

## PROLOGUE

“The Spirit, Who at different times has inspired numerous forms of consecrated life, does not cease to assist the Church, whether by fostering in already existing institutes a commitment to renewed faithfulness to the founding charism, or by giving new charisms to men and women of our own day so that they can start institutions responding to the challenges of our times. A sign of this divine intervention is to be found in the so-called new foundations, which display new characteristics compared to those of traditional foundations.

“... These [new] communities are sometimes inspired by one or other traditional form adapted to the needs of modern society. Their commitment to the evangelical life also takes on different forms, while, as a general rule, they are all characterized by an intense aspiration to community life, poverty, and prayer.” *(Vita Consecrata, 62)*

“... It is necessary to safeguard the significance of an institute’s own charism, to foster community life, to be attentive to the needs of both the universal and particular Church, to show concern for what the world neglects ... New situations of difficulty are therefore to be faced with the serenity of those who know that what is required of each individual is *not success, but commitment to faithfulness*. What must be avoided at all costs is the actual breakdown of the consecrated life, a collapse which is not measured by a decrease in numbers but by a failure to cling steadfastly to the Lord and to personal vocation and mission.” *(Vita Consecrata, 63)*

“Institutes of consecrated life are thus invited courageously to propose anew the enterprising initiative, creativity and holiness of their founders and foundresses in response to the signs of the times emerging in today’s world ... all must be fully convinced that the quest for ever greater conformity to the Lord is the guarantee of any renewal which seeks to remain faithful to the institute’s original inspiration. In this spirit there is a pressing need today for every institute to *return to the rule* since the rule and constitutions provide a map for the whole journey of discipleship, in accordance with a specific charism confirmed by the Church.” *(Vita Consecrata, 37)*

“There is also a need to rediscover the ascetic practices typical of the spiritual tradition of the Church and of the individual’s own institute. These have been and continue to be a powerful aid to the authentic progress in holiness. *Asceticism*, by helping to master and correct the inclinations of human nature wounded by sin, *is truly indispensable* if consecrated persons are to remain faithful to their own vocation and follow Jesus Christ on the way of the cross.” *(Vita Consecrata, 38)*

“... To say “yes” to the Lord’s call by taking personal responsibility for maturing in one’s vocation is the inescapable duty of all who have been called ...

“Formation should therefore have a profound effect on individuals, so that their every attitude and action, at important moments as well as in the ordinary events of life, will show that they belong completely and joyfully to God ... total self-giving ... must be the principal objective of formation.

“... formation should involve the whole person, in every respect of the personality, in behavior and intentions ...

“... it must include every aspect of Christian life. It must therefore provide a human, cultural, spiritual and pastoral preparation which pays special attention to the

harmonious integration of all its various aspects ... formation, understood as a process of development which passes through every stage of personal maturity – from the psychological and spiritual to the theological and pastoral. In the case of those studying for the priesthood, this initial formation coincides with and fits well into a specific course of studies, as part of a broader formation program.” *(Vita Consecrata, 65)*

These citations from Pope John Paul II’s Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, lay out certain principles which are fundamental to the *Canons Regular of the New Jerusalem*, a clerical institute of consecrated life founded in the present era in view of its specific charism and pastoral mission. As *Vita Consecrata* stresses, the usefulness of any community to the Church relies *not on success but rather on the fidelity of its members to their vocation*. The vocation to religious priestly consecration in this new institute is *the ascetic pursuit of holiness lived within the context of a communitarian and liturgical life, with a specific work in view for the good of the Church and for the good of the members who undertake it*. Holiness and community life are not mere window-dressings for more pressing concerns: they constitute the irreducible foundation of a vocation to life in this institute.

“The followers of Christ, called by God not in virtue of their works but by His design and grace, and justified in the Lord Jesus Christ, have been made sons of God in the baptism of faith and partakers of the divine nature, and so are truly sanctified. They must therefore hold on to and perfect in their lives that sanctification which they have received from God. They are told by the Apostle to live *as is fitting among saints* (Eph. 5:3), and to put on *as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, loveliness, meekness, and patience* (Col. 3:12), to have fruits of the Spirit for their sanctification (cf. Gal. 5:22; Rom. 6:22)”. *(Lumen Gentium, 40)*

The foundation of the Christian life itself is an objective consecration to the love and service of God effected through the grace of Baptism. This imparts a fundamental call to holiness and constitutes the principle requirement of faith, rooted in the grace of Christ and cooperation of His subjects. This Baptismal call to personal sanctity is the foundation for any particularized vocation in the Church and underlies every other work and undertaking of the Christian person.

True holiness is a process of perfection in charity, necessarily encompassing the whole of the human person and his nature. Given the fallen condition of man, mastery over what is unruly and disordered is indispensable to spiritual perfection. Thus the practice of *asceticism*, which derives from *voluntary self-renunciation*, remains an integral requirement in the growth of the love of God and neighbor. In an era of widespread self-indulgence, the consecrated religious priest shows forth in a particular way the value of self-denial in the pursuit of perfection:

“Many men and women ... pursue more closely the Savior’s self-emptying and show it forth more clearly by undertaking poverty with the freedom of God’s sons, and renouncing their own will: they subject themselves to man for the love of God thus going beyond what is of precept in the matter of perfection, so as to conform themselves more fully to the obedient Christ.” *(Lumen Gentium, 42)*

“Guided by the Holy Spirit ... from the God-given seed of the counsels a wonderful and wide spreading tree has grown up in the field of the Lord, branching out

into various forms of religious life lived in solitude or in community. Different religious families have come into existence in which spiritual resources are multiplied for the progress in holiness of their members and for the good of the entire Body of Christ.

“Members of these families enjoy many helps toward holiness of life. They have a stable and more solidly based way of Christian life. They receive well-proven teaching on seeking after perfection. They are bound together in brotherly communion in the army of Christ. Their Christian freedom is fortified by obedience. Thus they are enabled to live securely and to maintain faithfully the religious life to which they have pledged themselves. Rejoicing ... they advance on the road of love.” (Lumen Gentium, 43)

From these texts the following priorities of religious life are set in view:

1. For those who embrace it, religious life is a *particularization* of their means towards the universal call to Christian holiness received in Baptism.
2. It is achieved through a *stability of life*.
3. It encompasses *teachings* regarding the pursuit of holiness which are themselves *well-proven by the wisdom and experience of the Church*. These teachings cannot ignore the necessity of ascetic self-denial as integral to the pursuit of holiness.
4. A constitutive element in the pursuit of sanctification is the *fraternal association of fellow religious in a binding communion among themselves*, itself ordered to the work they perform together in service of the Lord.
5. The freedom of the religious in his fraternal service to Christ is strengthened by the virtue of *obedience*, which he practices *in view of the free choice he has made through his vows*.
6. As the end in every human action is first in intention and last in execution, the singular motivation in undertaking religious consecration is the ongoing pursuit of perfection – *growing in mystic love of Jesus and in the love of others for His sake*.

As Baptism induces a call to holiness, so too it imparts a power for responding in the first work of faith: the worship of God. By an adoration of latria the believer returns to God, albeit unworthily, a measure of that divine glory which is His due. Adored in His transcendent majesty and glorified for His divine goodness, the Most Holy and Sublime Trinity is approached in love as the source and end of the total life of the believer. The call to holiness is ontologically bound to the *work* of worship and this union finds its most perfect expression in the public liturgical acts of the Church. Therefore holiness expresses itself through liturgical worship with particular love and longing by the consecrated religious. In this worship he offers to God an adoration which, fed by Him, becomes the real cause of that secondary *conversio ad Deum* expressed in the full spectrum of all other Christian works.

Too often in modern life the *essential obligations* of religious consecration are overshadowed by secular paradigms of productivity. The Christian value of exterior works is real only when such works are truly *derivative* of an *actual pursuit of holiness* nourished within the context of a *consciously lived liturgical worship*. This is why the Church describes the liturgy as the:

“... summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed [and] the fount from which all her power flows. For the goal of the apostolic endeavor is that all who are

made sons of God by faith and baptism should come together to praise God in the midst of His Church to take part in the Sacrifice and to eat the Lord's Supper."

(*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10)

The Council continues, spelling out the intrinsic relationship of worship to sanctity:

"The liturgy, in its turn, moves the faithful filled with the "paschal sacraments" to be "one in holiness"; it prays that "they hold fast in their lives what they have grasped by their faith." The renewal in the Eucharist of the covenant between the Lord and man draws the faithful and sets them aflame with Christ's insistent love. From the liturgy, therefore, and especially the Eucharist, grace is poured forth upon us as a fountain, and the sanctification of men in Christ and the glorification of God to which all other activities of the Church are directed, as towards their end, are achieved with maximum effectiveness."

(*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10)

It is important to note that the Council has quoted from the liturgy itself, the Church's first contact with Holy Scripture and *principal font* of revealed religion. But most fundamentally, in it – through its living experience – God touches men and "sets them aflame." Little wonder then that the Church refers to the liturgy as a *fountain*. But in drinking from this source the Christian finds not only the goal of his life, he finds the cause of his union with others as well. In the public worship of Christ, the Church is bound together as a whole, and simultaneously, provides an inexhaustible food which nourishes that genuine union of charity which must bind religious brethren together in their common life and work. What bears reiteration is that this unity involves an *ontological* call to a genuine and pervasive pursuit of perfection, the ascetic practice of virtues and a *caritas non ficta*. This is that imitation of the "insistent love of Christ" which must be the conscious pursuit of every believer.

For these reasons the consecrated state, above all others, must have as its particular foundation an *active and consciously pursued love of God lived in and through communitarian life*. This reflects that communion of love which exists preeminently in the Most Holy Trinity and is so wonderfully reflected in the Mystical Body, the Church. Within the Church the religious has a particular vocation to give living witness to this communion of love. It manifests itself primarily through that *Christian love which religious have for one another in their life together*:

*Ecce quam bonum et quam iucundum habitare fratres in unum.* (Psalm 132)

This love is expressed through the interpenetrating graces of ascetic virtue and liturgical worship as *lived and manifest* in the conduct of the religious towards God and each other in a stable and on-going community life. From that integrated foundation alone fruitful works *ad extram* are made possible while *safeguarding the individual religious from the real dangers of isolation, overwork and spiritual fatigue brought on by incessant activity*.

The primary pursuit of holiness in charity must be jealously guarded by religious in their corporate vocation no matter what the urgency of other demands. The constant call for activity is such that it can easily and rapidly erode the supernatural foundation on which the vocation of consecrated priesthood is essentially and necessarily founded. This danger will be avoided among the Canons Regular of the New Jerusalem by *recognizing*

*in a particular way* the primacy of the perfection of charity in its members, the wisdom of the Church employed in the integral formation of the whole of their persons, the fundamental call to community life, the role of worship and the place of the canons' work and vision within the larger framework of the Church as a whole. By recognizing these priorities in the *Prologue* of the CRNJ's constitutions, there is established that explicit substrate required for the unfolding of their entire vocation and charism. ***It is to the whole of its charism that each member of the Canons Regular of the New Jerusalem is called in radical fidelity.*** By faithfully observing the whole of the Constitutions the members of this institute will be assured of the authenticity of their life and work in the eyes of God and the Church. Through this faithful observance the *patrimony* of the CRNJ will remain always fresh and fruitful, a gift received from God, and a return to Him in the fullness of Love answered by love.