

## **Growth in Holiness**



**Antidote to Contraceptive Mentality in Family Life,  
and Lack of Totality in Religious Life - *Humanae Vitae* 1968:  
and Sustained Hope for Growth in Holiness**

**[Conference given at St. Mary of the Lake Seminary –  
Mundelein IL - 25th Anniversary of *Humanae Vitae* - Easter 1993]**

**Rev. Joseph Henchey, CSS**

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## Growth in Holiness:

### Antidote to Contraceptive Mentality in Family Life, and Lack of Totality in Religious Life - *Humanae Vitae* 1968: and Sustained Hope for Growth in Holiness

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#### Introduction

Twenty-five years have passed His Holiness, Pope Paul VI, was writing his authoritative Encyclical, *Humanae Vitae* [July 25, 1968]. This document was written in the full light of the recently concluded Second Vatican Council, with its central document, *Lumen Gentium* [November 21, 1964], with its special emphasis on The Universal Call to Holiness [Chapter 5, §§ 39-41].

In this reflection, the ideals presented in this context will be studied as they have had a bearing on the consecrated life. The **nuptial theme** and the **total self-giving** of Jesus Christ have often been presented in varying contexts, but most particularly to those striving to live a consecrated way of life, following Christ in the evangelical counsels, persevering in celibacy.

There has been a steady flow of authoritative teaching from the official Magisterium of the Church. These documents offer a realistic, challenging and sustained hope for the re-discovery of the values of religious life, as we prepare to enter the Third Millennium.

In this present reflection, religious life will be considered as the following/imitation of Jesus Christ:

- A. "Put on the Minds of Christ Jesus" [cf. Ph 2:5, ff.]: the Total Self-giving of Christ;
- B. Spouse of the Church: the Nuptial Theme in the official Church teaching.
- C. Servant of God and Humanity [cf. Ph 2:6-11].

Conclusion: Contemplation - Witness - Progress.

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## A. “Put on the Mind of Christ Jesus” [cf. Ph 2:5, ff.]: His Total Self-Giving

### 1. The Universal Call to Holiness [cf. LG ## 29-42]:

All in the Church are called to holiness. Holiness of life was preached by Christ to each and every one of His disciples without distinction. Christians in any state of walk of life, are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love. To achieve this, the faithful are called to use the strength received to follow in Christ’s footsteps, to be conformed to His image. Each one will make use of personal gifts and fulfill personal duties to make progress, to advance steadfastly. All will do this living fully the conditions, duties, and circumstances of their lives.

This is how each person is challenged to cooperate with the divine will. The Christian vocation in this context is to do the Will of God in everything, by being whole-heartedly devoted to the glory of God and to the service of their neighbor. In accord with the baptismal vocation, all are invited to accept the interior motion of the Holy Spirit, to love God, with their whole heart, with their whole soul, with their whole understanding and with their whole strength - and to love their neighbor as Christ has loved them.

In this inspiring doctrine of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, we see the Trinitarian dimensions of holiness, the sublime challenge to live God’s Will in everything. Among the biblical themes that the Council document chose, there are two that strike the eye and the heart of any reader, in the context of our present gathering:

- the **Nuptial** Theme;
- Christ’s **Self-Emptying**.

In order for nuptials to succeed, one might indeed ponder these opening lines of LG 39:

... The Church, whose mystery is set forth by this Sacred Council, is held as a matter of faith, to be unfailingly holy. This is because Christ, the Son of God, Who with the Father and the Spirit is hailed as ‘alone holy’, loved the Church, **as His Bride, giving Himself up for her**, so as to sanctify her... [cf. Ep 5:25-26].

This is a sublime application of the biblical “**nuptial theme**”, quoting from St. Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians. Holiness is intimately connected with a cooperation in divine grace to self-giving. In order to cooperate with the divine will, to follow in the

footsteps of Christ, this is the challenge that is presented in the Church teaching on the way to holiness.

This Nuptial Ideal is then completed in LG 42:

... The Church bears in mind, too, the apostle's admonition when calling the faithful to charity and exhorting them to have the same mind which Christ Jesus showed who emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant ... and became obedient unto death [cf. Ph 2:7-8] ... and for our sakes, became poor though he was rich... [2 Co 8:9]...

This, the, is how the disciples, all Christians imitate Christ and how they follow after Him. Religious, consecrated life is described precisely here as the many men and women who pursue more closely the savior's self-emptying, conforming themselves more and more to the chaste, poor and obedient Christ.

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## 2. *Humanae Vitae* [July 25, 1968]

The Encyclical of twenty-five years ago, challenges those who are called to live the nuptial vocation in the sacrament of marriage to collaborate freely and responsibly with God, the Creator [# 1]. In order to produce this document, there was required of the teaching authority of the Church a more profound prayer on the revealed moral teachings of God.

In harmony with the biblical **nuptial theme**, the emphasis remains on the **mutual gift** of husband and wife, through cooperation with God. Their love needs to be total, the generous sharing of everything, allowing no unreasonable exceptions, or selfishness. Success demands that **mutual and total gift of self** [# 9]. Pope Paul VI quoted his predecessor, Pope Pius XII, and the correct understanding of the Principle of Totality [# 17]. To produce this vital document, the Pope confesses that he sifted carefully the evidence sent to him. He studied the entire matter intently, and prayed constantly in order to offer his authoritative reply to a series of grave questions [# 6]. The key to holiness in the **nuptial vocation is total self-giving, a complementary personal union**, in cooperation with God in the generous education of new lives [# 8]. This is the challenge of the vocation sanctified through the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony.

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### **3. Canon Law 687 § 1; Post-Synodal Exhortation: *Pastores Dabo Vobis* [March 25, 1992]:**

In this developing context, it is not unusual perhaps that we find repeatedly joined together the nuptial theme as well as St. Paul's principles of "self-emptying" placed side by side to present the challenge of a sublimely dedicated consecrated life.

The beautiful definition that Canon Law offers regarding religious life, is well known to all:

... Religious life, as a consecration of the **whole** person, manifests in the Church the marvelous marriage established by God as a sign of the world to come. Religious thus consummate a **full gift of themselves**, as a **sacrifice** offered to God so that their whole existence becomes a continuous worship of God in charity...

This **wonderful marriage**, an eschatological sign, needs to be a full gift, a sacrifice offered to God. Far more than what religious do, is their value in what they are. Religious life is a sign of the Risen Christ, and their existence is presented as pleasing worship offered to God, precisely as "sacrifice" [... *plenam suam ... donationem veluti sacrificium Deo oblatum...*]

The **nuptial theme**, coupled with **total self-giving**, is also the basis of the ideal presented by His Holiness, Pope John Paul II, in his *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, # 22. Once more Jesus is presented as the true Bridegroom, Who has **offered Himself up** for His Church [cf. Ep 5:25-27]. By giving His life for the Church, Christ stands before the Church as her **Spouse**. The priest is called to be configured to Jesus Christ, the Head, Shepherd, and Spouse of the Church. This spousal relationship and character, demands a **spousal love** - a genuine self-detachment, for the sake of the Church. This **Bride** proceeds like a New Eve from the open side of the Redeemer on the Cross.

This is a theme already presented in the Council documents:

... For it was from the side of Christ as He slept the sleep of death upon the Cross that there came forth the wondrous sacrament of the whole Church... [SC 5]

... The origin and growth of the Church are symbolized by the blood and water which flowed from the open side of the crucified Jesus... {Jn 19:34} [LG 3].

The background of the **nuptial them** and the Church being born from **the side of the New Adam** on the Cross, gives a sense of urgency - and a distinct Christological flavor to the following of Christ in the consecrated life. The priest is placed at the

forefront of the Church, challenged to imitate her Head, Shepherd and Spouse. The **spousal relationship** is one of **totality, self-giving** for the people of God.

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#### 4. “The Mind of Jesus Christ” [cf. Ph 2:5]

In His Holy Year Letter to the Bishops of the United States, dated April 3, 1983, Pope John Paul II described all formation as “a matter of taking on increasingly *the mind of Jesus Christ* [# 45]. This will challenge each religious to share more deeply this **gift of self** to the Father and to the human family. Religious profession is the “putting on” of Christ, in His poverty, in His love and in His obedience, the essential pursuit of His life. This ‘pursuit’ never ends, there is needed a constant maturing in it.

Pope Paul VI had called this the authentic **fundamental option**, the ultimate norm being the following of Christ according to the Gospel. In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelica Testificatio* [June 29, 1971], the Pope stated:

... The interior impulse which is the response to God’s call stirs up in the depth of one’s being certain fundamental options. Fidelity to the exigencies of these fundamental options is the touchstone of the authenticity of religious life... [ET # 12].

There could be no confusion in terminology with the revered Pontiff’s words cited here from his Apostolic Exhortation on Religious Life, and the Declaration of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Persona Humana* [December 29, 1975], on Sexual Ethics:

... There are those who say that it is only when there is a refusal directly opposed to God’s call that there comes into play the fundamental option, that is to say, the decision which totally commits the person, and which is necessary if mortal sin is to exist ... the so-called ‘peripheral’ actions do not change the fundamental option ... According to these authors, a change in the fundamental option towards God less easily comes about in the field of sexual activity. In reality, it is precisely the fundamental option which in the last resort defines a person’s moral disposition. It can be completely changed by particular acts. [# 10].

In the Directives for Mutual Relations between Bishops and Religious in the Church [*Mutuae Relationes*, April 23, 1978], there was a further return to this terminology of Pope Paul VI:

... Religious and their communities are called upon in the Church to give a visible testimony of their total consecration to God. This is the fundamental option of their Christian existence and the first objective to be attained in their distinctive way of life... [# 10].

## **B. Jesus Christ: Spouse of the Church - Religious Life as Espousals with Him**

On February 2, 1990, the Congregation for Institute of the Consecrated Life, issued directives for formation, entitled, *Potissimum Institutioni*. Among the many principles offered, we note the following:

... The call of Christ, which is the expression of redemptive love, embraces the whole person, soul and body, whether man or woman... Under this form those who are called by God give a response of love in their turn to Christ, their redeemer; a love which is given entirely and without reserve and which loses itself in the offering of the whole person, as 'a loving sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God' [Rm 12:1]... this love ... is of a **nuptial character** ... [# 9].

The recent papal documents on the Mother of the Redeemer [cf. Pope John Paul II, Encyclical, *Redemptoris Mater*, March 25, 1987] - and on St. Joseph, the Guardian of the Redeemer [Pope John Paul II, *Custos Redemptoris*, August 15, 1990] emphasize in a marked way also their **nuptiality**, their **total self-giving to God**, their commitment to Christ and their union with one another. Among the numerous inspiring texts, we might reflect merely on a few of them. It is to be strongly recommended that these documents be read and prayed - one of our risks may still be to be blessed with magnificent magisterial teaching, without their being sufficiently pondered.

### **1. Mary and the Holy Espousals**

This theme is much developed by the present Holy Father:

...The Holy Spirit had already come down upon her, and she became His Faithful **Spouse** at the Annunciation, welcoming the Word of God offering the full submission of intellect and will, and freely assenting to the truth revealed by Him - indeed abandoning herself totally to God through the obedience of faith... [RM # 26].

This is a key text, quoting the familiar Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation [DV 5]. It is this sense of **abandonment**, entrusting one's entire self to the Word of God. This "entrusting" one's entire self wholeheartedly, merits the name **abandonment to God**, in the full acceptance of His Word, expressing vocation. This theme is continued a bit later in the same Document, offering a challenge to the whole Church:

... in the weakness of the flesh, the Church may not waver from perfect fidelity, but remain a **Bride** worthy of her Lord: that moved by the Holy Spirit, she may never cease to renew herself, until through the Cross she arrives at the light which knows now setting... The Virgin Mother is constantly present on this journey of faith of the people of God towards the light... [RM # 35].

The intimate bond between Mary and the entire Church is noted here - her docility towards the Spirit is the model for all. In the economy of grace, all are being challenged to renewal, continuing conversion and in this arduous pilgrimage of faith, Mary offers the example:

... Mary consents to God's choice, in order to become, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Mother of the Son of God. It can be said that this consent to Motherhood is above all the result of her **total self-giving** to God in virginity. Mary accepted her election as Mother of the Son of God guided by **spousal love**, the love which **totally consecrates** a human being to God... she accepted and understood her own motherhood as a **total gift of self**, a **gift of her person** to the service and the saving plans of the Most High ... Mary's Motherhood, completely pervaded by her **spousal attitude** as 'the Handmaid of the Lord', constitutes the first and fundamental dimensions of that mediation which the Church confesses and proclaims in her regard. The basic fact of being the Mother of the Son of God is from the very beginning a **complete openness** to the Person of Christ, to His whole work, to His whole mission... She perfectly unites in herself the love proper to virginity and the love characteristic of motherhood, which are joined, and, as it were, fused together ... [RM # 39].

Mary's unique capacity for **self-giving** and **personal sacrifice** is one of the great challenges being offered to those who would follow after Christ in the consecrated life. The complete openness to the Person of Christ and to His whole work and Mission is the key quality of those consecrated to the Lord in our day. The whole Church is now being challenged to imitate this example of Mary:



... following the example of Mary, the Church remains the virgin faithful to her **Spouse**: the Church herself is a virgin, who keeps whole and pure the fidelity she has pledged to her **Spouse** [LG 64], For the Church is the **Spouse** of Christ ... [cf. Ep 5:21-33; 2 Co 12]... the **Bride** of the Lamb [Rv 21:9]... the image of **marriage** [cf. Ep 5:23-33] also has value as a model of **total self-giving** in celibacy [cf. RM # 43].

In preparation for the coming IXth Synod of Bishops to be held in 1994, the Synod Secretariat produced a Document, or “working paper”, known as *Lineamenta*, with the title: “Consecrated Life in the Church and in the World.” In # 45. we may find these words:

... Through her virginal consecration and **total dedication** to the Lord, Mary supplies a unique dimension to the consecrated life and expresses special features of the Church herself ... through her **unconditional response** to the divine vocation and her **interior consecration** by the Holy Spirit, the Virgin Mary is the model of vocation and **total self-giving to God** ... Through her **total dedication** to the mystery and mission of her son, she is a resplendent model of apostolic and ecclesial service ...

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## 2. Joseph, Spouse of Mary

To commemorate the centenary of Pope Leo XIII’s Encyclical Letter, *Quamquam Pluries* [August 15, 1889], that all might grow in devotion to the Patron of the Universal Church, Pope John Paul II offered to the Church an authoritative Apostolic Exhortation, *Redemptoris Custos* [August 15, 1989], on the Person and Mission of St. Joseph in the Life of Christ and of the Church. He continues the **nuptial theme** in the life of the Guardian of the Redeemer, as his **total self-giving** to the Person and Mission of Jesus Christ.

For the inspiration of the whole Church, the Pontiff teaches:

... Joseph’s **marriage** to Mary is the juridical basis for his fatherhood. It was to assure fatherly protector for Jesus that God chose Joseph to be **Mary’s Spouse**. It follows that Joseph’s fatherhood - a relationship that places him as close as possible to Christ, to whom every election and predestination is ordered [cf. Rm 8:28-29] - comes to pass through **marriage to Mary**... [# 7].

In the living out of his vocation, there is a parallel to Mary's Annunciation as presented by St. Luke, for St. Joseph it is offered by Matthew: Joseph, like Mary, did just as the Angel of the Lord has commanded him to do [cf. Mt 1:24]:

... Joseph cooperated in the fullness of time in the great mystery of salvation, and is truly a minister of salvation. His fatherhood is expressed concretely in his having made of his life a service, a sacrifice to the mystery of the Incarnation and to the Redemptive Mission connected with it; in having used the legal authority which was his over the Holy Family in order to make a **total gift of self** of his life and work: in having turned his human vocation to domestic love into a super-human **oblation of self, an oblation of his heart and all his abilities**, into love at the service of the Messiah, and growing up in his house.. [ RC # 8].

These lofty ideals are presented for the whole Church as the living out of the baptismal ideal. However, the **nuptial image** that is so often repeated and its challenge of making a **total oblation of self**, offer encouragement to religious living out their ideal at the service of the Person and the Redemptive Mission of Jesus Christ. This is simply '**Joseph's way**':

... In the course of that pilgrimage of faith, which was his life, Joseph, like Mary, remained faithful to God's call until the end. While Mary's life was the bringing to fullness of that **fiat** first spoken at the Annunciation, at the moment of Joseph's own Annunciation, he said nothing: instead, he simply did as the Angel of the Lord has commanded him [cf. Mt 1:24]. And this first 'doing' became the beginning of '**Joseph's Way**'... [RC # 17].

In the plan of God, the **nuptial union** of Mary and Joseph became the source of unique graces:

... Analyzing the nature of the marriage, both St. Augustine and St. Thomas always identify it with an indivisible union of souls, a union of hearts, with consent. These elements are found in an exemplary manner in the marriage of Mary and Joseph. At the culmination of the history of salvation, when God reveals His love for humanity through the gift of the Word, it is precisely the marriage of Mary and Joseph that brings to realization in full freedom the **spousal gift of self** in receiving and expressing such a love... [RC # 17].

The central value that keeps recurring here is **the total gift of self**, for the sake of the Person and the Redemptive Mission of Jesus Christ. The **nuptial theme** and its requisite **total self-giving, wholehearted commitment** served the Holy Father in his

Apostolic exhortation to Men and Women Religious on their Consecration in the Light of the Mystery of Redemption.

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### 3. **The Spousal Character of Religious Life: *Redemptionis Donum*** [March 25, 1984]:

Perhaps it was in the light of the Code of Canon Law, published on January 25, 1983, just the year before- or, simply because the **nuptial self-giving** is a favorite with the present Pontiff, the theme is found in a variety of contexts in the 17 articles of this Apostolic Exhortation:

... The call to the way of the evangelical counsels springs from the interior encounter with the love of Christ, which is redeeming love ... When Christ 'looked on you and loved you', calling each one of you... that redeeming love of His was directed towards a particular person, and at the same time, it took on a **spousal character** ... it became a love of choice. The One Who **given eternally to the Father**, 'gives' Himself in the Mystery of Redemption, has now called men and women in order that they in their turn should **give themselves entirely** to the work of Redemption through membership in a community of brothers and sisters... [cf. RD # 3].

This intimate consecration to Jesus `Christ will always stress one's '**being**' over his/ her 'having/doing':

... The teacher from Nazareth invites the person he is addressing to renounce programs of life... occupied by the category of possessing ... to accept in its place a program centered on the value of the human person: upon personal **being** with all the transcendence proper to it. Such an understanding of Christ's words constitutes, as it were, a wider setting for the ideal of evangelical poverty, especially that poverty which, as an evangelical counsel, belongs to the essential content of your **mystical marriage** with the divine **Spouse** in the Church... [cf. RD # 3].

The almost 'natural point of contact between the **self-giving nuptial theme** and religious consecration would be the **Covenant**. In his 1984 Holy Year Exhortation, Pope John Paul II emphasizes religious consecration as "**the special covenant of spousal love**"... in everyone who is consecrated to God as is **exclusive possession**. This is **the Covenant of Spousals and Paschal Love**:

... [religious brothers and sisters], all of you live **the Covenant** of the profession of the evangelical counsels ... renew your awareness of your special sharing in the Redeemer's death on the Cross - that sharing through which you have risen with Him, and continually rise with Him to new life ... In this form is contained your answer to the call of redeeming love, and it is also an answer of love: a **love of self-giving**, which is the heart of consecration... the love of **total and exclusive consecration to God** ... [cf. RD # 8].

This paragraph invites its own meditation because of its repeated insistence on making of life an **oblation** to the Lord, in accord with Paul's challenge to the Romans [cf. 12:1, ff.]; present your bodies [lives] as a **living sacrifice**, your spiritual worship. Consecrated men and women echo the Incarnate Lord who has come to do the Will of the Heavenly Father [cf. Heb 10:5, ff.]:

... in this Jubilee Year of Redemption, let us go back again to the mystery of the body and soul of Christ as the complete subject of **spousal** and redemptive love: **spousal**, because redemptive. For love, He **offered Himself**, for love He gave His body for the sin of the world. By immersing yourselves in the Paschal Mystery of the Redeemer, through the consecration of religious vows, you desire, through **the love of total giving**, to fill your souls with the **spirit of sacrifice**, even as St. Paul invites you to do in the words of the Letter to the Roman, just quoted: 'to offer your bodies as **sacrifice**...' [Rm 12:1]... In this way, the likeness of that love which in the heart of Christ is both **spousal** and redemptive, is imprinted on the religious profession... it is the beginning of a New Creation ... May the knowledge of belonging to God Himself in Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of the world, the **Spouse** of the Church, seal your hearts [Sgs 8:6], all your thoughts, words and deeds with the sign of the **biblical spouse**... [RD # 8].

Along with the evident application of the **nuptial theme** to the **spousal character** of chastity, 'the free renunciation of marriage and family life ... a charismatic choice of Christ as one's **exclusive choice**' [cf. RD # 11], the **nuptial theme** also offers support for the 'contemplation so fruitful for the apostolate of direct apostolic action':

... From this witness of **spousal love** for Christ, through which the entire salvific truth of the Gospel becomes particularly visible, there also comes ... as something proper to your vocation, a sharing in the Church's apostolate, in her universal mission, which is accomplished contemporaneously in every nation, in many different ways and through many different charisms. Your specific mission is in harmony with the Mission of the Apostles, whom the Lord sent 'to

the whole world', to teach all nations [cf. Mt 28:19], and it is also linked to the mission of the hierarchical order. In the apostolate which consecrated persons exercise, their **spousal love** for Christ becomes, in an organic way, love for the Church, as the Body of Christ, for the Church as the People of God - for the Church which is at one and the same time, **spouse** and mother.. [RD # 15].

To meet these lofty ideals, Pope John Paul II may be taking some inspiration from his own doctoral thesis at the ANGELICUM in Rome ["Faith according to John of the Cross"] of years ago: '... so many generations have traveled together with Christ, the Redeemer of the world and the **spouse of souls.**" The Pontiff offers the example of the saints to inculcate hope:

... To all of you who travel this road in the present phase of the history of the Church and the world, there is addressed this fervent hope of the Jubilee Year of Redemption that you being rooted and grounded in love, may have the power to comprehend with all the saints ... to know the love of Christ....[RD # 16].

Mary is of special encouragement to all:

... the Virgin of Nazareth is also the one most fully consecrated to God, consecrated in the most perfect way, her **spousals** of love reached its height through the power of the Holy Spirit ... she fulfills in the most perfect way, His call: Follow Me...' I invite you to renew your religious consecration according to the model of the consecration of the very Mother of God...[RD # 17

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### C. Jesus Christ: Servant of God and Humanity - Total Self-Giving [cf. Rm 12:1, ff.; Ph 2:6-11]

All Christians are invited by Paul, through his Letter to the Romans, to make of their entire lives an **oblation** offered to God. In 'putting on the mind of Christ Jesus', there is a model offered to us by Christ:

- His Eternity with God;
- His Life-Long Self-Emptying, Self-Giving;
- His Exaltation.

If we can accept this "pattern", it seems to be followed in the presentation of Mary and Joseph in the Pontifical documents - and we might also use the pattern to describe the spirituality of the Religious Life.

## 1. **Mary's Vocation:**

The pattern of Christ's *Kenosis* might also be traced in the presentation of Mary's vocation, with particular reference to Pope John Paul II's Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Mater*:

### a. **An Eternal Plan**

Mary has a precise place in the plan of salvation, that would unfold in the 'fullness of time'. The Holy Father presents this by quoting Paul's Letter to the Galatians [4:4-6]:

... For these are words which celebrate together the love of the Father, the mission of the Son, the role of the woman from whom the Redeemer was born and our own divine filiation in the mystery of the fullness of time... Uttering the first *fiat* of the New Covenant tenant, Mary pre-figures the Church condition as **spouse** and mother... [RM # 1].

Indeed Mary was eternally destined to be the Mother of the Son of God - in the night of the Advent expectation, she began to shine like a true Morning Star [ib. # 2]:

... The divine plan of salvation - which was fully revealed with the coming of Christ - is eternal ... Mary is prophetically foreshadowed in that promise made to our first parents... In this way, the Old Testament prepares that 'fullness of time' when Christ sent forth His Son born of a woman... [RM # 7].

Mary is greeted as 'Full of Grace', and 'Blessed among Women' in that she is eternally loved in the beloved Son [cf. RM # 8]:

... As a result, she is the favorite daughter of the Father and the temple of the Holy Spirit... she far surpasses all other creatures, in heaven as well as on earth [LG 53] [cf. RM # 9].

Mary's unique relationship with the Trinity is bound to her role as the Mother of the Son of God:

...In the salvific designs of the Most Holy Trinity... there comes into the world a Son, 'the seed of a woman ... in the Apocalypse there occurs the sign of the woman... this time, clothed with the sun...' [cf. Rv 12:1] [RM # 11].

This theology of the eternal vocation of Mary is developed reflecting on her title 'Full of grace':

...in the language of the bible, 'grace' means a special gift which according to the New Testament has its source precisely in the Trinitarian life of God Himself, Who is love [cf. 1 Jn 4:8]... On the part of God, this election is the eternal desire to save man, through a sharing in his own life [cf. 2 P 1:4]... The effect of this eternal gift of this grace ... is like a seed... or a spring... [RM # 8].

**b. Her Life-long, Whole-hearted Self-Giving:**

Full of grace and Blessed among Women, Mary most closely emulates the Self-giving of Jesus Christ by pronouncing her *fiat*:

... The *fiat* of Mary was decisive, on the human level, for the accomplishment of the divine mystery. There is a complete harmony with the words of the Son, Who, according to the Letter to the Hebrews, says to the Father as He comes into the world: 'Sacrifices and offering you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for Me... Lo, I have come to do Your will, O God...' [Heb 10:5-7]... And - as the Fathers of the Church teach - she conceived this Son in her mind before she conceived Him in her womb, precisely in faith!... [RM # 13].

Mary closely emulates Abraham, as the Woman of Faith. In her obedience to the Word of God, her faith is an Abandonment to God. She conforms herself to the ways and the judgment of God in the dim light of faith [cf. RM # 14]. As the 'Handmaid of the Lord', she *abandons* herself to the meaning given to the Words of God at the Annunciation, by Him from Whom they proceeded [cf. *ib.*, # 15]. Her encounter with Simeon, then, is like a Second Annunciation. She will live her obedience of faith at the side of the Suffering Savior, as the Sorrowful Mother [cf. *ib.*, # 16]:

... blessing reaches its full meaning when Mary stands beneath the Cross of her Son [cf. Jn 19:25]... joining herself with her maternal spirit to His sacrifice, **lovingly consenting to the immolation of the victim**, to Who she had given birth. In this way, Mary faithfully persevered in her union with her Son even to the Cross... [RM # 18].

... Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it [Lk 11:28]. Jesus wishes to divert attention from motherhood understood only as a fleshly bond in order to direct it towards those mysterious bonds of the spirit which develop from hearing and keeping God's word ... [RM # 20].

By her **fiat**, Mary is perfectly joined with Christ in His self-emptying - obedient unto death. Mary shares through her faith in this overwhelming mystery of the deepest **kenosis of Faith**. She shares the death of her Son on the Cross, and indeed Simeon's words are fulfilled on Calvary that the sword of the Word of God would pierce her soul.

There is no way that human reason could ever fathom the depths of the intimate spiritual union between Mary and Jesus. Her call is to share in the bringing about the Kingdom of God on earth. [cf. RM # 18].

... Mary, the handmaid of the Lord, has a share in the Kingdom of her Son. The glory of 'serving' does not cease to be royal exaltation: assumed into heaven, she does not cease her saving service, which expresses her maternal mediation 'until the eternal fulfillment of all the elect...' [RM # 41].

Mary's share in Christ's **kenosis** prepares for her exaltation.

### c. **Mary's Magnificat: Her Exaltation**

In her Canticle to the Mercy of God, she praises God for her being raised up from a lowly state. Elizabeth notices that Mary is indeed "blessed", as she believed there would be a fulfillment in her of the Lord's own words [cf. Lk 1:45]:

...These words can be linked with the title 'Full of Grace' of the Angel's greeting. Both of these texts reveal an essential Mariological content, namely, the truth about Mary, who has become really present in the mystery of Christ, precisely because she has believed. The 'fullness of grace' announced by the angel means **the gift** of God Himself... [RM # 12].

Mary is convinced that the true "mother" and "brothers" of Christ are those who hear the Word of God and do it [cf. Lk 8:20, ff.]. At the Annunciation, she accepted the Word of God because she believed it - she was obedient to God because she kept the word, pondering it in her heart. Mary's great canticle begins the **Magnificat** of the Ages [cf. RM # 20].

Beginning at the Annunciation and culminating on Calvary, an "interior space" is opened up for all of good will. This is the space of the new and eternal Covenant, one of intimate union with God. The Handmaid of the Lord constantly precedes the Pilgrim People of God [cf. RM # 28]. As she was called from all eternity, Mary will forever be exalted:

... She is thus aware that concentrated within herself as the Mother of Christ is the whole salvific economy in which 'from age to age' is manifested He Who as the God of the Covenant remembers His mercy... [RM # 36].

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## 2. The Call of Joseph:

### a. The Eternal Plan

Again, one may see a pattern in the presentation of Joseph - like all who would follow Jesus Christ, Joseph's vocation is eternal:

... This is precisely the mystery in which Joseph of Nazareth 'shared' like no other human being except Mary, the Mother of the Incarnate Word. He shared in it with her, he was involved in the same salvific event, he was the Guardian of the same love, through the power of which the Eternal Father 'destined us to be His sons in Jesus Christ...' [cf. Ep 1:5] [RC # 1].

Joseph's call is so much like Mary's:

... In the words of the 'Annunciation' by night, Joseph not only heard the divine truth concerning his wife's indescribable vocation; he also heard once again the truth about his own vocation... [RC # 19].

### b. Joseph's Persevering Self-Giving:

The whole Christian people is challenged to keep before their eyes his humble, mature way of serving and taking part in the planned of salvation [cf. RC # 1]. There is indeed a strict parallel in the "Annunciation accounts", as presented regarding Mary by St. Luke and that regarding St. Joseph by the first evangelist:

... Joseph is visited by the messenger as Mary's **spouse** ... He took her together with the Son Who had come into the world by the power of the Holy Spirit. In this way, Joseph showed a **readiness** of will like Mary's, with regard to what God asked him through the angel... [RM # 3].

Mary's faith meets that of Joseph. He responded positively to God's Word communicated to him by the angel. The oft-repeated statement of **DV 5**, on the obedience of faith, by which one freely commits him/herself entirely to God, making the full submission of intellect and will to God, touches the very existence of faith, and is perfectly applicable to Joseph of Nazareth [cf. RC # 4].

Joseph also helped to preserve Mary's **total self-giving to God** - this was a **total and exclusive gift** [cf. RC # 18]. It is God's own love that molds in a unique manner the love of husband and wife, making of it a covenant between persons, an authentic communion according to the model of the Blessed Trinity [c. RC # 19]. By his own **self-sacrifice**, Joseph gave expression to his generous love for the Mother of God, and gave her a **husband's gift of self** [cf. RC # 20].

Joseph is offered to the entire Church as a model accessible to all for the sanctification of daily life. For one to be a follower of Jesus Christ, the common, simple and human virtues, provided that they be authentic, are enough [cf. RC # 24]. Joseph challenges each vocation in **total self-giving**:

... The **total service**, whereby Joseph surrendered his **whole existence** to the demands of the Messiah's coming into his home, becomes understandable only in the light of his profound interior life... [He made] the decision to put his liberty immediately at the disposition of the divine designs, to make over to them also his legitimate human calling... This **submission to God**, this **readiness of will to dedicate oneself** to all that serves Him, is really nothing else than **that exercise of devotion** which constitutes one expression of the virtue of religion [cf. II-II, q. 82, a. 3, ad 2<sup>um</sup>].

After Mary, Joseph is the great Model of Obedience, having faithfully carried out God's commands. The basic attitude of the entire Church has to be that of hearing the Word of God reverently, with **the absolute readiness to serve faithfully God's salvific will** as made known in Jesus Christ. Mary and Joseph are our Models in this service [cf. RM # 30].

### c. **Joseph's Singular Dignity. His Exaltation in the Church**

Joseph did exactly as the Angel of the Lord directed him to do [cf. Mt 1:24]. The Fathers of the Church offered this parallel: that just as Joseph dedicated himself to the care of Jesus Christ, in similar manner he watches over and protects the Church, of which Mary is the exemplar [cf. RC # 1]. Even though Joseph's Pilgrimage of Faith apparently ended before Mary's did on Calvary, his moved in the identical direction. His whole life was determined by the Person and the Mission of the Redeemer. This dogmatic truth motivated Pope John XXIII to have Joseph's name inserted in the Roman Canon of the Mass, after Mary's and prior to the Apostles, popes and Martyrs [cf. RC # 6].

Joseph's singular dignity and his rights in regard to Jesus derived from his **Holy Espousals with Mary**. As marriage is the highest degree of association and friendship, God gave Joseph to Mary through the marriage pact so that he might also share in her sublime goodness [cf. RC # 20].

Jesus' own **Filial Love** directly influenced Joseph's **paternal love**. Anyone sensitive to the impulses of divine love have justly noted in St. Joseph a most outstanding witness to the depths of the interior life [cf. RC # 27]. More than a century ago, Pope Leo XIII had noted that the Church continually draws hope from St. Joseph - as the Guardian of the Redeemer once kept unceasingly watch over the Holy

Family of Nazareth, he now exercises a heavenly guardianship over the entire Church [cf. RC # 28].

We can make our own these words of Pope John Paul II:

... Commending ourselves, then, to the protection of him to whose custody God entrusted His greatest and most precious treasures, let us at the same time learn from him how to be **servants of the 'economy of salvation'**. May St. Joseph become for all of us an exceptional teacher in the service of Christ's saving mission, a mission which is the responsibility of each and every member of the Church: husbands and wives, parents, those who live by the work of their hands, or by any other kind of work - those called to the contemplative life and those called to the apostolate... [RC # 32].

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**Mary's spousal love** reached its height in the divine mother hood - among all persons **consecrated unreservedly to God**, Mary is the very first. She fulfills in the most perfect way His call to follow Him [cf. *Potissimum Institutioni*, Directives on Formation # 20]. The **unreserved donation of the human person, whole and entire, in the spirit of nuptial love** for Christ, is our challenge. One does not give life to Christ on a "trial basis". The gift of each person needs to be renewed each day [cf. ib, PI # 55].

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### 3. Religious Life as a *Kenosis*

This "pattern" may also be applied to the vocation of the Consecrated Life - the "exaltation" phase being reflected in its inherent eschatological dimension. However, there is ample evidence in the official documents of the Church of a vocation beginning within the eternal love of God, asking of religious a **whole-hearted self-giving all through their lives**.

The Code of Canon Law, published on January 25, 1983, reflects the magisterial insights prior to its promulgation, and serves as a spring-board for further reflection. The Canons reflect the Trinitarian and Eschatological dimensions of the Consecrated Life:

... Life consecrated through profession of the evangelical counsels is a stable form of living in which the faithful follow Christ more closely under the action of the Holy Spirit, and are **totally dedicated** to God, Who is supremely loved. By a new and special title, they are dedicated to seek the perfection of charity in the

service of God's Kingdom, for the honor of God, the building up of the Church and the salvation of the world. They are a splendid sign in the Church, as they foretell the heavenly glory.. [Canon 573 ¶1].

This excellent paragraph merits meditation. Other canonical teaching seems to flow in a similar vein - the life of the evangelical counsels is clearly based on the example of Christ, the Master. It is a divine gift, which the Church has gratefully received from the Lord and which, by his grace, it will always preserve. Whatever gifts are used in the development of the specific institutes, the basic ingredient is always Christ doing the Will of the Father [cf. Canon # 575]. The members of the consecrated way of life are specially called by God to this state. They are graced to contribute to the saving mission of the Church, according to the purpose and the spirit of each institute [cf. Canon # 573].

In his Holy Year Letter to the Bishops of the United States [April 3, 1983], the Holy Father speaks of the Church's insistence on the initiative of God and on the transforming relation to Him that religious life implies. The relationship that results from God's calling a person to be set apart for particular dedication to Himself is a covenant of mutual love and fidelity. It is a life of communion and mission, established for God's glory, the happiness of the one called and the salvation of the world [cf. # 5].

Jesus' own 'consecration' is that of Son of God - He lived 'dependent' on His Father. The consecration of profession is in imitation of Jesus Christ [cf. ib. # 7]. Religious, then, respond to the prior gift of God [cf. ib., # 7]. As a gift of love, this really cannot be 'rationalized' - God works this gift within [cf. ib., # 13].

The Apostolic Exhortation on Gospel **Witness** also presented consecration as a **relationship** to be discovered ever anew:

... keep the simplicity of the 'least ones' of the Gospel. May you succeed in discovering anew in an interior and closer relationship with Christ and in your direct contact with your brethren... Do not seek to be numbered among the learned and clever, whose numbers seem inclined by a combination of circumstances to increase... [ET # 54].

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### a. Religious Life, Rooted in Baptism, Eternal Covenant

From the very earliest traditions of the Church, there existed this privileged witness of the undivided quest for God. It is noted that religious life already *existed in germ* at that time, and *progressively developed* in different forms in the efforts to respond to the invitation to follow Christ [cf. ET # 3].

This special consecration, rooted in Baptism, is the willingness to flow Christ more freely, to imitate Him more faithfully [cf. *ib.*, # 4]. Religious Consecration is the free response to the call of the Holy Spirit, to follow Christ in dedication to God, and commitment to the Church:

...through such a bond a person is totally dedicated to God by an act of supreme love ... Thus, one is more intimately consecrated to divine worship... more intimately consecrated to divine service ... This consecration will be the more perfect to the extent that through more firm and stable bonds, the indissoluble union of Christ with His **Spouse**, the Church, is more perfectly represented... [ET # 7].

In the directives for the *Mutual relations between Bishops and Religious in the Church* [***Mutuae Relationes***, April 23, 1978], there is noted the “transcendent perspective” needed in any consideration of the Church in general:

... It is only in this transcendent perspective that mutual relations between the various members of the Church can be correctly understood. The reality upon which this unique nature is based is the very presence of the Holy Spirit... [MR # 1].

The Religious Consecration is based indeed on the love of the Redeemer. In his Apostolic Constitution, *To Men and Women Religious on their Consecration in the Light of the Mystery of the Redemption* [***Redemptionis Donum***, March 25, 1984], Pope John Paul II notes the eternal love of Jesus, that flows from all the human and divine depths of the Redemption. This love reflects the eternal love of the Father, Who gave His only Son so that all believers would have eternal life [cf. Jn 3:16] [cf. RD # 3]. The document continues:

... The structure of this vocation, as seen from the words addressed to the young man in the Synoptic Gospels [cf. Mk 10:21], is traced little by little as one discovers the fundamental treasure of one’s own humanity in the perspective of that treasure which man has in heaven .. In this perspective, the fundamental

treasure of one's own humanity is connected to the fact of 'being', by **giving oneself**. The direct point of reference in such a vocation is the living Person of Jesus Christ. The call to the way of perfection takes shape from Him, and through Him, in the Holy Spirit, Who continually recalls to new people, men and women, at different times of their lives ... Thus, the way of the evangelical counsels always has its beginning in God: You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide. The vocation in which a person discovers in depth the evangelical law of giving, a law inscribed in human nature, is itself a gift... [RD # 6].

In the *Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes [Potissimum Institutioni]*, February 2, 1990], there is an excellent presentation of the theology of vocation to the consecrated life:

... At the origin of religious consecration, there is a call from God, for which there is no explanation apart from the love which He bears for the persons whom He calls. This love is absolutely gratuitous, personal and unique. It embraces the person to the extent that one no longer pertains to one self, but to Christ. It thus reflects the character of an alliance. The glance which Jesus turned toward the rich young man has this characteristic: 'Looking at him, He loved him' [Mk 10:21]. The gift of the Spirit signifies and expresses it. This gift invites the person whom God calls to follow Christ through the practice and profession of the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience. This is a gift of God which the Church has received from her Lord, and which by his grace she always safeguards. And this is why the final form of the religious life will be the following of Christ as it is put before us in the Gospel... [PI # 8].

In the working paper, entitled *Lineamenta*, in preparation for the next Synod of Bishops to be held in 1994, these sublime ideals are summarized in Article 6:

... The consecrated life bears the Trinitarian imprint of a divine vocation which originates in the Father. It is manifested in dedication to God, Who is loved above all things, and is expressed in the following of Christ, the Lord and Master, through the profession of the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience. Furthermore, it is guided by the constant action of the Holy Spirit, who leads a person to accept the call and to remain faithful to living in more perfect conformity to Christ, and to making a total gift of self in service of the Church...

The manner of the wholehearted self-giving of those consecrated by the evangelical counsels in the Church is likewise presented in some detail. In the thought of the **nuptial theme**, the **total dedication** to the Other frequently surfaces and offers much food for thought and prayer.

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#### **b. Consecrated Commitment - Self-Giving to God through the Church**

In the service of God, through the Church, we often need to recall the words of ***Mutuae Relationes***, reminding us that the Church is both simultaneously a visible, social organism, as well as an invisible divine presence [cf. MR # 3].

The Code of Canon Law, in its presentation of the three vows, has authentically presented these ideals:

... The evangelical counsel of chastity, embraced for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, is a sign of the world to come, and a source of greater fruitfulness in an undivided heart... [Can. #599].

... The evangelical counsel of poverty, in imitation of Christ, Who, for our sake, was made poor, when he was rich, entails a life which is poor in reality and in spirit, sober, industrious and a stranger to earthly riches ... [ Can. # 600, citing 2 Co 8:9].

... The evangelical counsel of obedience, undertaken in the spirit of faith and love in the following of Christ, who was obedient even unto death, obliges submission of one's will to lawful superiors, who act in the place of God, when they give commands that are in accordance with each institute's own constitutions... [Can. # 601, referring to Ph 2: 6, ff.].

There is much emphasis on the integral Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ: His Passion and Death, as well as His Resurrection and Ascension. The vows enable a believer to live as Christ lived in areas covering all of life. He who was rich, became poor - He loved with **an undivided heart** - and came to do the will of His heavenly Father [cf. Pope John Paul II's *Letter to the American Hierarchy*, April 3, 1983, # 15]. Through the vows, religious simultaneously chose the Cross, which for Jesus is the proof of the greatest love [ib., # 31].

There is the challenge of **total availability** in cooperating with the mystery of redemption. Hand in hand with the submission-obedience thus conceived there is the attitude of **service** that informs the entire consecrated life [cf. RC # 13]:

... Christ, 'though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men...' ... Here, in the words of the Letter of St. Paul to the Philippians we touch the very essence of redemption... thus, through the vow of obedience, [religious] decide to be transformed into the likeness of Christ ... they desire to find their own role in the Redemption of Christ and their own way of sanctification... [RD # 13].

The vows are a program of **being** - this is all a part of the Eschatology of humanity, one realized through the **spiritual marriage** to Christ. This consecration establishes a new bond, a total handing of oneself over to God [cf. RD ## 5 & 7, passion]. There is the transformation of the cosmos from within the human heart, through the over which Christ's personal call in fuses into the depths of the individual [cf. RD # 9].

In Jesus Christ, there is joined **self-emptying** [cf. Ph 2:6, ff.], and the resurrection. The internal purpose of the evangelical counsels leads to the discovery of the close connection of the counsels with the economy of Redemption. In this harmony, religious follow Christ [cf. RD # 18]. This ideal is being offered to the upcoming Synod of Bishops for 1994:

... In imitation of Jesus, the Beloved of the Father, Who lived the consecration to its perfection, religious consecration is **a true covenant with God**. This consecration is deeply rooted in the consecration from Baptism and provides an ampler manifestation of it. Though the public profession of the evangelical counsels, it strives towards **a more complete configuration** to the mystery of the chaste, poor and obedient Christ. In this way, consecration undertaken through the evangelical counsels expresses the grace of the call and the anointing of the Spirit with which God Himself chooses and enables persons to make **a total gift of themselves**., and equips them to live a life of effective, free and **total dedication to the Lord** as the one supremely loved, and to His service... [*Lineamenta*, # 6].

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## CONCLUSION

Three final points might be pondered:

### **[1] The Original Charism:**

As is well known, fidelity to this originating grace is a primary concern in the quest for holiness in the consecrated life. Pope Paul VI put it most plainly:

...Only in this way you will be able to reawaken hearts to truth and to divine love in accordance with the charisms of your founders, who were raised up by God within His Church. In reality, the charism of religious life, far from being an impulse born of flesh and blood, or one derived from a mentality which conforms itself to the modern world, is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, Who is always at work in the Church.. [ET # 11]

The “Experience of the Spirit” is to be preserved, deepened and constantly developed in harmony with the Body of Christ, continually in a process of growth [cf. MR # 11]. The true marks of an authentic charism demand a constant re-examination of fidelity to the Lord, docility to His Holy Spirit. In any genuine charism, there is always a mixture of creativity and interior offering [cf. MR # 12].

In his 1983 *Holy Year Letter to the Bishops of the United States*, Pope John Paul II returns to this theme many times. In the wide variety of founding gifts, the authenticity of a community derives from that action of the Holy Spirit, which is the institute’s **founding gift**. This creates a particular type of spirituality, of life, of apostolate and of tradition [cf. # 11]. It is always a mistake to try to make the founding gift cover everything [# 22]. The Church commits to the institute as a whole the sharing of Christ’s Mission that characterizes it, expressing it in those works inspired by the **founding charism**. Configuration to Christ, which needs to be an on-going reality, can only genuinely come about in accord with the **founding charism**.

The Synod of 1994 will certainly reflect on this reality as is clear from the *Lineamenta*, prepared for it. The Church is most concerned with preserving and ratifying **the foundational charism** [cf. # 16]. All depends on fidelity to the gift of the Holy Spirit, given at the beginning [cf. ## 17; 31; 33].

## 2. The Contemplative Dimension of the Consecrated Life:

In the Document, *The Contemplative Dimension of Religious Life*, this aspect is much emphasized:

... The contemplative dimension is basically a reality of grace, experienced by the believer as God's gift. It enables persons to know the Father [cf. Jn 14:8]. in the Mystery of Trinitarian communion[cf. Jn 1-3], so that they can enter into the depths of God [cf. 1 Co 2:10] ... We describe the contemplative dimension fundamentally as the theological response of faith, hope and charity, by which the believer opens up to the revelation and communication of the living God through Christ in the Holy Spirit ... As the unifying act of all human movement towards God the contemplative dimension is expressed by listening to, and meditating on the Word of God: by participating in the divine life transmitted to us in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist; by liturgical and personal prayer; by the constant desire for God and the search for His Will in events and people; by the conscious participation in His salvific mission; by **self-giving** to others for the coming of the Kingdom. There results, in the religious, an attitude of continuous and humble adoration of God's presence in people, events and things... [cf. # 10].

Prayer needs to be open to creation and history, needs to be adoration and praise, while echoing a life of solidarity with other human beings, especially the poor and suffering [cf. ib., # 5]. The contemplative dimension is the real secret of renewal - this is because it leads also to an experiential knowledge of Jesus Christ. The basic principle is enunciated: 'the more open religious are to the contemplative dimension, the more attentive will they be to the demands of the Kingdom.' [cf. ib., # 30].

The call to conversion and reconciliation will always mean that we need to meditate more deeply in the light of our vocations and the mystery of Redemption [cf. RD # 1]. The example of Mary, assiduous with the Church in prayer, comes to the fore. She contemplates the Church in the light of the Word made man [cf. RD # 27]. The Christian people have always sensed a profound link between devotion to the Blessed Virgin and worship to the Eucharist [cf. RD # 44].

### 3. Witness

As a synthesis of much else said on the subject, Pope John Paul II's Holy Year Letter to the Bishops of the United States [1983] puts it succinctly:

... Religious are called... to bear witness to a similar, deep, personal experience of Christ, and also to share the faith, hope, love and joy which that experience goes on inspiring. Their continuous individual renewal of life should be a source of new growth ... What counts most is not what religious do, but what they **are** as persons consecrated to the Lord [# 33].

A final, most recent document to consider Religious Life is the soon to be published [in English], the ***Catechism of the Catholic Church***. Religious Life is described in language with which we are, by now, most familiar. The consecrated life is considered in the second section of the Catechism, promulgated in French, with the Apostolic Constitution of Pope John Paul II, ***Depositum Fidei*** [October 11, 1992]. This section devoted to the Creed, Article 9, is reserved for reflections on the Holy Catholic Church, Paragraph 4, regarding the People of God. In number III, the Consecrated Life is presented [cf. **## 914-945**].

The Religious State is one of the ways in which a more intimate consecration is lived. It is rooted in Baptism, and is one dedicated totally to God. In the consecrated life, Christ's faithful are moved by the Holy Spirit to follow Christ more closely, and to give themselves over to God loved before all else. They pursue the perfection of charity in the service of the Kingdom, to signify and to announce in the Church the glory of the world yet to come [cf. # 916]. The consecrated life reflects the mystery of the Church. It is a gift that the Church receives from the Lord. It is offered as a stable way of life to the faithful called by God to the profession of the evangelical counsels. Through this way of life, the Church can at one and the same time, manifest Jesus Christ and be recognized as his Spouse. Religious are invited to signify the very charity of God in the language of our time [cf. # 926].

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