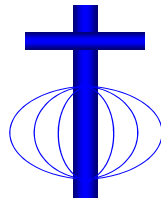


**PROBATIONER'S  
GUIDE**

**VOLUNTAS DEI INSTITUTE**



**2<sup>nd</sup> Edition**

**Trois-Rivières, Canada**

**2003**

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## PONTIFICAL DOCUMENTS CITED

**Pius XII**            PME     = Provida Mater Ecclesia (Providing for Mother Church)  
                         PF        = Primo Feliciter

**Paul IV**            EN        = Evangelii Nuntiandi (On evangelization in the Modern World)

**John Paul II**       VC        = Vita Consecrata (Consecrated life)  
                         CFL       = Christifideles Laici (On the vocation and the mission of the  
   lay faithful in the Church and in the world)

**Vatican II, The 16 Conciliar Documents** /dir. P.-A. Martin, Montréal : Fides, c1966.

                         LG        = Lumen Gentium (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church)

                         GS        = Gaudium et Spes (On the Church in the Modern World)

**Other Resources**   CRSI or SCRIS = Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes.

Dear Probationer,

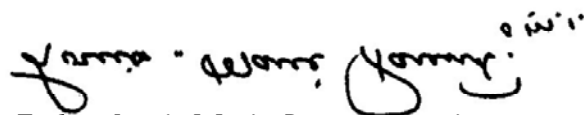
The person who desires to join the Institute must go through and submit to the different stages of formation.

Aspirancy allows one to know and become acquainted with another style of life. This spiritual beginning is followed by another stage, that of Probation. In Aspirancy, I look at; in Probation, I listen and carry out what the Holy Spirit is suggesting to me, telling me in order to prepare myself to live a consecration.

The Lord pulls out all the stops with love: His measure is beyond measure. By being attentive to His voice and walking in His footsteps, He has the power to communicate to you the desire to remain in His service in the midst of the Church and at the heart of the world.

In the name of Jesus, I bless your journey as a Probationer. I ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in the goodwill of the Father and be the light to guide your footsteps!

May the Virgin take you by the hand!



Father Louis-Marie Parent, o.m.i.

Cap-de-la-Madeleine  
March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2003

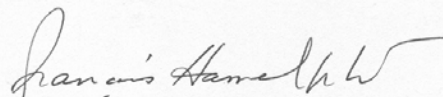
Dear Probationer,

You begin a second stage of formation in the secular Institute, *Voluntas Dei*: Probation. It is spread out over a period of two to four years. “ Its special purpose is spiritual formation according to the requirements of secular consecration”(Constitutions, 72).

If the time of Aspirancy allowed you to know the Institute better, and for the Institute to know you better, the time of Probation is a time of special graces which will prepare you to discern more fully the Will of God for your life. You will delve more deeply into the meaning of secular consecration. You will refine your ideal of life. You already take part in the life of the Institute and its mission in the Church and in the world. This will be a time of preparation to live officially, chastity, poverty and obedience. If you are a celibate layman, at the end of Probation, you will profess vows; if you are a married person, you will profess commitments. In both cases, it requires the investment of the whole person.

That is why, it is necessary to take this time to listen to the Spirit. He is your primary mentor. Most certainly, the person in charge of formation, the authorities of the Institute and your team are there to support and help you. You are not alone. Recall the experience of the disciples of Emmaus. They walked with the Lord, but they did not recognize Him. Nevertheless, their hearts burned within them (Lk 24:32). Perhaps this is your experience of formation. The Lord walks with you in your journey every day. Look within to see if your heart is animated by His presence. All consecrated life is centred on Christ Himself.

Have a great spiritual journey!

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Francois Hamel". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Francois Hamel, I. V. Dei,  
Director General

Trois-Rivieres, Qc  
May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2003

## PRESENTATION

At the beginning of this 21<sup>st</sup> century, in order to respond to the wishes and mandates of the last Assembly General of the Institute, *to review and revise our guides of formation*, it is necessary to take a step back to look at the real life and journey of our Institute since its beginnings.

This time of reflection firstly requires that we place ourselves in the position of listening to the Spirit: how He has worked during the course of the last 45 years and how He is the primary *mentor* for each one of us, in order to allow ourselves to assume a new blossoming forth in the midst of the Church.

Moreover, the editing of this guide has asked us to scan the most recent writings of the Church's *Magisterium* on the subject of secular institutes as well as the speeches of the Congress of the World Conference of Secular Institutes (WCSI) that they might act as a guide to direct and to define better our secular consecration which we will be studying in these texts.

As emphasized by our Founder and our Director General, the time of Probation is directed toward your preparation for a commitment within the Institute. The more prayer and reflection bring you along, the better you will grasp the seriousness of your future consecration to the Lord, and you will also open yourself to the God of Love and His calls at the heart of His Word and the world in which you live.

Before closing, we would like to mention the remarkable contribution that a Canadian colleague Michel Villeneuve made to the editing of this guide. His life experiences in the midst of the Institute, his charisms and deep spirit of prayer have inspired each of his lines. Thank You!

Have a great probation!

# 1- A BRIEF HISTORY OF CONSECRATED LIFE<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

In the Church, consecrated life did not always have the forms that we see today.<sup>2</sup> It has known a variety of modalities which has marked its history. This chapter wishes to enlighten you so that you can better understand what we are living in the Institute, and to situate you within the great context of Church history. At the core of the Church, the action of the Spirit expresses itself by respecting human sluggishness.

What we would like to indicate here is this great movement of the Holy Spirit. At a time when the Spirit seems to raise up new forms of evangelical consecration, notably secular consecration, it would not be without interest or usefulness to follow the movement of the different divine callings in the life of the Church. In doing so, you will discover criteria of discernment applicable to new experiences now being attempted. Are we not ourselves deeply implicated in one of these new experiences?

We must scan the age-old experience of the Church in a chronological manner in order to realize how, according to different mentalities and events, the Holy Spirit raised up movements of faith and charity which found expression in consecration to God and, especially today in secular consecration.

## 1. THE EARLY CHURCH

### 1<sup>st</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> Century

Everything begins with the Church's birth on Pentecost: the Holy Spirit took hold of the disciples who had gathered with Mary around Peter. There was an explosion of grace. The Church was launched and the divine GIFT broke out in a profusion of lifestyles. One of them, because of its richness, was to express itself in consecration to God for the sake of the Kingdom.

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<sup>1</sup> Inspired by *Theo: nouvelle Encyclopédie catholique*, Paris: Droguet-Ardant/Fayard, 1989.

<sup>2</sup> N.D.L.R. Consult chap. II of the book for more complete definition of the consecrated life in the Church.



The Pentecost event fully realizes the prayer of Jesus, *I consecrate myself for their sakes now, that they may be consecrated in truth* (Jn 17:19). Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, the resurrected Jesus consecrates and sanctifies His disciples. Consecrated life is the very life of the Resurrected One in those immersed in the Paschal Mystery who through Baptism live intensely in His Spirit. It is said that the consecrated person is the one who agrees to serve God, give him/herself to God and belong to God.

After the Church's first structures had been put into place, there appeared those who were set aside for the ministries, individuals or groups (Acts 21:8-9) that sought to live a lifestyle of total self-giving for the sake of the Kingdom through a more or less official consecration to God.

*This original form implied a dynamic style of insertion and presence in the surrounding society surprisingly akin to what secular institutes and other groups of secular consecration strive to live.* It comprised a largely communitarian or family oriented dimension and expressed Christian commitment to a *prophetic function* which is impressive because of its spiritual effectiveness, especially regarding evangelization and witness. *We can say that a consecrated person is a response to God in the world of his/her time.*

Also from the beginnings of the Church there are found Christians who opted for celibacy. This marked the beginning of groups of consecrated virgins.

After such humble beginnings where consecration was lived as a domestic experience, there took form a movement of retreat from the world toward the desert: this marked the beginning of the eremitical movement (the hermits). Like Jesus in the desert, those involved sought solitude so as to confront alone the adversary of salvation in order to upset him on his home ground, as well as to die to self and rise again with Christ.

To those who were thus engaged in following Christ through *domestic asceticism or through the eremitical life*, a rhythm of life totally filled with a search for God suggested itself: silence, meditation on the Word of God, praying the Psalms, and manual labour for one's sustenance. This quasi-monastic form of life gradually diminished during the ensuing centuries and gave way to community living without, however, disappearing altogether.

If there were different functions and a more and more organized life in Christian communities, all believers nonetheless made up but one category of members: the faithful, saints, or Christians. Or, to borrow the categories developed much later, the People of God comprised of *clerics-religious-laity* were regarded at that time only as laity (from the Greek *laikos*, member of the people).

It is this fundamental dimension of a *holy people* that Vatican II recovered and strongly affirmed in its Apostolic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*.

## 2. THE MONASTIC PERIOD

### 4<sup>th</sup> Century

The fourth Christian century was one of exceptional grandeur. After the conversion of Emperor Constantine in the year 313, the Edict of Milan put an end to the great persecutions of Christians. But what was especially noteworthy was that Christian history of the period was marked by men of genius whose influence would leave its mark for a long time to come on the thinking and the life of believers. This period marked a kind of Golden Age in the life of the Church. Ecumenical Councils, Church Fathers and Desert Fathers succeeded and complemented one another, giving impetus to a blossoming of the Christian way of life, the likes of which had never been known, at least not in the form it now took. One would no longer be able to talk about Christianity without referring to the events and the writings of this period.

In order to live consecration in this century, *the one called by God departed the world and left loved ones behind, with no further thought of acquiring earthly possessions; one's life was totally vowed through the consecration of one's whole being : mind affections, strengths, and projects to a God Who has revealed Himself.* Thus, Christians consecrating themselves to God became by their quality of being, men and women of the Kingdom. This would give rise to a plethora of monastic styles.

At first, there were only hermits living in solitude or there existed 'hermit colonies.' The time would arrive when *these solitary hermits would gather together within a common enclosure and place themselves under the authority of one of their number.* This would eventually evolve into the first monastery, a communitarian form of the eremitical life.

### 5<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> Century

The initiator of this movement was St. Antony of the Desert (circa 365), known as the 'Father of monks,' whose example led a veritable nation of brethren into the desert. Nonetheless, it was St. Pachomius (circa 346) who set down the first Rule of life. His monastic rule was to influence nearly all similar groups that were to follow, St. Basil (circa 365), St. Cesarius of Arles (circa 529), and St. Benedict (in the same period), Father of the Benedictines. All were inspired by St. Pachomius.

## 7<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> Century

At the level of human history, political as well as ecclesiastical, unfortunate misunderstandings led to a breaking of relations between East (the Greek Church) and West (the Latin Church). In addition, the many barbarian invasions of Europe broke through the last ramparts of the Roman Empire and obliterated the final vestiges of a civilization that was in its death-throes.

Against this apocalyptic backdrop, a new civilization conducive to the forming of a western Christian society was to take shape under the able and firm direction of bishops and monks. *While in the East monasticism was lived as a desert experience, western monasticism took on more and more a civilizing and cultural role in addition to evangelization.* Villages sprouted up around abbeys and schools developed under the aegis of monasteries.

The Benedictine Rule was the golden key of Western monasticism. It became the only normative text which determined the whole of consecrated life for men as well as for women until the arrival of the mendicant orders of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The basic traits of this monastic form of consecrated life included the following: an essential equality between all monks which permitted only assets of the spiritual life to determine the ascendancy of masters and sages; the numerical superiority of the laity with only a limited presence of priests for service to the brother-monks; the independence of each monastery while maintaining a set of links to a common tradition; the existence of a cloister with the majority of time and resources devoted to contemplation and to manual labour. In this Benedictine Rule, one important characteristic is that of a community of monks who are mostly lay Christians and only with time are these slowly associated with clerics.

Thus, with the great rise of Christian fervour which marked the beginnings of the year 1000, the way of perfection became the criteria for entry into the monastery. Within this context, the Christian lay persons, who were not monks, believed themselves to be in a position of inferiority in regards to Christian holiness which, nonetheless, is grounded in their very Baptism. Thus, monastic life marked the life of the Church and social life in the West for a number of centuries.

Consequently, monasticism became a force in all of Western Christianity. All power comprises dangers for the faith and especially for the diligent orientation toward evangelical perfection. Menaced by its enormous riches and by its political power, monasticism finds within itself remarkable reformers: the Cluny reform (909), that of Citeaux (Saint Bernard), Camaldules, Chartres, Valombreuse and at last the Gregorian reform. Thanks to these veritable heroes of God, the monastic life found again its original inspiration. The clergy itself was nourished by the model of the monks. Society was totally taken in control by the Church which permeates authoritatively all of its structures.

### 3. THE MENDICANTS

#### 11<sup>th</sup> - 15<sup>th</sup> Century

During the Eleventh Century, the power of monks and clerics largely predominated, and Western society was encompassed by rigid forms: in the visible world, order was imposed according to the presumed heavenly society. Rigidity of institutions, firmness of decisions and harshness in applying them created a harsh society that gloried so easily in its own perfection.

#### *The Rise of Laity in the Church*

There soon rose up a movement of protest among lay people who had the support of a few members of the clergy. They rose up against the power, the riches and the depravity of the great monasteries. These were the evangelical movements of St. Norbert, St. Francis of Assisi, and Valdez. This period marked the beginning of the mendicant orders.

There was born at that time fraternities comprising only lay people living outside of the established institutions giving themselves as the Rule, the Gospel, and for their manner of life, poverty and fraternity, and for their guidance, listening to the Holy Spirit. Their mission consisted in preaching and gave as an example a life totally submitted to the Gospel. Thus, Western Europe witnessed the sprouting up of numerous popular religious movements where lay people actively joined in reforming the Church, along with being witnesses of the great religious upheavals of the time: itinerant preachers, the Humiliati, the Penitents, the Beguards and Beguines.

#### *The Humiliati*

The Humiliati of Lombardi were city-dwellers who, although living at home, had committed themselves to living a certain form of religious life: they abstained from lying and court trials, dressed simply, and committed themselves to defend the Catholic faith. The Humiliati's specific character was to be found in their lifestyle and in the great importance they gave to manual labour. Many of those who joined them were married. Some of them joined to live in the neighborhood and others remained living in their own home setting.

### ***The Beguards and Beguines***

The Beguards and Beguines of the Netherlands had a lifestyle that was half-way between lay and monastic life. People of all classes and milieus, i.e., men, women, monks, secular priests and lay people, gravitated toward these new sources of spirituality, to learn at the feet of renowned spiritualists.

It must be noted that of all these groups only the Beguards and Beguines were to stand up to Rome in their decision to remain associations of lay people, and to this very day their original status has been maintained.

The other movements eventually became religious orders with spiritual ties to the laity – this is the origin of 'Third Orders' – or else they left the Church altogether and became heretical sects. Most of the Beguines disappeared bit by bit. Today, the Beguines of Gand and Bruges still exist, witnesses yet of a past for which one can feel nostalgic. That of Bruges still consists of women who have chosen silence and peace.

### ***The Mendicants***

The Mendicant Movement claimed a famous penitent layman as their originator, St. Francis of Assisi. These penitents were known as 'minors' because among them humility and simplicity were coupled with the joy of the poor and unimportant of the world. This momentum ascribed to the penitential perspective of the time. It was centred on evangelical conversion and its encompassing project was oriented toward the apostolic model and the first church communities born out of Pentecost.

Members of the community committed themselves to living as intensely as possible the radical requirements of evangelical brotherhood, evangelical poverty, an itinerant lifestyle in order to beg and to evangelize, fervent prayer in communion with one another, and with the people, service to the brethren, and evangelical witness in the midst of the world.

### ***Reaction of the Hierarchy***

To many clerics it seemed scandalous that lay people should engage in religious life and Gospel witness without renouncing their state of life. As for religious authorities, the groups presented difficulties centred on the following points: preaching without prior clerical training, especially since their preaching could be none other than critical of the lack of poverty (among religious authority), and since large numbers of people flocked to these preachers, their status was ambiguous: they were lay people but the temptation was to see them as clerics even if they lacked the intellectual formation.

Ecclesiastical authority therefore decided to channel this newly found fervour toward already existing structures, monastic or canonical, which clericalized these movements without overly diluting them, as well as to forbid preaching to those who refused to join a religious order. The Council of Lyon (France) sanctioned this move by forbidding any other new foundation.

Happily, Pope Innocent III understood that this movement responded to a deep felt need of lay people: their need to express as lay people their faith in the Gospel. The Pope sensed that alongside magisterial teaching there was room for something else which was the domain of every Christian: witnessing. He therefore was favourable to the possibility of evangelical living and even of preaching in public on condition that prior permission be granted by the local bishop.

This recognition is important because it stated that the lay state is compatible with religious life; one could become holy without becoming a monk or nun; Christian life was not linked to virginity and respect for enclosure; it could very well be compatible with every human situation such as work and marriage.

A new profile of consecrated life was going to clear itself of the mendicant model and structure itself in order to bring forth the double challenge of new heresies and the call to mission. The mendicant orders of Franciscans and Dominicans modified the face of the Church in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century in full conformity to the spirit of renewal which animated those in charge of the Church since the 11<sup>th</sup> century. They had the common trait of aiming toward an apostolate in the midst of the society of their time. However, in order to communicate effectively in the midst of the new society, they had to have a solid intellectual formation. We see dawning at that time in the midst of the Orders a cadre of professors and theologians of whom the most famous among the Dominicans were Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas, and among the Franciscans, Bonaventure and Duns Scotus.

#### 4. APOSTOLIC GROUPS

##### 16<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup> Century

The historical situation of the 16<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup> century directed the gaze of Western Europeans to the new lands. The discovery, especially America, stimulated energies and courage. At the same time, this situation threw out two challenges to believers. The first lay in countering the Protestant Reformation movement, and the second consisted in responding to calls for the evangelization of the newly discovered regions. It was the era of the Council of Trent (1545-1563).

The Church, in the state that the Council of Trent found itself confronted by a double challenge : could it at the same time work toward its own reform which was imposed upon it by the reality of the expansion of Protestantism, and launch out into a missionary endeavour which was almost world wide? And yet, in the example of the Society of Jesus, which almost since its foundation in 1540, ventured in this way, the Roman Church did not hesitate. America and Asia became effectively the grand theatre of its expansion.

The fruits of the Catholic reform were undeniable in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century : multiplication of seminaries, creation or reform of religious orders, rapid development of priestly and religious vocations, deepening of popular piety and the strengthening of spiritual and intellectual life.

The new groups took at the time for their objective service to the Church in difficulty or building up the Church in far away countries. They were all marked by the missionary call and by the need for internal structure. They were the shock troops easily transported to the places of combat for the faith. All of these groups were strongly marked by concrete action. They were typically 'active' movements maintaining a minimum of the contemplative life in the midst of their difficult apostolic tasks. They responded to the urgencies, often critical, or to great needs that were often beyond their capabilities.

In order to respond to the new needs, there arrived in America active communities and even, the birth of new communities vowed to education and the care of the sick. But a tremendous amount of tension was produced in the 18<sup>th</sup> century within the missionary activities for a number of reasons: lessening of religious energy, obstacles within congregations, and by governing bodies, suppression of the Jesuits by Rome, disruptions caused by the French Revolution and wars in Europe . . .and simultaneously, to the contrary, a rapid rise in the influence of Protestant missions with the colonial and maritime growth of England.

In France, happily, a significant initiative was the founding in 1882 of an association for the Propagation of the Faith by a lay person, Pauline Jaricot, who efficaciously contributed to the spread of the missionary spirit.

Moreover, the Pope to whom we owe the real stirring up of missionary action during the 19<sup>th</sup> century was Gregory XVI. He established clearly the parameters for the development of the missionary Church. This impetus and clarity, supported by a prodigious flowering of missionary vocations, prepared the birth of the authentic Churches which we see today growing rapidly: African Churches (Vicariate of the two Guineas, Madagascar and Ile Maurice), Asiatic Churches (Japan, Korea, Indochina), and Oceanic Churches where all of the islands were evangelized.



## 5. LAITY IN THE CHURCH 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Pius XI had complete leisure to develop an active pastoral approach to the laity in the spirit of his predecessors, Pius X and Benedict XV. At the time, in the eyes of Pius X, the laity did not have any other role than that of helpers to the clergy. Pius XI who loved to be called the Pope of the Catholic Action Movement, with interest and liking brought out the awareness of a specific role for the laity in the midst of the Church. At the same time, the young people became aware of their role as Christians which enlivened in them commitments and attitudes to which most middle of the road Catholics were not used to. All of the movements of Catholic Action birthed a host of militants which we find still today in the diverse forms of Christian presence.

### Consecration in the Midst of the World (Vatican II)

Vatican Council II (1962-1965), launched by John XXIII and completed under Paul VI, brought Catholicism back to the fundamental Christian experience: rediscovery of the roots of the Church of Pentecost.

The Conciliar texts, *Perfectae Caritatis* expresses itself in this manner: *lay religious life, for men and women, is a state for the profession of the evangelical counsels which is complete in itself. The holy Synod holds it in high esteem, for it is so useful to the Church in the exercise of its pastoral duty of educating the young, caring for the sick, and in its other ministries. It confirms the members in their vocation and urges them to adapt their life to modern requirements.*

## 6. SECULAR INSTITUTES

Well before Vatican II, in 1947, under Pius XII, recognition of secular institutes by the Church would create a first breach, but as aforementioned, it was preceded by the Catholic Action Movement which contributed to the profound development of the dignity of the lay person and promoted his/her proper place in the Church. These institutes agreed in an astonishing fashion with the deeply evangelical intuition of the religious movements of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, and especially with those of the Church of Pentecost.



In the Conciliar document, *Gaudium et Spes* <sup>3</sup>, the Church scrutinizes and expresses anew its relationship to the world while keeping in mind the new realities which modern society conveys : as with the social dynamism, progress in the field of scientific endeavors along with developments in social and economic solidarity, the hidden treasures of world culture, etc. It is important to enter well into this vision of the Church in order to situate secular institutes in their true place.

The Church is aware that she exists in the world, that she goes forward with humanity and experiences the same earthly lot which the world does. She serves as a leaven and as a kind of soul for human society. Therefore she has an authentic secular dimension, inherent in her profound nature and mission, whose roots plunge into the mystery of the Word Incarnate, and which has been realized in different forms for her members according to their own charism.

*The teaching authority of the Church never tires, especially in the course of the last years, to call Christians to assume rightly and loyally their proper responsibilities in the world. It is especially necessary today since humanity finds itself at a crucial point in history. A new world is in the process of being born: men search for new ways of thinking and action which will determine their life in the centuries to come.*<sup>4</sup>

*All forms of consecrated life are born in the midst of the Church as the shining forth of the presence of the action of the Spirit: it is the fruit of a charism, of a threefold gift for the common good. The history of an institute of consecrated life is that of a gift given from on high, received and transmitted and, consequently, the history of successive entry of the baptized into a charismatic context which precedes and transcends them!*<sup>5</sup>

*Secular Institutes are a "new gift of God" to His Church; they hold a unique significance for our time. They remind us of the sacred character of the secular order. They invite us to be concerned to safeguard this sacred character. They show us that a deep commitment to secular affairs is fully compatible with a radical commitment to the Kingdom of God as disciples of Jesus and members of the Church.*<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> GS, n. 40, 42, 44.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 45

<sup>5</sup> Carlo Rocchetta, "La consécration séculière aujourd'hui : l'institut séculier en tant que communauté", *Dialogue*, vol. xxii, no 102, 1994, p. 68.

<sup>6</sup> Subhash Anand. Les I.S. : un don de Dieu..., *Dialogue*, vol. xxv, no 112/113, 1997, p.55.

The community of a secular institute is before all a vocational community; it does not simply represent an association of the baptized, a spiritual movement or a work group: it is a community, which born of the gift of the Spirit to the Church, accepts the gift and, as a result of it, grows in view of its mission.

Thus, we are sufficiently enlightened about the timeliness of secular institutes in the present world. The present historical context justifies the new options related to the consecrated life. Secular institutes give to the Church and to the world a significant word for today which rests on the following theological postulates :

- ♦ the call of all to holiness because of everyone's baptismal consecration;
- ♦ the equal dignity of the Father's sons and daughters in Jesus Christ, and the unity of all the members of the mystical Body of Christ animated by the same Spirit;
- ♦ the functional and complementary diversity of the members gathered as one family where they live the experience of consecration;
- ♦ the Church's mission, which is none other than the mission of Christ carried out by each and every baptized person, in small community cells;
- ♦ the pursuit of evangelical perfection is possible and necessary for all through mutual aid and fraternal love, and through loose ties which do not necessitate life in common; and
- ♦ the possibility to strive for a common ideal and to collaborate in the same ecclesial mission, in different states of life.

### **Essential Elements of a Secular Institute**

It has now been established that three essential elements constitute the common denominator of all secular Institutes by which they can be recognized as authentic in spite of the variety of secondary elements that can be added: the consecration, the apostolate in the world and the secularity. These three essential elements will be investigated deeper in Chapter II of the guide.

### ***First Element: Consecration***

Members of secular institutes are consecrated to God. This means that they have given themselves totally to Him, loved above all else for His honour and service by the profession of the evangelical counsels in the midst of a specific institute set up by the Church.<sup>7</sup>

### ***Second Element: Apostolate in the World***

The members of secular institutes are obliged to work so that the divine message of salvation be known and received by all of humanity. They also have a particular duty to imbue society with the evangelical spirit, to perfect the temporal order and to give witness to Christ.

This apostolate of secular institutes must be faithfully exercised not only within the present age, but also so to speak by the means of the present age,<sup>8</sup> and consequently through profession, activities, conventions, in events and circumstances respond to this secular condition.<sup>9</sup>

Every secular Institute, by its very nature, is actively open to whatever it is that God's Kingdom in the world requires, open to every appeal of men and women whoever they are and whatever the need. Furthermore, the diverse needs and callings give rise to a large variety of apostolic projects by members of the same institute.

### ***Third Element: Secularity***

Consecrated lay people are really authentic lay people. They share with other lay people the reality of belonging neither to the priesthood or to the religious life, but belong on the contrary to the laity to which is entrusted particularly the management of temporal realities with the mission of ordering them to God.<sup>10</sup>

Associations of clerics and lay people whose members, in view of tending toward Christian perfection and submitting themselves totally to the apostolate, and make

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<sup>7</sup> Carl Jerome Hamer, *Les conclusions du Synode et ses conséquences pour les instituts séculiers*, *Dialogue*, vol. xvi, no. 78/79, (1988), p. 86.

<sup>8</sup> *PF*, II, 6

<sup>9</sup> Carl Jerome Hamer, *op. cit.*, p. 85-86.

<sup>10</sup> Carl Jerome Hamer, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

the profession to practice in the world the evangelical counsels, are exclusively designated under the name of institutes or secular institutes in order to be clearly distinguished from other ordinary associations of the faithful ...<sup>11</sup>

All secular institutes have the richness of these three elements.

The confidence that the Church testifies to in this new form of consecration to God, i.e., secular consecration, reveals itself well in the following affirmation:

*Through their actions and works, these secular institutes have proved that ... someone could achieve an intimate and effective consecration to the Lord not only interiorly but also exteriorly ... and in that way one had a means very adapted to action and apostolate in the world.*<sup>12</sup>

*Secular institutes by virtue of their charism of secular consecration seem to be Providential instruments to incarnate this spirit and to transmit it to the entire Church.*<sup>13</sup>

## 7. OTHER FORMS OF CONSECRATION (i.e. Public Associations of Christ's Faithful, etc.)

Vatican II opened the door to new kinds of commitment within the Church and in the world of today. New groups of consecrated people, each with its particular charism, arose here and there. Some of these placed more emphasis on baptismal grace and insisted much more on the family life of God's children. Others stressed more strongly the need for conversion and a turning back to prayer and penance. Still others were stamped with the evident and powerful impetus of the Holy Spirit through the exercise of specially developed charisms specific to their calling. In each instance, it was the Holy Spirit at work in the Church.

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<sup>11</sup> *PME*, 1.1.

<sup>12</sup> *PME*, 9.

<sup>13</sup> Paul VI, *On the Occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Provida Mater Ecclesia*, 2 February 1972.

1. After reading this chapter, does the framework proper to secular institutes touch the manner in which you want to live consecration within the Church?
2. What do you find to be the most inspiring aspect of secular consecration?
3. What is the main discovery that you made in reading this chapter?

## CONCLUSION

This brief overview of the history of consecrated life should have allowed you to grasp the importance and the richness of this particular prophetic witness in the midst of ecclesial life down through the ages.

Since consecrated life is lived centred on the practice of the evangelical counsels imitative of Jesus, it has searched constantly to adapt itself to the needs of the era in having for its mission to serve and to win others to Christ.

To this will of adaptation and enculturation, the members of secular institutes are particularly entrusted since they make the world their very place of consecration. It is in this sense that in solidarity with all those consecrated that we have the challenge of being an advanced wing, a laboratory of new experiences in the Church.

## II- CONSECRATION

### INTRODUCTION

At this time, as you are preparing to commit to consecrated life within the Institute, it is important to fully understand that this new call will have meaning and value for you only to the degree to which it will allow you to respond more perfectly to your baptismal commitment. In fact, baptismal consecration is the first and fundamental consecration. It is the original consecration, and the one which nourishes all other forms of consecration to the Lord God.

That is why we invite you who has put on Christ on the day of your Baptism to return to that moment in which you were immersed in the death and resurrection of Christ, passing (Passover) with Him to the new life of the children of God. At that moment you were configured to the Son, the Beloved of the Father. At that moment through the action of the Holy Spirit you also became (born again) a new creation. Be aware of who you have become: a sanctified person, a person made *SACRED*.

We have here the first general grasp of what consecration is all about and of its important connection to Baptism. As its name indicates, consecration is related to the category of the sacred. That is what has essentially been realized in Baptism for your whole being. That is why we speak of a baptismal consecration.

In a similar way, we call *consecrated*, a place, an object, everything that has been removed from the profane and dedicated to the service of God. It is signified by a ritual where we give a sacred character to that which has been placed into the sacred order; for example, a consecrated cup becomes a cup reserved to the celebration of the Eucharist.

Thus, you are a consecrated person by your Baptism. Since then, you have been initiated into the very world of the living God. You participate (take part) in the very nature of God (divine nature) and the very sanctity of God. Such is the nature of your new reality : so mysterious, yet so real. It needs to grow in you and reveal itself in the actions and attitudes of your life.

Thus perceived, consecration of a baptized person becomes his progressive assumption into the holiness of God thanks to his collaboration entrusted to the action of the Holy Spirit dwelling within it.

To follow-up on this introductory presentation to consecration, we can now deepen further that which constitutes it:

- ♦ the nature of baptismal consecration;
- ♦ the nature of the mission connected to all particular consecration, chiefly in its secular form; and
- ♦ the nature of the practice of the evangelical counsels.

## 1. BAPTISMAL CONSECRATION

We have just affirmed: Baptism configures you to Christ. Thus, take the time to contemplate the face of Jesus, your first born Brother and model. Consider Him consecrating Himself completely to the Will of the Father in loving service to his brothers and sisters.

**With the help of the following Biblical texts, meditate how:**

- ♦ Since the first moment of His conception, Jesus is called holy, totally engrossed in God, sacred, set apart for the work of God: Lk 1:35.
- ♦ His entire life and all of his actions revealed that he was guided and influenced by the Holy Spirit: Lk 3:22; 4:1-14, 18-20; Acts 10:38.
- ♦ Consciously and freely, He chose to consecrate His life to that for which He was sent: Heb 10:7; Jn 10:18; 17:19.
- ♦ His resurrection and glorification attest that He is the Holy One of God: Mk 15:39; Mt 28:18-20.

*It is in Christ (The Anointed One) Jesus that we discover the full meaning of the word 'consecrated' : it designates a transformation. We discover the same meaning in the sacramental rite of Baptism. Through water and the Spirit, we become a consecrated people, a holy nation of kings, priests and prophets (Heb 1). When in the Church we talk about consecrated life, it is always in relation to Christ. His Baptism gives value to all actions whereby a man or woman gives himself or herself to God.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Laplace, *Vie consacrée : existence transfigurée*. Paris : DDB, c2000, p. 51.



Christ continues His incarnation and mission of salvation through the baptized throughout the ages. Member of the one Body of Christ, the baptized person participates through and in Jesus in the same holiness of God : If primarily the holiness of God signifies separation and transcendence, the Total Other, it also signifies love, tenderness, and protection. Since fundamental holiness comes from God, human holiness is a participation in it. And that is why, if we can say that consecration or sanctification is a setting apart for entry into the realm of the Holy God, we can also describe it as the desire of spreading and diffusing which characterize the holiness of God.

The consecration of a person by God is the will of the Transcendent to render itself Immanent. The person grasped by God reveals His glory in the here and now through the praise offered to Him in worship and through the witnessing that is given among other people. It is an insertion into the holiness of God. Consecration is also being set apart not from the world as such, but from sin and its dominion; sanctification or consecration which God pursues in the world is a battle waged against sin and evil.<sup>2</sup>

The anointing of the sacrament of Confirmation attests to the reality of the consecration of the total being through baptism in Jesus, the Christ. The marks of the new membership are added to those of Baptism in view of the mission:

- ♦ *through Baptism, we enter into the family of God; through Confirmation, the Spirit enlivens us, contagious with life;*
- ♦ *through Baptism, we are called and justified in order to be glorified (Rom 8:9); through Confirmation, we are sent to make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:19) and in this we are cloaked in power (Lk 24:49);*
- ♦ *through Baptism, we become disciples, we are Church; through Confirmation, we are prophets, the Church that speaks, proclaims Jesus, the Christ, teaches, battles, in conjunction with the bishop, for the Gospel (Phil 4:3), that gathers together from all places, all languages and all cultures the entire family of nations under heaven;*
- ♦ *for the baptized, the Church is a family, a home; for the confirmed, the Church becomes a work to be accomplished;*

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<sup>2</sup> Francois Morlot, Consécration dans les instituts séculiers, *Vocation*, 262,1973, pp.58-59.



- ♦ *through Baptism, we are invested and imbued with Jesus, the Christ since he dwells within us; through Confirmation, we are more capable of shining forth;*
- ♦ *finally, the baptized confess the truth of the faith; and the confirmed enter into it.*<sup>3</sup>

Consequently, what would religious consecration add to the consecration of Baptism-Confirmation? Obviously, religious consecration must not be seen as an add-on, an extra for these sacraments; still less that of a quasi-sacrament. No, it is of the order of means. It is to be understood in the sense of a vocation: a response of grace to a particular call of the Lord to witness in a singular way the realities of the Kingdom already present and yet to come; a voluntary and free response to a requirement to love more radically as engendered within the person by the Holy Spirit.

*Baptism does not comprise degrees. Each of the faithful is totally and definitively consecrated and all of the faithful are equal. Between baptismal consecration and particular consecration, there is no difference of degree or intensity, but a difference in nature. The second presupposes the first, and harmonizes with it, but remains an "other" consecration which adds itself to that of Baptism.*

*Consequently, the baptized-consecrated person is not more Christian than the baptized layperson; not anymore than the baptized cleric is more Christian than the baptized layperson or the baptized consecrated person. To affirm the opposite would set up a form of discrimination among the baptized. We must recognize, however, that certain persons in addition to baptismal consecration, have one or two other consecrations: that of the sacrament of Orders, and/or that of the profession of the evangelical counsels. These consecrations are not added to baptismal consecration like realities of the same nature, but exist simultaneously in the same person as different realities which complement each other.*

*Moreover, baptismal consecration, common to all faithful, does not include in itself the various states of life. This is related to particular vocations: the lay life, consecrated life, the clerical life. It is therefore important to distinguish the baptismal vocation and that of the lay person. In fact, all those who are baptized are Christians, but all Christians are not lay persons. If Baptism makes one a disciple, it does not make one a lay or consecrated person, or a cleric. But it is upon Baptism that the three states of the Christian life are grafted.*<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Th. Rey-Mermet, *Croire: les sacrements*, Limoges, Droguet et Ardent, 1977, pp. 111-112.

<sup>4</sup> Bergh, Jean. *Études sur les instituts séculiers, v.3 : Appartenance*. Bruges, DDB, c1963, pp. 42-43.

- ♦ Express in your own words what signifies for you the meaning of sanctification through Baptism-Confirmation.
- ♦ Do you consider it a setting apart? a participation/ an insertion? an assumption? a mission?
- ♦ Until now, have you been aware of being, through Baptism and Confirmation, sent and charged with the Church's mission?
- ♦ In what particular activities are manifested the triple dimension of your baptismal vocation of priest, prophet and king?

(Consult Appendix B of this Guide in order to clarify this dimension of your vocation.)

## 2. SECULAR CONSECRATION

All the baptized are called to holiness, to the perfection of Christian charity. This seed of baptismal holiness is open to development; it belongs to the baptized, with the grace of God, to maintain and bring to fruition in one's life the sanctification received in Baptism. John Paul II reminds us often of this. To respond to this call, certain individuals feel attracted to the way of a particular consecration. According to the Conciliar document, *Lumen Gentium*, one of the ways by which God realizes among human persons the perfection that He fully possesses is through the individual call to a particular consecration to His service and to humanity. It is this consecration to God and to humanity, lived in the midst of the world, within a secular institute, that we call secular consecration.

### 2.1 A Reality To Be Well Defined

Should we say secular consecration or consecrated secularity? From the theological point of view, perhaps we should say secular consecration, but from the practical point of view and from our experience in a secular institute, it would seem more correct to say consecrated secularity. Each one of us will emphasize the one he prefers depending upon experiences, actual commitment, psychological make-up, and insertion in the world as a consecrated person.

Let's try, nonetheless, to discern a few dimensions of it. *Consecrated secularity is constituted by the three evangelical counsels. Consecrated life signifies the total commitment of the self to God Who is supremely loved. It is this total consecration to God within the context of authentic love that motivates decisively the vocation of particular consecration to God. God not only holds the primary place in one's life, He is the prime reason for the consecration. Thus, consecration involves the total gift of the self. To be consecrated signifies letting oneself be transformed by the love of God through a love that becomes chastity, poverty and obedience, or better, love in obedience : a love which is poor, a love which is chaste, a love which is obedient.* <sup>5</sup> Here is the first pole : the consecration of life.

The second, for a member of a secular institute, is closely linked to the aforementioned: it is secularity. That is to say, that this very concrete world is the place and the mission of the human being. For Christ, it is a surplus humanity. This world the member should love as God loves it, and be for it, in the manner of Christ, its servant and the saving love of God. The *Voluntas Dei* member is called by the very charism of the Institute to realize in his life the mystery of the Incarnation; this involves a deep awareness of its secular reality.

Let's listen to Father Parent's witnessing of this in a brief excerpt:

*As Jesus needed Mary to be incarnated, to enter as a man into the great family of humanity, so we have need of Mary to be incarnated as Jesus was into the midst of the world.*

*To be incarnated is not only to take on human flesh, it is to take on the whole of human life, all that it entails. Jesus did not merely take on the flesh that made Him a man, He became a Jew with all that it meant from birth to death, with all the rights and privileges of this race and also all the duties and the requirements.*

*No one made a mistake about His identity: all knew He was a descendant of the family of David, a Jew, a Galilean, a Nazarene. At times He was marked by His nationality, at times by His province or His municipality. He had the accent of His region. He could easily be identified; there is no doubt about His insertion into the world. His incarnation not only made Him a man, but it revealed that man to others, leaving Him to the mercy of their judgment, by which He was either loved or He made enemies, who ended up*

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<sup>5</sup> Carol Rochetta, op. cit., *Dialogue*, vol xxii, n. 100, 1994, pp. 3-7.

*eliminating Him. The incarnation is the body, in flesh and blood, that he received from Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is His insertion into a well-defined community.*

*As persons consecrated in a well-defined Institute, as a continuation of the humanity of Christ, we must admit that we remain incarnated in human flesh, that we are part of a precise milieu, one that is concrete, real and alive. This incarnation, this insertion is essential to our vocation. The ways Christ lived this incarnation is the model we must follow.<sup>6</sup>*

By being in solidarity with this world, the member of a secular institute, through consecration, desires to bring this world in his own way toward God. By his presence at the heart of the world and through the manner of living there, the consecrated secular seeks to imbue the force of the evangelical counsels into human and temporal values. By way of a new and original manner in the Church, the consecrated person, in a secular institute, knows that his consecrated life and secular condition can be unified within him without diminishing the essential requirements of consecration or impoverishing the quality of effective incarnation.

*Secularity is the reality of being a part of the world and in the world in order to build the future of the world. In this regard, secularity is a dimension that belongs to our human existence and to our condition of life with others; it exists within the framework of geographic, historical, cultural and social relationships. We are born within a secular world, we do not become secular. Secular consecration, however, is the conscious acceptance of our secular condition in order to be the instrument of the emergence of God in the midst of the historical human situation. It is not a natural given at this level; it is the free choice in faith of a person who wants to commit his existence to serving the fulfilment of the Reign of God; in this sense, one is not born secular, one becomes secular.<sup>7</sup>*

It is certain that the Church counts greatly on this new experiment of secular institutes, especially since Vatican II. Paul VI clearly said so in August 1976 during the Assembly General of the World Conference of Secular Institutes, in presenting secular institutes as: *the experimental laboratory of the presence of the Church in the world where she verifies the concrete modes*

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<sup>6</sup> Louis-Marie Parent, *In Intimacy with Jesus*, Trois-Rivières : Voluntas Dei Institute, c1987, pp.37-38.

<sup>7</sup> Carlo Rochetta, op. cit., *Dialogue*, vol. xxii, n. 100, 1994, pp. 3-7.

*of her presence to the world.*<sup>8</sup> Do not disappoint this expectation of the Church in regard to us since it requires that we, on our part, clothe ourselves with generosity, courage and perseverance in our freely chosen state of consecrated secularity.

- ♦ Express in a short written paragraph what inspired you in this statement of Father Parent: To become for Christ *a surplus humanity*.
- ♦ What is your understanding of this statement: in a sense we are born secular, and in another sense we become secular?

## 2.2 Our Reality

It is important to reiterate often: the Voluntas Dei member of a secular institute, embraces completely the secular situation which he recognizes within him, that which comes from within his condition of being human, but also that which he recognizes as the real place of existing and growing as a Christian person. In fraternal solidarity with other consecrated families of the Church, the Voluntas Dei member witnesses to the values of the Kingdom (to that which resembles life in the Kingdom of our Father, a Kingdom already present in the midst of the history of our world). For him, as for all members of secular institutes, consecration and secularity are realities indissoluble and intimately connected to his choice of life. Thus:

*Secularity does not point exclusively to the temporal dimension of human existence which should be surpassed or whose usefulness depends upon some spiritual evaluation. The secular condition of the human person is his own unique condition: it is unchangeable, indispensable and is itself sacred. For, according to the Biblical conception, it is impossible to contrast consecration and secularity. The two terms define from different angles the unique being-in-the world of the human person. One is consecrated to the degree that one lives finitude as the place of fulfilment; one is also secular to the degree that one's deepest desires animate continually the daily situations. In the Biblical sense, secularity approaches a sacrament: the two evoke the sacred within the temporal realm and the temporal with the sacred dimension. Secularity represents the presence of God within the history of the universe. Humanity and the universe, in effect, live with the hope of knowing the liberty and the glory of the children of God, (Rom 8:13-23).*<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Paul VI, *EN*, p. 98, and at the time of the Assembly General of the WCSI, August 1976.

<sup>9</sup> Jacky Stinckens, *Le sacré de la vie*, Québec: Anne Sigier, c 2000, p.195.

By his consecrated secularity, the *Voluntas Dei* is able to grasp the words of Paul VI: *in the midst of temporal realities, to insert the force of the evangelical counsels, i.e., the divine and eternal values within human and temporal values.*<sup>10</sup>

- ♦ Do you consider yourself well inserted into the society in which you live and work?
- ♦ What are the bonds that you consider the most important to nourish and develop?
- ♦ Do you believe that consecration by vows/commitments will change the way of your being present and your service to the world in which you live?

### 2.3 Consecration and Mission

We have already affirmed more than once; a vocational call is connected to an ecclesial mission. The call to consecrated life does not escape it. As affirmed above, consecrated secularity necessarily involves a mission for human society. Paul VI summarizes well the words that we have just cited from him.

If human society is the vast domain of the mission offered to consecrated persons, you can see that there are abundant areas where a member of a secular institute can assert himself and be a friendly presence, an enlightened guide, an attentive collaborator, and a believer calling forth others. Here are a number of examples:

- ♦ presence to families, especially those of the neighbourhood;
- ♦ presence to various professions and occupations;
- ♦ presence to political, economic, cultural, artistic, technological and ecclesial realms including trade unions;
- ♦ presence to services of charity, education and sports;
- ♦ presence to private and governmental organizations;
- ♦ gratuitous and attentive presence to persons young and elderly; and
- ♦ ...

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<sup>10</sup> Paul VI, *Discourse to Director Generals of Secular Institutes*, p.13, 1972.



It goes without saying that, for this mission in the midst of the world with its myriad of places for commitment, the *Voluntas Dei* member, consecrated by vows or commitments, makes his choice in light of the charism and apostolic objective of the Institute; he also takes into consideration the particular needs of the Institute as well as those of his surroundings and local Church. It also goes without saying that the member exercises this mission in respect to the obligations associated with his state of life in accordance with his personal talents and charisms.

For a long time the Church has been cool to the idea of a consecrated presence in the midst of the world without the protection of a religious habit, a community life, and the presence of superiors in the immediate surroundings. This hesitancy has not been without a certain wisdom derived from preceding centuries. This also indicates the grave challenge that secular institutes must take up: to give proof that it is possible and beneficial.

How do we ensure that the truth of a consecrated commitment, within a world whose values are oftentimes distant and contrary to those of the Gospel, is realized in conformity to the spirit of the Gospel, and carries a witnessing of the true values of the Kingdom?

The **first means** consists in living intensely the spirituality of the Institute, in becoming thoroughly imbued with it, and letting radiate forth in one's life the charism of the Institute.

The **second means** is fidelity to prayer. It is essential to find the time to meditate, contemplate, listen to God, read and ponder His Word. It is also important to have fervent and fraternal liturgical celebrations connected with one's milieu of life.

The **third means** is that of professional and spiritual formation, thorough and continuous. Formation is the main support and the central nerve of secular institutes. What is needed is a general basic formation in the fundamentals of Christian and consecrated life, as well as in the profession the members intend to practice. Also there is needed some specific training, depending on one's age or stage of incorporation within the Institute. This is then followed by ongoing formation by which each member accepts responsibility for replenishing his resources regularly and throughout life.

The mission of the consecrated person is sustained by the action of grace in his being. This action of grace manifests itself in a strong bi-polar force or movement :

To begin with, there is the **centrifugal force**, which in secular institutes, is experienced first. It is a thrust toward the world. It leads to an ever-deeper involvement in a chosen field of action corresponding to the member's particular calling. It is recognizable by the talents, aptitudes, tastes, circumstances and encounters leading to a specific project. But always and everywhere, the object is to incarnate Jesus Christ through one's presence, witness and action.

Secondly, there is also the **centripetal movement**. The members seek to come together in a flexible form of community. With the *Voluntas Dei*, it is the team which serves as a spiritual community. There we converse with other members, relate the wonders of the apostolate, are renewed by the Word and common prayer, find strength in the bonds of kinship, and share in the ideals of the charism which is ours. Together we acknowledge and affirm the sublimity of our calling, the ecclesial authenticity of our mission, and we experience for ourselves the efficacy of Christian salvation. We depart strengthened, better able to transcend conflicts, overcome obstacles, and bear up under the failures encountered along the way.

The mission of the consecrated person is a prophetic sign for the milieu of his life. The lifestyle of the consecrated person, focused on freedom, gift of self, being before having, contemplation before action, necessarily questions a hedonistic world centred on the immediate, having and doing. In a world often gloomy and lacking in hope, the consecrated person brings his positive outlook, joy and hope; indeed, since he contemplates all creation through God's eyes, the consecrated person affirms, despite evil, that the world is good and is on the way to restoration and glorification in Jesus Christ.

Called to build peace and fellowship in Jesus Christ, the *Voluntas Dei* member joins this prophetic movement. Indeed, in order to invest oneself completely in this apostolic objective, a positive outlook of faith is necessary which knows how to discern the springtimes of God, and it is essential to have a free and intense love which bursts forth from one's intimate union with God Who is loved above all else.



- ♦ What place is given in your life to the three means mentioned as supports to the fidelity of secular consecrated person?
- ♦ How do you understand that the life of the consecrated person must be a prophetic word for the world?
- ♦ Without being already a professed member in the Institute, do you have the feeling of living already something of secular consecration?

### 3. VOWS AND COMMITMENTS

Secular consecration, like all public consecration in the Church, is expressed through the profession of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience.

Through *profession* one makes a public declaration of faith. To profess the evangelical counsels reveals within the Church one's decision to live in conformity to the Gospel. This profession can take on a number of canonical forms: it is said publicly or privately, by vows or promises. We will return to this.

Secular consecration is lived in the midst of the world, in a spirit of incarnation which makes the member of a secular institute share *in the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men [women] of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way . . .*<sup>11</sup>

Secular consecration is made through a total and definitive gift of self to God. The person who responds to the invitation to follow Jesus more closely through the practice of the evangelical counsels accepts deliberately the influence of God in his life and a submission entrusted to the Holy Spirit. The person gives himself to God knowing that he is infinitely loved; the person responds to Love by love. Such a gift has all the characteristics of a covenant of love: it is complete and forever.

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<sup>11</sup> GS, 1.

### 3.1 Chastity, Poverty, Obedience

From where has the Church, in the course of its history, crystallized the following of Christ and particular consecration around the three counsels drawn from the Gospel? It comes from the contemplation of its Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. In particular, the contemplation of Jesus guided by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted. It was then for Jesus the moment of fundamental choice. Indeed, the three temptations touch the very roots of the human person and the dynamism of his nature.

*In order to support his existence he works; he desires with those around him a relationship of love; he seeks to organize himself with fellow human beings in order to set up a harmonious and peaceful society. Money, sex and power are three ways of expressing in modern terms that which man cannot do without in order to live and fulfil himself.*

*It is within these realities necessary to all o f life that the great temptation arises: 'All this has been given to me and I do with it what I want' says Satan to Jesus at the time of his retreat in the desert. Said differently, of all that surrounds you, make it your own, serve yourself, become your own master. This is the universal temptation. It is not in things, but in the way we make use of them. Instead of receiving them to live in fellowship and love, the temptation pushes each one to be god, independent of God and others, and to say: this belongs to me. The attraction, which is at the bottom of the human being offered by nature, becomes a compelling drive toward possessing, enjoying and dominating. It is the world upside down.*

*In order to put things in their correct perspective, the three vows were proposed to man. They combat what the tradition calls (1 Jn 2) the triple concupiscence: riches, flesh and pride. What is wrong, is not the desire or the attraction : as Jesus explains in the Sermon on the Mount, it is the look that seeks to possess the other and make of him an object. To redress this triple deviation, Christ wanted to live the triple temptation. He conquered them by putting everything back into place, and by turning everything toward the Father.*

*It is within the great dynamism lived by Christ for putting things back into order and for returning to the man his identity as son that the three vows were instigated.<sup>12</sup>*

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<sup>12</sup> Jean Laplace, *op. cit.*, p.67-68.

*Jesus experienced that these three attitudes kept him faithful and confident in the love of God, even in the most critical of moments. These were the choice keys for safeguarding His secularity; that is : His being-in-God within His being-in-the-flesh. Thus, these choices remain the determining factor for supporting the mystery of secularity for each human being. Taken within the evangelical context, vows are not optional counsels such as a “surplus spirituality” addressed to a minority of the baptized. They are basic attitudes which allowed Jesus to remain a man in the image of God.* <sup>13</sup>

It seems appropriate at this time, following the above citations, to contemplate Jesus in the desert. Whatever your state in life, surely you feel called to work toward putting the world in order.

- ♦ Read very slowly the text of Mt 4:1-11. Be aware also of the parallel texts in Mk 1:12-13, and Lk 4:1-13.
- ♦ Let this text speak to you; listen to your heart.
- ♦ Be aware of the explanatory notes at the bottom of the page of your Bible.
- ♦ Consider how you see yourself in regard to the three great desires of your human nature : to possess, to enjoy, to dominate.
- ♦ Let prayer come forth out of yourself in union with the Spirit of your Baptism.

### 3.2 Vows and Commitments in the Institute

At this moment in your study, it would be good to have on hand the **Constitutions** of the Institute. We will particularly refer, for celibate clerics and laymen, to Chapter I of the Second Part, art. 43 to 62, entitled: Consecrated Life in the Institute; for married couples, we will refer to Chapter II of the Third Part, art. 106 to 109, entitled: Consecrated Life of Associate Members in the Institute.

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<sup>13</sup>Jacky Stinckens, *op.cit.*, p.361-362.

The Constitutions make clear that the members of the Institute commit themselves to evangelical radicalism, the apostolic project of the Institute being to *make, by their consecration in the midst of the world, the Kingdom of God come about in themselves, in their own milieu, and wherever Christ has His rights. (article 1 and 101).*

This applies to all of the members of the Institute whether professed or associate members. Then, why make a distinction between *professed* and *associate*, profession by *vows* and profession by *commitments*?

The Constitutions, which govern the life of the Institute, must, for their approval by the Holy See, be written according to the prescriptions of Canon law. Canon law has its own language; just as there is a biblical language, a theological language, a poetic language. The Code of Canon law has given a precise and exclusive meaning to the word *consecrated*. This word when applied to a person designates that he is publicly committed to live the counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience. And for the counsel of chastity, the Code reaffirms the obligation of perfect continence for the celibate; what is impossible, according to the meaning of the Law, is the public consecration by vows for married persons. Thus, married persons cannot *canonically* be called members *in the strict sense* of an institute of consecrated life recognized as such by the authority of the Church.

The Constitutions of the Institute must take into account the canonical distinction between consecrated celibates by public profession of vows and married persons consecrated by private commitments to live the three evangelical counsels. In the first case, the Code of Canon law recognizes officially as consecrated persons celibate laymen, and in the second case, recognizes in the name of their baptismal consecration and their belonging to a family of consecrated persons, married persons who have committed themselves to live the ideal of Christian perfection proposed by the Gospel.

The distinction is primarily of the order of official recognition that the Church gives to the profession of vows and commitments. Indeed, there is also distinctions related to the manner of living them according to the states of life. Thus, in the Voluntas Dei Institute, all commit themselves, either by vows for celibate laymen, and by commitments for married persons, to follow the chaste, the poor and obedient Christ according to their respective state of life.

*Isn't commitment after all, before anything else, a response to a personal call of Jesus Christ, an attachment to His person and Gospel? This commitment of the member must grant to Jesus Christ a prominent place in all that touches his daily life. That is how Jesus becomes for the committed member the Way, the Truth and the Life; the One without whom he can do nothing. As well, Jesus becomes little by little the point of convergence of his existence. He becomes thus the reference for his system of values : the Gospel, summarized in the evangelical counsels; finally, there are norms, which in secular institutes, have been expressed until now as vows, promises or oaths. If we put the emphasis here on the Jesus Christ and His teachings rather than on the minimal requirements of the law, would we not embrace His radicalism and go beyond our comfortable limits rather than merely safeguard the law? Moreover, the evangelical counsels, while recognizing in a more evident manner their primary function as means, could rightly produce the effect which we await: to assist in the realization of a faithful and total commitment to Jesus Christ.* <sup>14 15</sup>

**It would be good now to read :**

- ♦ Chapter I of the Second Part, art. 43 to 62.
- ♦ Chapter II of the Third Part, art. 106 to 109 of the Constitutions

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<sup>14</sup> Gabrielle Lachance, *Consécration à Dieu et conseils évangéliques, Sécularité et engagement chrétien*, Montréal, Fides, c1976, p.127.

<sup>15</sup> In these texts, it is important to indicate that the term “commitment” does not take on the same meaning. In the Constitutions the word “commitment” means profession of the evangelical counsels whereas in the preceding text “commitment” denotes a total adherence to Christ.

## 4. EVANGELICAL COUNSEL OF CHASTITY

### 4.1 Nature

Chastity refers to the loving attitude of Jesus and to His love which is at the same time free and liberating. To reveal God's love for His children is the fundamental motivation of Jesus' work. He expresses it in words, but especially through his attitudes and actions. *God is Love* summarizes John the Evangelist. He learned this through daily contact with Jesus.

Jesus showed forth a very great freedom of loving: He dared to love even those who were considered unapproachable by the faithful religious of His time, the excluded: publicans, Samaritans, prostitutes, the impure and possessed. . .; He allowed going against the Law of the Jewish Sabbath in order to do something beneficial for one's neighbour.

Jesus demonstrated a liberating love: those who came to Him in faith returned healed, changed, transformed, better, resurrected, more alive. We will say of Jesus : *He went about doing good (Acts 10:38)*. We could also say as well: he went about loving: *there is no greater love than to lay down your life for your friends (John 15:13)*.

One of the characteristics of following Jesus that was quickly adopted in the Church by certain individuals who had a thirst for imitating the Lord perfectly, was that of celibacy.

The II Vatican Council clarified that celibacy for the Kingdom is the most distinctive characteristic of the life fully consecrated. The celibacy allows adherence without obstacles and intermediaries to the absolute Love which the human person meets in Christ.

The evangelical counsel of chastity invites to a disinterested love and without limit, drawn to the very heart of God. It invites the consecrated person to become *a universal brother, i.e., a friend of all men and women, at all times, at all occasions and in all situations*.<sup>16</sup>

Married persons are also invited to live chastity according to their state of life which is called *conjugal chastity*. It then becomes for the world a special sign of the fidelity and gratuity of the tender Love of God in His Covenant with humanity.

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<sup>16</sup> SCRIS, *Réflexion sur les instituts séculiers*, 91, April 25, 1976.



## 4.2 Theological Basis

The theological source of chastity is found in the very love of God, a love which unites for all eternity the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is understood that this divine love is inimitable. Except that human love can in itself be the receptacle, the instrument, the reflection. For God willed that His Love be spread through our hearts by the Holy Spirit given to us. The consecrated person wishes to communicate with this Love and to love like this Love.

Except for a reference to *eunuchs for the Kingdom of God (Mt 19:12)*, Jesus rarely ever spoke about chastity.

*If Jesus spoke so little about chastity, or did not think about giving it as an example, would it not be because for Him it was not only natural and spontaneous, but also fundamental and essential to His personhood. Free from all fear and desire, living thoroughly all human situations, especially close to the ones where humans meet and love, set free from eroticism in order to carry out love, Jesus did not have to preach about chastity. He, Himself, was a living radical chastity, a chastity which was at the source of his unique strength of the gift of Himself, welcome and understanding. If a man in the world had chosen to become a eunuch for the Kingdom, it was He. And, if the choice had been spontaneous, personal, free from all pressure or all apathy, it would have been His choice. Jesus did not choose to be chaste on account of a principle, in the name of an ideal or as a means to achieve something, he chose it simply to be Himself.<sup>17</sup>*

Jesus' choice to be chaste was because this condition of life corresponded better to his profound sense of being the Son of the Father and the Spouse of humanity. He chose it for the sake of the Kingdom of God which he came to inaugurate. To speak of Jesus' chastity is to speak about His exceptional love for the Father and for humanity. It is to speak of His freedom of heart to live here below what is lived in the Kingdom of God.

*True chastity for the Kingdom is before all else an openness to a new way of loving and anticipating the world to come; it is a sign of the immortal being of the man who became the Son of God and the Son of the Resurrection, no longer to die. It opens out to a new age into which the baptized enter and which is beyond the fluctuations of mortal life. There isn't in it any despise of the present condition, but a reminder of its transitory nature.*

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<sup>17</sup> Jean Guillet, *Jesus dans son monde*. Paris: DDB, 1974, 39-40.

*The life of consecrated chastity has a double character of guiding us to a total life with Christ and to that universal love for which He opens the human heart. The consecrated person lets shine forth, over all men who have become brothers, the love and the light that he possesses. He brings to the world the certitude of hope and love drawn from faith in the Resurrection of Christ and all of humanity.<sup>18</sup>*

#### **4.3 Practice of Chastity in the Institute**

The evangelical counsel of chastity invites the consecrated secular person to open his total being to the Love of God in order that his human capacities to love might be taken hold of and established in a new balance. At the time, it gives to him a new heart and a new outlook which allows him to see people as God sees them and to love them as God loves them.

The Voluntas Dei member knows that such a love granted requires on his part to remain faithfully connected to the Vine of life, Jesus, to continually refocus on the Spirit of Love Who sustains, and to turn himself constantly away from all movement toward self-centredness.

The evangelical counsel of chastity invites the consecrated secular person to make of his life a life given to all, fraternally loving everyone without exclusion, in the manner of Jesus.

The Voluntas Dei member knows that such a love requires emotional maturity. He works seriously to attain it as soon as possible, counting on the grace of God, but also seeking human assistance to achieve it. He recognizes the consequences of an infantile affectivity and/or an immature sexuality which prevent the attainment of a good human balance in this area.

The evangelical counsel of chastity invites the consecrated secular person to ensure that all acts of love begin and end in Jesus Christ.

The Voluntas Dei member knows that such a purity which allows the very love of Christ to flow through him without attaching to it his own difficulties to love, requires a humble and sincere recognition of his limits and human frailties, but especially a profound trust in the One who has chosen, shapes and takes care of him.

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<sup>18</sup> Jean Laplace, *op.cit.*, 72-74.



The celibate Voluntas Dei member, called to follow Christ in a radical way, will have the heart to keep alive within himself the influence exerted over him by the living person of Jesus Christ, His Kingdom and Good News. He will taste then the fruits of consecrated chastity: a deep intimacy with God, a great freedom of heart, a fraternal and blossoming universal love. He will witness to the very love of God for humanity: singular love, preferential love, unconditional love, and love as a gift.

Married Voluntas Dei members, by their commitment to conjugal chastity, enter more deeply into understanding the Love of the Lord in the new and eternal Covenant with humanity. Understanding this spousal love in light of their own sacramental experience of Christian marriage, the associate members are more able to show it forth to humanity. By their consecrated conjugal chastity, the married Voluntas Dei members remind the baptized of the qualities of fidelity, affection, richness of Love, and to married persons the importance and value of conjugal chastity.

*Yes, in Christ, it is possible to love God with one's whole heart while placing Him above all other love, and to love as well all creation with the freedom of God. This is one of the witnesses that is more than necessary today, precisely because it is so little understood by the world. It is offered to everyone, the young, engaged, married and Christian families to show that the force of love of God can work on great things interiorly and even on the vicissitudes of human love. It is a witness that responds also to a growing need for openness in all human relationships.<sup>19</sup>*

*Many ignore the fact that marriage is a true consecration. All marriages carry a vow for eternity. The best way to define this sacramental value would be perhaps to say that each spouse represents God symbolically to the other by receiving his spouse as an offering. The husband is for the wife and vice versa a presence of God Who has a right to the worship and service of their total beings.<sup>20</sup>*

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<sup>19</sup> VC, no. 88, March 25, 1996, p.59.

<sup>20</sup> *Initiation théologique*, t. III. Paris, Cerf, 1962-63, p. 1046.

*In living the conjugal life in the name of the Lord, in the Lord, the Christian couple exercises a service within the community. The couple reveals in their surroundings and in their way of life what will be the case in the Kingdom: perfect Love. And this sign, they give within marriage for their total lives. We could say that it is not the couple that receives the sacrament of marriage, but that the couple is or becomes the sacrament, a sign in the midst of the world of that which is to come but is not yet fulfilled, the Kingdom.<sup>21</sup>*

- ♦ How do you see consecrated chastity: liberating or alienating?
- ♦ How can it through time increase love of God and neighbour?
- ♦ What personally do you find questionable or what difficulties do you foresee having in your practice of consecrated chastity?
- ♦ What contributions or insights do you bring to consecration to chastity as a celibate layman or to consecrated conjugal chastity in the sacrament of marriage?
- ♦ What is of particular concern to you in the Constitutions in regard to the commitment to chastity (articles 59, 60, 61 and 108.3)?

## 5. EVANGELICAL COUNSEL OF POVERTY

### 5.1 Nature

Poverty refers to the fraternal attitude of Jesus which indicates that *though he was rich, he became poor* (2 Cor 8: 9).

*Before even being a service to the poor, evangelical poverty is a value in itself, for it evokes the first of the Beatitudes in imitation of Christ. It presents with force the idolatry of Mammon while presenting itself as a prophetic call to a society, which in a number of parts of the rich world, risk losing the sense of the degree as well as the value of things. It is requested of consecrated persons to give an evangelical witness, renewed, vigorous, selfless and simple, through a fraternal life characterized by simplicity and*

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<sup>21</sup> Albert Desserpri, *Le mariage, un sacrement*. Paris, Centurion, 1981, p. 95.

*hospitality. This witness will naturally be accompanied by a preferential option for the poor, and it will be revealed especially through the sharing of the conditions of life of the most deprived.*<sup>22</sup>

Poverty is carried out by sharing: sharing material goods, certainly, but especially the sharing of one's self by the effective and concrete gift of self to others, particularly the most disadvantaged brothers and sisters.

In solidarity with brothers and sisters who often find difficult their life and that of their family, or suffer within dehumanizing employment, consecrated persons bring the comfort of sharing in the hardships and detachment from temporal goods; they learn the way of cleverly using the means offered by nature, civilization and technical progress without becoming enslaved by them.

Evangelical poverty is then a richness for the human being and for persons who profess it as a leaven of the Gospel for our world.

## 5.2 Theological Basis

According to Hans Urs von Balthasar, the fundamental source of all evangelical poverty is to be found in God Himself, Trinity and Love. Each of the divine Persons wants only for itself what it can share with the Others. In God, this poverty is lived through God's relationship with each one of us.

*The Father : poor, because He has been stripped of His only wealth, the Son, Who He offered for us; the Son : poor, because he has only for the repose of His head the will of the Father who has stripped him; the Spirit : poor, because He is the unique love of the Father and the Son, and because His work consists in penetrating from within hearts in the divine work of emptying the self.*<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> VC, n.90, pp. 63-64.

<sup>23</sup> Hans Urs von Baltahazar, Une vie livrée à Dieu. Sens de la vie selon les conseils aujourd'hui, *Vie consacrée*, 43, 1971.

In Jesus Christ, by assuming the human condition in the fullness of its misery up to the cross, which is the total emptying of self through an ignominious death (Phil 2: 6-8), God takes upon Himself a nature which is poor, suffering and humble. Jesus relies completely on the Father to Whom He is totally abandoned. The fundamental filial behaviour of Jesus is expressed in an effective poverty which is revealed in acts.

*Christ is born poor, lives poor and dies poor; He loved the poor. His poverty is simple, joyful, without affectation. It is made to become a complete mastery of the created, a perfect interior liberty, a spirit completely dedicated to God, having the breadth of grandeur and immensity.*<sup>24</sup>

In itself, the life of Jesus is a call to a trusting dependence upon the Father, a call to the unconditional gift of self and to a total detachment in light of reaching the Kingdom (Lk 14:33; 6, 20).

Poverty is not an absolute or an end in itself; it is simply a way of following Jesus. If the Christian must seek poverty, it is via the imitation of Jesus who practiced poverty, and through docility to Him who preached it. Effective evangelical poverty makes the Christian capable of completely receiving God as a Father (dependence and trust) and sharing completely with brothers and sisters in humanity.

Effective evangelical poverty must be a sign and means of charity (1Jn 3:17): to love our brothers and sisters like Christ loved us. The misery of the world requires our full attention. Necessarily, it strips us bare.

In this way is found the way which leads to beatitude. *Happy are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Mt 5: 3).* Evangelical poverty renders the Christian available to welcome God and the true riches, making him a sign of hope for the world.

### **5.3 Practice of Poverty in the Institute**

The counsel of evangelical poverty contributes to the advancement of the Voluntas Dei member toward holiness while calling him to exhibit a vertical attitude (filial trust in the Father) the norm of his life, the internal law of his existence.

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<sup>24</sup> Jean Boyer, *Les instituts séculiers*, Paris, DDB, 1954, p. 134.

The counsel of poverty contributes to the advancement of the Voluntas Dei member in the accomplishment of his mission by calling him into solidarity with his brothers and sisters in Jesus, particularly those who are most needy.

The evangelical counsel of poverty invites the Voluntas Dei member to adopt a style of life, simple and modest in order to share. While maintaining the right to possession and gain, necessitated by following a mode of secular life, the consecrated Voluntas Dei member makes an effort to manage the goods entrusted to him by God; he judges that nothing belongs only to him, but that all must serve to convey the love and justice of God the Father for all humans.

The evangelical counsel of poverty calls the Voluntas Dei member to assume his responsibility of managing the world in order that creation can be for all humans, in accordance with the plan of God, the Creator, at the service of life, harmony and beauty.

The evangelical counsel of poverty opens up to the joy of gift of self and makes the Voluntas Dei member participate in the prodigality of a God Who is never lacking in generosity. For those faithful and wise managers who have worked prosperously at the works of the Lord without considering these their own, the Master will confer even more upon these valued servants, teaches Jesus.

The consecrated Voluntas Dei member, totally in love with evangelical poverty, practices it in spirit and in acts by sharing with others not only his temporal goods, but also his cultural and spiritual goods.

He undertakes a personal project of poverty and accords voluntarily the right of overseeing to the authority of the Institute in that which concerns his way of life and management of goods.

The consecrated Voluntas Dei member knows that he is called to collaborate with the interior work of the Holy Spirit that strives to put to death within him desires of the flesh and egoism in order to make live and grow the spiritual being, the icon of the Son, bearer of the mission of ordering all goods to the glory of the Creator and to the service of his brothers and sisters.

The Constitutions connect to the evangelical counsel of poverty the following commitments:

- ♦ A style of life that agrees to place trust in God the Father for all needs;
- ♦ Work to ensure his subsistence;
- ♦ A contribution to the missionary effort and functioning of the Institute; and
- ♦ A preferential option for the poor.

- ♦ Allow the Word of God to come and speak to you through the following biblical references:  
Mt 5:1-12; 6:19-34; 19:16-30; 25:14-46;  
Lk 12:33-34; 14:25-33; 16:9-13;  
1 Jn 3:16-19.
- ♦ Does evangelical poverty appear to you to be necessary for the complete realization of your filial dimension in relation to God and your fraternal dimension in relation to your neighbour?
- ♦ What personally do you find questionable or what difficulties do you foresee having in your practice of this counsel of poverty?
- ♦ What are the principal values that bring you or would bring you to follow Jesus in the practice of evangelical poverty?

## 6. EVANGELICAL COUNSEL OF OBEDIENCE

### 6.1 Nature

Obedience refers to the filial attitude of Jesus of which the essential nourishment is to do the Will of the Father. Thus, obedience involves doing the will of God, especially to welcome it through human mediation, such as the Church, and to accomplish it with love, joy and eagerness.

These are the essential characteristics of Christ's obedience:

Free obedience to the Father;

Free obedience of love guided by the Holy Spirit;

Perfect identification between obedience to the Father and freedom in the accomplishment of the mission;

Obedience that ends with the cross: Christ asks as a human person that 'if it is possible that the chalice be taken away from Him'.<sup>25</sup>

## 6.2 Theological Basis

In Greek, the term obedience signifies tuning the ear to listen. In the New Testament, obedience designates all of Christian existence as much as it is the active welcoming of the Word of Jesus and putting it into practice. (Rom 1:50).

The fundamental theological and biblical concept of obedience is oriented toward finding what is called the sonship of Jesus, i.e., His relationship to God as Father. The unconditional obedience of Jesus is the normal consequence of the Fatherhood of God and the natural requirement of His own filiation.

The obedience of Jesus is the principal source of life and salvation (Heb 5:9; Rom 8:21). It becomes an act of filial love, the total YES of Jesus which guides Him to death and which is a victory over sin. The servant thus becomes Lord. Further, God exalts Him and gives Him the Name which is above all other names (Phil 2:9-11).

The disciple completes what the Virgin Mary makes known about listening interiorly while seeking the will of God: she kept all of these things, pondering them in her heart (Lk 2:19), as well as the humble and eager acceptance of a loving heart: I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word (Lk 1:38).

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<sup>25</sup> SCRIS, *Réflexion sur les instituts séculiers*, 119, 22 April 1976.



### 6.3 Practice of Obedience in the Institute

In the Voluntas Dei Institute, as in all secular institutes, obedience is lived in a secular manner, i.e., in regard to the daily aspects of human life in which the consecrated members are immersed.

It is in daily life that obedience is formed and developed. To know this basic attitude, the member must seek and actualize the will of God. Obedience of the Voluntas Dei member is an expression of his willingness and conformity to the obedient Christ (art. 450). The very name *Voluntas Dei* translates this characteristic of his being.

Obedience involves a faithful and responsible love. Like Jesus, the member will learn to express his commitment to obedience in service to the neighbour; a service competent and humble that expects nothing in return and concerns itself with growing constantly in perfection.

Obedience involves a deep respect of the member in order that he discerns to be the will of God, and an eagerness to submit important things to the discernment of those who have authority over him.

Obedience involves a great interior liberty, and thus, a continuous conversion in collaboration with the Holy Spirit Who sanctifies and guides the children of God to perfect freedom; in as much as we are sinners, our filial response is impeded, hampered or weighed down.

Obedience involves a great desire for holiness. Holiness is viewed by the consecrated Voluntas as an imperative, and obedience offers itself as a sure way to achieve this holiness. Father Parent expressed to the first members of the Institute that *the Voluntas Dei must not only become saints, but do so rapidly. The Church demands it of us, and we must be ready.*<sup>26</sup>

All of the above statements apply to all members of the Institute : laymen, candidates to Holy Orders, clerics and married members. The Constitutions specify the concrete practical applications of the counsel of obedience as lived by professed members or by married members with commitments.

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<sup>26</sup> Louis-Marie Parent, o.m.i., *Le Voluntas Dei doit être un saint*, 1963, tape recording, 1963, no. 54, a, b.



- ♦ Is obedience necessary for you to realize in your life the dimension of being the son/daughter of God?
- ♦ Who of what personally do you find questionable or what difficulties do you foresee having in your practice of this vow or commitment to obedience?
- ♦ Have you developed thus far an attitude for listening to and finding the will of God in all various mediations : Word of God, moments of prayer, events of life, persons encountered? Is this important to you?
- ♦ Do you feel an urgency about following up on that which you have discerned as being a call or invitation from God?

## CONCLUSION

The preceding pages wanted to open you to a reflection on the meaning and value of a secular consecrated life in the Church, on its beauty and requirements, and what it brings to your personal life.

It follows from the preceding considerations that the life of a Voluntas Dei member is a life perfectly and completely consecrated to holiness through the profession, in the midst of the world, of the evangelical counsels of obedience, poverty and chastity. These remain indispensable not only to one's holiness but also to one's mission of transforming the world according to God's plan.

Far from tearing the Voluntas Dei member away from that which gives value to human existence, the evangelical counsels incorporate him more deeply into a fidelity to the plan of God for the world (Eph 1:2-14), by making him participate in the very freedom of Christ.

*The secular condition in the midst of the world* remains the radical original feature of our vocation. This *raison d'être* must appear in everything. Therein lies our understanding of living the evangelical counsels and witnessing to them.

As expressed already by Pius XII on February 2, 1947: *to carry out really in all times and in all places the life of perfection; to embrace it in certain cases where the canonical religious life is impossible or less adapted; to re-christianize intensely families, professions, society, thanks to being immediately and daily in touch with a life perfectly and completely consecrated to holiness; to exercise an apostolate under a variety of forms and*

*to carry out services whatever the place, the time and circumstances forbidden or rendered difficult to priests and religious, such are the tasks offered to secular institutes.*<sup>27</sup>

Before concluding this chapter on consecration, I invite you to read attentively a very short text of Carlo Rochetta, entitled: *Secular Consecration Today*. You will find this text in Appendix C of the Guide. This text can help you to enrich your understanding and to elaborate your own synthesis of secular consecration through the profession of the evangelical counsels.

With the help of the following questions, it is now time for you to test your own personal understanding of this important chapter :

- ♦ What remains for you the most important aspect of this chapter?
- ♦ Do you understand the evangelical counsels more in line with the Commandments or with the Beatitudes?
- ♦ During the reading, did you feel converted to a greater autonomy and responsibility? To a greater holiness?
- ♦ If you had to express in one word the secular sense of each counsel, what would you choose?
- ♦ What follow-up do you feel is important to bring to your reflection on consecration by the practice by the evangelical counsels?

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<sup>27</sup> PME, Feb. 2nd, 1947.

### III- CONSTITUTIONS

Rich is the history of our *Book of Life*, the *Constitutions*. It is the fundamental code that governs the life and activities of the members. It reflects many changes which brought about progressive enrichment and an ever clearer awareness on our part of the charism of the Institute's founding. It experienced in its journey toward maturity a variety of on-going changes from the perspectives of our Founder and the first generation of members of our Institute.

#### 1. HISTORY OF OUR CONSTITUTIONS

##### First Stage

In 1964, there appeared the first and tentative expression of the formula for the life of the Voluntas Dei Institute in accordance with the norms of Canon Law. In spite of the assistance of the Canon lawyers of the Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate and Father Louis-Marie Parent, o.m.i., the first literary attempt had a variety of inaccuracies and imperfections. Nonetheless, we find there an intuitive expression of a plan, which over the course of years would carry the abundant budding forth of a new grace that the Church had called forth out of its wishes and to which slowly it would open itself. Let us remind ourselves that the official recognition of this form of consecrated life in a secular institute did not appear until 1947. At that time, Pope Pius XII published the Apostolic Constitution *Provida Mater Ecclesia*, 2 February 1947, followed by the *Motu Proprio Primo Feliciter* 12 March 1948, and the instruction *Cum Sanctissimus*, 19 March 1948.

##### Second Stage

Toward 1970, further to General Assemblies that had been busy and now concluded, our formula of life oriented itself in a decisive way toward a secular consecrated life. This choice would require important changes, certainly painful. In addition, we cut ourselves off consciously from a certain common life which had prevailed since the beginnings; we affirmed strongly the autonomy of the life of the members in regard to residence, apostolic project, modalities of application of the commitment to poverty; we rethought the concrete applications touching the life of

the team and the relationship of the members to the authority in the Institute. We organized the districts and the sectors composed of teams (cf. Appendix D). We welcomed as full-fledged members married catechists from Laos. Later other couples joined the Institute: we rejoiced in this new challenge but canonically speaking it was not accepted. Without presenting all of the implications in this chapter of the consecrated life in the Church, we were initiating an important new development in the history of secular institutes.

The fruit of all these deliberations took form in the 1974 second edition of the *Constitutions*. It was presented to the Holy See and to the members as provisional. The tentative *Constitutions* sought to translate the reality of the grace of the Institute as it was discerned through the events marking its life, growth and maturity. The *Constitutions* demonstrated as well a willingness to adapt to the directions expressed in the Conciliar documents of Vatican II.

### Third Stage

This period extends until 1987. The challenge of the admission of married couples into the Institute posed a question to the authorities of Rome. The Assembly Generals of 1977 and 1980 studied extensively the question of the manner of inserting married people (couples) into the Institute. Also, important questions such as the following grasped the attention of the delegates:

- ♦ formation, particularly of members distant from Voluntas Dei teams;
- ♦ the birth and on-going organization of new districts in a number of countries such as Haiti, Sri Lanka, India, Dominican Republic, Laos, Ecuador, Colombia, United States, Bolivia and Guadeloupe necessarily attracted the energies of the members of these Assemblies.

At the end of the Assembly General of 1980, the members of the Assembly entrusted to the Central Council the mandate of seeing to the editing of the new text of the *Constitutions* in accordance with the decisions of the Assembly and the requirements of the Sacred Congregation For Religious and Secular Institutes (SCRSI). An editing committee was formed. After three years of patient labour and many consultations, the committee proposed its work to the intermediary Assembly of 1983. It received and approved the new version; the mandate was entrusted to the Central Council to present it to the authorities of Rome for approval. After new exchanges between the SCRSI, and after further corrections were made in compliance with the new code of Canon Law (1983), the text of the *Constitutions* received on July 12<sup>th</sup>, 1987, the definitive approval of the authorities of Rome.

## 2. THE ROLE OF THE CONSTITUTIONS

The difference between the *Constitutions* and the *Rule*.

The *Rule* is the place where one finds the principles of the spiritual life for consecrated persons. It is in a kind of way the Gospel applied to the particular way of life of a religious. The great Rules marking the history of consecrated life come from St. Augustine, St. Basil, St. Benedict, St. Francis of Assisi, and St. Ignatius of Loyola.

The *Constitutions* in main are the fundamental code of the consecrated life proper to a religious or secular Institute. According to the directives of the Holy See, they present almost all of the essential points of the consecrated life and generally are connected to one or the other of the great Rules aforementioned. For the most part, they recall the evangelical principles of the consecrated life in the Church while specifying them: the values proper to the Institute, the objective, the charism of the founding, the apostolic mission, the spirituality or the spirit of the Institute, the organization of formation and the life of the members, the commitment of members and the governance of the Institute. A brief overview of the table of contents of the *Constitutions* will allow one to review these points.

The *Constitutions* constitute therefore the fundamental book. The person who chooses to join the Voluntas Dei Institute is motivated by a real desire to move toward evangelical holiness, i.e., to the perfection of charity and is opened to the option of a secular consecrated life according to the modalities proper to the Institute. The *Constitutions* of the Institute present a beacon orienting the journey to evangelical holiness and specify the spirit proper to the Voluntas Dei member. It is thus normal for a member of the Institute to welcome this way of life with openness of heart and fidelity.

Not all of the articles of the *Constitutions* obligate a faithful observance with the same degree of moral seriousness. Thus, the articles related to the vows or commitments obligate more strongly the moral conscience before God than for example the articles treating fraternal meetings and the means of the apostolate. The essential element for the one who comes to the Institute is to journey toward the proposed goal – evangelical holiness through secular consecration – and for this purpose, to make use of the means suggested by the Institute which is found on the whole in the articles of the *Constitutions*.

It would be good to read article 43 now. It recalls the overall meaning of consecration. It exhorts us to strive for evangelical holiness which is rooted in Baptism. It reminds us also of the specific obligation associated with consecration: to desire fervently the ideal proposed by Jesus to His disciples, *You must be*

*perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect!*, (Mt 5:48). There can be a fault against this commitment freely chosen if a member becomes lax in a important, conscious, willing and extended manner, or if he/she flouts consciously the directives clearly specified in the *Constitutions* or those given by legitimate authority in the name of the *Constitutions*.

Let us conclude by briefly presenting two complementary books : the book of the *Rules* <sup>1</sup> and that of the *Statutes* of a district. Because the *Constitutions* touch upon the essentials of the consecrated life in the Institute and address altogether the members throughout the world, we cannot make modifications to the text which have not been adopted by the General Assembly and ratified by the authorities of Rome. The *Rules* specify the modes of application adapted to the circumstances of places and conditions of life; the *Rules* can, if needed, be modified through mere resolutions of a General Assembly.

A District can provide for itself *Statutes* which apply the *Constitutions* and/or the *Rules* while taking into account the culture and mentality of the milieu as well as the particular life situations of the members: and this in view of an adapted and effective fulfillment of the spiritual and apostolic objectives of the Institute. The *Statutes*, established by a District Assembly, must of course conform to the *Constitutions* and receive the approval of the Director General and his Council.

### 3. OUR CONSTITUTIONS ACCORDING TO OUR FOUNDER

In order to understand the thinking of Father Louis-Marie Parent, o.m.i., nothing is better than to read right now the *Preface* of the Founder found in the introduction of the 1988 edition of the *Constitutions*.

Read the introduction of our Constitutions, ed. 1988, p. xv to xvii.

In studying this text of our Founder we will learn a lot. That is why our aim in this section is to summarize the principal points and to bring to the forefront the richness of the contents of our own *Constitutions*.

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<sup>1</sup> The Rules described here should not be confused with the great rules of spiritual life for consecrated people described at the beginning of this section on page 3-3. The same term has a totally different meaning in each instance.



## Principal points

### *The Constitutions are a gift from God*

It is God Himself Who, via the grace of the foundation and the approval of the Church, gifts a family of consecrated people with the *Constitutions* through the expression of the charism inspiring such a gift. This origin, which like any other grace is *divine*, shows us its sacred character and points out the supernatural spirit with which one must consider, read, study and observe the *Constitutions*. They are a *code of holiness* for the spiritual advancement of members of the Institute.

### *The Constitutions are a permanent expression of God's thought*

God's thought was first expressed in Sacred Scripture and comes to us clearly developed in the teachings of the Church. God's thought sheds on the actions and events of our lives a supernatural light that brings out their true meaning. From this point of view, our *Constitutions* truly embody God's thought for us, because they are inspired by His Word and are submitted to the judgment of our Mother the Church. They are therefore a real light unto our path. They nourish our faith, sustain our hope and stimulate our charity.

### *The Constitutions are for us the lasting face of Jesus*

The *Constitutions* unfold before our eyes the living features of the face of *today's Jesus* who mingles with the contemporary crowd, and stoops down to the poor in our midst in order to alleviate their misery, to help them up when they fall, to console them in their unhappiness, and to bind their wounds like the good Samaritan in the Gospel. The *Constitutions* show Jesus as the perfect model of the consecrated person in the midst of the world committed to carrying out the Father's plan to live, in the present moment, the commitment of charity towards one's brothers and sisters. In our *Constitutions*, this truth often comes up in order to tell us that *Christ Jesus is our light*. Look at Him and you will understand this book of life. This is the meaning underlying the following frequently occurring expressions:

In the example of Jesus;

In the example of Jesus and the Virgin Mary;

To accomplish in everything, like Christ and the Virgin Mary, the will of the Father;

In the light of Christ; and

In the manner of Jesus, etc.



***The Constitutions are a manifestation of God's Will expressed in understandable terms***

The *Constitutions* apply to each of us in the detail of our lives the wills of God (His thoughts, projects, desires and calls) in order that our thoughts, wishes and actions conform to the secular consecrated life. In this way they preserve us from errors, hesitations and doubts that slow down or neutralize our progress toward God. They tell each *Voluntas Dei* member how to be leaven in the dough. They describe the attitudes of soul which actualize the Institute's spirituality. They carve out a path for our secular commitment. They teach us how to be servants docile to the Holy Spirit, and beings of service in charity.

***The Constitutions are a friend and a guide***

Friend and guide suggest the positive way we should view and accept them. We return often to a friend. We often have recourse to a guide. We do the same in regard to our *Constitutions*. We should even love and trust them just as we instinctively do with a friend, especially with a friend who has been with us since our childhood and to whom our soul has in a way become attached and bonded. Should not our *Constitutions* along with the *Bible* be our bedside books?

***The Blessed Virgin in the Constitutions***

This is a reference to the Virgin who is the Educator of God's children. Moreover, the *Constitutions* clearly express: *Members of the Institute recognize Mary Immaculate as their mother and their teacher in the faith and the apostolic mission.*<sup>2</sup>

At Cana, Mary gave away the great secret of this maternal education: she directed the gaze toward Jesus, her son and said: *Do whatever he tells you* (Jn 2:5). The Virgin leads us at the same time to the home in Nazareth where *secularity was lived diligently*; she guides us as well along the road of Jesus' public life where openness to the world shows us the love of Jesus' heart committed to countless services to people, beginning with the poorest.

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<sup>2</sup> *Constitutions*, art. 4.

#### 4. RICHNESS OF THEIR CONTENTS

The *Constitutions* are – with and like the *Bible* to which they conform and out of which they come entirely – a light unto our path, a table completely set for the spiritual meal of formation and life in the Institute. They show the narrow pathway of the Gospel in the radicality of its demands, but it is a pathway clearly illuminated by Christ, the Light of the world. The *Constitutions* are also a route leading to life, fulfillment and beatitude, (Mt 7:14). This is evident in this phrase taken from the preface of the *Constitutions*: *The Constitutions are more than a mere code of law. They are Christ's expression of His very Spirit to each of us.*<sup>3</sup>

It is up to you to go through this book at your own pace considering the content, analyzing the recommendations, assessing the richness of life placed within your reach, practicing the spirit and conforming your life to it in order to feel the assurances and joys of this way of God.

#### CONCLUSION

Let us conclude with the words of our Founder, Father Louis-Marie Parent, o.m.i., whose statements directed toward the *Constitutions* of the Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate apply equally well to the *Constitutions* of the Voluntas Dei Institute. Father Parent tells us:

*The Constitutions are for each of you a visit from the Archangel Gabriel who announces to you, as he did to Mary, the expressed will of God in order to foster your spiritual development, to give direction to your whole life, to anchor you in the divine wills, to stamp you with the seal of the charity of Christ, and to let you become steeped in and grasped by the Father's tenderness.*

*Love your Constitutions, place them next to the Bible, treat them with the same respect, and tell yourselves that they contain enough positive values to make you into authentic saints and prophets of hope ... Take them, read them, reflect on them, act upon them, and you will have the effectiveness of Christ Himself.*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Constitutions*, "Founder's Preface," p. xv.

<sup>4</sup> Louis-Marie Parent, *Constitutions of the Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate*, 1984.

Does this chapter of the *Probationer's Guide* on the *Constitutions* encourage you to do a careful reading of them?

## APPENDIX A INITIAL FORMATION SUMMARY PROBATION

### INTRODUCTION

The following table summarizes the chapters of the Probationer's Guide you are now using. It should help you better understand the sequence of steps through this period of your formation. It includes:

- ♦ THE OBJECTIVES YOU SHOULD SEEK TO ATTAIN;
- ♦ THE MEANS USED TO ATTAIN THESE OBJECTIVES;
- ♦ THE CONCRETE ACTIONS EXPECTED OF YOU;
- ♦ THOSE PERSONS WHO ARE AVAILABLE TO HELP YOU IN THIS PILGRIMAGE;
- ♦ AND THE RESOURCES AT YOUR DISPOSAL.

<b>A</b> <b>OBJECTIVES</b>	<b>B</b> <b>MEANS</b>	<b>C</b> <b>ACTIONS</b>	<b>D</b> <b>DUTY OF ...</b>	<b>E</b> <b>INSTRUMENTS</b>
1A To allow the candidate to assimilate the contents of the Probationer's Guide.	1B Study of the Probationer's Guide..	1C Add the candidate's name to the list of Probationers in his sector.  Personal reading.  Meeting with one's guide.  Participate in sector formation sessions for Probationers.	1D Sector Animator  Candidate  Sector Animator or his delegate  Sector Animator and candidate	1E Probationer's Guide.
2A To allow the candidate to know the history of consecrated life in the Church	2B Study of the Probationer's Guide, chap. 1	2C Reading chap. 1 of the Guide	2D Candidate	2E Probationer's Guide: chap. 1
3A To allow the candidate to discover the link between the baptismal consecration and the secular consecration.	3B Deepening of one's prophetic priestly and kingly mission (evangelization, sanctification, charity).	3C Personal reading of the Probationer's Guide: chap. 2.1  Team sharing	3D Candidate  Team members	3E Probationer's Guide : chap. 2.1 and Appendix B.
4A To discover those characteristics which are proper to consecration in the midst of the world.	4B Study of the fundamental elements of secular consecration.  Service of presence and witness in one's milieu.	4C Reading of the Probationer's Guide : chap. 2  Identifying the places he/she is called to evangelize, as well as the attitudes and tools required for the task.	4D Candidate  Candidate	4E Probationer's Guide : chap. 2.3

<b>A</b> <b>OBJECTIVES</b>	<b>B</b> <b>MEANS</b>	<b>C</b> <b>ACTIONS</b>	<b>D</b> <b>DUTY OF ...</b>	<b>E</b> <b>INSTRUMENTS</b>
5A To discover the evangelical counsels as a way of perfection.	5B Study and internalization of the evangelical counsels.	5C Reading and meditating on the Guide : chap. 2.3	5D Candidate	5E Probationer's Guide : chap. 2.3
6A To discover the graces and responsibilities inherent to each evangelical counsel.	6B Identifying the modalities proper to the Institute regarding the evangelical counsels.  Identifying the responsibilities taken on, through profession or commitment.	6C Knowledge of corresponding articles in the Constitutions.  Reading and sharing with the Sector Animator or his delegate, the Guide chap. 2.  Inner listening so as to discern whether he/she is called to live the evangelical counsels.  Evaluating one's personal aptitudes for taking on such a commitment.	6D Candidate  Candidate and the Sector Animator or delegate  Candidate  Candidate and Sector Animator or delegate	6E Constitutions, 2 <sup>nd</sup> part., chap. 1 & 3 <sup>rd</sup> part., chap. 1  Probationer's Guide : chap. 2.4, 2.5, 2.6
7A To more and more harmonize his/her consecrated life with his/her being-in-the-world.	7B Awareness of one's capacity to carry the spiritual values into the midst of all human situations, according to one's state in life.	7C Personal reading of the Probationer's Guide : chap. 2.3  Team sharing.	7D Candidate  Team members	7E Probationer's Guide : chap. 2.3

<b>A</b> <b>OBJECTIVES</b>	<b>B</b> <b>MEANS</b>	<b>C</b> <b>ACTIONS</b>	<b>D</b> <b>DUTY OF ...</b>	<b>E</b> <b>INSTRUMENTS</b>
<p>8A To understand the meaning and the raison d'être of the Constitutions in a secular institute.</p> <p>To familiarize oneself with the text of the Constitutions of the Voluntas Dei Institute.</p>	<p>8B Knowledge of the Constitutions.</p> <p>Study of the raison d'être of the Constitutions, the Rules and of the Statutes, as well of the structures of government in the Institute.</p>	<p>8C Attentive reading of the entire book of the Constitutions, with special stress on Part 4.</p> <p>Being knowledgeable of the Constitutions, the Rules and the Statutes.</p> <p>Being able to identify the different levels of authority in the Institute.</p> <p>Reading the Probationer's Guide: chap. 3</p>	<p>8D Candidate</p> <p>Candidate and Sector Animator or his delegate</p> <p>Candidate and Sector Animator or his delegate</p> <p>Candidate</p>	<p>8E Constitutions</p> <p>Constitutions Rules, Statutes of the district</p> <p>Appendix D</p> <p>Probationer's Guide : chap. 3</p>
<p>9A To discern God's calling and to signify his or her decision regarding the stage of First Profession or Commitment.</p>	<p>9B Prayer</p> <p>Meeting with Sector Animator.</p> <p>Ask to profess his/her First Vows or Commitments.</p>	<p>9C Discerning the call of God in prayer.</p> <p>Contacting those who are in charge and listening to the Spirit mediated through these persons.</p> <p>Indicating one's decisions in writing to the District Director.</p>	<p>9D Candidate</p> <p>Sector Animator who then avises the Team Animator.</p> <p>Candidate</p>	<p>9E</p>



**APPENDIX B**  
**POST-SYNODAL APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION :**  
**CHRISTIFIDELES LAICI, no 14 / John-Paul II.**  
**(on the vocation and the mission of the lay faithful**  
**in the church and in the world)**

Sharers in the Priestly, Prophetic and Kingly Mission of Jesus Christ. Referring to the baptized as *new born babes*, the apostle Peter writes: *Come to him, to that living stone, rejected by men but in God's sight chosen and precious; and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ ... you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Pt 2:4-5, 9).*

A new aspect to the grace and dignity coming from Baptism is here introduced: the lay faithful participate, for their part, in the threefold mission of Christ as Priest, Prophet and King. This aspect has never been forgotten in the living tradition of the Church, as exemplified in the explanation which St. Augustine offers for Psalm 26: *David was anointed king. In those days only a king and a priest were anointed. These two persons prefigured the one and only priest and king who was to come, Christ (the name "Christ" means "anointed"). Not only has our head been anointed but we, his body, have also been anointed ... therefore anointing comes to all Christians, even though in Old Testament times it belonged only to two persons. Clearly we are the Body of Christ because we are all "anointed" and in him are "christs", that is, "anointed ones", as well as Christ himself, "The Anointed One". In a certain way, then, it thus happens that with head and body the whole Christ is formed.*

In the wake of the Second Vatican Council (20), at the beginning of my pastoral ministry, my aim was to emphasize forcefully the priestly, prophetic and kingly dignity of the entire People of God in the following words: *He who was born of the Virgin Mary, the carpenter's Son -as he was thought to be-Son of the living God (confessed by Peter), has come to make us 'a kingdom of priests.* The Second Vatican Council has reminded us of the mystery of this power and of the fact that the mission of Christ-Priest, Prophet-Teacher, King continues in the Church. *Everyone, the whole People of God, shares in this threefold mission.*

With this Exhortation the lay faithful are invited to take up again and reread, meditate on and assimilate with renewed understanding and love, the rich and fruitful teaching of the Council which speaks of their participation in the threefold mission of Christ(22). Here in summary form are the essential elements of this teaching.

The lay faithful are sharers in the priestly mission, for which Jesus offered himself on the cross and continues to be offered in the celebration of the Eucharist for the glory of God and the salvation of humanity. Incorporated in Jesus Christ, the baptized are united to him and to his sacrifice in the offering they make of themselves and their daily activities (cf. Rom 12:1, 2). Speaking of the lay faithful the Council says: *For their work, prayers and apostolic endeavours, their ordinary married and family life, their daily labour, their mental and physical relaxation, if carried out in the Spirit, and even the hardships of life if patiently borne-all of these become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Pt 2:5). During the celebration of the Eucharist these sacrifices are most lovingly offered to the Father along with the Lord's body. Thus as worshipers whose every deed is holy, the lay faithful consecrate the world itself to God.*

Through their participation in the prophetic mission of Christ, *who proclaimed the kingdom of his Father by the testimony of his life and by the power of his word(24)*, the lay faithful are given the ability and responsibility to accept the gospel in faith and to proclaim it in word and deed, without hesitating to courageously identify and denounce evil. United to Christ, the *"great prophet" (Lk 7:16)*, and in the Spirit made *"witnesses"* of the Risen Christ, the lay faithful are made sharers in the appreciation of the Church's supernatural faith, that *"cannot err in matters of belief"(25)* and sharers as well in the grace of the word (cf. Acts 2:17-18; Rev 19:10). They are also called to allow the newness and the power of the gospel to shine out everyday in their family and social life, as well as to express patiently and courageously in the contradictions of the present age their hope of future glory even *through the framework of their secular life.*

Because the lay faithful belong to Christ, Lord and King of the Universe, they share in his kingly mission and are called by him to spread that Kingdom in history. They exercise their kingship as Christians, above all in the spiritual combat in which they seek to overcome in themselves the kingdom of sin (cf. Rom 6:12), and then to make a gift of themselves so as to serve, in justice and in charity, Jesus who is himself present in all his brothers and sisters, above all in the very least (Mt 25:40).

But in particular the lay faithful are called to restore to creation all its original value. In ordering creation to the authentic well-being of humanity in an activity governed by the life of grace, they share in the exercise of the power with which the Risen Christ draws all things to himself and subjects them along with himself to the Father, so that God might be everything to everyone (1 Cor 15:28; Jn 12:32).

The participation of the lay faithful in the threefold mission of Christ as Priest, Prophet and King finds its source in the anointing of Baptism, its further development in Confirmation and its realization and dynamic sustenance in the Holy Eucharist. It is a participation given to each member of the lay faithful individually, in as much as each is one of the many who form the one Body of the Lord: in fact, Jesus showers his gifts upon the Church which is his Body and his Spouse. In such a way individuals are sharers in the threefold mission of Christ in virtue of their being members of the Church, as St. Peter clearly teaches, when he defines the baptized as *a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people* (1 Pt 2:9). Precisely because it derives from Church communion, the sharing of the lay faithful in the threefold mission of Christ requires that it be lived and realized in communion and for the increase of communion itself. Saint Augustine writes: *As we call everyone 'Christians' in virtue of a mystical anointing, so we call everyone 'priests' because all are members of only one priesthood.*

## APPENDIX C

### SECULAR CONSECRATION TODAY

F. Carlo Rocchetta

Like all vocations of special consecration to God, secular consecration *plunges its roots most deeply into baptismal consecration and constitutes a more perfect expression of it.* (PC, 5).

#### 1. BAPTISM AND VOCATION OF SPECIAL CONSECRATION TO GOD

Baptismal fonts are *the divine bosom* where we are born into the life of Christ and where we are called to remain if we wish in a certain way to respond to His invitation. Baptism is to consecrated life what the source is to the river. In this regard, one can cite a celebrated text of Tertullian: *We are small fish in the image of our Fish (Ichthus), Jesus, the Christ: we are born in the water and we can only save ourselves by remaining immersed in it (in aqua permanendo)* : Christian existence is revived through permanent immersion in Baptism.

#### 2. CONSECRATED LIFE: IDENTITY AND CONTENT

Thus, all forms of consecrated life are only the total realization and fulfillment of the baptismal vocation. It is within this context that it is necessary to situate its identity and content. In this regard, we can refer to paragraph 44 of *Lumen Gentium*, repeated in different terms as well in the *Code of Canon Law* (in particular, canons 573-577).

The text does not claim to define consecrated life in abstract terms but puts forward concretely the elements concerning :

- ♦ the nature of consecration;
- ♦ baptism as the first consecration upon which is based the profession of evangelical counsels;
- ♦ its trait of permanent union.

Consecrated life is constituted by vows (or comparable bonds, by their nature, to the vows); this is the base line which defines the vocation of particular consecration to God. *Through vows, the faithful commit him/herself to observe the three evangelical counsels.* It is well known that the Reformation in its time was against

this choice; it saw the vows as a return to slavery to the law. It is necessary to understand the meaning of these bonds: it must be conceived not as the quashing of the freedom of the Christian, but as a choice of liberation and liberty. When two spouses commit to one another, without reservation, excluding even the idea of an eventual infidelity, it doesn't mean that they have become slaves; on the contrary, they express the authenticity of their love and protect themselves against its death which would occur if they do not commit themselves loyally to *one another completely and forever*.

*Consecrated life signifies the total commitment to God who is supremely loved* : it is this total consecration to God within a fullness of authentic love that motivates in a decisive way the vocation of particular consecration to God. God not only has the first place, but God is the reason for the consecrated life; it is in Him that the consecrated person rediscovers him/herself and rediscovers his/her relationship with the world and others. *Consecration involves consequently a total gift of self*: it is not only an adherence of the intellect and will, but a response of the total human person, with his/her spirituality, corporeality, affections, emotions, history and relationships under the form of *sacrificial offering* to God for His glory and in service to the His Kingdom.

Saint Thomas Aquinas accurately assigns to the consecrated life the meaningful term, *holocaust*: he says that consecrated persons *are those who consecrate themselves totally to the service of God making themselves a holocaust*.<sup>1</sup> It was well-known that, among the different kinds of sacrifices, holocaust was the one where the victim is entirely burned, consumed in an act of total worship without keeping anything for it/his/herself or for those who offer the sacrifice. Consecration belongs to this order of *sacrificial offerings*. The way of the evangelical counsels fulfills this form of life through which one makes of him/herself and his/her baptismal identity a holocaust to the service and honour of God. *Already through Baptism (the faithful) is dead to sin and consecrated to God*.

It is necessary to point out the passive style of the Conciliar text; baptism is a gift which comes from on high; one is not simply baptized, but one is baptized in the death and resurrection of Christ, and becomes reborn *in water and in the Spirit* as new creations consecrated to God. Vows are situated within the dynamics of baptismal consecration. They have the character of means not of end: their purpose is to lead *to the loosening of the obstacles that could distance the baptized from the fervour of charity and perfection of divine worship*.

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<sup>1</sup> *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 186, a. 1 c.

The heart, the centre and meaning of consecrated life, seeks after the perfection of charity, the charism of charisms, without which all the rest is meaningless (1 Cor: 13). The profession of the evangelical counsels has for its purpose to make the consecrated person grow in love, to lead him/her to make of his/her existence completely a living sign of the God of Love. Before the vows, there is only this: to *vow oneself* to the love of God, the root and reason of all.

The first monks did not propose as much to live the vows under a form more or less institutionalized as to respond to the love of God, making their lives a strong sign of this love. The first attestations of the present pronouncement of the three vows showed up at the end of the first millennium and at the beginning of the second. Its true and particular form canonically came only with the mendicant orders at the beginning of the XII-XIII centuries.

The objective was to bring to the fore the three great ways supporting the internalization and realization of consecration only to God in love and as love. We should never distance ourselves from this prime concept. To be consecrated means to let oneself be transformed by the love of God (love in the theological sense), via a love which becomes poverty, chastity and obedience or, better still, through a love in obedience: poor love, chaste love, obedient love. The motivation for the profession of the evangelical counsels is situated within this concept. To commit oneself to the way of consecration implies situating oneself in the way that aims at this perfection of love to which all the baptized are called. By a gift of God, the consecrated person becomes a living sign of this common vocation.

*Consecration will be all the more perfect since the bonds by which Christ is indissolubly united with the Church, His Spouse, will be more solid and stable.* The text is informative under two aspects:

- 1) Consecrated life is described beginning with the conjugal relationship between Christ and His Church for it represents Christ indissolubly united with His Church. We could ask ourselves why consecrated life is not a sacrament like marriage. The reason is simple: marriage belongs to the order of *signs* destined to the reality that will manifest itself in the beatific life, when those who will marry will not take wife or husband; the *consecratio virginum* belongs to this reality, it is already – although under an imperfect historic form – the condition to which we are all called.
- 2) *Consecration will be all the more perfect since the bonds by which Christ is indissolubly united with the Church, His Spouse, will be more solid and stable:* to express this reality in a temporary way is one thing, to express it in a perpetual way or in a totally definitive way is another. Alone, the character of totality and stability, the *all* and the *always* reveal in an appropriate way

the indissoluble covenant of Christ with the Church. All of this applies naturally as much to the level of institutional reality (form of life expressed in the *Constitutions*) as it does to the intention (the form of concrete life under which individuals fulfill it).

### 3. SECULAR CONSECRATION AS A REAL AND COMPLETE PROFESSION OF THE EVANGELICAL COUNSELS

Secular consecration is a form of consecrated life in the aforementioned sense, and consequently, a form of consecration in the total sense. There isn't any kind of compromise between religious and baptismal consecration; it isn't a midway choice. All that consecration represents in the life of the Church, secular consecration represents also in its own way. This certitude appears already in the first documents which refer to the foundation. The members of secular institutes *consecrate themselves totally to God (PM, a.3), professing full consecration to God and nothing ought to be removed from the total profession of Christian perfection (PF, v). Secular institutes – affirmed the Council in PC, 11 – involves a real and complete profession of the evangelical counsels in this century, recognized by the Church.*

Consecration, to use the language of Paul VI in 1972, *represents the personal, secretive and supportive structure of your action. It is there that resides your deep and hidden richness which the people among whom you live cannot explain and often cannot detect. Baptismal consecration has been achieved later following a demand associated with love, aroused in you by the Holy Spirit. The fact that this form of consecration must be lived 'in the world and apart from the world' does not in any way diminish the requirements of consecrated life; to the contrary, it leads to assuming them in an appropriate manner. Again, Paul VI reminds us : your form of consecration is new and original, suggested by the Holy Spirit to be lived in the midst of temporal realities and to imbue the strength of the evangelical counsels – to make known divine and eternal values – within human and temporal values.*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Address to Director Generals of Secular Institutes*, 1972, n. 13.



## **APPENDIX D**

### **ORGANIZATION OF THE VOLUNTAS DEI INSTITUTE**

#### **CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION**

DIRECTOR GENERAL (professed priest) and his elected Council  
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR GENERAL (professed priest)  
7 GENERAL COUNCILLORS (5 professed members and one committed couple)

*The election and responsibilities of the Central Council are specified in the Constitutions, art. 162-188.*

#### **ERECTED DISTRICTS**

DISTRICT DIRECTOR (professed priest) and his elected Council.  
ASSISTANT DISTRICT DIRECTOR (professed priest)  
COUNCILLORS (professed members and one committed couple)

*The election and responsibilities of the District Council are specified in the Constitutions, art. 189-197. The number of Councillors is determined in the Statutes of each District. It varies from 4 to 6 Councillors.*

#### **DISTRICTS IN FORMATION**

DISTRICT DIRECTOR (professed priest) and his elected or appointed Council  
ASSISTANT DISTRICT DIRECTOR (professed priest)  
COUNCILLORS (professed members and one committed couple)

*The number of members of the District Council in Formation varies according to the District concerned and the members are elected or appointed by the Director General and his Council ; Constitutions, art. 201-204.*

## REGIONS

DIRECTOR OF THE REGION (professed priest) and his appointed Council  
COUNCILLORS (professed members and one committed couple)

*The Director of the Region and his Council are appointed by the Director General and his Council. The number of Councillors varies according to the Regions.*

## SECTORS

SECTOR ANIMATOR (professed member)

*Each District or Region is grouped into one or more Sectors under the responsibility of a Sector Animator (professed member) appointed by the District Director and his Council; he is assisted by the Team Animators.*

### TEAM ANIMATORS OF THE SECTOR

*Each Sector comprises one or more teams of at least three members under the animation of one of the members of the team. Constitutions, art. 205-207 / Statutes of each District.*