

"A Sure Compass: The Documents of the Council"

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The Second Vatican Council and the Consecrated Life

Lumen gentium and *Perfectae caritatis*

1. Introduction

It is in *Lumen gentium* and *Perfectae caritatis* that we find the Council's teaching on religious life. It is placed within the *Constitution* which shows the Church's understanding of its identity in the modern world. Whilst it seeks to return religious life to its roots *Lumen gentium* raises other questions that it left unanswered, which in turn required further explanation from Popes Paul VI and John Paul II. For a fuller understanding of the Council, reference needs to be made to these later documents: unfortunately time does not permit exposition here.

This short paper has one objective: to evaluate Pope John Paul II's claim, namely that the Documents of the Second Vatican Council are a sure compass for the Church, and therefore for the religious life. The aim here is to bring out the value of the Council. Above all, our presentation tries to reflect the Council's comprehensive framework and to accentuate central teachings in these two Documents. Such a plan comes up against a diversity of texts and contexts. As far as possible we have taken these factors into account, in the analysis of the major texts, yet such difficulties may seem formidable. Nevertheless, our plan can be justified by one undeniable fact: the unity of the subject that promulgates the two documents *Lumen gentium* and *Perfectae caritatis*, namely the Council itself.

Prior to Vatican II, religious life in the Catholic Church had under the pressure of canonical legalism succumbed to a certain amount of monastic uniformity. What occurred in Vatican II is in some contrast to the prevailing understanding in generations immediately prior to the Council (though not in the Church tradition as a whole). The Council challenged contemporary religious to a healthy pluralism and prescribed a twofold strategy for diversifying vowed living. First, the Council fathers summoned each order and congregation both to return to the Christian sources of vowed living and to rediscover its special identity as a community through renewed understanding of the vision of its founder. Second, Vatican II

called for the prudent adaptation of different religious institutes to the changed conditions of life in the modern world.¹

Vatican II was the first Council to deal with the religious life, and it did so within the framework of a renewed ecclesiology. *Lumen Gentium* and *Perfectae caritatis* show that the Council found it difficult to explain the position of religious life. But it started a debate that enabled theological progress to be made and this was extended by the papal documents, which fostered deeper doctrinal reflection.

The Council's call for religious life to be more adapted to the modern world requires an understanding of the context of Modernity. The reform it put forward had some rather unfortunate consequences for religious, partly because of the speed at which it was expected to take place. This hastiness can be linked to a lack of correct understanding of Modernity, a subject which I will analyse before proceeding.

2. Catholic Modernity: Three Historical Questions

Historians are still debating how to describe Catholicism in this period. As John W. O' Malley notes names given such as 'Counter-Reformation' and 'Catholic Reformation' carry an implicit interpretative framework.² 'Catholic Reformation' implies that Catholicism was in a process of renewal during the early modern period and 'Counter Reformation' focuses more on the theological, political and military measures that Catholics took against Protestants.³ There is simply no neutral name for Catholicism in the early modern period. This fact is important in developing our understanding of Catholic Modernity, because analysis is not as clear cut as it might seem.

For most of the nineteenth and twentieth century the serious historical research on the early modern period was done by Protestants and mainly from their point of view. Catholic historians of the time tended to react to the Protestant reading of the period which often pictured Catholicism to be reactionary and repressive. The dominant scholarly reading of Catholicism was equivalent to anti-modernism. Scholars such as the German historian Wolfgang Reinhard have questioned the association of Catholicism with anti-modernism in the early modern era by suggesting that there were significant features of Catholicism that were forms of modernisation. In his 1977 article, Reinhard suggests that one could detect phases of modernisation in Catholicism such as the growth of bureaucratisation, social disciplining, and in the spirituality and practices of the Jesuit order.⁴ Though for Reinhard, this modernisation was not an intentional process of the Catholic Church, it contributed to

¹ *Perfectae caritatis*, 2. For a lucid analysis of the changes which Vatican II introduced into religious living, see Richard Hill S.J. "The Pastoral Guide to Canon Law: Religious," *Chicago Studies* (Fall 1976), pp. 316-329

² See John O' Malley, *Trent And All That. Renaming Catholicism in the Early Modern Era*, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 3

³ See O' Malley, pp. 126-134

⁴ See Wolfgang Reinhard, 1977, pp. 231, 240. Here Reinard is drawing on an earlier work produced by the English historian H.O. Evvenett in his *The Spirit of the Counter Reformation* (Cambridge, CUP, 1951), pp. 3, 20).

modernisation of the western world in significant ways. However, Catholic influence on modernisation has not been taken into account in theories of modernity.

It would be short sighted not to consider some of the responsibility for this with the Catholic Church itself. Marginalisation of Catholic influence in modernity was also due to the anti-modernist spirit in the Catholic Church in the nineteenth century, typified by popes such as Pius IX (1846-1878), whose distrust of everything that happened in the modern world seems to have become total.

The second historical issue to consider in a Catholic theory of modernity is that of opening out of the Church to the modern world in the Second Vatican Council 1962-1965. The historical question must be posed here: to what extent does this transformation in the Catholic Church represent a new relationship of Catholicism with modernity? The acceptance of Vatican II of a legitimate autonomy for the secular realm is in many ways a traditional position grounded in St. Thomas Aquinas' understanding of Aristotle's politics. Nevertheless, in coming to accept the legitimacy of liberal democratic government, human rights and other religious traditions, Vatican II ushered in a new rapprochement with the modern world. In developing the idea of Catholic modernity it will be important to assess the historical contribution of Vatican II in ushering in a new epoch for the Catholic Church.

The third historical question raised by Catholic Modernity is that of charting the origins of its trajectory from Trent to Vatican II and beyond. This is a matter of tracing pathways that provide a coherent account of modernisation as it has been influenced by Catholicism. There are many possible ways to approach this task. In the area of spirituality, for example, it would be interesting to see how the spirituality of St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits, was a real impetus to modernisation. Furthermore, the missionary strategies of religious orders such as the Jesuits in the early modern period also provide a wealth of material for analysing how Catholicism in this period was an agent of modernisation. In tracing the encounter of the individual with the Lord, the Spiritual Exercises effectively created a practice known as a retreat.⁵ Retreats had far reaching consequences in the areas of decision-making, social discipline and styles of apostolate. The Jesuits thus initiated a new model of religious life, as found in a number of nineteenth century religious foundations, such as the Menzingen Institute, which manifested a modern approach by combining a Spirit led inspiration, education and mission, understood as a synthesis of freedom and grace. Louis Dupre in his study of the origins of modernity considers the Spiritual Exercises to be a particularly modern synthesis of nature and grace untypical of the Reformation understanding of grace of the time.⁶

These historical questions concerning origins, entry points and pathways of modernisation raise important hermeneutical and philosophical questions concerning the meaning of the term 'modernity'. As we shall see later in section six of this paper, it does have a bearing on understanding the hasty implementation of the Documents of the Council. Returning to the

⁵ See John W. O' Malley, *The First Jesuits*, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1994, pp.46-47).

⁶ See Louis Dupre, *Passage to Modernity. An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 224-226

main topic of this paper on the 'Consecrated Life', we will commence by treating three essential points of the Council's doctrine: first, religious profession constitutes a special consecration; second, the divine origin of religious life is attributed to the inspiration granted to the founders by the Holy Spirit and recognised by the authority of the Church, and so return to the founder's inspiration is a source of true renewal for service in the Church; third, an understanding of the place of religious in the Church.

3. Teaching of the Council: Religious profession constitutes a special consecration

In *Lumen gentium* we find the Church's fundamental understanding of itself. Herein, the Council asserts that the Christian who professes the three evangelical counsels by vows "consecrates himself wholly to God, his supreme love. In a new and special way he makes himself over to God, to serve and honour him" (44a). Despite its theological importance, Jean Beyer S.J., rightfully finds this statement about consecration as overly limiting. It would seem not to be possible to construct a whole doctrine on this basis, because one fact is certain: it is God who has the initiative and it is He who calls the person to the consecrated life. Again, Beyer correctly states: "In actual fact consecration by God is carried out in the call, if it is perceived and received as it should be."⁷ The divine initiative calls forth a response that *Lumen gentium* did not pursue. If God's choice is motivated by love, the response to this choice is a response of love. The character of reciprocity would eventually be stressed by Pope John Paul II, in a gift of self that allows the person to belong to God forever.

Lumen gentium hardly provides a satisfactory explanation of the nature of religious consecration, since the Document confines its perspective to the vows of religion, rather than to the act of love entailed in total self-giving (44a). The importance of consecration is linked to the sacred bonds taken on, and it was more perfect if these bonds were perpetual (44a). This text is problematic, because if the value of the consecration depends on the extent of the bonds, we cannot deny that the consecration is an act of the person who consecrates himself to God. There is an implicit lack of clarity about the agent of consecration here.⁸

Since the consecration mentioned by the Council is central for a correct understanding of the religious life, I will examine this question in more depth, and by general reference to the Council's documents. Dictionaries lead us to conclude that 'to consecrate' and 'consecration' involves separating someone or something from the sphere of the profane, and placing him at 'the disposal of the divine', which is made explicit in the goal of consecration.⁹

Four texts in *Lumen gentium*, three in *Presbyterorum ordinis*, and one each in *Perfectae caritatis* and in *Optatam totius* clarify that God is the agent of consecration, which transmits

⁷ Beyer, "Life Consecrated by the Evangelical Counsels", in: *Volume Three Vatican II Assessment and Perspectives Twenty-five Years After (1962-1987)*, Rene Latourelle (Ed.), Paulist Press / New York/ Mahwah, 1989, footnote 26, p. 82

⁸ Beyer, "Life Consecrated by the Evangelical Counsels", p. 67

⁹ *Lexicon totius latinitatis of Aegidio Forcellini*, published by F. Corradini (Patavii, 1940.), Vol.1, p.798

gifts and graces. This affirmation allows us to speak about 'the effect of consecration' and the purpose for which God gives these graces. In *Ad Gentes* 38, the verb 'consecrate' is applied to bishops; in *Ad Gentes* 39, to priests; and in *Lumen gentium* 45, to religious. While affirming that it is God who consecrates, the prevailing meaning of to 'consecrate', is to dedicate. Moreover, the Second Vatican Council often links 'consecration' and 'mission', as is evident in *Ad Gentes* 38: "[...] all bishops are consecrated not just for one diocese, but for the salvation of the entire world". The same meaning is found in *Presbyterorum ordinis* 12, where a priest is one who is set aside by the sacrament of Orders, so as to better fulfil the baptismal mission, in his service of all the baptised. Finally, we have the text *Lumen gentium* 44, which regards the religious as one who obliges himself to observe the three evangelical counsels for the sake sanctification and mission:

It is true that through baptism he has died to sin and has been consecrated to God. However, in order to derive more abundant fruit from this baptismal grace, he intends by the profession of the evangelical counsels in the Church, to free himself from those obstacles which might draw him away from the fervour of charity and the perfection of divine worship. Thus he is more intimately consecrated to divine service (LG. 44).

The important conclusion to draw from the phrase 'he is consecrated' is that it is God who consecrates, even by means of 'non-sacramental' actions.¹⁰ It can be noted that a Trinitarian dimension pervades the whole teaching of the Council on 'consecration' and this dimension does not diminish in the texts we examine concerning 'non-sacramental' consecration that is given through the religious vow.

Now let us turn to the comparison between baptismal consecration and that of the profession of the evangelical counsels. Baptism is the fertile soil from which the vivifying sap of 'religious' consecration must arise.

Bearing in mind the parallel teachings of *Perfectae caritatis* 5 and *Lumen gentium* 44, it is noted that the two consecrations share common features in that both answer 'a divine call', and recipients are intended to accept this calling. Both entail dying to sin, and a commitment of the person to God. In this respect, the purpose of the two consecrations is basically the same. Here we can conclude that in both cases, God grants graces for the sanctification of Christians and at the same time he includes them in the mission of salvation through worship and service. The words of *Lumen gentium* 44, addressed to religious and alluding to their religious consecration are the following: "Through such a bond a person is totally dedicated to God by an act of supreme love, and is committed to the honour and service of God under a new and special title." The latter is in no way extrinsic to baptismal consecration, but reveals its inherent capacity more clearly.

Having noted what these consecrations have in common, let us examine what is particular to religious consecration. Its effect is to facilitate 'renouncing of the world' (*Perfectae caritatis*

¹⁰ Concerning the agent of consecration, the Council does not always use the term in an univocal sense, but have given it different referents and shades of meaning.

5). According to Antonio Queralto S. J., Vatican II has used this specific phrase so as to distinguish the religious from the laity, and to point out what is particular to the grace received by religious. Herein 'world' does not refer to what is evil in itself - sin, Satan, his works and his pomps - but to goods, such as marriage, riches and autonomy, which one renounces by following the evangelical counsels in imitation of Jesus Christ.¹¹ Here the reference is to the 'world' in terms of lesser goods for the one called, something which a religious renounces for the sake of sanctification and mission. No tension exists in this context, between seeking God and seeking others in mission.

By declaring that religious consecration provides a fuller manifestation of a life lived for God alone and commitment to the Gospel than does baptism, the council indicates that the effect of this renunciation of the 'world' is an enhancement of the same traits that were imprinted on the souls of religious by baptismal consecration. The strength of the religious consecration lies in the gift of love received from God which enables the one called to accept the divine choice.

The first paragraphs of *Perfectae caritatis* are of particular relevance to our subject. Religious have 'handed over their entire lives to God's service in an act of special consecration' (P.C.5). Religious profession entails answering a 'divine call'. At the same time, it is 'a self-sacrifice', and because it is received by the Church, this implies that 'one is dedicated' to service of the Church. Here the Council affirms that profession constitutes a consecration. The consecration made by religious involves the person placing himself into God's hands on entering his service. But the text goes further in explaining 'the service of the Church'. As an act of a member of the Body of Christ, religious profession is consequently of a salvific order, and under the influence of the Holy Spirit. The consecratory action of the Holy Spirit is perhaps only suggested, but no room for serious doubt is left. The professed are instruments of the Holy Spirit and their profession is the instrument of their non-sacramental consecration.

Chapter VI of *Lumen gentium*, presented the three evangelical counsels (*Lumen gentium* 43a; cf. *Perfectae caritatis* 1 c, 2 5), as a kind of lived anamnesis of the virginal and poor life that Christ chose for himself and his mother (*Lumen gentium* 46 b). The vows must also be seen as a unified attitude like that of Jesus in His single love for the Father lived out in dependence on, and in full obedience to the will of the One who sent Him. This filial aspect is suggested by *Lumen gentium* (44c and 45b), although the document did not develop it. In what way do the counsels make up consecration? And why do we speak of consecration by the counsels? Adequate answers to these questions are not found in *Lumen gentium*. Nor would they be given by the rest of the Council.

Consecration by the counsels: return to the Christian sources of vowed living

¹¹ Antonio Queralto, S.J., "Religious Consecration according to Vatican II", in: *Volume Three Vatican II Assessment and Perspectives Twenty-five Years After (1962-1987)*, Rene Latourelle (Ed.), Paulist Press / New York/ Mahwah, 1989, pp. 31-32

Perfectae caritatis first directs religious to the New Testament and the light it throws on the positive meaning of vowed living, when it tells us that the "fundamental norm" and the "supreme law" of every religious order or congregation always remains "the following of Christ as proposed by the Gospel" (*Perfectae caritatis* 2a). It is a foundational grace given to those whom God chooses: to leave behind what most roots a human being in life - family and possessions - and, following Jesus in consecrated celibacy, to live with Him in obedience to the Father and the Spirit until death. The relationship of friendship with and a love of Jesus that strives to give Him first place, are clearly central, and through several years of prayer, one can begin to discover some of the deeper implications not only of the vows but also this relationship with Him. Such friendship entails putting on His mind, learning to see the world with His eyes. Moreover, in the teachings of Jesus - as they are preserved in the New Testament - one can discover a coherent moral vision. He spoke little about poverty, but long about the willingness to share one's bread, one's material possessions, with others, especially with those in need. Such sharing should express trust in the Father's providential care of each of His children. It should initiate the gratuity with which He sends the good things of this life to saint and sinner alike. Christian sharing should reach across social barriers. It should welcome the sinner and the outcast. One can begin to think of the vow of poverty as a particular strategy for bringing into existence such communities of faith.

Consecration by the counsels can be understood then, as a deep participation in Jesus' unswerving fidelity to the mission given Him by the Father. The vow of obedience can be seen as a dynamic way of perpetuating - within a corporate charism - the atoning service of Christ to a sinful world. It is also to be understood as a participation in the divine filial relationship of Christ, so that by imitating His attitudes of love-response to the gift of the Father, the religious is united to Him through love and His sacrifice. Through His freely chosen death, Jesus is given, sanctified, and consecrated, so that those who share in the pattern of His life may also be sanctified and consecrated in giving themselves to the Father (John 17:19).

Religious consecration is grounded on baptism, and accomplished in the Eucharist. *Lumen gentium* refers to this union with the sacrifice of Christ without any explanation (45 c). *Perfectae caritatis* expresses an even weaker link between the consecrated life and the Eucharist (6b). But the 1983 Code is more explicit:

Religious life, as a consecration of the whole person, manifests in the Church the marvellous marriage established by God as a sign of the world to come. Religious thus consummate a full gift of themselves as a sacrifice offered to God, so that their whole existence becomes a continuous worship of God in charity (Canon 607, #1).

Furthermore, it is in the Eucharist that we understand that consecration is not only expressing love of God, but, through love of God, the love of mankind. Pope Pius XII had noted this when he spoke of a "consecration to God and to souls"¹², a concept that express the attitude

¹² *Motu proprio Primo feliciter V*, in AAS, 40 (1948), 283-286, esp. 285

of Christ and of those who, in Him and like Him, consecrate themselves to the Father for the promotion of the Kingdom and the building up of the Church. From this flows the ecclesial nature of any consecrated life.¹³

Although it does not develop its discussion of the ecclesial character of the consecrated life, *Lumen gentium* does not completely ignore it. It has its place in the *Constitution of the Church*. Union with Christ means that the consecrated life is dedicated to the whole Church, which means that each member works to establish and strengthen the Kingdom of Christ within souls, and to spread it throughout the world (*Lumen gentium* 44c).

The members of each institute, therefore, ought to seek God before all else, and solely; they should join contemplation, by which they cleave to God by mind and heart, to apostolic love, by which they endeavour to be associated with the work of redemption and to spread the Kingdom of God (*Perfectae caritatis* 5 e).

4. Teaching of the Council: the divine origin and identity of Religious Orders is located in the inspiration of the founders

The kernel of the Council's teaching is explicit: each religious order or congregation finds its Spirit-filled origin through the founder. The founder provides the distinctive spirit and purpose for the institute on mission in the Church. This teaching governs the doctrinal principles, that are to direct the renewal of religious life found both in *Lumen gentium* (VI) and *Perfectae caritas*, (1,2,3). The *Motu proprio Ecclesia Sanctae* of 1966 gave clear directives to general chapters to base their revised constitutions on the spirit and intentions of the founders.

The founding-time represents one pole. The institute's sense of apostolic purpose and corporate spirit today constitutes the other pole. An institute is to pursue, through every apostolate undertaken, practical dedication to the spirit and aims of the founder: this is an essential requirement and commitment for all the members. The central theological insight is that the specific identity of a religious congregation is constituted as the founder remembered Jesus as lived anamnesis expressed in values and specific commitments, given in response to needs in his society (*Lumen gentium* 44b).

God's design for each institute is that it constitutes its own identity, or its corporate vocation for the sanctification of the members and for mission; this inner dynamism is integrally connected to the spirit of the founder. Each member of a religious order or congregation has his own personal vocation. Before the Second Vatican Council this alone was considered the basis of religious life. The Council, however, understood renewal as a "continual return to the individual spirit of each institute, and simultaneously adaptation to the changing

¹³ I am grateful to Antonio Queralt, S. J. and Jean Beyer S.J. for pointing out the need to emphasise the forgoing points in: "Religious Consecration according to Vatican II", pp. 31-48, and, "Life consecrated by the Evangelical Counsels", pp. 64-83

circumstances of our time" (*Perfectae caritatis* 2). This means that each congregation is to have the same spirit and focus today as in the founding-time. Within this corporate vocation and spirit each member is to responsibly live his own personal vocation of chastity, poverty and obedience. This is not meant as some form of autonomy that places the religious beyond the framework of the institute. Rather, it is within its corporate vocation that the religious embraces "poverty", thereby as one "who more closely follows and more clearly demonstrates the Saviour's self-giving" (*Lumen gentium* 42). It is in the pursuit of the purpose or mission of the institute that religious "subject their own will to another person on God's behalf [...] likening themselves more thoroughly to Christ and his obedience" (*Lumen gentium* 42).

In the Menzingen Institute of the founding-time we witness this teaching. The members lived the vows in ways that served holiness of life and they furthered the mission of the Church. In Mother Bernarda Heimgartner we meet a woman very aligned with God and His will. The poverty lived by the sisters was to a large extent the consequence of their commitment to the formation and education of the young. During the founding time obedience consisted mainly in acceptance of the life of being a pilgrim for the sake of the mission. It required flexibility on the part of the leadership of the institute, availability (transfers) on the part of the sisters in their service of evangelisation through education. This spirituality required the attainment of a delicate balance, between not nesting or settling down and at the same time remaining free to give oneself fully in each local school and parish, between being in the world and not being of the world. This balance had to be always newly sought after.

If each institute has its own identity, life and purpose through its specific founding inspiration, it must express this as spirit, mission and structure, which constitute elements of any ecclesial community (*Lumen gentium* 8a). The founding inspiration is not to be limited to the spirit of an institute, but the structures express its spirit. This means that each institute needs its own law, - a need that the Code would meet (Canons 586, #1, 587, #1).

The autonomy of the institutes is not some sort of independence, and does not place the religious life "beyond the hierarchy". In fact, it permits better integration into the life of the Church, and this entails a special dependence on the hierarchy, which recognises and protects it.

5. Teaching of the Council: the Place of Religious in the Church

Religious orders are not usually founded on instructions from the hierarchy, but by men and women with a charism, initially without any assistance from popes or bishops, and not infrequently in the face of opposition and misgivings at first. Nevertheless, they were always understood to be communities within the Church and for the Church. For example, it was clear to Francis of Assisi that he had to work to obtain papal approval for his brotherhood and for his rule - no less clear than it was to Ignatius of Loyola. And both these men, like all other founders knew that they were called to serve the Church and its saving mission, through a form of life that they had drawn up under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

How should religious be described? The Second Vatican Council first discussed them, and this was necessary. Confining them to a single chapter on the vocation to holiness meant that their identity and the importance of the religious state were lost, and their role in the Church was downplayed. In this respect, the order of *Lumen Gentium* chapter V was important. It did not follow the traditional order, which would have dealt with clergy, religious, and lay people, a view that had not lost its influence at the time of the Council. However, there was a rejection of the thought of Pius XII, who saw religious as an intermediate state between clergy and laity.¹⁴ The removal of religious from the hierarchical structure of the Church was deeply felt, bearing in mind its divine composition.

Are religious outside the hierarchical structure of the Church? For clarification, it is necessary to discover the meaning of hierarchical. As employed in *Lumen gentium*, it is ambiguous. The term refers to a position of dependence on the hierarchy, but which hierarchy? That of sacred orders: bishops, priests, deacons?¹⁵ Or that of Church government: the pope, the college of bishops, diocesan bishops?¹⁶ Those who are not ordained are called 'lay people'. But who is ordained? At the time of the Council, minor orders still existed, and a person who received tonsure was a cleric.¹⁷ Today there are three degrees of sacred orders: episcopate, presbyterate, and diaconate.¹⁸ Is the diaconate a sacrament? This question has been asked, but has not been answered.

Beyer suggests that 'hierarchical' can also have the sense of harmonised and unified organic whole - and in this understanding every state of life according to the divine law belongs to this structure, forming the unity of the Church. In this perspective, the distinction between clerics and lay people no longer holds. But this conclusion does not seem to accord with the mind of the Constitution *Lumen gentium*.

Religious live in a state of life according to divine law, the counsels are a gift of the Lord, the founding inspirations are a gift of the Spirit, and each type of consecrated life belongs to the fullness of the Church, continuing the mission of Christ and the Church, and reveals the depth of the Christian life. Seen in this perspective, every form of the consecrated life belongs to the hierarchical structure of the Church. When *Lumen gentium* used the term 'hierarchical' in a partial sense, it practically denied it; however, stating that the religious life belongs to the holiness of the Church does not distinguish it. Every state of life belongs to the holiness of the Church, and each person must strive to live such holiness. All Christians are called to holiness.

¹⁴ Apostolic Constitution *Provida Mater Ecclesia* 4, in AAS, 39 (1947), p. 116; and Allocution *Annus sacer*, in AAS, 43 (1951), p. 27.

¹⁵ Sacred orders had been defined by Pius X in the Apostolic Constitution *Sacramentum ordinis*, in AAS, 40 (1948), p. 5-7. The subject of the Constitution was the validity of the rites of ordination.

¹⁶ Canon 108 #3 of the 1917 Code.

¹⁷ Beyer S.J., Jean, "Life Consecrated By the Evangelical Counsels", in: *Volume Three Vatican II Assessment and Perspectives Twenty-five Years After (1962-1987)*, p. 72

¹⁸ Minor orders were suppressed by the *Motu proprio* of Pope Paul VI, *Ministeria quaedam* (12 August 1976).

The problem was, therefore, not solved, and, is still not solved, even when we turn to examine the contribution of other conciliar documents to the theological reflection and analysis started by *Lumen gentium*.

6. *Lumen gentium* and *Perfectae caritatis*: "A sure compass" for consecrated life?

I would like at this point to refer to the metaphor of the compass as applied to the documents of the Council. 'A compass is an instrument for finding direction, having a magnetized needle which points to magnetic north.'¹⁹ It points us in a direction, but it does not tell us about the snares on the way. Nor does a compass tell us how to make the journey. It does not advise on how to pace ourselves, so that we will safely reach our true destination. From a theological point of view- a posteriori - if it is true that Vatican II is a 'compass' for the future of the Church (as it is claimed in the spiritual testimony of Pope John Paul II), then we need to ask what effect have the documents had? What value do they still have for us today?

It is arguable that *Lumen gentium* and *Perfectae caritatis* provide adequate direction for renewal of the consecrated life. However, it may be wondered whether Pope Paul VI's directive for their implementation, requiring the convocation of a special renewal chapter within three years was too much too soon for the religious orders and congregations. With the hindsight of fifty years that have passed since this directive, this is now a legitimate question. The high-speed response seems to be a fault-line running through the implementation of Vatican II in general. Perhaps because the time for Vatican II was over-due, for sociological reasons and for other reasons, there was a sense that reform was urgent. The subject analysed in section two of this paper played a role here, namely, misunderstandings on the part of historians concerning the significant contributions already made to Modernity by the Catholic Church.

Pope Paul VI's *Motu proprio, Ecclesia Sanctae* was issued in 1966, one year after *Perfectae caritatis*. With this, the reform of the consecrated life began as an act of authority, but the consultation of all the members of an institute, required by these guidelines for renewal, was a mistake. A fair number of misjudgements followed, especially in the evaluation of the results of such consultation, and under the direction of "certain sociologists and psychologists who were acting as their technical advisers in this delicate process."²⁰ Such free consultation organised on such a vast scale and embracing a wide range of subjects introduced a democratizing sense. This is not what was intended; but once walls were breached, the whole edifice was threatened. Once it happened, the democratizing process would, in some institutes, become an end in itself, initially as a means of educating religious in more participative forms of decision-making. Furthermore, research shows that at subsequent chapters and meetings, institutes began to reflect on their type of authority and governmental structures on the basis of 'outside' ideas that were circulating in the air around them and not

¹⁹ *Collins Concise English Dictionary* (Third Edition, Harper Collins Publisher, 1992)

²⁰ Dorteil-Claudot, S.J., Michael, "Revising the Constitutions of the Institutes", in: *Volume Three Vatican II Assessment and Perspectives Twenty-five Years After (1962-1987)*, p. 96

primarily in the perspectives of their own specific identity and vocation.²¹ Faith in the transcendent origins of the religious life seemed to lose clear focus. While not automatically implying cause and effect here, I give some indicators.

Their history and tradition contained little that prepared religious for this Vatican II challenge. The rule or constitutions, regulating the life, and presented to them at their profession, had been material for personal prayer and reflection, and the basic reference point for all decision-making, that is, having the status of a quasi sacred text. With Vatican II, they were required to re-write this document, in the form of new constitutions. James Sweeney C.P. notes correctly: "The psychological effect of this, begun by an extraordinary general chapter of renewal, was that it made a break with a lived tradition." Yet, it was the Holy See which required that a new text be drawn up to accommodate the theology of Vatican II (*Ecclesiae Sanctae*, nn. 12-14).²²

Moreover, a pre-conciliar lack of formation in theological, scriptural and doctrinal matters in many womens' religious institutes²³ meant that the whole dynamic of Vatican II reform could soon get out of control. The fruits of renewal were being sought at breakneck speed, under pressure from grassroots ferment in favour of change, and even while the constitutions were being re-formulated at a general chapter.²⁴ Practical decisions were being made without adequate theological basis. For instance, research into Apostolic -Activities of institutes show that at their special renewal chapters many had adopted a new but wise approach, "always remaining faithful to the traditional mission as defined in the previous constitutions", yet many others had systematically abandoned the tasks proper to the character and purpose of their institute, so that the range of the ministries of the members was imprudently broadened. In this group of institutes, research also shows that it was not possible to correct these mistaken orientations at intermediate chapters, and "in some cases they were in fact confirmed and reinforced."²⁵ Lack of clear profile or identity ensued.

The quest of some religious to be more like people in society was being tested. Such developments were hard to evaluate in the 1960s and 1970s, because Vatican II also required religious to re-express the founding inspiration according to the needs of the times, with the aim of up-dating religious institutes. Implicitly this signalled a re-evaluation of the religious life-forms, because a subtle shift in world-order had already become perceptible by the mid 1960s. The old was departing and something new was clearly beginning.²⁶ Moreover, this shift in self understanding of society would prove to be uncommonly deep, powerful and universal, as even an outline of developments of the remaining decades of the twentieth century would show.

²¹ Dortel-Claudot, "Revising the Constitutions of the Institutes", p.102

²² Sweeney, James, *The New Religious Order: The Passionists and the Option for the Poor*, (Bellow Publishing, London, 1994), p. 76

²³ Foley, Nadine OP, (ed.), *Journey in Faith and Fidelity, Women Shaping religious life for a Renewed Church*, (Continuum, New York, 1999), pp. 19-24

²⁴ Sweeney, James, *The New Religious Order*, pp. 76-78

²⁵ Dortel-Claudot, S.J., Michael, "Revising the Constitutions of the Institutes", pp.99-100

²⁶ Hanvey, James, "Refounding Living in the middle time", in *The Way Supplement*, p. 30

Religious life: A human institution of divine origin

Each authentic religious institute, present in the Church throughout the centuries, is a work of God and has its source in the Spirit. This *Perfectae caritas* makes clear. It is part of the mystery of God's salvation into which baptism has drawn the religious, and because of a further call from God he leaves all to exploit this intimacy and to continue the mission of Jesus (P.C.5). Nevertheless, fifty years later, belief in the religious life as an incarnate spiritual reality seems to have gone down the ladder. The horizontal dynamic has come to the fore during the Vatican II reception history, involving a loss of faith in the transcendent. Yet, a religious order or congregation is a transcendent living form. If we take it apart, we have either a corpse or a monster. The latter has life, but it can be very dangerous!

In truth, the liturgical reform has the same underlying history, with the horizontal dynamic coming to the fore during the reception history. This involves a loss of faith in the transcendent: the call to leave behind vestments; some priests placing the informal before the formal; the Assembly singing hymns not of a sacred character. A whole sense of abandonment of what is associated with the sacred and the sacramental can be evidenced. Fifty years on, there are signs in certain areas that the worst excesses are over, certainly at the liturgical level. New shoots can spring up from the old stump, with the documents of the Council as a sure compass.

7. Conclusion

We have seen that the Council opened up debate on the consecrated life that is not yet ended, setting in motion a theological renewal, the full impact of which we do not yet realise. To return to the primitive inspiration of the founders encourages a true renewal, to an inspiration given by the Spirit for the mission of the Church. An analysis of the nature and value of consecration highlights the divine vocation. The vows are lived for the sanctification of the members and for the mission of the Church. Christ is given a central place. The charisms of the founders lead to more faithful imitation of His mission, mystery, and His consecration provides the basis for that of those who consecrate themselves to Him in order to consecrate themselves to the Father through the action of the Spirit. His life as Son provides the evangelical counsels with their meaning and places them in the context of the Trinitarian life. This gives an evangelical tone to the consecrated life. However, a deeper and broader study and understanding of the ecclesial character of the consecrated life, allowing full communion with the People of God would seem to be required. The deep theological implications of the place given to religious in the Church needs urgent clarification, in the light of the teaching of the Church Fathers, the Church's tradition as well as that of the Documents of Vatican II.

In the face of this overall picture, fifty years on, we can see that the Council represented a call to a task of renewal that is still largely to be carried out in fidelity as a response to the action of the Spirit.

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