



**UNIVERSIDADE CATÓLICA PORTUGUESA**  
**FACULDADE DE TEOLOGIA**

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**NGOZI THERESA IHEOMA**

**The Relevance of Consecrated Life in the Contemporary  
Society**

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**sob orientação de:**  
**Professor Doutor Luís Miguel Figueiredo Rodrigues**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Church is experiencing profound growth in the area of consecrated life. This seduction by God of those created in his own image and likeness is the aim of this investigation notwithstanding its complexity in terms of popular perception amongst people of all faith and the magisterial teaching of the Church. Therefore, this work presents a comparative study with a holistic approach considering scripture, historical and oral tradition within the context of the universal call to holiness especially that of those called to special vocation or consecrated life.

Also, the investigation has its starting point with the Magisterium of the Church as outlined by the Second Vatican Council, with quantitative data gathered across a section of Nigerian and Portuguese people. The research includes Roman Catholics, Protestants, Evangelicals and an atheist.

The methodology includes literature reviews, the expository method and the use of questionnaires. Additionally, this study attests to the aesthetic beauty and the relevance of consecrated life in our contemporary society. In a nutshell, consecrated life is against all form of idolatry and discrimination. It is a life that celebrates real human values, such as obedience, chastity, poverty in spirit, meekness, self-emptying, freedom against human trafficking, abuse and promotes the dignity of all God's children.

**Keywords:** Consecrated life; Magisterium; Catholic Church; Second Vatican Council; Relevance; Contemporary society; Consecration. Evangelical Counsels: chastity, poverty and obedience.



## RESUMO

A Igreja experimenta um profundo crescimento na área da vida consagrada. Optamos por escolher como núcleo desta investigação o tema da consagração a Deus vivida por aqueles e aquelas que escolheram esta forma de vida, seduzidos por Deus. Tendo em conta a complexidade que ela supõe entre a compreensão popular de pessoas de todas as confissões e o ensinamento de magistério da Igreja, este trabalho apresenta um estudo comparativo, que privilegia uma abordagem holística, considerando a escritura, a tradição histórica e oral dentro do contexto do chamamento universal à santidade, especialmente daqueles (as) chamados (as) à vocação especial ou à vida consagrada.

Além disso, a investigação tem seu ponto de partida no Magistério da Igreja, conforme delineado pelo Concílio Vaticano II, com dados qualitativos recolhidos no contexto nigeriano e português.

A metodologia inclui revisões de literatura, o método expositivo e o uso de questionários. Além disso, este estudo atesta a beleza estética e a relevância da vida consagrada na nossa sociedade contemporânea. Em suma, a vida consagrada é contra toda a forma de idolatria e discriminação. É uma vida que celebra verdadeiros valores humanos, como obediência, castidade, pobreza de espírito, mansidão, autoesvaziamento, liberdade contra o tráfico humano e os abusos, e promoção da dignidade de todos os filhos de Deus.

**Palavras-chave:** Vida Consagrada; Magistério; Igreja Católica; Concílio Vaticano II; Relevância; Sociedade Contemporânea; Consagração; Conselhos Evangélicos; Castidade, Pobreza e Obediência.



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT .....	1
ABSTRACT .....	3
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	7
ABBREVIATIONS.....	9
INTRODUCTION .....	11
1. UNDERSTANDING CONSECRATED LIFE .....	15
<b>1.1. Meaning of the Concept .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>1.2. Tracing the origin of consecrated life .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<i>1.2.1. Consecration in the Scripture .....</i>	<i>18</i>
1.2.1.1. Consecration in the Old Testament .....	19
1.2.1.2. Consecration in the New Testament.....	23
<b>1.3. The Church Fathers.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<i>1.3.1. Saint Ambrose (340 – 397).....</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>1.3.2. Saint Augustine (354 – 386).....</i>	<i>34</i>
<b>1.4. The Magisterium.....</b>	<b>37</b>
<i>1.4.1. Vita Consecrata.....</i>	<i>42</i>
<i>1.4.2. Pontifical homilies.....</i>	<i>47</i>
1.4.2.1. Homilies of John Paul II.....	47
1.4.2.2. Homilies of Benedict XVI.....	52
1.4.2.3. Homilies of Francis .....	54
2. THE RELEVANCE OF CONSECRATED LIFE IN THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY .....	61
<b>2.1. Different Vocations in the Church .....</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>2.2. Evangelical Counsels .....</b>	<b>73</b>
2.2.1. <i>Chastity.....</i>	<i>75</i>
2.2.2. <i>Poverty .....</i>	<i>77</i>
2.2.3. <i>Obedience.....</i>	<i>79</i>
<b>2.3. Challenges facing Consecrated Life .....</b>	<b>82</b>
3. PERCEPTION ABOUT THE CONSECRATED LIFE.....	87
<b>3.1. <i>Auditus fidei</i> .....</b>	<b>87</b>

<b>3.2. Actio fidei .....</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>3.4. Fidei ontology.....</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>3.5. Research protocol.....</b>	<b>94</b>
3.5.1. Knowledge of respondents about Consecrated life .....	100
3.5.2. Perception of the importance of Consecrated people .....	120
3.5.3. Perception of the mission of Consecrated people .....	130
<b>3.6. Results of the open questions .....</b>	<b>139</b>
<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>155</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>161</b>
<b>ANNEX.....</b>	<b>171</b>

## Abbreviations

### DOCUMENTS OF THE CHURCH MAGISTERIUM

- LG** Ecumenical Council. Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* (21<sup>st</sup> of November 1964).
- GS** Ecumenical Council. Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes* (7<sup>th</sup> of December 1965).
- PC** Ecumenical Council. Vatican II, Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life *Perfectae Caritatis* (28<sup>th</sup> of October 1965).
- ET** Paulo VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelica Testificatio* (29<sup>th</sup> of June 1971).
- EN** Paulo VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8<sup>th</sup> of December 1975).
- CCE** *Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae* (15<sup>th</sup> of August 1997).
- RD** John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptionis Donum* (25<sup>th</sup> of March 1984).
- Can** Code of Canon Law (25<sup>th</sup> of January 1986).
- ChL** John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (30<sup>th</sup> of December 1988).
- VC** John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (25<sup>th</sup> of March 1996).
- FR** John Paulo II, Encyclical *Fides et Ratio* (14<sup>th</sup> of September 1998).
- LS** Francis, Encyclica *Laudato Si* (24<sup>th</sup> of May 2015).
- PG** *Patrologiae Cursus Completus Series Graeca* (Greek Patrology).
- PL** *Patrologiae Cursus Completus Series Latina* (Latin Patrology).



## INTRODUCTION

I will argue in this paper that consecrated life is a purpose driven life in obedience to the Father's will through years of discernment and formation that encompasses, human spiritual, educational and psychology evaluation and formation. Accordingly, "in every age there have been men and women who, obedient to the Father's call to the prompting of the Spirit, have chosen this special way of following Christ, in order to devote themselves to him with an *undivided* heart (cf. 1 Cor 7: 34)" (VC 1). Being inspired by this reference, I intend to explore the understanding of consecrated life presented by the Magisterium and the perception of the people on this "special" vocation. However, the intention of this research is not really to do a profound study on the concept of consecrated life, or special vocation, rather to contribute in explaining the meaning of consecration, tracing its biblical origin because of its intrinsic relationship with consecrated life.

This particular vocation of total self-giving has a total new meaning following the kenosis of Christ. Although it is present in different cultures, religions and epochs as history testifies (cf. VC 2)<sup>1</sup>. It is pertinent to note that the consecrated life in question is that present in the Roman Catholic Church, where men and women freely without coercion, force or undue pressure of bodily harm voluntarily respond to God's invitation to a life completely dedicated to him in a radical and prophetic way. In this sense, they dedicate their whole life to God by a special consecration, living the very way Jesus Christ lived on earth – chaste, poor and obedient. Thus, this is referred as the evangelical counsels which they profess as a bond or vow of their union of life that eventually materialize into a specific mission.

In a globalized world and concretely in our contemporary society where there are remarkable innovations in all aspect of human life: physical, spiritual and social, there are notable varieties of life-styles and works with many positive aspects as a result of different

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. J. C. R. García Paredes, *Teología de la Vida Religiosa* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 2000), 1.

experiences, for example, there are a lot of social institutes and organizations that dedicate themselves in the integral human promotion, increase in new forms of solidarity and involvement, fraternal communion, legitimate defense of human rights and promotion of peace and justice, while others in the negative aspect leads to exploration, injustice and dehumanization. Amidst all these complex situations, some important questions like the following are to be raised: why this consecration when we all are consecrated by the sacrament of Baptism? What is different in their work since institutions in the society or the civil servants can even do “better” than them... “People can serve God anywhere without being in the religious institutes”. The scandals caused by their unfaithful life as regards to the fidelity to the vows, lack of perseverance that makes many to live their institutes in the later years of their lives and the social negative influences, fear, preconcert attitudes that discourage the youths from making this option of total consecration, leading to the consideration of this specific vocation as outmoded. In addition, it is important to mention that in the global south, Africa, Asia and South America many young people are freely choosing the consecrated life, while in the global north the reverse is the case.

In spite of all these uncertainties, scientific progress in different perspectives and instabilities, we can say that there is something different between these social institutions and consecrated life in terms of its origin. It is worthwhile to note that the social institutions were created by man to promote and offer a better living to the citizens, for example, to create employments for the citizens, for economic purposes and for development of the society. In the same perspective, pope John Paul II stated in the introduction to his apostolic exhortation *Evangelica Testificatio* “the Council recognized *this special gift* (the consecrated life) as having a choice place(d) in the life of the Church, because it enables those who have received it to be more closely conformed to “*that manner of virginal and humble life which Christ the Lord elected for Himself, and which His Virgin Mother also chose*”.

Therefore, the intent of this research will focus on the effects and show the relevance of this vocation. This research will raise and compare what the Church teaches about consecrated life with the perception of the respondents from Nigeria and Portugal. In other words, our primary objective is to describe and analyze what Church magisterium says about consecrated life, its specific characteristics and mission. Consequently, this introduces us to a comparative study with the understanding of the respondents referred above.

In order to achieve our objectives, we applied descriptive method - this implies the exposition of the investigation. Another method is historical – which leads us to trace the biblical and non-biblical origin of consecration. Next is hermeneutic method, in the sense that it enables us to make good explanation and interpretation of the ideas gotten from the sources. We also formulated questionnaires for collection of data needed for the research with the aim to know the perception of the respective respondents from both countries which leads to its systematic and objective analysis.

Furthermore, the research is divided into two major parts, the first part is composed of two chapters. The first chapter is the exposition on the concept of consecration, the literal, biblical and non-biblical significance of the term. I will be referencing the Church Fathers: Ambrose and Augustine that wrote something similar to this state of life in their era. We choose them because of geographical reason (Orient and Occident) and their “prominence” in the history of the Church. In the second chapter, we shall explore the relevance of the consecrated life in our contemporary society. In this chapter, the following points are to be discussed: different vocations, evangelical Counsels and the challenges facing consecrated life.

The third chapter with the theme: the perception of consecrated life is the second part of the research and also the primary objective of this work. In this chapter, we intend to know the perception of the respondents in both countries about consecrated life through the questionnaires we formulated. Here we will explain that the free gift of God has a rational

implication, or rather, that faith and reason compliments each other, thus, comparing it with our research, we consider it as “theory and practical” where “theory” has been revealed to us by historical life of Jesus Christ and the “practical” is the response to this divine gift. This leads us to an exposition of an article titled: *A teologia como caminho: Considerações sobre o método teológico* by João Duque that we considered useful for a better comprehension of the theological methods. Later in this chapter, we will describe the methodology applied, what we want to know in the questionnaires formulated and finally, the systematic analysis of the data collected. It’s obvious that our analysis will permit us to make a critical evaluation and a comparable research as aimed to realize. Furthermore, we will be acknowledging the divergences and common elements as regards the “theory” presented by the Magisterium and the perception of the respondents about consecrated life. From the result of this research, we will conclude with our contribution as regards consecrated life.

We do not doubt the existence of many works and books written about the consecrated life. Nevertheless, they are few or even none has attempted to know the perception of the people about this life. It is as the result of this that I thought it wise to make this comparative research, to re-enforce its value and encourage its living.

## 1. UNDERSTANDING CONSECRATED LIFE

Created in the image and likeness of God, man is by nature a religious being. Conscious of his mortality and contingent nature, he tends therefore to seek and be in communion with something superior or above him, as noted by Friedrich Schleiermacher<sup>2</sup>. This absolute being above him could be a Divinity or other earthly forces. This realization or self-awareness of his contingency is never a defense mechanism. However, it is a motive to look further for the real and profound significance of his or her existence. In his curiosity, subjects him or herself to self-examination, why are we here, what is the ultimate destination and how do we get there? By raising these existential questions, he aligns himself into a relation with the divine. This relationship draws him into a deeper union with the divine being for total communion, fertility, good harvest, protection and self-actualization. By so doing, “man, begins his process of divination through Christ by consecrating himself or herself in the name of God, by a solemn vow. It is a sacrifice in so far as he dies to the world that he may live for God<sup>3</sup>. Nevertheless, we can say that there is a general inclination to or longing of a union with God and the tendency to “personal perfection”<sup>4</sup>. As Augustine of Hippo opined, “our hearts are restless until the rest in Thee” Therefore, the concept of consecration will be explored scripturally and in the light of the Patristics; thereby presenting its theology and significance.

In my research to justify the subject matter, I consider relevant the following questions that will enable me to explain the concept in our research: what do we understand by the word consecration? What are the essential features inherent in it? Is it inevitably a

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<sup>2</sup> Winston L. King, “Religion,” in *Macmillan Compendium: World Religions*, Simon & Schuster Macmillan. (New York: Macmillan Library Reference USA, 1998), 929-933; Cf. A. P. Ribeiro, “Consagração ao Coração Imaculado de Maria: uma proposta pastoral à luz de Fátima,” in AA. VV., *A Pastoral de Fátima. Actas do I Encontro Internacional sobre a Pastoral de Fátima, no 75.º Aniversário das Aparições* (Fátima: Santuário de Fátima, 1993), 170.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Agostinho, *A Cidade de Deus* vol. II, X, 6. (Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1993), 899.

<sup>4</sup> “Religious life” in *Catholic Encyclopedia*, accessed October 26, 2017, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12748b.htm>.

deprivation of something? Can we take it as a “forced abandonment” of something precious to us? Could it be understood in terms of sacrifice? What is the objective of such act? Guided by these and many other provocative questions, can it be that our investigation points another way? Or the data we are able to collect direct us to a different dimension? Our investigation would surely expose us to different dimensions and meanings of the Consecrated Life.

### **1.1. Meaning of the Concept**

Etymologically, the word “consecrate” has its origin in Latin, *sacrare* to ‘dedicate’ or “make sacred or declare sacred by certain ceremonies or rites” from consecrates, the past participle of consecrare “to make holy, devote”. [[www.etymonline.com](http://www.etymonline.com)]. Therefore, the word consecration is an act of making or declaring something sacred, dedicating it to a sacred use or purpose that is not its normal or common use. In this case, and in different situations, namely, the religious consecration of men and women in the religious order, they are dedicated to God<sup>5</sup>. The semantic understanding of the word is very vast depending on the aspects and circumstances we may intend to look at or explore. Generally, it is often used in a religious context. Consecration, in Latin as well – *consecration, - onis*, is the act of dedicating a person or something to serve a divinity<sup>6</sup>. It is an act to making something sacred in a religious ceremony that implies the proclamation of one’s faith and the profession of the evangelical counsels in case of consecration in the Religious Order. For example, in the religious perspective, there exists a new and “exclusive” relationship that is built, having its origin in God, from where it gains its value. All the same, we can say that it’s an offering of oneself, things or objects to God and for His glory and services, for our personal and universal

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. A.S. Hornby, *Oxford Advance Learners Dictionary of Current English* (Britain: Oxford University Press, 1986), 248.

<sup>6</sup> J. Rovira, “Consagração” in *A Consagração como dedicação na mensagem de Fátima*, cord. J. C. Carvalho. (Fátima: Santuário de Fátima, 2014), 173.

sanctification<sup>7</sup>. Obviously, the aim of any consecration is to be in relationship with the sacred – *Ordo ad sactum*<sup>8</sup>.

Due to the vast understanding of this topic, we will limit our research on the religious consecrated life, in the context or association of words that signifies it as an offering, devotion, reparation or sanctification. In addition, the biblical background will help clarify consecration as a condition, a dedication not necessarily on the institutional or ministerial dimension it may have acquired, but based on the general context of our vocation: a call to sanctity from our baptism, a call which takes different forms according to one's vocation in God's plan<sup>9</sup>.

## **1.2. Tracing the origin of consecrated life**

Traditionally, “the act of consecration results in an object being given a veridical status as ‘holy’ defined provisionally, as: Holy being used as an adjective to describe an object that has been set apart for a Godly use”<sup>10</sup>. Therefore, consecration should be understood in the context and etymology of the term without any negative dichotomous attitude as stated in canons 107 and 948 of the Code of Canon Law, 1917. In these canons, the lay state of life is seen as the opposite of consecrated life, or something below it in terms and degrees of importance. However, the theology of communion promoted in the Second Vatican Council exceeds this polarized conception because its foundation is the Sacred Scripture. More so, from our biblical understanding, consecration has to do with all that is required in a new relationship. Indeed, it is a new dynamic and creative way of living. It has to do with double mediation or movement. The descending movement refers to God's initiative and the

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<sup>7</sup> J. De Finance, “Consagração” in *A Consagração como dedicação na mensagem de Fátima*, cord. J. C. Carvalho (Fátima: Santuário de Fátima, 2014), 85.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. A.P. Ribeiro, “Consagração ao Coração de Maria: uma proposta pastoral à luz de Fátima”, in *A pastoral de Fátima. Actas do I Encontro Internacional sobre a Pastoral de Fátima, no 75. Aniversário das Aparições*. (Fátima: Santuário de Fátima, 1993), 170.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. J.C. Carvalho, “A consagração em Israel,” 13-14.

<sup>10</sup> James M. Arcadi, “A Theory of Consecration: A Philosophical Exposition of a Biblical Phenomenon,” *Heythrop Journal* (2013): 913.

ascending movement refers to man's response out of his free will or liberty<sup>11</sup>. Thus, a general vision sees it as an interpersonal phenomenon, in which the divine being and the human being enter into a dialogue composed of a loving call from above and a free response from below which can thus no longer be seen as a monologue<sup>12</sup>.

Consecration of God is the activity by which God in His grace dedicates and sanctifies to Himself an individual, the World or other things of the world. By analogy, in this movement or process, it is God's initiative which can get its "full" realization if the person in question accepts this invitation or grace offered by God. Although, His will is that we do not put any resistance to the operation of this process, but that we leave ourselves to be elevated and involved by His grace, knowing that man cannot be separated from his creator. The ontological existence of man depends on God. Analogically, for consecration to take place, there is a certain level of cooperation between man and God<sup>13</sup>. Furthermore, there is a determined effort on the part of the consecrated to live coherently as regards his or her vocation or consecration<sup>14</sup>.

### *1.2.1. Consecration in the Scripture*

There are many instances of Consecration of things and persons in the Sacred Scripture as confirmed in the biblical passages of the Old Testament (cf. Ex. 13:2ff; Ex. 19:10-22; Ex. 29:22-34, etc.). According to J. C. Carvalho, there are other words that have an equivalent meaning and notion of consecration for example, dedication, benediction and ordination. There is a basic understanding that a certain reality going through any of these processes is elevated and it takes on a whole new symbolic meaning. There is a newly

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. J.C. Carvalho, "A consagração em Israel," 14-15.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. A. P. Ribeiro, "Consagração ao Coração Imaculado de Maria: uma proposta pastoral à luz de Fátima", in *A Pastoral de Fátima. Actas do I Encontro Internacional sobre a Pastoral de Fátima, no 75.º Aniversário das Aparições*, 169-171.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. J.C. Carvalho, "A consagração em Israel," 19. Cf. A. P. Ribeiro, "Consagração ao Coração Imaculado de Maria," 171.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. J. De Finance, "Consagração," 89.

established conscientious relationship between the consecrated person and God to whom the person is consecrated. This is never a magical act. On this ground, it is understood that the word is used in different perspectives or circumstances. From the original Hebraic word, *barak* (blessing, to bless), it has a wider meaning than when it is applied as blessing or consecration<sup>15</sup>.

#### 1.2.1.1. Consecration in the Old Testament

For a better knowledge of what we intend to do, we start our study with the Pentateuch. They are the first five books in the Old Testament, the great Law of Israel. It narrates the love of God to the world since creation. The first book of the Pentateuch is Genesis. It happens to be the first to mention in chapter 2:3 the first consecration in the Scripture<sup>16</sup>. It reads: “So God blessed the seventh day and consecrated (*yeqadesh*) it, because on it God rested from all his work that He had done in creation”. The same verb was also used in Exodus 20:11: On Mountain Sinai when the people of Israel received the Ten Commandments from God through Moses. On this occasion, they were reminded to keep the Sabbath holy because God rested on the seventh day after creating the world in six days. As we read “Yahweh has blessed the Sabbath day and made it sacred (*yeqadeshêhu*)” (Ex. 20:11). He consecrated this day as a day different from others even though it has the same duration. Here lies the significance and importance of this day. Truly to show this, the people of Israel do not engage in any laborious activity on this day, thus dedicating it as a privileged day for their fellowship with Yahweh<sup>17</sup>. Similarly, this day was separated “for Godly use, the

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. J. De Finance, “Consagração,” 20.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Arcadi, “A Theory of Consecration,” 914.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. J. C. Carvalho, “A consagração em Israel e do novo Israel,” 24.

use, which, of course, is His own rest”<sup>18</sup>. Indeed, the story of Israel is a story marked by God’s consecration and Peoples dedication to God through covenant<sup>19</sup>.

Consequently, the weekly celebration of this day becomes the most important feast till the time of Jesus Christ. Hence, their major memorable feasts like the Passover feast (cf. Ex. 12:1ff), the feast of Unleavened Bread (cf. Ex. 12:16; Lv. 23:7-8; Nb. 28:18.25), the feast of Weeks (cf. Lv. 23:15-22; Nb. 28:26), to mention a few, are special days and weeks dedicated to celebrate the marvelous deeds of the Lord in favor of His people<sup>20</sup>. From the above research, we can say that consecration consists in the “threefold act of separating, sanctifying or purifying, and devoting or offering to the Deity”<sup>21</sup>. In a similar way, J.M. Arcadi refers to the key components of consecration as “the act of separation, distinguishing, or setting apart”<sup>22</sup>.

Furthermore, consecration can be seen in a double perspective: as objective or ritual consecration and as subjective consecration. The first perspective implies a ritual act whereby a person, a thing or a place are separated for dedication to Gods’ service, while in the other it is God that consecrates the consecrated by His Spirit. For example, Israel is destined as God’s own people and possession (cf. Lev. 11:44; Hos. 14:3)<sup>23</sup>. Hence, both perspectives are not in opposition neither are they always equivalent to each other but there is a progressive transference from objective perspective to the subjective perception. In view of this, it is opportune to mention few passages that present the essential elements of consecration. The book of Leviticus 10:10, for example, emphasized the separation of what is sacred from the profane, the unclean from the clean. Exodus 29:33, in the context of instruction to priests, this passage refers to the consecration of priests. But our interest here is to highlight the fact that

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<sup>18</sup> Arcadi, “A Theory of Consecration,” 914.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. A. P. Ribeiro, “Consagração ao Coração Imaculado de Maria: uma proposta pastoral à luz de Fátima”, in *A Pastoral de Fátima. Actas do I Encontro Internacional sobre a Pastoral de Fátima, no 75.º Aniversário das Aparições*, 173.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. J.C. Carvalho, “A consagração em Israel e do novo Israel,” 24-25.

<sup>21</sup> “Consecration” in *Catholic Encyclopedia*, accessed October 31, 2017, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04276a.htm>.

<sup>22</sup> Arcadi, “A Theory of Consecration,” 914.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. José C. R. García Paredes, *Teología de la Vida Religiosa* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 2000), 375- 376.

“God categorizes as ‘holy’ the food that was part of the atonement ceremony”<sup>24</sup>. The meaning is that the food is separated from consumption by outsiders because it was purposely used at the ordination.

The book of Exodus also reveals this conceptual aspect of consecration. Therefore, through election, covenant or ritual ceremony, God sets apart His people. Israel knows quite well that she is a nation elected and consecrated by God. Thus, in virtue of this singular honor, she is separated from other nations as well bidden to be faithful to the covenant (cf. Ex. 19:5-6; 20:33-5; Dt. 7:5-6)<sup>25</sup>. She is called to be holy as God is Holy. So, holiness is not “exclusively” reserved for God but something Israel is called to participate in, a goal to be pursued and aspired to. Therefore, whoever did not keep the covenant received a punishment<sup>26</sup>.

The human response to divine prescriptions leads to the fact that in the Old Testament, apart from divine election, consecration can also be obtained by ritual ceremonies by which people in this case, the priests, the Levites (cf. Nb. 3:6) and the Nazarites (cf. Nb. 6), objects, Temple, first fruit of the plants, first born of all the tribes (cf. Ex. 22:28) are consecrated and dedicated to God. Again, it is understood that once an object is consecrated or dedicated to God it remains sacred *in perpetuum* and nothing unclean or defiled should be consecrated or dedicated to God.<sup>27</sup>. Hence, we can consider covenant and consecration as two correlative terms that reveal the whole biblical dynamic movement of election<sup>28</sup>. However, the main characteristics of this event are taken to be three: election by God; strong bond of stable communion with God and testimony of God’s glory before others by the chosen one<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> Arcadi, “A Theory of Consecration,” 914.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. S. De Fiores, “Consecration,” in *Dicionário de Mariologia*, dir. S. De Fiores & S. Meo. (São Paulo: Paulus, 1995), 308

<sup>26</sup> Cf. S. De Fiores, “Consagração,” 132.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. “Consecration,” in *Catholic Encyclopedia*, accessed October 31, 2017, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04276a.htm>.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. J. Jost, “Fatima et la Consécration au Coeur Immaculé de Marie,” in *Fenomenologia e Teologia Das Aparições*, AA vv. (Fátima: Santuário de Fátima, 1997), 398.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Paredes, *Teología de la Vida Religiosa*, 376.

However, in addition to the Pentateuch, the concept of consecration is present in the historical books. For example, in the book of Joshua 6:19, Joshua reminded the Israelites that all precious objects consecrated to Yahweh and for His use must go into his treasury. In the book of Judges 17:12 we read “Micah installed (consecrated) the Levite; and the young man became Micah’s priest and stayed in his house”; consecration of Samson (cf. Jg. 13:1ff); Jephthah’s vow to sacrifice the first thing to come out of his house to meet him to God if he wins the battle against the Ammonites (cf. Jg. 11:30-37). The first book of Samuel 1:11ff, tells about the vow taken and the consequent consecration of Samuel by his mother Hannah. Second book of Samuel 8:11 tells of David’s consecration of objects to Yahweh. Second Chronicles 29:5, during the purification of the Temple the priests and the Levites were instructed to sanctify themselves and the Temple of Yahweh by Hezekiah. (cf. 1 Ch. 29:5; 2 Ch. 13:9; Ezr. 3:5; 2 Kg. 23:3). In Nehemiah 12:27, the word used is dedication. However, the kings are consecrated to and by God (cf. 2 Sam. 12:7).

Without leaving any stone unturned, we look forward to seeing how consecration is spoken about in the Wisdom books and in what situation or occasion it occurs. We verified that there are not much explicit references, but there are passages in some of the Wisdom books that points out the essence of consecration. Thus, the Psalms being a way the people of Israel spontaneously communicated to God in different situations of their life, present some examples relating to consecration, dedication and sacrifice. For example: in Psalm 85:7-8 the psalmist pleads for Gods’ salvation as a consecration. Psalm 4:3 states that; “But know that the Lord has set apart the godly for Himself; the Lord hears when I call to Him”. It refers to dedication to do the will of God (cf. Ps. 40:7; 51:17; 119:69), God anoints His king David (cf. Ps. 89:20-21), to mention but a few.

Similarly, in the prophetic books, we discover few passages that speak of consecration in vocational context. In that of Isaiah 6:3, the Hebrew word *qadesh* assumes particular importance because God is acclaimed Holy in the superlative order. In Isaiah 42:1-7 and

Jeremiah 1:5, we are confronted with the vocation and mission of the servant of God<sup>30</sup>. Later in the book of Jeremiah, he complains to God about his enemies pleading that they should be “set apart for the day of slaughter” (cf. Jr. 12:3). Consecration can also be understood in a negative way like consecrating oneself or something to idolatry and immorality. This was condemned by Hosea who denounced all those that dedicated themselves to Baal during the Assyrian exile in the eighth century before Christ (cf. Hos. 9:10)<sup>31</sup>. Above all, there is a remarkable difference in terms of the perception of consecration in the priestly and Deuteronomist theology. In the first, it is God that consecrates while in the other we live as consecrated people (cf. Dt. 7:6; 14:2.21; Is. 63:18; Jr. 2:3; Ps. 34:10; Ezr. 9:2)<sup>32</sup>.

With all this solemn conviction, it is important to know that in all consecrations, those involved have a particular relationship with God which implies a mission to be realized. There is always a function which the elected is destined to perform before and in favor of others<sup>33</sup>.

#### 1.2.1.2. Consecration in the New Testament

In consideration to the expositions above, and knowing that for a better comprehension of consecration in the Old Testament, the best attitude to adopt is to consider consecration in parallel with the New Testament. Thus, our research will continue with the same method applied in the Old Testament. That is to say that we will analyze how the word consecration is used in the New Testament and the situations where it occurs. However, we start with the Gospels, Acts of the Apostles followed by the Letters of St. Paul.

In view of this, in the life of consecration, Jesus Christ is the model to all his disciples and in a special way to all consecrated men and women as expressed in His priestly prayer (cf. Jn. 17:17.19)<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. J. Rovira, “Consecration,” in *A consagração como dedicação na mensagem de Fátima*, coord. J.C. Carvalho. (Fátima: Santuário de Fátima, 2014), 174.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. J.C. Carvalho, “A consagração em Israel e do novo Israel,” 24.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. J.C. Carvalho, “A consagração em Israel e do novo Israel,” 36.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Arcadi, “A Theory of Consecration,” 92.

Generally, in the synoptic gospels, we do not have much references, but in the gospel of Luck, before Jesus' public ministry, Jesus refers to Himself as the fulfillment and realization of the prophecy in the book of Isaiah 61:1-3, as the anointed or the consecrated by the Spirit of God (cf. Lk. 4:18-22)<sup>35</sup>. He is the quintessence of consecration. Christ indeed is the model in the sense that consecration means taking up the identity of Christ, assuming His mode of life and attitude towards life. Thus, He lives in profound love, poverty and obedience to the will of His Father (cf. Jn. 4:34).

Based on the notion that consecration can be obtain through election, we can then emphasize on the image and role of Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ as a consecrated daughter of Zion (cf. Zp. 14-17; St. Lk. 1:28). By conceiving through the Holy Spirit, she turns to be the new Ark of the Covenant and tabernacle of God<sup>36</sup>. Regarding this divine election, Mary responds with total submission to the will of God (cf. St. Lk. 1:38).

In addition to the above, she renews her *fiat* when she presented Jesus in the Temple. This gesture is the maxim expression of every consecration (cf., Lk. 2:21-39). More so, this expresses very well the figure of the Church that continues to offer her sons and daughters to the heavenly Father, associating them with the one oblation of Christ, cause and model of all consecration in the Church. Thus, the presentation of Jesus in the temple is an eloquent icon of the total offering of one's life for all the baptized and specially those who made this radical consecration by means of the evangelical counsels "the characteristic features of Jesus – the chaste, poor and obedient one" (cf. VC 1). Truly, in Jesus, every consecration gains its profound significance and the indelible character like that of baptism<sup>37</sup>.

Later in the gospel according to Mark, consecration is used twice. The first is in Mark 1:24: the demons saw Jesus as the elected or chosen One of God; and in chapter 6:20: Herod Antipas was afraid of John the Baptist because he considered him to be an elected or

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. S. De Fiores, "Consagração," in *Dicionário de Mariologia*, dir. S. De Fiores & S. Melo. (São Paulo: Paulus, 1995), 309.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. J. C. Carvalho, "A Consagração em Israel," 40.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. S. De Fiores, "Consagração," 309.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. J. Rovira, "Consagração," 174.

consecrated One of God (cf. Mc. 6:20). Likewise, in the gospel according to Luke, there occurred a semantic conversion of the Hebrew word “*qodesh*” into a Greek adjective “*agíōs*” which signifies Holy to designate the Name of God or those chosen by God for a mission (cf. Lk. 1:35.49.70-72; 2:23)<sup>38</sup>.

In the gospel according to John, a similar process repeated itself. The verb *teréo* means *to keep* under normal circumstances, but it undergoes a semantic conversion to signify rather ‘to consecrate’, ‘to destine’, and ‘to persevere in obedience’. It has the equivalent notion as consecration when it refers to Johannine tradition applied in the priestly prayer of Jesus; “keep them from the evil one” (Jn. 17:15) as “I kept them in thy name” (v.12). It is admirable that the same verb is used in chapter 9:16, when the Pharisees accused Jesus for not keeping the Sabbath day holy because He cured a blind man on this day<sup>39</sup>.

Meanwhile, in accordance to our guiding sketch, our study takes us to the book of Acts of the Apostles. There we understand that the word applied was the same adjective “*agíōs*” used in the gospel according to Mark. God anointed or consecrated Jesus with the Holy Spirit and power in virtue of His mission (cf. Acts 10:38). In their missionary work, the apostles announced Him as the Holy or Anointed Man of God (cf. Acts 3:14.21; 4:27.30; 7:33)<sup>40</sup>. We also discover that in different situations, the verb used to express consecration differs. For example, in Acts of the Apostle chapter 6: 4, the verb used was *Proskarteréō* which signifies *to dedicate, to devote*<sup>41</sup>.

As we journey across the letters of St. Paul, we observe that consecration is not seen as a spontaneous individual act or gesture that is not related to the salvific plan of God. It is a plan towards the realization of what we have in the Old Testament. It is rather, God’s project for man. In his letter to the Romans 8:30, for St. Paul, “It was those so destined that he called; those that He called, he justified, and those that He has justified, He has brought into glory”.

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. J. C. Carvalho, “A Consagração em Israel,” 44.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. J. C. Carvalho, “A Consagração em Israel,” 38.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. J. C. Carvalho, “A Consagração em Israel,” 44-45.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. J. C. Carvalho, “A Consagração em Israel,” 38.

It is a divine act that consecrates and sanctifies Christians (1 Cor. 1:2; Rm. 15:16)<sup>42</sup>. So pleasing and encouraging it is to see how St. Paul went further to express the dignity of those called to participate in this sacred mystery, saying that they have been sanctified and justified in the name of Jesus through the Spirit of God (cf. 1 Cor. 6:11; 2 Thess. 2:13; Ef. 2:1-6)<sup>43</sup>. Thus, by the virtue of their baptism, Christians are consecrated by and in the name of the Holy Trinity. They belong to Jesus Christ, and by His Spirit, they are adopted children of God<sup>44</sup>.

This ontological consecration that unites all the baptized to the sacred mystery of the death and resurrection of Christ should have a vital impact and consequence in all aspects of life in terms of our existence because it is a call to holiness; an offering of one's life as a total and special gift to God and for God, (cf. Rm. 12:1; 1 Thess. 4:4)<sup>45</sup>. In other words, by virtue of the mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, His disciples are strengthened to consecrate themselves to the cost of the gospel and the salvific revelation. They are called to live not for themselves but for Him and in Him laid down His life for them (cf. 2 Cor. 5:15; Rm. 1:1; Gal. 1:10). Their lives should be a continuous offering to God<sup>46</sup>.

However, St. Paul makes use of the word *étacsan* to express his missionary experience, exhorting his brethren to devote themselves to the service of God's holy people (cf. 1 Cor. 16:15). Moved by the love he has for the Church in Corinth, he applied the verb *ékô* (to have) to tell them how much he values his love for them that he dedicates all his attention to them (cf. 2 Cor. 2:4)<sup>47</sup>.

Consequently, it is clear that there are many words that tend to express this reality in the New Testament, words that convinced us that each act of consecration is Gods' work and a product of His initiative, in a process that involves the Creator and creature and not a mere project of human beings. Based on this, we acknowledge that the following vocabularies: to

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. S. De Fiores, "Consagração," 308.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. J. C. Carvalho, "A Consagração em Israel," 45.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. S. De Fiores, "Consagração," 308.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. S. De Fiores, "Consagração," 308; Cf. J. C. Carvalho, "A Consagração em Israel," 44.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. S De Fiores, "Consagração," 309.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. J. C. Carvalho, "A Consagração em Israel," 38.

sanctify, to dedicate, to anoint, to ordain, to consecrate and to devote, constitute or make up the canon of the New Testament that are connected to the word *consecration*. In other words, the verb used in both Testaments to talk about consecration is *agiazô* to sanctify, to consecrate<sup>48</sup>. Thus, God's name is par excellence *agiasmo* (*Consecrated*). This makes consecration "*um acontecimento teândrico*"<sup>49</sup>.

In a more profound way, we understand that Jesus is our "*agiasmós*", in the sense that our dedication and consecration to God is through Him, in Him and with Him. He is the mediation between us and the Father<sup>50</sup>. For St. Paul, consecration has to do with a new condition or relationship with God. In a thematic way, he applies the verb *agiazô*: to sanctify, to consecrate, referring to Jesus Christ as the Holy One who sanctifies others, with great attention to God as *agíós* (Holy), He consecrates us and in Him we are consecrated and sanctified. He exhorts the Christians in Rome to "yield your members to righteousness for sanctification" (Rm. 6:19), and in the Letter to the Hebrews 12:14, it is written: "Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see God"<sup>51</sup>.

Finally, we can say that the notion of consecration in St. Paul's Letters explains that a new relationship is established, a vocation to follow the dictates of God. Thus, human beings are called to participate out of their free will and liberty in the economy of salvation mindful of the fact that our vocation implies living according to the will of God.

We can conclude that the tradition of consecrating people and things to serve in the worship of God may be traced to the remotest times. Rite of consecration is mentioned in the early culture of the Egyptians and other pagan nations. The act of Consecration gives an indelible character on that which is consecrated. It has its origin in God but implies a dynamic and responsible response on the part of the people or individuals. Since it has to do with their relationship with God (cf. Dt. 4:37; 7:6-8; Is. 42:1-7; Ex. 1:5-6), it expresses and proves His

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<sup>48</sup> J. C. Carvalho, "A Consagração em Israel," 44.

<sup>49</sup> J. C. Carvalho, "A Consagração em Israel," 42.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. J. De Finance, "Consagração," 88.

<sup>51</sup> J. C. Carvalho, "A consagração em Israel e do novo Israel," 42.

love for His people<sup>52</sup>. In the Hebraic Law, it is applied to the entire people whom Moses designates as the people of God by a solemn act of consecration (cf. Ex. 19ff). Later, we read of the consecration of people dedicated to divine service like Abraham (cf. Gn. 12), Moses (cf. Ex. 3), David (cf. 1Sam. 16), Samuel (cf. 1 Sam. 1:9ff), the prophets (cf. Is. 6; 42:1-7; Jr. 1:5), the Nazirite (cf. Jg. 13:1ff), the priests (cf. Ex. 28; 29), the Levites (cf. Nb. 3:6; 6). Similarly, objects are consecrated also. It is relevant to know and to note that these words: consecration and dedication are used interchangeably. In both cases, objects and human persons once consecrated or dedicated remain sacred *in perpetuum*<sup>53</sup>.

In the New Testament, consecration is seen in different contexts. Thus, Jesus is the prototype of all consecrated men or women, in the sense that all the prophecies were realized in Him.

The idea of consecration in both Old and New Testament shows us that it is a dynamic and creative event that has its origin in God. It permits us to have a general view of its significance and value in the economy of man's salvation. In its true sense, the principal motivator and author is God's infinite love for man who then out of his freedom responds to this love of God. The revelation of God to man can be traced in the fact that he is made in His image and likeness, able to participate in His divine nature through His Son Jesus Christ by His Holy Spirit. In both Testaments, we understand that a new relationship is established and it consists in separating, sanctifying and devoting someone or something to God and His service. It is obtained<sup>52</sup> through a ritual ceremony or by election as recorded in the Old Testament while in the New Testament, it is by faith and trust in Jesus Christ. This implies been first of all baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

However, all reality becomes sacred or consecrated when it receives the touch of the Holy Spirit and by this, consecration has the character of epiclesis. In this perspective there is no consecration without a mission and its challenge lies in being faithful. Consecration is a

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<sup>52</sup> Cf. J. Rovira, "Consagração," 174.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. "Consecration," in *Catholic Encyclopedia*, accessed October 10, 2017, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04276a.htm>.

perpetual act with sacrificial connotation. Finally, in the New Testament, Christ is the foundation of all consecration and model for all consecrated persons. Through Him, in Him and with Him, we are consecrated to God and this implies living a new life in Jesus Christ.

### **1.3. The Church Fathers**

Having reflected briefly on the origin of consecrated life, it is important that we find out what the Fathers of the Church wrote on this or about a similar state of life. Perhaps, on this, we make a research on the history of the Church because consecration is a reality profoundly present in the Church's history (cf. VC 1). However, it cannot be left aside, though our intention is not to explore the history of the Church, but to make references to different and significant times or periods from where consecrated life gets its origin or foundation as recognized in the Church. Thus, the extra-biblical world serves as a reference to show how ancient religious cultures influenced the primitive Church, an influence that was later seen in the Religious or Consecrated life. Historically, there are certain practices or characteristics in the ancient Pythagorean group and in the Buddhists' monastic life that are recognized in the Christian Religious or Consecrated life<sup>54</sup>. That is to say, there are components such as community life, ascetic practices centered on renunciation of riches, carnal and sexual pleasure, and of all ambition of self-seeking and mortifications, in order to acquire a spirit of contemplation in union with the divine or separation of the mind from the body.

All these practices show that prosperity or acquisition of earthly riches and their glory are not to be considered as the end of human life or existence, but that what matters is a true communion with God<sup>55</sup>. Hence, what distinguishes these groups of people from Christian Religious or Consecrated life is the negative understanding of the concept of the body as a

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<sup>54</sup> Cf. V. Cordina and Noé Zevallos, *Vida Religiosa: História e Teologia*, (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1987), 14-15.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Cordina and Zevallos, *Vida Religiosa*, 15.

material that needed to be destroyed and despised in order to be at peace and harmony with God.

At first sight, the above demonstrates that there are common elements in these religious activities or doctrines and the Consecrated life such as: community life; ascetic practices and celibacy. Nevertheless, it is not to be strictly equated to Christian Consecrated life because the reference to a personal God with whom we can establish a relationship makes a great difference between Buddhist monastic life and her philosophy and that of Christianity. There is no doctrine of reincarnation in Christian theology and the monastic life built from it. But we ought to believe that Consecrated life has its root in the anthropology of man's integrated existence and his transcendental dimension<sup>56</sup>. Mindful of our inclination towards God as it was said by Saint Augustine: "God you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you"<sup>57</sup>; it is obvious that we discover this tendency and its manifestation more or less intense or revealed in similar way in "every" religion<sup>58</sup>.

Guided by rules and by the eminent sanctity of the Fathers of the Church and their followers during the first four centuries after the death of Christ, for example, Saint Antony, a contemporary of Pachomius founded the coenobitic Monastic way of life. They encouraged monastic life. Living retired from the world and in communities, they "gave lustre to the desert of Egypt"<sup>59</sup>. St. Basil emboldened the ideal fraternity laid down by Pachomius. He thus, deprecates and denounces against unnecessary mortification that can lead to pride. He exhorts and urges superiors to moderate external life sensibly. He also encourages the monks to embark on the education of the children. St. Augustine (354-430) wrote the first outline of canonical life, instituted monasteries of nuns and monks. He wrote a set of monastic rules know by his name, St. Augustine's Rule. St. Benedict (480-543) founder of western monasticism. St. Columbanus, an Irish monk (d. 615), was an apostle and civilizer of several

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. Cordina and Zevallos, *Vida Religiosa*, 15.

<sup>57</sup> Saint Augustine, "Confessions," XIII, in *Catholic Encyclopedia*, accessed October 14, 2017, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/110113.htm>.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. "Religious Life," in *Catholic Encyclopedia*.

<sup>59</sup> "Religious Life" in *Catholic Encyclopedia*.

countries in Europe. Under his name severe rules were promulgated in Ireland. St. Gregory (540- 604) promoted the Reform of the Church, which came to bear his name, the *Gregorian Reforms* of the *Roman Liturgy*<sup>60</sup>. As the biblical adage says: “by their fruits we shall know them” (Mt. 7:16); truly, by their prominent and good example these men of God made a lot of followers and by their progressive and successive transformations they are recognized in the history of the Church. Their great and noble contributions are of vital importance to Consecrated life.

After these preliminary observations, we can assertively look at how the Fathers of the Church took and understood the Consecrated or Religious life. We can also see what their ideal of such a life was and their contributions in respect to it.

We use the term Church Fathers to express the ancient and influential Christian theologians who through their life examples and writings taught and consolidated the faith and doctrine of Jesus Christ transmitted by the Apostles. They are writers and teachers that defended the Church against heresies that cropped up at different times in the early stages of the life of the Christian Community. Their era can be classified from the first to the seventh century AD. Without ignoring the historical facts or refusing them the attention they deserve, in harmony with the history of Consecrated or Religious life, we focus our attention on the comprehension of Consecrated life. Through our investigation, we find out that in the early age or century of the Church, the term is not explicitly conceived and used as we understand and use it today. However, in their writings and teachings there are facts and elements that convince us of their knowledge about this particular state of life.

Considering the social, economic, political and religious condition of their environment or era, and having the foundation of their teachings on the Scripture and the Tradition of the Church, many of them for example, St. Ambrose (340-397), St. Augustine (354-386), St. Clement of Rome (35-101); St. Gregory of Nyssa (died around 385 or 386);

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<sup>60</sup> Cf. “Religious Life” in *Catholic Encyclopedia*.

Tertullian (155-222), and others wrote about the Virgins which came to be a reality in Religious Life and later Consecrated life. Thus, for a better comprehension of their teachings on this topic, we ought to reflect on the social aspect of the society where and when they lived, have a notion of the “corruption” of the Greek world, the question of sexual liberty and the little or no consideration and respect given to women<sup>61</sup>.

However, Virgins are Christian women that dedicated their life to the service of God. Virginité, Continenence or celibacy are realities in the New Testament and later in the primitive Church. Hence, in Acts of the Apostle 21:8, we read about the four daughters of Philip the Evangelist. They are unmarried maidens that have gift of prophesying. Also in St. Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians 7:25ff, he exhorts Christians to live a pure and chaste life because virginité and holiness are seen as signs that announce and realize the eschatological state of Christians<sup>62</sup>.

### *1.3.1. Saint Ambrose (340 – 397)*

There are different opinions on how the virgins organized their life as we are made to understand in the first book of St. Ambrose, where he wrote about the virgins. According to him, the virgins are women who devoted themselves to God through a promise or vow declared in the presence of a bishop, a priest or friends to live a life of chastity. In the first book, he treats the dignity of Virginité. He took the story of the martyrdom of St. Agnes as the subject of the treatise to show how the grace of Virginité was observed and proclaimed by the coming of Jesus Christ. Inspired by the example of St. Agnes, he encouraged Christians in particular the young girls to embrace the life “because it brought down the *Word* from heaven, and hence its pursuit”<sup>63</sup>. He explains the foundation and source of this life, praises the mother of God who conceived the Word –*Logos* as a Virgin. He went further to say that “Virginité is

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<sup>61</sup> Cf. Cordina and Zevallos, *Vida Religiosa*, 21.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Cordina and Zevallos, *Vida Religiosa*, 21.

<sup>63</sup> Ambrosius, *De Virginitate ad Marcellinam Sororem Suam*, 1, 3: PL 16, 202.

not praiseworthy because it is found in martyrs, but because itself makes martyrs”<sup>64</sup>. Without neglecting married life, he urges parents to train their children to appreciate virginity for it is a pleasing sacrifice to the Lord. He advised them not to prevent their daughters from hearing speeches on this subject. He takes it as something holy, praiseworthy, a virtue and a gift from God. He admonished them to talk of its advantages, remembering what the book of Wisdom says in chapter 3:13: “Blessed is the barren that is undefiled”. As the metal becomes more precious when tried or strained by fire, so is the consecrated virginal body to the Divine Spirit. “The smell of your garments” says the Lord is “above all spices” (Song of Songs 4:10)<sup>65</sup>. In addition, he advises that the virgins themselves should live and be happy in their vocation thereby valorizing the dignity to which they are called to have Christ as their Spouse.

In his second book, he gives good attention to the education of the virgins. Taking it as an important issue to be treated highly, he defends the method of teaching by concrete and credible examples than with severe precepts. For this, he uses the life of Mary mother of Jesus Christ as the best example to teach the virgins. Taking her as a model, he speaks of all her virtues – chastity, humility, hard life, love of retirement, kindness to others, to mention but a few – teaching that they should adorn their life with these virtues, hence, holding fast to Mary. He encourages that they should devote more time in their spiritual growth while he denounces excessive austerity that obstructs this growth<sup>66</sup>. He refers to some virgins like Thecla and another virgin at Antioch, who by the prize of martyrdom prove their love to their Spouse. Perhaps, in some circumstances or situations the virgins were admired and moved<sup>64</sup> by their persecutors. He affirms that the grace of this virtue sustains the faithful ones. St. Ambrose concluded this book, by pointing out the merits and challenges facing whoever embraced this state of life. He backed up his teachings with citations and references in the Sacred Scripture. For example, referring to the Book of Songs of Song, he compares the love of a maiden to

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<sup>64</sup> Ambrosius, *De Virginitate ad Marcellinam Sororem Suam*, 1, 3, 10: PL 16, 202.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Ambrosius, *De Virginitate ad Marcellinam Sororem Suam*, 1, 7, 9: PL 16, 201.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Ambrosius, *De Virginitate ad Marcellinam Sororem Suam*, 2, 2, 6-9: PL 16, 220-221.

that of a virgin. In other words he refers to the profound love of the maiden to his beloved as a similar love which a virgin should have for her spouse who is in this case Jesus Christ<sup>67</sup>.

Consequently, he continues his teaching in the third book. He considered the education of virgins essential. He recommends that they should engage in the practice of pious exercises through prayer and self-mortification on food and drink will help to increase their spiritual growth, avoid temptations and distractions in order to keep their minds focused on God. He also, exhorts them “to avoid visits, to observe modesty, to be silent during the celebration of the Mysteries”<sup>68</sup>.

Finally, responding to his sister Marcellina, who asked about those who lost their lives or committed suicide in order to defend their virginity, he replied by telling the story of Pelagia, a virgin, who became a victim while defending her virginity. He praised the heroic attitude of this virgin and recommended that the integrity of this state of life be safe guarded. Thus, nothing is deprived of whoever lost his life for God’s sake “for Christ alone is to us hope, faith, and love – hope in His resurrection, faith in the laver, and love in the sacrament”<sup>69</sup>.

### *1.3.2. Saint Augustine (354 – 386)*

So diligent in his work and in continuation of his previous work that he entitles “The Good of Marriage”, St. Augustine writes about holy virginity. On this topic, his teaching can be divided into three parts. In the first part he writes about the prerogatives of virginity, contemplating it in Christ, in Mary and in the Church. He admires it as spiritual fruitfulness and values it in its character of consecration to God. He insists that any disregard to marriage is against virginity because the major glory of virginity lies in the sense that it transcends the

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<sup>67</sup> Cf. Ambrosius, *De Virginibus ad Marcellinam Sororem Suam*, 2, 6, 42-43: PL 16, 230-231.

<sup>68</sup> Ambrosius, *De Virginibus ad Marcellinam Sororem Suam*, 3, 3: PL 16, 234.

<sup>69</sup> Ambrosius, *De Virginibus ad Marcellinam Sororem Suam*, 3, 5, 22: PL 16, 238.

good of marriage<sup>70</sup>. In other words, he presented Christ as the son of a virgin, and spouse of virgins.

Furthermore, he presents the whole Church as mother and virgin espoused to Christ. He refers to the honor the apostles attributed to members of the Church that guarded in their body what the Church guards in faith. In view of this, he writes about the mother of Jesus as one who bears the Head of this body: Jesus of which the Church through the Spirit bears its members. Thus her virginity is a model in relation to the Church. The most important thing is that before conceiving in her womb the Son of God she has already conceived Him in her heart. She is the only virgin in body and spirit<sup>71</sup>. In other words, in the spiritual order as virgins, could become the mother of God if they do the will of God (cf. Mt. 12:48-50). However, the Church is a virgin and a mother, whereby, virginity consecrated to God is a charism in the Church<sup>72</sup>.

Without degrading the dignity of matrimony, he went further in the second part of the book to express the reward reserved for the virgins as they are described in the Sacred Scripture. He comments on the letters of St. Paul to the Corinthians where he gave his recommendation on the issue of matrimony (cf. 1 Cor. 7:32-34). On this, St Augustine explains how pertinent both state of life are in the Church, but in a more comprehensive way made known the integrity, privilege and merit of those who were able to keep holy their body and spirit. That is, those who consecrate their virginity to God and His Kingdom, thereby referring to the essence of virginity as dedication to God and its eschatological character as an anticipation of the future Jerusalem, the participation of the incorruptible eternity<sup>73</sup>. There they are led by the Lamb to wherever He goes (cf. Rev. 14:2-3), and their joy incomparable to earthly joy as he said; “Gaudium virginum Christi, de Christo, cum Christo, post Christum per Christum, propter Christum. Gaudia propria virginum Christi, non sunt eadem non virginum,

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<sup>70</sup> Cf. J. C. R. García Paredes, *Teología de la Vida Religiosa* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 2000), 40.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Paredes, *Teología de la Vida Religiosa*, 40.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *De Sancta Virginitate*, 1, 2-3: PL 49, 397.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Paredes, *Teología de la Vida Religiosa*, 41.

quamvis Christi. Nam sunt allis alia, sed nullis talia<sup>74</sup>”. Based on the Scripture concretely on the prophets, he speaks of the eunuchs who made themselves that way for the sake of the Kingdom of God (cf. Is. 56:4-5). Furthermore, he refers to the Beatitudes (cf. Mt. 5:3-10) and the Revelation (Rev. 14:1-5), all to highlight the glory, joy and peace that accompany those who faithfully keep what they have vowed with ardor regarding this state of life. He concludes this part with an exhortation to virginity<sup>75</sup>.

On this final part, he describes virginity as a gift of God which has its challenges. He took Jesus as a point of reference and as a doctor and teacher of humility. Stating that the Spirit of God is never found in a proud heart, for this humility lies in humble recognition of our sins<sup>76</sup>. It requires prayer and love in order to meet up to the expectations. For this, he denounces all attitude of pride, envy, lust and all sins that may be a hindrance to faithful obedience to the commandments of God. He instructs that the virgins should be aware of these temptations and learn from their Spouse who is meek and humble of heart (cf. Mt. 11:29; Jm. 4:6)<sup>77</sup>. However, he recommends and encourages a true and profound love of God and the practice of humility as the best way to preserve the gift of virginity<sup>78</sup>. Indeed, the Bishop of Hippo recognizes the need for discernment and adequate education in all its levels; spiritual and intellectual for a better and well integrated Christian life especially in the case of virgins’ which implies an authentic communion with the grace of God.

From the teaching of the two Church Fathers we studied, we discovered some elements specific in the consecrated life present in their teaching. Firstly, consecrated virginity is a life rooted in the life and person of Jesus Christ. Secondly, the priority of God and His service through the profession of the evangelical counsel though not explicit in their teachings. Thirdly, community life where ascetic practices and abnegation of the self are lived

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<sup>74</sup> Augustinus, *De Sancta Virginitate*, 1, 27: PL 49, 407.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *De Sancta Virginitate*, 1, 28-30: PL 49, 412.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. J. C. R. García Paredes, *Teología de la Vida Religiosa* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 2000), 42.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *De Sancta Virginitate*, 1, 31-34: PL 49, 412-415.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Paredes, *Teología de la Vida Religiosa*, 44.

in virtue to attain communion with God and love of neighbor is treasured. Logically, this reveals the mission to which all Christians are called as members of the mystical body of Jesus Christ.

The preliminaries discoursed above help us to acknowledge the wider scope of the topic we are studying. Aware of the efforts and remarkable contributions of the Church in relation to consecrated life since the earliest stage of its history till our present day, we admit that its history is predominantly formed by different moments and circumstances, of which some are good while others are not so pleasing. However, the Church has always valued and esteemed the consecrated life since its origin, thus giving it the necessary support through its writings and renovations in difficult moments. Regarding this, a lot of work has been done at the biblical, Christological, ecclesiological and anthropological level.

Due to the nature of our investigation or project and systematic reasoning, we will limit our study on the contribution of the magisterium to the consecrated life from the Second Vatican Council to the present age.

#### **1.4. The Magisterium**

The Church from the very beginning of the consecrated life has shown its concern in the sense of providing a proper understanding and the significance of consecrated life from its origin. Indeed, the general recognition of the Second Vatican Council as a splendid institutional expression of the new Pentecost in the entire life of the Church is of great importance. However, one of the important fruit of these inspirations of the Holy Spirit is the proper understanding and renewal of Religious or Consecrated life. In order to achieve this goal, the Council includes in one of its major Constitution – *Lumen Gentium*, chapter VI – the nature and essence of Consecrated life. In this document, the Church authority recognizes this

state of life as a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church of which has its foundation in the sacrament of Baptism (cf. LG 43).

In line with this, the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* of John Paul II on the Consecrated Life and its mission in the Church and in the World reaffirm this saying that “consecrated life, deeply rooted in the example and teaching of Christ the Lord, is a gift of God the Father to His Church through the Holy Spirit” (VC 1). The Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* went further to explain that consecrated life is a radical way of living the baptismal promise through the profession of the evangelical counsels namely chastity, poverty and obedience. Thus, through Baptism one consecrates himself or herself to God and dies to sin. Through the profession of the evangelical counsels the person in question binds himself or herself in a special way to God and His service (cf. LG 44). In view of this, the Constitution sees consecrated life as a manifestation of the priority of the Kingdom of God and also a prefiguration of the New Jerusalem.

Through the profession of evangelical counsels Christ’s historical way of living became visible in the world and the eyes of the faithful are directed towards the mystery of the Kingdom of God at work in history as it awaits its full realization in heaven (cf. VC 1). LG made it clear that religious or consecrated life is not an intermediate state between the clerical and lay states. Thus, it belongs to the life and holiness of the Church and not its hierarchical structure (cf. LG 44). But it is the duty of the ecclesiastical hierarchy to approve and regulate its spiritual life and external structure. In other words, consecrated life is a reality which affects the whole Church and not something isolated and marginal.

The Decree *Perfectae Caritatis* is one of the documents of Second Vatican Council that treats the adaptation and renewal of Religious or Consecrated life in the Church. It is a Decree that has to do with institutes of Consecrated Life. It gives proper clarification of the life and discipline of the institutes whose members profess the evangelical counsels. It also defines the needs of these institutes in our time (cf. PC 1). We understand in the Constitution

on the Church that the pursuit of Perfect charity through the evangelical counsels has its origin on the doctrine and example of Jesus Christ and reveals itself as a splendid sign of the heavenly Kingdom (cf. PC 1). The Decree recognizes the variety of consecrated life as a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church. It emphasizes that “the more fervently, then, they are joined to Christ by this total life-long gift of themselves, the richer the life of the Church becomes and the more lively and successful its apostolate” (PC 1). To promote the value of consecrated life and for the greater good of the Church, the decree establishes five principles to help in the renewal of the consecrated life and its discipline. It lives its adaptation to the criteria and freedom of each institution according to its specific traditions, history and mission.

Consequently, the Council acknowledges that the ultimate or supreme norm of the consecrated life is to follow Christ as his life and steps are set forth in the Gospels. For this purpose, it intends to restore proper precedence of this fundamental norm. Beside this supreme rule, he calls attention of the institute to honor “their founders’ spirit and special aims they set before them as well as their sound traditions” (PC 2b). Furthermore, he speaks about the mission of consecrated life as a vital participation in the mission of the Church (cf. PC 2c). It encourages “Institutes to promote among their members an adequate knowledge of social conditions of the times they live in and of the needs of the Church [...] in order that “they may be able to assist men more effectively” (PC 2d).

In addition to the above, the Council reminds us that the purpose of the consecrated life should be constantly kept in mind for any effective renewal of its spirit. Hence, all spiritual development must be in accordance with this aim. As Jesus Christ said; “I am the vine, you are its branches [...]; separated from me, you have no power to do anything” (Jn. 15:5). Thus, this aim must take precedence in their way of life and clearly articulated with any apostolic work (cf. PC 2e). In other words, their identity, specific characteristics and work should be suitably adapted to the modern physical and psychological circumstances of the members and also to the necessities of the apostolate, the demands of culture, social and

economic circumstances (cf. PC 3). The decree also sets outlines in respect to the legislation, administration and governing of the Institutes with a special attention to the contemplative communities, while stressing that all renewal and adaptation should be in accordance with the norm set out by the competent authorities of the Church (cf. PC 4).

Finally, we can conclude that the key principal words that lead the ideas or serve as background in the Decree are: adaptation and renewal. *Adaptation* has to do with the necessary changes to be carried out due to the globalization and *renewal* refers to the continuous return to the source of all Christian life and to the original spirit of the institutes (cf. PC 2). It is important to know that the fruitful outcome of this renewal proposed by the Council depends on authentic assimilation and implementation of the principles by the Institutes and their members.

According to the code of canon law, which incorporates the ecclesiology of Second Vatican Council's documents – *Lumen Gentium* and *Perfectae Caritatis* – the various features of consecration are taken care of in canons 573 and 607 of the year 1986. Despite being later documents, they systematize in the form of a law the documents of the Second Vatican Council. These two canons portray the marks and identity of a religious person. We understand that consecration is that unique act of love by which God dedicates a person to Himself (cf. Jn. 15:16), to His exclusive service, initiating in return, a corresponding act of response in love, in the consecrated soul to the predilection of God. Thus, the whole existence of the consecrated person becomes a continuous worship of God in charity. In this sense, consecration is primarily an act of God and it occurs as a freely conferred election by God.

The Code of Canon Law places consecration in the heart of the Church, in the sense that it vivifies it, sanctifies, reinvigorates and renders it more able for accomplishing her salvific mission. Precisely, it becomes the most radical way of living that evangelical mission for which the Church is sent to proclaim. Likewise, other documents of the Church, recognize that consecrated life is a gift of the Holy Spirit, which belongs to the life and holiness of the

Church (cf. Can. 574 §1). They went further to describe its structure in terms of organization as an Institution in the Church.

From the above documents of the Church, we realize that consecrated life is a charism, a gift of the Trinity to the Church. It is a divine gift which the Church preserves by the grace of God. It is a life that manifests in a more concrete and visible way how Christ lived historically on earth. Consecration is a divine act that has its origin in God. Through our freedom and by His grace we respond to this divine vocation. The seeds of its realization are planted in the sacrament of Baptism and reach their radical state in the profession of the evangelical counsels of Chastity, poverty and obedience. This implies a new state of life recognized in the Church as the Consecrated life.

It is “a stable form of living by which the faithful, following Christ more closely under the action of the Holy Spirit, are totally dedicated to God” (Can. 573). They live for His honor, the good of the Church and the salvation of the world. Hence, it is a covenant of love that materializes into a mission, in the sense that it participates in the mission of the Church which is to continue Christ’s salvific mission in the world. Thus, it belongs to the life and holiness of the Church and as such, it is a reality that has to be nurtured and promoted by all in the Church. We recognize that there are many institutes of consecrated life both of contemplatives and of active life, which depend on competent authority of the Church for their approval and proper orientation both on the spiritual and institutional level, without disregarding the autonomy of the institutes.

However, the documents laid emphasis on the importance of adequate, proper and up-to-date formation for all those that wish to embrace this state of life. An integral formation; ontological, psychological and spiritual formation that equip the members to understand and accompany the global evolution. This can only be effective and fruitful through their constant communion with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, which helps them to keep in mind the essence of their consecration. Therefore, the profession of the evangelical counsels, though

involving the renunciation of certain values which are to be honored, do not “detract from a genuine development of the human persons, but rather by its very nature is most beneficial to the development” (LG 46). Indeed, when it is voluntarily undertaken according to one’s vocation, it humanizes and contributes a great deal to the purification of heart and spiritual liberty. Obviously, it is a life that foretells the future resurrection and glory of the heavenly Kingdom.

#### *1.4.1. Vita Consecrata*

Over and above all the teachings and orientations by which the Church through her magisterium presents in the documents of the Second Vatican Council as “an enlightening point of reference for subsequent doctrinal development” (VC 13), the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* of John Paul II, is a text that enriches the whole Church with its profound teachings on consecrated life. The document develops its teaching on the theology of consecrated life. This Apostolic Exhortation addressed to the whole Church tends to offer everyone “the results of a stimulating exchange, guided by the Holy Spirit with his gifts of truth and love” (VC 13). Its objective is to give a fresh vigor and enthusiasm to the understanding of consecrated life according to its profound origin or significance. Hence, it serves as an encouragement to all consecrated persons to face the new challenges of our time with renewed Spirit and to give thanks to God for the gift of the consecrated life.

It is clear to us that consecrated life has its origin in the Trinity manifested in the historical life and teaching of Jesus Christ. However, being a radical way of following Christ, rooted in the sacrament of Baptism, it calls for an “undivided” heart (cf. 1Cor 7:4) in our relationship with God. Through religious consecration, one offers himself or herself freely to God in continuous worship and in the service of the entire people of God<sup>79</sup>. The Apostolic

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<sup>79</sup> Cf. Lourenço Kearns, *A Teologia da Vida Consagrada* (Aparecida: Editora Santuário, 1999), 25.

Exhortation acknowledging the treasure which the gift of the consecrated life in its different charism and institution represents in the universal Church, thank God for the marvelous things He continues to do in every generation (cf. VC 2).

In view of the reflection presented by the Apostolic Exhortation, we understand that the document develops the origin of the consecrated life in the mystery of Christ and of the Trinity. Based on this, we will summarize in few lines the important points in the document. It states that consecrated life is like an *icon* of the Transfigured Christ. It explains that the evangelical aspect of consecrated life is to be found in the special relationship which Jesus established with some of His disciples in His public life. He called them not only to stay with him or for them to embrace the kingdom of God but also to send them out for a mission in favor of others. Thus, we can say that consecrated life has this two faces which cannot be separated, and one without the other does not make any meaning. Therefore, one without the other would not manifest the real and true meaning of consecrated life (cf. VC 14).

We understand that by the virtue of our baptism we all are consecrated, called to reject sin and all its seductions and to manifest the life of Christ in our lives. Our reference document and life experience made it clear that it is only possible to live this way “on the basis of a special vocation and in virtue of a particular gift of the Spirit” (VC 14). Logically, in such a life, baptismal consecration turns into a radical response through the acceptance and profession of the evangelical counsels for the sake of the Kingdom of God (cf. VC 14). Thus, this special vocation has an “essential Christological and pneumatological meaning” (cf. VC 14). Following Christ in this way shows the Trinitarian nature of Christian life and prefigures the eschatological fulfillment – that is: *now and not yet* – towards which the whole Church is tending in the Gospel.

For a better comprehension of the essential characteristics of consecrated life, the Apostolic Exhortation on consecrated life describes the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ (cf. Mt 17:1-9) as an event that includes the contemplative and active dimensions of consecrated life.

However, it strengthens the faith of His disciples, reveals Christ's glory – His Resurrection and serves as a preparation to face the tragedy of the Cross. In this way, the disciples who had the privilege of having this intimate experience with the Master,

“surrounded for a moment by the splendor of the Trinitarian life and of the communion of saints [...] are immediately brought back to daily reality, where they see ‘Jesus only’, in the lowliness of His human nature, and are invited to return to the valley, to share with Him the toil of God's plan and to set off courageously on the way of the Cross” (VC 14).

That is to say that consecrated life is rooted in contemplation which leads to concrete action. Without these two elements, it lacks its vigor and significance.

Similarly, we all are called to be followers of Christ to the extent to say like Paul “for me to live is Christ” (Phil 1:21). But we understand that those who are called to “consecrated life have a special experience of the light which shines forth from the Incarnate Word” (VC 15). So to say that the event of the Transfiguration especially in Peter's word: “Lord, it is well that we are here” (Mt 17:4) manifests the Christocentric orientation of the whole Christian life and also expresses the radical nature of the vocation to the consecrated life. However, consecrated life implies the fundamental option of configuration of the whole existence to Christ in a total commitment (cf. Mt 19:27; Rev 14:4) which prefigures the eschatological perfection, in harmony with one's charism<sup>80</sup>.

The consecrated life involves a transfigured existence by the power of the Holy Spirit, awakening in them the desire to make visible by the testimony of their life and words the marvelous deeds of the God in fragile humanity. Thus, it is a living memory of Christ's way of existing and acting in history. Precisely, as the adverb says there is no crown without a cross, we understand that the paschal dimension of the consecrated life relies on the authentic aspirations for the divine love and beauty – *Philokalia* – that reveals itself in the mystery of

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<sup>80</sup> Cf. Velasio De Paolis, *La Vida Consagrada en La Iglesia* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 2011), 22.

the death and resurrection of Christ<sup>81</sup>. Truly the Cross reveals the beauty and power of God's love which a consecrated person discovers and experiences on his or her daily contemplation at the foot of the Cross of Christ. Hence, the consecrated life echoes the splendor of God's love by its fidelity to the mystery of the Cross and confesses that it believes and lives by the love of the Trinity. In this way "it helps the Church to remain aware that the Cross is the superabundance of God's love poured out upon this world" (VC 24). Indeed, this shows the saving presence of Christ, especially in the midst of difficulties, sufferings, trials, to which a good number of consecrated men and women give testimony. Many others also suffer persecutions and martyrdom. In silent sacrifice and abandonment to God's holy will, they complete in their bodies "what is lacking in Christ's afflictions" (Col. 1: 24).

In line with what has been noted so far, in a true sense, love of God leads to love of our neighbor. Therefore, fortified by their experiences and their faith in the mystery of death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the consecrated persons live out this double law of God by constant and generous service and presence in the life of their brothers and sisters especially the poor and less privileged (cf. VC 24). This points out the missionary nature of the consecrated life. However, their missionary nature reflects in the mission and life of the Church. In this sense, their first missionary duty is to themselves, a duty they fulfill by collaborating and being open to the promptings of the Spirit of Christ. Their witness reminds the whole Church that the most important thing in life is to serve God freely. And so, "they proclaim to the world the peace which comes from the Father, the dedication witnessed by the Son, and the joy which is the fruit of the Holy Spirit" (VC 25). Hence, they reveal the *ideal* they profess and are really signs of Christ in the world.

Aware of the brevity of life and the passing nature of things of the world (cf. 1 Cor. 7:31; 1 Pet. 1:3-6), our reference document writes about the eschatological nature of consecrated life. On this very perspective we understand the role of consecrated life as an

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<sup>81</sup> Cf. Paredes, *Teología de la Vida Religiosa*, 127.

eschatological sign. As a life totally committed to God and His Kingdom as their unique treasure through the profession of their vows of chastity, they prefigure the resurrected state and the glory of the heavenly Kingdom<sup>82</sup>. However, the eschatological expectation lived in the spirit of Beatitudes establishes a more human society of justice, peace, solidarity and forgiveness in the world (cf. Rev. 21:1-4). Thus, “consecrated life is at the service of this definitive manifestation of the glory of divine glory” (VC 27), this constant reminder of the primacy of God gives full meaning and joy to human lives because we are created for God and ‘our hearts are restless until they rest in Him’.

In line with the eschatological expectation which has its “visible” expression in the life and mission of the consecrated, the Post-synodal Exhortation calls attention to the prophetic dimension of the consecrated life. It’s perception on this is collective, in the sense that its origin is Jesus Christ, extended to all the people of God as a prophetic community by virtue of their Baptism. Therefore, the prophetic character of the consecrated life is not something inclusive in the prophetic nature of the whole Church<sup>83</sup>. It is a special way of sharing in Christ’s prophetic office communicated by the Holy Spirit to the whole people of God. This is as a result of its radical nature in following Christ and consequently her mission (cf. VC 84).

Above all, it states that a true prophecy is born of God, from relationship with Him, from attentive listening to His word in different situations in history, from continuous and passionate search of God’s will and self-giving. However, prophetic witness requires an unflinching communion with the Church, spiritual discernment and love of truth expressed in the denunciation of all that is contrary to the divine will and the desire to search for new ways to apply the Gospel in history. Thus, the prophetic nature of consecrated life manifests itself when these traits are verified in its spirituality, fraternal life and in its missionary activities which many at times lead to martyrdom<sup>84</sup>. These characteristics point out the major challenges

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<sup>82</sup> Cf. Velasio De Paolis, *La Vida Consagrada en La Iglesia*, 27.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Paredes, *Teología de la Vida Religiosa*, 128.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Paredes, *Teología de la Vida Religiosa*, 129.

the prophetic task of the consecrated life has faced throughout the ages and in a particular way the challenges in the contemporary society.

#### *1.4.2. Pontifical homilies*

Acknowledging all the pressing and positive contributions of the Apostolic Exhortation of the Pope, in respect to the theological basis of consecrated life, we need to confront our study or research with what different Popes said through their messages and homilies on the world day of consecrated life. We note that this feast is celebrated on the feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple. It was first celebrated and inaugurated as the world feast of the consecrated life by John Paul II on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1997.

##### 1.4.2.1. Homilies of John Paul II

As the first inception of the world day for the consecrated life, he extolls and cheers all consecrated persons specially those who have chosen to follow Christ by the profession of the evangelical counsels. According to him, the intention of this celebration is to “help the entire Church to esteem ever more greatly the witness of those persons who have chosen to follow Christ by means of the practice of the evangelical counsels”<sup>85</sup>. This feast day also intends to be a suitable occasion for consecrated men and women to renew their vows and commitment and rekindle the passion which inspired their self-offering to Christ. Recalling what he said in the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* in relation to the nature and mission of the consecrated life in the Church, he invites the consecrated persons to look towards the future with confidence, trusting on the fidelity of God who will see them through for success in all

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<sup>85</sup> John Paulo II, “Message of the Holy Father for the 1th World day for Consecrated life,” (January 6, 1997), accessed September 29, 2017, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/consecrated\\_life/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_mes\\_06011997\\_i-consecrated-life-day.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/consecrated_life/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_06011997_i-consecrated-life-day.html).

their undertakings. Hence, he attests that they have glorious history at hand, but also a great history of prosperity to accomplish in the future where the spirit might send them to work.

John Paul II, before the consecrated men and women identified three reasons for the celebration of the world day for consecrated life. For him, this day “answers the intimate need to praise the Lord more solemnly and to thank Him for the great gift of consecrated life, which enriches and gladdens the Christian community by the multiplicity of its charism and by the edifying fruit of so many lives totally given to the cause of the Kingdom”<sup>86</sup>; it helps to assure that the doctrine of the consecrated life is made known and esteemed by the entire People of God. In other words, this state of life embraced by Christ and made present by the consecrated persons is important to the Church who is called to follow Christ in every member in light and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Also, “they are invited to celebrate together solemnly the marvels which the Lord has accomplished in them, to discover by a more illumined faith the rays of divine beauty spread by the Spirit in their way of life, and to acquire a more vivid consciousness of their irreplaceable mission in the Church and in the world”<sup>87</sup>. Meanwhile, having been exposed to the world of disorderliness, discomfort and distraction in the course of their mission, with the annual celebration of this day, they are helped to reflect on the source of their vocation, take stock of their own lives and confirm the commitment of their own consecration. Fortified in this way, they will be able to continue to give testimony in their different situations and circumstances with joy that God is love and always able to fill the hearts of his sons and daughters.

Nevertheless, this day is also the feast of Presentation of Jesus in the Temple. It happens to be an eloquent icon of the total offering of one’s life for all those who are called to live the “characteristic features of Jesus – the chaste, poor and obedient one” (VC 1). In this respect, John Paul II recalled that this is a “figure of the Church who continues to offer her sons and daughters to the heavenly Father, associating them with one oblation of Christ, cause

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<sup>86</sup> John Paulo II, “Message of the Holy Father for the 1th World day for Consecrated life”.

<sup>87</sup> John Paul II, “Message of the Holy Father for the 1th World day for Consecrated Life”.

and model of all consecration in the Church”<sup>88</sup>. Again, he expresses his joy and gratitude to all in the celebration and wished that this day may assemble as well other faithful together with them so as to sing with our Blessed Virgin Mary the wonders the Lord has accomplished in their lives in calling them as witnesses to the world and to those redeemed by Christ.

Finally, he entrust to the maternal protection of our Blessed Virgin Mary the institution of this world-day and prayed that She may obtain for us the grace to be authentic witnesses of that which She did not cease to accomplish for the good of the Church and humanity.

In his subsequent messages till the end of his pontificate, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2005, he continued to celebrate with great affection and enthusiasm this special day of the Presentation of our Lord, the world-day of consecrated life. From his messages and homilies we highlight the following elements as importance in his general view of this day and in relation to the consecrated life: spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving for the gift of the vocation to the consecrated life; apostolate and mission both in the Church and in the world seen in its prophetic and eschatological dimensions; challenges to the consecrated life and lastly referring to our Blessed Virgin Mary as a model worthy of emulation. In all he wrote nine messages.

However, we will develop the above components in few lines for a better comprehension of what he communicated on this day. John Paul II, teaches on this day that Christ is our Light – *Lumen ad revelationem gentium!* (cf. Lk 2:32). In this biblical passage, he sees the prophetic attitude of Simeon and Ana as the Old Covenant that expresses the joy of the meeting with the Savior, just as the old man (Simeon), “looks at the past and foretells the future”<sup>89</sup>. With him, “the “aged” world receives in its arms the splendor of God’s eternal

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<sup>88</sup> John Paul II, “Message of the Holy Father for the 1th World day for Consecrated Life”.

<sup>89</sup> John Paulo II, “Jubilee of the Consecrated Life,” (2 February 2000), accessed September 29, 2017, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2000/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_20000202.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2000/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_20000202.html).

youth”<sup>90</sup> Thus, Simeon’s inspired words expresses the universality of this Light of which the consecrated men and women are called to be and to bear in the society.

In virtue of this solemnity and with full enthusiasm of our baptismal faith, he invites all and in a special way all those that made the evangelical profession of chastity, poverty and obedience, to give thanks to God for the gift of their vocation. With them he also showed his gratitude to God. He reminded them that they are signs of contradiction to the logic of the world, because of the radical inspiration they got from the gospel message oriented to future eschatological realities. As they know the One in whom they put their trust, he advised them to remain faithful to this special vocation. He prayed that their total fidelity to Christ be a source of light and hope for all they had met with and all they will meet later in their life and in the mission.

Consequently, he maintained that those called to consecrated life are called to reflect Christ’s light in a unique way. In view of this, he spoke of their mission in the Church and in the world<sup>91</sup>. According to him, their mission is rooted in their solid and profound contemplation of Christ’s face through prayer, participation in the Eucharist and other spiritual exercises which help to rekindle in them the fire of Christ’s love, as the source and summit of life and apostolic activities.

Indeed, making this their priority makes them authentic witnesses of His love in every situation or circumstances of their mission. Being called to a special mission in the Church, he exhorts them to be testimonies of Christ, the Light that never fades in the world. In order that people might see their good work and glorify their Father in heaven (cf. Mt. 5: 16). As Christ is offered in the Temple, in a similar way, faithful to their spiritual and generous mission, they offered their lives in union with Christ’s sacrifice for the salvation of humanity. On this he

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<sup>90</sup> John Paulo II, “Homily on the feast of the Presentation of the Jesus in the Temple,” (2 February 1998), accessed September 29, 2017, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1998/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_02021998\\_candel.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1998/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_02021998_candel.html).

<sup>91</sup> Cf. John Paulo II, “Homily on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord 5<sup>th</sup> Word day of the Consecrated Life,” (2 February 2001), accessed September 29, 2017, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2001/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_20010202\\_presentation-lord.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_20010202_presentation-lord.html).

refers to all men and women that have lost their lives while performing an apostolic mission and those in the front line fighting for the poor and the marginalized. Thus, he recognizes the prophetic value of their presence in the Church and in the world.

Furthermore, he affirms that the eschatological witness is part of their vocation. Reminding them that the profession of the evangelical counsels proclaims to the world man's ultimate destiny, he exhorted them to live the mystery of the expectation of Christ's coming exemplified in the attitude and life of Simeon and Anna<sup>92</sup>. Through their solidarity and by shouldering the spiritual and material problems of their brothers and sisters they bring hope to many that are discouraged about the future. Besides, by their *fiat*, they are called to "represent in an outstanding way the eschatological newness of Christian life. You are called to be lights of the truth and of justice, witnesses of solidarity and peace"<sup>93</sup>. In respect to this, he recalled the challenges facing this state of life which can be faced only with their uncompromising faithfulness to Christ.

In addition to the above, he refers to the Blessed Virgin Mary as a true icon and model for all consecrated persons. He explains that the feast we are celebrating is also a "Marian mystery, in which the martyrdom of her soul is foretold to the mother, blessed along with her Son"<sup>94</sup>. According to him, the icon of the Blessed Virgin Mary can be understood in two complementary ways. Firstly, this can be understood in relation to the Church and the consecrated life. Analogically, as she gave birth to Christ, the Church through the sacrament of Baptism "gives birth" to her sons and daughters. Also, as the Blessed Virgin Mary offers Christ in the Temple, in a similar way the Church continues to offer many of her sons and daughters to God through the profession of the evangelical counsels.

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<sup>92</sup> Cf. John Paulo II, "Jubilee of the Consecrated Life," (2 February 2000), accessed September 29, 2017, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2000/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_20000202.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2000/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_20000202.html).

<sup>93</sup> John Paulo II, "Homily on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord 6th Word day of the Consecrated Life," (2 February 2002), accessed September 29, 2017, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2002/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_20020202\\_presentation-lord.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2002/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_20020202_presentation-lord.html).

<sup>94</sup> John Paulo II, "Homily on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord 5<sup>th</sup> Word day of the Consecrated Life," (2 February 2001), accessed September 29, 2017, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2001/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_20010202\\_presentation-lord.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_20010202_presentation-lord.html).

In addition, he held that the ‘yes’ uttered by the consecrated is modeled on that of Christ and His Blessed Mother. And so, her journey of faith and consecration is the archetype for every baptized person and in particular for those who embrace the consecrated life. He expresses how encouraging and comforting it is to know the supernatural value of Mary’s presence in their lives which is beyond all emotional sentiments. In other words, she is profoundly close to us as attested to by the Scripture, Tradition and testimony of many who have followed Christ in this state of life. Finally, he exhorts them to take her as their guide and pray that through her intercession they may be holy Disciples of Christ, as they joyfully make their way in communion with their brothers and sisters towards our heavenly home.

#### 1.4.2.2. Homilies of Benedict XVI

Pope Benedict XVI in line with his predecessor continued the celebration of this feast day as the world day of consecrated life. During his tenure from 19<sup>th</sup> of April 2005 to 28<sup>th</sup> of February 2013, he wrote eight homilies addressed to the consecrated life. Guided by the same Spirit leading his predecessor John Paul II, his homilies can be resumed as follows: praise and thanksgiving for the gift of the consecrated life; its essence; challenges and mission; Blessed Mary as a model to all consecrated persons.

Moved by the Spirit of fraternal communion, he said that the celebration of this day is an appropriate occasion to praise and thank God for the precious gift which the consecrated life represents and at the same time, the celebration is “an incentive to encourage in all the People of God knowledge and esteem for those who are totally consecrated to God”<sup>95</sup>. Full of trust and gratitude, he invited them to celebrate on this day the marvelous works of the Lord in them and to renew their total offering in presenting themselves to the Temple.

He went further to express the intrinsic nature of consecrated life. On this, he asked them not to forget that the consecrated life is a divine gift of which the Lord ensures its

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<sup>95</sup> Benedict XVI, “Homily on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord World day of the Consecrated Life,” (2 February 2006), accessed September 29, 2017, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2006/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20060202\\_presentation-lord.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2006/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20060202_presentation-lord.html).

success in accordance with his plans. It is a life rooted in the Gospel, called to a more intimate “*sequela*” of Christ in order to remain alive and fertile, bearing fruit for the salvation of souls. Hence, through their vivid experience of God’s love and forgiveness, they are called in a special way to be witnesses of His mercy and source of salvation to all humanity<sup>96</sup>.

Living in a society marked by radical plurality, progressive marginalization of religion and by relativism which affects the fundamental values, they are called to be eloquent sign of God’s love present and active in the world by their witness and active participation in the sufferings and joys of their brothers and sisters. As Christ is the Light of the world, analogically they are called to reflect and portray this Light to all creation. By the profession of the evangelical counsels they are challenged to be reminder of the fundamental value of the Gospel to all the baptized. He also referred to the sacrificial and prophetic dimension of their mission<sup>97</sup>.

He encouraged them on their cooperation and participation in the life and mission of the Church in the world. He also manifested his concern and solidarity to many of them that feel the burden of their daily effort as well as the sick and elderly who are limited physically but still participated in the passion of Christ with and through their silent sufferings. He affirmed that God associates all their sufferings in His *throne of grace* because they are precious gift for the world that is thirsting for God and His word. Indeed he reminded them that the certainty that the Lord will lead them to successful end despite their weaknesses should be a comfort and encouragement as they face the inevitable difficulties of life and the challenges of the modern epoch<sup>98</sup>.

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<sup>96</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, “Homily on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord and the 16<sup>th</sup> day of Consecrated Life,” (February 2, 2012), accessed September 29, 2017, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2012/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20120202\\_vita-consacrata.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20120202_vita-consacrata.html).

<sup>97</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, “Feast of the Presentation of the Lord 11<sup>th</sup> World day of the Consecrated Life,” (February 2, 2007), accessed September 29, 2017, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2007/february/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20070202\\_festa-presentazione.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2007/february/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20070202_festa-presentazione.html).

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, “Homily on the Occasion of the 17<sup>th</sup> day of Consecrated Life,” (February 2, 2013), accessed September 29, 2017, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2013/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20130202\\_vita-consacrata.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2013/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20130202_vita-consacrata.html).

Lastly, he refers to the Blessed Virgin Mary as the *Tota Pulchra*, a model to all consecrated persons by her unconditional offering that involves her in the first person through her *fiat*. Associated in the mystery we are celebrating, Benedict XVI exhorts all to learn in her school the spirit of total dedication to God which leads to love of their brethren. He invokes God's blessings through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary that they may be living and true testimony of Christ.

#### 1.4.2.3. Homilies of Francis

The celebration of this feast day of the Presentation of Jesus Christ in the Temple and the world day of the consecrated life continues with pope Francis elected on 13<sup>th</sup> of March 2013. His homilies in these four years on this special feast day enrich the understanding of the consecrated life in a different perspective. His homilies focused much on God's encounter with His people. This encounter is led by the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph but guided by the Holy Spirit. It brings joy and renews hope<sup>99</sup>.

Analogically and in a comparative manner, he relates this encounter with consecrated life in the sense that the priority of this encounter describes the significance of consecrated life. Hence, consecrated men and women are called to make this encounter a priority in their life in order to face the challenges of their mission without fear or defensive attitude. He emphasized that consecrated men and women are called to be leaven in this dough according to their charisms, capable of sharing "the joys and hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted" (GS n. 1).

He denounces the routinization of spiritual life and activity and the crystallization of charism in an abstract document. However, he encouraged them to make prophetic and courageous choices like their founders', who, moved by the Spirit to soil their hands with struggles of daily life and labor, bearing the problems of their brothers and sisters without fear

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<sup>99</sup> Cf. Franciscus, "Die Vitae Consecratae Dicato," AAS 106 (2014): 72-74.

and complaints, while they moved along the geographical and existential peripheries, were thus able to give an authentic prophetic witness to the Lord. They were able to do all these, because they “kept in their hearts the astonishment over the encounter with Christ”<sup>100</sup>. So pertinent is this encounter that its experience is marked with gratitude and thanksgiving for the gift of their vocation in different charisms. He asked them to remember always their earliest experience of God’s call to them. Through prayers they can keep this experience alive. Prayers can also help them pursue a faithful and coherent life style proper to their consecration.

As men and women whose encounters with the Lord transformed their lives, they are called to take the path as Jesus, the path of obedience (cf. Phil. 2: 6-8). This path takes the form of a ‘Rule’ which the Gospel expressed in their various charisms. Thus, through this path of obedience the “Lord turns obedience into wisdom by the work of His Spirit”<sup>101</sup>. He refers to “*aggiornamento*” as the fruit of wisdom forged in docility and obedience.

Pope Francis refers the arms of the Blessed Virgin Mary as “the ladder of God’s condescension”<sup>102</sup>. In a similar way he exhorts the consecrated people to cultivate this attitude in their lives thereby allowing themselves to be led by her. In other words, they should be guiders who themselves are guided. Through her intercession, he prayed that the grace of this mystery may enlighten and be our comfort as we make our journey to the New Jerusalem.

In order to promote and value the essence and identity of consecrated life, he further added to his homilies the message titled “Rejoice” for the year of consecrated life celebrated in 2014. In this message, he consolidates what he had briefly hinted in his homilies on the occasion of the world day of consecrated life. I think it is opportune to highlight the points more significant in his letter due to its pertinence. As the letter titled, *Rejoice!* He made it clear that according to the Scripture, *joy* is a fruit of the Spirit (cf. Gal. 5:22; Rm. 14:17),

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<sup>100</sup> Franciscus, “Occasione Diei Vitae Consecratae Dicati,” AAS 108 (2016): 113-115.

<sup>101</sup> Franciscus, “Die Vitae Consecratae Dicato,” AAS 107 (2015): 152-154.

<sup>102</sup> Franciscus, “Die Vitae Consecratae Dicato,” AAS 107 (2015): 152-154.

possible only in constant encounter with Christ who lights up in us a radiating happiness. He referred to consecrated persons as followers of Christ in a special prophetic way, and as His witnesses, able to inflame the world with their courageous evangelical decisions that bear fruit of joy. On this he recognized the effect of an authentic priority of the primacy of God that gives full meaning and joy to human lives (cf. VC 27).

Furthermore, he sees joy as the beauty of consecration and the foundation of human life which implies a free and conscious response to one's vocation. It is an exodus of oneself in order that Christ becomes the center of his or her life. Thus, consecrated life is a call to incarnate the Good News, to take up Jesus' way of life in relation to the Father and in relation to our fellow brethren. Practically this is a general mission of the people of God and in a particular way that of the consecrated life of which prayer is the source of its fruitfulness. In respect to this, he called attention to the inestimable value of the Eucharist as the "root" of faith, communion, service, solidarity, evangelization, fidelity and restlessness of love etc.

More so, they are called to be creative, dynamic and open to the suggestions of the Holy Spirit, capable to discern His presence in the course of history and in the world. Hence, as people transformed by their encounter and experience with Christ, they are called to console the people of God through their joy in the Lord. This witnessing should start in their different communities so as to extend to others in their parishes, dioceses and the universal Church. The example of some saint for example St. Augustine and St. Francis and others can also inspire our prophetic attitude by courageously denouncing all attitudes that are against the Gospel.

Pope Francis pointed at consistency and authenticity in life in order to attract and raise the young people to embrace this human and Christian life with joy. He recommended restlessness of love of God in its vertical and horizontal dimensions.

Finally, he presented Blessed Virgin Mary as a model to our faith. She carried the God of joy from the moment of Annunciation and through her this joy was extended to her cousin

Elizabeth and to the entire world. In her, the Church is identified with “all who journey together; in the love of those who go out to the most fragile; in the hope of those who know that they will be accompanied in their going out and in the faith of those who have a special gift to share”<sup>103</sup>. Through her motherly intercession and care, and led by the Holy Spirit we are able to fulfill our vocation and to reach out to others.

From the outlook of the findings of the messages from different popes, I made a summary of their teachings on the occasion of the world day of consecrated life. In all their homilies and teachings, I understood that they used these notions or concepts like primacy of God, evangelical counsels, encounter, totality, joy, immediateness, prophetic, martyrdom and fidelity to explain consecrated life. They recognized that the consecrated life is expressed in its different charisms and institutes. In a special way, it is a gift and work of the Trinity to the Church. They acknowledged that it is a closer and more exceptional and radical way to follow Jesus Christ. For this motive, in one way or the other they expressed their gratitude to God for this gift and in a spirit of thanksgiving they invite all the people of God to thank and celebrate this particular day with joy, great affection and fraternal communion.

They emphasized that it is a state of life rooted in the example and teaching of Christ during His existence on earth which was eventually communicated to us through the sacrament of Baptism of which we are made to participate in the three offices - *munus* of Christ: Priest, Prophet and King. However, profession of the evangelical counsels “consolidates” the radicality of our baptismal vows lived in a more prophetic way. Thus, profundity and universality are characteristics that attest to its existence rooted in the mystery of our Redemption. Therefore, consecrated men and women are called to share in this mystery

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<sup>103</sup> Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, “Rejoice! ‘A Letter to Consecrated men and women’,” (2 February 2014) accessed September 29, 2017, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccsclife/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccsclife\\_doc\\_20140202\\_rall\\_egratevi-lettera-consacrat\\_i\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccsclife/documents/rc_con_ccsclife_doc_20140202_rall_egratevi-lettera-consacrat_i_en.html).

of the Savior - mystery of His sacrifice “in which glory and the cross are indissolubly joined according to the paschal character of Christian life”<sup>104</sup>.

They recognized that before this total commitment to the service of the Kingdom of God, those who wish to respond to this call have accepted to collaborate with God’s grace by conforming their lives to the Gospel, through prayer, meditation on the Word of God, Divine Office, the sacraments and other spiritual exercises. In view of this, they see consecrated life as eloquent expression of the inmost nature of the Church as “Bride” of Christ (cf. VC 105). In other words, the priority of the primacy of God is highly valued and esteemed in the consecrated life. Without this vertical relationship, obviously consecrated life loses its significance. It becomes a house constructed on sand without foundation (cf. Mt.7:24-27).

Furthermore, they reminded us of another essential element of consecrated life; the mission of the consecrated people in the Church and in the world. Their mission is understood as participation in the mission of the Church since its nature is an intrinsic reality in the Church. They pointed out the prophetic, sacrificial and eschatological dimension of the consecrated life. It is Prophetic, in the sense that it announces the marvelous deeds of the Lord present in the world and as well denounces courageously by their life-examples and words off any attitude that opposes the Gospel. Knowing how difficult it is to give such testimony and witness, in solidarity they thank God for the heroic attitude of many consecrated men and women that have lost their life in this same mission. Nevertheless, they encouraged the sacrificial attitude of total offering of their lives and the capacity to share the joys and sorrows of the world with their brothers and sisters specially the less privileged and the poor (cf. 1 Cor. 9:22).

Logically, the challenges facing consecrated life lies here. They also exhorted the consecrated persons to trust and depend on God who called them to this life like St. Paul (cf. 2 Cor. 11:16-23; 2 Cor. 12:9-10). They remembered the elderly ones, those facing difficult

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<sup>104</sup> John Paulo II, “Homily on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord 5th Word day of the Consecrated Life,” (2 February 2001), accessed September 29, 2017, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2001/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_20010202\\_presentation-lord.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_20010202_presentation-lord.html).

moments in their apostolate and the sick, encouraging them to remain firm and faithful in their professions also to make memory of their first “yes”, “here I am” to the Lord, stressing that their authentic witness will motivate many to live a faithful Christian life for their salvation and that of the whole world.

However, they acknowledged that the mystery we are celebrating is also a Marian mystery, as she participated in the mystery of our salvation. She is the *icon* and model of consecrated life, being the first to respond to God’s call by her *fiat*. Inspired by her love, joy, humility, service, and communion and through her intercession they invoke God’s blessings on all the people of God.

In conclusion, it is important to know that Second Vatican Council, promoted the identification of the Consecrated Life by its origin in the mystery of the Holy Trinity. Its realization is through the sacrament of Baptism and its “prophetic radicalness” by the profession of the evangelical counsels. It participates in the mission of the Church. This means, that its essence is the primacy of God. The mission of the consecrated life is in the Church and in the World.



## **2. THE RELEVANCE OF CONSECRATED LIFE IN THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY**

The relevance of consecrated life in the contemporary society is a witness to God and humanity. On November 29, 2013, Pope Francis announced that 2015 will be a year ‘set apart’ for the celebration of this special vocation of consecrated life. The relevance according to pope Francis lies in the invitation to the Church’s religious sisters, brothers and priests to “wake up the World” with their testimony of faith, hope and service. Also, the relevance of consecrated life, in the canonical sense as defined by the Catholic Church in the Code of Canon Law, “is a stable form of living by which the faithful, following Christ more closely under the action of the Holy Spirit, are totally dedicated to God who is loved most of all, so that, having dedicated themselves to His honor, to the building up of the Church and to the salvation of the world, they strive for the perfection of charity in service to the Kingdom of God” (Can. 573 §1).

According to Diana Waal, RSCJ in the article what is the Year of Consecrated Life? States that what makes the consecrated life a more exacting way of Christian living is the public profession of vows whereby the person commits himself or herself for the love of God, to observe as binding the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. The relevance of consecrated life Diana observes is an ongoing and progressive identification with Jesus Christ. In addition, the relevance of consecrated life enables us to identify that in life and in the society, there are lights and shadows, and recognizing this is an exercise of lucidity and courage. Furthermore, the relevance of consecrated life helps us to know ourselves and others better. Because we stand on the shoulders of holy men and women, their wisdom, insight upon which is the foundation and inspiration are built our present and future. It is relevant in a very profound way because consecrated life is a gift of the Spirit to the Church affording me the privilege to express my vocation in a way and with the means to live it

meaningfully in the religious community and the world. The relevance of consecrated life in the contemporary society is made manifest in the awareness that is led by pope Francis against the life of materialism and global warming in protecting our common home the earth. The relevance is seen in the work the religious men, women, priests are doing in the global south working with the sick, elderly, children in poverty, child soldiers in Columbia, Liberia and Congo DR. The relevance of consecrated life in contemporary society is witnessed by the work nuns are doing in the United States providing education and shelter in low income cities and neighborhoods. In recent memory, Saint Theresa of Calcutta became the epitome of the relevance of consecrated life in the contemporary society. However, here in Braga, Lisbon, our Foundress during war time demonstrated the relevance of consecrated life in the world by opening the convent to orphans and children at risk of human trafficking and industrial slavery and child labor. Despite the persecution she suffered in the hands of the state she remained faithful to her special vocation in witnessing to the relevance of consecrated life in Portugal due to the intrinsic nature of consecrated life.

The recognition of the intrinsic nature of consecrated life in the Church as a reflection of the splendor of God's love and, as a tangible seal which the Trinity impresses upon history so that the longing attraction of divine beauty, may serve as a motivation to acknowledge and reflect on the indispensable relevance of consecrated life in our contemporary society. Obviously, this is rooted on its' essence and mission. That is, it depends on its sincere communion with the Holy Trinity from where it draws its strength for the missionary activities. Logically, its relevance has to do with these two important elements simultaneously: first, for the greater glory of God. Second, for edification of the Church and salvation of all mankind (cf. VC 32)<sup>105</sup>. In this perspective of bearing witness to the Beatitudes of the Gospel, consecrated life reminds "the baptized of the fundamental values of

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<sup>105</sup> Cf. Velasio De Paolis, *La Vida Consagrada en La Iglesia*, 58.

the Gospel” acknowledging that the world can only be transformed by the “spirit of the Beatitudes” (VC 33).

However, as it participates in the mission of the Church, it lives the image of the Church as bride in the sense that it recalls the Church of the primacy of God and its spousal dimension. Thus, by sharing in the joys and sufferings of the World, they contribute to the growth of a new humanity. In this way, they express “their spiritual fruitfulness by becoming receptive to the world” (VC 34). In our contemporary society dominated by wealth, power, pride and egoism, the consecrated life guided by the Holy Spirit reminds all men of God’s perfection and at the same time foster holiness by promoting and supporting every Christian desire for perfection (cf. VC 19, 35, 39). Meanwhile, the vocation of the consecrated persons is to seek first the Kingdom of God and its righteousness – a call to complete conversion and holiness. For this reason, they are called to give singular witness to this prophetic dimension by reminding everyone that, the building of the secular city must be founded on the Lord and have him as its goal (cf. LG 46). In the same perspective argues António Gomes Dias on the identity of consecrated people as one of the challenges facing consecrated life, due to the profound changes in the society of which consecrated men and women are expected to live out their original identity: The primacy of God in their life and in what they do<sup>106</sup>.

The consecrated life has effectively helped to keep alive in the Church the value and necessity of fraternity as a form of witness to the Trinity, by constantly promoting internal and external communion through dialogue and fraternal love. This shows that our participation in the “Trinitarian communion can change human relationship and create a new type of solidarity” (VC 41). We acknowledged that a lot has been done on these areas but it is not enough because of the increase in demand rising from the complex realities of some sectors. For example, the plight of refugees, violations of the rights of the unborn, defense of

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<sup>106</sup> Cf. António Gomes Dias, “O desafio da Identidade,” in *Vida Consagrada às Portas do Terceiro Milénio: Desafios e Apelos no ano dedicado ao Espírito Santo*, ed. Abílio Pina Ribeiro et al. (Lisboa: Paulinas, 1998), 31-33.

life, human trafficking, unjustified curtailment of human and religious rights, lack of social assistance, defense and promotion of peace and justice etc. Hence, the intervention of the consecrated life is most needed now than ever to attest to the presence and love of God through their witnessing.

In this rapid changing era amidst cultural diversity and the many challenges we are facing (cf. LS 4), the consecrated men and women, moved by the desire to serve God and work for integral human promotion contribute to the organic development of the society through their active presence in evangelization, through works of charity serving the victims of both old and new forms of poverty (cf. EN 69); as well as in being close to the sick and marginalized; also in the education of the children, adolescents and the youths; in schools and universities; in the advancement of culture in becoming artisans of peace and justice and in the mass media. That is to say that, the consecrated life “scattered” throughout all the areas of the activities of the society, through their different charisms, influences the transmission and formation of different culture. For example, in the middle Age, at the beginning of European consolidation, when the monasteries were places in which the culture of Christian humanism was developed. In this context, we may say that their activities and social works are proofs to their constant commitment to integral human promotion.

Furthermore, the consecrated life is a type that when lived with its true spirit of total love and self-surrender to the will of God<sup>107</sup> and for the love of neighbor (cf. PC 6), leads one to the experience of inner and outward peace, love and joy, thereby making the reign of God present and known in the world. It is in a certain way, a prolongation of Christ’s humanity (cf. VC 19), which expressively “shows that the more one lives in Christ, the better one can serve Him in others, going even to the furthest missionary outposts and facing the greatest dangers”

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<sup>107</sup> Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated life and Societies of Apostolic Life, “*Mutuae Relationes* ‘Directives for the Mutual Relations between Bishops and Religious in the Church’,” accessed May 23, 2018, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccsclife/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccsclife\\_doc\\_14051978\\_mutuae-relationes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccsclife/documents/rc_con_ccsclife_doc_14051978_mutuae-relationes_en.html).

(VC 76). For this reason, it is often found in the front lines of the Church's mission and dialogue with the world.

In other words, they consecrated men and women live the same events and realities as the people of God in various geographical and cultural contexts (cf. GS 1). However, we need to know that they face a lot of challenges when they “intervene more decisively in the areas of greater injustice and oppression”<sup>108</sup>. This endangers their lives even to the risk of death (cf. EN 69). But, as citizens, they involve themselves in the societal activities through their secular professions. They carry out their duties in the social-economic and political sectors with the aim of defending human rights and evangelical values. For example, through their academic institutes, communication media and multiple religious and educational projects, they actively contribute specially to the formation of the young, inasmuch as making them architects of human and social development<sup>109</sup>. From the history of the Church, we discovered that their involvement in politics – we mean the dynamic organization of the whole life of the society - directly or indirectly was due to the internal and external needs of the society. In this context, “they are called to be in the midst of the People of God both sign and stimulant of this fundamental option which promotes and conditions all others”<sup>110</sup>.

Indeed, by their nature – the primacy of God - and by their features of universality, they situate themselves as people of The Absolute in the dynamism of the Church, where they dedicate in a special way to the service of God and the whole Church (cf. EN 69; PC 6). Thus, consecrated life is a radiant sign of the Kingdom of heaven (cf. PC 1; LG 44). Nevertheless, conscious of their eloquent and intrinsic participation in the mission of the Church, they are guided by the magisterium, whom she - Institutes of consecrated life - pledges obedience, and whom she recognizes as a guarantee of her universality and the special nature of her charism

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<sup>108</sup> Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated life and Societies of Apostolic Life, “Religious and Human Promotion ‘Plenary of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes’”.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated life and Societies of Apostolic Life, “Religious and Human Promotion,” 12.

<sup>110</sup> Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated life and Societies of Apostolic Life, “Religious and Human Promotion,” 12.

(cf. Can. 573-606). Hence, their specific contribution in the Church and in the world is oriented by the criteria of discernment approved by the Roman Pontiff to ensure its adequate and effective vitality in its present and hope for its future<sup>111</sup>.

After this general view of the contribution of consecrated life in the Church and in the world, we realize that there are new roads to walk on (cf. VC 84), new possibilities to explore, new question to ask and respond to, as people are changing, objectives are different and new needs are emerging. There is a need to re-define and remodel with openness our life-style<sup>112</sup>, our ministries, formation and administration to be more relevant to this changing world as recommended by *Perfectae Caritatis* n° 2 (cf. GS 4)<sup>113</sup>. Perhaps, we consider it necessary to recall the proposed four fidelities that guard the consecrated life in its mission. First is its fidelity to Christ and to His Gospel, on this we may ask if actual consecrated life takes Christ and His Gospel as the first and ultimate reason of their life and mission. The Gospel is the foundation, rule and joy of their existence. Second, fidelity to the Church and her mission in the world through her communion. Third, fidelity to the consecrated life and to the charism of one's institute. In fact, their identity is an essential element that is always present in their spiritual and apostolic activities. Last but not the least, fidelity to humanity and to our age. However, as witnesses to God in the world, they are invited to that dynamic fidelity which discovers through contemplation of the Lord's countenance and attention to the needs of the men and women of our days, the paths of salvation through the Gospel sown by the Spirit<sup>114</sup>.

Consequently, we observed that the contribution of consecrated life is present as a "small light" in the society of which leads us to affirm of its relevance in the contemporary society, thus, confident in the divine grace and providence, we resound with the words of St.

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<sup>111</sup> Cf. Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated life and Societies of Apostolic Life, "Religious and Human Promotion," 21-27.

<sup>112</sup> Cf. Agostinho Leal, "A Vida Consagrada, 'Sinal de Contradição,'" in *Esta Geração Pede um Sinal: O Sinal da Vida Consagrada*, XVII Semana de Estudo. ed. Jacinto Farias et al. (Lisboa: Paulinas, 2001), 25-27.

<sup>113</sup> Cf. Jacinto Farias, "Jesus Cristo "Sinal de Contradição," in *Esta Geração Pede um Sinal: O Sinal da Vida Consagrada*, XVII Semana de Estudo. ed. Jacinto Farias et al. (Lisboa: Paulinas, 2001), 7-9.

<sup>114</sup> Cf. Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated life and Societies of Apostolic Life, "Religious and Human Promotion," 13-31.

Paul in his letter to the Romans “Now to him who can strengthen you, according to the Gospel, and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, ... made known to all nations to bring about the obedience of faith, to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ be glory forever and ever” (Rom. 16:25-27). This reminds us of the mandate of the Second Vatican Council to the consecrated people to return to the source of their foundation, that is, their prophetic and radical nature is rooted in the mystery of the incarnate Word (cf. PC 1, GS 22). It also reaffirms the pragmatic and irreconcilable paradox of this vocation with incoherent lifestyle<sup>115</sup>.

## 2.1. Different Vocations in the Church

The ecclesiastical law maintains that the faithful are those who are baptized. However, through the sacrament of baptism, they are incorporated in Christ and into the Church as its members. For this reason, they participate in the priestly, prophetic and royal function of Christ and in the mission of the Church according to each one's condition (cf. Can. 204). The faithful determines the common vocation of all the members of the Church, by virtue of their baptism there is a true equality between them in terms of dignity and action (cf. Can. 208). From the common dignity of the faithful, exist diversification in the function to be performed in the Church. In respect to this, the Church recognizes that there exist specific vocations for every living person. Thus, “vocation is the providential thought of the Creator for each creature [...]. Vocation is (a) the divine invitation to self-realization according to this image (that is, of God who called each one of us)”<sup>116</sup>. Therefore, by divine institution exists various vocations among the faithful: the clerics or the ordained ministers, the lay faithful and those in

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<sup>115</sup> Cf. Núria Frau, “O desafio Da Fidelidade Criativa,” in *Vida Consagrada às Portas do Terceiro Milénio: Desafios e Apelos no ano dedicado ao Espírito Santo*, ed. Abílio Pina Ribeiro et al. (Lisboa: Paulinas, 1998), 17-22.

<sup>116</sup> Cf. Pontifical Work for Ecclesiastical Vocation, “New Vocation for a New Europe,” 13a (5-10 May 1997), accessed September 29, 2017, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccsclife/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccsclife\\_doc\\_06011998\\_new-vocations\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccsclife/documents/rc_con_ccsclife_doc_06011998_new-vocations_en.html).

the consecrated life. The distinction among them is based on its functional organization. For example, the sacrament of Holy order, in which by divine institution some faithful are constituted as sacred ministers to carry out the sacred offices (cf. LG 18. 32). Hence, by the virtue of their ordination, they exercise specific ministry in three different degrees in the Church, which are: the episcopate, the presbyterate, and the diaconate (cf. CCE n° 1554; Can. 1009 §1).

Generally, we have discoursed about the nature and mission of the consecrated life. Now we are being reminded that the faithful are called by God in this vocation or state of life in order to enjoy this particular gift in the life of the Church and according to one's vocation contribute to the salvific mission of the Church (cf. LG 43). Consecrated life is a special vocation known by its "specific" consecration in view of a specific mission through the profession of evangelical counsels as vows or by other sacred bonds recognized and approved by the competent authority of the Church (cf. Can. 574 §2). In our study, we discover that there is a little difference in the comprehension of this vocation as religious state of life or consecrated life. The difference is that consecrated life includes religious institutes and secular institutes, while when we refer to religious life it is strictly on religious institutes.

Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium* present the term "religious state of life" in its hierarchical structure and in the mystery of the Church. According to this document, with reference to number 915 of the Catholic Catechism, what characterizes or identifies consecrated life as such is not the evangelical counsels in itself, but the consecrated way of living them as recognized and approved by the Church (cf. LG 42-43; PC 1-2)<sup>117</sup>. Thus, religious consecration is understood as a total offering of a faithful to God through bonds that are not necessarily by vows, but the evangelical counsels proposed by Christ to His disciples foster in a special way the holiness of the Church. Discoursing on its value. Affirm that "this

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<sup>117</sup> Cf. Tomás Rincón-Pérez, "Normae Communes Omnibus Institutis Vitae Consecratae," in *Comentario Exegético Al Código de Derecho Canónico*, cord & dir. A. Marzoa et al. Vol. II. (Pamplona: EUNSA, 1996), 1403.

consecration will be more perfect, in as much as the indissoluble bond of the union of Christ and His bride, the Church, is represented by firm and more stable bonds” (LG 44). Nevertheless, in the Catholic Catechism number 925, it differentiates religious life from other forms of consecrated life with some particular characteristics like: public profession of the evangelical counsels, fraternal life in common and its liturgical obligations. Secular institutes and the Society of common life also had the same consideration with religious in terms of common norms to all institutes of consecrated life. That is to say, that the term religious assume its original theological significance before canonical understanding or better an *autonomous* significance<sup>118</sup>.

It also refers to this state of life as a stable way of living with a specific juridical recognition and approval by the competent authority of the Church. This implies that by their consecration, they contribute to the salvific mission of the Church in a particular way as a special vocation received from God. More so, it mentioned the distinctive feature of consecrated life as the eschatological character of this vocation. Thus, the testimony of those “called” to this vocation prefigures the glory of the New Jerusalem<sup>119</sup>.

Decree *Perfectae caritatis*, explicitly explain that Secular Institutes are not Religious institutes, but they profess the evangelical counsels in the world. However, their consecration is recognized by the Church, while the lay and clerics can belong to these institutes (cf. PC 11). It puts consecrated life in continuation of baptism and also differentiates it from baptism. Hence, Code of Canon Law on its own explains the term consecrated life by the profession of evangelical counsels in its theological and juridical perspectives. This means that consecrated life is a stable form of living by which a faithful through the profession of the evangelical counsels dedicates his or her life totally to God, for His honor, the building up of the Church and the salvation of the world (cf. Can. 573 §1.2)<sup>120</sup>. Therefore, taking note of the differences

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<sup>118</sup> Cf. Velasio De Paolis, *La Vida Consagrada en La Iglesia*, 45-46.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. Rincón-Pérez, “Normae Communes Omnibus Institutis Vitae Consecratae,” 1392.

<sup>120</sup> Cf. Velasio De Paolis, *La Vida Consagrada en La Iglesia*, 47.

in terms of the names – in religious institutes, the evangelical counsels is understood as a public vow, while in institutes of consecrated life it may not be a public vow but other specific bond recognized and approved by the competent authority in the Church - and in consideration of their common similarity, we intend presenting different forms of consecrated life. Moreover, consecrated life in a broad sense includes the institutes of consecrated life, institutes of religious life and secular institutes. There are two elements essential in these forms of consecrated life: the profession of the evangelical counsels and also canonical recognition by the competent authority in the Church (cf. can 573 § 1.2; 607 § 1.2).

The various forms of the consecrated life are as follows:

*The monastic life:* Through monastic profession they participate in the Paschal Mystery of Christ's death and resurrection. In this way, they are bearers of the cross and the spirit "capable of endowing history with hidden fruitfulness by unceasing praise(s) and intercession(s), in spiritual counsels and works of charity" (VC 6). The eremitic or anchoritic and cenobitic life recognized in the Church are known as different expressions of monastic life (cf. Can. 603 §1; VC 6).

*The Order of Virgins:* They profess the evangelical counsels in the hands of the diocesan bishop according to the approved liturgical rite. Thus, "they constitute a special eschatological image of the Heavenly Bride and the life to come, when the Church will at last fully live her love for Christ the Bridegroom" (VC 7; cf. Can. 604 §1.2).

*Men and women hermits:* They are recognized by law as faithful dedicated to God in consecrated life if they publicly profess "in the hands of the diocesan bishop the three evangelical counsels, confirmed by vow or other sacred bond, and observe a proper program of living under his (bishop) direction" (Can. 603 §2; cf. VC 7).

*Institutes completely devoted to contemplation:* composed of either men or women who imitate "Christ in His prayer on the mountain, bearing witness to God's lordship over history and anticipate the glory which is to come" (VC 8) by their lives and mission.

*Apostolic religious life:* they consecrate themselves to God through public profession of the evangelical counsels in accordance with a specific charism and in a stable form of common life in order to render apostolic service to the People of God. Religious Congregations of men and women devoted to apostolic and missionary activities. The Mendicant Order, the Clerics Regular are examples of apostolic religious life (cf. VC 9).

*Secular Institutes:* through their profession of evangelical counsels, live out their consecration to God in the world in the midst of the temporal realities. By this specific presence in the world, they contribute to the sanctification of the world and consequently, “make present in the society the newness and power of Christ’s Kingdom” (VC 10). The consecration of members in this Institute does not change their canonical condition among the people of God. They have their constitutions which serve as a rule that orient or direct the lives of its members in respect to their consecration and obligations in the institute. More so, their members express and exercise their consecration in apostolic activities from within like a leaven for the growth of the Church. (cf. Can. 710 - 730)<sup>121</sup>.

In view of all that we have said about various vocations in the Church, that reveals the infinite richness of the mystery of Jesus Christ, we conclude by saying that they have their origin in the mystery of the Trinity. They are gifts of the Father by His Son through the Holy Spirit to the Church. In this sense they are “deeply united in the Church’s mystery of communion and are dynamically coordinated in its unique mission” (ChL 55). We understood that the Church is the mother of every vocation because she gave birth to them; she protects, nurtures and sustains them by the power of the Holy Spirit. This means that, “she exercises a precious mediating and pedagogical function [...] when she helps and stimulates each believer to be aware of the gift received and the responsibility that the gift brings with it”<sup>122</sup>.

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<sup>121</sup> About the *Societies of Apostolic Life*: They are not institutes of consecrated life. Their commitment to the evangelical counsels is made through sacred bond officially recognized by the Church in their constitutions. This specific nature of their consecration distinguishes them from institutes of consecrated life. (cf. Can. 731 - 755).

<sup>122</sup> Pontifical Work for Ecclesiastical Vocations, “New Vocations for a New Europe: ‘*In Verbo tuo...*’” 19 (5-10 May 1997), accessed September 29, 2017.

We observed that there are varieties of vocations but they complement each other as they work hand in hand in the Lord's vineyard. That is to say "that each of them has a basic and unmistakable character which sets each apart, while at the same time each of them is seen in relation to the other and placed at each other's service" (ChL 55). On this, António Gomes Dias highlights the importance of this mutual relationship that should be promoted in the ecclesial communities, in order to avoid all preconceptions, lack of confidence and "superiority" of different charism. He considers dialogue as an essential element to cure all tensions and conflicts that may arise because of the identity of each vocation<sup>123</sup>. In a different perspective, Bruno Secondin, stress on a new theological proposal and strategies about consecrated life that will not depend on the repetition of the past nor a "fantasy" of the existential reality thereby situating it outside its cultural context, that is, not paying attention to the geographical reality where it originates. He appeals for vocational discernment, interior life and "optical solidarity of communion of compassion"<sup>124</sup>.

Furthermore, every vocation opens up in three directions: as a *sign* in relation to Christ, revealing the face of Jesus Christ; as *ministry* in relation to the Church, "rooted in the pure gratuity of the gift [...], for the common good, in the dynamism of many ministerial services"<sup>125</sup>, and as a *mission* in relation to the world because it is lived for others like Jesus did, therefore it is life-giving project. However, "vocation and mission constitutes two faces of the same prism. They define the gift and contribution of each person to God's plan, in the image and likeness of Jesus"<sup>126</sup>. The most important and fundamental element is their *being* Christians that implies living out their Christian dignity and the universal call to holiness in the perfection of love according to one's vocation. Thus, the lay state has its distinctive

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[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccsclife/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccsclife\\_doc\\_06011998\\_new-vocations\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccsclife/documents/rc_con_ccsclife_doc_06011998_new-vocations_en.html).

<sup>123</sup> Cf. António Gomes Dias, "O Desafio da Identidade," in *Vida Consagrada às Portas do Terceiro Milénio*, 38-39.

<sup>124</sup> Bruno Secondin, "Los Actuales Desafíos De/a la Vida Consagrada en Europa," *Vida Religiosa* (12 May 2017), accessed May 25, 2018. <https://vidareligiosa.es/los-actuales-desafios-dea-la-vida-consagrada-europa-i/>.

<sup>125</sup> Pontifical Work for Ecclesiastical Vocations, "New Vocations for a New Europe: 'in *Verbo tuo*...'" 19c.

<sup>126</sup> Pontifical Work for Ecclesiastical Vocations, "New Vocations for a New Europe: '*In Verbo tuo*...'" 19c.

feature in the secular character; the ministerial priesthood represents the permanent guarantee of the sacramental presence of Christ our Savior and the consecrated or religious state bears witness to the eschatological character of the Church through their vows of chastity, poverty and obedience (cf. ChL 55).

## **2.2. Evangelical Counsels**

One of the basic characteristic of consecrated life is the public or private profession of the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience. The evangelical counsels are based on the teaching and example of Jesus Christ. They are “divine gift which the Church received from the Lord and preserves always through His grace” (Can. 575; cf. LG 44; VC 1). The profession of the evangelical counsels is an act of total offering of oneself to God and His service, therefore its importance is “seem in the fact that it fosters the perfection of love of God and love of neighbor in an outstanding manner and strengthened by vows” (LG 45). We ought to believe that the profession of the evangelical counsels is a generous and unreserved response to one’s vocation. For this reason, it cannot be considered as a denial of the values inherent in nature as regards to sexuality; desire to possess material goods or make decisions for oneself because by nature these values or inclinations are good in themselves (cf. VC 87; LG 46). Hence, the profession of chastity, poverty and obedience as a constant remembrance of our human condition, affirms the value of created goods while it also *relativizes* them by pointing to God as Absolute Good. In other words, those who profess them, propose a spiritual “*therapy* for humanity, because they reject the idolatry of anything created” (VC 87).

The evangelical counsels are something that englobes human existence and so, should be seen as the symbol that expresses total commitment and as a charism. It is a triad that signifies “unity” that is, three but one. A triad that refers to all the dimension of the gospel and life of those involved. In addition, it has to be understood as a special grace to the “three” dimensions of human being: affectivity, autonomy and possession and not a personal effort or

work. So to say, it is not an act of self-affirmation but of supplication and confidence in God<sup>127</sup>. The profession of the evangelical counsels is realized through a public vow or any other sacred bond or declaration according to the constitution of each institute approved by Church authority.

Perhaps, it is pertinent to clarify the meaning of the word vow. In the Occidental Church, the word in Latin *votum*, is a promise made to God conditioned to obtain a request. In this case, it is a sacred promise that should be fulfilled by who made or undertakes the vow. It implies a covenant, a relationship with God and human being. In Greek, vow has a wider significance, it means: gift, petition and prayer. It is not a conditioned promise as in occidental Church, but expresses a recognition and acknowledgment of a divinity<sup>128</sup>. Generally, it is a promise made to God that involves a ritual act or ceremony, however, it has a religious connotation. As regards to religious vow, it is a deliberate “love” promise made to God. It is a sacred bond that unites God and the person in question and has its end in God. It has a consecratory effectiveness because it expresses the gift of oneself to God<sup>129</sup>. Religious vow can be divided into: solemn and simple. It is solemn in relation to its juridical effect – it make void all contrary to them - different from simple vow. It can be perpetual for the whole life or temporary for a period of time or years. And also it can be public if it is done in religious institutes approved by competent Church authority or private as a devotion. Meanwhile, the solemn vows are always public and perpetual<sup>130</sup>. We now develop each vow base on its anthropological, Christological and ecclesiological dimensions.

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<sup>127</sup> Cf. Paredes, *Teología de la Vida Religiosa*, 394-395.

<sup>128</sup> Cf. Paredes, *Teología de la Vida Religiosa*, 372-373.

<sup>129</sup> Cf. Velasio De Paolis, *La Vida Consagrada en La Iglesia*, 63.

<sup>130</sup> Cf. L. Babbini, “Consejos Evangelicos (y votos religiosos),” in *Diccionario Enciclopédico de Teología Moral*, ed. Leandro Rossi and Ambrogio Valsecchi. (Madrid: Paulinas, 1974), 127. 124-131.

### 2.2.1. Chastity

In Latin *castitas*, means a state or practice of abstaining from extramarital or sexual intercourse. It can be considered as a virtue, continence and as an evangelical counsel professed as a vow, but our consideration is based on its understanding as an evangelical counsel professed as a vow. The vow of chastity professed for the sake of the kingdom of God is rooted in the life and example of Jesus Christ. It is a precious gift of the Father to certain souls (cf. Mt. 19:12ff), in order that they may love Him above all things (cf. LG 42-43; PC 12). This vow reminds us in a particular way the natural love of human beings, elevated to its plenitude, because Jesus himself lived this particular love to its fullness, to the point of giving his life on the cross for love of mankind. Motivated by the love of His Father and the implementation of His Kingdom, He lived chaste, obedient and poor. However, if God is love and Jesus Christ is the plane revelation of this love (cf. 1 Jn. 4:7-11), then we are called to love one another as God has loved us in Christ and in a particular way, consecrated men and women through the profession of this vow, love God above everything and their neighbors while reproducing in their lives the earthly futures of Jesus life: chaste, obedient and poor. We can say that chastity professed for the sake of the Kingdom of God is first a gift which later turns into an option by personal encounter with the Lord. It is a prophetic sign that points the primacy of Gods' love as we read in first latter of John. 4:10. The encounter of Jesus and Zacchaeus tells us that the initiative is always from God (cf. Lk. 19:1-11)<sup>131</sup>. Reflecting on Mathews 19:12ff and in parallel to the order of God in Genesis 1:28, we may ask if this is not a provocation on the part of Christ in a circumstance where a man or woman can naturally express their masculinity and femininity. How can we justify the order of God in Genesis 1:28 "Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it"? Truly, these affirmations are not contrary of the teachings and example of Christ. He said "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law but to fulfill it" (cf. Mt. 5:17). We acknowledge that human beings are

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<sup>131</sup> Cf. Anabela Carneiro, "O Sinal da Castidade pelo Reino," in *Esta Geração pede um Sinal*, 74-76.

characterized by their sexuality which includes sentiments, emotions and affectivity, also for a healthy, authentic relationship with others, these intuitive feelings should be educated, integrated and lived in equilibrium. That is, in a way that liberates us than making us slaves because unbridled sexuality can lead one into frustration and other dangerous situations.

Professed chastity for the sake of the kingdom of heaven in the consecrated life is a sign of the world to come and “a source of more abundant fruitfulness in an undivided heart, entails the obligation of perfect continence in celibacy” (Can. 599). It does not disvalue “sex” or look down on our human condition because of its inevitability in life, but it tends to take it to a plane comprehension in the economy of our salvation. It is a call to love in a way that contradicts any relationship that enslaves or do not labrets or makes one to grow in an authentic love (cf. Mt. 13:31-32; Jn. 4:4-30)<sup>132</sup>. In other words, it helps us to “transform in our interior life everything that has its sources in the lust of flesh” (RD 9). It keeps present the love of God in the heart of the person who made this vow, enabling him or her to love as Christ did<sup>133</sup>.

That notwithstanding, here lies the Christocentric characteristic of this vow, though not all understand this mystery and its language (Mt. 13:11; 19:12). This vow has its foundation in the life of Christ who called us to follow Him (Mt. 16:24). It tends to express an “exclusive” and spousal love for Christ, making oneself eunuch for the sake of the kingdom of heaven (cf. RD 11). In this sense, chastity is a prophetic sign, a virginal love response of the Church to Christ. Analogically, it can be compered as the love of Christ to the Church<sup>134</sup>. More so, it points out the importance of faith in our Christian life, faith that is expressed in our freedom in the very option we made with all its consequences and also exercised in our mission by our authentic witnesses. It is a concrete *via* that invites us to speak like Paul in his letter to the Galatians 2:20 “yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live

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<sup>132</sup> Cf. Anabela Carneiro, “O Sinal da Castidade pelo Reino,” in *Esta Geração pede um Sinal*, 76-80.

<sup>133</sup> Cf. Maria da Glória Magalhães, “A Profissão dos Conselhos Evangélico,” in *A Essência da Vida Consagrada*, ed. António Couto et al. (Lisboa: Paulus Editora, 2015), 105.

<sup>134</sup> Cf. Lourenço Kearns, *A Teologia da vida Consagrada* (Aparecida: Editora Santuário, 1999), 160-163.

in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me”<sup>135</sup>.

However, since consecrated life introduces its members into the universal mission of the Church, rooted in the messianic mission of Christ, the profession of this vow implies also the participation of this salvific mission of the Church. Analogically, the love that exists between Christ and the Church is what is expected to happen between the person who professed this vow and Christ. This vow impels each person to a total dedication of his or her entire life to a joyful service to God, and His people. It enables us to share the joys and sorrows of humanity especially among the poor (cf. GS 1). As a sign of an intimate relationship, it also depends on faith and love (cf. 2 Tm. 1:12), expressed as a fundamental option in one’s life, source of his or her coherent witness and apostolate<sup>136</sup>. In this way, according to what is said about her biography, Teresa of Avila is in plain communion with the Church, as confirmed by her word: “I am a daughter of the Church”<sup>137</sup> and Teresa of the Child Jesus: “In the heart of the Church, my Mother, I will be Love”<sup>138</sup>.

### 2.2.2. Poverty

Poverty, *Paupertas* is a state of being in need of the essential necessities of life. A general view of poverty shows that it can be studied in different perspectives, for example as a problem caused by social existence of life - unjust accumulation of material things and consumerism - or as a spiritual poverty. In this sense, its biblical perspective is our interest. In consecrated life, poverty implies two things: to be poor “of the poorest” and poor in spirit which leads to a moderate use of material things and liberation from earthly riches. It also implies dependence and limitation in the use and disposition of goods, in accordance with the nature of each institute and what is established in the Canon Law (cf. Can. 600).

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<sup>135</sup> Cf. Joyce Ridick, *Os Votos um Tesouro em Vasos de Argila* (Lisboa: Edições Paulistas, 1986), 88-89.

<sup>136</sup> Cf. Kearns, *A Teologia da vida Consagrada*, 163-164; Ridick, *Os Votos um Tesouro em Vasos de Argila*, 90.

<sup>137</sup> Efrén de la Madre de Dios, Otger Steggink, *Tiempo y Vida de Santa Teresa* (Madrid: B.A.C, 1968), 761.

<sup>138</sup> Santa Teresa do Menino Jesus, *Obras Completas* (Marco de Canaveses: Carmelo, 1996), 230.

Nevertheless, these two dimensions go hand in hand despite their differences. In this case, Paul's second letter to the Corinthians constitutes a concise synthesis of this theme in the Gospel. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9). This means that poverty is part of the interior structure of the redemptive grace of Jesus Christ and without it we cannot understand the mystery of the gift of God to man.

As we can verify, this is "provocative" or emblematic as well pragmatic in the sense that Jesus Christ proclaims "blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 5:3). Indeed, in this context probably we can say that Jesus Christ is not merely referring to human lack of material things but the point on which He is insisting or emphasizing on the bases of the poor in spirit. It is certain that God is not against the possession of earthly things and our human tendency of acquiring worldly goods, but what matters is that we do not make them our "god" by not making a proper use of them. In this context, "evangelical poverty reveals to the eyes of the human soul the perspective of the whole mystery, "hidden for ages in God" (Eph. 3:9)" (RD 12; cf. RD 9). Therefore, only the "poor" can truly understand the poverty of the One who is infinitely rich. That is, Christ poverty is an infallible expression of the infinite richness of God. Logically, "He is not only a teacher but also the spokesman and guarantor of that salvific poverty which corresponds to the infinite richness of God and to the inexhaustible power of His grace" (RD 12). More so, profession of poverty like that of Christ is a concrete project because it is part of the human history<sup>139</sup>. Hence, the profession of this vow for the sake of the kingdom of God is not a degrading or dehumanization of the integrity of man.

In addition to the above, the episode of the rich young man in the synoptic Gospels calls our attention to be free of those material things that can be an obstacle in our faith and dependence in God. It is an invitation to make God our unique Treasure, trusting that He will

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<sup>139</sup> Cf. Arturo Palio, *Buscando Libertad: Castidad – Obediencia – Pobreza* (Santander: Editorial Sal Terrae, 1981), 120

provide for our needs (cf. Mt. 6:25; 6:33). However, it is also a call to enrich others with our material goods. Thus, this expresses the mission of the Church as a continuation of the mission of Christ the Good Shepherd. The Church is an ecclesial community where its members contribute for its growth like Christ Himself (cf. 1 Pe. 4:10-11)<sup>140</sup>. In line with this, the profession of poverty intensifies the testimony of each community and the Church as a whole. It reveals a sense of liberation from all slavery of material things, freedom from the driving force of accumulation and consumerism<sup>141</sup>. In respect to this, it manifests the readiness of members to share their life and what they have with the poor in solidarity through their moderate use of earthly goods (cf. Can. 600; PC 13)<sup>142</sup>. Through this practice, the vow of poverty manifests the participation in the sacramental nature of the People of God because it is in itself a part of the Church's mystery and as a social reality<sup>143</sup>.

Finally, looking at the world of civilization marked by prodigious movement of material growth, alluring security of possessions, knowledge and power, evangelical poverty as a call of God places the person at the *pinnacle* of the Christian conscience, in order to remind the People of God that true and complete progress consists in responding to their vocation to participate in the life of God which find its culmination in the paschal event (cf. ET 19; RD 12). Truly, "Christ, the poorest in His death on the cross, is also the One who enriches us infinitely with the fullness of new life, through the (His) resurrection" (RD 12).

### 2.2.3. *Obedience*

We are convinced that the evangelical counsels are a triple expression of a single "yes" to the one relationship of total consecration and dedication of life to God and His

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<sup>140</sup> Cf. Jerome Murphy O'Connor, *Os Religiosos na Igreja Particular* (São Paulo: Edições Paulinas, 1974), 83-87.

<sup>141</sup> Cf. O'Connor, *Os Religiosos na Igreja Particular*, 87-88; "Religious and Human Promotion," 15.

<sup>142</sup> Cf. Tomás Rincón-Pérez, 1484-1485.

<sup>143</sup> Cf. Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, "Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching on Religious Life," 38 (1983), accessed September 29, 2017, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccsclife/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccsclife\\_doc\\_31051983\\_magisterium-on-religious-life\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccsclife/documents/rc_con_ccsclife_doc_31051983_magisterium-on-religious-life_en.html).

service which leads to love of our neighbor. This is done by following Christ as the “only One thing” that is necessary in life (cf. Lk. 10:42). Our study on chastity and poverty can equally be referred to obedience in the sense that their unique foundation is the mystery of life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Based on this fact, we now proceed further our study.

The term obedience *ob-audiencia*, in latin *oboedientia* and in Greek, means to listen, “to have a listening ear”. In terms of religious it signifies the practical attitude of listening to the word of God. As regards to the teachings of the Church, obedience entails a relationship and voluntary act of commitment to God through a total offering of ones will to His salvific will (cf. PC 14; ET 2)<sup>144</sup>. In the case of a consecrated person, his or her superior holds the place of God, for this, the profession of this evangelical counsel requires the submission of ones will in faith to the legitimate mandates of the superior. This should be a free, responsible, active and participative surrender of their will as a sacrifice of themselves to God through those who represent God<sup>145</sup>.

We may at this point ask: is man obedient by nature? Yes in fact! He is obedient by nature. That is, he obeys in three aspects of his life: physiologically – he listens and responds to his natural needs; psycho-social - in his relationship with others, he also attends to their various necessities and spiritually out of his free will, he obeys God<sup>146</sup>.

However, we understood that the profound significance of this term goes beyond our physical and social aspect of this word. In other words it lies in its transcendence and spiritual nature. Meanwhile, it is based on its essence that we intend to discourse. The profession of obedience in the light of faith and in accordance with the very vigor of Christ love is a gift of the Holy Spirit (LG 43). Following the example of Jesus Christ who came to do the will of His Father (cf. Jn. 4:34; 5:30; Heb. 10:7; Ps. 39:9), and in communion with Him who “learned

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<sup>144</sup> Cf. Paredes, *Teología de la Vida Religiosa*, 418; T. J. Van Bavel, *O Núcleo da Vida Religiosa: Tensão evangélica impulso da Sociedade* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1978), 178-179.

<sup>145</sup> Cf. Tomás Rincón-Pérez, “Can. 601,” 1486-1487.

<sup>146</sup> Cf. Joyce Ridick, *Os Votos um Tesouro em Vasos de Argila*, 133- 144.

to obey through suffering” (Heb. 5:8), one who professes this vow has “assumed a firmer commitment to the ministry of the Church and of your (his) brethren” (ET 23; cf. PC 14).

Analogically, evangelical obedience like that of Christ should be passive in the sense that He made an interior submission of His will like a lamb been lead to the slaughter house without resistance (cf. Is. 53:7; Mt. 27:12), also it should be active in terms of His filial relationship with His Father. An intimate bond qualified as *perichoresis* (cf. Phil. 2:6-8). Hence, this relation leads to a special love of His disciples to the extent of giving up His life in love for their salvation (cf. RD 13)<sup>147</sup>. In view of this, the vow of obedience reveals ecclesiological aspect of its nature. Taking into consideration the love that exists between Christ and His Church, similarly, that love is revealed in the community life where each member gives a witness to Christ obedience by a mutual availability and submission of his or her will to the authority for the common good and growth of the community. Thus, religious community is a manifestation of the Church as a community which participates in the mission of Christ His Spouse. Precisely, by obeying the Church Magisterium they are doing so to Christ (cf. ET 6; PC 14; Heb. 13:17; RD 13; Can. 590 §1, 2; 601).

In driving home our discourse for conclusion, we affirm that the evangelical vows are three ways of pledging oneself to live as Christ lived on earth. They have to do with the integral or totality of human existence and “each emphasizes a strong relation to Jesus Christ, consecrated and sent”<sup>148</sup>. Where-fore, the evangelical counsels are fundamental option that frees a person for a plain realization of his potentials rather than an impoverish renunciation. They should be understood and lived as dynamic values which is conquered and renewed constantly through prayer, asceticism, spiritual exercises and participation in the liturgical life of the Church. They constitute the most radical means of human transformation in the economy of our salvation (cf. RD 9). As a stable way of participating in the mystery of the Church, they are oriented by competent Church authority. Therefore, it is a “journey” of faith,

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<sup>147</sup> Cf. Joyce Ridick, *Os Votos um Tesouro em Vasos de Argila*, 161-162.

<sup>148</sup> Cf. Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, “Essential Elements,” 15.

love and hope to live in trust and joy according to one's vocation and charism. As a matter of fact, the "vows are triple expression of a single "yes" to the one relationship of total consecration",<sup>149</sup>

### **2.3. Challenges facing Consecrated Life**

The major challenges facing consecrated life is based on its prophetic nature and mission. With regard to its essence rooted in the mystery of the Trinity, its first challenge has to do with its fidelity and perseverance to Christ and His Gospel. Considering that consecrated life is a concrete expression of Christ life, its members are called to be authentic witnesses of Him who called them to this vocation. They do so by living out the primacy of God in their life, by their prophetic radical nature through the vow of chastity, poverty and obedience. Their lives remind the faithful of the fundamental values of the Gospel. Therefore, they are called to reflect Christ light in an exceptional way.

As a reality in the very heart of the Church, it is a decisive element for her mission, since it "manifests the inner nature of the Christian calling and the striving of the whole Church as (a) Bride towards union with her one Spouse" (VC 3). In respect to this, it faces another challenge which calls for her fidelity to the Church. This means that consecrated men and women are called to live ecclesial communion by being "a social sign of the mystery of God's consecrating action throughout life"<sup>150</sup> and to identify with the Church's mission, which is open to the needs of humanity. From this point of view, they are challenged to understand the social situation of their time and the needs of the Church in order to make an effective contribution, both in integral human promotion and in the construction of a more just society (cf. PC 2d). This calls for the need of *inculturation* in their mission. Although it is not an easy task, but when they maintain the prophetic witness of their consecration, with faith, love and hope they serve as a point of reference for culture, thereby pointing out all that

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<sup>149</sup> Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes. "Essential Elements," 14.

<sup>150</sup> Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes. "Essential Elements," 38.

is inhuman, in order to “serve as a Gospel leaven within a culture, purifying and perfecting it” (VC 80). On this, we acknowledge the examples of many founders and foundress despite their limitations and the problematic condition of their society were able to propose a new cultural model. For example: St. Benedict, St. Francis of Assis, St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Calcutta, to mention but a few.

Indeed, consecrated life expressed in different charisms is a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church. The charism proper to each institute is a way to express the characteristics futures and activities of Christ the Good Shephard by their founders and foundress. Meaning that the charism of each Institute is not a “*bottle of distilled water*”, nor to be preserved in an abstract document<sup>151</sup>. However, it requires a renewed spirit of “commitment to be on the move, to be the face of the Church in troubled areas on the margins of society”<sup>152</sup>. Therefore, it is a challenge to the members of each institute to be faithful to the nature, purpose, spirit and character of their founders and foundress. In fidelity to these principles, the Church recognizes herself fully. Nevertheless, this is achieved by a renewed dynamic discernment of their charism and apostolate in different geographical context they find themselves.

Purposefully, they strive to be responsive to the needs of the world and to the expectations of the Church as regards to their mission or specific charism<sup>153</sup>, (cf. Can. 577-578; PC 2b, 2c; RD 7). However, it is not a matter of resolving the problems of the world but to “bring the presence of God to the world”<sup>154</sup>. Specifically, it is all about the need for conversion and holiness that will awake the world (cf. VC 35), knowing that the evangelical radicalness is not only for consecrated men and women. But for the fact that they follow the Lord in a special and prophetic way, their testimonies and witnesses are expected to “awake

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<sup>151</sup> Cf. Francis, “Homily on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord 20<sup>th</sup> World day of the Consecrated Life,” (February 2, 2016), accessed February 7, 2018, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2016/documents/papa-francesco\\_20160202\\_omelia-vita-consacrata.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20160202_omelia-vita-consacrata.html).

<sup>152</sup> Jerome Kodell, “Challenges for Consecrated Life,” *Benedictines* (2017) 7.

<sup>153</sup> Cf. Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, “Religious and Human Promotion ‘Plenaria of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes’,” 31.

<sup>154</sup> Jerome Kodell, “Challenges for Consecrated Life,” 10.

the world” in the sense that they should first awake themselves before others. This emphasizes the need of constant conversion<sup>155</sup>.

Consecrated life as a life totally dedicated to God and His service, is faced with another challenge that is: its authentic formation. According to the teachings of the Church, no one should be admitted without a suitable preparation, in connection to the charism and apostolate of the institute he or she wants to join (cf. Can. 597 §1.2). For a more integral growth and adaptation of members, formation should be a complete program that includes every aspect of Christian life. It must therefore provide “a human, cultural, spiritual and pastoral preparation which pays special attention to the harmonious integration of all its various aspects” (VC 65; cf. PC 18). In this way, it is understood as a process that has to pass through every stage of personal maturity from the psychological and spiritual to the theological and pastoral dimension (cf. VC 65).

However, the primary objective of formation is to prepare the new candidate for his or her total consecration to God in the following of Christ, and to the service of the Church’s mission. For this reason, special attention and preparation should be given to those responsible for formation, acknowledging that God is the supreme educator per excellence but the mediation of humans is equally important and indispensable (cf. VC 65-69). Obviously, it is a gradual process and not what is achieved in an eyes-twin or by instant<sup>156</sup>.

Beyond the challenges facing consecrated life, we thought it necessary as well to highlight the threefold orientations fundamental to every charism. First, it leads to the “Father, in the filial desire to seek his will through a process of unceasing conversion, wherein obedience is the source of true freedom, chastity expresses the yearning of a heart unsatisfied by any finite love, and poverty nourishes that hunger and thirst for justice which God has promise to satisfy (cf. Mt. 5:6)” (VC 36). In the second place, it leads to the Son, encouraging an “intimate and joyful communion of life with him, in the school of generous service of God

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<sup>155</sup>Jerome Kodell, “Challenges for Consecrated Life,” 11.

<sup>156</sup> Cf. Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, “Essential Elements,” 44-48.

and neighbor” (VC 36). Finally, every charism leads to the Holy Spirit. It prepares members to “let themselves be guided and sustained by him, both in their personal spiritual journeys and in their lives of communion and apostolic work, in order to embody that attitude of service which should inspire the true Christian’s every choice” (VC 36).

Having reflected on the challenges of consecrated life, which do not ignore the social and environmental challenges that threaten humanity, we understood that the principal challenge is to bring the presence of God by faithfully living out their consecrated life rooted in baptism and expressing it in fullness. This entails a courageous act, willing to move out to the geographical and existential peripheries without fear trusting that God who called them in this vocation is accompanying to make Him known to others<sup>157</sup>.

Generally at the end of this chapter, we have positively looked at the contribution of consecrated life in the contemporary society. From our research, a lot has been done while also many are left to be accomplished. Critically, we may say that a lot is being expected from the consecrated men and women of our days. The courage to face the reality without fear, moving out to “dirty” their hands as pope Francis appealed, as well as discussed in the Second Vatican Council (cf. PC 2; GS 1). However, knowing that the present situation of the society is a challenge and a preoccupation to consecrated life in the sense that there is a demand to propose new strategies and dynamisms to respond to the problems of life. The demand for a leap quality in consecrated life becomes a question that calls us to a deep sense of listening to the Holy Spirit, who continues to sustain and raise in the Church different vocations. We explained that exists different vocations among the faithful and it is a divine gift of which everyone is called to sanctity according to ones’ vocation. We understand that the Church is the mother of all vocations and in turn, each vocation has a specific mission in the Church and in the world. They are seen as members of the same body of Christ that works for its growth (cf. Rm. 12:4-6; 1 Pe. 4:10).

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<sup>157</sup> Cf. Franciscus, “Occasione Diei Vitae Consecratae Dicati,” *AAS* 108 (2016): 113-115.

From our research, we can say that the evangelical counsels lived by Jesus Christ is an essential element that constitutes consecrated life – a new life for God in Christ (cf. RD 7). It is also a great challenge facing this vocation. The profession of the evangelical counsels for the sake of the Kingdom of God rooted in baptismal consecration humanizes whoever made this option in the sense that it liberates from the slavery of sin: lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes and the pride (cf. 1 Jn. 2:15-17). It is certain that they are gift of the Holy Spirit but cultivated in faith, hope and charity. On this, we may ask if the evangelical counsels continue to be a sign of the future Jerusalem and if the examples of the consecrated people motivate others to make this option in their life. Above all, it is clear that the practice of evangelical counsels is not a denial of the values inherent to human nature though it requires discernment and formation.

Finally, we recognize that the greatest challenge to consecrated life lies on its fidelity and perseverance and fidelity to Christ and being a sign of contradiction in a world suffering from consumerism, discrimination, eroticism, hatred, violence and oppression<sup>158</sup>. Precisely, this means that the more they consecrated men and women are “*converted* to God’s plan for humanity as revealed in the New Man Jesus, they will help accelerate in others that *conversion* of mentality and outlook which will make the reform of economic, social and political structure authentic and stable”<sup>159</sup> for a peaceful and just coexistence. We pray with the words of Paul in his letter to the Philippians 1:9.11 “that your love may increase ever more and more...to discern what is of value, so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God”.

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<sup>158</sup> Cf. Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, “Essential Elements,” 17.

<sup>159</sup> Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated life and Societies of Apostolic Life, “Religious and Human Promotion,” 15.

### 3. PERCEPTION ABOUT THE CONSECRATED LIFE

The investigation carried out till this chapter, gives us a wider view or horizon about consecrated life in its various perspectives, that is, in the sacred Scripture, Church fathers and the magisterium. Amid the complexity of our study, we cannot prescind the interpretation of the citizens in relation to consecrated life. For the fact that we acknowledge that “theology seeks to understand in a rational and systematic way the saving truth of God believed by the Church”<sup>160</sup>, we taught it necessary to dialogue with the citizens of Nigeria and Portugal in order to know their view or perception and understanding of consecrated life.

Perhaps, we believe, as José Silva Lima argues, that our ecclesial communities are dynamic institutions, capable of revealing its qualities and “entropies”, `strength and weaknesses and therefore actresses of their own construction’<sup>161</sup>. Before we proceed, let us look at the reflection of João Duque “*A teologia como caminho: considerações sobre o método teológico*”<sup>162</sup>.

According to João Duque, the theological method is organized in two dimensions traditionally: *auditus fidei* and *intellectus fidei* assumed as two sequential steps of which he (João Duque) includes the *actio fidei*, that is, all practical aspects of Christian life - the kerygmatic, liturgical and charitable – and that of ontological *fidei*, based on his study on contemporary epistemology. They are different dimensions of a unique method<sup>163</sup>.

#### 3.1. *Auditus fidei*

According to him, *auditus fidei*, in terms of theological moment is related to ‘the general hermeneutic realization’, meaning the general interpretation of the Revelation. This

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<sup>160</sup> L. M. Figueiredo Rodrigues, *O Digital No Serviço Da Fé. Formar Para Uma Oportunidade* (Lisboa: Universidade Católica Editora, 2016), 211.

<sup>161</sup> Cf. José da Silva Lima, *Teologia Prática Fundamental. Fazei Vós, Também*, (Lisboa: Universidade Católica Editora, 2009), 308.

<sup>162</sup> João Duque, “A Teologia como Caminho: Considerações sobre o método teológico” in *Didaskalia*, vol. 39 n. 2 (2009), 13.

<sup>163</sup> Cf. João Duque, “A Teologia como Caminho” in *Didaskalia*, vol. 39 n. 2 (2009), 18.

“vision” establishes that there is no ideal without a preconceived ideal. From the theological point of view, these presuppositions take on the “objective” character in the sense that there is no theological knowledge that do not have its reference point in revelation with historical base and a particular purpose. However, these revealed elements also involve a “subjective” moment insofar as they are received by faith. Thus, it becomes a challenge to every person who receive this interpellation to make an option to respond or not to respond to it. This distinguishes the modern empirical method from theological method. Theology as *auditus fidei* is realized as a specific listening exercise that involves faith category. The fact that they are “inspired” events with a theological significance, oriented by faith as a response to God who reveals (cf. Rom. 16:26), makes them *locus theologicus* – “a starting point for the entire *auditus fidei*”. Considering the primary meaning of theology as a theory of faith and revelation, as basic epistemological category for all theological construction, he argues that *auditus fidei* is theological because it implies essential reference to the categories of faith, using language to express what is beyond expression, in this case God and the very listening exercise. He maintains that *auditus fidei* is only understandable by its practical application which is *actio fidei*, influenced by the *auditus fidei*<sup>164</sup>. Furthermore, the practical application of what we hear leads us to another dimension that is, *actio fidei*.

### **3.2. Actio fidei**

The understanding of *actio fidei* as debated by João Duque, is a practice, an action that needs to be communicated. This is, its first aspect as regards Christian faith, *actio fidei* is taken as *comunicatio fidei*, in the sense that it is a fundamental element in theological activity. He stated that the proper notion of faith already implies that it is a dynamic process communicated as a principle or as object of theological reflection. For him, the “narrative

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<sup>164</sup> Cf. João Duque, “A Teologia como Caminho” in *Didaskalia*, vol. 39 n. 2 (2009), 21-22.

language” plays an important role in the transmission of Christian faith because it configures *communication fidei* as *narration fidei*, identified as a center of Christian action. He shows that faith is first transmitted by narrating or re-telling the history of Jesus Christ, the experience and activities of the early Church, and secondly, through the Christian community as a fraternity where exist relationship and communication. There, it is essentially the community that tells or narrates its history as a way of transmitting and living out her faith. Thus, theology can only be faithful to her identity if she maintains her relationship with *narration fidei*, by her capacity to dialogue and articulate her concepts with other sciences.

In view of the above, he went further to say that, since action is communicated therefore, the “center of *actio fidei* is undoubtedly the *praxis fidei* as a specific attitude of a believer”<sup>165</sup>. In other words, *praxis fidei* is the charitable work carried out by Christians of which he refers as the starting and end point of Christian attitude and also as regard to theological method. Consequently, it is a kind of evidence that serves as a criterion for theological study. In line with this, theology finds its deepest truth in its charitable service to the Christian community. As a result of this “charitable” character, it serves as a fundamental truth adequate to theological method. In this perspective, João Duque quoted Johann Baptist Mertz who defend that the knowledge of God for Christians is a practical knowledge in the sense that it is impossible to establish a relationship without being challenged to make a concrete decision, in other words to act in accordance or against His Word<sup>166</sup>.

Precisely, we cannot think of theory without the practical aspect of it because of the intrinsic relation between both when we talk of theological method. However, it was clear that not all *praxis* is *praxis fidei* because *paxis fidei* is based on faith, of which differentiates it from any *praxis*. In the horizon of *actio fidei* the celebrative aspect should be considered, for it is regarded as a gift that transcends human nature, received from ONE totally different from us. Hence, the celebrative aspect or action in its symbolic character introduces us into

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<sup>165</sup> João Duque, “A Teologia como Caminho” in *Didaskalia*, vol. 39 n. 2 (2009), 24.

<sup>166</sup> Cf. João Duque, “A Teologia como Caminho” in *Didaskalia*, vol. 39 n. 2 (2009), 24.

doxology. Therefore, theology as a science is related to its knowledge that manifests the traditional dimension of the *intellectus fidei*<sup>167</sup>.

### 3.3. *Intellectus fidei*

The rational dimension of theology as *intellectus fidei* is the intellectual comprehension of theological method. It is based on reason and also entails a plural concept of knowledge. João Duque, held that, theology as a science cannot be separated from its transcendent nature, in accordance with *Fidei et ratio* that affirms “A theology without a metaphysical horizon could not move beyond an analysis of religious experience, nor would it allow the *intellectus fidei* to give a coherent account of the universal and transcendental value of revealed truth” (FR 83), in this way, the fundamental element of *intellectus fidei* is not a question of confirming the doctrine of faith but rather to evaluate the rational dimension of faith related to Christian believe and existence. In effect, Christian knowledge is influenced by *auditus fidei*, *actio fidei* and *intellectus fidei* which are part of the act to believe and not an idea added to it.

The tradition of *intellectus fidei* involves the capacity to dialogue with other forms of knowledge, while this capacity to dialogue is a characteristic that identifies it as a Christian knowledge. In line with this, theology as a specific activity of *intellectus fidei* implies faith and constant dialogue with other science to avoid an obscure influence of these forms of knowledge even though it inevitable in the dialogue of this type. João Duque argues that though it is difficult to talk of a universal knowledge, but it is important that theology in her method do not forget to defend her truth while presenting or debating with other forms of knowledge to avoid absolutism of concepts. The debate established will help to keep alive the

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<sup>167</sup> Cf. João Duque, “A Teologia como Caminho” in *Didaskalia*, vol. 39 n. 2 (2009), 25. 27.

requirement of self-criticism of reason because it confronts other perspectives of knowledge. It also contributes to condemn unreasonable pretensions of other knowledge.

The fundamental element of *intellectus fidei* is her self-critical dimension as regards faith and theology, although theology is accused of not having any critical activity that can provide this self-evaluation, in other words, her doctrine is too dogmatic. Proved wrong by João Duque, because the very “object” of theology in its generic conception considering God as *Prima veritas* or the specific doctrine of what we believe, is an important element that helps to establish a relationship with God and this implies a constant evaluation of theological statements. In this way, he affirms that theological method is a permanent way of self-criticism of her concepts. He recognizes that the only possible way to accept theological method depends on this particular aspect of its work – self-criticism. He observed that, absurd pretension of human *logos* is avoided by theological reason for the fact that they cannot be known if not revealed. This has to do with theological truth which is a gift and not a convention of human reason. However, theological method creates a way to accept this gift by removing all obstacles that prevents its acceptance. Thus, theological method guided by faith leads us to a proper level of knowledge, the dimension of *fidei* ontology<sup>168</sup>.

### **3.4. *Fidei ontology***

Logically, after all the explanation of different dimensions of theological method as theological way, João Duque went further to consider the place where these methods are leading us being aware that a good method leads to a proper destiny. Since it is a theological way, obviously, God is the beginning and end point as he referred the famous words of Augustine “*credere Deo et credere in Deum*”. In his study, the universal reality only makes meaning in God (cf. GS 22). Interestingly, he explains that ontology has to do with human

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<sup>168</sup> Cf. João Duque, “A Teologia como Caminho” in *Didaskalia*, vol. 39 n. 2 (2009), 31.

desire to discover life's meaning and the ultimate truth of existence. This also implies hermeneutic significance of human reality, for the fact that things are considered according to their meaning – what they are and what they can do. In this case, when this last truth of existence is recognized as God in theology, that means that theological statements are ontological statements. He stated also that, *fidei ontology* corresponds to Christian interpretation of human reality – the being and truth of existence. This interpretation is based on their faith and experience from the moment they hear the Word of God and are called to make an option in their lives. Thus, this implies that the hermeneutic process is not limited to individual interpretation but has to do with universal meaning since it involves human reality. In this aspect, he considered theological method as a “process” that leads human existence to its transcendental dimension, while it respects their autonomy and freedom.

When we talk of *fidei ontology* as a method or process, it is seen as a way that promotes freedom of creatures in making any decision in relation to their needs and desire to seek the truth. In other words, the “being of reality” is not something given or made clear in the present but what we discover as life goes on, depending on our freedom and capacity to know the truth that is revealed in history. In this sense, “*fidei ontology* is a perfect conjugation of universal truth and personal freedom, of ontology and anthropology”<sup>169</sup>. This harmonic articulation is where theological method should lead us, contrary to this, then, it is not a true way of theology. In theological context, this perfect conjugation presupposes the theological virtues: faith as basic interpreting element, charity as its pragmatic confirmation and hope as what guide and animate this process to its final Truth. Finally, João Duque confirm that theological truth has its fundamentals on these theological virtues because they are Gods' gift to human heart which also function as a “ladder” on which the human heart have access to God.

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<sup>169</sup> João Duque, “A Teologia como Caminho” in *Didaskalia*, vol. 39 n. 2 (2009), 33.

After this explanation of the theological method systematized in different dimension, we understood that theological method has its proper dynamism because it refers to God as the beginning and end of human reality. This makes it different from other science although it shares non-arbitrary character with them to avoid being unreasonable. We observed that there is no knowledge without a preconceive idea, that is faith on which other knowledge is sustained and developed. It is a universal gift even though not all accept it, but for Christians, it came from authentic listening of the Word of God, that is, *auditus fidei*. At this point, we can relate this study with consecrated life in the sense that, consecrated life is a free response to God who reveals in His Word. In other words, an authentic listening leads to make an option on how to interpret and live based on faith. Consequently, this calls to act and live in a different way. We can also see this as different ways by which Christian's respond to their vocations. In another perspective, as regards our investigation, we take it that the first part of our study had explained the *auditus fidei* of consecrated life. Our questionnaire is now taken to be an authentication of *actio fidei*, in the sense that we want to know if the authentic listening exercise corresponds to the interpretation of *auditus fidei*. We understood *intellectus fidei* as intellectual comprehension of this method. It was clear that the transcendent nature cannot be neglected since it implies Gods' revelation, and it is through faith that we can establish a relationship with Him. Since, the truth revealed is a gift given and not a pure initiative of human being, *Intellectus fidei* entails constant dialogue with other forms of knowledge. This capacity makes it searches for the true meaning of human existence and its reality. In this aspect, human freedom is respected and we recognize that the theological method can achieve its objective if there exist a perfect conjugation between universal truth and personal freedom, between ontology and anthropology; however, this presupposes the theological virtues.

Relating *intellectus fidei* with our investigation, we may say that the results gotten from the method implemented will attest *intellectus fidei* thereby confirming or not the true

meaning and relevance of consecrated life. Having explored theological method as a way to theological studies, it is highly imperative to explain that there is a relationship between the theoretical aspect of consecrated life and the concrete reality of this vocation. These two strands should be considered simultaneously because theory can only be understood when it is practiced<sup>170</sup>. This obliges us to look for a method that helps to put the theory into practice. Consequently, the need for methodological study in a two-way discourse is needed: theory that establishes the epistemological basis of the subject – consecrated life – identifying the discussion of the method with its proper foundation and the practical that explores the existential reality of living out consecrated life<sup>171</sup>.

In this context, we will be using mixed method. This is a research study that combines quantitative or statistical trends and qualitative method to answer a research question<sup>172</sup>. However, this method involved a pre-determined and emerging methods, both open-and closed ended questions, multiple forms of data drawing on all possibilities, statistical and text analysis and finally a across database interpretation<sup>173</sup>. In other words, the questionnaire, having these elements will enable us to discover the relationship and discrepancy between the theoretical conception and the concrete reality of living consecrated life. It will also be a useful instrument to attest the relevance of consecrated life in our contemporary society.

### **3.5. Research protocol**

To know the reality, we try to put on our “theoretical lens”<sup>174</sup>, we proceed by explaining the steps carried out in order to achieve the objectives of our research. Descriptive method was chosen and applied in this empirical research because it permits us to describe the results, attitudes and situations collected from our convenience sample. Also, through this

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<sup>170</sup> João Duque, “A Teologia como Caminho” in *Didaskalia*, vol. 39 n. 2 (2009), 13-14.

<sup>171</sup> Cf. João Duque, “A Teologia como Caminho” in *Didaskalia*, vol. 39 n. 2 (2009), 14-18.

<sup>172</sup> Cf. John W. Creswell, *Projeto de Pesquisa: Métodos Qualitativos, Quantitativo E Misto*, 3rd ed. (Porto Alegre: Artmed, 2010).

<sup>173</sup> Cf. John W. Creswell, *Projeto de Pesquisa: Métodos Qualitativos, Quantitativo E Misto*, 2nd ed. (Porto Alegre: Artmed, 2007), 46-49.

<sup>174</sup> Cf. Creswell, *Projeto de Pesquisa. Método Qualitativo, Quantitativo E Misto*, 76-100.

method we will be able to observe the frequency of certain phenomena in our data, for example, the view of the respondents about those living this vocation, their opinion about the vows and challenges. However, the convenience sample is a type of non-probability sampling technique where subjects are selected because of their convenient accessibility. Thus, data were collected using the questionnaire survey technique and special attention was given so that they are safeguarded from been accessed or altered by third parties<sup>175</sup>.

We decided using questionnaires because the population is large and due to the nature of the questions. Few open questions are used since our intention is to obtain from our respondents concrete and valuable information for efficient statistical analysis. The fact, our sample is a convenience one, and amidst the various types of questionnaires, electronic(s) type serves as an “adequate” instrument instead of the use of paper or telephone to communicate or spread the questions to respondents because of its simplicity and it is economical and can be used frequently to reinforce the call for response. Thus, electronic system increases research opportunities; In fact, it is flexible and promotes a fast creation of response and delivery of data<sup>176</sup>.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to make a general statement about the results without taking any risk due to lack of representativeness of the population, hence, producing distorted results. In addition, the criteria of our convenience sample is that the participants agree freely, that is, without coercion to participate. In this case, the sample applied is considered to be a type of non-probability sample. We also considered as our sample the respondents that fit within the established criteria, for example, being a citizen of Nigeria or Portugal and above the age of sixteen.

We further considered it necessary the ethical implication of this investigation since it's an aspect that is highly valued and reflected in any research that uses social media to obtain and process its data. Therefore, confidentiality of the information gathered is granted

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<sup>175</sup> Cf. T. Anderson, H. Kanuka, *E-Research: Methods, strategies and Issues*, 62.

<sup>176</sup> Cf. T. Anderson, H. Kanuka, *E-Research: Methods, strategies and Issues*, 62.

and special attention in respect to this was present in the elaboration of the questionnaires till its final analysis.

The questionnaire was made using Google Drive technology, because of the low cost effectiveness and in consideration of its ready availability in facilitating sharing through links and also in allowing it to be introduced in various social networks. Digital media makes the work easy and more practical to gather the respondents' feedback. The questionnaire was available in the social network from 2<sup>nd</sup> of May 2018 till 30<sup>th</sup> of the same month and year. We deactivated the program because we have gotten the required two hundred respondents.

We use Likert scale in creating the questions. It is a psychometric scale used in research that involves questionnaire. This scale bears the name of its inventor, psychologist Rensis Likert. The questions are in form of sentences and each is considered as a Likert item – this is a statement which the respondent is requested to give a quantitative value according to his or her level of agreement or disagreement. The normal used scale is the five ordered response.

The questions are organized in three major groups. First group, the knowledge people have about consecrated life; second group, the importance of consecrated people in the society today and lastly, the consideration and perception of people on the work they do in the society<sup>177</sup>. Based on these groups, sentences are formulated to be graded from zero to five, where zero is total disagreement and five is total agreement.

The objective of our research is to know if what is been presented in the theory corresponds to the knowledge people have about the consecrated men and women, and in this way attest to the relevance of consecrated life in the contemporary society. In other words, it is a comparative study.

The questionnaire is composed of fifty sentences of which forty seven are closed statements in the sense that the respondent is requested to grade according to his or her level

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<sup>177</sup> Cf. *Questionnaire*, Annex I.

of agreement or disagreement using the Likert scale from zero to five; while three are open questions in which the respondents are to write their opinion as regards the object of our discussion.

The first five questions serve as means to know the personal information of the respondent: country, language, age, gender, level of education, civil and religious status. English language was used by the respondents from Nigeria and Portuguese by those from Portugal. We present below the social demographic scale of the respondents.

Socio-demographic profile	Nigeria	Frequency	Portugal	Frequency
<b>Age</b>	17	1	17	1
	19	1	18	3
	20	1	19	2
	21	1	20	2
	22	2	21	2
	23	2	22	3
	24	1	23	3
	25	5	24	1
	26	3	25	7
	27	2	26	1
	28	4	27	1
	29	2	28	3
	30	5	29	3
	31	4	30	7
	32	1	31	1
	34	4	32	4

35	9	33	2
36	4	34	1
37	4	35	3
38	3	36	1
39	3	38	3
40	4	39	1
41	2	40	4
43	2	41	1
44	2	43	1
45	6	44	2
46	2	45	2
47	2	46	3
48	2	47	2
49	2	48	2
50	4	49	1
51	1	50	2
52	1	51	3
53	1	52	2
54	1	53	1
55	1	54	3
57	1	55	1
60	2	56	5
62	1	58	2
68	1	62	1
72	1	64	1

	75	1	67	1
	76	1	71	1
			81	1
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Nigeria</b>		<b>Portugal</b>	
Male	48		34	
Female	55		64	
<b>Level of Education</b>				
Not Educated	0		0	
Primary School	0		1	
Secondary School	14		16	
University	89		80	
<b>Civil/Religious Status</b>				
Single	35		47	
Unmarried Couple <sup>178</sup>	0		3	
Married Couple	26		25	
Divorced	1		1	
Widow/Widower	2		1	
Consecrated	23		12	
Priests/Pastors	16		8	
<b>Religion/Denomination</b>				
Atheist	0		1	
Agnostic	0		1	
Catholics	90		95	
Protestants	5		0	

<sup>178</sup> When I refer to unmarried couples am talking about the couples that are not officially recognized in the Church.

Pentecostals	7	0
Jehovah Witness	1	0

### 3.5.1. Knowledge of respondents about Consecrated life

This is the first group of the questionnaire and the purpose of the division is to facilitate the statistical analysis and for organizational reasons. Thus, the Likert scale has the following values: 0 means total disagreement; 1- disagreement; 2 – partial disagreement; 3 – partial agreement; 4 – agreement and 5 – total agreement. The questions in this group were meant to enable us to know the understanding of consecrated life by our respondents from both countries: Nigeria and Portugal. In this sense, the questions refer to their identity and presence. Therefore, Q. 20 was asked to know if our respondents knew about this vocation in the Church. The table below shows their responses:

Q. 20 – I know of the apostolate of a male or female Religious Congregation.

Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
3	2.9	0	2	2.1
3	2.9	1	3	3.1
2	1.9	2	1	1
12	11.7	3	8	8.2
14	13.6	4	26	26.8
69	67	5	57	58.8

The table shows that majority of the respondents know of their apostolate. In other words, this signifies that they know of their presence in the society. Logically, this leads us to

ask about the essence and constituent of this vocation concretely on the vows or profession of the Evangelical Counsels: chastity, obedience and poverty. Q. 21 permits us to know if our respondents know about the significance, value and implication of these vows.

Q. 21 – I know the implication of living the Evangelical Counsels.				
Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
4	3.9	0	2	2.1
5	4.9	1	5	5.2
4	3.9	2	2	2.2
12	11.7	3	21	21.6
15	14.6	4	31	32
63	61.2	5	36	37.1

Significant value was verified by the respondents from Nigeria than those from Portugal. This means that they have a higher knowledge of the implications of the Evangelical Counsels.

Qs. 23, 24 and Q. 25 were made to know the meaning of chastity according to the respondents, that is, if they consider it as a source of happiness or something that disvalues sexuality.

Q. 23 – Chastity is a denial of the values inherent to human nature				
Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
42	40.8	0	35	36.1
9	8.7	1	12	12.4
3	2.9	2	12	12.4
11	10.7	3	15	15.5
11	10.7	4	14	14.4
27	26.2	5	9	9.3

The number of the respondents that considered that this vow is not against the values inherent to human nature is greater from the Nigerian respondents but an overall view proof that the respondents from Portugal manifest a higher knowledge of this reality.

Q. 24 – Chastity is a source of joy				
Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
6	5.8	0	12	12.4
2	1.9	1	12	12.4
6	5.8	2	9	9.3
10	9.7	3	25	25.8
16	15.5	4	11	11.3
63	61.2	5	28	28.9

There is a great difference in regard to this vow as a source of happiness. The table above illustrates that a greater number of the respondents accepted it as a source of joy while the number decreases from the respondents in Portugal. From our data analysis we observed

that those who totally agreed from the respondents in Portugal are all females as well as university graduates, among them, 5 are married, 1 divorced, 2 are widows, 12 are consecrated persons and 8 are priests and all are Catholics. The data information collected are not clear because we cannot have all the respondents as females and Catholics with 8 respondents as priests in Portugal. From the respondents in Nigeria we have the following data: 8 respondents are males, 55 are females; all are university graduates, among them, 21 are married, 1 divorced, 2 are widows, 23 are consecrated people and 16 are priests. 50 respondents are Catholics, with 1 Protestant, 5 are Evangelicals, 6 are Anglicans, 1 is a Jehovah Witness, and 2 from other denomination not mentioned. We verified that in both countries no consecrated person or priest was identified in the level of total disagreement. They are all males and single. In Portugal, they are 2 primary school pupils and 10 secondary school students while in Nigeria, they are all secondary school students and all are Catholics. In Portugal, we got 1 Atheist and 1 Agnostic and 10 Catholics. We could probably say that the results are being influenced by the religious education received. Nevertheless, we do not make a conclusive affirmation because of our limited sample criterion.

Q. 25 – Chastity disvalues sexuality.				
Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
52	50.5	0	40	41.2
12	11.7	1	20	20.6
6	5.8	2	6	6.2
4	3.9	3	14	14.4
3	2.9	4	10	10.3
26	25.2	5	7	7.2

A good number of the respondents from Nigeria disagreed that chastity disvalues sexuality but we observed that the number of those who totally agreed is just half of those who totally disagreed. It is interesting to know that in this question it is only priests and consecrated people that responded totally agreed from respondents in Nigeria while only priests responded in Portugal and they are university graduates. In both countries they are all females while in Nigeria their religious denomination are different. There are 13 Catholics, 1 Protestant, 4 Anglicans, 5 Evangelicals, 1 Jehovah Witness and 2 other denomination not mentioned. There are wrong informations in the data collected. For example, in Portugal, the respondents cannot be all females and priests. Curiously, in both countries the priests and consecrated people never pronounced on totally disagreed, from the respondents in Nigeria we have 48 males and 4 females; 35 are single people and 17 are married among which 38 are university graduates and 14 are secondary school students and all are Catholics. The same level of total disagreement from the respondents in Portugal, we have 34 males and 6 females; 22 university graduates, 2 are primary school pupils and 16 are secondary school students. According to their civil/religious status they are all single while 38 are Catholics, 1 is Atheist and another 1 is Agnostic.

Q. 26 was asked to know their perception and the relationship they establish between the commandments of God (cf. Gn. 1:28 “to increase and multiply”) and the vow of chastity.

Q. 26 – Since God commanded mankind to increase and multiply, chastity is a violation of this divine law.

Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
75	72.8	0	44	45.4
11	10.7	1	21	21.6
2	1.9	2	11	11.3
5	4.9	3	10	10.3
4	3.9	4	5	5.2
6	5.8	5	6	6.2

The table above shows that the majority of the respondents from Nigeria disagreed that chastity is a violation of Gods commandments while there is a decrease in number from the respondents in Portugal. Hence, from the statistical analysis we discovered that the respondents from Nigeria that totally disagreed have an age range from 10 to 20 years are 2 respondents, 21 to 30 years are 27 respondents, 31 years to 40 are 36 respondents and from 41 to 50 are 10 respondents; 47 are males and 28 are females of which 34 are single, 1 is divorced, 2 are widows, 26 are married and 12 are consecrated people. Finally all are Catholics. The respondents from Portugal with the same level of total disagreement have the following data analysis: age interval from 10 to 20 years is 8 respondents, 21 to 30 years are 31 respondents and 31 to 40 years are 5 respondents of which 34 are males are and 10 are females. There are 2 primary school pupils, 16 are secondary school students and 26 are university graduates; all are single, while 42 are Catholics, 1 is Atheist and another 1 an Agnostic. We verified that the same mistake occurred in both countries in respect to those that totally agreed. In both countries they identified themselves as females as their gender and priests in their civil/religious status, in Portugal they are all Catholics. For this reason we consider it as wrong information even though it may be a reality in Nigeria because the

respondents are not Catholics: 3 are Evangelicals, 1 is a Jehovah Witness and 2 are from other denomination not identified.

From Qs. 27 and 28 we are able to know if they consider chastity as a selfish – option to stay away from people - attitude that is against our natural sentiments, instinct or impulses.

Q. 27 – Chastity is an option of isolation and egoism.

Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
69	67	0	56	57.7
12	11.7	1	17	17.5
6	5.8	2	9	9.3
5	4.9	3	7	7.2
3	2.9	4	3	3.1
8	7.8	5	5	5.2

The frequency of the discordance in both countries is mostly the same generally, though the number of total discordance is higher from the respondents in Nigeria.

Q. 28 – Chastity is contrary to natural impulses.

Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
43	41.7	0	28	28.9
16	15.5	1	12	12.4
7	6.8	2	16	16.5
11	10.7	3	16	16.5
9	8.7	4	10	10.3
17	16.5	5	15	15.5

We can say that the frequency from the respondents in Nigeria that totally disagreed with the question is more compared to those from Portugal, while a difference of 2 is observed in the total agreement in both countries. The statistical analysis shows that the respondents from Portugal that totally disagreed have the age range of 10 to 20 years are 8 respondents, from 21 to 30 years are 20 respondents of which all are males; 2 are primary school pupils, 16 are secondary school students and 10 are university graduates; all are single; 1 is Atheist, another 1 is an Agnostic and 26 Catholics. However, in the same level of total disagreement, the respondents from Nigeria have the following data analysis: age range from 10 to 20 years are 2 respondents, 21 to 30 years are 27 respondents and 31 years to 40 years are 14 respondents; all are males of which 13 are secondary school students and 30 are university graduates; 34 are single and 9 are married according to their civil/religious status and all are Catholics. It is curious to know that other religious denominations did not pronounce on this question from Nigeria. We verified that there are some mistakes in the data from the respondents in Portugal because they identified themselves as females and Catholics while in their civil/religious status we saw that 7 are consecrated people and 8 are priest. From the logical point of view in Portugal there are no female priests in Portugal, for this reason, the information is not correct. The age range of these respondents are from 50 to 60 years are 9 respondents, 61 to 70 years are 4 respondents and 71 to 81 years are 2 respondents. The same level of total agreement from Nigerian respondents have the same age range from 50 to 60 years are 12 respondents, 61 to 70 years are 2 and from 71 to 80 years are 3 respondents; all are females and university graduates; 1 consecrated person and 16 priests. It is possible to have such result in Nigeria in the sense that other Christian denominations may identify any one (male or female) presiding their assembly as a pastor or with other similar name. According to their religious denomination we observed that 1 is a Protestant, 4 are Angelical, 5 are Evangelical, 1 is a Jehovah Witness, 4 are Catholics and 2 are from other denomination not identified. It is interesting to know that those that responded in this level of agreements

are all with a certain age and experience in life of which their perceptions are conditioned by their “wisdom” and “experience of life” even though not always as we predict.

As regards the vow of obedience, the model used in chastity was followed. Questions were formulated with the intention to know the concept and understanding of the respondents in relation to its value, significance and challenges. With Q. 29 we seek to know the consideration of our respondents about this vow, if they see it as against personal dignity and as a contradiction to nature Q.30.

Q. 29 – The vow of obedience is against the dignity of a person.				
Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
75	72.8	0	48	49.5
16	15.5	1	16	16.5
5	4.9	2	15	15.5
0	0	3	13	13.4
4	3.9	4	4	4.1
3	2.9	5	1	1

It is clear from the table above that there is total disagreement from the respondents in Nigeria and in Portugal when we add the frequency of the scale from 0 to 2. Thus, the analysis made shows the absence of consecrated people among those that responded total disagreement from the respondents in Portugal while in the same level of total disagreement, 11 consecrated people were identified, 2 are widows, 1 is divorced and 5 are single respondents; all were Catholics of which 48 are males and 27 are females; 14 are secondary school students and 61 are university graduates. Their age range from: 10 to 20 years are 3 respondents, 21 to 30 years are 27 respondents, 31 to 40 years are 36 respondents and 41 to 50 years are 9 respondents. In addition, the age range of the respondents from Portugal with the

same level of total disagreement is from 10 to 20 years are 8 respondents, 21 to 30 years are 31 respondents, 31 to 40 years are 9 respondents; 14 among them are males and 34 are females; 2 are primary school pupils, 6 are secondary school students and 40 are university graduates of which 1 is an unmarried person and 47 are single in their civil/religious status; 1 is an Atheist another 1 is an Agnostic and 46 are Catholics. Generally, there is an influence of Christian education in the responses especially those from the consecrated people.

Q. 30 – The vow of obedience contradicts human nature.				
Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
56	54.4	0	46	47.4
19	18.4	1	17	17.5
7	6.8	2	17	17.5
6	5.8	3	8	8.2
4	3.9	4	7	7.2
11	10.7	5	2	2.1

We observed that the respondents from Portugal firmly manifest that this vow is not a contradiction to human nature while 10% of the respondents from Nigeria considered it contradictory to human nature. Generally, the frequency of discordance is nearly the same.

We also wish to know if it is a source of liberation for those who live this vow Q. 31 or whether it makes them slaves of their superiors Q. 32.

Q. 31 – The vow of obedience gives true freedom to the person that lives it.

Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
8	7.8	0	12	12.4
4	3.9	1	13	13.4
8	7.8	2	13	13.4
9	8.7	3	18	18.6
13	12.6	4	18	18.6
61	59.2	5	23	23.7

The number of total agreement from the respondents in Nigeria is almost triple of those from Portugal; in general, it is more than half of the respondents in both countries.

Q. 32 – The vow of obedience makes the consecrated men and women slaves of their superiors.

Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
62	60.2	0	33	34
19	18.4	1	12	12.4
7	6.8	2	15	15.5
6	5.8	3	15	15.5
3	2.9	4	14	14.4
6	5.8	5	8	8.2

We continue to observe a high number of total discordance from the respondents in Nigeria in relation to those from Portugal. This shows the knowledge of this vow to the respective countries. We find out from our data that the respondents from Portugal that totally

disagreed have the following age intervals: from 10 to 20 years are 8 respondents, 21 to 30 years are 25 respondents of which all are males; 2 are primary school pupils and 16 are secondary school students with 15 university graduates. All are single in their civil/religious status. Among them, we have 1 Atheist and 1 Agnostic and 31 Catholics. Consequently, respondents with the same level of disagreement in Nigeria have the same age intervals from 10 to 20 years are 3 respondents, from 21 to 30 years are 27 respondents and from 31 to 40 years are 32 respondents. 48 are males and 14 are females of which 14 are secondary school students and 48 are university graduates among them, 35 are single; 26 are married and 1 is divorced while they are all Catholics. It is curious to observe that no consecrated person or priest is identified in both countries. We may say that their Christian education influenced their position in respect to this question. The respondents that totally agreed from Portugal have the age interval of 50 to 60 years are 2 respondents, 61 to 70 years are 4 respondents, 71 to 80 years are 1 respondent and from 81 to 90 years is 1 respondents; all are females and university graduates; all are Catholics and priests. Here, we question if in Portugal priests are females, this shows that the respondents mistakenly gave wrong information on this. In Nigeria their age are 60, 62, 68, 72, 75 and 76; all are female as well as university graduates. Their civil/religious status states that they are all priests/pastors with different religious confessions: 3 Evangelicals; 1 is Jehovah Witness and 2 are from other religious denomination not identified. Here we may deduce that their positive or negative experiences might have impact in their responses. We hardly believe that in Nigeria the presidents of these other denominations assembly are called “priests” or “pastors” even though that they are female or there is a hypotheses that this question is not well understood by the respondents. No Catholic identified.

Furthermore, we would like to know also if it has value in the society Q. 33, in the Church Q. 34, as well as how easy is its observance in the world that promotes absolute right and freedom Q. 35.

Q. 33 – The vow of obedience has value to the society.				
Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
0	0	0	7	7.2
2	1.9	1	7	7.2
6	5.8	2	15	15.5
6	5.8	3	20	20.6
13	12.6	4	23	23.7
76	73.8	5	25	25.8

The situation repeats itself in the above table, the result shows a higher frequency from the respondents in Nigeria to those in Portugal. The statistical analysis shows that the respondents from Nigeria that totally agreed have the following age interval: 30 to 40 years are 39 respondents, 41 to 50 years are 24 respondents, 51 to 60 years are 8 respondents, 61 to 70 years are 2 and 71 to 80 years are 3 respondents; 21 are males and 55 are females of which all are university graduates; 8 are single, 26 are married, 1 is divorced, 2 are widows, 23 are consecrated people and 16 are priests; 63 are Catholics, 1 respondent is Protestant, 1 is Jehovah Witness, 5 are Evangelicals, 4 are Anglicans and 2 from other denomination not mentioned. The respondents from Portugal with the same level of agreement have the age interval of 50 to 60 years are 19 respondents, 61 to 70 years are 4 respondents, 71 to 80 is 1 respondent and 81 to 90 years is also 1 respondent. They are all females and university graduates; all Catholic. Among them, 2 are married, 1 is divorced, 2 are widows 12 are consecrated people and 8 are priests. We verified wrong information here as we question if there could be female priests in Portugal since all respondents were identified as Catholics. The 7 respondents from Portugal that totally disagreed have the age interval of 10 to 20 years. They are all males and single, among them are 2 primary school pupils and 5 secondary school students of which 1 is an Atheist; another 1 is Agnostic and 5 Catholics.

Q. 34 – The vow of obedience is valuable to the Church.

Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
1	1	0	0	0
3	2.9	1	3	3.1
0	0	2	3	3.1
3	2.9	3	8	8.2
14	13.6	4	34	35.1
82	79.6	5	49	50.5

The table above explains that 79.6 % of the respondents from Nigeria totally agreed that this vow is valuable to the Church. The respondents from Portugal also manifest their total agreement but with a significant difference to those from Nigeria.

Q. 35 – Living the consecrated obedience in a world that want absolute right and freedom to do whatever each person wants is an easy task.

Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
60	58.3	0	38	39.2
11	10.7	1	21	21.6
8	7.8	2	14	14.4
16	15.5	3	12	12.4
2	1.9	4	8	8.2
6	5.8	5	4	4.1

The observance of this vow as presented in the table above shows that 58.3% of the respondents from Nigeria acknowledge that it is not an easy task, though; a general view verifies the same understanding in both countries.

Also, we would like to know if the respondents consider it easy to live in the world that promotes ungodly or unethical laws.

The same justice is applied in the vow of poverty. We intend to know if our respondents know about the positive contributions of this vow in the community and in the society with Q. 36 and if they understand it as something that upgrades or degrades human nature with Q. 37.

Q. 36 – The vow of poverty is advantageous.				
Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
24	23.3	0	7	7.2
8	7.8	1	7	7.2
11	10.7	2	13	13.4
14	13.6	3	16	16.5
11	10.7	4	22	22.7
35	34	5	32	33

The table above shows the perception of the respondents about this vow. However, 23.3% of the respondents from Nigeria manifested their total disagreement regarding its advantage, or rather; they considered that it is not advantageous to the person and community. We verified that the percentage of those who think contrary is nearly the same in both countries. That is, 34% from Nigeria and 33% from Portugal.

Q. 37 – The vow of poverty dehumanizes the human person.				
Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
58	56.3	0	59	60.8
13	12.6	1	21	21.6
8	7.8	2	7	7.2
7	6.8	3	5	5.2
4	3.9	4	5	5.2
13	12.6	5	0	0

It is interesting the understanding of this vow. Respondents from Portugal strongly believe that poverty do not dehumanize a person, while 12.6% of the respondents from Nigeria are of a contrary opinion. This leads us to identify the age, sex, civil/ecclesial status, religion and level of education of those in question. Thus, from the data analysis we verified that respondents that totally agreed from Nigeria have the age interval of 51 to 60 years are 8 respondents, from 61 to 70 years are 2 and 71 to 80 years are 3 respondents, all are females and university graduates; pastors from different denominations: 1 is a Protestant, 4 are Anglicans, 5 are Evangelicals, 1 is a Jehovah Witness and 2 are from other religious denomination not identified. The 59 respondents from Portugal that totally disagreed have the following data analysis: age interval from 10 to 20 years are 8 respondents, 21 to 30 years are 31 respondents, 31 to 40 years are 20 respondents of which in all, 34 are males and 25 are females; 2 primary school pupils, 16 are secondary school students and 41 are university graduates. According to their civil/religious status, 47 are single; 3 are unmarried and 9 are married; 1 respondent declared as an Atheist, another 1 agnostic and 57 are Catholics while 58 respondents from Nigeria with the same level of disagreement are all Catholics; 35 respondents are single and 23 are married. According to their level of education, 14 are

secondary school students and 44 are university graduates; 48 are males and 10 are females. Their age interval from 10 to 20 years is 3 respondents, from 21 to 30 years are 27 respondents and from 31 to 40 years are 28 respondents.

Consequently, we intend to know whether the vow of poverty is something private, or that it involves the whole community Q. 38. Also, we wish to know if it is mundane or outdated Q. 39. Lastly, with Q. 40, we seek to know their general perception of the vows. That is, if they understood the evangelical counsels as sign of frustration.

Q. 38 – The vow of poverty involves the community.				
Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
24	23.3	0	8	8.2
3	2.9	1	8	8.2
9	8.7	2	12	12.4
12	11.7	3	23	23.7
16	15.5	4	19	19.6
39	37.9	5	27	27.8

The involvement of the community in the profession of this evangelical counsel is highly not accepted by the respondents from Nigeria while in Portugal the frequency shows that the respondents have a different opinion, they accepted that it also has to do with the community, having 8.2%. We could say that this manifests “in a small view” the social and economic view and reality of both countries.

Q. 39 – The vow of poverty is absurd.

Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
54	52.4	0	54	55.7
14	13.6	1	17	17.5
9	8.7	2	9	9.3
15	14.6	3	9	9.3
2	1.9	4	4	4.1
9	8.7	5	4	4.1

In Portugal, the frequency is significant on total agreement in the sense that it shows how this vow is valued by the respondents while in Nigeria 8.7% of the respondents considered it absurd.

Q. 40 – The vows can be seen as a sign of frustration.

Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
67	65	0	50	51.5
17	16.5	1	24	24.7
5	4.9	2	8	8.2
3	2.9	3	6	6.2
2	1.9	4	6	6.2
9	8.7	5	3	3.1

The general view of the evangelical counsels shown in the table above indicates that 65% of the respondents from Nigeria and 50% from Portugal have a positive perception of the vows. Also, the frequency on total agreement is significant in Portugal in the sense that those

that took it as a sign of frustration is “just” 3.1% compared with 8.7% from the respondents in Nigeria. It is curious to know that the respondents from Nigeria that totally agreed in this question identified themselves as priests/pastors but I think they are not because they are all females, not Catholics while the following religious denomination were identified: 1 is an Anglican, 5 are Evangelicals, 1 is a Jehovah Witness and 2 from other religious denomination not identified. All are university graduates with the following age: 55 years, 57, 60, 60, 62, 68, 72, 75 and 76 years. The 3 respondents from Portugal that have the same level of total agreement are 67 years, 71 and 81 years; all are females; university graduates; priests and Catholics. There is something wrong here as shown in the data analysis.

Precisely, after asking about the “identity” of the consecrated life we went further to ask if the respondents know of the biblical foundation of this vocation with Q. 44. And in Q. 22, we intend to know if they considered it pertinent the profession of these vows.

Q. 44 – The consecrated life has a biblical foundation.

Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
2	1.9	0	1	1
2	1.9	1	4	4.1
1	1	2	7	7.2
3	2.9	3	16	16.5
5	4.9	4	29	29.9
90	87.4	5	40	41.2

The above results show the knowledge of the respondents on the biblical foundation of consecrated life. We observed that the frequency of total agreement is higher from the respondents in Nigeria than those from Portugal. This could be analyzed that those from

Nigeria have more knowledge of the biblical foundation of consecrated life compared to those in Portugal.

Q. 22 – It is important to profess the evangelical counsels: obedience, chastity and poverty.

Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
2	1.9	0	4	4.1
2	1.9	1	7	7.2
1	1	2	11	11.3
9	8.7	3	19	19.6
14	13.6	4	24	24.7
75	72.8	5	32	33

According to the table above, we observed that more than the majority of the respondents from Nigeria totally agreed that the profession of the evangelical counsels is important while in Portugal the number is reduced to 32. Logically, the difference is much; therefore, it urges us to know the demographic profile of the respective respondents from Nigeria and Portugal. The data analysis shows that their age intervals are from 30 to 40 years and they are 38 respondents, from 41 to 50 years are 24 respondents, 51 to 60 years are 8 respondents, 61 to 70 years are 2 respondents and from 71 to 80 years are 3 respondents; males are 20 and females are 55. All are university graduates, of which 7 are single according to their civil/religious status, 26 are married, 1 is divorced, 2 are widows, 23 are consecrated people and 16 are priests; 62 respondents are Catholics, 1 Protestant, 4 Anglicans, 5 Evangelicals, 1 Jehovah Witness and 2 respondents from other religious denomination not identified. From Portugal, the 32 respondents are all Catholics, as well as university graduates; and all females. 9 are married; 1 divorced; 2 are widows; 12 consecrated people

and 8 are priests. We question if priests are females in Portugal, there is a mistake in the data information. Respondents from Portugal that totally disagreed have the age range of 17 to 18 years with 4 respondents; all males; 2 are primary school pupils and another 2 secondary school students; all single; 1 Atheist, another 1an Agnostic and 2 Catholics. From Nigeria the respondents with the same level of disagreement are 2 Catholics; single; males; secondary school students with the age of 17 and 19 years. With this statistical analysis we conclude with the first group of the questionnaires.

Subsequently, knowing the general view of the respondents about consecrated life as regards their essence, we proceed to the next group where we intend to know how important they are in the society, in the Church and in the World.

### *3.5.2. Perception of the importance of Consecrated people*

From the questions in this group, we seek to know the opinion of the respondents in relation to the importance of consecrated people in the society. The “importance” we mean here has to do with the challenges and interpellation of this vocation to those who made this option and to the society. In this way, Q. 6 permits us to know whether the life of consecrated men and women is a challenge to the society, in the sense that it makes the society to think about the true meaning of life and earthly things, and if their lives suggest something different in the society.

Q. 6 – The life of special consecration (religious men and women) is a challenge to the contemporary society.

Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
9	8.7	0	1	1
9	8.7	1	6	6.2
3	2.9	2	1	1
16	15.5	3	20	20.6
18	17.5	4	29	29.9
48	46.6	5	40	41.2

There is a significant point of view from the respondents in Portugal, only 1% of them did not agree totally in respect to this question. This shows that they acknowledge that the life of religious men and women is not a challenge to the contemporary society while 8.7% of the respondents from Nigeria did not agree totally. In other words, these respondents did not recognize the life of religious men and women as a challenge to the society.

With Q. 7, we want to know if the community life of the consecrated men and women gives them satisfaction, makes them to feel realized and fulfilled in their vocation.

Q. 7 – The consecrated life communities respond concretely to the needs of the consecrated people.

Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
10	9.7	0	3	3.1
3	2.9	1	5	5.2
11	10.7	2	12	12.4
30	29.1	3	42	43.3
20	19.4	4	27	27.8
29	28.2	5	8	8.2

We verified from the table above that both respondents partially agreed that the communities of the consecrated life do provide the needs of their members. It is the number in the scale with the highest number of respondents. We also noted that the number of total agreement from the respondents in Portugal is significant in the sense that, only 8 respondents confirmed in this question unlike the 29 respondents from Nigeria. Generally, we can say that 79.3% of the respondents in Portugal agreed that the communities of religious men and women respond concretely to their needs while 76.7% of the respondents in Nigeria have the same view. We will like to know the response of the consecrated men and women in this question. However, we observed that the respondents from Nigeria that totally agreed to this question are 16 priests and 13 consecrated people while in the same level of total agreement from the respondents in Portugal they are all priests. According to their gender they are all females. On this, the data information is wrong or that there are female priests in Portugal because they identified themselves as Catholics. The 42 respondents that partially agreed from Portugal are within the age range of 25 to 35 years are 29 respondents, from 36 to 46 years are 13 respondents of which 13 are males, 29 are females; all are university graduates; 13 are married, 3 are unmarried and 26 are single people. From Nigeria the respondents with the

same level of partial agreement have the following data analysis: age range from 29 to 39 years is 30 respondents; 24 are males and 6 are females; all are university graduates and Catholics; 11 are single and 19 are married.

Q. 8 and 9 permit us to know the perception of our respondents as regards the contribution of the communities of the consecrated life in the contemporary society, if their charism and mission help in the spiritual growth and development of the society.

Q. 8 – The consecrated life communities respond to the concrete needs of the society.

Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
5	4.9	0	6	6.2
3	2.9	1	7	7.2
11	10.7	2	13	13.4
28	27.2	3	38	39.2
31	30.1	4	26	26.8
25	24.3	5	7	7.2

The table above shows that 25 respondents from Nigeria totally agreed that the community of religious men and women respond to the needs of the society unlike 7 respondents from Portugal that gave the same response. We observed that the highest number is from the respondents that partially agreed in relation to this question in Portugal while in Nigeria, those that agreed to this reality have the highest number. The data analysis revealed that the respondents from Portugal that partially agreed have the age range of 28 to 38 years are 27 respondents, those in the age bracket of 39 to 49 years are 11 respondents. In all, 7 are males and 31 are females. All are university graduated and Catholics. Their civil/religious status reads that 20 are single, 3 are unmarried while 15 are married. Compared with the respondents from Nigeria with the same level of partial agreement, we observed that those in

the age bracket of 20 to 30 years are 11 respondents, and those within the range of 31 to 40 years are 17 respondents. They are all males; all are university graduates of which 16 are single, 12 are married and all are Catholics. Hence, the respondents from Nigeria that totally agreed to this question identified themselves as 16 priests and 9 are consecrated people; all are university graduated also we observed that there is an unclear information here because all identified themselves as females with different religious confession as: 12 respondents are Catholics, 1 is Protestant, 4 are Anglicans, 5 are Evangelicals, 1 is a Jehovah Witness and 2 are from other religious denomination not identified. Thus, their gender and civil/religious status do not offer a clear information for our analysis.

Q. 9 – Consecrated life is important to the contemporary society.				
Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
5	4.9	0	1	1
1	1	1	2	2.1
2	1.9	2	7	7.2
5	4.9	3	17	17.5
15	14.6	4	31	32
75	72.8	5	39	40.2

It is significant that the value of total disagreement from the respondents in Portugal is only 1%, but the highest number is from the respondents in Nigeria with 72.8% of total agreement about the importance of consecrated life in the contemporary society. The personal demographics of these respondents shows that they have the following age interval: from 30 to 40 years are 38 respondents, from 41 to 50 years are 24 respondents, 51 to 60 years are 8 in number, 61 to 70 years are 2 and from 71 to 80 years are 3 in number. Among them are 2 males and 73 females. All are university graduates. Those in single status are 7 respondents,

26 are married, 1 is divorced, 2 are widows, 23 are consecrated people and 16 are priests. We verified that 62 are Catholics, 1 respondent is Protestant, 4 are Anglicans, 5 are Evangelicals, 1 Jehovah Witness and 2 others not identified. We could say that the cultural and religious formation may have influenced in the responses presented with geographical considerations. However, there are some vacuum in the information gathered in the sense that we question if there are possible means to have 2 males with civil/religious status of 16 priests, in the case of respondents from Nigeria. The same mistake observed from the respondents from Portugal, where all the respondents were identified as females with civil/religious status of 8 priests. Logically some informations are missing and so no adequate analysis is being realized.

With Q. 16, we seek to know if our respondents consider that the exemplary life of the consecrated men and women can transform the lives of the citizens.

Q. 16 – The authentic examples of the consecrated men and women can change or transform the life of the society.

Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
0	0	0	0	0
1	1	1	1	1
4	3.9	2	1	1
5	4.9	3	9	9.3
12	11.7	4	28	28.9
81	78.6	5	58	59.8

As demonstrated in the table above, a significant number of the respondents from both countries, although more from the participants in Nigeria manifests their total agreement that the authentic examples of the consecrated men and women has positive influence on the society. Thus, both respondents totally disagreed without any opposition to this question.

However, in Q. 18 and 19 we intend to know if they consider this vocation as obsolete, out of fashion or that it makes sense in this contemporary society.

Q. 18 – The consecrated life is outdated.				
Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
73	70.9	0	31	32
14	13.6	1	23	23.7
5	4.9	2	14	14.4
4	3.9	3	12	12.4
3	2.9	4	13	13.4
4	3.9	5	4	4.1

The results from the table above show that the same number of respondents from Nigeria and Portugal manifest the same opinion, with the same level of total agreement, accepting that consecrated life is outdated. It also shows that more than the majority of the participants in Nigeria have a different view by not accepting the idea that consecrated life is obsolete.

Q. 19 – The consecrated life makes sense in this our epoch.

Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
1	1	0	2	2.1
4	3.9	1	2	2.1
3	2.9	2	1	1
13	12.6	3	23	23.7
22	21.4	4	36	37.1
60	58.3	5	33	34

A general observation of the table above shows that 92.3% of the respondents from Nigeria agreed that consecrated life makes sense in our epoch while 94.8% of those from Portugal have the same ideal

Q. 17 and Q. 41 permits us to know if this vocation is treasured, appreciated by others in the sense that youth could be advised to make option to enter the consecration life.

Q. 17 – The consecrated life is something valuable.

Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
0	0	0	2	2.1
3	2.9	1	1	1
1	1	2	1	1
3	2.9	3	12	12.4
7	6.8	4	34	35.1
87	86.4	5	47	48.5

The table above demonstrates that there is no total disagreement from the respondents in Nigeria as regards this question, that is to say that the participants from Nigeria strongly

affirmed that consecrated life is something valuable. The frequency of total agreement also manifests this position of the respondents from Nigeria. In all, we verified a proximate frequency from the respondents in both countries that defend consecrated life as something valuable.

Q. 41 – It is praiseworthy seeing young boys and girls opting for the consecrated life.				
Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
5	4.9	0	2	2.1
3	2.9	1	2	2.1
1	1	2	9	9.3
5	4.9	3	14	14.4
16	15.5	4	30	30.9
73	70.9	5	40	41.2

The analysis of the table above shows that the respondents from Portugal considered this option praiseworthy but in different level of agreement of which 41.2% of the respondents from Portugal totally agreed that it is praiseworthy seeing the youths choosing this state of life, while 70.9% of the respondents from Nigeria have the same level of agreement.

Furthermore, we inquired to know how relevant it is in keeping the Evangelical Counsels, we ask in Q. 42 and 43, the perception of the respondents in relation to the faithful observance of these vows. We also seek to know if they take it as something very possible and easy to embark on in this contemporary society.

Q. 42 – Faithfulness is relevant in the keeping of the Evangelical Counsels: Obedience; Chastity and Poverty.

Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
1	1	0	3	3.1
3	2.9	1	4	4.1
2	1.9	2	9	9.3
3	1	3	19	19.6
10	9.7	4	24	24.7
86	83.5	5	38	39.2

The number of respondents from Nigeria that totally disagreed with this question as shown in the table above is significant in the sense that it tells how important it is to them, only one participant totally disagreed in opposition of three respondents in Portugal with the same level of agreement. We may say that the increase in number of the respondents from Nigeria that totally agreed with this fact, show their positive knowledge of the challenges facing those who made these vows. Hence, we observed that the respondents from Portugal also considered it relevant but the number of the participants is seen in different level of agreement in the scale.

Q. 43 – Fidelity is possible in the living of these vows in the contemporary society.

Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
6	5.8	0	2	2.1
1	1	1	5	5.2
4	3.9	2	7	7.2
13	12.6	3	32	33
17	16.5	4	25	25.8
62	60.2	5	26	26.8

Our observation in the table Q. 42 may be repeated here. In this case, 6 respondents from Nigeria declared total disagreement with the question unlike 2 respondents with the same level of total disagreement from Portugal. Thus, the level of agreement as demonstrated in the table above, shows that the respondents from Portugal considered this fact as something that requires a certain “discipline and formation” on the part of the religious. On the contrary, 62 respondents from Nigeria demonstrated total agreement, that it is their “obligation” to live what they profess from our point of view.

In a different way, with open questions Q. 48 and 49, we intend to know what they think about consecrated life and the challenges facing those that have consecrated their lives to God. Our intention was also to compare their responses with what we have written in chapter two (cf. p.82 to 86). With these questions we are taken to the last group that we titled the perception of the respondents about the mission of consecrate men and women.

### *3.5.3. Perception of the mission of Consecrated people*

The questions in this group are constructed in order that we may understand what our respondents think and know about the mission of consecrated men and women in the

contemporary society. Here, we refer to mission as their presence, work and the influence it has in the society. We started by trying to explore their view on the possibility to work as follow citizen in Q. 10 or if this may be endangering their vocation.

Q.10 – Consecrated people should participate or work  
in the civil service like other members of the society.

Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
11	10.7	0	1	1
4	3.9	1	1	1
5	4.9	2	3	3.1
18	17.5	3	13	13.4
15	14.6	4	30	30.9
50	48.5	5	49	50.5

The table above demonstrates that 10.7% of the respondents from Nigeria are not in accord that the consecrated people should work as civil servants while only 1% of the respondents from Portugal have the same point of view.

Consequently, with Q. 11 and 12, we wish to know if their presence contributes to the increase in faith of Christians and citizens and whether they accompany the changes in the world in terms of globalization or rather if they are integrated into the globalized world.

Q. 11 – The presence of consecrated people strengthens the Christian faith.

Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
0	0	0	1	1
2	1.9	1	2	2.1
2	1.9	2	3	3.1
5	4.9	3	17	17.5
15	14.6	4	37	38.1
79	76.7	5	37	38.1

From the table above, we verified that majority of the respondents from Nigeria agreed that the presence of consecrated people strengthens the Christian faith. For this reason, no one declared total disagreement. We also observed that the respondents from Portugal agreed but their position is shown in different level of agreement not concentrated in total agreement as from the participants in Nigeria. Who are these respondents? We verified wrong information from the respondents in Portugal in the sense that the data collected identified all the respondents as female while we have the civil/religious status of 8 priests with all respondents identified as Catholics. From the Nigerian respondents we got the age range from 20 to 30 years are 6 respondents. Those from the range of 31 to 40 years are 36 respondents and those that range from 41 to 50 years are 24 respondents. Those from the range of 51 to 60 years are 8 respondents, 61 to 70 years are 2 and from 71 to 80 years are 3 respondents. Among them are 24 males and 55 females; all with the same level of education - university. Their civil/religious status states that 11 are single, 26 are married, 1 is divorced, 2 are widows, 23 are consecrated people and 16 are priests; 66 are Catholics, 1 is a Protestant, 5 are Evangelicals, 4 are Anglicans, 1 Jehovah Witness and 2 from other religious denomination not identified. We can probably say that other religious confessions recognize that the presence of the consecrated people strengthens the faith of the people.

Q. 12 – The consecrated people are integrated into the globalized world of today.

Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
3	2.9	0	0	0
4	3.9	1	5	5.2
8	7.8	2	15	15.5
26	25.2	3	38	39.2
23	22.3	4	29	29.9
39	37.9	5	10	10.3

In the table above, the respondents from Nigeria manifest a higher level of agreement in respect to this question than those from Portugal, although those from Nigeria had a higher number of respondents that totally disagreed with this question in relation to those from Portugal. This urges us to find out the demographic profile of these respondents from Nigeria. The statistical analysis demonstrates that the respondents from Nigeria that totally agreed have the age range from 40 to 50 years are 26 respondents, from 51 years to 60 are 9 respondents, from 61 to 70 years is 1 respondent and from 71 years to 80 are 3 respondents; they are all females and university graduated, among them are 23 consecrated people and 16 priests. We observed a mistake in the data information because it will be difficult to have the gender as females with civil/religious status of only priests and consecrated people in different religious denominations as registered: 26 respondents are Catholics, 1 respondent is Protestant, 4 are Anglicans, 5 are Evangelicals, 1 is a Jehovah Witness and 2 from other religious denomination not identified. A similar mistake is observed from the respondents in Portugal. Their age range is from 50 to 60 years with 4 respondents, 61 to 70 years are 4 respondents, 71 to 80 years is 1 respondent and 81 years to 90 is also 1 respondent; they identified themselves as females, all with the same level of education – university of which 2

respondents are consecrated people and 8 are priests. They are all Catholics. Logically, the data information is not correct.

In addition, we seek to know if their presence in the schools, hospitals and in mission is of benefit and worth to be encouraged Q. 13.

Q. 13 – The presence of the consecrated people in the schools, hospitals and in the missions is advantageous.

Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
2	1.9	0	1	1
2	1.9	1	2	2.1
2	1.9	2	0	0
0	0	3	7	7.2
14	13.6	4	37	38.1
83	80.6	5	50	51.5

The results in the table above show that 83 respondents from Nigeria are in total accord that the presence of religious in these places are of great advantage in relation to 50 respondents from Portugal that have the same level of agreement. Though, the number that disagreed totally is higher in Nigeria. Nevertheless, the social condition may have influence in both responses.

Also, we inquire to know if their lives have any positive impact in the Church Q.14, in the society and in the world Q.15.

Q. 14 – The consecrated life has an influence in the Church.				
Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
0	0	0	0	0
3	2.9	1	1	1
0	0	2	6	6.2
6	5.8	3	7	7.2
8	7.8	4	43	44.3
86	83.5	5	40	41.2

The table above clearly explains the position of the respondents in respect to the question. According to the data shown, the respondents from both countries did not disagree totally with the question, demonstrating that they acknowledge that the consecrated life has influence on the Church even though that the level of agreement differs in both countries. 83.5% of the respondents from Nigeria totally agree on this fact while 41.2% of those from Portugal declare the same level of total agreement. The data analysis shows that the age range of the respondents from Portugal are from 40 to 50 years with 17 respondents, from 51 to 60 years are 17 respondents, 61 to 70 years are 4 respondents, 71 to 81 years are 2 respondents; all are females; university graduates and Catholics of which 17 are married, 1 is divorced, 2 are widows, 12 are consecrated people and 8 are priests. Here, we observed a mistake in the data because all the respondents cannot be females and Catholics with 8 priests. With this, there is a vacuum in the analysis, but we can probably say that personal experience influences the respondents since they are of certain “age”. The respondents from Nigeria with the same level of total agreement have their data analysis as follows: age range of 20 to 30 years are 13 respondents, 31 to 40 years are 36, 41 to 50 years are 24 respondents, 51 to 60 years are 8 respondents, 61 to 70 years are 2 respondents and 71 to 80 years are 3 respondents of which, 31 are males and 55 are females; all are university graduates; 18 are single, 26 are married, 1

divorced, 2 are widows, 23 are consecrated people and 16 are priests. Among them, 1 respondent is a Protestant, 4 are Angelical, 5 are Evangelicals, 1 Jehovah Witness, 2 from other religious denomination not identified and 73 are Catholics.

Q. 15 – The consecrated life has an influence in the World.				
Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
2	1.9	0	0	0
3	2.9	1	4	4.1
3	2.9	2	3	3.1
7	6.8	3	20	20.6
23	22.3	4	35	36.1
65	63.1	5	35	36.1

Our observation in Q.14 can also serve for this question, in the sense that no one affirms total disagreement from the respondents in Portugal unlike 2 respondents from Nigeria that totally disagreed with the question. In addition, 65 respondents from Nigeria declare total agreement to the question while 35 of those from Portugal have the same point of view as regard their grading. Generally, we can say that the influence of the religious is recognized in the Church.

Q. 46 and 47 permit us to know whether consecrated men and women are considered as nice and happy people.

Q. 46 – Consecrated people are happy.

Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
3	2.9	0	0	0
1	1	1	3	3.1
0	0	2	7	7.2
26	25.2	3	19	19.6
21	20.4	4	47	48.5
52	50.5	5	21	21.6

According to the table above and in general, they are seen as happy people despite that the level of agreement differs in both countries. From the Nigerian respondents, 52 held that they totally agreed that they are happy people while 47 respondents from Portugal agreed that they are happy people.

Q. 47 – Consecrated people are nice people.

Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
5	4.9	0	1	1
4	3.9	1	1	1
5	4.9	2	6	6.2
30	29.1	3	23	23.7
21	20.4	4	41	42.3
38	36.9	5	25	25.8

As demonstrated with the table above, consecrated people are not really seen as nice people by the respective respondents. 4.9% of the respondents from Nigeria disagreed totally

on this question unlike 1% of the same level of agreement from Portugal. Furthermore, 42.3% of these respondents agreed that they are nice people while only 25.8% totally agreed on this question. Contrary to the data of the respondents from Nigeria where 20.4% agreed and 36.9% totally agreed.

Consequently, having known the perception of the respondents about consecrated life in general, with Q.50, an open question, in one sentence, we seek to know what they expect from them. Finally, we wish to know if the respondents know of any empowerment of the universal Church to the consecrated life with Q. 45.

Q. 45 – Roman Catholic Church has contributed a lot to the encouragement of the consecrated life.

Nigeria	%	L. Scale	Portugal	%
1	1	0	5	5.2
1	1	1	5	5.2
0	0	2	11	11.3
4	3.9	3	33	34
9	8.7	4	28	28.9
88	85.4	5	15	15.5

The results of the data we have before us in Q.45 are significant. The respondents from Nigeria have a better knowledge of the contribution of the Church's Magisterium to encourage consecrated life, contrary to the respondents from Portugal that manifest a little knowledge of this contribution from the Catholic Church. In other words, 5 respondents disagreed totally, 15 respondents agreed totally while, 28 agreed and 33 partially agreed to this reality. The highest number of respondents comes from those in Nigeria, 88 of them totally agreed, only 1 disagreed totally, 9 agreed and 4 agreed partially. Thus, from the data

analysis we verified that the respondents from Nigeria have the age interval from 10 to 20 years is 1 respondent, from 21 to 30 years are 14 respondents, 31 to 40 years are 36 respondents, 41 to 50 years are 24 respondents; 51 to 60 years are 8 respondents; 61 to 70 years are 2 and 71 to 80 years are 3 respondents. There are 33 males and 55 females among them; 87 respondents are university graduates and 1 is a secondary school student; 20 respondents are single, 26 are married, 2 are widows, 1 divorced, 23 consecrated people and 16 are priests, of which, 1 respondent is a Protestant, 4 are Angelical, 5 are Evangelical, 1 is a Jehovah Witness, 75 Catholics and 2 others not identified. Compared with the 15 respondents from Portugal, the analysis of the data shows that all the respondents are Catholics; all are females; all are university graduates composed of 7 consecrated people and 8 priests with the age interval from 50 to 60 years are 9 respondents, from 61 to 70 years are 4 respondents, from 71 to 80 years is 1 respondent and from 81 to 90 years is also 1 respondent. Also, we observed that there are mistakes while responding to this questionnaire in the sense that the gender could not be only females since all are Catholics with 8 priests. The respondents from Portugal, that partially agreed have the following demographic analysis: age interval from 21 to 30 years are 17 respondents while from 31 to 40 years are 16 respondents of which 12 are males and 21 are females; all are university graduates; 25 are single, 3 unmarried and 5 married. All the respondents are Catholics. The above analysis demonstrates the cultural and educational understanding of the respondents perhaps influenced by their personal and social-geographical environment.

### **3.6. Results of the open questions**

As we have said above that the intention of these questionnaires were to know whether the description of consecrated life corresponds to the knowledge and opinion of the respondents. In the following paragraphs, we will transcribe the opinions of the respondents in both countries in relation to these questions. We shall be starting with the transcription of

the ideas from our respondents in Nigeria and simultaneously relate it with those in Portugal. That is, analyzing and comparing each Q. with the subsequent results of both countries. For example, the result of question 48 from respondents in Nigeria with the result of question 48 from the respondents in Portugal respectively. We remind that the objective of each questionnaire is the same but in two different languages: English and Portuguese, therefore, this research work is a comparative study.

**Q. 48 – In two sentences describe what you think about consecrated life**

The respondents from Nigeria considered consecrated life as a special gift of God to the Church and humanity, although they said that it is not for everyone but for those called to this vocation. Thus, it is a divine call which people respond out of their freedom to dedicate or commit themselves totally to God and humanity. They see it as a noble vocation, in this way, it should be lived with total love and focus on Christ as an example while extending this love to humanity through their generous service. They recognize that this total-self offering is done through the profession of the evangelical counsels, thereby taking it as a holy life, an easy way to perfection, a life of close relationship with God. However, they also see it as a call to the higher service to God and humanity. According to the respondents, it is an option to serve God in truth and in spirit. By obeying His commandments, the consecrated men and women become available for the work of evangelization, without hindrance from family.

In other words, they share the joy and sorrows of humanity while spreading the Gospel. In addition, they see it as a life that makes one to be a guide, a bridge (mediator) between man and God and also the fastest “avenue” to obtain and call down God’s favors, and perhaps, an easy way to hell. They consider it as a life of sacrifice, and the life through which courageous souls love God and love Him in His creatures. It is a simple life devoid of materialism. It is a life that prefigures eternal life and the joy to come. They said that there is fulfilment in living true consecrated life. On this, they considered it as a mystery, a treasure,

something good, precious, interesting, wonderful, beautiful and a call that leads to self-realization. They emphasize that it needs a proper preparation and maturity to face the challenges and persevere to the end. They take it as a decent life worthy of emulation even though not easy, it is a sign of contradiction in the world. Thus, with faith and love, God is their strength and provider. They recognize that men and women in this life are happy, cheerful, humble, and approachable, pay attention to complains, and are nice people. They wrote that they should be integrated in the society and learn craft work.

Some considered that it is not useful in our time since one can dedicate his or her life to God and still have a normal family life, while another respondent sees it as a kind of enslavement, and something that disvalues humans. Contrary to this, others considered that it has a positive influence in the society, and when it is lived well, it gives room for spiritual growth. In other words, it is a life of prayer and not to be taken as “*fuga mundi*”. They acknowledged that certain respect is shown to consecrated men and women in the society. For the respondents, it liberates souls from materialism and generally, from earthly things to focus more on God. Despite its challenges, they are happy to see youths making this option of total consecration to God. According to them it should be encouraged, and lived with fidelity and sincerity by the special grace of God. It is a praiseworthy life if one is given this grace. It is a great wisdom when understood and followed properly. It is not easy, if at all possible without divine help. It is a situation in which people forgo the pleasure of earthly things for the service of God. It is living one’s life for the good of others, to the glory of God. It is God’s gift of love that should be accepted with gratitude. A precious life that is to be lived with fidelity and sincerity. Finally, it expresses self-giving, self-control and spiritual maturity.

Simultaneously, the same question was responded by participants in Portugal as follows: they considered consecrated life as an option which one made in life out of his or her free will to dedicate his or her life to God through Christ. It is an unconditional life commitment to love and serve God and humanity, a configuration of life to that of Christ –

poor and humble, living the beatitudes - and service to humanity. They also see it as a divine gift of God to the Church and humanity. It is a life guided by faith and passion for evangelization. It is not for everybody but for the “chosen” ones. It is a challenge to the present society and to those who made this option. For our respondents, it is as important as other ways of life like marriage, also important in the life and mission of the Church. It is important in the present society because it’s against consumerism. It is a way to feel realized and also to reach out to others without reserve. It is a vocation that requires courage, detachment from earthly things, perseverance, love, service, dedication and sharing. It is a life in communion with God, a happy life for those who have received this vocation and live it authentically. It shows the way to Christ and invites people to fraternity and sharing (solidarity). It is a sign of God’s presence in the world, reminding people that our life is made for God. In this way, they see it as an important witness to the gospel in our day. It is a mission and an encounter, a light for/to the world. For them it is a holy life, something marvelous and joyful to consecrate oneself to God. It is a life one can choose after a good discernment and preparation. It is a praiseworthy life of faith and love of God. It is a generous response where each one gives testimony of God’s love through his or her service to others, as a result God is made known and loved where and when human dignity is promoted. It is a great proof of one’s dedication and commitment to God and a challenge to all those who adopt this philosophy of life. It is also a very difficult challenge in our present society and requires a lot of sacrifice. They see it as a life whereby one abandons himself or herself completely in the hands of God in response to His love – because He loves us first (cf. 1 Jn 4: 19). Thus, it is a beautiful life but difficult when lived in a selfish and “closed” community. It is lived by people who have left everything to dedicate their lives to a higher and greater value – God.

Few of the respondents expressed that there should be more interaction, openness in religious congregation for the growth of the Church, more involvement in the activities of the

parishes in order to encourage these communities and the society as a whole. They also wrote that those who live this life, run away from the difficulties of the families, for this reason, it is a selfish and easy option that is against human nature. A life that does not allow people to express their ideas freely, therefore, those living this life are not totally happy.

As a gift of God, they thought that everyone should live this life independent of one's vocation. They considered it as a fundamental element in the Church and in the society. It is a practice of a religion, an option for great dignity and prestige in the society. It is a life that obliges members to foolishly follow the rules of the consecrated life, also, it is not a suitable life for our society. Meanwhile, not all represent it in a dignify way. Its values and references are directed to others. It is a testimony of life or "escape from the world", that is, *fuga mundi*, though, necessary and irreplaceable. They understand it as a life that requires attentive listening to God's word and the capacity to take earthly things as secondary in their daily life. They considered it difficult to understand but a hope to the contemporary world and a sign of the Kingdom of God. It is a life that needs a renewed integration in the society

In a comparative way, we observed that there are repeated ideas in both respondents and also differences in their perceptions. However, the perceptions that are common among them in respect to this question are as follows: both respondents considered consecrated life as a special gift of God to the Church and humanity, they recognized that it is a vocation for those "called" for this type of life, an option one makes in life for total commitment to God, service to mankind. They take it as a life that involves the profession of the evangelical counsels. Both recognized that it has a mission to fulfill. They conceived it as a holy and perfect way of living, of which when lived authentically gives joy and testifies God's love. For them, it is a sign of God's presence, praiseworthy life of faith and love, while against materialism and consumerism of the society. It is a configuration to the life of Jesus Christ, of which needs preparation and discernment before this consecration to God and service to humanity, but with many challenges. Also, the perception that it makes one a bridge between

man and God is explicit in the response from Nigeria but not as such in the response from Portugal.

Nevertheless, exist different ideas in both responses in relation to this question. The respondents from Nigeria defend that it is a life of sacrifice while it is not mentioned in the response of those from Portugal. The idea of a life that ran away of family problems was observed from respondent in Portugal while that from Nigeria is that it is not necessary because one can dedicate his or her life to God and still have a normal family. Another clear idea from the respondents in Nigeria is that it reminds people of the world to come and also a witness of the life to come.

As we have earlier stated on the motive of this research work, we likewise, do maintain the same intention in this part. That is, to verify whether the views of the respondents on the consecrated life correspond with the stand of the magisterium of the Church. Therefore, considering the results of the questionnaires, we observed that the respondents have a minimal knowledge of consecrated life though with some distorted ideas. Distortion of this sort, could be seen in the following comments made by some of the respondents from both countries: “consecrated life is a kind of enslavement”, “it does not value humans”, “it is a life that run away from daily family problems” – demonstrates the *fuga mundi* – and “a selfish and easy option that is against human nature”. We may say that these ideas are not in conformity with the teachings of the church in respect to this vocation. Could it be that such perceptions about consecrated life are as a result of the impression created about this vocation in the past? It is true that religious life was once taken as “*fuga mundi*” in the early age of Christianity by the founders of monastic life, such as Saint Anthony of Egypt, St. Pachomius and St Paul the Hermit but gradually, was reformed by the Mendicants Orders in 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Century. However, this impression is still present in the contemporary society. Sequel to this idea, we may suggest that it is wise to rethink on a renewed spirit – authentic conversion of members, creative and dynamic form of presenting

consecrated life in the Church and in the society. The idea is not to get involved in “propaganda” nor to “resolve the problems” in the world but to awake the society by making the presence of God felt in the world since this vocation has its foundation in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. In other words, it is a gift of God through the Holy Spirit in the founders of various Religious Orders or Institutes of consecrated life.

However, the interpretation we give to life reality and experiences makes them what they are. Therefore, looking at what our respondents have said about consecrated life, we went further to concretize what they said in respect to the challenges facing those that have consecrated their lives to God.

**Q. 49 – In two sentences, write the challenges facing those that have consecrated their lives to God**

We understood from their responses that the challenges they are facing englobes different aspects of human nature. That is, or (In other words), they are personal and psychological challenges, social and institutional, economic and spiritual challenges.

The first aspect has to do with the knowledge the consecrated men and women in the religious institutes have of themselves. According to our respondents, there should be proper knowledge of what they are committing themselves to in order to live it with dignity. As expressed by our respondents, personal and psychological challenges includes: loneliness, desire to be like others and tendency to possess material things and physical comfort, misplacement of priority, fear of being denied of their “dignity”, as some people see them as abnormal, competitive attitude as regards to career, hatred, rejection, humiliation, sexual perversion, envy, jealousy, selfishness among themselves, high expectations from family, challenges of understanding and supporting each other, ambitious desires to be “mother founder” or “father founder”. Last but not the least is the challenge to persevere to the faithful

living of the evangelical counsels which in our view and interpretation has to do with integral dimensions of human beings – physical, psychological, social, and spiritual – in this case, especially to those who made these vows.

The “divisions” of these challenges are to help us to make a good transcription and description of the respondents’ responses. Thus, there is no division in each of them because they are inter-related and complementary which cannot be conceived separately. For example, the challenge of rejection, humiliation, sexual temptation and vows can be seen as personal, psychological, social and institutional and spiritual challenge. Having this as our background, we now proceed to the challenges we classified as social and institutional.

From the respondents, these challenges are related to societal expectations and their institutional challenges. They include the following: poor understanding and interpretation of this vocation in the society which lead to persecution, stress, discouragement, rejection, humiliation, attacks and bad influences of media communication. According to them, secularism is a threat to the evangelical counsels, lack of adequate support from one’s Religious family. Also, materialism and poor understanding of secularization leads to disrespect to religion and its Institutes. The challenge to be in the world but not of the world, we acknowledge that this is a challenge to all Christians but with a “higher weight” on religious men and women. On the other hand, challenges from their respective families. For the society, it looks like the consecrated men and women are “swimming against the current of the culture of contemporary society” in terms of priority of values and believe - faith. They stated that this vocation is a contradiction to the way of the world therefore not easy for those who made the option. Thus, it is a challenge to them.

In relation to Institutional challenges, they identified the following attitudes as challenges facing consecrated men and women: poor promotion of genuine and fraternal love among themselves by their superiors. This leads to favoritism, tribalism, bad distribution of duties, responsibilities and unfairness in sharing goods for personal use in terms of material

goods and monetary support, which have a negative influence on them – looking for satisfaction outside their communities. In other words, lack of support lures some consecrated people into dangers of hanging around for helper who may take undue advantage of them. The challenge of selective obedience, loss of personal identity, in the sense that some consecrated persons cannot stand their ground and define themselves but are totally absorbed in a false group mentality. Religious are not au courant with the positive changings in the world and in their environment that is to say, that they are not aware of the changings in the world. The fear of not living up to the expectations is also recognized as a challenge to consecrated men and women. They are being used as slaves at times and being humiliated in the communities. Also, they are confronted with the demands in the community life. On the part of the members as we have referred on the personal challenges, they force themselves to obey their superiors, poor formation, poor knowledge and immaturity as regards their vocation has its bad influence in the Institute in general, on this, they mentioned the vows – sexual perversion.

As explained above, the intention is not to make a separate study of these aspects of human being, knowing that they are correlated and when each of these aspects is lacking, the consequence is integral – man suffers it. This leads us to the spiritual challenges which the consecrated men and women are facing. The respondents considered this as a challenge to them, that is, temptation as regards their faith seen as sacrifice to God – living out what they professed, and the capacity to endure hardship, sufferings, rejections, and humiliations in the cause of their mission. Challenge to trust God and His Word and live by His grace. They said that it is only a true love of God and His Church – humanity – will help them to live their vocations, if not it will be very difficult to live it.

In relation to the respondents in Portugal, we will also group it as we have done in the responses of the respondents from Nigeria. The challenges are personal and psychological, social and institutional, economic and spiritual. According to the respondents, the personal

and psychological challenges includes the following attitudes: “detachment” from biological home and all that deprive them of an authentic offering of themselves, capacity to overcome difficulties, loneliness, incomprehension, joyful and total commitment and rejection in the family and in the community. Challenge to be courageous, disciplined and happy thereby, overcoming the impulses of the desire of power, wealth, showing that one’s vocation is important to the world and as a sign against the “current mode”. For example, the judgment from fellow members and others that do not understand their values, always ready to criticize them as quickly as possible. They face the challenges against chastity in the world, courage to be a sign of the Kingdom of God in the midst of a consumerist and hedonistic society, unconcerned about spiritual values. They are challenged to live a coherent life according to their faith and what they professed, to overcome indifference, preconception, and lack of respect. They are challenged to be perseverant, honest, fiel to their charisms, community obligations and mission in the society. The Primacy of God in their life and in all they do is a due challenge to them, more so, to draw people closer to God by their true testimony and witness to the Gospel. They are challenged to be determined and confident in their free option.

The complementary nature of the challenges implies that poor understanding and living of each of them, influences the others vice versa. Consequently, we transcribe what the respondents said about the social and institutional challenges. According to them, the society itself is already a challenge to this vocation in the sense that it has to overcome conceived preconceptions, critics of not living a “normal life”, rejection and discredit of the population, indifference, individualism, materialism, relativism and integration in an increasing secularized society. This means that they should give testimony of their experience of God in a world where relativism reigns. They face the challenge of live their vocations and carry out their missions - evangelization - in a globalized world. In other words, consecrated men and women are challenged to be true Disciples of Christ, thereby following His ways and being a

true witness to the Gospel in a world filled with unbelievers. However, they are challenged to adapt to the new social reality in terms of social media, to be a sign of contradiction in this world where power, pleasure and pride reign. Hence, they are challenged to be in the world and not of the world.

However, when we use the term institution, we are referring to the challenges consecrated men and women face in their various institutes or the one the institute as a whole is subjected to. On this, respondents wrote the following as challenges facing the consecrated men and women in their institutes: incomprehension and bad example on the part of their superiors and members, poor acceptance, discrimination and preconception. Sometimes, they lack humble collaboration with the lay people in their mission, thereby not recognizing their equal dignity. In this way, they are challenged to give an authentic witness as an Institute. They wrote that sometimes obedience is taken too extreme by some superiors that human dignity is prejudiced. They also mentioned the challenge of lack of vocations, of “interculturality” and “intergenerationality”. Consecrated men and women are challenged to avoid a luxurious life and not to be worried about their subsistence but live a happy and lovely life in order to change people’s mentality. Hence, they are challenged to fight against the societal ideologies.

The last but not the least is the challenges we classified as economic and spiritual. It is curious to state that the respondents from Portugal did not identify any challenge associated with money while it is explicit in the response given by the respondents from Nigeria. One may ask why? We attributed it to different geographical and social-economic context where this vocation is found and its understanding, or that it is seen as something obvious that it needs not to be referred to. Another reason may be that it’s not being considered or valorized by respondents from Portugal. On spiritual challenges, they mentioned the capacity to listen and follow Christ the Son of God, showing their experiences through their perseverance and faithful living of the Gospel. In their lives, they are challenged to take primacy of God as their

priority, have faith and live radically their vocation, thus, being a light to the world. We verified also that nothing is said on prayer from our respondents in Portugal. Could it mean that they do not consider it as a challenge to the consecrated life? Or, that they don't know of it.

Consequently, after these transcriptions of the perceptions of the respondents in both countries, we proceed with the description of the common ideas in their responses. We identified the challenges of both respondents with the divisions made above, and which is summarily outlined here as: personal and psychological, social and institutional, economic and spiritual. That is, the understanding of the challenges of the consecrated life. In other words, these aspects are common in both respondents. Comparing the division with what we wrote in the previous chapter two with the subtitle: Challenges facing consecrated life (cf. p. 68ff), we verified that their responses are in line with our exposition but in different terms. For example, the major challenges which we mentioned are based on the prophetic nature and mission of the consecrated life, but in the response or data collected, we classified it as personal, institutional, social and spiritual challenges. And the challenges related with the Charism, we identified it as Institutional and personal challenges. Also, the challenge of adequate formation for new members stated was related to all the aspects mentioned above as regards our divisions. Thus, we may say that the respondents have a good knowledge of the challenges facing those that have consecrated their lives to God.

**Q. 50 – In one sentence write what you expect of consecrated people**

In this last open question, we intend to know the expectations of the respondents from consecrated people. Their major expectation as we observed has to do with their essence and mission. That is, to live for the glory of God, good and salvation of humanity. This implies that they should live a holy, authentic, prophetic and joyful life, which they attributed as: understanding the unfathomable love of God for them hence, freely and totally respond to it,

being faithful to their vows, living a life worthy of emulation and more engagement in the society without being carried away by worldly wealth and materialism. They expect them to make a joyful representation and proclamation of God's presence in the world, to be prayerful, honest, simple and live a clean life.

Furthermore, they expect them to draw heavenly blessings and as well make heaven, to be righteous, perseverant, faithful, spiritual guides, serve God with all their hearts and mind, body and soul without looking back. In this way, they will draw people to God. They should be educated – “high knowledge in religion”. They should live exemplary life like Jesus Christ; render a joyful service to humanity especially the poor in the society. They expect them to depend on God's grace for their uprightness till Christ comes again. They want them also to enjoy their consecration by living their vows, a non-self-centered life in relation to their missions. They should radiate the love of God shown to us through Jesus Christ, show maturity in what they are doing – human maturity, that is, be convinced of what of their decision before joining. They should be good, loving, happy, human, loyal and God fearing people. They should be light to the nation and peace makers, capable to remain focused on God remembering that their call is divine. They should work harder in evangelizing the world. They are to “be in the world but not of the world”. They are expected also be like Mary mother of Jesus Christ, collaborate with the local Church and in all, live a “pure Christian life”.

To conclude they referred us to read Jn. 15: 1-5, that is to say from our interpretation, that consecrated men and women are the branches but not “exclusive branches” of the True Vine – Jesus, which the Father – Grower, takes complete care – that involves joys and suffering stages – to bear much and good fruit by total dependence on the Grower because without Him they can do nothing.

Our journey to this point has given us a wide view of what the respondents from Nigeria thought about consecrated life and the challenges facing them. It's now opportune to know the expectations of the respondents from Portugal on this question.

According to the perception of these respondents as manifested in the data collected, they expect consecrated men and women to evangelize and inspire community – theirs and the society in which they live, to transmit the Word of God in a clear way in order to draw the faithful closer to God without getting into much “promises”. They expect them to love God and humanity, to live happily the gift of their vocations and give testimony of their faith. They want them to make a joyful proclamation of the word of God lived in love in their lives. They also expect them to be truthful, coherent everywhere and not to be ashamed to live their vocations. In addition, they expect them to be in solidarity with one another, that is, their action should speak more than their beautiful words as use to be and be faithful to God. They expect their radical, visible presence in the society and in the Church, an authentic presence that is seen and recognized in the parishes, schools and hospitals. They want them to be in communion with Christ and open to people. They should live the life of loyalty, genuine testimony and faithful to the values of their congregations and their charism. They should live exemplary life, capable of transforming the world by their renewing action. They should be the loving “face” of God in the society and example to the whole Church, reaching out to every human being without reservations. In this way, Christian communities will be a fraternal community where the faithful desire to follow the example of their leaders. They expect them to be comprehensive, able to welcome and share their lives with others. They should be salt of the earth and light of the world, be good Christians and have confidence in the better world to come.

Furthermore, the respondents expect them to be coherent in their lives, in other word, their lives should correspond with the vows the professed, thereby being a true light in this society ingrained in possession and appearance. They expect a joyful testimony of God's love,

joyful encounter with Jesus and His Gospel, being a true image of Christ to others and transmit values to the society especially the lost value of faith and moral. Thus, they should accompany the dynamic movement of the world, although they recognized that some are on this process, they plead for more correspondences on this aspect. They expect them to be sincere, realistic, fulfil their obligations towards God and also, give a prophetic witness. They acknowledge that they are like other human being, but they expect them to give a “higher example” of life and more available to the community.

In addition to the above, they expect a testimony of who find a Treasure and desire to share it with others. They should not be “politicians” but rather, more actions and less words, without expecting anything in exchange. They should be true mothers and true followers of Christ. They should give a witness of a useful and free life that correspond to the essence and identity of the consecrated life. They should not judge but show hospitality, be free and poor, sympathetic and capable to work and sustain themselves - auto-subsistence - in the society, while at the same time, maintain their consecration to God and service to others. They expect them to show that they are happy and fulfilled in their vocation, being example of love, solidarity and altruism. They expect from them an authentic witness of faith in the Risen Lord. Few respondents lamented on the hypocrisy in the Church, too much ostentation and selfishness, expressing that there is no time to listen to the flock, on this the referred the priests. They should be more human, live their consecration in a simple form, be more accessible to the people, and be example of faith and spirituality to the people. They urge that whoever that is making this decision should live and follow it with joy. They should be dedicated people, attentive to others like other citizens, be happy and feel realized in their vocation. They expect them to live truly the evangelical counsels, saying that “we have many consecrated persons that do not give true testimony of their vocation, thereby giving a bad image to the religious life”. They should talk in a singular form about their experiences and the impact they have on them. They should be truthful and coherent in their life. Be people

who spread love and joy, always close to the less privileged, “see” with the heart and be people who value more “to be” to “having”. They quoted Luke 6: 36 “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful”. They should be people rooted in the presence of God, teaching people to be humble, live a radical fidelity to the Gospel, which is possible only when Jesus Christ is the center of their lives. Finally, they should be people of faith and hope, being faithful to their initial *Fiat* and give priority to true Love.

From the above ideas of the respondents, we verified that there are common expectations in both responses and few different points of view. The prevalent expectations are: that they should be coherent in their life, radical fidelity to God through prayer, to the Gospel by faithful living of the evangelical counsels, to their charism by being faithful to the spirit of their founder and foundress and humanity by their mission. A joyful proclamation of the Gospel by their life and example, witness of a true love and happy realization in their vocation, primacy of God in all their undertakings and solidarity to humanity especially the less privileged and marginalized in the society are ideas that were frequently referred to. The expectation to remain focused on God and persevere to the end is also included in the common expectations. The difference observed is that from the respondents from Nigeria there is an explicit expectation as regards prayer, the Blessed Mother Mary and St. Teresa of Calcutta, also, being educated while these points are not evident in the response from respondents in Portugal.

## CONCLUSION

It is imperative to state that Consecrated Life is relevant in the contemporary society seeing and experiencing the good work that is done by these men and women. It seems rhetorical to ask this question with an obvious answer of yes, of course. The Church in every age always aims to renew, under the influence and guidance of the Holy Spirit, all those who freely choose to respond to this special vocation, towards the perfection of Christian charity. In other words, the Church's conviction that this kind of life is still relevant in contemporary society and has a necessary role to play in awakening the gospel message on the Beatitude is the purpose of this thesis in the light of Consecrated life. This thesis methodically presents the relevance of consecrated life in today's socio-political and economic environment that's power drunk with materialistic tendencies to say the least. In addition, the Church cannot afford to recede deeper into the confines of the traditional approach which have lost their touch or impact in the Church and the World.

In addition, various studies and authors have made a vital contribution in rediscovering and re-interpreting the relevance of consecrated life in the contemporary society, for example, Sr, Inigo Joachim of the congregation of St. Anne's Chennai from her Asian perspective, said that because of the scientific progress, young men and women, full of zeal and enthusiasm, come forward to dedicate their live to serve the poor and the marginalized of our society. Furthermore, she observed that there is also a growing anti-clericalism and anti-religious feeling amongst many Christians in the region of Asia, especially the youth. However, she redefines the relevance of consecrated life with a soul searching question "what kind of Consecrated Life do we want in the future?"

Therefore the vocation to the consecrated life will always be relevant in a changing World, between the haves and the have not.

In drawing up this research, we were able to explore in chapter one the understanding of consecrated life, starting with the exposition of the meaning of consecration and its Foundation. It is clear to us that the word consecration undergoes semantic transformation depending on the aspect or circumstances we may wish to discuss. We understood that the word consecration is an act of dedicating a person, place or thing to the divine use or service. We discovered that the term is frequently used in Religious context in various ways by different religions. For this reason, this work limits itself to the Religious consecration of men and women in the Roman Catholic Church. This particular consecration is a divine action that requires human consent for its concretization. In other words, “it is a covenant of mutual love and fidelity, of communion and mission, established for God’s glory, the joy of the person consecrated, and the salvation of the world”<sup>179</sup>. In the Old Testament, we came to understand that the concept of consecration is frequently related to something or a person separated from its usual “environment” for a specific purpose or mission assigned by God. We noted also that in the priestly theology of consecration, it is God that consecrates while in the Deuteronomist theology, we live as the consecrated people of God.

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ is the consecrated son of God that reveals the perfect way to understand and to live consecrated life. In fact, He is the prototype and model of consecrated life. The patristic view made us to understand that this consecration was initially practiced by the virgins with a particular ritual which progressively came to be a model of the consecration of men and women in Religious Institutions approved by the magisterium. However, this study has demonstrated how the magisterium has shown a particular concern since the early life of the consecrated life by providing the necessary support and encouragement for a better and authentic living of the consecrated life as the authority responsible for the interpretation of the deposit of faith and doctrine. In the process of our study, we laid hands on the major documents of the Church, for example: Documents

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<sup>179</sup> Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, “Essential Elements,” 1.

of the Second Vatican Council, Apostolic Exhortations, Pontifical messages on the world day of the consecrated life and other materials. These documents, summarily held that consecrated life is a gift of God to the Church, though do not pertain to the hierarchical structure of the Church but belongs to its life and holiness and participate in its mission. It is important to note that this research has shown how important the Magisterium is in the structural and spiritual orientation of the consecrated life.

In chapter two, we made a description of the relevance of consecrated life in the contemporary society. In this chapter, we underscore that the relevance of consecrated life depends mostly on its foundation in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ concretized in the sacrament of Baptism. On this point, attention was given while expressing the intrinsic nature of this life with the mission of the Church. It was made known that the Church cannot renounce the consecrated life because of its commitment in the life and holiness of the Church as declared in the Constitution of the Church (cf. LG 44; VC 3). Its relevance is noted by its various mission or work of evangelization situated “in the very heart of society such as: health, education, social, economic and cultural. Hence, their missions have a double objective: for the glory of God and the salvation of mankind. Consequently, we emphasized that vocation is a divine call of which every human being respond in a different way. It was explained that by the sacrament of Baptism, every Christian participate in the *tria munera* of Christ: priestly, prophetic and royal function of Christ according to one’s condition (Cf. Can. 208). However, according to the teachings of the Church we recognized that exist specific vocation for every living person. Also, we identified the ordained ministers, the lay faithful and those in the consecrated life. In addition, we demonstrated that the consecrated life by its “specific” consecration through the profession of the evangelical counsels includes the religious institutes and secular institutes approved by the competent authority of the Church. However, the evangelical counsels (chastity, poverty and obedience) were outlined as the essential elements of consecrated life. It is a configuration of a person to the very feature of

the life of Christ and His teachings. Therefore, they were treated based on their anthropological, Christological and ecclesiological dimensions. It was understood that they do not prevent those consecrated to this life the values inherent to human nature neither are they denial of human dignity; rather, they help mankind to avoid excessive seeking of possessions, knowledge and power (cf. ET 19). In so doing reaffirming the words of Paul in 2 Cor. 4:7, we can say that the vows are treasures in earthen vessels that need a “special” care. Hence, the challenges facing consecrated life are taken as a call to consecrated men and women to face the reality with fidelity and perseverance to Christ and His Gospel by going against the current. Sequel to this, Pope Paul VI in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelica Testificatio* remained the religious that through the vow of obedience, they have assumed a firmer commitment to the ministry of the Church and of their brethren (cf. ET 23). Therefore, an adequate care in the area of formation, discernment, and the conformity to the charism, mission and needs of the society must be continually emphasized.

Furthermore, we expounded on the principal objectives of this research the perception of people on consecrated life. The use of questionnaires for data collection in chapter three was verified as a method to achieve this aim. At this juncture, we can say that consecrated life is a gift of God received by the founders and foundress through the divine illumination. However, from the questionnaires we were able to know the perception of the respondents. In fact, majority of the respondents had critical idea, which includes a positive and negative perception of the teachings of the Church on this vocation though we cannot generalize their view or ideas due to the applied sample criterion because of the lack of representativeness of the population of which creates a lacuna in this work. Another difficulty that we had to confront was lack of bibliography since there is no similar work found or realized in this area of investigation.

Having observed and evaluated the perception of the respondents regarding consecrated life, I was challenged to make my contribution which I would like to do in form

of constructive criticism in the following way: could it not be that consecrated life needed to be renewed in its way of conceiving and living out its vows. Without prejudice, I feel that continuous conversion and renewal of mentality of the members is urgent for its spiritual and institutional development. Therefore, a dynamic, creative and authentic development is expected from its members and as an institution in general. Thus, the journey so far led us to a renewed vision of consecrated life. I have come to realize that there are new roads to walk on, new possibilities to explore, new questions to ask and new philosophical and theological strategies to respond with, as the society and people are changing, objectives are different and new needs are emerging. As Sr. Inigo (YCL-Manila 2015) opines, “we must re-define and remodel with openness our very life-style, our ministries, formation and administration to be more relevant to this changing world”.

I accept this challenge, vision and mission for the consecrated life which Sr. Inigo calls the “new poor” that is created by Globalization and recent financial crisis, person with AIDS/HIV, sex-workers, child abuse, street children, child laborers, refugees, undocumented migrants, prisoners, and the ecological imbalance in many unimaginable ways have affected Consecrated Life across the World. Additionally, I observed cultural alienation in consecrated life because it is predominantly Western in expression. It remains very much foreign. As I make this journey with the grace of God, with the above-mentioned areas I see consecrated life today more relevant and challenging to the universal call of salvation. When consecrated men, women and priests cry “Lord, save us” (Mt. 8:25), the God of history will stretch out His hand and answer us.

In conclusion, we are aware that this work is like a starting point, an entering door with different perspectives of which a future research or investigation could be explored. Subsequently, further study could be realized profoundly on the concept of consecration in other religions like Buddhism, Hinduism and African Traditional Religion. A comparative

study could also be carried out on the concept of consecration between these religions or other forms of consecration in Roman Catholic Church.

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## **Annex**



## QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THEOLOGICAL RESEARCH

The present questions are integrated in the theological research of a final year student in the faculty of Theology in the Catholic University Braga – Portugal. The aim is to gather information on the general comprehension/understanding of Consecrated life by people. The data in the questionnaire will only be used for academic purposes mentioned above and the information collected will be assured total confidentiality.

We appreciate your willingness to respond to this questionnaire which is slated for 10 minutes.

With all due respect, we plead for clarity and sincerity in giving your answers.

The questions are all compulsory answers.

### QUESTIONNAIRES:

Questions to answer in a scale of 1 to 5.

1 is total disagreement and 5 is total agreement.

NS/NR is no response or no opinion.

NOTE: When we speak of “religious” and “consecrated life” or any similar expression, we are referring always to those in religious congregations in the Catholic Church.

1. Age:

2. Sex: M  F

3. Level of education: Not Educated  Primary School  Secondary School   
University

4. Civil State/ Religious Status: Single  Married Couple  Unmarried Couple   
Divorced  widow/ widower  Consecrated  Priests/Pastors  Others

5. Religion/Denominations: Catholic:  Protestant  Anglican  Evangelic  Jehova  
Witness  Others  IURD  Believers  Atheist

6. The life of special consecration (religious men and women) is a challenge to the contemporary society.
7. The consecrated life communities respond concretely to the needs of the consecrated people.
8. The consecrated life communities respond to the concrete needs of the society.
9. Consecrated life is important to the contemporary society.
10. Consecrated people should participate or work in the civil service like other members of the society.
11. The presence of consecrated people strengthens the Christian faith.
12. The consecrated people are integrated into the global world of today.
13. The presence of the consecrated people in the schools, hospitals and in missions is advantageous.
14. The consecrated life has any influence in the Church.
15. The consecrated life has any influence in the world.
16. The authentic examples of the consecrated men and women can change or transform the life of the society.
17. The consecrated life is something valuable.
18. The consecrated life is outdated.
19. The consecrated life makes sense in this our epoch.
20. I know of the apostolate of a male and female Religious Congregation.
21. I know the implication of the Evangelical Counsels.
22. It is important to profess the evangelical councils: obedience, chastity and poverty.
23. Chastity is a denial of the values inherent to human nature.
24. Chastity is a source of joy.
25. Chastity disvalues sexuality.

26. Since God commanded us to increase and multiply, chastity is a violation of this divine law.
27. Chastity is an option of isolation and egoism.
28. Chastity is contrary to natural impulses.
29. The vow of obedience is against the dignity of a person.
30. The vow of obedience contradicts human nature.
31. The vow of obedience gives true freedom to the person that lives it.
32. The vow of obedience makes the consecrated men and women slaves of their superiors?
33. The vow of obedience has value in the society.
34. The vow of obedience is value to the Church.
35. Living the consecrated Obedience in a world that want absolute right and freedom to do whatever each person wants is an easy task.
36. The vow of poverty is advantageous.
37. The vow of poverty dehumanizes the human person.
38. The vow of poverty involves the whole community.
39. The vow of poverty is absurd.
40. The vows can be seen as a sign of frustration.
41. It is praiseworthy seeing young girls and boys opting for the consecrate life.
42. Faithfulness is relevant in the keeping of the Evangelical Counsels: Obedience; Chastity and Poverty.
43. Fidelity is highly possible in the living of these vows in the contemporary society.
44. The consecrated life has a biblical foundation.
45. Roman Catholic Church has contributed a lot to the growth of the Consecrated life.
46. Consecrated people are happy.
47. Consecrated people are nice people.

48. In two sentences, describe what you think about consecrated life.

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49. In two sentences write the challenges facing those that have consecrated their life to God.

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50. In one sentence write the witness you expect from the consecrated people.

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## **INQUERITO POR QUESTIONÁRIO PARA TRABALHO DE INVESTIGAÇÃO TEPLÓGICA**

O presente questionário insere-se no âmbito da dissertação conclusiva do Mestrado Integrado em Teologia, na Faculdade de Teologia da Universidade Católica Portuguesa – Braga. A pesquisa visa recolher informações sobre a perceção que a comunidade em geral tem sobre a vida consagrada.

Agradecemos a sua disponibilidade para responder a este questionário, que não demorará mais de 10 minutos.

Os dados serão apenas utilizados para a finalidade académica referida acima assegurando-se a confidencialidade das informações recolhidas.

### **QUESTIONÁRIOS:**

Perguntas respondida numa escala de 1 a 5

1 é desacordo total e 5 é acordo total

NS/NR para quem não tem opinião

1. Idade:

2. Sexo: M  F

3. Escolaridade: Nunca fui à escola  Ensino Básico  Ensino secundário   
Universidade

4. Estado civil/Eclesial: Solteiro (a)  Casado(a)  União de facto  Divorciado  
(a)  Víúvo (a)  Consagrado (a)  Sacerdote  Seminaristas  Outros

5. Confissão religiosa: Católica  Protestantes  Anglicanos  Evangélicos   
Testemunho de Jehová  Mormon  IURD  Sem Religião .

Quando aqui se fala em “religiosos (as)” e “vida consagrada” ou expressões similares, referimo-nos sempre ao âmbito da Igreja Católica Romana.

6. A vida de especial consagração (frades e freiras) é desafiante para a sociedade contemporânea.
7. As comunidades da vida consagrada respondem às reais necessidades dos consagrados (as).
8. As comunidades da vida consagrada respondem às reais necessidades da sociedade.
9. A vida consagrada é importante para sociedade contemporânea.
10. Os consagrados devem participar ou trabalhar na sociedade civil tal como os outros membros da sociedade.
11. A presença dos consagrados (as) aviva a fé dos cristãos.
12. Os (as) consagrados (as) estão integrados (as) no mundo globalizado dos nossos dias.
13. É vantajosa a presença dos (das) consagrados (as) nas escolas, hospitais e outras missões.
14. A vida consagrada tem influência na Igreja.
15. A vida consagrada tem influência no mundo.
16. Os exemplos autênticos de homens e mulheres consagrados (as) podem mudar ou transformar a vida da sociedade.
17. A vida consagrada valorosa.
18. A vida consagrada está ultrapassada,
19. A vida consagrada faz sentido na nossa época.
20. Conheço o trabalho realizado por alguma congregação religiosa masculino ou feminina.
21. Sei o que implica dos conselhos evangélicos.
22. É importante professar os conselhos evangélicos: obediência, castidade e pobreza.
23. A castidade como é uma rejeição dos valores inerentes à natureza humana.
24. A castidade é fonte de alegria.

25. A castidade desvaloriza a sexualidade.
26. Visto que Deus manda que a Humanidade cresça e se multiplique, a castidade é uma violação a este mandamento divino.
27. A castidade é uma opção de isolamento e egoísmo.
28. A castidade é contrária ao impulso da natureza.
29. O voto de obediência vai contra a dignidade da pessoa.
30. O voto de obediência é contrário à natureza humana.
31. O voto de obediência torna verdadeiramente livre a pessoa que o vive.
32. O voto de obediência torna a pessoa serva do superior.
33. O voto de obediência tem valor para a nossa sociedade.
34. O voto de obediência tem valor para a Igreja.
35. Viver a obediência consagrada, num mundo que defende o direito absoluto à liberdade para se fazer o que se quer é uma tarefa fácil.
36. O voto de pobreza é vantagem.
37. O voto de pobreza desumaniza a pessoa.
38. O voto de pobreza envolve toda comunidade.
39. O voto de pobreza é absurdo.
40. Os votos podem ser vistos como um sinal de frustração.
41. É apreciável que os jovens (rapazes e raparigas) façam opção pela consagração total a Deus.
42. É relevante a fidelidade aos conselhos evangélicos: obediência, castidade e pobreza.
43. A total fidelidade aos votos é possível na sociedade contemporânea.
44. A vida consagrada tem um fundamento bíblica.
45. A Igreja católica realiza iniciativa para incrementar a vida consagrada.
46. Os (as) consagrados (as) são pessoas alegres.

47. Os (as) consagrados (as) são pessoas simpáticos (as).

48. Em duas frases curtas, diga o que pensa sobre a vida consagrada.

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49. Em duas frases curtas, diga os desafios que enfrentam aqueles (aquelas) que se consagram a Deus.

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50. Diga que testemunho que espera dos (das) consagrados (as).

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