

# Evangelical Counsels

Prepared for a Holy Hour in anticipation of the final profession of  
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## Outline

- I. Scriptural passage on evangelical virtues from Matthew 19
- II. General Introduction to the Role of the Evangelical Counsels in Religious Life
- III. Chastity
- IV. Poverty
- V. Obedience

## Scriptural passage

**Matt. 19:1** When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went to the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. **2** Large crowds followed him, and he cured them there. **3** Some Pharisees came to him, and to test him they asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?" **4** He answered, "Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' **5** and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? **6** So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." **7** They said to him, "Why then did Moses command us to give a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her?" **8** He said to them, "It was because you were so hard-hearted that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. **9** And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery." **10** His disciples said to him, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry." **11** But he said to them, "Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only those to whom it is given. **12** For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can."

**13** Then little children were being brought to him in order that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples spoke sternly to those who brought them; **14** but Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs." **15** And he laid his hands on them and went on his way.

**16** Then someone came to him and said, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" **17** And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." **18** He said to him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; **19** Honor your father and mother; also, You shall love your neighbor as yourself." **20** The young man said to him, "I have kept all these; what do I still lack?" **21** Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." **22** When the young man heard this word, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

**23** Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly I tell you, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. **24** Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." **25** When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astounded and said, "Then who can be saved?" **26** But Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible." **27** Then Peter said in reply, "Look, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?" **28** Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. **29** And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and will inherit eternal life. **30** But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."

## Briefly:

- 1) This 19th chapter of St. Matthew's Gospels points to all three theological virtues.
- 2) In the passage on the eunuchs, Jesus mentions that some are incapable of sexuality activity from birth, some are made so by men (castrated or sterilized) and others become eunuchs by choice for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. This is a clear allusion to the counsel of chastity, those who give up sexuality activity voluntarily (like Christ) for the sake of God's kingdom.
- 3) The little children have been seen by many fathers of the Church as a paradigmatic example of obedience. Good children lovingly obey their parents, trusting in them even when they ask them to do something difficult or that they don't understand, loving and honoring their parents. Moreover, their obedience is always filial rather than servile. It is to such obedient, trusting, faithful children that the kingdom of heaven belongs.
- 4) The passage of the Rich Young Man is a paradigmatic one on the counsel of poverty, that to follow Jesus closely it is necessary first to leave behind everything else to which your heart might be attached so that you might then be free to follow Jesus. It begins with an act of generosity and detachment, giving what you have to the poor, and then it has a subsequent following of Jesus who becomes your sole treasure. From then on, you can give of yourself (rather than money or things) and give of Jesus to everyone.
- 5) Finally, Peter's question leads to Jesus' promise that those who die to themselves so that He might rise again in them will receive a hundredfold in this life and will inherit eternal life. That's his promise, which is the greatest promise he ever made!

## In General

- Evangelical counsels are proposed to every disciple. They are rooted in baptism and more fully express it.

CCC 915 Christ proposes the evangelical counsels, in their great variety, to every disciple. The perfection of charity, to which all the faithful are called, entails for those who freely follow the call to consecrated life the obligation of practicing chastity in celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom, poverty and obedience.

PC 5. This constitutes a special consecration, which is deeply rooted in that of baptism and expresses it more fully.

VC 14. For in such a life baptismal consecration develops into a radical response in the following of Christ through acceptance of the evangelical counsels, the first and essential of which is the sacred bond of chastity for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. [23]

- Consecrated religious are called to live the counsels in a special way. Their baptismal consecration develops into a radical response in the following of Christ.

CCC 915 It is the profession of these counsels, within a permanent state of life recognized by the Church, that characterizes the life consecrated to God. [454]

RD 7. Religious profession creates a new bond between the person and the One and Triune God, in Jesus Christ. This bond develops on the foundation of the original bond that is contained in the Sacrament of Baptism. Religious profession "is deeply rooted in baptismal consecration and is a fuller expression of it." [25] In this way religious profession, in its constitutive content, becomes a new consecration: the consecration and giving of the human person to God, loved above all else. The commitment undertaken by means of the vows to practice the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience, according to the determinations proper to each religious family as laid down in the constitutions, is the expression of a total consecration to God and, at the same time, the means that leads to its achievement. This is also the source of the manner proper to consecrated persons of bearing witness and of exercising the apostolate. And yet it is necessary to seek the roots of that conscious and free consecration and of the subsequent giving of self to God as His possession in Baptism, the sacrament that leads us to the Paschal Mystery as the apex and center of the Redemption accomplished by Christ. Therefore, in order to highlight fully the reality of religious profession, we must turn to the vibrant words of St. Paul in the letter to the Romans: "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ...we too might walk in newness of life"; [26] "Our old self was crucified with him so that...we might no longer be enslaved to sin"; [27] "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." [28] Upon the sacramental basis of Baptism in which it is rooted, religious profession is a new "burial in the death of Christ": new, because it is made with awareness and by choice; new, because of love and vocation; new, by reason of unceasing "conversion." This "burial in death" causes the person "buried together with Christ" to "walk like Christ in newness of life." In Christ crucified is to be found the ultimate foundation both of baptismal consecration and of the profession of the evangelical counsels, which--in the words of the Second Vatican Council--"constitutes a special consecration." It is at one and the same time both death and liberation. St. Paul writes: "Consider yourselves dead to sin." At the same time he calls this death "freedom from the slavery of sin." Above all, though, religious consecration, through its sacramental foundation in holy Baptism, constitutes a new life "for God in Jesus Christ." In this way, simultaneously with the profession of the evangelical counsels, in a much more mature and conscious manner, "the old nature is put off" and likewise "the new nature is put on, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness," to use once more the words of the letter to the Ephesians. [29]

- The counsels are a "more intimate" consecration to God, by allowing one to follow Christ more nearly.

CCC 916 The religious state is thus one way of experiencing a "more intimate" consecration, rooted in Baptism and dedicated totally to God. [455]

CCC 945 Already destined for him through Baptism, the person who surrenders himself to the God he loves above all else thereby consecrates himself more intimately to God's service and to the good of the whole Church.

VC 16. The three disciples caught up in ecstasy hear the Father's call to listen to Christ, to place all their trust in him, to make him the center of their lives. The words from on high give new depth to the invitation by which Jesus himself at the beginning of his public life called them to follow him, to leave their ordinary lives behind and to enter into a close relationship to him. It is precisely this special grace of intimacy which in the consecrated life makes possible and even demands the total gift of self in the profession of the evangelical counsels. The counsels, more than a simple renunciation, are <a specific acceptance of the mystery of Christ lived within the Church.>

- Counsels draw their doctrine and example from the Divine Master.

PC 1: The sacred synod has already shown in the constitution on the Church that the pursuit of perfect charity through the evangelical counsels draws its origin from the doctrine and example of the Divine Master and reveals itself as a splendid sign of the heavenly kingdom.

VC 16. The three disciples caught up in ecstasy hear the Father's call to listen to Christ, to place all their trust in him, to make him the center of their lives. The words from on high give new depth to the invitation by which Jesus himself at the beginning of his public life called them to follow him, to leave their ordinary lives behind and to enter into a close relationship to him. It is precisely this special grace of intimacy which in the consecrated life makes possible and even demands the total gift of self in the profession of the evangelical counsels. The counsels, more than a simple renunciation, are <a specific acceptance of the mystery of Christ lived within the Church.> ... It is the duty of the <consecrated life> to show that the Incarnate Son of God is <the eschatological goal toward which all things

tend>, the splendor before which every other light pales and the infinite beauty which alone can fully satisfy the human heart. In the consecrated life, then, it is not only a matter of following Christ with one's whole heart, of loving him "more than father or mother, more than son or daughter" (cf. Mt. 10:37)—for this is required of every disciple— but of living and expressing this <by conforming one's whole existence to Christ> in an all-encompassing commitment which foreshadows the eschatological perfection to the extent that this is possible in time and in accordance with the different charisms. By professing the evangelical counsels, consecrated persons not only make Christ the whole meaning of their lives, but strive to reproduce in themselves as far as possible "that form of life which he, as the Son of God, accepted in entering this world." [27] By embracing <chastity>, they make their own the pure love of Christ and proclaim to the world that he is the Only Begotten Son, who is one with the Father (cf. Jn. 10:30, 14:11). By imitating Christ's <poverty>, they profess that he is the Son who receives everything from the Father and gives everything back to the Father in love (cf. Jn. 17:7, 10). By accepting through the sacrifice of their own freedom the mystery of Christ's filial <obedience>, they profess that he is infinitely beloved and loving, as the one who delights only in the will of the Father (cf. Jn. 4:34), to whom he is perfectly united and on whom he depends for everything.

- The counsels are a renunciation of the world so that they may follow Christ and live for God alone. They are a special image and imitation of Christ, who was the supremely obedient, chaste and poor one.

PC 5. Members of each institute should recall first of all that by professing the evangelical counsels they responded to a divine call so that by being not only dead to sin (cf. Rom. 6:11) but also renouncing the world they may live for God alone. They have dedicated their entire lives to His service. This constitutes a special consecration, which is deeply rooted in that of baptism and expresses it more fully. ... Faithful to their profession then, and leaving all things for the sake of Christ (cf. Mark 10:28), religious are to follow Him (cf. Matt. 19:21) as the one thing necessary (cf. Luke 10:49) listening to His words (cf. Luke 10:39) and solicitous for the things that are His (cf. 1 Cor. 7:32).

VC 14. The evangelical basis of consecrated life is to be sought in the special relationship which Jesus in his earthly life established with some of his disciples. He called them not only to welcome the Kingdom of God into their own lives, but also to put their lives at its service, leaving everything behind and closely imitating his own <way of life>. Many of the baptized throughout history have been invited to live such a life "in the image of Christ."

VC 16. The counsels, more than a simple renunciation, are <a specific acceptance of the mystery of Christ lived within the Church> ... In the consecrated life, then, it is not only a matter of following Christ with one's whole heart, of loving him "more than father or mother, more than son or daughter" (cf. Mt. 10:37)—for this is required of every disciple— but of living and expressing this <by conforming one's whole existence to Christ> in an all-encompassing commitment which foreshadows the eschatological perfection to the extent that this is possible in time and in accordance with the different charisms. By professing the evangelical counsels, consecrated persons not only make Christ the whole meaning of their lives, but strive to reproduce in themselves as far as possible "that form of life which he, as the Son of God, accepted in entering this world." [27] By embracing <chastity>, they make their own the pure love of Christ and proclaim to the world that he is the Only Begotten Son, who is one with the Father (cf. Jn. 10:30, 14:11). By imitating Christ's <poverty>, they profess that he is the Son who receives everything from the Father and gives everything back to the Father in love (cf. Jn. 17:7, 10). By accepting through the sacrifice of their own freedom the mystery of Christ's filial <obedience>, they profess that he is infinitely beloved and loving, as the one who delights only in the will of the Father (cf. Jn. 4:34), to whom he is perfectly united and on whom he depends for everything.

VC 18. The Son, who is the way which leads to the Father (cf. Jn. 14:6), calls all those whom the Father has given to him (cf. Jn. 17:9) to make the following of himself the whole purpose of their lives. But of some, those called to the consecrated life, he asks a total commitment, one which involves leaving everything behind (cf. Mt. 19:27) in order to live at his side [30] and to follow him wherever he goes (cf. Rv. 14:4). In the countenance of Jesus, the "image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15) and the reflection of the Father's glory (cf. Heb. 1:3), we glimpse the depths of an eternal and infinite love which is at the very root of our being. [31] Those who let themselves be seized by this love cannot help abandoning everything to follow him (cf. Mk. 1:16-20; 2:14; 10:21, 28). Like St. Paul, they consider all else as loss "because of the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ, by comparison with which they do not hesitate to count all things as "refuse, in order that they "may gain Christ" (Phil. 3:8). They strive to become one with him, taking on his mind and his way of life. This leaving of everything and following the Lord (cf. Lk. 18:28) is a worthy program of life for all whom he calls in every age. 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," [32] 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. This is why Christian tradition has always spoken of the <objective superiority of the consecrated life.> Nor can it be denied that the practice of the evangelical counsels is also a particularly profound and fruitful way of sharing in <Christ's mission>, in imitation of the example of Mary of Nazareth, the first disciple, who willingly put herself at the service of God's plan by the total gift of self. Every mission begins with the attitude expressed by Mary at the Annunciation: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk. 1:38).

VC 22. The consecrated life, through the prompting of the Holy Spirit, "constitutes a closer imitation and an abiding reenactment in the Church" [38] of the way of life which Jesus, the supreme consecrated one and missionary of the Father for the sake of his Kingdom, embraced and proposed to his disciples (cf. Mt. 4:18-22; Mk. 1:16-20; Lk. 5:10-11; Jn. 15:16). In the light of Jesus' consecration, we can see in the initiative of the Father, the source of all holiness, the ultimate origin of the consecrated life. Jesus is the one whom "God anointed ... with the Holy Spirit and with power" (Acts 10:38), the one "whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world" (Jn. 10:36). Accepting his consecration by the Father, the Son in turn consecrates himself to the Father for the sake of humanity (cf. Jn. 17:19). His life of virginity, obedience and poverty expresses his complete filial acceptance of the Father's plan (cf. Jn. 10:30; 14:11). His perfect offering confers an aspect of consecration upon all the events of His earthly existence. Jesus is <the exemplar of obedience>, who came down from heaven not to do his own will but the will of the one who sent him (cf. Jn. 6:38; Heb. 10:5, 7). He places his way of living and

acting in the hands of the Father (cf. Lk. 2:49). In filial obedience, he assumes the condition of a servant: He "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant ... and became obedient unto death, even death on a Cross" (Phil. 2:7-8). In this attitude of submissiveness to the Father, Christ lives his life as a virgin even while affirming and defending the dignity and sanctity of married life. He thus reveals <the sublime excellence and mysterious spiritual fruitfulness of virginity>. His full acceptance of the Father's plan is also seen in his detachment from earthly goods: "Though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9). <The depth of his poverty> is revealed in the perfect offering of all that is his to the Father. The consecrated life truly constitutes <a living memorial of Jesus' way of living and acting> as the Incarnate Word in relation to the Father and in relation to the brethren. It is a living tradition of the Savior's life and message.

**VC 109.** To bear witness to Christ by one's life, works and words is the particular mission of the consecrated life in the Church and in the world. You know the one in whom you have put your trust (cf. 2 Tm. 1:12): Give him everything! Young people will not be deceived; When they come to you, they want to see what they do not see elsewhere. An immense task awaits you in the future: In a special way young consecrated persons, by witnessing to their consecration, can, can lead their contemporaries to a renewal of their lives.[260] An impassioned love of Jesus Christ is a powerful attraction for those other young people whom Christ in his goodness is calling to follow him closely and forever. Our contemporaries want to see in consecrated persons the joy which comes from being with the Lord. Consecrated women and men, old and young alike, live faithfully your commitment to God in mutual edification and mutual support! Despite the difficulties you may occasionally encounter, and despite the lessening of esteem for the consecrated life in certain quarters, you have the task of once more inviting the men and women of our time to lift their eyes, not to let themselves be overwhelmed by everyday things, to let themselves be captivated by the fascination of God and of his Son's Gospel. Do not forget that you, in a very special way, can and must say that you not only belong to Christ but that "you have become Christ!"[261]

- They are consequently a way of perfection in the imitation of Christ.

**RD 4.** This way is also called the way of perfection. Speaking to the young man, Christ says: "If you wish to be perfect..." Thus the idea of the "way of perfection" has its motivation in the very Gospel source. Moreover, do we not hear, in the Sermon on the Mount: "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect"[12]? The calling of man to perfection was in a certain way perceived by thinkers and moralists of the ancient world and also afterwards, in the different periods of history. But the biblical call has a completely original nature: it is particularly demanding when it indicates to man perfection in the likeness of God Himself. [13] Precisely in this form the call corresponds to the whole of the internal logic of Revelation, according to which man was created in the image and likeness of God Himself. He must therefore seek the perfection proper to him in the line of this image and likeness. As St. Paul will write in the letter to the Ephesians: "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." [14] Thus the call to perfection belongs to the very essence of the Christian vocation. On the basis of this call we must also understand the words which Christ addressed to the young man in the Gospel. These words are in a particular way linked to the mystery of the Redemption of man in the world. For this Redemption gives back to God the work of creation which had been contaminated by sin, showing the perfection which the whole of creation, and in particular man, possesses in the thought and intention of God Himself. Especially man must be given and restored to God, if he is to be fully restored to himself. From this comes the eternal call: "Return to me, for I have redeemed you." [15] Christ's words: "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have, and give to the poor,..." clearly bring us into the sphere of the evangelical counsel of poverty, which belongs to the very essence of the religious vocation and profession. At the same time these words can be understood in a wider and, in a sense, essential way. The Teacher from Nazareth invites the person He is addressing to renounce a program of life in which the first place is seen to be occupied by the category of possessing, of "having," and to accept in its place a program centered upon the value of the human person: upon personal "being" with all the transcendence that is 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. Reading Christ's words in the light of the superiority of "being" over "having," especially if the latter is understood in a materialistic and utilitarian sense, we as it were touch the very anthropological bases of a vocation in the Gospel. In the framework of the development of contemporary civilization, this is a particularly relevant discovery. And for this reason the very vocation to "the way of perfection" as laid down by Christ becomes equally relevant. In today's civilization, especially in the context of the world of well-being based on consumerism, man bitterly experiences the essential incompleteness of personal "being" which affects his humanity because of the abundant and various forms of "having"; he then becomes more inclined to accept this truth about vocation which was expressed once and for all in the Gospel. Yes, the call which you, dear brothers and sisters, accepted when you set out on the way of religious profession touches upon the very roots of humanity, the roots of man's destiny in the temporal world. The evangelical "state of perfection" does not cut you off from these roots. On the contrary, it enables you to anchor yourselves even more firmly in the elements that make man man, permeating this humanity--which in various ways is burdened by sin--with the divine and human leaven of the mystery of the Redemption.

- They are more than a simple renunciation, but an acceptance of the mystery of Christ lived within the Church.

**VC 16.** The three disciples caught up in ecstasy hear the Father's call to listen to Christ, to place all their trust in him, to make him the center of their lives. The words from on high give new depth to the invitation by which Jesus himself at the beginning of his public life called them to follow him, to leave their ordinary lives behind and to enter into a close relationship to him. It is precisely this special grace of intimacy which in the consecrated life makes possible and even demands the total gift of self in the profession of the evangelical counsels. The counsels, more than a simple renunciation, are <a specific acceptance of the mystery of Christ lived within the Church.>

**RD 5.** Vocation carries with it the answer to the question: Why be a human person--and how? This answer adds a new dimension to the whole of life and establishes its definitive meaning. This meaning emerges against the background of the Gospel paradox of losing one's life in order to save it, and on the other hand saving one's life by losing it "for Christ's sake and for the sake of the Gospel," as we read in Mark. [16] In the light of these words, Christ's call becomes perfectly clear: "Go, sell what you possess, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." [17] Between this "go" and the subsequent "come, follow me" there is a close connection. It can be said that these latter words determine the very essence of vocation. For a vocation is a matter of following the footsteps of Christ (sequi--to follow, hence sequela Christi). The terms "go...sell...give" seem to lay down the precondition of a vocation. Nevertheless,

this condition is not "external" to a vocation but is already inside it. For a person discovers the new sense of his or her humanity not only in order "to follow" Christ but to the extent that he or she actually does follow Him. When a person "sells what he possesses" and "gives it to the poor," he discovers that those possessions and the comforts he enjoyed were not the treasure to hold on to. The treasure is in his heart, which Christ makes capable of "giving" to others by the giving of self. The rich person is not the one who possesses but the one who "gives," the one who is capable of giving. At this point the Gospel paradox becomes particularly expressive. It becomes a program of being. To be poor in the sense given to this "being" by the Teacher from Nazareth is to become a dispenser of good through one's own human condition. This also means to discover "the treasure." This treasure is indestructible. It passes together with man into the dimension of the eternal. It belongs to the divine eschatology of man. Through this treasure man has his definitive future in God. Christ says: "You will have treasure in heaven." This treasure is not so much a "reward" after death for the good works done following the example of the divine Teacher, but rather the eschatological fulfillment of what was hidden behind these good works here on earth, in the inner "treasure" of the heart. Christ Himself, in fact, when He invited His hearers in the Sermon on the Mount[18] to store up treasure in heaven, added: "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."[19] These words indicate the eschatological character of the Christian vocation. They indicate even more the eschatological nature of the vocation that is realized through spiritual marriage to Christ by the practice of the evangelical counsels.

- They are a sharing in Christ's mission and a clear witness of holiness to the world.

VC 18. Nor can it be denied that the practice of the evangelical counsels is also a particularly profound and fruitful way of sharing in <Christ's mission>, in imitation of the example of Mary of Nazareth, the first disciple, who willingly put herself at the service of God's plan by the total gift of self. Every mission begins with the attitude expressed by Mary at the Annunciation: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk. 1:38).

VC 109. (To consecrated persons) But it is above all to you consecrated women and men that at the end of this exhortation I appeal with trust: Live to the full your dedication to God, so that this world may never be without a ray of divine beauty to lighten the path of human existence. Christians, immersed in the cares and concerns of this world but also called to holiness, need to discover in you purified hearts which in faith "see" God, people docile to the working of the Holy Spirit who resolutely press on in fidelity to the charism of their call and mission. You know well that you have set out on a journey of continual conversion, of exclusive dedication to the love of God and of your brothers and sisters, in order to bear ever more splendid witness to the grace which transfigures Christian life. The world and the Church seek authentic witnesses to Christ. And the consecrated life is a gift which God offers in order that everyone can recognize the "one thing necessary" (cf. Lk. 10:42).

RD 7. Your vocation, dear brothers and sisters, has led you to religious profession, whereby you have been consecrated to God through the ministry of the Church, and have been at the same time incorporated into your religious family. Hence, the Church thinks of you, above all, as persons who are "consecrated": consecrated to God in Jesus Christ as His exclusive possession. This consecration determines your place in the vast community of the Church, the People of God. And at the same time this consecration introduces into the universal mission of this people a special source of spiritual and supernatural energy: a particular style of life, witness and apostolate, in fidelity to the mission of your institute and to its identity and spiritual heritage. The universal mission of the People of God is rooted in the messianic mission of Christ Himself--Prophet, Priest and King--a mission in which all share in different ways. The form of sharing proper to "consecrated" persons corresponds to your manner of being rooted in Christ. The depth and power of this being rooted in Christ is decided precisely by religious profession.

- They are an imitation of Mary of Nazareth's total love, obedience and poverty. They are also a spousal and virginal imitation of Mary and the Church, pregnant with spousal significance. This is particularly significant for women.

VC 18. Nor can it be denied that the practice of the evangelical counsels is also a particularly profound and fruitful way of sharing in <Christ's mission>, in imitation of the example of Mary of Nazareth, the first disciple, who willingly put herself at the service of God's plan by the total gift of self. Every mission begins with the attitude expressed by Mary at the Annunciation: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk. 1:38).

VC 34. In the consecrated life particular importance attaches to the spousal meaning, which recalls the Church's duty to be completely and exclusively devoted to her Spouse, from whom she receives every good thing. This spousal dimension, which is part of all consecrated life, has a particular meaning for women, who find therein their feminine identity and as it were discover the special genius of their relationship with the Lord. The consecrated life has always been seen primarily in terms of Mary— Virgin and Bride. This virginal love is the source of a particular fruitfulness which fosters the birth and growth of divine life in people's hearts.[72] Following in the footsteps of Mary, the New Eve, consecrated persons express their spiritual fruitfulness by becoming receptive to the word, in order to contribute to the growth of a new humanity by their unconditional dedication and their living witness. Thus the Church fully reveals her motherhood both in the communication of divine grace entrusted to Peter and in the responsible acceptance of God's gift, exemplified by Mary. God's people, for their part, find in the ordained ministry the means of salvation and in the consecrated life the incentive to make a full and loving response through all the different forms of Christian service.[73]

VC 109. (To consecrated persons) But it is above all to you consecrated women and men that at the end of this exhortation I appeal with trust: Live to the full your dedication to God, so that this world may never be without a ray of divine beauty to lighten the path of human existence. Christians, immersed in the cares and concerns of this world but also called to holiness, need to discover in you purified hearts which in faith "see" God, people docile to the working of the Holy Spirit who resolutely press on in fidelity to the charism of their call and mission. You know well that you have set out on a journey of continual conversion, of exclusive dedication to the love of God and of your brothers and sisters, in order to bear ever more splendid witness to the grace which transfigures Christian life. The world and the Church seek authentic witnesses to Christ. And the consecrated life is a gift which God offers in order that everyone can recognize the "one thing necessary" (cf. Lk. 10:42). To bear witness to Christ by one's life, works and words is the particular mission of the consecrated life in the Church and in the world. You know the one in whom you have put your trust (cf. 2 Tm. 1:12): Give him

everything! Young people will not be deceived; When they come to you, they want to see what they do not see elsewhere. An immense task awaits you in the future: In a special way young consecrated persons, by witnessing to their consecration, can lead their contemporaries to a renewal of their lives.[260] An impassioned love of Jesus Christ is a powerful attraction for those other young people whom Christ in his goodness is calling to follow him closely and forever. Our contemporaries want to see in consecrated persons the joy which comes from being with the Lord. Consecrated women and men, old and young alike, live faithfully your commitment to God in mutual edification and mutual support! Despite the difficulties you may occasionally encounter, and despite the lessening of esteem for the consecrated life in certain quarters, you have the task of once more inviting the men and women of our time to lift their eyes, not to let themselves be overwhelmed by everyday things, to let themselves be captivated by the fascination of God and of his Son's Gospel. Do not forget that you, in a very special way, can and must say that you not only belong to Christ but that "you have become Christ!"[261]

- Counsels are a response to a divine call of love, which invites a loving response.

PC 5. Members of each institute should recall first of all that by professing the evangelical counsels they responded to a divine call so that by being not only dead to sin (cf. Rom. 6:11) but also renouncing the world they may live for God alone.

PC 6. Let those who make profession of the evangelical counsels seek and love above all else God who has first loved us (cf. 1 John 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, quicken and directs the actual practice of the evangelical counsels.

VC 14. But this is possible only on the basis of a special vocation and in virtue of a particular gift of the Spirit. For in such a life baptismal consecration develops into a radical response in the following of Christ through acceptance of the evangelical counsels, the first and essential of which is the sacred bond of chastity for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. [23]

VC 18. Those who let themselves be seized by this love cannot help abandoning everything to follow him (cf. Mk. 1:16-20; 2:14; 10:21, 28). Like St. Paul, they consider all else as loss "because of the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ, by comparison with which they do not hesitate to count all things as refuse, in order that they "may gain Christ" (Phil. 3:8). They strive to become one with him, taking on his mind and his way of life. This leaving of everything and following the Lord (cf. Lk. 18:28) is a worthy program of life for all whom he calls in every age.

RD 3. "Jesus, looking upon him, loved him,"[6] and said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." [7] Even though we know that those words, addressed to the rich young man, were not accepted by the one being called, their content deserves to be carefully reflected upon, for they present the interior structure of a vocation. "And Jesus, looking upon him, loved him." This is the love of the Redeemer: a love that flows from all the human and divine depths of the Redemption. This love reflects the eternal love of the Father, who "so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." [8] The Son, invested with that love, accepted the mission from the Father in the Holy Spirit and became the Redeemer of the world. The Father's love was revealed in the Son as redeeming love. It is precisely this love that constitutes the true price of the Redemption of man and the world. Christ's Apostles speak of the price of the Redemption with profound emotion: "You were ransomed...not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot," [9] writes St. Peter And St. Paul states: "You were bought with a price." [10] The call to the way of the evangelical counsels springs from the interior encounter with the love of Christ, which is a redeeming love. Christ calls precisely through this love of His. In the structure of a vocation, the encounter with this love becomes something specifically personal. When Christ "looked upon you and loved you," calling each one of you, dear religious, 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. This love embraces the whole person, soul and body, whether man or woman, in that person's unique and unrepeatable personal "I." The One who, given eternally to the Father, "gives" Himself in the mystery of the Redemption, has now called man in order that he in his turn should give himself entirely to the work of the Redemption through membership in a community of brothers or sisters, recognized and approved by the Church. Surely it is precisely to this call that St. Paul's words can be applied: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit...? You are not your own; you were bought with a price." [11] Yes, Christ's love has reached each one of you, dear brothers and sisters, with that same "price" of the Redemption. As a consequence of this, you have realized that you are not your own, but belong to Christ. This new awareness was the fruit of Christ's "loving look" in the secret of your heart. You replied to that look by choosing Him who first chose each one of you, calling you with the measurelessness of His redeeming love. Since He calls "by name," His call always appeals to human freedom. Christ says: "If you wish...." And the response to this call is, therefore, a free choice. You have chosen Jesus of Nazareth, the Redeemer of the world, by choosing the way that He has shown you.

- The Counsels allow people to give themselves completely to God, who is loved above all. They are a gift of self.

CCC 916 In the consecrated life, Christ's faithful, moved by the Holy Spirit, propose to follow Christ more nearly, to give themselves to God who is loved above all and, pursuing the perfection of charity in the service of the Kingdom, to signify and proclaim in the Church the glory of the world to come. [456]

VC 16. It is precisely this special grace of intimacy which in the consecrated life makes possible and even demands the total gift of self in the profession of the evangelical counsels. The counsels, more than a simple renunciation, are <a specific acceptance of the mystery of Christ lived within the Church> ... By professing the evangelical counsels, consecrated persons not only make Christ the whole meaning of their lives, but strive to reproduce in themselves as far as possible "that form of life which he, as the Son of God, accepted in entering this world." [27] By embracing <chastity>, they make their own the pure love of Christ and proclaim to the world that he is the Only Begotten Son, who is one with the Father (cf. Jn. 10:30, 14:11). By imitating Christ's <poverty>, they profess that he is the Son who receives everything from the Father and gives everything back to the Father in love (cf. Jn. 17:7, 10). By accepting through the sacrifice of their own freedom the mystery of Christ's filial <obedience>, they profess that he is infinitely beloved and loving, as the one who delights only in the will of the Father (cf. Jn. 4:34), to whom he is perfectly united and on whom he depends for everything.

VC 18. Those who let themselves be seized by this love cannot help abandoning everything to follow him (cf. Mk. 1:16-20; 2:14; 10:21, 28). Like St. Paul, they consider all else as loss "because of the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ, by comparison with which they do not hesitate to count all things as "refuse, in order that they "may gain Christ" (Phil. 3:8). They strive to become one with him, taking on his mind and his way of life. This leaving of everything and following the Lord (cf. Lk. 18:28) is a worthy program of life for all whom he calls in every age. 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>.

RD 5. The terms "go...sell...give" seem to lay down the precondition of a vocation. Nevertheless, this condition is not "external" to a vocation but is already inside it. For a person discovers the new sense of his or her humanity not only in order "to follow" Christ but to the extent that he or she actually does follow Him. When a person "sells what he possesses" and "gives it to the poor," he discovers that those possessions and the comforts he enjoyed were not the treasure to hold on to. The treasure is in his heart, which Christ makes capable of "giving" to others by the giving of self. The rich person is not the one who possesses but the one who "gives," the one who is capable of giving. At this point the Gospel paradox becomes particularly expressive. It becomes a program of being. To be poor in the sense given to this "being" by the Teacher from Nazareth is to become a dispenser of good through one's own human condition. This also means to discover "the treasure." This treasure is indestructible. It passes together with man into the dimension of the eternal. It belongs to the divine eschatology of man. Through this treasure man has his definitive future in God. Christ says: "You will have treasure in heaven." This treasure is not so much a "reward" after death for the good works done following the example of the divine Teacher, but rather the eschatological fulfillment of what was hidden behind these good works here on earth, in the inner "treasure" of the heart. Christ Himself, in fact, when He invited His hearers in the Sermon on the Mount[18] to store up treasure in heaven, added: "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."[19] These words indicate the eschatological character of the Christian vocation. They indicate even more the eschatological nature of the vocation that is realized through spiritual marriage to Christ by the practice of the evangelical counsels.

- They are a free response to a divine invitation.

RD 3. This new awareness was the fruit of Christ's "loving look" in the secret of your heart. You replied to that look by choosing Him who first chose each one of you, calling you with the measurelessness of His redeeming love. Since He calls "by name," His call always appeals to human freedom. Christ says: "If you wish...." And the response to this call is, therefore, a free choice. You have chosen Jesus of Nazareth, the Redeemer of the world, by choosing the way that He has shown you.

RD 4. This way is also called the way of perfection. Speaking to the young man, Christ says: "If you wish to be perfect...." Thus the idea of the "way of perfection" has its motivation in the very Gospel source. Moreover, do we not hear, in the Sermon on the Mount: "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect"[12]? The calling of man to perfection was in a certain way perceived by thinkers and moralists of the ancient world and also afterwards, in the different periods of history. But the biblical call has a completely original nature: it is particularly demanding when it indicates to man perfection in the likeness of God Himself. [13] Precisely in this form the call corresponds to the whole of the internal logic of Revelation, according to which man was created in the image and likeness of God Himself. He must therefore seek the perfection proper to him in the line of this image and likeness. As St. Paul will write in the letter to the Ephesians: "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." [14] Thus the call to perfection belongs to the very essence of the Christian vocation. On the basis of this call we must also understand the words which Christ addressed to the young man in the Gospel. These words are in a particular way linked to the mystery of the Redemption of man in the world. For this Redemption gives back to God the work of creation which had been contaminated by sin, showing the perfection which the whole of creation, and in particular man, possesses in the thought and intention of God Himself. Especially man must be given and restored to God, if he is to be fully restored to himself. From this comes the eternal call: "Return to me, for I have redeemed you." [15] Christ's words: "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have, and give to the poor...." clearly bring us into the sphere of the evangelical counsel of poverty, which belongs to the very essence of the religious vocation and profession. At the same time these words can be understood in a wider and, in a sense, essential way. The Teacher from Nazareth invites the person He is addressing to renounce a program of life in which the first place is seen to be occupied by the category of possessing, of "having," and to accept in its place a program centered upon the value of the human person: upon personal "being," with all the transcendence that is 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. Reading Christ's words in the light of the superiority of "being" over "having," especially if the latter is understood in a materialistic and utilitarian sense, we as it were touch the very anthropological bases of a vocation in the Gospel. In the framework of the development of contemporary civilization, this is a particularly relevant discovery. And for this reason the very vocation to "the way of perfection" as laid down by Christ becomes equally relevant. In today's civilization, especially in the context of the world of well-being based on consumerism, man bitterly experiences the essential incompleteness of personal "being" which affects his humanity because of the abundant and various forms of "having"; he then becomes more inclined to accept this truth about vocation which was expressed once and for all in the Gospel. Yes, the call which you, dear brothers and sisters, accepted when you set out on the way of religious profession touches upon the very roots of humanity, the roots of man's destiny in the temporal world. The evangelical "state of perfection" does not cut you off from these roots. On the contrary, it enables you to anchor yourselves even more firmly in the elements that make man man, permeating this humanity--which in various ways is burdened by sin--with the divine and human leaven of the mystery of the Redemption.

RD 5. Vocation carries with it the answer to the question: Why be a human person--and how? This answer adds a new dimension to the whole of life and establishes its definitive meaning. This meaning emerges against the background of the Gospel paradox of losing one's life in order to save it, and on the other hand saving one's life by losing it "for Christ's sake and for the sake of the Gospel," as we read in Mark. [16] In the light of these words, Christ's call becomes perfectly clear: "Go, sell what you possess, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." [17] Between this "go" and the subsequent "come, follow me" there is a close connection. It can be said that these latter words determine the very essence of vocation. For a vocation is a matter of following the footsteps of

Christ (sequi--to follow, hence sequela Christi). The terms "go...sell...give" seem to lay down the precondition of a vocation. Nevertheless, this condition is not "external" to a vocation but is already inside it. For a person discovers the new sense of his or her humanity not only in order "to follow" Christ but to the extent that he or she actually does follow Him. When a person "sells what he possesses" and "gives it to the poor," he discovers that those possessions and the comforts he enjoyed were not the treasure to hold on to. The treasure is in his heart, which Christ makes capable of "giving" to others by the giving of self. The rich person is not the one who possesses but the one who "gives," the one who is capable of giving. At this point the Gospel paradox becomes particularly expressive. It becomes a program of being. To be poor in the sense given to this "being" by the Teacher from Nazareth is to become a dispenser of good through one's own human condition. This also means to discover "the treasure." This treasure is indestructible. It passes together with man into the dimension of the eternal. It belongs to the divine eschatology of man. Through this treasure man has his definitive future in God. Christ says: "You will have treasure in heaven." This treasure is not so much a "reward" after death for the good works done following the example of the divine Teacher, but rather the eschatological fulfillment of what was hidden behind these good works here on earth, in the inner "treasure" of the heart. Christ Himself, in fact, when He invited His hearers in the Sermon on the Mount[18] to store up treasure in heaven, added: "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."[19] These words indicate the eschatological character of the Christian vocation. They indicate even more the eschatological nature of the vocation that is realized through spiritual marriage to Christ by the practice of the evangelical counsels.

**RD 7.** Your vocation, dear brothers and sisters, has led you to religious profession, whereby you have been consecrated to God through the ministry of the Church, and have been at the same time incorporated into your religious family. Hence, the Church thinks of you, above all, as persons who are "consecrated": consecrated to God in Jesus Christ as His exclusive possession. This consecration determines your place in the vast community of the Church, the People of God. And at the same time this consecration introduces into the universal mission of this people a special source of spiritual and supernatural energy: a particular style of life, witness and apostolate, in fidelity to the mission of your institute and to its identity and spiritual heritage. The universal mission of the People of God is rooted in the messianic mission of Christ Himself--Prophet, Priest and King--a mission in which all share in different ways. The form of sharing proper to "consecrated" persons corresponds to your manner of being rooted in Christ. The depth and power of this being rooted in Christ is decided precisely by religious profession. Religious profession creates a new bond between the person and the One and Triune God, in Jesus Christ. This bond develops on the foundation of the original bond that is contained in the Sacrament of Baptism. Religious profession "is deeply rooted in baptismal consecration and is a fuller expression of it." [25] In this way religious profession, in its constitutive content, becomes a new consecration: the consecration and giving of the human person to God, loved above all else. The commitment undertaken by means of the vows to practice the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience, according to the determinations proper to each religious family as laid down in the constitutions, is the expression of a total consecration to God and, at the same time, the means that leads to its achievement. This is also the source of the manner proper to consecrated persons of bearing witness and of exercising the apostolate. And yet it is necessary to seek the roots of that conscious and free consecration and of the subsequent giving of self to God as His possession in Baptism, the sacrament that leads us to the Paschal Mystery as the apex and center of the Redemption accomplished by Christ. Therefore, in order to highlight fully the reality of religious profession, we must turn to the vibrant words of St. Paul in the letter to the Romans: "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ...we too might walk in newness of life"; [26] "Our old self was crucified with him so that...we might no longer be enslaved to sin"; [27] "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." [28] Upon the sacramental basis of Baptism in which it is rooted, religious profession is a new "burial in the death of Christ": new, because it is made with awareness and by choice; new, because of love and vocation; new, by reason of unceasing "conversion." This "burial in death" causes the person "buried together with Christ" to "walk like Christ in newness of life." In Christ crucified is to be found the ultimate foundation both of baptismal consecration and of the profession of the evangelical counsels, which--in the words of the Second Vatican Council--"constitutes a special consecration." It is at one and the same time both death and liberation. St. Paul writes: "Consider yourselves dead to sin." At the same time he calls this death "freedom from the slavery of sin." Above all, though, religious consecration, through its sacramental foundation in holy Baptism, constitutes a new life "for God in Jesus Christ." In this way, simultaneously with the profession of the evangelical counsels, in a much more mature and conscious manner, "the old nature is put off" and likewise "the new nature is put on, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness," to use once more the words of the letter to the Ephesians.[29]

- They fight specifically against the three-fold lust.

**RD 9.** We can discover the bases of the economy of Redemption by reading the words of the first letter of St. John: "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If any one loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. 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. And the world passes away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever." [48] Religious profession places in the heart of each one of you, dear brothers and sisters, the love of the Father: that love which is in the heart of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of the world. It is love which embraces the world and everything in it that comes from the Father, and which at the same time tends to overcome in the world everything that "does not come from the Father". It tends therefore to conquer the threefold lust. "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life" are hidden within man as the inheritance of original sin, as a result of which the relationship with the world, created by God and given to man to be ruled by him, [49] was disfigured in the human heart in various ways. In the economy of the Redemption the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience constitute the most radical means for transforming in the human heart this relationship with "the world": with the external world and with one's personal "I"--which in some way is the central part "of the world" in the biblical sense, if what "does not come from the Father" begins within it. 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. We are deliberately speaking here of an overcoming as a transformation, for the entire economy of the Redemption is set in the framework of the words spoken in the priestly prayer to the Father: "I do not ask you to take them out of the world, but to guard them from the evil one." [50] The evangelical counsels in their essential purpose aim at "the renewal of creation": "the world," thanks to them, is to be subjected to man and given to him in such a way that man himself may be perfectly given to God.



- The Counsels allow one to pursue the perfection of charity in the service of the Kingdom. They also bear witness to the reality of the redemption in the world, by their unambiguous testimony of love.

CCC 916 In the consecrated life, Christ's faithful, moved by the Holy Spirit, propose to follow Christ more nearly, to give themselves to God who is loved above all and, pursuing the perfection of charity in the service of the Kingdom, to signify and proclaim in the Church the glory of the world to come.[456]

RD 14. The profession of the evangelical counsels shows each of you how with the help of the Spirit you can put to death[92] everything that is contrary to life and serves sin and death; everything that is opposed to true love of God and others. The world needs the authentic "contradiction" provided by religious consecration, as an unceasing stimulus of salvific renewal. "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." [93] ... May this gift of the Church [new constitutions] encourage you to know them, to love them and, above all, to live them in generosity and fidelity, remembering that obedience is an unambiguous manifestation of love. It is precisely this witness of love that the world today and all humanity need. They need this witness to the Redemption as this is imprinted upon the profession of the evangelical counsels. These counsels, each in its own way and all of them together in their intimate connection, "bear witness" to the Redemption which, by the power of Christ's cross and resurrection, leads the world and humanity in the Holy Spirit towards that definitive fulfillment which man and—through man—the whole of creation find in God, and only in God. Your witness is therefore of inestimable value. You must constantly strive to make it fully transparent and fully fruitful in the world.

- They are a special confession and gift of the Holy Trinity, and an imprint of the Holy Trinity on history.

VC 14. This special way of "following Christ," at the origin of which is always the initiative of the Father, has an essential Christological and pneumatological meaning: It expresses in a particularly vivid way the <Trinitarian> nature of the Christian life, and it anticipates in a certain way that <eschatological> fulfillment toward which the whole Church is tending.[24]

VC 16. By this profound "configuration" to the mystery of Christ, the consecrated life brings about in a special way that <confessio Trinitatis> which is the mark of all Christian life; it acknowledges with wonder the sublime beauty of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and bears joyful witness to his loving concern for every human being.

VC 20. The evangelical counsels are thus above all <a gift of the Holy Trinity>. The consecrated life proclaims what the Father, through the Son and in the Spirit, brings about by his love, his goodness and his beauty. In fact, "the religious state reveals the transcendence of the Kingdom of God and its requirements over all earthly things. To all people it shows wonderfully at work within the Church the surpassing greatness of the force of Christ the King and the boundless power of the Holy Spirit." [35] The first duty of the consecrated life is <to make visible> the marvels wrought by God in the frail humanity of those who are called. They bear witness to these marvels not so much in words as by the eloquent language of a transfigured life, capable of amazing the world. To people's astonishment they respond by proclaiming the wonders of grace accomplished by the Lord in those whom he loves. ... The consecrated life thus becomes one of the tangible seals which the Trinity impresses upon history, so that people can sense with longing the attraction of divine beauty.

VC 21. The deepest meaning of the evangelical counsels is revealed when they are viewed in relation to the Holy Trinity, the source of holiness. They are in fact an expression of the love of the Son for the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit. By practicing the evangelical counsels, the consecrated person lives with particular intensity the Trinitarian and Christological dimension which marks the whole of Christian life... The consecrated life is thus called constantly to deepen the gift of the evangelical counsels with a love which grows ever more genuine and strong in the <Trinitarian> dimension: love <for Christ>, which leads to closeness with him; love <for the Holy Spirit>, who opens our hearts to his inspiration; love <for the Father>, the first origin and supreme goal of the consecrated life.[37] The consecrated life thus becomes a confession and a sign of the Trinity, whose mystery is held up to the Church as the model and source of every form of Christian life. Even <fraternal life>, whereby consecrated persons strive to live in Christ with "one heart and soul" (Acts 4:32), is put forward as an eloquent witness to the Trinity. It proclaims <the Father>, who desires to make all of humanity one family. It proclaims <the Incarnate Son>, who gathers the redeemed into unity, pointing the way by his example, his prayer, his words and above all his death, which is the source of reconciliation for a divided and scattered humanity. It proclaims <the Holy Spirit> as the principle of unity in the Church, wherein he ceaselessly raises up spiritual families and fraternal communities.

- The Counsels allow one to signify and proclaim in the Church the glory of the world to come.

CCC 916 In the consecrated life, Christ's faithful, moved by the Holy Spirit, propose to follow Christ more nearly, to give themselves to God who is loved above all and, pursuing the perfection of charity in the service of the Kingdom, to signify and proclaim in the Church the glory of the world to come.[456]

PC 1: The sacred synod has already shown in the constitution on the Church that the pursuit of perfect charity through the evangelical counsels draws its origin from the doctrine and example of the Divine Master and reveals itself as a splendid sign of the heavenly kingdom.

VC 14. This special way of "following Christ," at the origin of which is always the initiative of the Father, has an essential Christological and pneumatological meaning: It expresses in a particularly vivid way the <Trinitarian> nature of the Christian life, and it anticipates in a certain way that <eschatological> fulfillment toward which the whole Church is tending.[24]

VC 16. It is the duty of the <consecrated life> to show that the Incarnate Son of God is <the eschatological goal toward which all things tend>, the splendor before which every other light pales and the infinite beauty which alone can fully satisfy the human heart. In the consecrated life, then, it is not only a matter of following Christ with one's whole heart, of loving him "more than father or mother, more

than son or daughter" (cf. Mt. 10:37)— for this is required of every disciple— but of living and expressing this <by conforming one's whole existence to Christ> in an all-encompassing commitment which foreshadows the eschatological perfection to the extent that this is possible in time and in accordance with the different charisms. ... By this profound "configuration" to the mystery of Christ, the consecrated life brings about in a special way that <confessio Trinitatis> which is the mark of all Christian life; it acknowledges wit wonder the sublime beauty of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and bears joyful witness to his loving concern for every human being.

- The evangelical counsels sum up the entire economy of salvation, transforming the heart of man.

**RD 9.** Through your profession, the way of the evangelical counsels opens up before each one of you. In the Gospel there are many exhortations that go beyond the measure of the commandment, indicating not only what is "necessary" but what is "better." Thus, for example, the exhortation not to judge,[42] to lend "expecting nothing in return,"[43] to comply with all the requests and desires of our neighbor,[44] to invite the poor to a meal,[45] to pardon always[46] and many other invitations. If, in accordance with Tradition, the profession of the evangelical counsels has concentrated on the three points of chastity, poverty and obedience, this usage seems to emphasize sufficiently clearly their importance as key elements and in a certain sense as a "summing up" of the entire economy of salvation. Everything in the Gospel that is a counsel enters indirectly into the program of that way to which Christ calls when He says: "Follow me." But chastity, poverty and obedience give to this way a particular Christocentric characteristic and imprint upon it a specific sign of the economy of the Redemption. Essential to this "economy" is the transformation of the entire cosmos through the heart of man, from within: "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. . . and will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God." [47] This transformation takes place in step with that love which Christ's call infuses in the depth of the individual— that love which constitutes the very substance of consecration: a man or woman's vowing of self to God in religious profession, on the foundation of the sacramental consecration of Baptism. We can discover the bases of the economy of Redemption by reading the words of the first letter of St. John: "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If any one loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. 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. And the world passes away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. [48] Religious profession places in the heart of each one of you, dear brothers and sisters, the love of the Father: that love which is in the heart of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of the world. It is love which embraces the world and everything in it that comes from the Father, and which at the same time tends to overcome in the world everything that "does not come from the Father." The evangelical counsels in their essential purpose aim at "the renewal of creation": "the world," thanks to them, is to be subjected to man and given to him in such a way that man himself may be perfectly given to God.

## Chastity

- Chastity is a divine gift to make one's own the pure love of Christ, who was both virgin and spouse.

**VC 16.** By embracing <chastity>, they make their own the pure love of Christ and proclaim to the world that he is the Only Begotten Son, who is one with the Father (cf. Jn. 10:30, 14:11).

**VC 22.** In this attitude of submissiveness to the Father, Christ lives his life as a virgin even while affirming and defending the dignity and sanctity of married life. He thus reveals <the sublime excellence and mysterious spiritual fruitfulness of virginity>.

- It is a reflection of the infinite love within the Trinity and of Christ for us.

**VC 21.** The <chastity> of celibates and virgins as a manifestation of dedication to God with <an undivided heart> (cf. 1 Cor. 7:32-34) is a reflection of the <infinite love> which links the three Divine Persons in the mysterious depths of the life of the Trinity, the love to which the Incarnate Word bears witness even to the point of giving his life, the love "poured into our hearts" through the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 5:5), which evokes a response of total love for God and the brethren.

- Chastity is for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.

**PC 12.** The chastity "for the sake of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 19:12) which religious profess should be counted an outstanding gift of grace.

**PO 16.** Perfect and perpetual continence for the sake of the kingdom of heaven was recommended by Christ the Lord.[33] It has been freely accepted and laudably observed by many Christians down through the centuries as well as in our own time, and has always been highly esteemed in a special way by the Church as a feature of priestly life.

- It is an outstanding gift of grace.

**PC 12.** The chastity "for the sake of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 19:12) which religious profess should be counted an outstanding gift of grace. It frees the heart of man in a unique fashion (cf. 1 Cor. 7:32-35) so that it may be more inflamed with love for God and for all men.

**PO 16.** This sacred Council approves and confirms this legislation so far as it concerns those destined for the priesthood, and feels confident in the Spirit that the gift of celibacy, so appropriate to the priesthood of the New Testament, is liberally granted by the Father, provided those who share Christ's priesthood through the sacrament of Order, and indeed the whole Church, ask for that gift humbly and earnestly. This sacred Council also exhorts all priests who, with trust in God's grace, have of their own free choice accepted consecrated celibacy after the example of Christ, to hold fast to it with courage and enthusiasm, and to persevere faithfully in this state,

appreciating that glorious gift that has been given them by the Father and is so clearly extolled by the Lord [42] and keeping before their eyes the great mysteries that are signified and fulfilled in it. And the more that perfect continence is considered by many people to be impossible in the world today, so much the more humbly and perseveringly in union with the Church ought priests demand the grace of fidelity, which is never denied to those who ask. At the same time they will employ all the helps to fidelity both supernatural and natural, which are available to everybody. Especially they should never neglect to follow the rules of ascetical practice which are approved by the experience of the Church and are as necessary as ever in the modern world. So this sacred Council asks that not only priests but all the faithful would cherish this precious gift of priestly celibacy, and that all of them would beg of God always to lavish this gift abundantly on his Church.

**PDV 29.** Referring to the evangelical counsels, the Council states that "preeminent among these counsels is that precious gift of divine grace given to some by the Father (cf. Mt 19:11; 1 Cor 7:7) in order more easily to devote themselves to God alone with an undivided heart (cf. 1 Cor 7:32-34) in virginity or celibacy. ... While in no way interfering with the discipline of the Oriental Churches, the Synod, in the conviction that perfect chastity in priestly celibacy is a charism, reminds priests that celibacy is a priceless gift of God for the Church and has a prophetic value for the world today. ... The Synod would like to see celibacy presented and explained in the fullness of its biblical, theological and spiritual richness, as a precious gift given by God to his Church and as a sign of the Kingdom which is not of this world, a sign of God's love for this world and of the undivided love of the priest for God and for God's People, with the result that celibacy is seen as a positive enrichment of the priesthood".[78]

**RRL 15.** For our part, We must be firmly and surely convinced that the value and the fruitfulness of chastity observed for love of God in religious celibacy find their ultimate basis in nothing other than the Word of God, the teachings of Christ, the life of His Virgin Mother and also the apostolic tradition, as it has been unceasingly affirmed by the Church. We are in fact dealing here with a precious gift which the Father imparts to certain people. This gift, fragile and vulnerable because of human weakness, remains open to the contradictions of mere reason and is in part incomprehensible to those to whom the light of the Word Incarnate has not revealed how he who loses his life for Him will find it. [25]

**TAR:** With singular care, Religious should preserve chastity as a treasured gem.

- Chastity frees the heart of man so that it might be more inflamed with love for God and for all men. It allows man to act with an undividing heart.

**PC 12.** The chastity "for the sake of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 19:12) which religious profess should be counted an outstanding gift of grace. It frees the heart of man in a unique fashion (cf. 1 Cor. 7:32-35) so that it may be more inflamed with love for God and for all men. Thus it not only symbolizes in a singular way the heavenly goods but also the most suitable means by which religious dedicate themselves with undivided heart to the service of God and the works of the apostolate. In this way they recall to the minds of all the faithful that wondrous marriage decreed by God and which is to be fully revealed in the future age in which the Church takes Christ as its only spouse.

- It is a sign and stimulus of love, to pastoral charity.

**RRL 14.** Thus, dear brothers and sisters, it is necessary for you to restore to the Christian spirituality of consecrated chastity its full effectiveness. When it is truly lived, for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, consecrated chastity frees man's heart and thus becomes "a sign and stimulus of charity as well as a special source of spiritual fruitfulness in the world." [24] Even if the world does not always recognize it, consecrated chastity remains in every case effective in a mystical manner in the world.

**PDV 29.** Referring to the evangelical counsels, the Council states that "preeminent among these counsels is that precious gift of divine grace given to some by the Father (cf. Mt 19:11; 1 Cor 7:7) in order more easily to devote themselves to God alone with an undivided heart (cf. 1 Cor 7:32-34) in virginity or celibacy. This perfect continence for love of the Kingdom of Heaven has always been held in high esteem by the Church as a sign and stimulus of love, and as a singular source of spiritual fertility in the world". [76] ... It is especially important that the priest understand the theological motivation of the Church's law on celibacy. Inasmuch as it is a law, it expresses <the Church's will> even before the will of the subject expressed by his readiness. But the will of the Church finds its ultimate motivation in the <link between celibacy and sacred Ordination>, which configures the priest to Jesus Christ the Head and Spouse of the Church. The Church, as the Spouse of Jesus Christ, wishes to be loved by the priest in the total and exclusive manner in which Jesus Christ her Head and Spouse loved her. ... Celibacy, then, is to be welcomed and continually renewed with a free and loving decision as a priceless gift from God, as an "incentive to pastoral charity", [79] as a singular sharing in God's fatherhood and in the fruitfulness of the Church, and as a witness to the world of the eschatological Kingdom. To put into practice all the moral, pastoral and spiritual demands of priestly celibacy it is absolutely necessary that the priest pray humbly and trustingly

**VC 75.** "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. And during supper ... Jesus rose ... and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded" (Jn. 13:1-2, 4-5). In the washing of feet Jesus reveals the depth of God's love for humanity: In Jesus, God places himself at the service of human beings! At the same time he reveals the meaning of the Christian life and, even more, of the consecrated life, which is <a life of self-giving love>, of practical and generous service. In its commitment to following the Son of man, who "came not to be served but to serve" (Mt. 20:28), the consecrated life, at least in the best periods of its long history, has been characterized by this "washing of feet", that is, by service directed in particular to the poorest and neediest. If, on the one hand, the consecrated life contemplates the sublime mystery of the Word in the bosom of the Father (cf. Jn. 1:1), on the other hand it follows the Word who became flesh (cf. Jn. 1:14), lowering himself, humbling himself in order to serve others. Even today those who follow Christ on the path of the evangelical counsels intend to go where Christ went and to do what he did. He continually calls new disciples to himself, both men and women, to communicate to them by an outpouring of the Spirit (cf. Rom. 5:5) the divine <agape>, his way of loving, and to urge them thus to serve others in the humble gift of themselves, far from all self-interest. ... The fact that consecrated persons fix their gaze on the Lord's countenance does not diminish their commitment on behalf of

humanity; on the contrary, it strengthens this commitment, enabling it to have an impact on history, in order to free history from all that disfigures it. The quest for divine beauty impels consecrated persons to care for the deformed image of God on the faces of their brothers and sisters, faces disfigured by hunger, faces disillusioned by political promises, faces humiliated by seeing their culture despised, faces frightened by constant and indiscriminate violence, the anguished faces of minors, the hurt and humiliated faces of women, the tired faces of migrants who are not given a warm welcome, the faces of the elderly who are without even the minimum conditions for a dignified life.[181] The consecrated life thus shows with the eloquence of works that divine charity is the foundation and stimulus of freely given and active love. St. Vincent de Paul was deeply convinced of this when he explained to the Daughters of Charity this program of life: The spirit of the Society consists in giving yourselves to God in order to love our Lord and to serve him in the person of the materially and spiritually poor, in their houses and elsewhere, in order to teach poor young girls, children, in general anybody whom Divine Providence sends you." [182] Today, among the possible works of charity, certainly the one which in a special way shows the world this love "to the end" is the fervent proclamation of Jesus Christ to those who do not yet know him, to those who have forgotten him and to the poor in a preferential way.

**PO 16.** For it is at once a sign of pastoral charity and an incentive to it as well as being in a special way a source of spiritual fruitfulness in the world.[34] ... There are many ways in which celibacy is in harmony with the priesthood. For the whole mission of the priest is dedicated to the service of the new humanity which Christ, the victor over death, raises up in the world through his Spirit and which is born "not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (Jn. 1:13).

- It brings sexuality back to its original meaning, a genuine sign of and precious service to the love of communion and gift of self to others.

**PDV 29.** In virginity and celibacy, chastity retains its original meaning, that is, of human sexuality lived as a genuine sign of and precious service to the love of communion and gift of self to others. This meaning is fully found in virginity which makes evident, even in the renunciation of marriage, the "nuptial meaning" of the body through a communion and a personal gift to Jesus Christ and his Church which prefigures and anticipates the perfect and final communion and self-giving of the world to come: "In virginity or celibacy, the human being is awaiting, also in a bodily way, the eschatological marriage of Christ with the Church, giving himself or herself completely to the Church in the hope that Christ may give himself to the Church in the full truth of eternal life" .... It is especially important that the priest understand the theological motivation of the Church's law on celibacy. Inasmuch as it is a law, it expresses <the Church's will> even before the will of the subject expressed by his readiness. But the will of the Church finds its ultimate motivation in the <link between celibacy and sacred Ordination>, which configures the priest to Jesus Christ the Head and Spouse of the Church. The Church, as the Spouse of Jesus Christ, wishes to be loved by the priest in the total and exclusive manner in which Jesus Christ her Head and Spouse loved her. Priestly celibacy, then, is the gift of self <in> and <with> Christ <to> his Church and expresses the priest's service to the Church in and with the Lord.

- It is a spousal sign of love for the redeemer himself. The Lord is loved above all things.

**RD 11.** The paschal character of this call makes itself known from various points of view, in connection with each individual counsel. It is indeed according to the measure of the economy of the Redemption that one must also judge and practice that chastity which each of you has promised by vow, together with poverty and obedience. There is contained in this the response to Christ's words, which are at the same time an invitation: "There are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs 1

renewed with a free and loving decision as a priceless gift from God, as an "incentive to pastoral charity",[79] as a singular sharing in God's fatherhood and in the fruitfulness of the Church, and as a witness to the world of the eschatological Kingdom.

**RRL 13.** Consecrated chastity evokes this union in a more immediate way and brings that surpassing excellence to which all human love should tend. Thus, at the very moment that human love is more than ever threatened by a "ravaging eroticism,"[23] consecrated chastity must be today more than ever understood and lived with uprightness and generosity. Chastity is decisively positive, it witnesses to preferential love for the Lord and symbolizes in the most eminent and absolute way the mystery of the union of the Mystical Body with its Head, the union of the Bride with her eternal Bridegroom. Finally, it reaches, transforms and imbues with a mysterious likeness to Christ man's being in its most hidden depths.

- It is a direct response to the hedonistic culture that degrades sexuality. It reorients disordered human love back to its original purpose, by helping one receive the self-mastery, strength and discipline necessary to love with the love of Christ.

**VC 88.** (The challenge of consecrated chastity) The <first challenge> is that of a <hedonistic culture> which separates sexuality from all objective moral norms, often treating it as a mere diversion and a consumer good and, with the complicity of the means of social communication, justifying a kind of idolatry of the sexual instinct. The consequences of this are before everyone's eyes: transgressions of every kind, with resulting psychic and moral suffering on the part of individuals and families. The <reply> of the 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. The consecrated person attests that what many have believed impossible becomes, with the Lord's grace, possible and truly liberating. Yes, in Christ it is possible to love God with all one's heart, putting him above every other love, and thus to love every creature with the freedom of God! This testimony is more necessary than ever today, precisely because it is so little understood by our world. It is offered to everyone—young people, engaged couples, husbands and wives and Christian families—in order to show that <the power of God's love can accomplish great things> precisely within the context of human love. It is a witness which also meets a growing need for interior honesty in human relationships. The consecrated life must present to today's world examples of chastity lived by men and women who show balance, self-mastery, an enterprising spirit, and psychological and affective maturity.[224] Thanks to this witness, human love is offered a stable point of reference: the pure love which consecrated persons draw from the contemplation of Trinitarian love, revealed to us in Christ. Precisely because they are immersed in this mystery, consecrated persons feel themselves capable of a radical and universal love, which gives them the strength for the self-mastery and discipline necessary in order not to fall under the domination of the senses and instincts. Consecrated chastity thus appears as a joyful and liberating experience. Enlightened by faith in the Risen Lord and by the prospect of the new heavens and the new earth (cf. Rv. 21:1), it offers a priceless incentive in the task of educating to that chastity which corresponds to other states of life as well.

**RRL 13.** On this condition, the gift of self, made to God and to others, will be the source of deep peace. Without in any way undervaluing human love and marriage--is not the latter, according to faith, the image and sharing of the union of love joining Christ and the Church?[22]--consecrated chastity evokes this union in a more immediate way and brings that surpassing excellence to which all human love should tend. Thus, at the very moment that human love is more than ever threatened by a "ravaging eroticism,"[23] consecrated chastity must be today more than ever understood and lived with uprightness and generosity.

**TAR:** With singular care, Religious should preserve chastity as a treasured gem. Everyone knows that in the present condition of human society the practice of perfect chastity is made difficult, not only because of the prevalence of depraved morality but also on account of false teachings which glamorize excessively the merely natural condition of man, thereby pouring poison into his soul. An awareness of these facts should impel Religious to stir up their faith more energetically--that same faith by which we believe the declarations of Christ when He proclaims the supernatural value of chastity that is sought for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. It is this same faith which assures us beyond doubt that, with the help of divine grace, we can preserve unsullied, the flower of chastity. To obtain this blessed objective, it is, of course, necessary to practice Christian mortification with more courageous zeal, and also to guard the senses with more diligent care.

- It does not have any disdain for Christian marriage, but, in fact, a support of it.

**RD 11.** As you know, it is a question here of chastity in the sense "of making themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven," a question, that is, of virginity or celibacy as an expression of spousal love for the Redeemer Himself. In this sense the Apostle teaches that they "do well" who choose matrimony but they "do better who choose virginity."[60] "The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord,"[61] and "the unmarried woman or girl is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit."[62] There is contained neither in the words of Christ nor in those of Paul any lack of esteem for matrimony. The evangelical counsel of chastity is only an indication of that particular possibility which for the human heart, whether of a man or of a woman, constitutes the spousal love of Christ Himself, of Jesus the "Lord." "To make themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven" is not in fact merely a free renunciation of marriage and family life, but a charismatic choice of Christ as one's exclusive Spouse. This choice not only specifically enables one to be "anxious about the affairs of the Lord" but--when it is made "for the kingdom of heaven"--it brings this eschatological kingdom of God close to the life of all people in the conditions of temporality, and makes it in a certain way present in the midst of the world. In this way, consecrated persons accomplish the interior purpose of the entire economy of the Redemption. For this purpose expresses itself in bringing near the kingdom of God in its definitive, eschatological dimension. Through the vow of chastity, consecrated persons share in the economy of the Redemption through the free renunciation of the temporal joys of married and family life; on the other hand, precisely by their "having made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven," they bring into the midst of this passing world the announcement of the future resurrection[63] and of eternal life: life in union with God Himself through the beatific vision and the love which contains in itself and completely pervades all the other loves of the human heart.

**RRL 13.** Only the love of God--it must be repeated--calls in a decisive way to religious chastity. This love moreover makes so uncompromising a demand for fraternal charity that the religious will live more profoundly with his contemporaries in the heart of Christ. On this condition, the gift of self, made to God and to others, will be the source of deep peace. Without in any way undervaluing human love and marriage--is not the latter, according to faith, the image and sharing of the union of love joining Christ and the Church?[22]--consecrated chastity evokes this union in a more immediate way and brings that surpassing excellence to which all human love should tend.

- It gives a sign of the eschatological marriage between Christ and the Church.

**PDV 29.** This meaning is fully found in virginity which makes evident, even in the renunciation of marriage, the "nuptial meaning" of the body through a communion and a personal gift to Jesus Christ and his Church which prefigures and anticipates the perfect and final communion and self-giving of the world to come: "In virginity or celibacy, the human being is awaiting, also in a bodily way, the eschatological marriage of Christ with the Church, giving himself or herself completely to the Church in the hope that Christ may give himself to the Church in the full truth of eternal life". [77] ... The Synod would like to see celibacy presented and explained in the fullness of its biblical, theological and spiritual richness, as a precious gift given by God to his Church and as a sign of the Kingdom which is not of this world, a sign of God's love for this world and of the undivided love of the priest for God and for God's People, with the result that celibacy is seen as a positive enrichment of the priesthood". [78] It is especially important that the priest understand the theological motivation of the Church's law on celibacy. Inasmuch as it is a law, it expresses <the Church's will> even before the will of the subject expressed by his readiness. But the will of the Church finds its ultimate motivation in the <link between celibacy and sacred Ordination> which configures the priest to Jesus Christ the Head and Spouse of the Church. The Church, as the Spouse of Jesus Christ, wishes to be loved by the priest in the total and exclusive manner in which Jesus Christ her Head and Spouse loved her. Priestly celibacy, then, is the gift of self <in> and <with> Christ <to> his Church and expresses the priest's service to the Church in and with the Lord.

**PO 16.** By means of celibacy, then, priests profess before men their willingness to be dedicated with undivided loyalty to the task entrusted to them, namely that of espousing the faithful to one husband and presenting them as a chaste virgin to Christ.[39] They recall that mystical marriage, established by God and destined to be fully revealed in the future, by which the Church holds Christ as her only spouse.[40] Moreover they are made a living sign of that world to come, already present through faith and charity, a world in which the children of the resurrection shall neither be married nor take wives.[41] For these reasons, based on the mystery of Christ and his mission, celibacy, which at first was recommended to priests, was afterwards in the Latin Church imposed by law on all who were to be promoted to holy Orders.

- Safeguards for chastity are prayers, the sacraments, fraternal love, asceticism and custody of the senses.

**PC 12.** Religious, therefore, who are striving faithfully to observe the chastity they have professed must have faith in the words of the Lord, and trusting in God's help not overestimate their own strength but practice mortification and custody of the senses. Neither should they neglect the natural means which promote health of mind and body. As a result they will not be influenced by those false doctrines which scorn perfect continence as being impossible or harmful to human development and they will repudiate by a certain spiritual instinct everything which endangers chastity. In addition let all, especially superiors, remember that chastity is guarded more securely when true brotherly love flourishes in the common life of the community. Since the observance of perfect continence touches intimately the deepest instincts of human nature, candidates should neither present themselves for nor be admitted to the vow of chastity, unless they have been previously tested sufficiently and have been shown to possess the required psychological and emotional maturity. They should not only be warned about the dangers to chastity which they may meet but they should be so instructed as to be able to undertake the celibacy which binds them to God in a way which will benefit their entire personality.

**PDV 29.** For an adequate priestly spiritual life, celibacy ought not to be considered and lived as an isolated or purely negative element, but as one aspect of a positive, specific and characteristic approach to being a priest. Leaving father and mother, the priest follows Jesus the Good Shepherd, in an apostolic communion, in the service of the People of God. Celibacy, then, is to be welcomed and continually renewed with a free and loving decision as a priceless gift from God, as an "incentive to pastoral charity",[79] as a singular sharing in God's fatherhood and in the fruitfulness of the Church, and as a witness to the world of the eschatological Kingdom. To put into practice all the moral, pastoral and spiritual demands of priestly celibacy it is absolutely necessary that the priest pray humbly and trustingly, as the Council points out: "In the world today, many people call perfect continence impossible. The more they do so, the more humbly and perseveringly priests should join with the Church in praying for the grace of fidelity. It is never denied to those who ask. At the same time let priests make use of all the supernatural and natural helps which are now available to all".[80] Once again it is prayer, together with the Church's Sacraments and ascetical practice, which will provide hope in difficulties, forgiveness in failings, and confidence and courage in resuming the journey.

**TAR:** With singular care, Religious should preserve chastity as a treasured gem. Everyone knows that in the present condition of human society the practice of perfect chastity is made difficult, not only because of the prevalence of depraved morality but also on account of false teachings which glamorize excessively the merely natural condition of man, thereby pouring poison into his soul. An awareness of these facts should impel Religious to stir up their faith more energetically--that same faith by which we believe the declarations of Christ when He proclaims the supernatural value of chastity that is sought for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. It is this same faith which assures us beyond doubt that, with the help of divine grace, we can preserve unsullied, the flower of chastity. To obtain this blessed objective, it is, of course, necessary to practice Christian mortification with more courageous zeal, and also to guard the senses with more diligent care. Therefore, the life of the Religious should find no place for books, periodicals or shows which are unbecoming or indecent, not even under the pretext of a desire to learn things useful to know or to broaden one's education, except possibly the case, duly ascertained by the Religious Superior, where there is proven necessity for the study of such things. In a world pervaded by so many

sordid forms of vice, no one can adequately reckon the powerful effectiveness of the sacred ministry of one whose life is radiant with the light of a chastity consecrated to God and from which he draws his strength.

## Poverty

- Evangelical poverty is a participation in the poverty of Christ who became poor for our sakes.

PC 13. Religious should diligently practice and if need be express also in new forms that voluntary poverty which is recognized and highly esteemed especially today as an expression of the following of Christ. By it they share in the poverty of Christ who for our sakes became poor, even though He was rich, so that by His poverty we might become rich (cf. 2 Cor. 8:9; Matt. 8:20).

PDV 30. Poverty for the priest, by virtue of his sacramental configuration to Christ, the Head and Shepherd, takes on specific "pastoral" connotations which the Synod Fathers took up from the Council's teaching [82] and further developed. Among other things, they wrote: "Priests, following the example of Christ who rich though he was became poor for love of us (cf. 2 Cor 8:9), should consider the poor and the weakest as people entrusted in a special way to them and they should be capable of witnessing to poverty with a simple and austere lifestyle, having learned the generous renunciation of superfluous things ("Optatam Totius," 9; C.I.C., can. 282)".... Jesus Christ, who brought his pastoral charity to perfection on the Cross with a complete exterior and interior emptying of self, is both the model and source of the virtues of obedience, chastity and poverty which the priest is called to live out as an expression of his pastoral charity for his brothers and sisters. In accordance with Saint Paul's words to the Christians at Philippi, the priest should have "the mind which was in Christ Jesus", emptying himself of his own "self", so as to discover, in a charity which is obedient, chaste and poor, the royal road of union with God and unity with his brothers and sisters (cf. Phil 2:5).

VC 22. His full acceptance of the Father's plan is also seen in his detachment from earthly goods: "Though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9). <The depth of his poverty> is revealed in the perfect offering of all that is his to the Father.

- Poverty is ultimately at the center of the economy of salvation in the plan of Christ, and without being poor in spirit, one cannot really understand the depth and greatness of the redemption. It reaches its culmination on the Cross.

RD 12. How very expressive in the matter of poverty are the words of the second letter to the Corinthians which constitute a concise synthesis of all that we hear on this theme in the Gospel! "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich." [64] According to these words poverty actually enters into the interior structure of the redemptive grace of Jesus Christ. Without poverty it is not possible to understand the mystery of the gift of divinity to man, a gift which is accomplished precisely in Jesus Christ. For this reason also it is found at the very center of the Gospel, at the beginning of the message of the eight beatitudes: "Blessed are the poor in spirit." [65] Evangelical poverty reveals to the eyes of the human soul the perspective of the whole mystery, "hidden for ages in God." [66] Only those who are "poor" in this way are also interiorly capable of understanding the poverty of the one who is infinitely rich. The poverty of Christ conceals in itself this infinite richness of God; it is indeed an infallible expression of it. A richness, in fact, such as 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. Christ, the God-man, is the first of these: He who "though he was rich became poor" is not only the teacher but also the spokesman and guarantor of that salvific poverty which corresponds to the infinite richness of God and to the inexhaustible power of His grace. And thus it is also true as the Apostle writes--that "by his poverty we have become rich." It is the teacher and spokesman of poverty who makes us rich. For this very reason He says to the young man of the synoptic Gospels: "Sell what you possess and give...and you will have treasure in heaven." [67] In these words there is a call to enrich others through one's own poverty, but in the depths of this call there is hidden the testimony of the infinite richness of God which, transferred to the human soul in the mystery of grace, creates in man himself, precisely through poverty, a source for enriching others not comparable with any other resource of material goods, a source for bestowing gifts on others in the manner of God Himself. This giving is accomplished in the context of the mystery of Christ, who "has made us rich by his poverty." We see how this process of enrichment unfolds in the pages of the Gospel, finding its culmination in the paschal event: Christ, the poorest in His death on the cross, is also the One who enriches us infinitely with the fullness of new life, through the resurrection. Dear brothers and sisters, poor in spirit through your evangelical profession, receive into the whole of your life this salvific profile of the poverty of Christ. Day by day seek its ever greater development! Seek above all "the kingdom of God and his righteousness" and the other things "shall be yours as well." [68] May there be accomplished in you and through you the evangelical blessedness reserved for the poor, [69] the poor in spirit! [70]

- This is a means by which religious find their sole treasure in Christ and in the things of God.

PC 13. Religious should diligently practice and if need be express also in new forms that voluntary poverty which is recognized and highly esteemed especially today as an expression of the following of Christ. By it they share in the poverty of Christ who for our sakes became poor, even though He was rich, so that by His poverty we might become rich (cf. 2 Cor. 8:9; Matt. 8:20). With regard to religious poverty it is not enough to use goods in a way subject to the superior's will, but members must be poor both in fact and in spirit, their treasures being in heaven (cf. Matt. 6:20).

VC 21. Poverty proclaims that God is man's only real treasure. When poverty is lived according to the example of Christ who, "though he was rich ... became poor" (2 Cor. 8:9), it becomes an expression of that <total gift of self> which the three Divine Persons make to one another. This gift overflows into creation and is fully revealed in the Incarnation of the Word and in His redemptive death.

- Poverty is an expression of the total gift of self among the persons of the Blessed Trinity.



VC 21. Poverty proclaims that God is man's only real treasure. When poverty is lived according to the example of Christ who, "though he was rich ... became poor" (2 Cor. 8:9), it becomes an expression of that <total gift of self> which the three Divine Persons make to one another. This gift overflows into creation and is fully revealed in the Incarnation of the Word and in His redemptive death.

- It is a subjection of all goods to the supreme good of God and his Kingdom. It doesn't despise earthly goods but orients them.

PDV 30. On the subject of <evangelical poverty> the Synod Fathers gave a concise yet important description, presenting it as "the subjection of all goods to the supreme good of God and his Kingdom".[81] In reality, only the person who contemplates and lives the mystery of God as the one and supreme good, as the true and definitive treasure, can understand and practise poverty, which is certainly not a matter of despising or rejecting material goods, but of a loving and responsible use of these goods and at the same time an ability to renounce them with great interior freedom, that is, with reference to God and his plan.

PO 17. Priests can learn, by brotherly and friendly association with each other and with other people, to cultivate human values and appreciate created goods as gifts of God. While living in the world they should still realize that according to the Word of our Lord and Master they are not of the world. [1] By using the world, then, as those who do not use it they will come to that liberty by which they will be freed from all inordinate anxiety and will become docile to the divine voice in their daily life. From this liberty and docility grows that spiritual insight through which is found a right attitude to the world and to earthly goods. This attitude is of great importance for priests for this reason, that the Church's mission is carried out in the midst of the world and that created goods are absolutely necessary for man's personal progress. Let priests be thankful then for everything that the heavenly Father has given them towards a proper standard of living. However, they ought to judge everything they meet in the light of faith, so that they will be guided towards the right use of things in accordance with God's will and will reject anything that is prejudicial to their mission. Priests as men whose "portion and inheritance" (Num. 18:20) is the Lord ought to use temporal goods only for those purposes to which the teaching of Christ and the direction of the Church allow them to be devoted. Priests are to manage ecclesiastical property, properly so called, according to the nature of the case and the norm of ecclesiastical laws and with the help, as far as possible, of skilled laymen. They are to apply this property always to those purposes for the achievement of which the Church is allowed to own temporal goods. These are: the organization of divine worship, the provision of decent support for the clergy, and the exercise of works of the apostolate and of charity, especially for the benefit of those in need. [3] Priests, just like bishops (without prejudice to particular law), [4] are to use moneys acquired by them on the occasion of their exercise of some ecclesiastical office primarily for their own decent support and the fulfilment of the duties of their state. They should be willing to devote whatever is left over to the good of the Church or to works of charity. So they are not to regard an ecclesiastical office as a source of profit, and are not to spend the income accruing from it for increasing their own private fortunes. [5] Hence priests, far from setting their hearts on riches, [6] must always avoid all avarice and carefully refrain from all appearance of trafficking. In fact priests are invited to embrace voluntary poverty. By it they become more clearly conformed to Christ and more ready to devote themselves to their sacred ministry. For Christ being rich became poor for our sakes, that through his poverty we might be rich. [7] The apostles by their example gave testimony that the free gift of God was to be given freely. [8] They knew both how to abound and to suffer need. [9] Even some kind of use of property in common, like the community of goods which is extolled in the history of the primitive Church, [10] provides an excellent opening for pastoral charity. By this way of life priests can laudably reduce to practice the spirit of poverty commended by Christ. Guided then by the Spirit of the Lord, who anointed the Saviour and sent him to preach the Gospel to the poor, [11] priests and bishops alike are to avoid everything that might in any way antagonize the poor. More than the rest of Christ's disciples they are to put aside all appearance of vanity in their surroundings. They are to arrange their house in such a way that it never appears unapproachable to anyone and that nobody, even the humblest, is every afraid to visit it.

- The counsel of poverty leads to a greater interior freedom.

PDV 30. On the subject of <evangelical poverty> the Synod Fathers gave a concise yet important description, presenting it as "the subjection of all goods to the supreme good of God and his Kingdom". [81] In reality, only the person who contemplates and lives the mystery of God as the one and supreme good, as the true and definitive treasure, can understand and practise poverty, which is certainly not a matter of despising or rejecting material goods, but of a loving and responsible use of these goods and at the same time an ability to renounce them with great interior freedom, that is, with reference to God and his plan. "... It is a condition and essential premise of the Apostle's docility to the Spirit, making him ready to "go forth", without travelling bag or personal ties, following only the will of the Master (cf. Lk 9:57-62; Mk 10:17-22). Being personally involved in the life of the community and being responsible for it, the priest should also offer the witness of a total "honesty" in the administration of the goods of the community, which he will never treat as if they were his own property, but rather something for which he will be held accountable by God and his brothers and sisters, especially the poor. ... The interior freedom which is safeguarded and nourished by evangelical poverty will help the priest to stand beside the underprivileged, to practise solidarity with their efforts to create a more just society, to be more sensitive and capable of understanding and discerning realities involving the economic and social aspects of life, and to promote a preferential option for the poor. The latter, while excluding no one from the proclamation and gift of salvation, will assist him in gently approaching the poor, sinners, and all those on the margins of society, following the model given by Jesus in carrying out his prophetic and priestly ministry (cf. Lk 4:18).

RRL 22. You are aware, dear sons and daughters, that the needs of today's world, if you experience them in heart-to-heart union with Christ, make your poverty more urgent and more deep. If, as is evident, you must take account of the human surroundings in which you live, in order to adapt your life style to them, your poverty cannot be purely and simply a conformity to the manners of those surroundings. Its value as a witness will derive from a generous response to the exigencies of the Gospel, in total fidelity to your vocation--not just from an excessively superficial preoccupation for appearing to be poor--and in avoiding those ways of life which would denote a certain affectedness and vanity. While We recognize that certain situations can justify the abandonment of a religious type of dress, we cannot pass over in silence the fittingness that the dress of religious men and women should be, as the Council wishes, a sign of their consecration [34] and that it should be in some way different from the forms that are clearly secular.

PO 17. Priests, just like bishops (without prejudice to particular law),[4] are to use moneys acquired by them on the occasion of their exercise of some ecclesiastical office primarily for their own decent support and the fulfilment of the duties of their state. They should be willing to devote whatever is left over to the good of the Church or to works of charity. So they are not to regard an ecclesiastical office as a source of profit, and are not to spend the income accruing from it for increasing their own private fortunes.[5] Hence priests, far from setting their hearts on riches,[6] must always avoid all avarice and carefully refrain from all appearance of trafficking. In fact priests are invited to embrace voluntary poverty. By it they become more clearly conformed to Christ and more ready to devote themselves to their sacred ministry. For Christ being rich became poor for our sakes, that through his poverty we might be rich.[7] The apostles by their example gave testimony that the free gift of God was to be given freely. [8] They knew both how to abound and to suffer need.[9] Even some kind of use of property in common, like the community of goods which is extolled in the history of the primitive Church,[10] provides an excellent opening for pastoral charity. By this way of life priests can laudably reduce to practice the spirit of poverty commended by Christ.

- It allows the greater availability to be sent wherever the Spirit needs.

PDV 30. Poverty alone ensures that the priest remains available to be sent wherever his work will be most useful and needed, even at the cost of personal sacrifice. It is a condition and essential premise of the Apostle's docility to the Spirit, making him ready to "go forth", without travelling bag or personal ties, following only the will of the Master (cf. Lk 9:57-62; Mk 10:17-22).

- It is a direct response to the materialism of the modern world, to make the world more human.

VC 89. (The challenge of poverty) <Another challenge> today is that of a <materialism which craves possessions>, heedless of the needs and sufferings of the weakest, and lacking any concern for the balance of natural resources. The <reply> of the consecrated life is found in the profession of <evangelical poverty>, which can be lived in different ways and is often expressed in an active involvement in the promotion of solidarity and charity. How many Institutes devote themselves to education, training and professional formation, preparing young people and those no longer young to become builders of their own future! How many consecrated persons give themselves without reserve in the service of the most disadvantaged people on earth! How many of them work to train future educators and leaders of society so that they in turn will be committed to eliminating structures of oppression and to promoting projects of solidarity for the benefit of the poor! Consecrated persons fight to overcome hunger and its causes; they inspire the activities of voluntary associations and humanitarian organizations; and they work with public and private bodies to promote a fair distribution of international aid. Nations truly owe a great deal to these enterprising agents of charity, whose tireless generosity has contributed and continues to contribute greatly to making the world more human.

RRL 20. You will likewise be able to understand the complaints of so many persons who are drawn into the implacable process of work for gain, of profit for enjoyment, and of consumption, which in its turn forces them to a labor which is sometimes inhuman. It will therefore be an essential aspect of your poverty to bear witness to the human meaning of work which is carried out in liberty of spirit and restored to its true nature as the source of sustenance and of service. Did not the Council stress--in a very timely way--your necessary submission to "the common law of labor?"[32] Earning your own living and that of your brothers or sisters, helping the poor by your work--these are duties incumbent upon you. But your activities cannot derogate from the vocation of your various institutes, nor habitually involve work such as would take the place of their specific tasks. Nor should these activities in any way lead you towards secularization, to the detriment of your religious life. Be watchful therefore regarding the spirit which animates you: what a failure it would be if you felt yourselves valued solely by the payment you receive for worldly work!

- In this vow of poverty, religious profess their trust and dependence on the provident care of God in heaven.

PC 13. Religious should consider themselves in their own assignments to be bound by the common law of labor, and while they procure what is required for their sustenance and works, they should banish all undue solicitude and trust themselves to the provident care of their Father in heaven (cf. Matt. 6:25).

VC 16. By imitating Christ's <poverty>, they profess that he is the Son who receives everything from the Father and gives everything back to the Father in love (cf. Jn. 17:7, 10).

- It is shown by diligence and love of work, to support oneself and other members of the community.

PC 13. Religious should consider themselves in their own assignments to be bound by the common law of labor, and while they procure what is required for their sustenance and works, they should banish all undue solicitude and trust themselves to the provident care of their Father in heaven (cf. Matt. 6:25).

- It is not enough to use goods subject to superior's will, but religious should be poor in fact and spirit.

PC 13. With regard to religious poverty it is not enough to use goods in a way subject to the superior's will, but members must be poor both in fact and in spirit, their treasures being in heaven (cf. Matt. 6:20).

TAR: Do not fail to inculcate a love for poverty, concerning which there is much discussion going on in the Church today. Religious must surpass all others by their example of true evangelical poverty. Therefore, they must love that poverty to which they have spontaneously committed themselves. It is not enough for Religious to depend merely on the Superior's decision with regard to their use of material things. Let the Religious, of their own will, be content with the things that are needed for properly fulfilling their way of life, shunning those conveniences and luxuries by which the religious life is devalued. Moreover, in addition to that poverty which should

characterize the life of the individual Religious, we must not fail to take into account that poverty by which the family or whole body of Religious should be distinguished. Therefore let the Religious Institutes avoid a too exquisite style and ornamentation in their buildings and in carrying out their functions, as well as anything else that savors of luxury, always bearing in mind the social condition of the people among whom they live. Let them also refrain from excessive concern in gathering funds; rather let them be preoccupied with using the temporal goods which Divine Providence has bestowed upon them to minister to the genuine necessities of needy brethren; whether those in need of assistance be their fellow countrymen or those who live in other parts of the world.

- It allows the pastoral living out of the preferential option for the poor in imitation of the Lord who came to preach the Gospel to them.

**PDV 30.** Priests, following the example of Christ who rich though he was became poor for love of us (cf. 2 Cor 8:9), should consider the poor and the weakest as people entrusted in a special way to them and they should be capable of witnessing to poverty with a simple and austere lifestyle, having learned the generous renunciation of superfluous things ... It is a condition and essential premise of the Apostle's docility to the Spirit, making him ready to "go forth", without travelling bag or personal ties, following only the will of the Master (cf. Lk 9:57-62; Mk 10:17-22). ... The interior freedom which is safeguarded and nourished by evangelical poverty will help the priest to stand beside the underprivileged, to practise solidarity with their efforts to create a more just society, to be more sensitive and capable of understanding and discerning realities involving the economic and social aspects of life, and to promote a preferential option for the poor. The latter, while excluding no one from the proclamation and gift of salvation, will assist him in gently approaching the poor, sinners, and all those on the margins of society, following the model given by Jesus in carrying out his prophetic and priestly ministry (cf. Lk 4:18). Nor should the prophetic significance of priestly poverty be forgotten, so urgently needed in affluent and consumeristic societies: "A truly poor priest is indeed a specific sign of separation from, disavowal of and non-submission to the tyranny of a contemporary world which puts all its trust in money and in material security".[84]

**VC 90.** (Evangelical poverty at the service of the poor) Even before being a service on behalf of the poor, <evangelical poverty is a value in itself>, since it recalls the first of the Beatitudes in the imitation of the poor Christ. [225] Its primary meaning, in fact, is to attest that God is the true wealth of the human heart. Precisely for this reason evangelical poverty forcefully challenges the idolatry of money, making a prophetic appeal as it were to society, which in so many parts of the developed world risks losing the sense of proportion and the very meaning of things. Thus, today more than in other ages, the call of evangelical poverty is being felt also among those who are aware of the scarcity of the planet's resources and who invoke respect for and the conservation of creation by reducing consumption, by living more simply and by placing a necessary brake on their own desires. Consecrated persons are therefore asked to bear a renewed and vigorous evangelical witness to self-denial and restraint in a form of fraternal life inspired by principles of simplicity and hospitality, also as an example to those who are indifferent to the needs of their neighbor. This witness will of course be accompanied by <a preferential love for the poor> and will be shown especially by sharing the conditions of life of the most neglected. There are many communities which live and work among the poor and the marginalized; they embrace their conditions of life and share in their sufferings, problems and perils. Outstanding pages in the history of evangelical solidarity and heroic dedication have been written by consecrated persons in these years of profound changes and great injustices, of hopes and disappointments, of striking victories and bitter defeats. And pages no less significant have been written and are still being written by very many other consecrated persons, who live to the full their life "hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3) for the salvation of the world, freely giving of themselves and spending their lives for causes which are little appreciated and even less extolled. In these various and complementary ways, the consecrated life shares in the radical poverty embraced by the Lord and fulfills its specific role in the saving mystery of his Incarnation and redeeming Death.[226]

**RRL 17.** You hear rising up, more pressing than ever, from their personal distress and collective misery, "the cry of the poor." [26] Was it not in order to respond to their appeal as God's privileged ones that Christ came. [27] even going as far as to identify Himself with them? [28] In a world experiencing the full flood of development this persistence of poverty-stricken masses and individuals constitutes a pressing call for "a conversion of minds and attitudes." [29] especially for you who follow Christ more closely in this earthly condition of self-emptying. [30] ... As disciples of Christ, how could you follow a way different from His? This way is not, as you know, a movement of the political or temporal order; it calls rather for the conversion of hearts, for liberation from all temporal encumbrances. It is a call to love.

**PO 17.** Guided then by the Spirit of the Lord, who anointed the Saviour and sent him to preach the Gospel to the poor. [11] priests and bishops alike are to avoid everything that might in any way antagonize the poor. More than the rest of Christ's disciples they are to put aside all appearance of vanity in their surroundings. The are to arrange their house in such a way that it never appears unapproachable to anyone and that nobody, even the humblest, is every afraid to visit it.

- Religious communities should have a quasi-collective witness of poverty as well, including sharing their goods with other needy communities. They should avoid every appearance of luxury or the accumulation of goods.

**PC 13.** Due regard being had for local conditions, religious communities should readily offer a quasi-collective witness to poverty and gladly use their own goods for other needs of the Church and the support of the poor whom all religious should love after the example of Christ (cf. Matt. 19:21; 25:34-46; James 2:15-16; 1 John 3:17). The several provinces and houses of each community should share their temporal goods with one another, so that those who have more help the others who are in need. Religious communities have the right to possess whatever is required for their temporal life and work, unless this is forbidden by their rules and constitutions. Nevertheless, they should avoid every appearance of luxury, excessive wealth and the accumulation of goods.

**PDV 30.** On the subject of <evangelical poverty> the Synod Fathers gave a concise yet important description, presenting it as "the subjection of all goods to the supreme good of God and his Kingdom". [81] In reality, only the person who contemplates and lives the mystery of God as the one and supreme good, as the true and definitive treasure, can understand and practise poverty, which is certainly not a matter of despising or rejecting material goods, but of a loving and responsible use of these goods and at the same time an ability to renounce them with great interior freedom, that is, with reference to God and his plan. Poverty for the priest, by virtue of his

sacramental configuration to Christ, the Head and Shepherd, takes on specific "pastoral" connotations which the Synod Fathers took up from the Council's teaching [82] and further developed. Among other things, they wrote: "Priests, following the example of Christ who rich though he was became poor for love of us (cf. 2 Cor 8:9), should consider the poor and the weakest as people entrusted in a special way to them and they should be capable of witnessing to poverty with a simple and austere lifestyle, having learned the generous renunciation of superfluous things ("Optatum Totius," 9; C.I.C., can. 282)".[83] It is true that "the workman deserves his wages" (Lk 10:7) and that "the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the Gospel should get their living by the Gospel" (1 Cor 9:14), but it is no less true that this right of the Apostle can in no way be confused with attempts of any kind to condition service to the Gospel and the Church upon the advantages and interests which can derive from it. Poverty alone ensures that the priest remains available to be sent wherever his work will be most useful and needed, even at the cost of personal sacrifice. It is a condition and essential premise of the Apostle's docility to the Spirit, making him ready to "go forth", without travelling bag or personal ties, following only the will of the Master (cf. Lk 9:57-62; Mk 10:17-22). Being personally involved in the life of the community and being responsible for it, the priest should also offer the witness of a total "honesty" in the administration of the goods of the community, which he will never treat as if they were his own property, but rather something for which he will be held accountable by God and his brothers and sisters, especially the poor. Moreover, his awareness of belonging to the one presbyterate will be an incentive for the priest to commit himself to promoting both a more equitable distribution of goods among his fellow priests and a certain common use of goods (cf. Acts 2:42-47). The interior freedom which is safeguarded and nourished by evangelical poverty will help the priest to stand beside the underprivileged, to practise solidarity with their efforts to create a more just society, to be more sensitive and capable of understanding and discerning realities involving the economic and social aspects of life, and to promote a preferential option for the poor. The latter, while excluding no one from the proclamation and gift of salvation, will assist him in gently approaching the poor, sinners, and all those on the margins of society, following the model given by Jesus in carrying out his prophetic and priestly ministry (cf. Lk 4:18). Nor should the prophetic significance of priestly poverty be forgotten, so urgently needed in affluent and consumeristic societies: "A truly poor priest is indeed a specific sign of separation from, disavowal of and non-submission to the tyranny of a contemporary world which puts all its trust in money and in material security".[84] Jesus Christ, who brought his pastoral charity to perfection on the Cross with a complete exterior and interior emptying of self, is both the model and source of the virtues of obedience, chastity and poverty which the priest is called to live out as an expression of his pastoral charity for his brothers and sisters. In accordance with Saint Paul's words to the Christians at Philippi, the priest should have "the mind which was in Christ Jesus", emptying himself of his own "self", so as to discover, in a charity which is obedient, chaste and poor, the royal road of union with God and unity with his brothers and sisters (cf. Phil 2:5).

**RRL 21.** The necessity, which is so imperative today, of fraternal sharing must preserve its evangelical value. According to the expression in the Didache, "if you share eternal goods, with all the more reason should you share the goods that perish." [33] Poverty really lived by pooling goods, including pay, will testify to the spiritual communion uniting you; it will be a living call to all the rich and will also bring relief to your needy brothers and sisters. The legitimate desire of exercising personal responsibility will not find expression in enjoyment of one's own income but in fraternal sharing in the common good. The forms of poverty of each person and of each community will depend on the type of institute and on the form of obedience practiced in it. Thus will be brought to realization, in accordance with particular vocations, the character of dependence which is inherent in every form of poverty.

## Obedience

- Religious obedience follows and participates in the loving obedience of Christ.

PC 14. In professing obedience, religious offer the full surrender of their own will as a sacrifice of themselves to God and so are united permanently and securely to God's salvific will. After the example of Jesus Christ who came to do the will of the Father (cf. John 4:34; 5:30; Heb. 10:7; Ps. 39:9) and "assuming the nature of a slave" (Phil. 2:7) learned obedience in the school of suffering (cf. Heb. 5:8), religious under the motion of the Holy Spirit, subject themselves in faith to their superiors who hold the place of God. Under their guidance they are led to serve all their brothers in Christ, just as Christ himself in obedience to the Father served His brethren and laid down His life as a ransom for many (cf. Matt. 20:28; John 10:14-18).

VC 21. Obedience, practiced in imitation of Christ, whose food was to do the Father's will (cf. Jn. 4:34), shows the liberating beauty of a <dependence which is not servile but filial>, marked by a deep sense of responsibility and animated by mutual trust, which is a reflection in history of the loving <harmony> between the three Divine Persons.

VC 22. Jesus is <the exemplar of obedience>, who came down from heaven not to do his own will but the will of the one who sent him (cf. Jn. 6:38; Heb. 10:5, 7). He places his way of living and acting in the hands of the Father (cf. Lk. 2:49). In filial obedience, he assumes the condition of a servant: He "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant ... and became obedient unto death, even death on a Cross" (Phil. 2:7-8).

- It follows Christ, who became obedient unto death, death on a Cross. As a result, religious obedience touches at the heart of the mystery of sin and the redemption.

RD 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. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross." [71] Here, in these words of the letter of St. Paul to the Philippians, we touch the very essence of the Redemption. In this reality is inscribed in a primary and constitutive way the obedience of Jesus Christ. Other words of the Apostle, taken this time from the letter to the Romans, confirm this: "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous." [72] The evangelical counsel of obedience is the call which derives from this obedience of Christ "unto death". Those who accept this call, expressed by the words "Follow me," decide as the Council says--to follow Christ" who, by an obedience which carried Him even to death on the cross, redeemed humanity and made it holy. [73] By living out the evangelical counsel of obedience, they reach the deep essence of the entire economy of the Redemption. By fulfilling this counsel they desire to gain a special sharing in the obedience of that "one alone" by whose obedience all "will be made righteous." It can therefore be said that those who decide to live according to the counsel of obedience are placed in a unique way between the mystery of sin [74] and the mystery of justification and salvific grace. They are in this "place" with all the sinful background of their own human nature, with all the inheritance "of the pride of life", with all the selfish tendencies to dominate rather than to serve, and precisely by means of the vow of obedience they decide to be transformed into the likeness of Christ, who "redeemed humanity and made it holy by his obedience." In the counsel of obedience they desire to find their own role in the Redemption of Christ and their own way of sanctification. This is the way which Christ marked out in the Gospel, speaking many times of fulfilling the will of God, of ceaselessly searching for it. "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work." [75] "Because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me." [76] "He who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him." [77] "For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me." [78] This constant fulfilling of the will of the Father also reminds us of that messianic confession of the psalmist in the Old Testament: "Behold, I come; in the written scroll it is prescribed for me. To do your will, O my God, is my delight, and your law is within my heart." [79] This obedience of the Son--full of joy--reaches its zenith in the face of the passion and cross: "Father, if it is your will, take this cup from me; yet not my will but yours be done." [80] From the prayer in Gethsemane onwards, Christ's readiness to do the will of the Father is filled to the very brim of suffering, becoming that obedience "unto death, even death on a cross" spoken of by St. Paul. Through the vow of obedience consecrated persons decide to imitate with humility the obedience of the Redeemer in a special way. For although submission to the will of God and obedience to His law are for every state a condition of Christian life, nevertheless, in the "religious state," in the "state of perfection," the vow of obedience establishes in the heart of each of you, dear brothers and sisters, the duty of a particular reference to Christ "obedient unto death". And since this obedience of Christ constitutes the essential nucleus of the work of the Redemption, as is seen from the words of the Apostle quoted above, therefore, also in the fulfilling of the evangelical counsel of obedience we must discern a particular moment in that "economy of the Redemption" which pervades your whole vocation in the Church. From this derives that "total availability to the Holy Spirit" who is at work above all in the Church, as my Predecessor Paul VI puts it in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelica testificatio*, [81] and who is likewise manifested in the constitutions of your institutes. From this derives that religious submission which in a spirit of faith consecrated persons show to their legitimate superiors, who hold the place of God. [82] In the letter to the *Hebrews* we find on this theme a very significant indication: "Obey your leaders and submit to them; for they are keeping watch over your souls, as men who will have to give account." And the author of the letter adds: "Let them do this joyfully, and not sadly, for that would be of no advantage to you." [83] On the other hand, superiors will bear in mind that they must exercise in a spirit of service the power conferred on them through the ministry of the Church, and they will show willingness to listen to their brothers or sisters in order to discern more clearly what the Lord asks of each one. At the same time they retain the authority proper to them to decide and order what they consider appropriate. Hand in hand with submission-obedience thus conceived goes the attitude of service which animates your whole life after the example of the Son of Man, who "came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." [84] And His Mother, at the decisive moment of the Annunciation-Incarnation, entering from the very beginning into the whole salvific economy of the Redemption, said: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." [85] Remember also, dear brothers and sisters, that the obedience to which you committed yourselves by consecrating yourselves without reserve to God through the profession of the evangelical counsels is a particular expression of interior freedom, just as the definitive expression of Christ's freedom was His obedience "unto death": "I lay down my life, that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord." [86]

RRL 24. The same paschal mystery of Christ is lived in the religious state as in the whole Church. The profound meaning of obedience is revealed in the fullness of this mystery of death and resurrection in which the supernatural destiny of man is brought to realization in a perfect manner. It is in fact through sacrifice, suffering and death that man attains true life. Exercising authority in the midst of your brethren means therefore being their servants.<sup>[37]</sup> in accordance with the example of Him who gave "his life as a ransom for many."<sup>[38]</sup>

- It is a surrender (even a holocaust) of the will, of the person to God, to be permanently united to God's will. It seeks God's will.

PC 14. In professing obedience, religious offer the full surrender of their own will as a sacrifice of themselves to God and so are united permanently and securely to God's salvific will. ... Religious, therefore, in the spirit of faith and love for the divine will should humbly obey their superiors according to their rules and constitutions.

VC 16. By accepting through the sacrifice of their own freedom the mystery of Christ's filial <obedience>, they profess that he is infinitely beloved and loving, as the one who delights only in the will of the Father (cf. Jn. 4:34), to whom he is perfectly united and on whom he depends for everything.

RRL 23. Through this profession, in fact, you make a total offering of your will and enter more decisively and more surely into His plan of salvation. Following the example of Christ, who came to do the will of the Father, and in communion with Him who "learned to obey through suffering" and "ministered to the brethren," you have assumed a firmer commitment to the ministry of the Church and of your brethren.<sup>[35]</sup>

TAR: Religious obedience is and must remain a holocaust of one's own will which is offered to God. A Religious makes this sacrifice of self with a view to humbly obeying lawful Superiors (whose authority, of course, should always be exercised within the confines of charity and with due regard for the human person), even though our times summon Religious to the performance of many and heavy burdens, and to carrying out these duties more cheerfully and more promptly.

- It allows one to serve all brothers and sisters in the faith in imitation of Christ.

PC 14. Under their guidance they are led to serve all their brothers in Christ, just as Christ himself in obedience to the Father served His brethren and laid down His life as a ransom for many (cf. Matt. 20:28; John 10:14-18). So they are closely bound to the service of the Church and strive to attain the measure of the full manhood of Christ (Eph. 4:13).

PO 15. Among the virtues especially demanded by the ministry of priests must be reckoned that disposition of mind by which they are always prepared to seek not their own will but the will of him who has sent them.<sup>[27]</sup> The divine task for the fulfilment of which they have been set apart by the Holy Spirit<sup>[28]</sup> transcends all human strength and human wisdom; for "God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong" (1 Cor. 1:27). Therefore the true minister of Christ is conscious of his own weakness and labors in humility. He proves what is well-pleasing to God <sup>[29]</sup> and, bound as it were in the Spirit,<sup>[30]</sup> he is guided in all things by the will of him who wishes all men to be saved. He is able to discover and carry out that will in the course of his daily routine by humbly placing himself at the service of all those who are entrusted to his care by God in the office that has been committed to him and the variety of events that make up his life. The priestly ministry, being the ministry of the Church itself, can only be fulfilled in the hierarchical union of the whole body of the Church. Hence pastoral charity urges priests to act within this communion and by obedience to dedicate their own will to the service of God and their fellow-Christians. They will accept and carry out in the spirit of faith the commands and suggestions of the Pope and of their bishop and other superiors. They will most gladly spend themselves and be spent<sup>[31]</sup> in whatever office is entrusted to them, even the humbler and poorer. By acting in this way they preserve and strengthen the indispensable unity with their brothers in the ministry and especially with those whom the Lord has appointed the visible rulers of his Church. They also work towards the building up of the Body of Christ, which grows "by what every joint supplieth."<sup>[32]</sup> This obedience, which leads to the more mature freedom of the sons of God, by its nature demands that priests in the exercise of their duties should be moved by charity prudently to seek new methods of advancing the good of the Church. At the same time it also demands that while putting forward their schemes with confidence and being insistent in making known the needs of the flock entrusted to them, they should always be prepared to submit to the judgment of those who exercise the chief function in ruling God's Church. By this humility and by responsible and willing obedience priests conform themselves to Christ. They reproduce the sentiment of Jesus Christ who "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant... and became obedient unto death" (Phil. 2:7-9), and who by this obedience overcame and redeemed the disobedience of Adam, as the apostle declares: "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous" (Rom. 5:19).

- Obedience leads to full and authentic freedom, rather than humiliation. But obedience should always be responsible and filial.

PC 14. Realizing that they are contributing to building up the body of Christ according to God's plan, they should use both the forces of their intellect and will and the gifts of nature and grace to execute the commands and fulfill the duties entrusted to them. In this way religious obedience, far from lessening the dignity of the human person, by extending the freedom of the sons of God, leads it to maturity.

VC 22. Jesus is <the exemplar of obedience>, who came down from heaven not to do his own will but the will of the one who sent him (cf. Jn. 6:38; Heb. 10:5, 7). He places his way of living and acting in the hands of the Father (cf. Lk. 2:49). In filial obedience, he assumes the condition of a servant: He "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant ... and became obedient unto death, even death on a Cross" (Phil. 2:7-8).

PDV 28. "Among the virtues most necessary for the priestly ministry must be named that disposition of soul by which priests are always ready to seek not their own will, but the will of him who sent them (cf. Jn 4:34; 5:30; 6:38)".[74] It is in the spiritual life of the priest that obedience takes on certain special characteristics. First of all, obedience is "<apostolic>" in the sense that it recognizes, loves and serves the Church in her hierarchical structure. Indeed, there can be no genuine priestly ministry except in communion with the Supreme Pontiff and the Episcopal College, especially with one's own diocesan Bishop, who deserves that "filial respect and obedience" promised during the rite of ordination. This "submission" to those invested with ecclesial authority is in no way a kind of humiliation. It flows instead from the responsible freedom of the priest who accepts not only the demands of an organized and organic ecclesial life, but also that grace of discernment and responsibility in ecclesial decisions which was assured by Jesus to his Apostles and their successors, for the sake of faithfully safeguarding the mystery of the Church and serving the structure of the Christian community along its common path towards salvation. Authentic Christian obedience, when it is properly motivated and lived without servility, helps the priest to exercise in accordance with the Gospel the authority entrusted to him for his work with the People of God: an authority free from authoritarianism or demagogery. Only the person who knows how to obey in Christ is really able to require obedience from others in accordance with the Gospel. Priestly obedience has also a "community" dimension: it is not the obedience of an individual who alone relates to authority, but rather an obedience which is deeply a part of the unity of the presbyterate, which as such is called to cooperate harmoniously with the Bishop and, through him, with Peter's successor.[75]

RRL 27. Let us add this: the more you exercise your responsibility, the more you must renew your self-giving in its full significance. The Lord obliges each one to "lose his life" if he is to follow Him. [40] You will observe this precept by accepting the directives of your superiors as a guarantee of your religious profession, through which you offer to God a total dedication of your own wills as a sacrifice of yourselves. [41] 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: your duty is to make that act ever more vital, both by your own initiative and by the cordial assent you give the directives of your superiors. Thus it is that the Council includes among the benefits of the religious state "liberty strengthened by obedience", [42] and stresses that such obedience "does not diminish the dignity of the human person but rather leads it to maturity through that enlarged freedom which belongs to the sons of God." [43]

- The virtue of obedience counteracts the distorted modern relationship between freedom and truth. Conflicts between a religious' conscience and the mandates of superiors will be rare.

VC 91. (The challenge of freedom in obedience) The <third challenge> comes from those <notions of freedom> which separate this fundamental human good from its essential relationship to the truth and to moral norms. [227] In effect, the promotion of freedom is a genuine value closely connected with respect for the human person. But who does not see the aberrant consequences of injustice and even violence in the life of individuals and of peoples to which the distorted use of freedom leads? An effective <response> to this situation is the <obedience which marks the consecrated life>. In an especially vigorous way this obedience repropose the obedience of Christ to the Father and, taking this mystery as its point of departure, testifies that there is <no contradiction between obedience and freedom>. Indeed, the Son's attitude discloses the mystery of human freedom as the path of obedience to the Father's will and the mystery of obedience as the path to the gradual conquest of true freedom. It is precisely this mystery which consecrated persons wish to acknowledge by this particular vow. By obedience they intend to show their awareness of being children of the Father, as a result of which they wish to take the Father's will as their daily bread (cf. Jn. 4:34), as their rock, their joy, their shield and their fortress (cf. Ps. 18:2). Thus they show that they are growing in the full truth about themselves, remaining in touch with the source of their existence and therefore offering this most consoling message: "The lovers of your law have great peace; they never stumble" (Ps. 118:165).

RRL 28. And yet, is it not possible to have conflicts between the superior's authority and the conscience of the religious, the "sanctuary of a person where he is alone with God, whose voice echoes in the depths of his being"? [44] Need we repeat that conscience on its own is not the arbiter of the moral worth of the actions which it inspires? It must take account of objective norms and, if necessary, reform and rectify itself. Apart from an order manifestly contrary to the laws of God or the constitutions of the institute, or one involving a serious and certain evil-in which case there is no obligation to obey--the superior's decisions concern a field in which the calculation of the greater good can vary according to the point of view. To conclude from the fact that a directive seems objectively less good that it is unlawful and contrary to conscience would mean an unrealistic disregard of the obscurity and ambivalence of many human realities. Besides, refusal to obey involves an often serious loss for the common good. A religious should not easily conclude that there is a contradiction between the judgment of his conscience and that of his superior. This exceptional situation will sometimes involve true interior suffering, after the pattern of Christ Himself "who learned obedience through suffering." [45]

- Superiors should exercise authority out of service in obedience to the Lord. Authority and obedience go together to discover the Lord's will.

PC 14. Superiors, as those who are to give an account of the souls entrusted to them (Heb. 13:17), should fulfill their office in a way responsive to God's will. They should exercise their authority out of a spirit of service to the brethren, expressing in this way the love with which God loves their subjects. They should govern these as sons of God, respecting their human dignity. In this way they make it easier for them to subordinate their wills. They should be particularly careful to respect their subjects' liberty in the matters of sacramental confession and the direction of conscience. Subjects should be brought to the point where they will cooperate with an active and-responsible obedience in undertaking new tasks and in carrying those already undertaken. And so superiors should gladly listen to their subjects and foster harmony among them for the good of the community and the Church, provided that thereby their own authority to decide and command what has to be done is not harmed.

PDV 28. "Among the virtues most necessary for the priestly ministry must be named that disposition of soul by which priests are always ready to seek not their own will, but the will of him who sent them (cf. Jn 4:34; 5:30; 6:38)".[74] It is in the spiritual life of the priest that obedience takes on certain special characteristics. First of all, obedience is "<apostolic>" in the sense that it recognizes, loves and serves

the Church in her hierarchical structure. Indeed, there can be no genuine priestly ministry except in communion with the Supreme Pontiff and the Episcopal College, especially with one's own diocesan Bishop, who deserves that "filial respect and obedience" promised during the rite of ordination. This "submission" to those invested with ecclesial authority is in no way a kind of humiliation. It flows instead from the responsible freedom of the priest who accepts not only the demands of an organized and organic ecclesial life, but also that grace of discernment and responsibility in ecclesial decisions which was assured by Jesus to his Apostles and their successors, for the sake of faithfully safeguarding the mystery of the Church and serving the structure of the Christian community along its common path towards salvation. Authentic Christian obedience, when it is properly motivated and lived without servility, helps the priest to exercise in accordance with the Gospel the authority entrusted to him for his work with the People of God: an authority free from authoritarianism or demagogery. Only the person who knows how to obey in Christ is really able to require obedience from others in accordance with the Gospel. Priestly obedience has also a <"community" dimension>: it is not the obedience of an individual who alone relates to authority, but rather an obedience which is deeply a part of the unity of the presbyterate, which as such is called to cooperate harmoniously with the Bishop and, through him, with Peter's successor.[75] This aspect of the priest's obedience demands a marked spirit of asceticism, both in the sense of a tendency not to become too bound up in one's own preferences or points of view, and in the sense of giving brother priests the opportunity to make good use of their talents and abilities, setting aside all forms of jealousy, envy and rivalry. Priestly obedience should be one of solidarity, based on belonging to a single presbyterate. Within the presbyterate, this obedience is expressed in co-responsibility regarding directions to be taken and choices to be made. Finally, priestly obedience has a particular <"pastoral" character.> It is lived in an atmosphere of constant readiness to allow oneself to be taken up, as it were "consumed", by the needs and demands of the flock. These last ought to be truly reasonable and at times they need to be evaluated and tested to see how genuine they are. But it is undeniable that the priest's life is fully "taken up" by the hunger for the Gospel and for faith, hope and love for God and his mystery, a hunger which is more or less consciously present in the People of God entrusted to him.

VC 92. (Carrying out together the Father's will) This testimony of consecration takes on special meaning in religious life because of the <community dimension> which marks it. The fraternal life is the privileged place in which to discern and accept God's will, and to walk together with one mind and heart. Obedience, enlivened by charity, unites the members of an Institute in the same witness and the same mission, while respecting the diversity of gifts and individual personalities. In community life which is inspired by the Holy Spirit, each individual engages in a fruitful dialogue with the others in order to discover the Father's will. At the same time, together they recognize in the one who presides an expression of the fatherhood of God and the exercise of authority received from God, at the service of discernment and communion. [228] Life in community is thus the particular sign before the Church and society of the bond which comes from the same call and the common desire—notwithstanding differences of race and origin, language and culture—to be obedient to that call. Contrary to the spirit of discord and division, authority and obedience shine like a sign of that unique fatherhood which comes from God, of the brotherhood born of the Spirit, of the interior freedom of those who put their trust in God despite the human limitations of those who represent him. Through this obedience, which some people make their rule of life, the happiness promised by Jesus to "those who hear the word of God and keep it" (Lk. 11:28) is experienced and proclaimed for the good of all. Moreover, those who obey have the guarantee of truly taking part in the mission, of following the Lord and not pursuing their own desires or wishes. In this way we can know that we are guided by the Spirit of the Lord and sustained even in the midst of great hardships by his steadfast hand (cf. Acts 20:22-23).

RRL 25. Consequently, authority and obedience are exercised in the service of the common good as two complementary aspects of the same participation in Christ's offering. For those in authority, it is a matter of serving in their brothers the design of the Father's love, while, in accepting their directives, the religious follow our Master's example[39] and cooperate in the work of salvation. Thus, far from being in opposition to one another, authority and individual liberty go together in the fulfillment of God's will, which is sought fraternally through a trustful dialogue between the superior and his brother, in the case of a personal situation, or through a general agreement regarding what concerns the whole community. In this pursuit, the religious will be able to avoid both an excessive agitation and a preoccupation for making the attraction of current opinion prevail over the profound meaning of the religious life. It is the duty of everyone, but especially of superiors and those who exercise responsibility among their brothers or sisters, to awaken in the community the certainties of faith which must be their guide. This pursuit has the aim of giving depth to these certainties and translating them into practice in everyday living in accordance with the needs of the moment; its aim is not in any way to cast doubt on them. This labor of seeking together must end, when it is the moment, with the decision of the superiors whose presence and acceptance are indispensable in every community.

- To be lived well, obedience needs to be developed within a spirit of asceticism.

PDV 28. This aspect of the priest's obedience demands a marked spirit of asceticism, both in the sense of a tendency not to become too bound up in one's own preferences or points of view, and in the sense of giving brother priests the opportunity to make good use of their talents and abilities, setting aside all forms of jealousy, envy and rivalry. Priestly obedience should be one of solidarity, based on belonging to a single presbyterate. Within the presbyterate, this obedience is expressed in co-responsibility regarding directions to be taken and choices to be made. Finally, priestly obedience has a particular <"pastoral" character.> It is lived in an atmosphere of constant readiness to allow oneself to be taken up, as it were "consumed", by the needs and demands of the flock. These last ought to be truly reasonable and at times they need to be evaluated and tested to see how genuine they are. But it is undeniable that the priest's life is fully "taken up" by the hunger for the Gospel and for faith, hope and love for God and his mystery, a hunger which is more or less consciously present in the People of God entrusted to him.

## Final Remarks

- 1) Each of the evangelical counsels ultimately derives its meaning, purpose, inspiration and example from Christ himself. He is the supremely obedient, poor and chaste one.



- 2) As a result, those who profess and live the evangelical counsels today are those who allow Christ to live out these virtues in them within the world.
- 3) These three virtues are right at the heart of the redemption. By Christ's obedience, he overcame Adam's disobedience. By Christ's poverty, he enriched us with the greatest gift of all. And by his chastity, he loved all of us with the burning love of the Trinity until the very end and overcame the egoism that is sin at its very root. Consequently, any religious who strives to live these counsels well with the help of Lord attacks the sources of sin at their very roots.
- 4) By living the evangelical counsels, religious live out, with and in imitation of the Blessed Mother, the perfect response of the Church to the gift of salvation in the person, words and deeds of Christ in anticipation of that time when all of the elect will share in that kingdom to which they point, in which there will be no giving or taking in marriage, in which we will all love God to the utmost of our capacities, in which we will find in him our soul treasure, and in which we will lovingly listen to and obey him perfectly.

**Abbreviations:**

- CCC:** Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1993.  
**PC:** Perfectae Caritatis, Vatican II Document on the Renewal of Religious Life, October 28, 1965.  
**PDV:** Pastores Dabo Vobis, Apostolic Exhortation by John Paul II, March 25, 1992.  
**PO:** Presbyterorum Ordinis, Vatican II Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, December 7, 1965.  
**RD:** Redemptoris Donum, Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II, March 25, 1984.  
**RRL:** On the Renewal of Religious Life, Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Paul VI, June 29, 1971.  
**TAR:** To All Religious, Address of Pope Paul VI given on May 23, 1964.  
**VC:** Vita Consecrata, Apostolic Letter given by Pope John Paul II, on March 25, 1996.