

A Symposium on Apostolic Life

Apostolic Religious Life since Vatican II . . . Reclaiming the Treasure: Bishops, Theologians, and Religious in Conversation

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Apostolic Religious Life in the Post-Vatican II Church: Ongoing Challenges of Renewal—Perfect and Imperfect Love

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Perfect charity or *complete love*, the divine reality signified by the opening words of the “Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life” of the Second Vatican Council (“*Perfectae caritatis . . .*”), provides the theme of this paper.¹ This theme is pursued insofar as love, as it ranges in human life from earthly mortal love to charity, constitutes the practical basis and effective engine for meeting ongoing challenges of renewal of apostolic religious life. The Council’s “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church” (*Lumen Gentium*) had earlier forcefully made the point that charity, “the first and most necessary gift,”² is the ultimate guide and engine of holiness for all the faithful, and in a special way for religious: “For charity, as the bond of perfection and the fulfillment of the law (cf. Col. 3:14; Rom. 13:10), rules over all the means of attaining holiness, gives life to them, and makes them work. Hence it is the love of God and of neighbor which points out the true disciple of Christ.”³ After more than thirty years of momentous and unexpected change in the world, the church, and religious life since the Council, Pope John Paul II’s post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata* emphasized the same principle, writing of “the grace of this special communion of love with Christ” and “this special grace of intimacy which, in the consecrated life, makes possible and even demands the total gift

of self in the profession of the evangelical counsels.”⁴ One instance of the dynamic of charity at work in the founding of a religious order is given in the acts of canonization of Saint Dominic:

Frequently he made a special personal petition that God would deign to grant him a genuine charity, effective in caring for and obtaining the salvation of men. For he believed that only then would he be truly a member of Christ, when he had given himself totally for the salvation of men, just as the Lord Jesus, the Savior of all, had offered himself completely for our salvation. So, for this work, after a lengthy period of careful and provident planning, he founded the Order of Friars Preachers.⁵

This paper discusses the complex reality of love, active and engaged concretely in real life, as the necessary condition for genuine and meaningful ongoing renewal of consecrated life, either with respect to the perennial and constant need for renewal or for the specific needs for renewal today.⁶ The point may seem obvious, and it is, but the theme is worth exploration, if only because for all its obviousness, renewal in religious life has been neither automatic nor easy.

Ongoing challenges of renewal of apostolic religious life in the post-Vatican II church is a large topic. The church is universal and there is great diversity in religious life. Thus there are limits and parameters to my reflections, including the following. (1) To the extent to which my paper speaks to contemporary and specific need for renewal, in contradistinction to the constant need for renewal in even the best of religious life, they address the scene in the developed rather than the developing world. (2) This paper pursues an analysis that more likely fits more established religious communities, rather than newer ones still in the joy and fervor of their youth. (3) As the reference to Saint Dominic indicates, my experience and observations of religious life, which ground these reflections and which are, I hope, adequate for saying something useful, are nevertheless perforce limited. (4) *Perfectae Caritatis* from the Second Vatican Council and the apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata* some thirty years later are the bounding documents for this paper. Both provide general principles for renewal with some

indications of the contemporary situation in their respective times, with much about specific conditions left as a subtext, especially in *Perfectae Caritatis*.⁷ Much has changed, of course, in the world, in the church, and in religious life, since the Second Vatican Council called for renewal of consecrated life. These momentous changes, which do surface in *Vita Consecrata*, have continued if not accelerated since the dawn of the New Millennium.⁸ Details of the current situation and the pressing challenges and opportunities of our times have been richly addressed during this Symposium and are not my immediate concern. I offer as a complement, and one with sufficient specificity, I hope, an analysis offering a formula for ongoing renewal based on practical aspects of the forms of love relevant to religious life. Love has a fundamental practical character with concrete applications to contemporary religious life in relation to contemporary society and culture.

The analysis of this paper depends on a basic philosophical distinction with respect to the workings of human character and the ultimate motivations and springs of human action. This distinction takes some form as this—the distinction between love and hate, attraction and aversion, desire and fear, pleasure and pain.⁹ Humans act either to attain what they love or long for, on the one hand, or to avoid what they hate or fear, on the other. In a concrete case of action the situation is often mixed, but one of love or hate predominates, and explicitly or implicitly every philosophical outlook gives ultimate priority to one over the other. For example, the classical tradition of Plato, Aristotle, and Aquinas gives priority to love or desire, whereas Hobbes in early modernity and Nietzsche in late modernity acknowledge as the natural condition of human life the war of each against all. Plato in the *Phaedo* has Socrates note that in actual life the two sides of the distinction are found together and have their interplay in how we determine to act:

Socrates sat up on the bed, bent his leg and rubbed it with his hand, and as he rubbed he said: “What a strange thing that which men call pleasure seems to be, and how astonishing the relation it has with what is thought to be its opposite, namely pain! A man cannot have both at the same time. Yet if he pursues and catches the one, he is almost always bound to catch the other also, like two creatures with one head. I think that if Aesop had noted this he would have composed a fable that a god wishes to reconcile their opposition but could not do so, so he joined their two heads together, and therefore when a man has the one, the other follows later. This seems to be happening to me. My bonds caused me pain in my leg, and now pleasure seems to be following.”¹⁰

The good philosophical answer, in my judgment, is that love predominates in the natural mix of human life.¹¹ The Christian answer goes farther, namely, to the supernatural reality of the pure Love that is God without any trace of its opposite, without need, want, or lack, found in the life of the Trinity, and in which we share in faith by grace through the saving death of Christ.¹² Pope John Paul II’s admonition “Be not afraid!”, repeated from the beginnings of his pontificate, has its ultimate warrant in the reality of divine love without opposite, which is present by grace in Christian life, however much contending forces of love and hate, desire and aversion, condition the earthly life of individuals, communities, and the world as a whole. The consecrated life based on the profession of the evangelical counsels is to be a unique, distinctive, and outstanding sign not only of the ultimacy and triumph of love over hate, strife and fear, but of the supernatural love possessed and lived now, that transcends the natural interplay of love and hate, of longing and fear, in human life. Thus disciples are called to love even their enemies and to forgive endlessly, doing it all joyfully and willingly in freedom. Thus those who have professed the evangelical counsels are called to a renunciation of the world and to living without earthly cares, realizing for the whole church the life of heavenly realities already in this world.¹³

This is much to hope for, but it is what Christ offers in a particularly urgent and compelling way in the call to religious life and makes possible. The constant need for conversion and renewal in such a life, however, becomes quite clear. If these philosophical and

theological points about love and hate in relation to action are granted, love, not its opposite, is the ultimate and only unfailing force for authentic and genuine renewal in religious life, as in any life. One pressing issue for ongoing renewal today, then, is to bring such general considerations, valid as I find them, to concrete, particular, and sustained application. Grace perfects nature and God's grace works in the details of our lives—both the specific conditions and circumstances of life in our various religious families and the specific conditions and circumstances of our larger culture and society.

Lumen Gentium affirms that the “religious state reveals in a unique way that the kingdom of God and its overmastering necessities are superior to all earthly considerations. Finally, to all men it shows wonderfully at work within the Church the surpassing greatness of the force of Christ the King and the boundless power of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁴ This is, to my mind, one of the most compelling features of religious life, that people can actually live happily in the service of God and others giving up the goods of marriage, possessions, and free decision-making—that the grace and love of God at work in authentic religious life is real, real enough to give one's whole life to it.¹⁵ *Perfectae Caritatis* adds that a “life consecrated by the profession of the counsels is of surpassing value” and that “[s]uch a life has a necessary role to play in the circumstances of the present age.”¹⁶

Despite the beauty of this transcendent or other-worldly way of life lived now in the world and its necessity for the world today, *Vita Consecrata* finds it necessary, nonetheless, to cite decreasing numbers of vocations and the disappearance of some religious institutes, including the possibility of dioceses without the presence of members of religious communities at all, while adding: “The various difficulties stemming from the decline in personnel and apostolates *must in no way lead to a loss of confidence in the evangelical vitality of the*

consecrated life, which will always be present and active in the Church. While individual Institutes have no claim to permanence, the consecrated life will continue to sustain among the faithful the response of love towards God and neighbor.”¹⁷ It also states that “the consecrated life is destined to remain a shining witness to the inseparable love of God and love of neighbour,” but then immediately argues that “[w]hat must be avoided at all costs is the actual breakdown of consecrated life, a collapse which is not measured by a decrease in numbers but by a failure to cling steadfastly to the Lord and to personal vocation and mission.”¹⁸

The ultimate imperative of renewal, as John Paul II states, is fidelity to the mission of love by professed religious, rather than numbers, but a huge and sad change in the church since the Second Vatican Council in the developed world is the prospect of religious life becoming, by virtue of low numbers relative to the overall population of the faithful, a token or quaint presence in the normal life of the church as a whole.¹⁹ The ongoing challenge of renewal of religious life today includes this dimension. In arguing for an effective and practical engagement with love as a basis for ongoing renewal in religious life, for the sake both of greater fidelity among professed religious and an increase in vocations, I want to argue in a way that specifically addresses the threat of tokenism and quaintness by an analysis that indicates more rather than less engagement and connection with what I have just called here “the normal life of the church as a whole.”²⁰ By this phrase I should want to designate the life of the lay faithful and the life of marriage and raising of children.

This paper’s attempts to spell out this engagement and connection capitalizes (1) on the bonds that exist between all the faithful for mutual support because of the universal call to holiness and (2) also on the truth of two interconnected paradoxes of religious life that figure in

religious life precisely because of its renunciation of the world and its special dedication to living more exclusively by spiritual means.²¹

The first paradox of religious life that I have in mind can be formulated with the help of a principle first articulated by Plato, namely, that corruption of the best is the worst.²² I am not asserting that consecrated life is a better life than other lives in the church, but do affirm, as our councilor and other documents do, the special and distinctive character of consecrated life as a complete dedication to God's service in answer to God's specific call.²³ Religious life entails living the evangelical counsels in a radical way, including forsaking the intimacy of marriage and the having of children, ownership of goods, freedom to do as one pleases, and so on. Religious life, even in its most active forms, requires a privacy and quiet for prayer and contemplation, that is not normal in married and family life. It also provides a freedom for worship of God and service that is not otherwise possible.

Full and authentic religious life is possible only by dependence on God's grace and by a divine love of the life—love of the evangelical counsels, of the rule and constitutions, of the practices and way of life, and of one's brothers and sisters in the life. It is said of Saint Dominic repeatedly in the acts of canonization that he loved poverty.²⁴ Such an observation is appropriate to acts of canonization, for love of poverty, the active desire for and wanting of poverty, is a sign of sanctity. Already in the early Dominican community there were tendencies to eat delicacies, ride horses, acquire rich vestments, accept properties, and expand small cells, all of which Saint Dominic attempted to prevent.²⁵ *Perfectae Caritatis* specifies the process of “a continuous return . . . to the original inspiration behind a given community” and endorses the principle that “loyal recognition and safekeeping . . . be accorded to the spirit of founders” for appropriate renewal to take place.²⁶ This process and this principle for renewal are not just for the sake of recalling

ideals, as important as that is, but for rekindling the love that animated the original community through its founder, something that tends to dissipate with time and growth in numbers.

Along with a natural tendency to laxness apart from much strength of grace is the fact that the essential conditions of consecrated life, conditions which make for freedom to worship God, to study, and to serve others, are materially such by their nature that they can be too readily enjoyed for their own sake. While life may be simple, there can be a level of economic security in religious life along with a sense of entitlement that is missing even from middle-class life among the lay faithful. There is privacy and possible detachment from others in community not normal in lay family life, including relative independence from superiors beyond anything a spouse may hope for. The freedom to serve all and any others that comes from celibate chastity, so that, so that as *Lumen Gentium* says,²⁷ the devotion of the professed religious is “to the welfare of the whole Church,” can be prone to the “problem of socialism,” namely, to belong to everyone is to belong to no one. Examples could be multiplied. My general point is that the structures, practices, and circumstances of religious life, including ones that are absolutely essential to it and necessary for the spiritual life and pursuit of holiness to which profession of the evangelical counsels is dedicated, can be readily degraded if not corrupted when not practiced in the spirit of divine love under the influence of grace. Even minor corruption of the best injures religious life. It can also indeed be the worst, as the scandals of the recent past have shown.

This is the paradox, since the solid and essential practices of “religious families give their members the support of greater stability in their way of life, a proven method of acquiring perfection, fraternal association in the militia of Christ, and liberty strengthened by obedience,” as *Lumen Gentium* points out, concluding: “Thus these religious can securely fulfill and

faithfully observe their religious profession, and rejoicing in spirit make progress on the road of charity.”²⁸ These means of grace specific for religious life are the primary basis for growth in holiness and the principal means of conversion and renewal, and yet life within these structures and practices, when external or lax, can work the opposite. The counter-productive possibilities and tendencies, risked by daring to attempt religious life, which this paradox indicates, needs remedy.

The second paradox about religious life that I want to consider bears on its relation to marriage. The material meaning and signification of marriage is found in actual marriage of men and women. In distinguishing consecrated life, *Lumen Gentium* states that consecrated life is a “better symbol” of the marriage of Christ to the church:

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 fervor of charity and the perfection of divine worship. Thus he is more intimately consecrated to divine service. This consecration gains in perfection since by virtue of firmer and steadier bonds it serves as a better symbol of the unbreakable link between Christ and his Spouse, the Church.²⁹

Perfectae Caritatis reaffirms this idea particularly with respect to celibate chastity: “Religious thereby give witness to all Christ’s faithful of that wondrous marriage between the Church and Christ her only spouse, a union which has been established by God and will be fully manifested on the world to come.”³⁰ Professed religious, whose lives are patterned “after the manner of virginal and humble life, which Christ the Lord elected for Himself, and which His Virgin Mother also chose,”³¹ are better signs of the undying fidelity and dedication of marriage—the marriage of Christ to his church—than the marriages of married people.³²

This fact indicates the complex and sophisticated pattern of analogy and equivocation needed to express adequately the nature of religious life as it models and enacts the spousal love

of Christ for his church, which itself involves a complex equivocal semantics relating the meaning of Christ and his church, as spouses, to the meaning of human marriage. The concrete nature of earthly human marriage in all its dimensions, including physical, psychological, and cultural ones, supplies one baseline of meaning for the whole interplay of meanings. The specific spiritual character of the marriage of Christ to his bride the church, which as incarnational embraces the physical, supplies the other baseline of meaning. Keeping the whole array in mind, as each semantic part plays its role, is the challenge for pondering things rightly and drawing practical conclusions from the fact that religious life signifies a marriage and does so in a way superior to the marriages present in the world, whose meaning informs and articulates, in part, that religious life.

This complex array of equivocal signification regarding marriage is not a matter merely of ideas, abstractions, or theory, however inspirational and high-sounding. It is a matter of expressing the realities accurately. Thus our connection through reflection and understanding to the reality of religious life, as it is and as it should be, is enhanced by appreciating and exploring the role that that the full material meaning of ordinary marriage plays in the distinct but related meaning of religious life.

This point brings the two paradoxes of this paper together. The first paradox about the built-in tendencies in the structures and practices of religious life toward corruption apart from a fullness of grace can find a partial effective remedy by applying deliberately to actual religious life the full material meaning of ordinary marriage, a meaning which is involved in the proper and specific meaning of religious life itself as a sign and living out already in the present age of the marriage of Christ and his church.³³ This exercise, if itself performed under the influence of grace, which works in the particulars of life, has the potential to inform and stamp the operating

understanding of religious life in a way that can encourage effective renewal through concrete acts of love. The second paradox regarding the complex equivocality of marriage in the meaning of religious life provides the conceptual warrant for the feasibility of the project.

By “the full material meaning of ordinary marriage” as the one baseline meaning for the spousal character of consecrated life, I have in mind a whole range of conditions and circumstances normally constituting family life that give it its specific texture and tone, that provide it with its characteristic joys and challenges. This includes physical closeness and intimacy between family members and a relative inescapability of the demands of love, including cooperation in the maintenance of the home, caring and concern for spouses and children around-the-clock, and so on. This range of conditions and circumstances with their attendant responsibilities and expectations normal to marriage and family life in ordinary and human ways tends to build love and bring maturity to family members, both spouses and children. There is no claim here of perfection of love in normal marriage and family life. The “vocations crisis” in marriage, as measured merely by high divorce rates and broken homes among couples married in the church apart from any gauge of seriously dysfunctional marriages, rivals in its own way the vocations problems in religious life. What I am trying to describe, nonetheless, is real and observable in countless families in their daily lives, however lived imperfectly. What I am trying to describe, indeed, is an arena of imperfect, but genuine, love, whose dynamics demand with relative immediacy and concreteness, and also regularly elicit more or less successfully, responsible and loving behavior and growth in marriage and family life.³⁴

The deliberate and developed appropriate application of the meaning of ordinary married and family life to religious life for the sake of inspiring heightened love as an engine of renewal does not entail abandoning or substituting any of the distinctive structures, conditions, and

circumstances of consecrated life, for activities necessary and common to ordinary family life. It is rather a matter of the living of religious life in a manner informed and stamped by the concrete and inescapable imperatives of love that show themselves tangibly and almost automatically in married and family life. For example, religious should love the actual people whom they serve, whether in active apostolates or at a physical distance by strictly spiritual means such as prayer, with the force of love that family members feel when bound by marriage, blood, and adoption.³⁵

Our documents lay great stress on co-operation within community life for effective renewal of religious life. *Perfectae Caritatis* states unequivocally that “[s]uccessful renewal and proper adaptation cannot be achieved unless every member of a community cooperates” and makes the further point beyond cooperation that when God’s love is present “a religious community is a true family gathered in the Lord’s name and rejoicing in his presence.”³⁶ *Vita Consecrata* quotes Paul VI’s encyclical letter *Ecclesiam Suam* that “dialogue is the new name of charity” and adds that the “consecrated life, by the fact that it promotes the value of fraternal life, provides a privileged experience of dialogue.”³⁷ The increasingly complex relationships of cooperation, friendship, and true family—in religious life, as in all life—require reciprocity and mutual regard. In married life, so long as one partner shuts down or backs out, there is no recourse. In normal married life partners cannot get too far away from each other physically or emotionally, which does not always make life easy but makes cooperation, dialogue and mutual assistance a daily and inescapable reality unless there is massive breakdown in the marriage. In a similar way, child-rearing, which parents frequently describe as the most difficult task of life, requires the personal mutual engagement with offspring. Cooperation, friendship, genuine family life in religious communities, where individuals are called together by God’s choice

rather than through the agency of romance, blood or adoption, nevertheless need the same level of loving reciprocity forged in the demands of daily life for constant renewal of life and especially for meeting the challenges of adaptation to new conditions. The first paradox shows itself again here, however, that the bonds of communal life, as spiritual bonds depending on grace to thrive, can without an abundance of grace be less than what they should be, even in the natural order. Efforts by individuals to effect reform within established communities, however correct and well-meaning, can be counter-productive, unless accompanied by uncommon gifts of sanctity, as with a holy founder. The stamp of the required cooperation and loving reciprocity marking normal family life on the self-understanding of religious communities offers prospects of more effective efforts at on-going renewal, namely, ones that are cooperative and familial in character.

Jordan of Saxony, who succeeded Saint Dominic as Master of the Order, wrote in an encyclical letter of May, 1233:

We say a lot, we do a lot, we endure a tremendous lot, which would make us so much richer in virtue, so much more fruitful in merit, if only charity abounded in our hearts, directing and ordering everything towards our proper goal, which is God. But as it is, our minds are too often occupied with futile thoughts, our feelings drawn by futile desires, we do not carry through to its end the sifting and purging of our hearts' purposes, so it is hardly surprising that we are so slow to accomplish anything, so sluggish is our ascent towards perfection.³⁸

This paper makes a modest proposal for recourse by appreciation and recognition to the normal conditions of the life of the lay faithful, particularly those who are married and raising children, for instilling in religious for the sake of renewal of life re-dedication and re-commitment to the living out in concrete and inescapable ways the loving practices that specifically constitute religious life, akin to the daily inescapable ways that fill lay married and family life. In facing the challenges of contemporary renewal of religious life, Jordan's lament should be keenly felt.

Why with all the richness that constitutes both the meaning and the specific practices of consecrated life is genuine contemporary renewal so elusive? The call to belong exclusively to Christ battles tendencies to belong merely to oneself. It does so through the love that pulls one out of oneself to Christ and to those for whom Christ died. This paper has proposed one specific and practical way—it is hoped—to actualize love for the pressing needs of constant and contemporary renewal of religious life.

¹ The “Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life,” referred to hereafter by its Latin title *Perfectae Caritatis* and cited as *PC*, was promulgated on October 28, 1965. All documents of the Second Vatican Council are cited and quoted from Walter M. Abbott, S.J., general editor, *The Documents of Vatican II: All Sixteen Official Texts Promulgated by the Ecumenical Council 1963-1965 Translated from the Latin*, introduction by Lawrence Cardinal Shehan, translations directed by Joseph Gallagher (London and Dublin: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966) by section and page number.

² “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,” §42 (p. 70); hereafter referred to by its Latin title *Lumen Gentium* and cited as *LG*. This decree was promulgated November 21, 1964.

³ *LG* §42 (p. 71). This quotation regards the universal call to holiness; specific reference to the fundamental role of the perfection of charity in consecrated life is abundantly given in chapter 6 of the Decree, where §44 (page 74) gives one early instance: “The faithful of Christ can bind themselves to the three previously mentioned counsels either by vows, or by other sacred bonds which are like vows in their purpose. Through such a bond a person is totally dedicated to God by an act of supreme love, and is committed to the honor and service of God under a new and special title.” See further in §44 (pages 74-5) and at §45 (page 76): “For by that practice [of the evangelical counsels] is uniquely fostered the perfection of love for God and neighbor.” See also §46 (page 77).

⁴ *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation “Vita Consecrata” of the Holy Father John Paul II to the Bishops and Clergy, Religious Orders and Congregations, Societies of Apostolic Life, Secular Institutes, and all the Faithful on the Consecrated Life and Its Mission in the Church and in the World* (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 1996), §§15-16 (page 24), promulgated on March 25, 1996. All citations and quotations are from this volume by section and page number, hereafter cited as *VC*. See also *VC* §42 (page 72): “Love led Christ to the gift of self, even to the supreme sacrifice of the Cross. So too, among this disciples, *there can be no true unity without that unconditional mutual love which demands a readiness to serve others generously, a willingness to welcome them as they are, without ‘judging’ them (cf. Mt 7:1-2), and an ability to forgive up to ‘seventy times seven’ (Mt 18:22)*” (emphasis in the text).

⁵ Quoted from the Office of Readings for August 8 in *The Liturgy of the Hours according to the Roman Rite*, volume IV, Ordinary Time, Weeks 18-34 (New York: Catholic Book Publishing, 1975), page 1302.

⁶ On the need for constant renewal within religious life, see *VC* §109 (page 196): “You know well that you have set out on a journey of continual conversion, of exclusive dedication to the love of God and of your brothers and sisters, in order to bear ever more splendid witness to the grace which transfigures Christian life.” See, also §110 (page 198 on “day by day” renewal in Christ).

⁷ Cf. *PC* §1 (pages 467-8) with *VC* §2 (page 4), §4 (page 7), and §13 (page 19).

⁸ For example, *VC* makes explicit reference to difficulties facing religious life since the Council (§2 [pages 4-5]; §3 [page 6]; §13 [page 18]; makes more explicit reference to technocratic, utilitarian, individualistic, secularistic and relativistic cultural conditions that seem to have accelerated since the nineteen-sixties (§43 [page 74]; §67 [page 121]; §85 [page 156]; §§87-92 [pages 159-67]; §103 [page 187]; §104 [page 190]); notes the emergence of new religious orders and ecclesial communities, the work done to rewrite constitutions and other foundational documents by religious institutes, and the formation of federations and unions of religious communities (§56 [page 96]; §62 [page 109]); considers the role of feminism in the church and society (§58 [page 99]); and

emphasizes the need for fidelity to the Magisterium (§46 [page 79]; §47 [pages 80-1]). For an example of one very specific issue, the wearing of religious habits, *PC* §17 (page 478) calls for one form of renewal, stating that “religious habits should be simple and modest, at once poor and becoming. They should meet the requirements of health and be suited to the circumstances of the time and place as well as to the services required by those who wear them.” It goes on to mandate that “Habits of men and women which do not correspond to those norms are to be changed.” *VC* §25 (page 41) the effects of change are obvious in a call for another form of renewal: “Since the habit is a sign of consecration, poverty, and membership in a particular Religious family, I join the Fathers of the Synod in strongly recommending to men and women religious that they wear their proper habit, suitably adapted to conditions of time and place. Where valid reasons of their apostolate call for it, Religious, in conformity with the norms of their Institute, may also dress in a simple and modest manner, with an appropriate symbol, in such a way that their consecration is recognizable.”

⁹ These are not synonymous pairings but they are close enough in meaning to serve the present analysis.

¹⁰ *Phaedo* 60b1-c7, quoted from the translation of G. M. A. Grube in Plato, *Complete Works*, edited with introduction and notes by John M. Cooper (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), page 52.

¹¹ This basic point holds notwithstanding the further issue of properly directed love or longing. This further, fundamental, issue is well covered in our documents, which are very articulate about the guides, norms, and measures of properly directed love. *PC* §2 (page 468), e.g., includes as principles for appropriate renewal (a) the gospel and as the fundamental norm and “supreme law” and (b) the specific charisms of individual communities. The revision of constitutions and other foundational documents required by the Council has sharpened and focused these documents as guides and measures of religious life (*PC* §3 [page 469]). There is no lack of solid and inspirational direction for rightly directed love and desire in religious life.

¹² *VC* §§17-22 (pages 26-36) emphasizes in a beautiful way the Trinitarian life of love and community as it relates to consecrated life.

¹³ *VC* §§26-27 (pages 42-5) emphasizes the eschatological dimensions of consecrated life.

¹⁴ *LG* §44 (page 75).

¹⁵ This life lived “for God alone not only by dying to sin (cf. Rom. 6:11) but also by renouncing the world” is what *PC* §5 (page 470) calls “an ampler manifestation” of baptismal consecration.

¹⁶ *PC* §1 (page 467).

¹⁷ *VC* §63 (pages 112-3; emphasis in the text); §48 (page 84); see also, *VC* §105 (page 191): “What would become of the world if there were no Religious”? Beyond all superficial assessments of its usefulness, the consecrated life is important precisely in its being *unbounded generosity and love*, and this all the more so in a world that risks being suffocated in the whirlpool of the ephemeral” (emphasis in the text). *L’Osservatore Romano* reported on February 4, 2008 that the overall number of men and women religious in the church worldwide was 945,210, down by 94,790 from one year before.

¹⁸ *VC* §63 (pages 113-4).

¹⁹ This is true even in the United States, which compared to the pervasive secularism of Western Europe, is relatively religious in outlook and practice.

²⁰ The pressing demands for contemporary renewal of religious life, whose fruit, it is trusted, would include an increase of vocations, include this issue of biodiversity within the church. Religious communities cannot become like the ivory-billed woodpecker in Alabama (also known as the “Lord God Bird” for the reaction seeing one evoked due to its size and beauty), possibly glimpsed from time to time. The argument that follows depends on this biodiversity, where the different ways of life in the church support one another, as *VC* §31 (page 52) points out: “The vocations to the lay life, to the ordained ministry and to the consecrated life can be considered paradigmatic, inasmuch as all particular vocations, considered separately or as a whole, lead back to them, in accordance with the richness of God’s gift. These vocations are also at service to one another, for the growth of the Body of Christ in history and for its mission in the world.”

²¹ *LG* §40 (pages 66-7) on the universal call to holiness in loving service to each other states: “The Lord Jesus, the divine Teacher and Model of all perfection, preached holiness of life to each and every one of His disciples, regardless of their situation: ‘You therefore are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect’ (Mt. 5:48). He Himself stands as the Author and Finisher of the holiness of life. For he sent the Holy Spirit upon all men that He might inspire them from within to love God with their whole heart and their whole soul, with all their mind and all their strength (cf. Mk. 12:30) and that they might love one another as Christ loved them (cf. Jn. 13:34; 15:12). . . . Thus it is evident to everyone that all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status are called to the

fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity. By this holiness a more human way of life is promoted even in this earthly society.”

²² See, e.g., *Republic* 2.380e3-381c10.

²³ The Platonic principle is used in its original form since the corresponding notion, that the corruption of the special and the distinctive is special and distinctive, while true, does not capture the point.

²⁴ “He loved poverty very much, and zealously incited the brethren to have a similar love. Asked how he [Brother John of Spain] knew this, he answered that Brother Dominic gloried in the poorest clothing, and that, having given up all temporal things, he often exhorted the brethren to love poverty, and this is the presence of the witness.” *Saint Dominic: Biographical Documents*, edited with an introduction by Francis C. Lehner, O.P. (Washington, D. C.: The Thomist Press, 1964), page 117; see also pages 110; 116; 120-1; 126; 129-30; 134; and 140.

²⁵ *Biographical Documents*, pages 110; 118; 120; 126; and 143.

²⁶ *PC* §2 (page 468). *VC* §93 (pages 167-8) beautifully connects the perfection of charity to saintly founders in a passage worth quoting at length: “One of the concerns frequently expressed at the Synod was that the consecrated life should be nourished *from the wellspring of a sound and deep spirituality*. This is a primary requirement, inscribed in the very essence of the consecrated life by the fact that, just as every baptized person, and indeed even more so, those who profess the evangelical counsels must aspire with all their strength to the perfection of charity. This commitment is clearly evidenced in the many examples of holy founders and foundresses, and of so many consecrated persons who have borne faithful witness to Christ to the point of martyrdom. To tend toward holiness: this is in summary the programme of every consecrated life, particularly in the perspective of its renewal on the threshold of the Third Millennium” (emphasis in the text).

²⁷ *LG* §44 (page 75); cf. *PC* §12 (page 474) regarding the chastity of religious life: “For it liberates the human heart in a unique way (cf. 1 Cor. 7:32-35) and causes it to burn with greater love for God and all mankind.”

²⁸ *LG* §43 (pages 73-4).

²⁹ *LG* §44 (page 74).

³⁰ *PC* §12 (page 474). *VC* §34 (page 57) states: “In the consecrated life, particular importance attaches to the spousal meaning, which recalls the Church’s duty to be completely and exclusively devoted to her Spouse, from whom she receives every good thing. This spousal dimension, which is a part of all consecrated life, has a particular meaning for women, who find therein their feminine identity and as it were discover the special genius of their relationship with the Lord.” It also notes the spiritual character of this spousal relationship at *VC* §32 (page 32) where the “*objective superiority*” (emphasis in the text) of consecrated life is mentioned: “The consecrated life proclaims and in a certain way anticipates the future age, when the fullness of the Kingdom of heaven, already present in its first fruits and in mystery, will be achieved, and with the children of the resurrection will take neither wife nor husband, but will be like the angels of God (cf. *Mt* 22:30).”

³¹ *LG* §46 (page 77).

³² The documents, of course, recognize that Christian marriage is a sign of Christ’s spousal love of the church. *LG* §41 (page 69), e.g., states how “married couples and Christian parents . . . can offer all men an example of unwearied and generous love, build up the brotherhood of charity, and stand as witnesses to and cooperators in the fruitfulness of Holy Mother Church. By such lives, they signify and share in that very love with which Christ loved his Bride and because of which he delivered Himself up on her behalf.”

³³ That the spousal meaning in consecrated life is meant in tangible and genuine ways, and not just as an idea or ideal, is indicated by *VC* §34 (page 57), which relates this matter in particular to women religious: “In the consecrated life, particular importance attaches to the spousal meaning, which recalls the Church’s duty to be completely and exclusively devoted to her Spouse, from whom she receives every good thing. This spousal dimension which is part of all consecrated life, has a particular meaning for women, who find therein their feminine identity and as it were discover the special genius of their relationship with the Lord.”

³⁴ One of my favorite examples of this dynamic is witnessing the transformation of students I have known upon from their university days after a few years of assuming the responsibilities of marriage and family. This transformation is remarkable, especially in the case of some men.

³⁵ Saint John Bosco in a letter writes: “First of all, if we wish to appear concerned about the true happiness of our foster children and if we would move them to fulfill their duties, you must never forget that you are taking the place of the parents of these beloved young people. I have always labored lovingly for them, and carried out my priestly duties with zeal. And the whole Salesian society has done this with me. . . . Let us regard these boys over whom we have some authority as our own sons. Let us place ourselves in their service. Let us be ashamed to assume an attitude of superiority. Let us not rule over them except for the purpose of serving them better.” Quoted

from the Office of Readings for January 31 in *The Liturgy of the Hours according to the Roman Rite*, volume III, Ordinary Time, Weeks 1-17 (New York: Catholic Book Publishing, 1975), page 1338.

³⁶ *PC* §4 (page 469); §15 (page 477).

³⁷ *VC* §74 (page 134).

³⁸ *Early Dominicans: Selected Writings*, edited with an introduction by Simon Tugwell, O.P. (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), page 124.