show men and women of this time *what in truth builds up the human person*, thanks to the search, discernment, acquisition and development of convictions and ways of being which *transcend changes of time and customs*.

Your vocation, like the Christian vocation, yet at a much more decided level, is *eschatological*.<sup>5</sup>

In other words, living out our religious profession of vows reveals the truth that the human person has an eternal destiny. Religious are individually and corporately 'living eschatological signs.'

In 1986, John Paul II elaborated further on the Christian foundation of the prophetic way of life for religious. In an address to the Conference of Religious of Brazil he described how religious specifically share in the prophetic function of Christ through their Baptism:

*The prophetic dimension of religious life is born of its insertion into Christ, the prophet par excellence, whose authority is not received by delegation as in the Old Testament, because he is the only begotten Son. Religious, by virtue of their baptism, participate - through Christ and through the gift of the Spirit - in the prophetic mission of the whole Church, a mission that is fundamentally expressed in the hearing and the proclamation of the Word and in a life of witness: hence, in the Gospel meditated upon, proclaimed and lived. Furthermore, because*

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<sup>5</sup> Jean Beyer, S.J. (ed.), "To Women Religious in Viterbo (Italy)," (May 27, 1984) in *John Paul II Speaks to Religious*, (Chicago/Leeds/Dublin/ Randwick: Little Sisters of the Poor, 1978-2000): 262-263. (My emphasis)

religious life continues to represent in the Church the same condition of life that the Son of God embraced when he came to do the Father's will (cf. LG, n. 44), it offers to the whole People of God *a witness that we can well call prophetic*.<sup>6</sup>

By May 1987, John Paul II, addressing the International Union of Superiors General in Rome observed that: "The *precise purpose of your meeting* in Rome is to do some in-depth study of what forms should be assumed by *the prophetic mission of religious life* in the Church and in the world."<sup>7</sup> He then offered some advice from his own perspective on the theme, emphasizing the existential dimension of the religious prophetic call:

*... the secret of a truly prophetic life resides in the existential consistency of the religious woman with the witness which she gives. She is not content with taking up in turn the contestation and the condemnation of injustices ... It pertains to religious, both men and women, to be in the world "what the soul is for the body" ... (cf. LG, n. 38). They must live like pilgrims in the midst of corruption, in expectation of the incorruption of heaven. Their pilgrimage is, as it were, an incessant proclamation of the Kingdom in process of realization, because he who has conquered the world has promised it.*"<sup>8</sup>

By the next year, 1988, when distinguishing women from men in *Mulieris Dignitatem*, John Paul II described a further dimension of

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<sup>6</sup> "Message to the XIV General Assembly of the Conference of Religious of Brazil" (July 11, 1986) in *John Paul II Speaks to Religious*, Book IV (1985-1986): 204-205. (My emphasis)

<sup>7</sup> "To the International Union of Superiors General in Rome," (May 14, 1987), in *John Paul II Speaks to Religious*, Book V (1987-1988): 78-79. (My emphasis)

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 82. (My emphasis)

prophetic character - it's particularly feminine dimension and relation with the Holy Spirit:

The passage from the Letter to the Ephesians which we have been considering enables us to think of a *special kind of "prophetism" that belongs to women in their femininity*. The analogy of the Bridegroom and the Bride speaks of the love with which every human being - man and woman - is loved by God in Christ. But in the context of the biblical analogy and the text's interior logic, it is precisely the woman - the bride - who manifests this truth to everyone. *This "prophetic" character of women in their femininity finds its highest expression in the Virgin Mother of God. She emphasizes, in the fullest and most direct way, the intimate linking of the order of love - which enters the world of human persons through a Woman - with the Holy Spirit. At the Annunciation Mary hears the words: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you" (Lk. 1:35).*<sup>9</sup>

In the same year, 1988, in his address to women religious in La Paz, Bolivia, John Paul II also mentioned the significance *an institutional charism has for the prophetic witness* of each religious person:

Your prophetic presence as consecrated persons in the world, *in harmony with the charism of your own Institute*, will be a continuing and hope-giving characteristic of being light and salt, sign and

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<sup>9</sup> MD, n. 29. It is interesting to note that there is no emphasis of the prophetic character of the Blessed Virgin Mary in his Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater* (March 25, 1987), with the exception of her prophecy in the *Magnificat* that "all generations will call me blessed," n. 27.

encouragement that are distinctions of the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount.”<sup>10</sup>

Each person’s witness is according to the line of his or her vocation: The laity witness to Christ through their elevation of the secular world; priests witness to Christ through their preaching, service in the sacraments, and governing within the hierarchy established by Christ after his resurrection; and consecrated religious witness individually and collectively to Christ and to the eschatological kingdom.

Each person in the Church gives a prophetic witness according to his or her vocation: the laity witness to Christ through their elevation of the secular world; priests witness to Christ through their preaching, service in the sacraments, and governing within the hierarchy established by Christ after his resurrection; and consecrated religious give witness to Christ and to the eschatological kingdom individually and collectively. John Paul II offered criteria for testing whether a prophesy is from the Holy Spirit: “... desire to advance in truth and love. It cannot be given with bitterness; ... expressed in insults, or acts or judgments which offend the honor of individuals or groups ...”<sup>11</sup>

*Deepening the Prophetic Dimensions through the Synod on Consecrated Life (1994-1996)*

The most significant development in the thought of Pope John Paul II about how religious life is a prophetic way of life occurred in relation to the Synod on Consecrated Life. This development took

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<sup>10</sup> “To Women Religious in La Pax (Bolivia)” (May 10, 1998) in *John Paul II Speaks to Religious*, Book V (1987-1988): 129.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

place in three stages: the working paper or *Instrumentum Laboris* for the Synod on Consecrated Life in early 1994; the actual synod on Consecrated Life in October 1994; and the Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, issued March 3, 1996.

In preparation for the Synod, the Holy Father identified different dimensions of prophetic reality: “[Consecrated life] is a witness of commitment in the following of Christ and a *prophecy of the eschatological destiny of history*.”<sup>12</sup> He also wrote that the *communal dimension* of religious life is the prophetic sign of the communion in the Holy Trinity:

The dimension of *fraternal communion* is a constitutive part of every form of consecrated life, [can. 602] in that it is a sign of what the church is in her mystery. In the church as communion - an image of the Trinity - the consecrated life is presented as a visible, *prophetic reminder of the communion* which the whole church must already be living and which, at the same time, is her ultimate goal.<sup>13</sup>

In section 64 called, “A Prophetic and Transcendent Sign,” the Working Document described the connection between a prophetic way of life and prophecy through a counter-cultural witness to truth and critique of false idols:

*The mission of the consecrated life has a special prophetic role in the midst of the people of God, which is prophetic by its very nature. First of all, consecration itself is already a prophecy* in virtue of the fact that

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<sup>12</sup> Vatican Synod Secretariat, *Instrumentum Laboris for the 1994 Synod on Consecrated Life and Its Role in the Church and in the World*, n. 8. See also n. 62: “As God’s gift to the church and the world, it jointly manifests a prophetic witness to the kingdom and its eschatological dimension.” See also n. 15 and n. 18.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 57

it bears witness to Gospel values, which frequently are counter-cultural in a society marked by secularism. *Such values are a prophetic rejection of the idols which this world is always tempted to adore.* Moreover, it is always destined to evoke questions in those who are pursuing purely earthly goals. Therefore, when it is lived fully and in joyful thanksgiving, the consecrated life is a *prophecy pointing to ultimate realities, the definitive goal of every created thing and the final destiny of every event of human history, the earth and the universe.* This prophecy is needed more than ever in an era like our own, marked by a lack of clarity about various human longings. Therefore, the consecrated life is considered “a very clear symbol of the heavenly kingdom.”<sup>14</sup>

Here, the developing understanding of the prophetic dimension of religious life is linked back to the first paragraph of the Second Vatican Council document on the renewal of religious life, *Perfectae Caritatis*.<sup>15</sup> This lengthy passage ends with the hope that its own *prophetic effort* will result in a new, authentic development for religious life itself.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. Note in the text, cf. PC, n. 1.

<sup>15</sup> See also M. Prudence Allen, R.S.M., and M. Judith O'Brien, “The Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of Religious Life, *Perfectae Caritatis*,” in Matthew L. Lamb and Matthew Levering, eds. *Vatican II: Renewal Within Tradition* (Oxford: University Press, 2008): 251-270.

<sup>16</sup> The passage in PC, n. 64 continues: “*The consecrated life is a prophetic sign when it makes the primacy of God’s love present and visible. It witnesses to that presence through the particular charism of the individual institutes, lived in service of the poor and abandoned, of the victims of violence and injustice, and of the new poor who make society’s panorama a sad one. This service is done in imitation of the founder’s compassion and mercy, and with a sensitivity for human rights and the just cause of human advancement. A courageous prophetic effort, undertaken for the future of humanity and to assure God’s presence in the future, is also expected from the synod so that hope for the future of the consecrated life can be better developed in light of an authentic Christian service of the whole human person and all of humanity, the intended recipients of the salvation brought by Jesus Christ.*”

In 1996, the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, was promulgated by Pope John Paul II. He stated that a major development in the prophetic dimension of consecrated life occurred within the Synod itself.

*The prophetic character of the consecrated life was strongly emphasized by the Synod Fathers. It takes the shape of a special form of sharing in Christ's prophetic office, which the Holy Spirit communicates to the whole People of God. There is a prophetic dimension which belongs to the consecrated life as such, resulting from the radical nature of the following of Christ and of the subsequent dedication to the mission characteristic of the consecrated life. The sign value, which the Second Vatican Council acknowledges in the consecrated life, is expressed in prophetic witness to the primacy which God and the truths of the Gospel have in the Christian life.*<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, the prophetic dimension of consecrated life dynamically interacts with people from other states of life in the light of challenges in the world:

In the history of the Church, alongside other Christians, there have been men and women consecrated to God who, through a special gift of the Holy Spirit, have carried out a *genuinely prophetic ministry*, speaking in the name of God to all, even to the Pastors of the Church. *True prophecy is born of God*, from friendship with him, from attentive listening to his word in the different circumstances of history. Prophets feel in their hearts a burning desire for the holiness of God and, having heard his word in the dialogue of prayer, they proclaim that word with their lives, with their lips and with their actions,

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<sup>17</sup> VC, n. 84.



becoming people who speak for God against evil and sin. *Prophetic witness requires* the constant and passionate search for God's will, for self-giving, for unfailing communion in the Church, *for the practice of spiritual discernment* and love of the truth. It is also expressed through the denunciation of all that is contrary to the divine will and through the exploration of new ways to apply the Gospel in history, in expectation of the coming of God's Kingdom.<sup>18</sup>

The document also summarizes with new emphasis the traditional characteristics of a prophetic way of life:

In our world, where it often seems that the signs of God's presence have been lost from sight, a convincing prophetic witness on the part of consecrated persons is increasingly necessary. In the first place this should entail *the affirmation of the primacy of God and of eternal life*, as evidenced in the following and imitation of the chaste, poor and obedient Christ, who was completely consecrated to the glory of God and to the love of his brethren. *The fraternal life is itself prophetic* in a society which, sometimes without realizing it, has a profound yearning for a brotherhood which knows no borders. Consecrated persons are being asked *to bear witness everywhere with the boldness of a prophet who is unafraid of risking even his life*.<sup>19</sup>

Consecrated women who died working with the sick is offered as an example of this ultimate prophetic witness:

Following a glorious tradition, a great number of consecrated persons, above all women, carry out their apostolate in the field of health care,

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., n. 85.

according to the charism of their respective Institutes. Down the centuries, many consecrated persons *have given their lives* in service to victims of contagious diseases, confirming the truth that dedication to the point of heroism belongs to the prophetic nature of the consecrated life.<sup>20</sup>

*Vita Consecrata* asks for a collaboration among the various vocations in the Church in such a way that mutual respect reigns along with truthful discussion:

Prophecy derives a particularly persuasive power from *consistency between proclamation and life*. Consecrated persons will be faithful to their mission in the Church and the world, if they can renew themselves constantly in the light of the word of God. Thus will they be able to enrich the other faithful with the charismatic gifts they have received and, in turn, let themselves be challenged by the prophetic stimulus which comes from other sectors of the Church. *In this exchange of gifts, guaranteed by full harmony with the Church's Magisterium and discipline*, there will shine forth the action of the Holy Spirit who "gives [the Church] a unity of fellowship and service; he furnishes and directs her with various gifts, both hierarchical and charismatic."<sup>21</sup>

In this context, the way in which persons can flourish in a life of vowed poverty, chastity, and obedience is also emphasized:

The prophetic task of the consecrated life is brought into play by *three major challenges* addressed to the Church herself ... These challenges

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., n. 83.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., n. 85.

relate directly to the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience, impelling the Church, and consecrated persons in particular, to clarify and testify to the *profound anthropological significance* of the counsels ... The evangelical counsels should not be considered as a denial of the values inherent in sexuality, in the legitimate desire to possess material goods or to make decisions for oneself. Insofar as these inclinations are based on nature, they are good in themselves.<sup>22</sup>

The document emphasizes that consecrated life is a prophetic witness against various idolatries: consecrated chastity against the idolatry of the sexual instinct; consecrated poverty against the idolatry of the craving for possessions; and taking as its point of departure the obedience of Christ to the Father, consecrated obedience is against the aberrant and distorted exercise of freedom in violence and injustice. For our present theme, it is the high point of Pope John Paul II's elaboration of the prophetic dimension of religious life.

*The New Evangelization through Prophetic Religious Life (1996-2000)*

During the final years of his Pontificate, Pope Saint John Paul II (1995-2000), continued to develop further meanings of the prophetic witness in his addresses to consecrated religious. In January 1995, he addressed an urgent appeal to all religious to "put their *prophetic mission at the service of the new evangelization*."<sup>23</sup> Calling religious

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., n. 87.

<sup>23</sup> "To the Members of the 24<sup>th</sup> Jesuit General Congregation," (January 1995) in *John Paul II Speaks to Religious*, Book IX (1995-1996): 47. See also, "To Religious in Rome," (February 2, 1996): 109.

“witnesses and prophets of the transcendence of human life.”<sup>24</sup> We sense a new momentum drawing John Paul II towards the moment of his own death. He described an increasing engagement with Jesus Christ, the Prophet, by following Him through the pilgrimage of life, into death, and eternal life, only to return as a witness to others of the Risen Lord. To a Congress of young religious in 1997 in Rome, John Paul II said:

Before the world you are privileged witnesses of this formidable truth: the Lord is risen and makes himself the traveling companion of the pilgrim man on life’s journey, until the paths of time cross the way of the Eternal One, when “we shall see him as he is” (1 Jn. 3:2). Consecrated life *thus has a prophetic charism because it extends between the experience of “having seen the Lord” and the certain hope of seeing him again “as he is.”*<sup>25</sup>

Finally, in his homily for the Jubilee of Consecrated Life on February 2, 2002, John Paul II reflected on the prophetic value of consecrated religious for others:

Having been a pilgrim in so many parts of the world, I have been able to appreciate *the prophetic value of your presence for all Christian people*. Men and women of this generation have a great need to meet the Lord and his liberating message of salvation ... Many of them [who unreservedly serve the poor, the outcast and the lowly] even in recent years have paid with the supreme witness of blood for their

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<sup>24</sup> “To the Sick and Men and Women Religious at the Archabbey of Brevnov, in Prague,” (April 26, 1997) in *John Paul II Speaks to Religious*, Book X (1997-1998): 76.

<sup>25</sup> “To Participants in the International Congress for Young Religious in Rome,” (September 30, 1997) in *ibid*: 136-137.

choice of fidelity to Christ and to man, without surrender or compromise.<sup>26</sup>

This completes the extraordinary, foundational teaching of Pope Saint John Paul II on the relationship between religious life and prophecy and the prophetic way of life.

## Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI (2005-2013): Deepening the Prophetic Impulse of Women Religious in the Church

In order to understand Pope Benedict's thought about the relation of prophecy and the prophetic way of life to women's religious vocations, we need to go back to an interview he gave in 1993-1994 to a doctoral student, Niels Christian Hvidt, on "*The Problem of Christian Prophecy*."<sup>27</sup> This remarkable interview has been published online recently under the title, "The Problem of Christian Prophecy: Interview with Cardinal Josef Ratzinger."<sup>28</sup>

*Cardinal Josef Ratzinger, "The Problem of Christian Prophecy" (1993-94) - Mary and the Supreme Prophetic Line at Conception and Pentecost*

In this interview, Cardinal Ratzinger considered the Old Testament, New Testament, and the Catholic history of prophets.

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<sup>26</sup> "Homily for the Jubilee of Consecrated Life," (February 2, 2000) in *John Paul II Speaks to Religious*, Book XI (1999-2000): 98.

<sup>27</sup> See Niels Christian Hvidt, "Prophecy and Revelation. A Theological Survey on the Problem of Christian Prophecy," *Studia theologica: Journal of Scandinavian Theology* 52 (1998): 147-161.

<sup>28</sup> See Niels Christian Hvidt, "The Problem of Christian Prophecy: Interview with Cardinal Josef Ratzinger." Available at: <http://www.tlig.org/en/spirituality/prophecy/intratz1/>.

Drawing from these sources, he briefly summarized the primary meaning of prophet as a person through whom God can speak to the world in order to bring it back in line with the Divine Plan. We read:

Ratzinger: First of all, let's dwell for a moment on prophecy in the Old Testament. To avoid any misunderstanding, it should be clearly established who the prophet really is. The prophet is not a soothsayer. The essential element of the prophet is not the prediction of future events; the prophet is someone who tells the truth on the strength of his contact with God; the truth for today which also, naturally, sheds light on the future. It is not a question of foretelling the future in detail, but of rendering the truth of God present at this moment in time and of pointing us in the right direction ... <sup>29</sup>

Cardinal Ratzinger continued his description of prophecy by reminding us that at the dawn of the New Testament is the person of Mary. It is here that the relation between the prophetic vocation and the identity of women religious reveals its deeper dimension. In his words:

Ratzinger: There is an ancient patristic tradition that calls Mary, not priestess but *prophetess*. The title of prophetess in the patristic tradition is Mary's supreme title. It is in Mary that there is a precise definition of what prophecy really is, that is, this intimate capacity to listen to, perceive, feel, that allows one to sense the consolation of the Holy Spirit, accepting him within oneself, making him fruitful, bringing him fruitful into the world. It might be said, in a sense, without wishing to be categorical, that it is none other than the Marian line that represents in the Church the prophetic dimension. Mary has

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

always been seen by the Fathers of the Church as the archetype of the Christian prophet and it is from her that the prophetic line comes then to enter into the history of the Church.<sup>30</sup>

Cardinal Ratzinger adds that the Marian line of prophecy is active not only at the moment of conception, but also before her life, and especially at Pentecost. In his words:

Ratzinger: I am convinced that the primary accent is placed on the fact that it is the Holy Spirit who opens the door for Christ to be accepted *ex Spiritu Sancto*. What happened in Mary by the action of the Holy Spirit (*ex Spiritu Sancto*) is an event that was under careful preparation for a long time. Mary re-assumes in herself the whole prophecy as the entire economy of the Spirit. The provenance *ex Spiritu Sancto* of the whole prophecy is then concentrated in her in Christ's conception. To my mind, this does not exclude the ulterior prospect that Christ is always conceived anew *ex Spiritu Sancto*. Saint Luke himself set the story of Jesus' childhood on a parallel with the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles which speaks to us of the birth of the Church. In the circle of the twelve apostles gathered around Mary the *conceptio ex Spiritu Sancto* comes about and it happens again in the birth of the Church.<sup>31</sup>

### *Women Religious and the Prophetic Impulse in the Church*

Carrying forward into his Papacy this theme of Mary's prophetic identity, Pope Benedict spoke at Castel Gandolfo in 2006 about her prophecies:

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid. (My emphasis)

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

In the *Magnificat*, the great hymn of Our Lady we just heard some surprising words. Mary says: “Henceforth all generations will call me blessed.” The Mother of the Lord prophesies the Marian praises of the Church for all of the future, the Marian devotion of the People of God until the end of time. In praising Mary, the Church did not invent something “adjacent” to Scripture: she responded to this prophecy which Mary made at that moment of grace.

And Mary’s words were not only personal, perhaps arbitrary words. Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, as St Luke said, exclaimed with a loud cry: “Blessed is she who believed ...” And Mary, also filled with the Holy Spirit, continues and completes what Elizabeth said, affirming: “all generations will call me blessed.” It is a real prophesy, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and in venerating Mary, the Church responds to a command of the Holy Spirit; she does what she has to do.<sup>32</sup>

Returning again to the interview with Cardinal Ratzinger, he traced the dynamic interaction of the prophetic and theological dimensions of the Church. The Cardinal offered many examples from the history of the Church and religious life to exemplify the complementarity of prophecy and governing:

Ratzinger: Later, it is not hard to see a charismatic origin in the movement of the mendicant orders. Neither Dominic nor Francis prophesied the future but they did understand that the moment had come for the Church to shake free of the feudal system, to give new value to the universality and poverty of the Gospel, and to apostolic

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<sup>32</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, “Homily at Parish Church of St. Thomas of Villanova, Castel Gandolfo,” (August 15, 2006). Available at: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2006/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20060815\\_assunzione-maria.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2006/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20060815_assunzione-maria.html).



life. By so doing, they gave the Church its true face back, that of a Church fired by the Holy Spirit and led by Christ himself. They represent a new beginning and they thus brought about the reform of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Other examples are Catherine of Siena and Brigid of Sweden, two great female figures. I think it is very important to stress how, at a particularly difficult time for the Church such as the Avignon crisis and the schism that ensued, female figures rose up to emphasize Christ's claim, Christ who lives and suffers in his Church.<sup>33</sup>

In these examples, we can see how the prophet speaks the truth from contact with God in order to bring people who have wandered away from the Divine plan, back onto the line that God intends. The beauty of Cardinal Ratzinger's reflections increased as he pondered the various ways that women prophets, several of whom are religious, have revitalized the Church through the centuries:

Ratzinger: The sisters of the great saints also all belong to this line. Saint Ambrose owes much to his holy sister for the spiritual pathway he embarked upon. The same holds for Basil and Gregory of Nyssa and for Saint Benedict. Further on, in the late Middle Ages, we meet some great female figures and of them we must mention Francesca Romana. In the 16th century, Teresa of Avila was very determinant for John of the Cross and, more generally, for the entire development of faith and devotion. The prophetic female line was of great importance in the history of the Church: Catherine of Siena and Brigid of Sweden could be an illustration. Both addressed a Church which had an apostolic college and where sacraments were administered. So the essential things were still there however threatened with decadence because of internal conflicts. They re-awakened the Church

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<sup>33</sup> Hvidt, "The Problem of Christian Prophecy: Interview with Cardinal Josef Ratzinger."

and in it they restored value to evangelical unity, humility and courage and to evangelization.<sup>34</sup>

Broadening his analysis to include the dependence of theologians on prophets, Cardinal Ratzinger concluded:

I believe that it can be proven that for all the great theologians any new theological elaboration is only possible if the prophetic element has first paved the way. While one proceeds with the mind only, nothing new will ever happen. Increasingly more definite systems may well be construed, increasingly subtle questions raised but the true and proper way from which great theology may again flow is not generated by the rational side of theological work but by a charismatic and prophetic thrust. And it is in this sense, I believe, that prophecy and theology go hand in glove. Theology, as theological science in the strict sense, is not prophetic but may only truly become living theology under the thrust and illumination of a prophetic impulse.<sup>35</sup>

*Pope Benedict (2005-2007) - Religious founders and foundresses as “Prophetic Pioneers”*

In the first year of his Pontificate, on December 10, 2005, in an address to Women and Men Religious, and Members of Secular Institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life in Rome, Pope Benedict reflected on the ways that consecrated women and men witness to eternal life while living in the world: “Consecrated persons live in their own time, but their hearts reach out beyond time and they witness to their contemporaries, often absorbed in the things of the world, that

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

their true destiny is God himself.” He then concluded with a reference to the prophetic dimension of their lives: “May the Blessed Virgin, a model of consecrated life, guide and sustain you, so that you may be for all a ‘*prophetic sign*’ of the Kingdom of Heaven.”<sup>36</sup>

In the same year, in his first Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (2005), Pope Benedict referred to the early prophets, Hosea and Ezekiel, and their description of “God’s passion for his people using boldly erotic images. God’s relationship with Israel is described using the metaphors of betrothal and marriage; idolatry is thus adultery and prostitution.”<sup>37</sup>

Then, two years later, on May 7, 2007, when Pope Benedict addressed the International Union of Superiors General (IUSG) in Rome, his words reflected back on the theme these religious had chosen for their Congress, namely, “weaving a new spirituality”:

As your President recalled, the theme of the Plenary Assembly, which is being held in these days, is particularly interesting: *Called to weave a new spirituality that generates hope and life for all of humanity*. The topic you have chosen is the fruit of an ample reflection on the following question: In contemplating our world, listening to its cries, its needs, its thirst and its aspirations, what thread are we, religious, responsible for our Congregations, called to weave in this moment in order to become *prophetic and mystic ‘weavers of God’*?<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, “Address to Women and Men Religious, and Members of Secular Institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life in Rome,” (December 10, 2005). Available at: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf\\_ben\\_xvi\\_spe\\_20051210\\_religious-rome-diocese.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf_ben_xvi_spe_20051210_religious-rome-diocese.html).

<sup>37</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, n. 9.

<sup>38</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, “Address to the International Union of Superiors General,” (May 7, 2007) Available at: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2007/may/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20070507\\_uisg.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2007/may/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20070507_uisg.html), n. 4.

Pope Benedict emphasized that the chosen symbol of “weaving” is a typically feminine image used in all cultures. He reminded the Superiors General from 85 countries that, “You are aware that each Superior General is called to be an animator and promoter, as your President opportunely emphasized, of a ‘mystic and prophetic’ Consecrated Life, strongly committed to the realization of the Kingdom of God.”<sup>39</sup>

Next, Pope Benedict laid out his own view of the qualities he identified in the “prophetic founders and foundresses” of their religious communities:

The Founders and Foundresses of your institutes have been “*prophetic pioneers*” in the Church because they never lost the acute awareness of being in the world, but not of the world, according to the clear teaching of Jesus (cf. Jn. 17: 14). Following his example they tried to communicate God's love with words and concrete gestures through the total gift of themselves, always keeping their gaze and their heart fixed on him. Dear Religious Sisters, if you want to walk faithfully in the footsteps of your Founders and Foundresses to help your own Sisters to follow their examples, cultivate the “mystical” dimension of Consecrated Life, that is, always keeping your soul united to God through contemplation.<sup>40</sup>

The authentic prophet is grounded in a personal relation of love with Jesus Christ in prayer and mystical contemplation.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., n. 7.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., n. 12-15.

*Called to be "Prophetic Signs" of the Kingdom of Heaven*

The authentic prophet not only serves as a living sign of the Kingdom of Heaven through mystical contemplation and prayer, but also through witnessing to a life of suffering, cross, and resurrection. On February 2, 2013, Pope Emeritus Benedict gave the homily for the Feast of the Presentation to members of the institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life. He returned to the theme of prophecy with the added dimension of the *suffering* of the prophet:

So it is that we also discover the topic of suffering, very pronounced in the Gospel passage in which Simeon imparts his prophecy concerning both the Child and the Mother: "Behold, this Child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and, [to Mary], a sword will pierce through your own soul also)" (Lk. 2:34-35). The "salvation" that Jesus brought to his people, and which he embodies in himself, passed through the Cross, through the violent death that he was to vanquish and to transform with the sacrifice of his life through love. This sacrifice was already foretold in the act of the Presentation in the Temple, an act without any doubt motivated by the traditions of the old Covenant, but that was deeply enlivened by the fullness of faith and love, which correspond to the fullness of time, to the presence of God and of his Holy Spirit in Jesus. Indeed, the Spirit moved over the whole scene of the presentation of Jesus in the Temple and in particular over Simeon, but also over Anna.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, "Homily at the Mass of the Presentation of Our Lord on the Occasion of the 16th Day of Consecrated Life," St. Peter's Basilica, (February 2, 2013). Available at: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2013/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20130202\\_vita-consacrata.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2013/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20130202_vita-consacrata.html).

The suffering of the Mother, and the suffering of Simeon and of Anna participate in an authentic dimension of the prophet and the prophetic life which is always a participation in the suffering of Jesus Christ, led by the Holy Spirit, bringing new life in the face of the suffering. According to Pope Benedict,

The Spirit “Paraclete” brings consolation to Israel and motivates the steps and moves the hearts of those who await him. He is the Spirit who prompted the prophetic words of Simeon and Anna, words of blessing and praise of God, of faith in his Anointed One, of thanksgiving, for at last our eyes could see and our arms embrace “your salvation” (cf. 2:30).<sup>42</sup>

Pope Benedict invited those present to enter into the wound of suffering in the world and to help others discover the Paschal mystery of a resurrected life:

... I invite you to have a faith that can recognize the wisdom of weakness. In the joys and afflictions of the present time, when the harshness and weight of the cross make themselves felt, do not doubt that the *kenosis* of Christ is already a paschal victory. Precisely in our limitations and weaknesses as human beings we are called to live conformation with Christ in an all-encompassing commitment which anticipates the eschatological perfection, to the extent that this is possible in time (ibid., n. 16). In a society of efficiency and success, your life, by the “humility” and frailty of the lowly, of empathy with those who have no voice, becomes an evangelical sign of contradiction.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

In this light, Pope Benedict warned those religious listening to his words:

*Do not join the ranks of the prophets of doom who proclaim the end or meaninglessness of the consecrated life in the Church in our day; rather, clothe yourselves in Jesus Christ and put on the armour of light - as St. Paul urged (cf. Rom. 13:11-14) - keeping awake and watchful. St. Chromatius of Aquileia wrote: "Distance this peril from us so that we are never overcome by the heavy slumber of infidelity. Rather may he grant us his grace and his mercy, that we may watch, ever faithful to him. In fact our fidelity can watch in Christ (Sermon 32, 4)."*<sup>44</sup>

Pope Benedict concluded by returning to the relation of consecrated persons to Mary: "Dear brothers and sisters, the joy of consecrated life necessarily passes through participation in the cross of Christ. This is how it was for Mary Most Holy. Hers is the suffering of the heart that is one with the Heart of the Son of God, pierced by love."<sup>45</sup>

## Interlude: Sandra Schneiders, I.H.M., Religious Life as a Prophetic Lifeform

At this point, my presentation will consider two themes in the thought of Sr. Sandra Schneiders, I.H.M., concerning religious life as a prophetic lifeform. Writing during the pontificates of our three popes, Sister Schneiders has developed a different perspective in two respects about the way that religious should relate to prophecy. The first concerns

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid. (My emphasis)

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

a rupture of the relation of a religious *within a particular charism* to the sisters elected as their leaders. The second concerns the rupture of relation of religious sisters *to the hierarchy of the Church*.

### *Rupture of the Hierarchical and Charismatic Dimensions of the Religious Vocation*

“Charismatic dimensions of a religious vocation” means the way that each religious shares the particular charism of the founder or foundress of his or her community. Sandra Schneiders radically distinguishes between egalitarian and hierarchical structures within a religious community. In her words, “... Religious Community is not a hierarchical structure but an egalitarian one.”<sup>46</sup> This division between the egalitarian dimensions and hierarchical dimensions of the same religious community creates an artificial rupture. Why is it not possible for a religious community to be both egalitarian and hierarchical at the same time? Sisters in the same community are equal by their creation in the image and likeness of God, their baptism, confirmation, salvation in Jesus Christ, and participation in the same charism of their founder or foundress. The same sister may at times be elected to a general counsel, appointed as a local superior, or some other position in the service of governing. At other times, she may be simply serving as part of the community with others and not in the service of governing. The constitutions specify how the authority in religious life is lived out.

Sandra Schneiders focuses her particular attention on the practice of the vow of obedience which she describes as a mindless

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<sup>46</sup> Schneiders, *Buying the Field: Catholic Religious Life in Mission to the World*, 446.



obedience to the will of another person.<sup>47</sup> She also describes religious hierarchical structures as demonic and satanic power structures.<sup>48</sup> Failing to distinguish between a structure itself and the poor use or abuse of a structure, she rejects all hierarchical structures themselves. An analogy with a human body might be helpful here. Each human body has a hierarchical structure of organization from cells, organs; systems in which the higher organizes the lower. The body also has a skeletal structure which is essential to the working of the cells, organs, and systems, which it holds in place. By analogy, each person has an inherent equal dignity with every other person, even though in a spiritual body, like a religious community or the Church, there may be hierarchical positions.

Drawing her model of religious life from what she calls the “itinerant band of followers” of Jesus during His years of active ministry, Sandra Schneiders seems to ignore ways that Jesus Himself formed His apostles, calling out Peter for particular purposes, taking James and John aside to reveal to them His Transfiguration, and asking them not to share this experience until after His death. After His resurrection and before His ascension, Jesus continued to form His apostles in ways that combined hierarchy and equality.

The vow of obedience in religious life is lived practically through union with the Resurrected Jesus and by identification with Him in the Garden of Gethsemane in order to actively choose to follow His Father’s will. The practice of obedience in a religious community is not simply blind submission to another person’s will or the sacrifice of one’s conscience. It is an active intelligent decision to obey out of love for Jesus Christ who entirely united His will to the will of His

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 518 and 556.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 458-459 and 491.

Father in heaven. Religious obedience becomes a participation in Jesus' love for His Father, with the help of the Holy Spirit. It is a dying and rising in Christ and with Christ.

### *Rupture of Complementary Vocations in the Church*

When turning to the second area of divergence between the thought of Sr. Sandra Schneiders and Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict, we shift from the situation *within* a women's religious community where authority and hierarchy are exercised by persons of the same gender, as with all the sisters who share the same charism. When looking at the relation of hierarchy in the governing structures of the Church *to women's religious communities*, Sandra Schneiders becomes increasingly ideological. Drawing upon a secular feminism, she places all members of the male hierarchy into a so-called satanic domination system.<sup>49</sup> Schneiders defines: "A 'domination system' is a two-tiered structure in which a few people (the rich, the politically powerful, the religious authorities) oppress the vast majority of the people for the benefit of the oppressors."<sup>50</sup>

Sister Schneiders argues that "Religious are ... in an analogous relationship to the contemporary ecclesial reality as the prophets, including Jesus, were to Judaism."<sup>51</sup> In her understanding, religious women should prophecy against the hierarchy as part of their prophetic lifeform. In Schneiders' writing about "Religious Life as Prophetic Lifeform in the Church" she elaborates her principles:

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 428-429.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 467.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 541.

Jesus' prophetic ministry of word and work was not merely a threat to the particular domination systems of Rome and Jerusalem. It was a fundamental subversion of domination itself as the demonic structure operative in human history ... Jesus was the end of all domination systems, all systems of salvation by the power exercised by a few over the many ... The demonic 'world', the kingdom of Satan, was undone by Jesus who was bringing into existence a new creation, an entirely different world ... In this new creation, those who held power, Rome and Jerusalem, males and masters, strong and rich, were finished.<sup>52</sup>

Sandra Schneiders neglects to include passages from Scripture of the post-Resurrection Jesus' interaction with the Apostles. According to Pope John Paul II, "After the resurrection, before definitively sending out the apostles into the whole world, Christ linked their service to the administration of the sacraments of Baptism (cf. Mt. 28: 18-20), of the Eucharist (cf. Mk. 14:22-24 and parallel passages), and Reconciliation (cf. Jn. 20:22-23), instituted by him as salvific signs of grace. The apostles are therefore endowed with priestly and pastoral

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<sup>52</sup> Sandra M. Schneiders, I.H.M., *Prophets in their Own Country: Women Religious Bearing Witness to the Gospel in a Troubled Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 76. See also Sandra Schneiders, "Religious Life as Prophetic Lifeform," *National Catholic Reporter* (January 4, 2010); "Call, Response and Task of Prophetic Action," (January 10, 2010); "What Jesus Taught Us About His Prophetic Ministry," (January 10, 2010); "Tasks of Those Who Choose the Prophetic Lifestyle," (January 7, 2010); and "Religious Life: Sharing Jesus' Passion, Resurrection," (January 8, 2010). Available at: <https://www.ncronline.org/news/women-religious/religious-life-prophetic-life-form>; [https://www.ncronline.org/news/women-religious/call-response-and-task-prophetic-action?\\_ga=1.238188739.291342299.1472228129](https://www.ncronline.org/news/women-religious/call-response-and-task-prophetic-action?_ga=1.238188739.291342299.1472228129); [https://www.ncronline.org/news/women-religious/what-jesus-taught-us-about-his-prophetic-ministry?\\_ga=1.239877568.291342299.1472228129](https://www.ncronline.org/news/women-religious/what-jesus-taught-us-about-his-prophetic-ministry?_ga=1.239877568.291342299.1472228129); [https://www.ncronline.org/news/women-religious/tasks-those-who-choose-prophetic-life-style?\\_ga=1.62602479.291342299.1472228129](https://www.ncronline.org/news/women-religious/tasks-those-who-choose-prophetic-life-style?_ga=1.62602479.291342299.1472228129); and [https://www.ncronline.org/news/women-religious/religious-life-sharing-jesus-passion-resurrection?\\_ga=1.62602479.291342299.1472228129](https://www.ncronline.org/news/women-religious/religious-life-sharing-jesus-passion-resurrection?_ga=1.62602479.291342299.1472228129).

authority in [the hierarchical system of] the Church.”<sup>53</sup> The priestly vocation serves the others through the sacraments and preaching the Word; the lay vocation serves the others by elevating the secular world through Christian values; and the religious vocation serves the others by its prophetic way of witnessing as a living eschatological sign of the Kingdom of Heaven. These are the dynamic ways that members of the three paradigm vocations, lay, religious, and clerical, are called to a life of mutual service of one another as initially described by Pope John Paul II.

Pope Benedict also elaborated examples of the collaboration of Christian prophets, like St. Catherine of Siena, with the clerical and lay vocations to help bring the Church back on the line of the Divine plan. Recall also how the Marian line of prophecy, open to the Holy Spirit, gathered into herself at the Incarnation and at Pentecost all previous prophecies, so that the Eternal Word could come to earth through the action of the Holy Spirit to reveal the divine plan in its fullness.

With those images in mind, we will now turn to the final part of this presentation in which Pope Francis offers his insights into the question: If I am living a prophetic way of life, how can I be an authentic prophet? How can I avoid prophesying falsely?

## Pope Francis (2013-present): Religious Life as a School for Prophets

If religious life is a prophetic way of life, how can we assess when we are living it as a true prophet and when as a false prophet? The

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<sup>53</sup> Pope John Paul II, General Audience, June 22, 1988. Available at: <http://totus2us.com/teaching/jpii-catechesis-on-jesus-christ/jesus-founder-of-the-ministerial-structure, par. 9 and 11.>

first way to learn about how to be a true prophet is to understand our temptations and to reject them. Pope Francis offers several examples of the temptations of prophets.

### *Temptations of Prophets*

#### *First Temptation: to be a gloomy prophet of doom*

Pope Francis, in his Apostolic Letter to All Consecrated Persons on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life repeated the words of the Pope Benedict against being a prophet of doom about consecrated life:

In scanning the horizons of your lives and the present moment, be watchful and alert. Together with Benedict XVI, I urge you *not* to “join the ranks of the prophets of doom who proclaim the end or meaninglessness of the consecrated life in the Church in our day; rather, clothe yourselves in Jesus Christ and put on the armour of light - as Saint Paul urged (cf. Rom. 13:11-14) - keeping awake and watchful.” Let us constantly set out anew, with trust in the Lord.<sup>54</sup>

Pope Francis then developed this theme further:

None of us should be dour, discontented and dissatisfied, for a “gloomy disciple is a disciple of gloom.” Like everyone else we have our troubles, our dark nights of the soul, our disappointments and infirmities, our experience of slowing down as we grow older. But in all these things we should be able to discover “perfect joy.”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Pope Francis, To All Consecrated Persons on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life, I. 3. (My emphasis)

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, II. 1.

Joy is the fruit of the Resurrection given by the Holy Spirit to the disciples of Christ. It is here that we see another important difference between modeling the religious life like the itinerate band of disciples who followed Jesus *before* his Resurrection (or modeling it on the *post*-Resurrection community). Pope Francis reminds us that: “Our founders and foundresses were attracted by the unity of the Apostles with Christ and by the fellowship which marked the first community in Jerusalem [following the resurrection]. In establishing their own communities, each of them sought to replicate these models of evangelical living, to be of one heart and one soul, and to rejoice in the Lord’s presence (cf. PC, n. 15).”<sup>56</sup>

### *Second temptation of a prophet: to flee from God*

Consider Pope Francis’s two homilies on the Prophet Jonah. In his first homily on October 7, 2013, the Holy Father reflected on how we can run away from God: “[Jonah] didn’t want to be disturbed in the way of life he had chosen; when he heard the word of God he sought to escape. And he fled from God.” Therefore, when “the Lord sent him to Nineveh, he boarded a ship to Spain. He was fleeing from the Lord.” In the end, the Pontiff explained, “Jonah had already written his own story: ‘I want to be like this, this and this, according to the commandments’. He did not want to be disturbed. This is why he fled from God.” The Pope warned that we, too, can be tempted to flee. “We can run away from God,” he said, “as a Christian, as a Catholic, and even as a priest, bishop or Pope. We can all flee from God. *This is a*

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., I. 2.

*daily temptation*: not to listen to God, not to hear his voice, not to hear his promptings, his invitation in our hearts.”<sup>57</sup>

Pope Francis returned to the theme of fleeing from God again in his Apostolic Letter for the Year of Consecrated Life:

At times, like Elijah and Jonah, you may feel the temptation to flee, to abandon the task of being a prophet because it is too demanding, wearisome or apparently fruitless. But prophets know that they are never alone. As he did with Jeremiah, so God encourages us: “Be not afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you” (Jer. 1:8).<sup>58</sup>

*Third Temptation: to stubbornly resist God’s prophetic impulse*

Am I being stubborn by ‘running away from’ what the Lord is asking me to say and do? In his second homily on Jonah the Prophet, Pope Francis drew a parallel between the Gospel and the first reading from the book of Jonah. The prophet, he said, was “stubborn” because he did not want to do what the Lord was asking of him. He said:

It was only after the Lord saved Jonah from the belly of a whale that he decided: “Lord, I will do whatever you say.” As Jonah went through the streets prophesying Nineveh’s imminent destruction, the Ninevites “began to pray with words, with their hearts and with their

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<sup>57</sup> Pope Francis, “Homily: Fleeing from God,” Domus Sanctae Marthae, (October 7, 2013). (My emphasis) Available at: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2013/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie\\_20131007\\_fleeing-god.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2013/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20131007_fleeing-god.html).

<sup>58</sup> Pope Francis, To All Consecrated Persons on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life, II. 2.

bodies. Prayer can work miracles in the midst of problems and even calamity.”<sup>59</sup>

*Fourth temptation: to “cudgel” someone with a prophetic word*

If I do hear and prophesy against what someone is doing or not doing, am I then just wishing for their imminent destruction, or am I praying ardently for their deep conversion to the true good? Expounding on this need for ardent prayer Pope Francis adds:

... there are those like the “stubborn Jonah” who went about prophesying, but in his heart he said: if they deserve it let it be ... he prophesied but he didn’t pray, he didn’t ask the Lord to forgive them, he *only sought to cudgel them* ...<sup>60</sup>

The Holy Father emphasizes the importance of praying when he added, “and when we don’t pray, we close the door to the Lord” so that “he can do nothing.” But “praying in difficult situations is like opening the door to the Lord, in order that he might enter” and, he added, “the Lord knows how to put things back in order.”<sup>61</sup>

*Examen of Conscience for True and False Prophecy*

As a Jesuit skilled in self-examination, Pope Francis offers many examples or models for an examen. When Pope Francis visited

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<sup>59</sup> Pope Francis, “Morning Meditation in the Chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae, Choosing the Better Part,” (October 8, 2013). Available at: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2013/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie\\_20131008\\_better-part.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2013/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20131008_better-part.html).

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. (My emphasis)

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.



the garden of Gethsemane in May 2014, he demonstrated the skill of self-examination so necessary to live our prophetic vocation well:

In that hour, Jesus felt the need to pray and to have with him his disciples, his friends, those who had followed him and shared most closely in his mission. But here, at Gethsemane, following him became difficult and uncertain; they were overcome by doubt, weariness and fright. As the events of Jesus' passion rapidly unfolded, the disciples would adopt different attitudes before the Master: attitudes of closedness, distance, hesitation. Here, in this place, each of us - bishops, priests, consecrated persons, and seminarians - might do well to ask: Who am I, before the sufferings of my Lord? Am I among those who, when Jesus asks them to keep watch with him, fall asleep instead, and rather than praying, seek to escape, refusing to face reality? Or do I see myself in those who fled out of fear, who abandoned the Master at the most tragic hour in his earthly life?

Is there perhaps duplicity in me, like that of the one who sold our Lord for thirty pieces of silver, who was once called Jesus' "friend", and yet ended up by betraying him? Do I see myself in those who drew back and denied him, like Peter? Shortly before, he had promised Jesus that he would follow him even unto death (cf. Lk. 22:33); but then, put to the test and assailed by fear, he swore he did not know him. Am I like those who began planning to go about their lives without him, like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, foolish and slow of heart to believe the words of the prophets (cf. Lk. 24:25)?<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Pope Francis, "Address to Priests, Religious, Seminarians at the Garden of Gethsemane," Mount of Olives (May 26, 2014). Available at: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/may/documents/papa-francesco\\_20140526\\_terra-santa-religiosi.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/may/documents/papa-francesco_20140526_terra-santa-religiosi.html).

In his Encyclical Letter *Lumen Fidei*, Pope Francis introduces the Prophet Isaiah (Is. 7:9) and the event of his prophesy to Ahaz, showing Ahaz that unless he has faith in God he will not understand or establish himself in the truth:

The firm foundation that Isaiah promises to the king is indeed grounded in an understanding of God's activity and the unity which he gives to human life and to the history of his people. The prophet challenges the king, and us, to understand the Lord's ways, seeing in God's faithfulness the wise plan which governs the ages.<sup>63</sup>

Pope Francis interprets the words of Isaiah as having a clear message for us: "Read in this light, the prophetic text leads to one conclusion: we need knowledge, we need truth, because without these we cannot stand firm, we cannot move forward. Faith without truth does not save, it does not provide a sure footing." (n. 24) When we consider the problem of false prophets and of times when true prophets lose their footing, it is important to understand that knowledge and truth is essential to the integrity of the religious vocation as a particular kind of prophetic way of life.

In addition to seeking knowledge of the truth, religious should examine whether they are *self-focused*. In the words of Pope Francis:

Don't be closed in on yourself, don't be stifled by petty squabbles, don't remain a hostage to your own problems. These will be resolved if you go forth and help others to resolve their own problems, and proclaim the Good News. You will find life by giving life, hope by giving hope, love by giving love.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Lumen fidei* (June 29, 2013), n. 23.

<sup>64</sup> Pope Francis, *Apostolic Letter to All Consecrated Persons*, II. 4.

Pope Francis encouraged members of religious institutes to work together with each other, adding:

This would make for a more prophetic witness ... No one contributes to the future in isolation, by his or her efforts alone, but by seeing himself or herself as part of a true communion which is constantly open to encounter, dialogue, attentive listening and mutual assistance. Such a communion inoculates us from the *disease of self-absorption*.<sup>65</sup>

Finally, Pope Francis identified a temptation towards uniformity, which may involve a whole religious community, in his address to Consecrated Men and Women of Rome on May 16, 2015:

Now let's move to the question: consecrated life is a gift, a gift of God to the Church. It's true. It's a gift of God. You speak of prophecy: it's a gift of prophecy. It is God present, God who wants to make himself present with a gift: He chooses men and women, but it is a gift, a freely given gift. The vocation is also a gift, it is not an enlistment of people who want to take that path. No, it is a gift to the heart of a person; a gift to a congregation; and that congregation is also a gift. Not always, however, is this gift appreciated and valued in its identity and in its specificity. This is true. There is a temptation to standardize consecrated people, as if they were all the same thing. ... No, it is a gift with a special identity, which comes through the charismatic gift that God gives to a man or a woman to form a religious family.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., II. 3. (My emphasis)

<sup>66</sup> Pope Francis, "Address to Consecrated Men and Women of Rome," Paul VI Audience Hall (May 16, 2015), par. 16. Available at:

This special gift is, first, of the gift of a specific charism, and, second, a particular gift of the prompting of the Holy Spirit flowing from an encounter with the Living Lord. This gift of prophecy is unique and unrepeatable. How can we come to recognize this gift in our community members and in ourselves? An answer to this question takes us to the third area of Pope Francis' contribution to the theme of the relation of religious life to prophecy.

*Prophesying about Women Religious as Spiritual Directors in the Prophetic Vocation*

In his 2015 address to Men and Women Religious in Rome, Pope Francis brought up the topic of religious women as spiritual directors in their own community. The Holy Father explained that the origins of spiritual direction were in the laity. Therefore, spiritual directors were not always limited to the clerical state. In his words:

And then a problem: the problem of how to accompany men and women religious. The communities, especially women's, in our local Church often have difficulty finding serious men and women to accompany them, formators, spiritual fathers and confessors. Either because they do not understand what consecrated life is, or because they want to place themselves in the charism and give interpretations that harm the heart of the nun ... Or, finding those rigid men, who do not really understand where the problem may be, because they do not understand religious life.<sup>67</sup>

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[http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/may/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150516\\_religiosi-roma.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/may/documents/papa-francesco_20150516_religiosi-roma.html).

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

Pope Francis emphasized a return to the origins of spiritual direction in order to help a contemporary set of problems for women religious. He did this by distinguishing confession from spiritual direction:

A spiritual director is one thing and a confessor is another thing. I go to the confessor, I tell my sins, I feel the flogging; then he forgives me of everything and I go ahead. But I must tell the spiritual director what is happening in my heart. The examination of conscience is not the same for confession and for spiritual direction. For confession, you must search where you have fallen short, whether you have lost patience; if you have been greedy: these things, concrete things, which are sinful. But for spiritual direction, you must examine what has happened in the heart; such as the movement of the spirit, whether I have been desolate, if I have been consoled, if I am tired, why I am sad: these are the things to speak about with a spiritual director. These are the things.<sup>68</sup>

Like a prophet trying to bring religious life within the Church back on a line of development consistent with God's original plan, Pope Francis next opens up an approach within women's religious communities to help religious receive good spiritual direction.

I always advised the nuns who came to ask advice: "Tell me, in your community or in your congregation, *isn't there a wise nun, a nun who lives the charism well, a good nun with experience? Do spiritual direction with her!*" - "But she's a woman!" - "But it is a charism of lay people!" Spiritual direction is not an exclusive charism of the

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid, par. 17.

presbytery: it's a charism of the laity! In early monasticism lay people were the great directors. ... It is a charism of the laity. When the superiors see that a man or woman in that congregation or that province has that charism ... they must try to help them to be formed, to perform this service. It is not easy.<sup>69</sup>

The Pope places this prophetic challenge to form spiritual directors from within a religious community squarely on the shoulders of the religious superiors.

The superiors have the responsibility of looking, in the community, in the congregation, in the province, for those who have this charism, to give this mission and form them, help them with this. To accompany on the path is to go step by step with the consecrated brother or sister. I believe that we are still immature in this respect. We are not mature in this, because spiritual direction comes from discernment. But when you find yourself in front of consecrated men and women who do not know how to discern what is happening in their own heart, who do not know how to discern a decision, it is a lack of spiritual direction. And this can be done only by a wise man, a wise woman. But also formed! Today you cannot go only with good will: today the world is very complex and human science also helps us, without falling into psychologism, but it helps us to see the path.<sup>70</sup>

Furthermore, Pope Francis elaborates on how a woman religious can discover her own spiritual maternity through becoming a spiritual director of sisters in her community,

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

How can we rediscover this wealth? The face of consecrated life is 80 percent female: it's true, there are more consecrated women than men. How is it possible to value the presence of women and particularly of consecrated women, in the Church? I am repeating a little in what I am about to say: give consecrated women this function that many believe is only for priests; and also give concreteness to the fact that a consecrated woman is both the face of Mother Church and of Mother Mary, and that is going forth in maternity, and maternity is not only having children! Maternity is accompanying growth; maternity is spending hours next to a sick person, a sick child, a sick brother; it is spending one's life in love, with that love of tenderness and maternity. On this path we will find even more the woman's role in the Church.<sup>71</sup>

In this new invitation, Pope Francis, as a religious, is himself speaking prophetically to women religious. He is opening the possibility for deeper reality of spiritual direction which could help spiritual maternity flourish within the Church in furthering the Divine plan. As a Jesuit, whose community specializes in spiritual direction and emphasizes the importance of confession, Pope Francis is calling women religious to discover through the help of women spiritual directors within their own communities how to go forward towards ever greater holiness in their religious life.

Following in the footsteps of Saint John Paul II, Pope Francis connects this spiritual maternity in the Church to the theme of 'the feminine genius':

... what is essential to the woman's role is - speaking in theological terms - to act in a manner which expresses the feminine genius. When we face a problem among men we come to a conclusion, but when we

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

face that same problem with women the outcome will be different. It will follow the same path, but it will be richer, stronger, more intuitive. For this reason, women in the Church should have this role, they must clarify, help to clarify the feminine genius in so many ways.<sup>72</sup>

With this prophecy of Pope Francis as a prophetic impulse to our own prophetic way of religious life, I conclude my presentation on the three popes. Thank you very much.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.



## Religious/Consecrated Life at the Heart of the Church

SISTER MARY NIKA SCHAUMBER, R.S.M.

Jean Jacques Olier said, "... Jesus Christ in the Most Holy Sacrament ... is the true heart and true source of life in the Church."<sup>1</sup> In the Eucharist, "the mysterious essence of the Church receives a perfect expression."<sup>2</sup> Truly the Eucharist is the heart, the center, and the source of all life in the Church. How then was I asked to title this paper: "Religious Life at the Heart of the Church?" Is it true that religious life is at the heart of the Church? Many documents of the Church agree with the truth of this title. For example, Father Mark Said, the relator or chairman of the Pontifical Commission for the Revision of the Code of Canon Law, stated: "By the new legislation all the institutes of consecrated life and their members are going to be put where they really belong, *in the heart of the Church itself*."<sup>3</sup> The 1983 Code of Canon Law did just that, as canon 574 §1 states: "The state of persons who profess the evangelical counsels in these institutes belongs to the life and holiness of the Church. It is therefore to be fostered and promoted by everyone in the Church." The first part of this canon

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Jacques Olier, *Grand'messe de paroisse*, 61, quoted in Henri De Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1999), 160.

<sup>2</sup> See Dom Augustin Kerkvoorde, O.S.B. in *ibid*.

<sup>3</sup> Mark Said, "The Present State of the Reform of the Code," *Studia Canonica* 8 (1974): 228. The quote regards the intention of the commission about the section called, *De Institutis Perfectionis*.

echoes *Lumen Gentium*, n. 44: “Although the religious state constituted by the profession of the evangelical counsels does not belong to the hierarchical structure of the church, nevertheless it belongs inseparably to her life and holiness.” Saint John Paul II’s apostolic exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, resonates with the same understanding: “The consecrated life is integral to the life of the Church and is at the very heart of the Church’s mission in the world. It is not only a help and a support, but also a precious and essential gift to the People of God.”<sup>4</sup>

This paper will seek to explain the Eucharistic underpinnings of religious life, which makes it “integral to the life of the Church” and “at the very heart of the Church’s mission.”<sup>5</sup> First, we will look at the perfection of charity to which religious are called. Then, we will differentiate the forms of consecrated life *per se* and societies that “approximate” to institutes of consecrated life, as the Code indicates of societies of apostolic life. Finally, we will return to our initial question: why is religious life considered to be at the heart of the Church?

## Called to the Perfection of Charity

The Eucharist is the sacrament of charity, as Saint Thomas explains in the *Summa*.<sup>6</sup> As the body and blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ, the Most Blessed Sacrament is the “perfection of perfections,” the source and fountain of all holiness. To participate in this profound mystery, first one needs to be called by the Father in baptism. Only with baptismal grace may we partake in the Eucharist and receive the command of the Lord, “be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt. 5:48).

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<sup>4</sup> VC, n. 3.

<sup>5</sup> VC, n. 3.

<sup>6</sup> ST III, q. 73, a. 3.

What does “being perfect” mean? A thing is said to be perfect insofar as it attains its proper end. For example, an apple is a perfect apple if it is ripe and delicious and is enjoyed as such. It becomes food for man. The proper end of man is union with God. How is that union achieved? St. Thomas says, “It is charity that unites us to God.”<sup>7</sup> In the letter to Saint John we read, “He that abides in charity abides in God, and God in Him” (1 Jn. 4:16). “Therefore,” Saint Thomas concludes, “the perfection of the Christian life consists radically in charity.”<sup>8</sup> In a sense, one of the most consoling truths of the Christian faith is that our perfection consists, not in any external achievement, but in the intensity of our self-giving love. As St. Thomas Aquinas states, “he who has more charity shall see God more perfectly and shall be more happy.”<sup>9</sup>

All the faithful are called to this perfection of charity. The means provided to attain Christian perfection, to come to our proper end of union with God, are the observance of the commandments or precepts of God, including the Sermon on the Mount, with the help of grace and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit.<sup>10</sup> As Saint John tells us, “If you love me, keep my commandments” (Jn. 14:21). Observing these precepts removes the obstacles to charity and thereby allows us to love God, and to achieve our end or perfection, union with God.

Still, other practices or means to arrive at perfection were also suggested by the Lord. These means or counsels are instruments that enable us to arrive at the perfection of love, both of God and of neighbor. The counsels uniquely help us to grow in charity. Pius XII in *Annus Sacer* said, “While it is true that all Christians must ascend or

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<sup>7</sup> ST II-II, q 184, a. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> ST I, q. 12, a. 6.

<sup>10</sup> Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor* (August 6, 1993), n. 11-22.

climb this holy peak of Christian perfection still there are some who advance toward it by means of a journey or a way which is entirely proper to them and one that offers helps of a higher nature.”<sup>11</sup>

The evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience are those helps of a “higher nature.” Those who profess such counsels choose to exclude acts which, in and of themselves may be good, but are contrary to the evangelical counsels. For example, it may be very good to give one’s entire salary to help the refugees, but if you are a religious, an act of a “higher nature” is to vow poverty; to renounce receiving any salary or possessions altogether.<sup>12</sup> In the same way, by the vow of obedience a religious woman makes a holocaust of her will by following the directives of the superior.<sup>13</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, n. 18 states:

The evangelical counsels, by which Christ invites some people to share his experience as the chaste, poor, and obedient One, call for and make manifest in those who accept them an explicit desire to be totally conformed to him. Living “in obedience, with nothing of one’s own, and in chastity,” consecrated persons profess that Jesus is the model in whom every virtue comes to perfection. His way of living in chastity, poverty and obedience appears as **the most radical way of living the Gospel** on this earth, a way which may be called **divine**, for it was embraced by him, God and man, as the expression of his relationship as the Only-Begotten Son with the Father and with the Holy Spirit.

For these reasons, traditionally religious life was called the “state of perfection.” A “state” is a stable form of life, a permanent

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<sup>11</sup> Pope Pius XII, Allocution *Annus Sacer* (December 8, 1950), n. 28.

<sup>12</sup> ST II-II, q. 88, a. 6.

<sup>13</sup> ST II-II, q. 186, a. 1.

manner of living that arises from definite obligations, and is usually assumed by a public or solemn act.<sup>14</sup> Marriage is a “state of life;” so too, is the priesthood. Sadly, our society is becoming less and less familiar with permanent forms of life, with a permanent commitment to anyone or anything. By referring to religious life as a “state of perfection,” it does not, of course, indicate that all religious are perfect. Rather, it refers to the stable form of religious life which provides all the elements that can lead members towards God. St. Thomas makes clear that the state of perfection is an objective and not necessarily an interior reality. He rightly says that some living in a state of perfection are lacking in charity, such as wicked religious.<sup>15</sup> Having been given greater aids to perfection, these wicked religious are more responsible for their lack of charity.

In the course of the revision of the Code of Canon Law, some objected that the designation, “state of perfection,” implies that other persons in the Church are not striving for perfection. As a result, this title is rarely used now in ecclesial documents since Vatican II. *Vita Consecrata*, however, does not hesitate to remind us of the objective superiority of the consecrated life. Paragraph 32 states: “As a way of showing forth the Church’s holiness, it is to be recognized that the consecrated life, which mirrors Christ’s own way of life, has an objective superiority.”

At the same time, it is critical to recognize that each of the different ways of life within the Church is unique and important. The fullness of grace, centered in Christ as head of the Church, flows to His members in different ways for the perfecting of Christ’s body, the Church. Saint Paul tells us, “For this reason He made some to be

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. canons 219, 574, 588.

<sup>15</sup> ST II-II, q. 194, a. 4.

apostles, some prophets, others evangelists, others pastors and doctors, for the perfecting of the saints” (Eph. 4:11-12). The distinct states and their related duties in the Church contribute to the unity of the Church; all are needed for the orderly functioning of the body. St. Thomas says, “The Church derives a certain beauty from the variety of states.”<sup>16</sup> Saint John Paul II called this variety a “harmonious constellation of gifts.”<sup>17</sup> In *Vita Consecrata*, he speaks of the particular mission of the laity to proclaim the Gospel message in the temporal sphere, of the indispensable ministry of those in Holy Orders, and of that way of life that mirrors Christ’s life, which is religious life: “a more complete expression of the Church’s purpose, which is the sanctification of humanity.”<sup>18</sup>

In sum, we have seen that the perfection of Christian life is union with God through charity. All the faithful are called to the love of God and neighbor and are given the commandments, precepts, graces, and Gifts of the Spirit in order to avoid the obstacles to charity and thereby grow in it. Some are called to follow the Lord more directly through the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience. They are called to the perfection of charity in a consecrated way of life that has an objective superiority.

## Various States of Consecrated Life

Presently, there are different states or ways of life that encompass what we commonly now refer to as “consecrated life.” It is critical to clarify what unites and what differentiates these different forms of life in the Church. There is a tendency today to equate them.

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<sup>16</sup> ST II-II, q. 184, a. 4.

<sup>17</sup> VC, n. 32.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

While certainly all within these states of life are members of Christ's faithful striving for holiness, we do a disservice in not recognizing and actually celebrating each form of life for the uniqueness it brings. The path of relativism equates all and diminishes all. *Renovationis Causam* insisted:

[E]ach one must stand firm in the vocation to which he has been called, since the mission of those called to the religious state in the Church is one thing; the mission of secular institutes is another thing; the temporal and apostolic mission of the laity not especially consecrated to God in an institute, is quite another.<sup>19</sup>

According to the Code of Canon Law, there are primarily two forms of consecrated life: religious institutes and secular institutes, and one form that "approximates" consecrated life, that is, "societies of apostolic life." How do these forms of life differ?

First, we will consider religious life. As a canon lawyer I will take this section from a canonical point of view; please forgive the details, but as the saying goes, "the devil is in the details." Canon 607 states that religious life is a consecration of the whole person, and "manifests in the Church the marvelous marriage established by God as a sign of the world to come." Religious "consummate a full gift of themselves as a sacrifice offered to God." Our whole existence becomes a continuous worship of God in charity. The next two paragraphs of this canon list the essential elements of religious life:

1. members profess public vows and
2. live a fraternal life in common

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<sup>19</sup> Sacred Congregation of Religious and Secular Institutes, *Renovationis Causam* (January 6, 1969), Introduction, n. 5.

3. have a certain separation from the world, proper to the character of each institute.

Next, we will describe secular institutes. In his apostolic constitution, *Provida Mater Ecclesia*, Pope Pius XII established secular institutes to be: “A society, whether clerical or lay, whose members, in order to attain Christian perfection and to exercise a full apostolate, profess the evangelical counsels *in the world*.”<sup>20</sup>

The Code of Canon Law developed this understanding, and defines a secular institute as “an institute of consecrated life in which Christ’s faithful, living in the world, strive for the perfection of charity and endeavor to contribute to the sanctification of the world, especially from within.”<sup>21</sup> Hopefully, you have noticed the emphasis on “in the world.” The special consecration of members of secular institutes is expressed in apostolic activity<sup>22</sup> and is professed by sacred bonds defined by each institute.<sup>23</sup>

From a canonical point of view, canon 712 establishes one of the most important differences between religious and secular institutes. Religious profess the evangelical counsels through public vows; members of secular institutes profess them through oaths, promises, or vows. During the revision of the Code, some suggested that a third category of vows be introduced, those which secular institutes take. It was decided not to introduce new terminology in this regard, because the commissioners were undecided if vows taken in secular institutes are public or not. From a commentary on Canon 712, “Some

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<sup>20</sup> Pope Pius XII, Apostolic Constitution concerning Secular Institutes, *Provida Mater Ecclesia*, art. 1 quoted in Charles Schleck, *The Theology of Vocations* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1963), 101.

<sup>21</sup> Can. 710.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. can. 713.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. can. 712.



considered them public because they had some official character in the Church, while others considered them private because they were not accepted *nomine Ecclesiae*.”<sup>24</sup> This query will eventually have to be resolved by the Church. Tied to this question is the difference between religious and secular consecration. According to Jean Beyer, a proposal was made to the commissioners revising the Code to clarify the typology of consecrated life, but that proposal was rejected. According to Beyer, “Such a typology will one day be of major importance for an ecclesial life that is concerned over truth and renewal.”<sup>25</sup>

Another enigma with regard to secular institutes as defined in the code is presented in canon 711: “Without prejudice to the provisions of the law concerning institutes of consecrated life, consecration as a member of a secular institute does not change the member’s proper canonical status among the people of God, be it clerical or lay.” Consecration in a secular institute, therefore, does not change the canonical status of the person. One would presume that the canonical status of members of secular institutes would be considered to be consecrated seculars, secular consecrated or ordained consecrated, but this is contrary to the canon.

It is understandable that the nature of the consecration by sacred bond in secular institutes is not yet clearly expressed. It took centuries for religious life to be clarified in the canonical norms of the Church. As you perhaps know, active religious institutes were only recognized as religious in 1900! Before that, they were pious associations of the faithful. Secular institutes were recognized only in

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. Comm. 12 (1980), 375, quoted in Tomas Rincon-Perez, “Commentary on Canon 712,” *Exegetical Commentary of the Code of Canon Law*, vol. II/2 (Chicago, IL: Midwest Theological Forum: 2004), 1918.

<sup>25</sup> Jean Beyer, “Life Consecrated by the Evangelical Counsels,” in *Vatican II, Assessment and Perspectives*, vol. 3, edited by Rene Latourelle (NY: Paulist Press, 1989): 78.

1947, so the nature of this form of life has yet to be fully clarified. It is known that shortly before the end of Vatican II, *Perfectae Caritatis* was changed to state clearly that members of secular institutes are not religious.

According to Fathers Basil Cole and Paul Connor, “members of secular institutes follow Christ with a lesser degree of the virtue of religion, since they normally make profession to live the evangelical counsels not by vows but by sacred promises.”<sup>26</sup> Again when it is said, “with a lesser degree of the virtue of religion,” we are speaking objectively, not with regard to the holiness of individual members. The mission of both religious institutes and secular institutes is needed to complete the perfection of the Church. In the words of Pius XII in establishing secular institutes: “although they lack some of the requirements which are necessary for the complete state of perfection, such as public vows, yet in other respects which are regarded as essentials of the life of perfection, [they] bear a close similarity to religious institutes and are almost necessarily connected with them.”<sup>27</sup>

Having considered two forms of consecrated life - religious and secular institutes - we will proceed to other forms of consecrated life in the Church. Often they are referred to as “new communities,” but this term is very imprecise. Some opine that we should speak of “ecclesial societies,” “spiritual societies,” or “spiritual families,” to name just a few suggestions.<sup>28</sup> Some look to the crisis in traditional religious life in the 1950’s, together with the spread of secularization, as

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<sup>26</sup> Basil Cole, O.P. and Paul Connor, O.P., *Christian Totality* (New York, NY: Alba House, 1997), 44.

<sup>27</sup> Pope Pius XII, *Provida Mater Ecclesia*, 12.

<sup>28</sup> Rick van Lier, *Les nouvelles communautés religieuses dan l’Église catholique du Québec, Une etude de cas: Services Myriam Beth’léhem*, (Québec: Université Laval, 1996), 102-103, quoted in Giancarlo Rocca, S.S.P., “New Forms of Consecrated Life: New Communities,” in *Consecrated Life*, English edition of *Informationes – SCRIS*, vol. 30, n. 2 (2010): 213.

the origin of new movements.<sup>29</sup> Canon 605 foresees these new forms of consecrated life, the approval of which is entrusted to the Holy See. Presently, there is an enormous variety of new forms of consecrated life.

Many of the new communities have been approved by the Pontifical Council for the Laity, although several communities desire that at least some of their members embrace the evangelical counsels. The first institute to do so seems to have been *Sequimi*, approved in 1974 as a private association. That was followed by *Memores Domini*, which is tied to *Communion and Liberation*, and the Work of Mary (*Focolari* Movement), which includes branches of common life for men and women, and the French community *Emmanuel*, which includes more than 100 priests and more than 150 consecrated persons. *Emmanuel* was recognized as a universal association of the faithful in 1992. There are many canonical problems to be resolved with these new communities. For example, what does embracing the evangelical counsels in a private association mean? Do their vows or bonds change their canonical state? Father Rocca wrote about these new communities in *Informationes*, the publication put out by the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, which preceded what we now commonly call CICLSAL or the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. Father Rocca speaks of the “difficulties tied to the education of children in the case of ‘consecrated’ parents.”<sup>30</sup> This certainly poses a problem: can married persons be consecrated as we understand that term? *Vita Consecrata* states that married persons cannot be considered to be consecrated

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<sup>29</sup> Rocca, “New Forms of Consecrated Life,” 219.

<sup>30</sup> Rocca, “New Forms of Consecrated Life,” 212-253.

persons. Is this term “consecration” being used with another understanding?<sup>31</sup>

At the recent Canon Law Society of America meeting, I attended a pre-conference seminar on new movements and associations in the Church. One of the women presenting belongs to the *Verbum Dei* Missionary Fraternity (VDMF), which she explained is an “Ecclesial Family of Consecrated Life.” There are presently six pontifically approved “families” of consecrated life but the *Verbum Dei* Missionary Fraternity is the only one that includes three branches: two branches of consecrated celibates - the female branch called, “Verbum Dei missionary women,” and the male, clerical branch called, “Verbum Dei missionary men,” - together with a branch called, “Verbum Dei missionary married couples.” I asked the obvious question: how can married couples belong to an institute of consecrated life? The presenter explained that the married couples are not associates of the institute; they are members. She was not sure how to answer my question, and said that she is struggling to clarify the governance-structure of her community. It is, however, beyond the scope of this presentation to discuss the many problems involved in resolving that enigma. Certainly, the Holy Spirit can raise up new entities in the Church that serve in ways beyond the present canonical structures. It seems very important, however, that the theological basis of such entities is developed along with juridical norms that can guide such movements.

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<sup>31</sup> VC, n. 62: “Worthy of praise are those forms of commitment which some Christian married couples assume in certain associations and movements. They confirm by means of a vow the obligation of chastity proper to the married state and, without neglecting their duties towards their children, profess poverty and obedience. They do so with the intention of bringing to the perfection of charity their love, already ‘consecrated’ in the Sacrament of Matrimony. However, by reason of the above-mentioned principle of discernment, these forms of commitment cannot be included in the specific category of the consecrated life.”

Another question unique to new communities is the incorporation of non-Catholics into such movements. The *Focolare* website, for example, had an article on Cathy Limebear.<sup>32</sup> The title of the article was: “Londoner, Anglican, and *Focolarina*.” If *Focolare* includes non-Catholics, according to present canonical jurisprudence, it must be a private association of the faithful. I could not find their canonical status on their website. Some of the presenters of the course at the CLSA said that some groups wish to remain private associations of the faithful in order to enjoy a greater freedom to expand as they desire.<sup>33</sup>

It seems extremely important that these new movements, associations, or institutes understand and properly portray the nature of their communities. Are they consecrated or not? What vows or bonds do they take? What is their canonical status? Are they a private association or a public one? Are they tending toward becoming a religious institute or a secular institute? Do they tell their prospective new members who they are? It is a tremendous disservice if this is not being done. Many young people are drawn to new forms of consecrated life or religious life. They are drawn by the Spirit and if they are meant to be within the community, they will accept the stage of formation in which the institute finds itself. The leaders of communities have a moral duty to clearly inform and educate individuals drawn to their communities.

It is also important to realize that there is a difference between an emerging religious institute and one that is already erected by the Church. Again, if a discernor is called by God to the institute, one does

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<sup>32</sup> Available at: <http://www.focolare.org/usa>.

<sup>33</sup> *New and Emerging Models of Consecrated Life*, presented at the 2015 Canon Law Society of America by Sr. Amy Hereford, C.S.J., Sr. Karla Felix-Rivera, V.D.M.F., and Christina Hip-Flores.

not have to fear that explaining the truth would deter entrance. Members of an emerging institute make private vows to the bishop and not public vows. The superior of the institute does not receive the power to govern from the Church until the institute is erected as a religious entity. These are among the critical differences that have to be acknowledged.

Having now considered consecrated life - religious and secular institutes as well as the new forms of consecrated life - there is yet another “level” of dedication to following the Lord more closely that is exemplified by societies of apostolic life. Societies of apostolic life, according to the Code, *approximate* to institutes of consecrated life. Their members, through “a bond,” strive for the perfection of charity, pursue apostolic work, and live a fraternal life in common.<sup>34</sup> The origin of these institutes can be traced back to the fourth century when St. Eusebius gathered secular priests to live with him in common under one rule.<sup>35</sup> Most of these institutes founded in earlier ages evolved into religious institutes or disappeared. St. Philip Neri established a society that fulfills the definition of present day societies of apostolic life, as well as St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac. Everything in these institutes is organized in relation to the apostolate.<sup>36</sup>

In societies of apostolic life, the three evangelical counsels are assumed through a bond established in the constitutions. They are *assumed* not *professed*, because profession is a public act. Interestingly these bonds, which are not *sacred*, as are those in secular institutes, do not incorporate the member into the institute. In societies of apostolic life, these bonds - whatever they may be - are means at the service of

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<sup>34</sup> Cf., can. 731.

<sup>35</sup> Jean Bonfils, S.M.A., “Commentary on c. 731,” *Exegetical Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*, vol. II/2, 1974.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

the apostolate; they are not the key element as in institutes of consecrated life.<sup>37</sup> We must keep in mind that if the founders of societies of apostolic life did not make vows; they believed they did not have the call or the grace to do so. They respected the diversity of the Holy Spirit's gifts.

One member of a society of apostolic life told me that they were striving to become a religious institute. I quickly responded, "Please, be who you are called to be. The Church needs you." While there are different "levels," so to speak, of institutes called to be more closely associated with the way of life of Christ, every level of institute, and every member of each body, is needed in the Church. We must rejoice in the grace that we have received and not desire any other.

The novices and I have been watching a DVD series on *Dante* by Professor Anthony Esolen. I was impressed by the answer *Dante* received when confronted with the levels of heaven. He asked *Piccarda dei Donati* if she would not wish to be in a higher level of heaven:

"Brother, our love has laid our wills to rest,  
Making us long only for what is ours,  
And by no other thirst to be possessed.

If we could wish to bide in loftier bowers,  
Our wish would jangle with that will of His  
Which hath assigned our proper place and powers; ...

And please the King that here in-willeth us  
To His own will; and His will is our peace."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 1978.

<sup>38</sup> Dante, *The Divine Comedy III: Paradise*, trans. Dorothy L. Sayers and Barbara Reynolds (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 75.

God the Father calls each of us according to His will and in following that will is our peace.

## Communion

We have now considered the objective superiority of the state of perfection of consecrated life, the various forms of consecrated life, and of those institutes that approximate to consecrated life, with their unique differences and gifts. Finally, we will return to our initial question: since the Eucharist is the heart of the Church, to what degree can one say that religious life and/or consecrated life is at the heart of the Church?

The opening lines of St. John Paul II's encyclical on the Eucharist, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* states: "The Church draws her life from the Eucharist. This truth does not simply express a daily experience of faith, but recapitulates the heart of the mystery of the Church."<sup>39</sup> The Eucharist, the body and blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ, is the constitutive reality of the Church: the Church makes the Eucharist and the Eucharist makes the Church. The Eucharist is the "source and summit of the Christian life."<sup>40</sup> Saint Thomas says that this sacrament has a three-fold significance, from which come the various names by which it is called: 1. a sacrifice because it is a commemoration of the Lord's Passion; 2. communion because, in the words of St. John Damascene, "both because we partake of [Christ's] flesh and Godhead, and because we communicate with and are united to one another

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<sup>39</sup> Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (April 17, 2003), n. 1.

<sup>40</sup> LG, n. 11.



through it;” 3. viaticum because it provides the way for us to enter paradise, for “it really contains Christ, who is full of grace.”<sup>41</sup>

Could one then say that a state of life shares in the Eucharistic mystery as closely as it partakes in the mystery of sacrifice, communion, and viaticum? As we begin this section of our presentation, I would like to explain that I agree with the documents of the Church that present consecrated life at the “heart of the Church.” At the same time, I would like to propose that there may be “levels” or degrees of being “at the heart of the Church,” and it seems to me that religious life encapsulates more closely the three-fold significance of the Eucharist as expressed by St. Thomas.

As we have seen, consecrated life is considered to partake in the “state of perfection,” because of the means it provides to enable one to arrive at the perfection of love. As *Vita Consecrata* states, living the evangelical counsels is “the most radical way of living the Gospel on this earth, a way which may be called divine, for it was embraced by him, God and man, as the expression of his relationship as the Only-Begotten Son with the Father and with the Holy Spirit.”<sup>42</sup> Living the evangelical counsels is both a sacrifice - a holocaust, as St. Thomas says - and a joy, because the counsels are *media* or channels of grace and of union with Our Lord. In this way, too, the counsels provide the means to enter paradise; they are a way, we could say, of viaticum.

Now we come to consider the most common expression of the Eucharist, that of communion. It is on this point that I see a major difference between religious institutes and secular institutes. Living the fraternal life in common is part of the essence of a religious institute.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, the Code specifies that a religious community lives in one

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<sup>41</sup> ST III, q. 73, a. 4.

<sup>42</sup> VC, n. 18.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. can. 607 §2.

house under the authority of a superior.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, each house is “to have at least an oratory in which the Eucharist is celebrated and reserved, so that it may truly be the center of the community.”<sup>45</sup> Members of secular institutes, on the other hand, “live their lives in the ordinary conditions of the world, either alone, in their families or in fraternal groups, in accordance with the constitutions.”<sup>46</sup> While members of both religious and secular institutes are encouraged to participate in the Eucharist daily,<sup>47</sup> religious are also expected to receive the Eucharist and adore the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.<sup>48</sup>

Further, the document, *Religious and Human Promotion* was the first document to call religious “experts in communion ... witnesses and architects of the *plan for unity* which is the crowning point of human history in God’s design.”<sup>49</sup> *Essential Elements* places as a criterion for acceptance into a religious community: if God’s gifts to this person “make for unity and deepen communion.”<sup>50</sup> *Fraternal Life in Community* states that for religious men and women, “fulfillment comes through their communities. One who tries to live an independent life, detached from community, has surely not taken the secure path to the perfection of his or her own state.”<sup>51</sup> As our Superior General *emerita* stated:

A call to communion with Jesus Christ is a unique and special gift. As Saint Thomas Aquinas would say, it is a super-illumination of the

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. can. 608.

<sup>45</sup> Can. 608.

<sup>46</sup> Can. 714.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. can. 719 §2; can. 663.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. can. 663.

<sup>49</sup> Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, *Religious and Human Promotion* (August 12, 1980), n. 54.

<sup>50</sup> EE, n. 22.

<sup>51</sup> *Fraternal Life in Community*, n. 25.

mind, of the intellect, which flows forth with affection and love. It is an illumination by Christ Himself, the Word of Truth, the Light of God who illuminates the human intelligence that responds to such great truth with affection. ... It is a call to communion, not only a call to work, or a “call to ministry,” as it is often named. Communion begets mission. Unfortunately, in our time persons seem to desire the mission but not the communion.<sup>52</sup>

To live the spirituality of communion demands the exercise of what our community calls - the “asceticism of participation,” the discipline of moving from “me” to “us,”<sup>53</sup> from individualism to a life lived in common where one risks entering into relationship with others. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI:

The dialogue that God establishes with each one of us, and we with him in prayer, always includes a “with; it is impossible to pray to God in an individualistic manner. ... [We] enter into the “we” of the Church that prays. And we must transform our “I,” entering into this “we.”<sup>54</sup>

Objectively speaking, the norms governing religious life provide for living the spirituality of communion in daily life: religious live a fraternal life in common with the presence of the Eucharist as the center of their communities and their lives.

Can we then conclude that religious life is at the “heart of the Church”? Objectively, religious life provides all the means capable of

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<sup>52</sup> Mother Mary Quentin Sheridan, R.S.M., January 4, 2008.

<sup>53</sup> Religious life is the place where the daily and patient passage from “me” to “us” takes place, from my commitment to a commitment entrusted to the community, from seeking “my things” to seeking “the things of Christ.” *Fraternal Life in Community*, n. 39.

<sup>54</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience, October 3, 2012.

impelling the members more deeply into the Eucharistic mystery through the evangelical counsels (sacrifice), fraternal life in common (communion), and a certain detachment from the world (viaticum). The other forms of consecrated life partake in this mystery, but do not contain all the elements that support a fully Eucharistic way of life in the same way. Again, this can only be said in an objective sense; it is certain that not all religious attain this dimension of holiness. In conclusion, we can only thank the Lord for the gift of religious life in the Church and strive to fulfill our mission in communion.

# Scriptural Understanding of a Prophetic Vocation

MOTHER MARY TIMOTHEA ELLIOTT, R.S.M.

## Old Testament Background

It has become almost commonplace to speak about consecrated life as a “prophetic” call in the Church. But, there seems to be some confusion as to the meaning of this expression. What does it mean to be a prophet? What is a prophetic call? And how is it realized in the Church?

In order to explore these questions, we need to return to the primary source of the concept of the prophet - namely to Sacred Scripture, and there trace the origins and development of the prophetic call and mission. My approach here today will be to focus upon the Scriptural concept of prophets and prophecy, to draw comparisons with the consecrated life and vocation, and to facilitate your reflection and discussion.

### *Terminology with Respect to Prophets*

The Old Testament has three words or expressions to refer to the person we call a “prophet.” The first, in chronological time is *hozeh*. Quite literally the word means “a seer.” The verb *hazah*, from which it

is derived, means to “see profoundly, in depth, to have a vision.” While much of the literature on the early stages of prophecy in Israel would categorize and then dismiss the “seers” as mere clairvoyants (to use a modern term), there is more to be said. These early prophets had a deeper vision than most people; they were frequently consulted because of their capacity to predict the future - wars, famine, recovery from illness, or certain death. The *hozeh* were deeply in touch with the world of nature, of human events, and the supernatural world; and they were able to bridge all three. But the *hozeh* were not unique to Israel. There were other prophets of this nature in the diverse cultures of the ancient Near East. In Israel they disappeared as a distinct group rather early, and the term *hozeh* itself rarely appears (cf. 1 Sam. 9:9, 11).

A second term for prophet and by far the most common one, is the *nabi'* (masculine) or *nabi'ah* (feminine). These were prophets in the strict sense, in and for Israel. These men and women were called by God to stand in a special relationship with Him. They were empowered to speak His Word and to disclose His will for His people. The *nabi'im* (prophets) at times lived in groups or guilds (cf. 1 Sam. 10:5-16). A prophet of singular stature (like Samuel) would gather other prophets around him as disciples, and they would live a common life together, usually in a place on the periphery of a city or village. At other times they lived alone as solitary hermits and moved about as God would lead them. Elijah and Elisha are typical examples.

The *nabi'* often were part of the royal household like Nathan (cf. 2 Sam. 7:1-17) and Gad (cf. 1 Sam. 22:5) who were part of the household of David. They were called upon by the kings of Israel to make known the Lord's will in difficult times. The fact that they ate at the King's table need not inhibit their confrontation with a ruling monarch when his will or behavior ran contrary to God's will and Covenant Law. Nathan for example, confronted David with sins of

adultery and murder (cf. 2 Sam. 12:1-25) and Gad rebuked David for taking the census of Israel (cf. 2 Sam. 24:11 ff.). Prophets also formed part of the temple personnel where they sometimes performed a role in the official cult or worship. It is in this sense that Miriam, the sister of Moses, was called *nabi'ah* as she composed the Song of the Sea and led the Israelites in that great song of praise, playing her tambourine and dancing on the opposite shore after the miraculous passage through the sea in Exodus.

At other times they spoke an oracle revealing the will of God in the temple setting. We think here of the prophetess Huldah who was consulted by King Josiah when the Book of the Law (Deuteronomy) was discovered in the temple treasury during his reign. She set in motion one of the great reform movements in the History of Israel (cf. 2 Kgs. 22:11-23:27; Jer. 7).

A third and final manner of referring to the prophets, particularly during the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries before Christ was *'ish ha'elohim* (the man of God). This expression came into use in Northern Israel during a time when there were numerous false prophets, prophets of the Canaanite religion. To distinguish the true prophet from the prophets of Baal, the expression *'ish ha'elohim* came into use. We find it particularly in the stories of Elijah and Elisha. Elijah was a fierce prophet who stood alone against the 450 prophets of Baal that Queen Jezebel brought from Tyre when she married King Ahab. These 450 prophets ate at the King's table and told him what he wanted to hear. The "man of God," however, could not be "bought." He was God's man, who relentlessly spoke God's word and fought for his rights in the face of the idols introduced to Israel (cf. 1 Kgs. 18:20-40).

We have then three words and three concepts with respect to the prophets. They are *hozeh*, that is, "seers"; *nabi* "spokesmen" for God; and *ish ha'elohim*, the man of God" identified thoroughly with

His will. It is the second term *nabi*’ which the Greek Bible, the Septuagint, translated *prophetas*, “one who speaks for another,” a spokesman, that gives us our word “prophet.” When we use the term prophet, we must include in our mind all three concepts of seeing deeply, being a visionary, and a person who belongs totally to God.

## Elements of the Prophetic Call in the Old Testament

The Biblical accounts of prophetic calls follow a relentlessly similar pattern. There are nine elements which are usually found in a call narrative (although the order may not always be the same).

1. A call comes to an individual in a time of historical crisis. At times when the people of God need particular guidance, He raises up a prophet. In the various accounts we note that Moses, the greatest of all the prophets, was called when the Hebrew nation was enslaved in Egypt, the victim of a program of genocide; Gideon was called when Midian threatened the existence of the southern tribes; Isaiah came on the scene in the Assyrian crisis; and Jeremiah during the Babylonian crisis.

2. The prophet was engaged in some very ordinary, day-to-day activity when the call came. Moses was tending the sheep of his father-in-law Jethro (cf. Ex. 3:1); Amos was also tending sheep (cf. Am. 7:15); Gideon was threshing wheat (cf. Jgs. 6:11); Isaiah was worshipping in the temple (cf. Is. 6:1); Hosea was about to be married (cf. Hos. 1:2).

3. Each one of these persons was deeply identified with his people, his nation, and the crisis of the time, and spoke about it in their dialogue with God. Examples: “Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips, living among a people of unclean lips” (Is. 6:5); Jeremiah’s identification with his suffering country, “My anguish! My anguish! I writhe in anguish! I writhe in pain! Oh, the walls of my heart! My heart



is beating wildly: I cannot keep silent; for I hear the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war” (Jer. 4:19).

4. In this setting God speaks. There is an encounter with God, the experience of the transcendent: “And the Angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in a flame of fire out of the midst of the bush; and he looked and lo, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed” (Ex. 3:2). “In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and His train filled the temple. Above Him stood the seraphim; each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory’” (Is. 6:1-3).

5. God calls His prophets by name. In the Biblical accounts that name has a great deal to do with the mission and the message of the prophet. God calls, “Moses, Moses!” *Mosah* means drawn from (the water). Moses was drawn from the water as a baby by Pharaoh’s daughter, and he will bring his people through the water to freedom. The Angel of the Lord addresses Gideon, “The Lord be with you, you mighty man of valor” (Jgs. 6:12). Gideon will be called to lead his people to victory over the Midianites. Ezekiel is addressed as, “Son of Man, stand up here!” (Ezek. 2:1). This prophet will be called to stand up (frequently as a pantomime artist) and reveal the judgment of God against his people who have forgotten that they are mere men, mere dust of the earth.

6. The prophet is sent as a messenger of God to His people. Here there are two words that amount to a formal commissioning of the messenger to speak on behalf of God. They are the two words *halak* (go) and *salah* (send). God says to Moses, “Go, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt”

(Ex. 3:10). To Gideon He says, “Go in this strength of yours and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian; do I not send you?” (Jgs. 6:11-14).

7. The call narratives generally record some resistance on the part of the prophet-to-be. Moses cried, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?!” (Ex. 3:11). Gideon responds, “Pray Lord, how can I deliver Israel? Behold my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family” (Jgs. 6:15). Jeremiah cries, “Ah ... ah ... ah Lord God! Behold I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth” (Jer. 1:6). Isaiah alone volunteers with his bold “Here I am Lord, send me!” but soon realized how difficult his task would be and asked, “How long, O Lord, how long?” (Is. 6:11).

8. There is a reassurance on the part of God and usually it comes in the simple words, “I will be with you” (Ex. 3:12; Jgs. 6:16; Jer. 1:8).

9. Finally, God gives a sign to the prophet that it is truly He who calls, a sign that verifies to the prophet that it is God’s word and not his own that he will speak. To Moses God says “... and this will be a sign to you: when you have brought forth the people out of Egypt you shall serve God upon this mountain” (Ex. 3:12). Gideon boldly asks for a sign, and then another, and then another ...” (Jgs. 6:17-18, 36-40; 7:9-15). For Isaiah, one of the seraphim brought a burning coal from the altar and cleansed his lips (Is. 6:6). God touched the mouth of Jeremiah and said, “Behold, I have put my words in your mouth” (Jer. 1:9).

## The Functions of the Prophet

There are many functions of the prophet and of prophecy. In this short time we will focus on a limited number. The primary function of the prophet is “to bear the Word of God.” Before the prophet could bear God’s Word, be His messenger, he had first of all

to “hear” it profoundly. Second Isaiah speaks of this experience: “Morning by morning He wakens my ear, and I was not rebellious, I turned not backward” (Is. 50:4-5). This Word of God was a tangible reality for the prophets, it pressed in upon them, absorbed all their emotions, and they made it their own. Jeremiah speaks of his experience of receiving the Word at the beginning of his call in this way: “When I found your words, I devoured them; they became my joy and the happiness of my heart because I bore your name, O Lord God of Hosts” (Jer. 15:16). Later, he weeps in the pain of his call with yet another experience of the Word: “Whenever I speak, I must cry out, violence and outrage is my message; the word of the Lord has brought me derision and reproach all the day. I say to myself I will not mention Him, I will speak in his name no more. But then it becomes like fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones; I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it” (Jer. 20:8-9). The prophet is impelled to speak the Word of God, not his own word, and only when God provides that Word.

At the same time that the prophet is the spokesman for God, frequently articulating a message of judgment for the sins of the nation, he is also the one who intercedes for the people and pleads their cause with God. The image of Moses praying with arms outstretched, supported by Aaron and Hur comes to mind (cf. Ex. 17; 10-17; Num. 14:12-19) or Amos pleading before the vision of an invasion of locusts or a judgment by fire: “Cease! Forgive! Lord God! How can Jacob stand, he so small” (Am. 7:2-5). Jeremiah tells God that he has been a faithful prophet fulfilling his role as mediator/intercessor: “Remember that I stood before You to speak in their behalf, to turn your wrath away from them” (Jer. 18:20). “Tell me, Lord, have I not served You for their good: Have I not interceded with You in time of misfortune and anguish? You know I have” (Jer. 15:11). Thus, the second function of the prophet

is to be a mediator, an intercessor between God and his people. This function is realized primarily through prayer, the prayer of intercession.

The third function of the prophet has to do with Tradition, in the best sense of that word. The Word of God includes the promises spoken to the patriarchs, the experience of the Exodus, the giving of the Covenant and the Law - in other words, the collective memory of the People of God. This living Tradition was seized upon by the prophets in order to interpret the present and to point towards the future. The creative genius of the prophets was in being able to take hold of the authentic Tradition of Israel, and to energize it by applying it freshly to the present moment. Hans Walter Wolff, in his book *Anthropology of the Old Testament* notes that the Hebrew word for future is 'ahare, literally, what is behind. He explains this puzzling expression by using the analogy of going fishing. When one gets into a rowboat and takes up the oars, one's back is to the direction you want to go, what is behind you. What the prophets did was to explain God's plan for the future by looking to the Traditions of the past. They looked intently upon their historical traditions in order to project the future. Thus, they could speak of God's fidelity to His promises in terms of an "ideal king" to come, of renewed relationship after total infidelity as a "new covenant," of the return from the Babylonian Exile as a "new exodus." The new realities always surpassed the old, but they were in continuity with those authentic moments of encounter with God in the past. In reinterpreting the traditions, they came to deeper insights as to their original meaning, energized them, and brought them forward to illuminate the present moment.

The fourth function is to "live as a sign." The Word of God so possessed the prophets that all that they did and all that they were became an articulation of that Word. Often "living the Word" was the

most powerful of all messages. Hosea's marriage, filled with love and passion, with infidelity and abandonment, of anger and forgiveness, of rejection and compassion, became the living sign of God's love for His people (cf. Hos. 1-3). Isaiah and Micah walked naked and barefoot through Jerusalem, like prisoners of war; Isaiah was for three years a dramatic sign of what would happen to the inhabitants if they relied upon the instruments of war rather than upon the grace and power of God to deliver them from the power of Assyria (cf. Mic. 1:8; Is. 20:2-4); Jeremiah lived the sign of his celibate life (cf. Jer. 17). In the midst of the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, he purchased a field as a sign of his confidence in the future of Judah (cf. Jer. 32). Ezekiel was struck dumb by God (cf. Ezek. 3:22) and pantomimed his prophecies regarding the destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation of her inhabitants.

A fifth function of the prophets is the unmasking of the idols, revealing them to be non-gods, and abolishing them. Sometimes the idols are of mankind's own making - a golden calf (cf. Ex. 32) or figures in wood or stone (Is. 44:9-20). They might be the fertility gods of the Canaanites (cf. 1 Kgs. 18:20-40), or "trust in chariots and horses" to deliver a nation from the judgment of God. The king, the temple ("... the Temple, the Temple, the Temple of the Lord" Jer. 7:4) and the land itself became idols used to control and to limit God so they had to be destroyed. Time and time again the prophets insisted upon the absolute holiness of God. They evaluated all human institutions and behavior in light of this ultimate measure.

A sixth function of prophets is to witness to the "big picture" to what we might call *ultimate realities*. The prophets take the long view of the plan of God unfolding in time. They see all nations on the earth entering into this plan, all serving as instruments of revelation, judgment, discipline, and most of all, *salvation*. What appears as

human tragedy can be transformed into occasions for revealing God's mercy, his greatness. Even deportation and exile become means of evangelizing the nations, revealing his Holy Name to the ends of the earth. The prophets see that God is continuously creating something brand new, his rule, his kingdom. He is calling to conversion. And all the while the prophets bring God's truth to bear upon the present moment, frequently pronouncing judgment and woe, their prophecies are equally filled with fierce professions of faith and songs of joy. They do not hesitate to break into hymns of praise and thanksgiving, into celebrations of wonder over all that God is accomplishing in redeeming his people.

This brings us to an end of my summary of the Old Testament's insights into the nature and function of prophets and prophecy.

## New Testament Continuity

### *Mary, Queen of Prophets*

In the Piazza de Spagna in Rome, there is a magnificent monument in honor of Mary, the Immaculate Conception. It was erected there on the occasion of the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in 1854. The monument is an extremely high pillar, perhaps 6 or 7 stories high, upon which is mounted a lovely statue of Mary, arms outstretched, crowned with twelve stars, and standing upon the serpent. At the base of the stone column sit the prophets of the Old Testament, gazing up to her.

The feast of the "Immaculata" is a feast dear to the Roman people; it is a national holiday. From 6:00 a.m. onwards through the entire day, the many little streets surrounding the piazza are teeming

with thousands of people who come in processions from parishes, various organizations, as families, or as individuals. Everyone brings flowers. At 6:00 a.m. the street cleaners come as a group, carrying over their heads and shoulders an enormous blanket of blue and white carnations. They wrap it around the base of the monument like a mantle and sing their hymn. Next, the firemen come. They raise a tall ladder and place a wreath of flowers around the outstretched arms of Mary and sing their tribute. All day the people come, placing their flowers there, singing and praying the rosary. At 5:00 p.m. the Holy Father comes and lays a wreath of red roses at her feet and prays and sings with the people.

All day the figures of the prophets at the base of the statue loom larger than life, watching ... at the center of it all. Those figures set me to thinking about the title which we find in the Litany of Loreto, "Mary, Queen of Prophets, pray for us." *In what sense is Mary the Queen of the Prophets?*

If you were alert as I enumerated the various elements of the prophetic call narratives and their functions, you probably are already making the connections.

1. The call comes at a crisis moment in history. Historically, Mary's call came from God when pagan Rome dominated the Middle East, and Israel in particular. Paul, writing to the Galatians says, "When time had fully come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law" (Gal. 4:4).

2. The person is involved in everyday affairs when the call comes. Luke tells us the Mary lived in a small town named Nazareth and she was betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph. (cf. Lk. 1:26)

3. The person is totally identified with their own people, their concerns, etc. All four Gospels present Mary as one who is totally

identified with the town of Nazareth, with Joseph the carpenter, with her relations and neighbors (Mt. 13:55; Mk. 6:3; Jn. 2, 6:47).

4. The encounter with God, with the supernatural world: “The Angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph of the House of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said...” (Lk. 1:26-27).

5. The person/prophet is called by name, a name that has something to do with the mission. “Hail, O Highly favored one!” (*Chaire Kecharitomene*, “Rejoice! You who have been transformed by grace.” or “You, who have been established in grace.”

6. The giving of a mission: “Behold you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus” (Lk. 1:31).

7. Resistance or question on the part of one called. Mary asks the angel, “How shall this be, since I have no husband?” (Lk. 1:34).

8. Reassurance: “The Lord is with you” (Lk. 1:28b). “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God” (Lk. 1:30). “The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you” (Lk. 1:35).

9. The giving of a sign. “Behold your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible” (Lk. 1:36-37).

Mary’s response is an assent to her call. “Behold I am the Handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to your word” (Lk. 1:38). Mary applies the Greek word *doule* (handmaid, servant, slave) to herself. It is the feminine form of the term *doulos*, frequently referred to the prophets, especially to Moses (the servant of the Lord). It is the word God addresses to his own prophetic “Suffering Servant,”



called to collaborate in his plan of salvation (cf. Is. 49:3). Luke clearly presents Mary to us as a prophetess.

One final word may be added here. Mary's response to her call resembles to some degree the joyful cry of Isaiah, "Here I am, send me!" Luke employs the optative form of the verb **genoito**, "let it be done." The optative form of a verb expressed a strong wish or desire. It is not a passive resignation on Mary's part, ("well, all right, let it be done" or even in the sense of Jesus' similar prayer in the Garden of Gethsemani, "Not my will but thine be done." *This is a joyful embrace of the call, full of desire: "Oh, let it be!"*)

## How Does Mary Fulfill the Functions of a Prophet?

Bearing the Word of God: Clearly Mary fulfills this function in a pre-eminent way. Hers was not a commission to "speak" the Word, but to clothe the Word in flesh (cf. Jn. 1:14), to give a body to the Eternal Word of God. The Gospel of Luke presents her as contemplating the Word, pondering it in her heart (cf. Lk. 2:19, 52), hearing the Word and putting it into practice (cf. Lk. 8:21).

Intercession: In the fourth Gospel, Mary is present as an intercessor at the wedding feast of Cana. It is her intercession over the lack of wine that initiates the public ministry of Jesus (cf. Jn. 2:1-5). Her intercession results in the disciples coming to see his glory, to believe in Him.

The Gospels say nothing about Mary's prayer at Calvary, but having heard her Son's cry "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do," we cannot doubt that this was her prayer also. After the death and resurrection of Jesus we find her again in prayer, this time with his disciples interceding for them, praying for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (cf. At. 1:14).

Bringing the religious traditions of the past to bear upon the present moment: The *Magnificat* is an excellent example of this function of prophecy. Based upon the Old Testament prayer of Hannah (cf. 1 Sam. 2), the *Magnificat* brings this prayer forward in time and adapts it to the unique and wonderful encounter between Mary and her kinswoman Elizabeth, weaving into it the major themes and promises of the old covenant with the joy and wonder of their present fulfillment.

Living as a sign: Each of the Gospels present Mary to us as a sign, whether that sign is that of a “perfect disciple” who lives the fullness of evangelical life and values, as one who is the sign of the “New Eve” bringing a renewed humanity to birth or as the new Ark of the Covenant.

Unmasking the idols: Mary, standing at the foot of the Cross, fulfills this function of prophecy in an extraordinary way. She stands with her Son, truly knowing Him and submitting with Him to the whole plan of the Father for the salvation of the world. All those who have lived intimately with him during his public ministry, those who had their dreams of power and glory based upon selfish preconceptions of a Messiah conformed to their own limited vision were gone.

Witnessing to the big picture: Mary fulfills this aspect of prophetic life in several ways. In the infancy narrative of Matthew, she is presented as a “still point” in the midst of converging crises. In Luke’s infancy account she is seen as focusing the promises made to the patriarchs, to Abraham and his descendants, to David and his descendants. Her habit of “pondering all these things in her heart” maintains the contemplative view of what God is doing and what it all means. Like Miriam of old, she spontaneously breaks into a song of joyful praise in recognition of God’s saving work.

## Jesus, Embodiment of the Line of Prophets

With the Incarnation of Jesus, *the* Word of God, the floodgates of prophecy were opened. Zachary's lips were opened and he began to prophesy about the mission of his son, John the Baptist (cf. Lk. 1:67-79). Elizabeth, his wife, prophesied in her encounter with Mary the mother of Jesus (cf. Lk. 1:41-45). Simeon and Anna prophesied about Jesus when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple (cf. Lk. 2:29-35).

Matthew's Gospel consistently presents Jesus as a new Moses, the greatest of all the prophets, and fulfilling the Messianic prophecies of all the prophets. His infancy narrative parallels the infancy of Moses in many respects: 1.) Pharaoh's attempt to kill the infants of the Hebrews // parallels Herod's attempt to slay the Jewish children under two years of age; 2.) the flight from Egypt and Pharaoh in the Exodus // parallels the Holy Family's flight into Egypt to escape Herod's wrath; 3.) Israel a corporate figure in Old Testament prophecy: "Out of Egypt I have called my son" (Hosea 11:1b) // parallels Jesus presented as "new Israel" who undergoes the same temptations as Israel in the Old Testament and triumphs in the account of the Temptations in the Desert (cf. Mt. 4:1-11). 4.) There are five lengthy "sermons" of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel paralleling the five books of the Torah attributed to Moses. 5.) The first of these sermons is delivered "on the Mount." Moses went to Mount Sinai to receive the Law // parallels Jesus gives the new Law from the Mount of the Beatitudes. 6.) Moses tells the Israelites that God will feed his people in the wilderness with bread from heaven (manna) // parallels Jesus feeds the people in the wilderness by the multiplication of the loaves. 7.) On Mount Tabor Jesus is transfigured in the presence of Peter James and John. He is speaking with Moses and Elijah, two of the greatest prophets.

Luke makes the connection of Jesus and Elijah, the prophet, even stronger. At the beginning of his Gospel, the angel Gabriel appears to Zachary in the temple as he is offering incense and announces that he and Elizabeth are to have a child in their old age. Zachary disbelieves and as a consequence is struck dumb until “all these things come to pass.” Consequently he cannot bless the people who are waiting outside when he leaves the holy place (cf. Lk. 1: 18-23). At the end of the Gospel, (cf. Lk. 24:50-53) Jesus imparts a blessing to his disciples as he ascends into heaven. One immediately recalls the passage in 2 Kgs. 2:9-12 where before Elijah is taken up in the fiery chariot, he asks Elisha what he shall do for him before he is taken from him. Elisha responds, “I pray you, let me inherit a double share of your spirit.” Elijah responds, “... If you see me as I am being taken from you, it shall be so for you ...” Elisha witnesses Elijah’s departure. In the Gospel account of the ascension of Jesus, the disciples witness Jesus being taken up. They return to Jerusalem and remain in prayer until the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost (cf. Lk. 24:50-53).

As we read and hear the four Gospels proclaimed throughout the liturgical year, the elements of the prophetic vocation and the functions of the prophets can be noted frequently. The Father’s voice is heard identifying Jesus as his “Son,” his “well-beloved” and Mary and Joseph in their vocational call are told to name him “Jesus” which means “Savior.” Jesus constantly lives and preaches in intimate union with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Jesus calls his disciples by name. Simon, he called Peter; James and John the sons of Zebedee he called “the sons of thunder” (*Bo-anerges*); the other Simon he called, “the Zealot” (Mk. 3:13-19a). He called them to “be with him” and to preach, to heal and to cast out demons; their mission was to prepare the people for his coming. The call and conversion of Paul illustrates the elements and functions of a prophet

dramatically. Now, in the Church, by baptism, we receive the three-fold responsibility to be “priest,” “prophet,” and “king” in our various states of life.

## The Prophetic Function of Consecrated Life

It is time now to look at consecrated life in light of these foundational observations. All the examples that have been given thus far have been taken from cases of individual prophets and prophetesses since they are much more obvious. However, we have to recognize that from the beginning, groups, that is, communities, were called to be prophetic. Some of the “spirit” was taken from Moses and bestowed upon the seventy elders of Israel and when the spirit rested upon them they began to prophesy (cf. Num. 11:24). Now these seventy elders were to have an administrative service to Israel. They were to be judges and arbiters for the people. Israel perceived those bearing the service of authority for their communities as prophetic! There was not the severe and sometimes forced dichotomy (and incompatibility?) that some in the post Vatican II Church would have us believe exists between an authority/hierarchical structure and a prophetic/charismatic reality.

It is true that the prophetic persons were frequently obliged to call the king, the priests, the sages, and even other prophets to lives of truth and holiness. But they were never the total “outsider.” Prophets came from priestly circles (Jeremiah and Ezekiel), from among the sages and councilors of Kings (Isaiah). Some were business men and politicians (Amos and Micah), some were married (Hosea), some were widows (Anna; cf. Lk. 2:36-38), widowers (cf. Ez. 24:15-18), and at least one was celibate (cf. Jer. 16). All lived within their communities and deeply identified with them.

The primary prophetic service of consecrated religious is to “bear the Word of God.” From *Perfectae Caritatis* onwards, the Council and post-Conciliar documents have admonished and pleaded with religious to take the Sacred Scriptures in hand daily - to develop a Biblical way of prayer, a Biblical spirituality. *Dei Verbum*, chapter 6, urges us to establish every catechetical program and to base parish and diocesan programs upon Sacred Scripture. We have an obligation to “bear the Word” in our lives.

Intercessory prayer is a basic prophetic activity, one that the prophets of old took very seriously. The apostolic constitution *Laudis Canticum* for the promulgation of the new Divine Office speaks about the Liturgy of the Hours as a prayer of intercession for the Church. It also accents another aspect of this prayer as “prophetic” in that, “By offering praise to God in the Hours, the Church joins in singing that hymn of praise which is sung through all eternity in the halls of heaven. Her song of praise is a foretaste of that heavenly praise which resounds unceasingly before the throne of God and the Lamb.”<sup>1</sup>

Every effort to return to the best “traditions” of our founders and foundresses and to “energize” them by bringing what is most authentic to bear upon the present is a prophetic function. Future directions will come out of creative internalization of these “traditions.”

Consecrated life, publicly professed, is meant to be a sign to the Church and to the entire world. A radical living of the evangelical counsels is a sign to the Church. In one of the post-Conciliar documents, there is a line that says, “A religious is meant to be a sign of the power of grace working in a human life.” Too often we tend to

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<sup>1</sup> Apostolic Constitution promulgating the Revised Book of the Liturgy of the Hours, *Laudis Canticum* (November 1, 1970).

think of the prophets as just very angry people. That is certainly not the whole picture. More than that, they are people in whom God's holiness makes a tremendous inroad, and consequently they have a great impact on the lives of others. The result of abandoning themselves to God is *joy, faith, and persistent hope*. Their lives are attractive to others, calling forth a similar response.

Consecrated life is prophetic when it unmask the idols of contemporary society by expressing the purity of Gospel values in a common life. In fact, the effort to live a truly common life unmask the idols we personally carry around.

Finally, consecrated life is prophetic when it witnesses to the big picture - when it reaches beyond the concerns and preoccupations of an individual institute, diocese, and country, to embrace the joys and sorrows of the entire Church, the entire world.

# The Prophetic Witness of Secular Institutes

DANIELLE M. PETERS

In his very last words directed to the Council Fathers on December 7, 1965, Paul VI reminisced:

... [the Council] took place at a time which everyone admits is oriented toward the conquest of the kingdom of earth rather than that of heaven; ... a time in which the fundamental act of the human person ... tends to pronounce in favor of his own absolute autonomy, in emancipation from every transcendent law...<sup>1</sup>

These serious farewell words spoken nearly fifty years ago pointed to a crisis identified in *Gaudium et Spes* as “the birth of a new humanism.”<sup>2</sup> Like every birth, the new humanism is a gift; yet - as we already know from hindsight - it was, is, and will not be exempt from birth pangs and growing pains.

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Paul VI, “Address during the last General Meeting of the Second Vatican Council” (December 7, 1965).

<sup>2</sup> Second Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes* (December 7, 1965), n. 55. According to *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 54 this new humanism is necessary due to the profound social and cultural changes of post modernity.



## Provida Mater Ecclesia

Just as the religious communities were an answer to the needs of a particular time and naturally continue to be of essence today, so at this critical junction in our time *Mother Church Provides (Provida Mater Ecclesia)* a new branch to the consecrated life, the secular institutes, charged as the advanced wing of the Church ‘in the world’ to shape it and keep it holy, as from within like “a genuine leaven.”<sup>3</sup>

When the Apostolic Constitution *Provida Mater Ecclesia* (PME)<sup>4</sup> was first published in the *L’Osservatore Romano* of March 14, 1947 - i.e. six weeks after its promulgation on February 2 - the front page introduced it as a “historical document for the inner life of the Church.”<sup>5</sup> Together with the official promulgation of the Latin text, an accompanying article in Italian commented on the significance of the Constitution which added “a new jewel in the crown of the Church ... thereby complementing, as it were, the concept of the state of perfection in the Church.”<sup>6</sup>

*Provida Mater Ecclesia* defines secular institutes as “Societies, clerical or lay, whose members make profession of the evangelical counsels, living in a secular condition for the purpose of Christian perfection and full apostolate.”<sup>7</sup> Recent statistics reveal that worldwide

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<sup>3</sup> PC, n. 11. Cf. Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church, *Ad Gentes*, n. 40.

<sup>4</sup> Pope Pius XII, Apostolic Constitution concerning Secular Institutes, *Provida Mater Ecclesia* (February 2, 1947). Its first part recalls the gradual development of the norms for the state of the counsels. The second part introduces the Law of the secular institutes.

<sup>5</sup> *L’Osservatore Romano*, 87 (1947), 1. The Italian text reads: “Storico documento nella vita interna della chiesa.”

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.6 “... creando perciò una terza categoria intesa, per così dire, a completare il concetto di stato di perfezione operante nella stessa chiesa.”

<sup>7</sup> This was confirmed by Pius XII’s *Motu Proprio Primo Feliciter* (1948) and by the Sacred Congregation for Religious’ Instruction *Cum Sanctissimus* (1948); it was sanctioned by the Code of Canon Law 1983, canons 710-730. Priests do not lose their intrinsic relationship with

approximately 60,000 members have responded to this vocation in one of more than 200 secular institutes of pontifical or episcopal status, twenty-six of which are represented in the United States.<sup>8</sup>

The term ‘secular institute’ is often misunderstood or gives reason for ambiguous notions. Some may view secular institutes as a compromise between religious life and the laity, characterizing it as a more or less fortunate adaptation of the traditional religious life to post-modern exigencies. By so doing, this newer branch on the tree of the consecrated life cannot be fully appreciated.

## The Distinctive Role

In light of this, let us focus on the “distinctive role, the new factor [secular institutes] bring to today’s Church.”<sup>9</sup> In an address to participants of the Italian Conference of Secular Institutes, Pope Francis summarized their ‘newness’ as follows:

You are part of that poor Church which goes out and which I dream of! As a vocation, you are lay and priestly like others and among others; you lead an ordinary life, free from outward signs, without the support of community life, without the visibility of an organized apostolate or specific works. Your only wealth is the all-encompassing experience of God’s love and thus you are able to understand and

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the world through their ordination. By joining a secular institute, they either remain incardinated in their diocese under the jurisdiction of their local ordinary, or they are incardinated in an institute with its own superiors.

<sup>8</sup> The United States Conference of Secular Institutes, canonically erected in 1976, meets regionally and has an annual national meeting. The purpose of the conference is to make the vocation known, to share information, to assist groups aspiring to be secular institutes, and to promote research.

<sup>9</sup> Pope Paul VI, “A New and Original Form of Consecration,” Address to the Leadership of Secular Institutes (Castel Gandolfo, September 20, 1972), 8.

share the toils of life in its many expressions, infusing them with the light and power of the Gospel.<sup>10</sup>

Extemporaneously the Holy Father added:

“The good you do for the Church is very great, it is done with courage; for one needs great courage to live in the world. Many of you are alone ... some of you live in small communities. Every day you live the life of a person in the world, and, at the same time, retain contemplation. [You] contemplate reality ... contemplate the beauty of the world as well as the great sins of society ... and always in spiritual tension.”<sup>11</sup>

The spiritual tension of which the Holy Father speaks here points to our living “in this world” (Jn. 17:11) while at the same time being “not of this world” (Jn. 17:14).<sup>12</sup> Without the security of convent walls, a habit, and community life, and with a minimum of bindings, the consecrated secular faces the constant challenge of what “Jesus demands of all his disciples: a radical ‘out’ of the world in order to stake everything for Him and to be able thus to be sent ‘into’ the world, equipped with the message of heaven in a more radical way.”<sup>13</sup> In order to safeguard and inspire this fundamental calling of all the baptized, members of secular institutes radicalize their baptismal consecration through a commitment to the three evangelical counsels (cf. canon 712) which in the words of Paul VI should be so genuine as to confirm

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<sup>10</sup> Pope Francis, Address to Participants in the General Assembly of the Italian Conference of Secular Institutes (Vatican, May 10, 2014).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. can. 714.

<sup>13</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Das Wagnis der Säkularinstitute,” *Internationale Katholische Zeitschrift Communio* 10 (1981): 240.

that “deep down in (their) hearts the world becomes consecrated to God.”<sup>14</sup>

## Bridge Builders

Each sphere of life, each moment of the day is an opportunity for a consecrated secular to build bridges between nature and supernature, church and world, laity and religious. Von Balthasar observed that this bridge building which was dared with secular institutes “is pretty bold, almost audacious, to some this form even appears like a *wooden iron*.”<sup>15</sup> In his view, this apparent paradox is possible as long as consecrated seculars are committed to continuing the dialogue between Mary, the first consecrated secular, and the Triune God, which von Balthasar describes as “the growth of the world in total gift to God, authentic worldly profession in Christian consecration ..., the fruitfulness of God in man.”<sup>16</sup> I am a member of one of the five pontifical Schoenstatt secular institutes, the Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary. Our founder, Father Joseph Kentenich (1885-1968), liked the image of a suspension bridge, which for him metaphorically describes the consecrated secular who strives for high ideals without much visible support. Just as the main load-bearing elements are hung

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<sup>14</sup> Pope Paul VI, “On the 25th Anniversary of the Apostolic Constitution *Provida Mater Ecclesia*: A Presence and an Action Which Will Transform the World from Within.” (February 2, 1972). “The condition in which you live, your life description in human society becomes your theological self and your way of bringing salvation into the realm of reality for all the world to see ... Consecration on the other hand, indicates the intimate and secret carrying structure of your being and acting ... Here is your deep and hidden wealth, which the people around you cannot explain and often cannot even suspect.”

<sup>15</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Das Wagnis der Säkularinstitute,” 239.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Juan M. Sara, “Secular Institutes according to Hans Urs von Balthasar,” *Communio* 29 (Summer 2002): 333. Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 24. See also: Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Our Task* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994).

from cables from above, so is the heart anchored in God and Our Lady the only reinforcement and safety for a consecrated secular.<sup>17</sup> Such a heart is set in an oscillation, i.e. in the encounter of God's need and the world's need for love. At the intersection of these two needs, their ecclesial commission enables and obliges consecrated seculars to return filial human love to the Father from the heart of the world, in union with the Son, and to return fraternal divine love to all they meet, with the Son, to the glory of the Father.<sup>18</sup>

Canon 712 authorizes each secular institute "to establish the sacred bonds by which the evangelical counsels are assumed." As with religious institutes and congregations, "the form of binding is "stable ... either perpetual or temporary but to be renewed at its expiration." Father Kentenich likened the evangelical counsels to the supporting pillars of the suspension bridge.<sup>19</sup> While most secular institutes take vows, members of the Schoenstatt Institutes sign a contract with the institute to which is connected an ascetical consecration to the Triune God through Our Lady. This form of binding corresponds with the mind of our founder who chose secular ties for his institutes which "the laity can adopt under normal circumstances."<sup>20</sup>

To live in the world and to be seriously committed to a life of holiness takes a vocation different from that of religious life. A careful selection and formation of candidates aims at the affective maturity of

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Joseph Kentenich, "Nordamerikabericht: Auf Dein Wort hin werfe ich die Netze aus" (1948). Partly published in Joseph Kentenich, *Philosophie der Erziehung*. Prinzipien zur Formung eines neuen Menschen- und Gemeinschaftstyps (Vallendar-Schönstatt, 1991): 111. Ibid, *Gedanken zur juristischen Bindung der Schönstatter Säkularinstitute* (Milwaukee, 1961, not published): 107.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Juan M. Sara, "Secular Institutes according to Hans Urs von Balthasar," 321-322, especially footnotes 35 and 36.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Joseph Kentenich, "Nordamerikabericht," 74. Ibid, *Brasilien Terziat*, II (Santa Maria, Brazil: 1952): 122.

<sup>20</sup> Herta Schlosser, "Die Schönstatter Säkular Institute," *Dialog* 6, nr. 32 (1968): 25.

personalities who need to be aware of the values they renounce and those they assume. Serving the world at large - the macrocosm - presupposes vigilance and nurturing of one's inner world - the microcosm - which carries in its DNA the genes of the new humanism described in *Gaudium et Spes*. To remain untouched by the spirit of the world presupposes in the first place self-knowledge and the readiness for continuous conversion and generous reaching towards Christian ideals. Each institute in the spirit of its specific charism takes care that "members are skillfully trained in matters both human and divine."<sup>21</sup> High-mindedness, coupled with the capacity to be adaptable to the circumstances and needs of others, makes us, in the words of Pope Francis, resemble "*antennas* ready to receive the smallest innovations prompted by the Holy Spirit" and to transmit them to "the heart of the world with the heart of God."<sup>22</sup> Like antennas, which at times function also as lightning rods, continues Pope Francis,

... your vocation makes you *interested* in every man and in his deeper issues which are often left unexpressed or masked. ... Thus, you can be close enough to *touch* the other, his wounds and his expectations, his questions and his needs, with the tenderness that is an expression of care that erases all distances.<sup>23</sup>

Pope Francis considers this "a vocation which is spot on, where the salvation not only of people but of the institutions is at stake."<sup>24</sup> The Holy Father expressed his "hope that [we] will always retain this attitude of going beyond, not only beyond, but beyond and

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<sup>21</sup> PC, n. 11.

<sup>22</sup> Pope Francis, Address to Participants in the General Assembly of the Italian Conference of Secular Institutes (Vatican, May 10, 2014).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

in between. There, where everything is at stake: politics, the economy, education, family ... precisely there!”<sup>25</sup> This takes courage and in the mind of the Holy Father it is at once “fascinating” and “revolutionary”!<sup>26</sup>

As I conclude I would like to highlight something that seems evident: each branch on the tree of the consecrated life serves the Church with a specific gift and way of life. We are not competing with one another but are meant to strengthen and cherish one another in our uniqueness. Let us therefore pray for one another specifically during the general intercessions of Holy Mass, when we pray for vocations not only to the religious life but to the consecrated life, confident that the Lord will send workers to his Church in order to meet the needs of the new evangelization (cf. Mt. 9:37-38).

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Ibid.

# The Prophetic Witness of a Life of Consecrated Virginity Lived in the World

MARY KAY LACKE

One of the beautiful fruits of the Second Vatican Council was the restoration in 1970 by Pope Paul VI of the ancient Rite of Consecration to a Life of Virginity for Women Living in the World. The 1970 restoration of this rite opened a whole new witness in our contemporary world that very much resembles ancient Rome's virgin martyrs who witnessed with their lives the beauty and strength of belonging exclusively to Christ, no matter the cost.

Today, consecrated virgins join the ranks of so many and varied forms of consecrated life, focused on Christ, Bridegroom of the Church and dedicated to His mission from the cross to draw everyone to Himself (cf. Jn. 12:32). Yet, in a very real way, consecrated virginity lived in the world is a form of consecrated life that predates all other forms of consecrated life now present in the Church.

The restoration of the vocation of consecrated virginity seems to be one important expression of the Second Vatican Council's mission to bring the Gospel message anew into the world. Pope John Paul II confirmed the place of this vocation of virginal chastity in the heart and structure of the Church by specific inclusion in the 1983 Code of Canon Law<sup>1</sup> as well as in other pastoral documents. In his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, he wrote,

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. can. 604.



It is a source of joy and hope to witness in our time a new flowering of the *ancient Order of Virgins*, known in Christian communities ever since apostolic times. Consecrated by the diocesan bishop, these women acquire a particular link with the Church, which they are committed to serve while remaining in the world. Either alone or in association with others, they constitute a *special eschatological image of the Heavenly Bride and of the life to come*, when the Church will at last fully live her love for Christ, the Bridegroom.<sup>2</sup>

What distinguishes the vocation of consecrated virginity lived in the world is that, although she may associate with other consecrated virgins, the virgin lives *singularly* the gift of virginity she has received, united as spouse to her Divine Bridegroom and as an icon of the Church, Bride of Christ. The *praenotanda* to the Rite of Consecration opens by explaining that the virgin is consecrated "... a sacred person, a surpassing sign of the Church's love for Christ, and an eschatological image of the world to come and the glory of the heavenly Bride of Christ."<sup>3</sup> The consecrated virgin lives this vocation in the context of her diocese and her local parish in the midst of her work or other setting of which she is a part. She witnesses by her life to the love of Christ, her Spouse, and by her participation in His mission, in the unique way that she is able.

## 1995 Anniversary Celebration with Pope John Paul II: Witnesses to the Espousal Love of Christ

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<sup>2</sup> VC, n. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Rite of Consecration of a Virgin for Women Living in the World* (May 31, 1970).

In 1995, Pope St. John Paul II celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the restoration of the Rite of Consecration at an international conference of consecrated virgins living in the world. In his address, he exhorted them to love Christ:

... as He desires to be loved in your concrete life: 'If you love Me, you will keep My commandments' (Jn. 14:15; cf. 14:21). Love Him as is fitting to your spousal condition: assuming His same sentiments (cf. Phil. 2:5); sharing His way of life consisting in humility and meekness, love and mercy, service and joyful availability, untiring zeal for the glory of the Father and the salvation of the human race.<sup>4</sup>

The pope exhorted the consecrated virgins to recognize the prophetic witness they were called to give when he shared with them the radical nature of their "*sequela Christi*" as he stated: "The following of the Lamb in Heaven (cf. Rev. 14:6) begins on earth, walking down the narrow path (cf. Mt. 7:14). Your *sequela Christi* will be more radical, the greater your love is for Christ and the more lucid your awareness of the meaning of virginal consecration."<sup>5</sup>

He recalled his reflection on consecrated virginity in his Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*<sup>6</sup> wherein he stated that consecrated virginity expresses the radical nature of the Gospel, which consists in leaving everything and following Christ. Later on in his remarks, he recalled the teaching of the Fathers of the Church, saying,

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<sup>4</sup> Pope John Paul II, International Conference of Consecrated Virgins, "May Christ Be Your Total and Exclusive Love," (June 2, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. MD, n. 20.

... in receiving from the Lord the ‘Consecration of Virginity,’ virgins become a visible sign of the virginity of the Church, the instrument of its fruitfulness and witness of its fidelity to Christ. Virgins are also a reminder of the orientation of the Church towards the future goods and a warning to keep this eschatological tension alive.<sup>7</sup>

Reflecting on the outward expression of the virgin’s union with Christ, her Spouse, Pope John Paul II adds,

It is also the task of virgins to become an active hand of the generosity of the local church, the voice of its prayer, an expression of its mercy, a help for its poor, a consolation for its afflicted sons and daughters, and a support for its orphans and widows. We could say that at the time of the Fathers, the pietas and caritas of the Church were expressed in great part through the heart and hands of consecrated virgins.<sup>8</sup>

## Living out the Espousal Relationship with Christ

What Pope St. John Paul II expressed in his address to the consecrated virgins is at the heart of the vocation of the consecrated virgin as experienced in her everyday life. The key to her prophetic witness is Christ’s spousal relationship with her. From that relationship flows the witness of her life. Each consecrated virgin living in the world has her own milieu in which she lives her vocation. She expresses her love and devotion to her Heavenly Bridegroom, in union with the Church, as Bride of Christ, in various ways. Many virgins are engaged in active professional lives, particularly in education and health care.

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<sup>7</sup> Pope John Paul II, “May Christ Be Your Total and Exclusive Love.”

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

Some are directly engaged in Church-related occupations and others witness in a variety of secular fields.

Central to the life of the consecrated virgin is the Holy Eucharist, the Liturgy of the Hours, and the sacramental life as well as contemplative prayer. Her work within and outside the home is not just a means to support herself but a context in which to reflect her spousal relationship with Christ. Many times that reflection is in sharp contrast to the society around her which quite often does not have any appreciation for her life, even finding it worthless. Yet her primary witness is in living faithfully her consecration. She strives to present Jesus as Spouse to a world desperately in need of this witness. In union with Mary, her Mother, the consecrated virgin is called to live a life of discipleship of Christ, intercession, compassion, and empowerment in the Holy Spirit.

As consecrated virgins share formal and informal associations with each other, it is very edifying to hear about the ways they are reaching out in local communities and also witnessing through their lives in the society around them. The following are a few examples of outreach and witness.

One consecrated virgin developed a ministry for the dying and elderly poor, establishing a home for them called the “Mother Teresa House.” What started out for this consecrated virgin as a part-time work developed into a full-time ministry, staffed almost completely by volunteers. It is not only an outreach but also a prophetic witness to the sacredness of human life and the value of the human person, no matter the economic position or age of the person. Her vocation as a consecrated virgin was the impetus for her to develop this ministry.

While still the Dean of Evangelization at Franciscan University of Steubenville, I experienced a similar fruit of this vocation when the Lord inspired me to reach out to a widow in Steubenville,

living in a very poor section of town, who had been taking care of orphaned and abandoned children since she was eighteen years old. What began as a singular outreach on my part, has developed into a non-profit, fund-raising organization called the “Friends of Widows and Orphans” to help financially support the outreach begun in 1996. This continues to be a real blessing for the many people who became personally involved in this ministry and witness to the sanctity of human life, nurtured from infancy to adult life.

Quite a number of consecrated virgins are involved directly or indirectly in pro-life ministries around the country. This seems to be a natural expression of their vocation as consecrated virgins.

# The Prophetic Witness of Societies of Apostolic Life

SISTER ANNE MARIE WALSH, S.O.L.T.

I would like to introduce this short reflection with an excerpt from *Vita Consecrata*, in which Pope St. John Paul II speaks specifically and beautifully about societies of apostolic life. He says:

Also worthy of special mention are *Societies of Apostolic Life* or of common life, composed of men or women. These pursue, each in its own particular way, a specific apostolic or missionary end. In many of them, an explicit commitment to the evangelical counsels is made through sacred bonds officially recognized by the Church. Even in this case, however, the specific nature of their consecration distinguishes them from Religious Institutes and Secular Institutes. The specific identity of this form of life is to be preserved and promoted; in recent centuries, it has produced many fruits of holiness and of the apostolate, especially in the field of charity and in the spread of the Gospel in the Missions.<sup>1</sup>

I begin this way because societies of apostolic life are not well understood and tend, more often than not, to be defined from the negative. As sisters we often hear, “You’re not religious. You don’t have religious vows, so you shouldn’t be wearing habits. You shouldn’t call yourselves consecrated spouses of Christ.” The list continues. Some of

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<sup>1</sup> VC, n. 11.

this is simply untrue and some of it simply needs further explanation and clarification.

It is important to begin by saying that societies of apostolic life have their origin in Christ, as do all institutes of consecrated life: religious institutes, secular institutes, consecrated virgins, and hermits. The calling to become a member of a society of apostolic life is a divine vocation. The Church clearly recognizes this and affirms it by giving societies of apostolic life a distinct juridical status and yet places them alongside institutes of consecrated life which they “resemble.”<sup>2</sup> The Church affirms societies of apostolic life as a way of life founded in the Gospels which leads to the holiness and perfection of its members and the furtherance of the mission of the Church in the world at large. It is important that the distinct status of societies of apostolic life be maintained in order to ensure a certain flexibility to the founders and foundresses in following the divine inspirations given them.

Here it is helpful to look at the origins of societies of apostolic life. In a commentary on the Code of Canon Law, Sr. Sharon Holland, I.H.M. says:

A glance at history helps explain the charismatic and juridic identity of societies of apostolic life and why the Code dedicates a distinct section to them. Two broad periods are identifiable: The first includes the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the second takes in the mid-nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. Many of the best known societies from the first period were founded in France where widespread poverty and misery were compounded by the

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<sup>2</sup> Can. 731 §1. “Societies of apostolic life resemble institutes of consecrated life; their members, without religious vows, pursue the apostolic purpose proper to the society and, leading a life in common as brothers or sisters according to their proper manner of life, strive for the perfection of charity through the observance of the constitutions.”

attitude of a society little disposed to assist its poor. These were the circumstances that gave rise to the Oratory of Jesus and Mary Immaculate under the guidance of Pierre de Berulle in 1611, the Company of Priests of Saint Sulpician founded by Jean Jacques Olier in 1642, and the Congregation of Jesus and Mary founded by Saint John Eudes in 1643. Two other great societies of the first period are the Congregation of the Mission founded by Saint Vincent De Paul in 1625 and the Daughters of Charity founded by Saint Vincent and Saint Louise de Marillac in 1633. What was new in Saint Vincent de Paul's vision was the accent on mission.<sup>3</sup>

Speaking of the second period, Sr. Sharon Holland indicates there were many "diverse foundations but, most frequently, new societies were founded for the missions abroad. These included the Society of African Missions, the Missionary Society of Saint Joseph of Mill Hill, the Missionaries of Africa (the White Fathers), the Maryknoll Foreign Mission Society and the Missionary Society of Columba. Also founded during this period, but with a scope broader than the foreign missions, was the Society of the Catholic Apostolate (Pallottines, 1835)."<sup>4</sup>

Societies of apostolic life typically took on apostolic works at a time when such works were not recognized as proper to religious women who tended for the most part to be cloistered. It is worth noting, especially for founders or foundresses of women's societies, that the ideal of consecrated life, specifically the perfection of charity, was their aim but that they did not want to be limited to the restrictions placed on religious orders at the time, especially in regards to mission.

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<sup>3</sup> John P. Beal, James A. Coriden, Thomas J. Green, (Eds.), *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law: Study Edition* (New York: Paulist Press International, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.



To reflect upon what it means to live apostolic life in common with other members who have been called to the same vocation, it is helpful to turn to Fr. Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P. Father Garrigou-Lagrange explains,

In relation to this perfection which consists in charity we distinguish three forms of human life: the contemplative life, the active life, and the apostolic life. Contemplation studies divine truth; action serves our neighbor; [the apostolic life] gives to our neighbor the fruits of our own contemplation.”<sup>5</sup> He further notes, “... the perfect apostolic life, as exemplified in the apostles and their successors presupposes plenitude of contemplation, which itself advances by the gifts of knowledge, understanding, and wisdom, which make faith penetrating and attractive.”<sup>6</sup>

Father Garrigou-Lagrange continues:

“Perfection,” St. Thomas continues, “lies principally in love of God, secondarily in love of neighbor, and only accidentally in the evangelical counsels,” obedience, chastity, and poverty, which are unprescribed instruments of perfection. Hence perfection can be attained without literal observance of the counsels, in the state, say, of matrimony, though the spirit of the counsels, i.e., detachment from worldliness, is necessary for perfection in any state. The advantage of literal observance of the counsels lies in this: they are the most sure and rapid road whereby to reach sanctity.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., *Reality: A Synthesis of Thomistic Thought* (Ex Fontibus Co., 2015), 288.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 287.

This is one reason why many apostolic societies, ours included, have some form of profession of the evangelical counsels. The holiness of the members is key to the apostolic mission or purpose of societies.

The point that I stress here is that apostolic life is a contemplative-active way of life, rooted in the very life of Jesus Himself and the apostles. It also exemplifies the life of Our Lady, who was the perfect disciple of Jesus. To live apostolic life well requires a maturity and the keeping of a balance that can often be challenging to maintain amid the pressing rigors of mission today.

Mission, or a specific apostolic goal, is one of the central orientations of societies of apostolic life, again, in imitation of Jesus who was sent into this world to save the lost and reunite us all as one family of our Father.<sup>8</sup> Although not all societies of apostolic life assume the evangelical counsels by a form of bond, as do members of institutes of religious life, they all strive for the perfection of charity through the observance of their constitutions. Again Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange helps us here:

Love of neighbor, though secondary in value when compared to love of God, is nevertheless first in the order of time, because love of our neighbor, who is the visible image of God, is the indispensable first proof of our love for God. Our Lord says, “By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love one for another.”<sup>9</sup>

Saint Vincent de Paul, one of the great founders of societies of apostolic life, said of the Daughters of Charity that “they should be free to ‘leave God for God.’ If the poor arrive even during prayer, the

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. can. 731.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Daughter of Charity should feel free to leave the conversation that she is having with the Lord in prayer in order to converse with the Lord in the person of the poor.”<sup>10</sup> Saint Vincent gave many conferences on prayer to the Daughters of Charity and clearly believed many of his daughters were already contemplatives, though – for the most part – they were just simple, uneducated, country girls.

Because of the diversity found among societies of apostolic life, the way of life in a given society is defined in great part by its proper law, though societies do also rely on certain canons governing institutes of consecrated life. Fidelity to the intent of the founder or foundress determines the direction of the community and how the life is lived. This fidelity is always a primary key in evaluating works, development, fraternal life in common, formation of members, and the specific apostolic or missionary end.

Father Robert P. Maloney, C.M., 23rd Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission (1992 to 2004), identifies some common characteristics of the spirituality of societies of apostolic life. They are: 1. “The holiness of their members, their being grasped by God, is intrinsically bound up with their apostolic mission.” 2. “Their growth in God’s life also flows from the bonds of deep charity forged with their own brothers and sisters in community.” 3. “The prayer of apostolic societies, a crucial element in their spirituality, has its own particular dynamic, flowing from and leading to action.” 4. Liberty 5. “... deeply incarnational, rooted in the enfleshed humanity of Jesus.”<sup>11</sup>

At this point, a concrete example of the founding of a current society of apostolic life may be helpful. I will use our own community.

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<sup>10</sup> Robert P. Maloney, C.M., “The Spirituality of Societies of Apostolic Life,” *Vincentiana* 41, No. 6, Article 9 (1997). Available at: <http://via.library.depaul.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2108&context=vincentiana>.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

The Society of Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity worked with canon lawyers in the various dicasteries of the Holy See for decades, looking for a juridical form that best fit the unique vision of our founder, Fr. James Flanagan. We were founded originally as one family comprised of priests, religious, and laity, each sharing equal membership according to our states in life.

In our common life and mission, we try to make manifest a Trinitarian vision of relationships. Our founder saw that one of the marks of the modern world was the breakdown of relationships. He also saw that the answer that God gives to heal those relationships is living Trinitarian relationships as Our Lady did, as family. Our vision is to bring all peoples into union with the Most Holy Trinity, and to bring all people to become one family of our Father. That is why we exist; that is our goal. We do this through our charism which is living as disciples of Jesus through Mary, living in Marian-Trinitarian communion and serving on ecclesial family teams (that is, teams comprised of all the vocations) in areas of deepest apostolic need. Working in this vision requires a deeply spiritual life, but it is a spirituality of communion to which the Church herself calls all of us in this third millennium.

The structure of our community posed somewhat of a problem for the dicasteries particularly in relationship to the laity. It was discerned that apostolic life fit us best, and we were constituted as two separate societies of apostolic life: the Priests Society and the Sisters Society, with the laity aggregated to the Priest Society of Apostolic Life. In order to protect and preserve our common vision, charism, and mission: our patrimony, decision-making, planning, and coordination in missions and apostolates is carried out by structures that unite the vocations. These are the joint general servants council and the joint regional servants councils. They are comprised of the general servants,

or superiors, of each vocation and their councils, with the same structure operating at the regional level.

You can imagine that as sisters striving to live a relationship with the Lord in the context of our spiritual family, we do not easily fit into all of the regular canons that govern institutes of consecrated life. The flexibility that is needed because of our relationship with the other vocations came to us through the juridical form of apostolic life and on many other levels, apostolic life beautifully expresses our way of life.

It is characteristic of founders of societies of apostolic life, including the great saints St. Philip Neri, St. John Eudes, St. Vincent de Paul, St. Louise de Marillac and others, to aim for the living out of the perfect life of Our Lord in the world today according to the unique demands of that age. We hold that to be our aim, as well.

Father Robert Maloney refers to this when he suggests that one of the characteristics of the spirituality of societies of apostolic life is liberty. He says:

A first striking sign of liberty in one's spirituality is availability and mobility. Almost all apostolic societies had their origins in a need that cried out and that their founders heard. The societies were the advance troops going in to meet that need. With the obedience characteristic of the times, members went from place to place quickly, willingly, and joyfully ... Jesus' call resounded in their ears: "Go! Go into the whole world and preach the good news to every creature" (Mk. 16:15). Today as the Church repeatedly calls us to a new evangelization - new in its ardor, new in its methods, new in its expression - availability and mobility are all the more important.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

You can see that the prophetic witness has been a part of the genesis of societies of apostolic life and continues to mark them. This certainly is a part of our own calling in going into areas of deepest need with an inspired vision for the healing of relationships today.

I hope this has been helpful in deepening your understanding of societies of apostolic life and giving you some insight into their nature and prophetic witness. Thank you for your kind attention. May Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity obtain abundant blessing for all of you.

# The Mercy of God in My Life

SISTER ANN SHIELDS, S.G.L.

Good evening. I have prepared a talk. But, as I've been praying about this talk tonight, I felt like it was necessary to discard what I had written and, instead to speak to you from my heart.

As I begin, let me say that this gathering is one of the greatest joys of my life - to see so many vibrant communities here in this room. I've lived in religious life throughout the '50s, '60s, '70s, '80s, '90s, up to today ... We have gone through some pretty rocky times, pretty difficult times, haven't we? So, it's a joy to me, a great joy, to see so many faithful women present who love the Lord and who desire to follow Him. GOD IS FAITHFUL!

I'm going to talk to you about a section from *Vita Consecrata*, which you have in front of you; you can refer to it, not just this evening, but, hopefully in the days and weeks ahead. I will refer to *Vita Consecrata*, section 17 which speaks about the meaning of the call to consecrated life. It is an initiative coming wholly from the Father - wholly from the Father - who asks those whom He has chosen to respond with *complete and exclusive devotion*. That's italicized - *complete and exclusive devotion*. The experience of this gracious love of God is so deep and so powerful that the person called, senses the need to respond by unconditionally dedicating his or her life to God, consecrating to Him all things present and future, and placing them in His hands. This is why we come, with St. Thomas, to understand the identity of the consecrated person, beginning with his or her complete self-offering as comparable to a genuine holocaust.

I want to share with you tonight how that became very real in my life, and what it meant for me that there was a genuine holocaust, although it's still incomplete. But I want to share with you where I am.

I entered religious life in the 1950s, so I'm somewhere between my 57th and 58th year of religious life. I began to live that life, as did most of us, very idealistically. When we are 17-18 years old and enter religious life, we have high ideals of what we are going to do for God. We try to do everything right. We're formed and sometimes reformed, and sometimes re-reformed, but eventually we get there. If we follow the rules and do what's asked, then we are and will be good religious. That, in summary, is how I perceived the process.

I did genuinely love the Lord. In hindsight, I had no real understanding of what that truly meant. I tried to be as faithful as I could to follow what the community taught, and it taught some very good things. But then we entered the '60s and many questions began to be asked in religious life: questions about authority, dress, living situations, service. As a result, we entered a period of great turmoil and difficulty that has lasted for a long time. I want to tell you what happened to me in that time because I want you to see what I think God might be asking of each of us. That is, I am not suggesting that you go through what I went through. Rather, I ask you to ponder what I learned. All I want to do is pass it on to you and to ask you to reflect on what I learned and whether it corresponds to your journey with God in consecrated life.

In the 1960s, in the community that I was part of, we suffered through issues such as the purpose of vows and common life, issues of authority in the community and in the Church, issues of women in the Church. As a result, faith in God for some and certainly for me became very weak. It was very, very difficult. I had been taught, of



course, to obey my superiors, and when your sisters who are much older than you speak positively of something you know is not orthodox, you're faced with a great challenge. I was faced with a number of them. I persevered, I spoke up. I was elected to Chapters. I did everything I knew to do. I finally realized that I could no longer assent to their agenda, and that cost me greatly, as you can imagine.

In the late 1960s, I remember a particular day. It was as though I went from living to dying. I entered a great depression, a very, very hard time in my own personal life. I received some very good counseling and got through it. Nevertheless, there was still a tremendous heaviness in my soul. I realized that what had happened was I had lost my faith in God. This is very personal, but this is what happened to me. One day, I was standing in the convent and I was looking out the window and said, "God, if you exist, please do something; if you exist, please help me." And sisters, I turned to walk out of the room. As I did, I walked directly into what I would describe as a man's chest. Literally, I could see nothing. I thought perhaps I was really losing my mind, and I stepped back, and I walked forward again, and the same thing happened. I was alone in the room. It was a parlor on the main floor. And then I, not audibly, but in my spirit, I clearly heard these words: "Don't you know I've been with you all the time?" And my answer was "No, I didn't."

And those few seconds of encounter enabled me to persevere. That alone enabled me. If God existed, then there was a way out of this depression. I was able to persevere for the next two or three years. By now we were entering the '70s, and an older sister who had been very good to me during those years, almost like a silent, wonderful companion, said to me, on a Friday night, "Do you know what? They're having a prayer meeting at the seminary." And I thought, "Oh, one more 'new' thing." She said, "I would love to go." How

could I say no? She had been so good to me. And so I said, “All right, we’ll go.” I was not at all impressed. Nobody knew what they were doing. Nobody knew what they were singing. It was the beginning of the Catholic charismatic renewal. The very next day she came to me and she said, “Do you know they’re having one next Friday?”

It was 23 miles up the mountains in Pennsylvania in the winter. And she asked, “Would you take me?” I couldn’t say no. She had been so very good to me. And so the second week, and then the third week, and coming home from the third week, after crying out to God all these years for help, I found myself saying: “Lord, I want to give my life to you in a way I never have before, but I don’t know what that means, because you received everything in my vows. I don’t understand this.” Yet the longing in my heart was growing almost hour by hour, although it was not inspiration from the prayer meetings.

Yes, in the early prayer meetings, nobody even knew what songs to sing. Father Michael Scanlan was rector of the seminary and he was the one who had started the prayer meeting. None of us knew one another and we certainly didn’t know this “new” music. Father was teaching and leading us, working off mimeographed sheets!! Do you remember mimeograph?

So, in short, there wasn’t any external reason to be inspired, but this hunger and thirst continued to grow. Finally, after another two weeks, I called a cloistered Carmelite sister with whom I had been in high school. I didn’t know that they, too, had been praying with the charismatic renewal for a baptism in the Holy Spirit. I said to her, “Is there any chance I could come and visit you and you could pray with me?” And she said, “Come at two o’clock.” I remember thinking, “Wow, I never thought I’d get in to see a cloistered sister that fast.”

So I went up the mountain again, and I went to this cloistered convent, and she sat down on the other side of the grille. We prayed for a few minutes and then she said to me, “What do you really want?” and I said, “I don’t know. I want to give my life to God in a way I never have before, and I don’t know what that means. He has my whole life through my vows! I know God exists. That’s what I’m clinging to, but I don’t know what it means to give my life more to God.” And she said, “Why don’t you just tell God that?” So right there, I said, “God, I want to give you my life in a way I never have before, but I don’t know what that means. Amen.” That was my prayer.

I went back down the mountain. I was teaching high school at the time. I was directing plays, and there was play practice, so I was caught up in a lot of activity. I came home from practice and I went into the chapel, as I always did, to make a little visit. As I knelt down in the chapel I just said, “Lord, if you heard my prayer, please do something. Please do something.”

In my spirit I was still clinging, by my fingernails, as I left the chapel. I walked up the steps on my way to correct papers and as I walked up those steps, on one particular step, it was as though somebody took a pitcher of water and poured it over my head. But it wasn’t water. It was joy. A joy flooded my being. And in my typical cynical fashion, I thought, “Well, this won’t last.”

That’s exactly what I said - “This won’t last.” I climbed to the top of the steps and I said, “God, if this is you, what is it? What are you doing?” And again, not audibly, but in my spirit, very clearly, “This is my Holy Spirit.” Sisters, I have to tell you, in 45 years, it has *never left me*. It ebbs and flows but it’s never gone. It is the joy which comes from the Holy Spirit in my soul. I am forever grateful for what

He has done for me in my poverty and weakness and sinfulness. It is HIS MERCY! I am forever grateful.

That encounter resulted in some major changes. It meant leaving that religious community which resulted in the loss of very good relationships. It meant beginning anew in another community. It meant some very challenging, difficult times. Through it all, though, that joy has never gone.

I've spent my life in those years saying to the Lord, "Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you that you exist, that you love me. Thank you that you care for me, that the sacrifice of my life means something for you. Thank you that you care. Thank you that you're here. Thank you that you're my Savior, and I need a Savior." In all these years, I have realized how frail and weak and sinful I am, and how much I need a Savior every day. I need Him, to save me yet again from myself.

God is faithful and I imagine there are many of you here who have had your own bouts, your own valleys, your own deserts. God is utterly faithful. And yet it is through that desert, that cross, that crucifixion, that He reveals Himself. When it gets very dark, don't doubt Him. You don't have to go through all I went through. Just don't doubt Him. He strips in order to reveal Himself. He strips in order to reshape and refashion us, because He loves us more than we can even begin to understand. He loves you, each of you. Scripture tell us He numbers the hairs on our head. He knows us intimately, through and through. He knows what it is in us that keeps us back from deeper and ever deeper union with Him.

Some of you have heard me tell the story of a very good friend of mine. She was talking to me one day about what she thought God might want from me, and I was absolutely opposed. She said to me, "Who do you think you are, the vice president of creation?" And I

said, “Yes. God would do well to listen to me.” I was half joking but, obviously, half clinging to my will, clinging to my way.

So those things are there, those ups and downs, those moments of battle, those moments of unwillingness to yield my will to God. But look what it tells us. The experience of this gracious love of God is so deep and so powerful that the person senses the need to respond by unconditionally dedicating his or her life to God, consecrating to Him all things present and future, and placing them in His hands. This is why, with St. Thomas, we understand the identity of the consecrated person, beginning with his or her complete self-offering as being comparable to a genuine holocaust. He will ask that of all of us if we’re willing to walk that path with Him. He can be seen and known and loved within us, and we become literally light in the darkness. We become transparent, but it can only come by dying.

I learned, in religious life, that there is a rule for doing everything. That’s fine because you are becoming part of a new family. You’re learning new things and that’s fine. But it’s so easy to stop there. I’ve conformed. I do what I’m asked to do. I’m teaching. I’m nursing. We can get ourselves into a box where we say, “I’m fine. I’m doing everything. Give me the checklist.” But we’re not really surrendering our wills to Him. We’re not going the extra steps that lead to sanctity. I am not a saint, but hopefully, I am on the path. I don’t want any of us to settle for less than what God has for us, but it costs everything!

I remember one day I came across the passage in Lamentations 3. This passage is one of my favorites, so I come back to it again and again and again: “But this I call to mind as my reason to have hope: the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, His mercies never come to

an end; they are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness. ‘The Lord is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘therefore I will hope in Him.’”

Sisters, we’re living in a world that’s growing darker. I’m not a prophet of doom and gloom. This is just reality. We’re living in a society that’s growing darker, a society that’s casting God to the periphery. *We need to be seen*. Christ needs to be seen in us and it’s going to come by our death to self. I’m in the middle of dying to self: I want with all my heart to be able to say yes to Him, every day, yes to what He asks, yes when I like it and yes when I don’t like it, because it draws me to Him. He becomes more evident. He becomes more visible. He can work through me. He doesn’t need my gifts and talents. He gave them to me. He will use my gifts. I belong to Him; I’m His. I am no longer my own.

St. Paul said it: “do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body” (1 Cor. 6:19-20). To glorify Him is the purpose of our lives. Isaiah 66:1-2 is another passage that I think upon a lot, where the Lord says, “Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me and what is my resting place? All these things my hand has made, and so all these things are mine, says the Lord. But this is the one to whom I will look, to the humble and contrite in spirit, who trembles at my word.” Listen to those words: *the humble and contrite in spirit, who trembles at my word*. In other words, those who put His will first in their daily lives. This is how we become the holocaust God can use for His glory and the salvation of many.

He loves us more than we know. He loves us more than we can imagine. There is joy that cannot be quenched. He loves you, and he wants your whole heart. He wants everything you are and everything

you have. All these different communities, all the different charisms, all the different gifts, if they come through a living holocaust, then God can change the world. The world can be changed because I died to myself. I died to what I wanted and when I wanted it. Please understand me. I'm not saying there isn't a place for discussion, for conversation, for compromises. All that kind of thing has a place. But what I'm getting at is your own heart. How willing are you to die for Him? That's the question that faces us this year. You see, God wants to be light in our darkness. It's not my light. Mine's just a little glimmer, a match. But God wants to be light in the darkness and he can't be light in our darkness unless we're willing to die to those things that darken our lives, step by step and piece by piece. That's what it costs, but oh, my goodness, what's the reward? Eternal union with love itself. Truly!

CMSWR offers many plans and programs and all of them are needed, but if your heart and mind aren't in the palm of God's hand, the programs are good for a time and then they die. But if we die, if we're willing, God can use us powerfully. He can change the world.

There are two ways [of living consecrated life] that are very, very important. The one is the vows. Am I living poverty? I'm doing what I'm told, but where is my heart? I'm living now what I've committed myself to, but where is my heart? Am I coveting? Am I looking for things? Am I looking for titles? Am I looking for privileges? Am I looking for degrees to enhance who I am? There's a place for all of these things, but what's going on in my heart? How poor am I really? How much is Jesus Christ the one treasure of my life?

We cannot have a nice discussion as a community and learn the answer to these interior questions. Rather, I think it means prostrating ourselves before God and saying, "I've given you my life.

I've vowed to be poor for your sake. Am I living it? What do you want of me?" Ask Him. Chastity: Is my heart really exclusively given to God? My body may be, but is my heart? Is my mind? Is my spirit? There's a lot of evil coming in at us. For example, there are 130 or maybe even more million free pornographic sites accessible to anybody. We're flooded with it. It comes at us from all sides. There are lonely days. There are hard days. There are fatiguing days. Do my heart and my body really belong to Him? Am I chaste for His sake? I think we have to be honest and look at ourselves. And obedience: Obedience is done with Christ, in Christ, for Christ. Obedience sets you free. It's a paradox. To be obedient from your heart will set you free. I don't know how else to say it, but it works.

How poor, chaste, and obedient am I? Do I check off my list - I'm poor, chaste, obedient? I've done it, I've fulfilled what the requirements are? Or am I poor, chaste, and obedient in the sense that I want God to be everything for me? I want Him to have full access to me. I want to be poor, chaste, and obedient for Him. I want Him to own my heart. I want Him to possess my body, my soul, my spirit. And I want to be obedient to Him because Jesus Himself said, "I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father" (Jn. 14:31). I want my obedience in union with Christ so that the world may know I love the Father.

Is your relationship with God like that? That's what God wants, and that's the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the love between the Father and the Son. He is love. And that Holy Spirit dwells in you by Baptism and Confirmation. The desire of the Holy Spirit is to unite you in love with the Father and the Son. Jesus Himself tells you in John 14: "I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father." Sisters, there is a world that God created. God wants to reshape us and, yes, even at my



age, reform us, day in and day out until we're more and more conformed to His image and likeness. And when we do, things change.

I'll give you one very good example. I have often prayed the prayer of Cardinal John Henry Newman from Great Britain. A portion of the prayer may be familiar to you. "Shine through me and be so in me that every soul I come in contact with may feel Thy presence in my soul. Let them look up and see no longer me but only Thee, O Lord!" Several years ago, I had had a pretty bad accident, and my left arm and wrist had to be rebuilt with titanium and were encased in a very large cast. On a particular morning some weeks after the accident, I was driving to work. I noticed that I was almost out of gas, so I pulled into a nearby gas station. I got out to pump the gas and the overhang had a hole in it. It was March; cold rain and snow were coming through. There was no other available pump. I went into an inner tirade: "For heaven's sakes, you'd think somebody would know how to manage a gas station," I thought to myself. I was going a mile a minute, and worked myself into righteous indignation.

I had to go inside to pay, so I marched myself over to the door. I had my hand on the handle of the door when I clearly heard God say to me, "Remember who you are." It was as clear as a bell. I stopped. I said, "Lord, I am your daughter. I'm the spouse of Jesus Christ, and you deserve better from me." So I took a deep breath and opened the door. I was the only one in the gas station at that moment. There was a young man behind the counter. He was Middle Eastern; I don't know if he was Muslim or Christian. As I walked towards him he leaned over the counter and whispered, "Who are you?" I looked around to see if there was another person to whom he was speaking, but there was no one...

I said, "Pardon me?" And he said, "Who are you?" and he's actually whispering. So I said, "I'm Sister Ann Shields." He whispered, "What do you do?" I said, "I do Catholic evangelism and mission work out of that office building across the street, down the block. That's where I work." And he said, "I want to make something out of my life too."

What did he see when I walked in that door? Shine in me and so be in me that all with whom I come in contact may know Thy presence in my soul. Let them look up and see no longer me but only Jesus. Me - poor, weak, sinful, broken, mad, frustrated. That moment I repented to God. I said, "God, I'm sorry. You're my Father."

I've seen it again and again and again, and other people have told me of similar things happening to them. Who are you going to meet in this hotel? Who are you going to meet on the street? Who are you going to meet in the grocery store? What do they see when they see you? God wants to use us, sisters. He wants to use our vows. He wants to use our commitment. He wants to use our love for Him so that His face may shine out in the darkness and people would stop being lost.

We are here because we want to strengthen our communities. We are here because we want to grow in knowledge of Him and love of Him, but it is also for the purpose of evangelizing. Yes, it is for the purpose of our own holiness and our sanctification, but it's also that we may bring light to a world that is growing in darkness. And so I ask you to seriously take a look and pray the Scriptures every day. The Word is a living Word. This Word has power to change you. It's one of the greatest gifts God ever gave us. Read the Word every day, and ask God for the grace to live by it. I also want to encourage you to do what John Paul II urged us to do, and that is before the Blessed

Sacrament, to adore Him. As we adore Him, let us ponder the sorrowful face of the crucified Christ.

In *Novo Millennio Ineunte*,<sup>1</sup> John Paul II urges us to read Isaiah 51-52, the Suffering Servant and the Gospel accounts of the crucifixion where we ponder the sorrowful face of Christ. He also encourages us to take time to ponder the risen Face of Christ in the Gospel accounts of the resurrection. He teaches us how, if we truly ponder and reflect, we will be touched by the Lord in such a way that we will “vibrate with the Holy Spirit” and be changed. Carefully read and ponder sections 24-35 of *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, especially. As often as you have Eucharistic adoration, take time for this “radiation therapy” as John Paul once called it and be before Him - crucified and risen. Let the grace of His life flow into you. Let Him be seen and known and loved. That is what will amaze the world. We will know that it’s not us. It is Him. May all the glory be His!

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter at the Close of the Great Jubilee Year 2000, *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (January 6, 2001).

## Contributors

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FATHER CHRISTOPHER COLLINS, S.J. is Director of the Catholic Studies Program at Saint Louis University and the Chair of the Board of the Apostleship of Prayer for the United States. His research and teaching are in the areas of Systematic Theology and Spirituality. His

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\*Pope John Paul II, May 9, 2001

\*\*Pope John Paul II, *On the Dignity and Vocation of Women*



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