

# A NEW CONSECRATION?

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THE LEADING document of Vatican Council II on the nature of the Church brought into prominence an aspect of their state of life with which most religious were entirely unfamiliar: that their profession of the evangelical counsels was integral to the consecration common to all Christians — sacramental baptism. In fact, before *Lumen Gentium* had been promulgated, Pope Paul VI had declared:

So it is that the profession of the evangelical vows is added to the consecration which is proper to the baptized. One may call it a special kind of consecration which is the fulfilment of baptism, in that, by means of this consecration, Christ's faithful commit themselves wholly to God to such an extent that their dedication puts their entire lives at his disposal.<sup>1</sup>

The question thus arises whether this consecration of those who make profession of the evangelical counsels is something new, in addition to their baptismal consecration.<sup>2</sup> One of the key-texts of the dogmatic Constitution on the Church reads as follows:

Through vows — or other sacred bonds which of their nature are similar to those vows, certain of Christ's faithful take on the obligations of the three evangelical counsels, and are wholly given over to God, their supreme love, as his slaves. In this way they are taken into God's service, for his glory, *by a new and special title*. Indeed, they are already dead to sin and consecrated to God through baptism . . . (but) they are *more intimately consecrated* to his worship.<sup>3</sup>

The decree on the renewal of religious life best suited to our times makes the same precise points in other words. It speaks of renouncing the world, of living wholly for God, of handing over

<sup>1</sup> In an Allocution to Superior Generals of Women's Congregations. Cf A.A.S. 56 (1964), p 567.

<sup>2</sup> *Lumen Gentium* (10) underlines the fact that 'the baptized . . . through the new birth and the anointing of the Holy Spirit are consecrated into a spiritual house and a holy priesthood'.

<sup>3</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 44 (italics ours). Cf also *Ad Gentes*, 18. Paul VI repeated these words verbatim in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelica Testificatio*, 7 (29 July 1971), addressed to all religious. Cf *Supplement to The Way*, 14 (Autumn 1971), p 6.

their whole lives as his slaves (*eius famulatus mancipatur*), of this being a special kind of consecration, rooted indeed in baptismal consecration, but expressing it more fully. It also adds that religious profession is a response to a divine call.<sup>4</sup>

To make our question more precise still: do these texts indicate that the consecration integral to the profession of the evangelical counsels is one and the same as that conferred by baptism, or is it a new consecration? And if it is, what is its precise force? What, in actual fact, is this new element? There can be no doubt that these questions are of considerable importance for the whole Church, in its existence as a community which proclaims that it lives by faith and holiness — not to mention their importance in the sphere of canon law.

### *Some definitions*

Before we proceed to examine the various opinions which have been proffered on this matter, it is necessary to say exactly what is meant by the terminology currently in use.

Consecration, as applied to christian men and women, is commonly understood as the elevation, achieved in and through Christ, into the world of God's own holiness.<sup>5</sup> This consecration is effected by means of the counsels: by which is meant, according to the teaching of Vatican II, Paul VI, and various spiritual writers, the three traditional counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience.<sup>6</sup> The point at issue is the *profession* of these counsels: that is, the voluntary making of them;<sup>7</sup> and, very probably, their practice as well.<sup>8</sup> However this may be, what we are concerned with is the practice of the counsels which are made voluntarily and perpetually.<sup>9</sup> Lastly, we must note that these matters concern all Institutes currently recognized as such by the Church, as the Council makes clear.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *Perfectae Caritatis*, 11. Cf *Supplement to The Way*, 2 (May 1966), pp 38-39.

<sup>5</sup> Cf Beyer, J. S.J.: *De vita per consilia evangelica consecrata* (Rome, 1969), p 33.

<sup>6</sup> Cf *Lumen Gentium*, 44; *Perfectae Caritatis*, 1; *Evangelica Testificatio*, 7; Beyer, *loc. cit.*, pp 39ff.

<sup>7</sup> Cf *Perfectae Caritatis*, 5 (*se responsum dedisse*); also in the Allocution of Paul VI, *loc cit.*, A.A.S. 56 (1964), p 57; and *Lumen Gentium*, 44 (*quibus christi-fidelis . . . se obligat*).

<sup>8</sup> Cf e.g. *Perfectae Caritatis*, 11, concerning Secular Institutes; with greater probability, *ibid.*, 1: *ita magis magisque vivunt Christo*: similarly in *Evangelica Testificatio*, 1 *consiliorum evangelicorum . . . usum servantes*. Cf *Lumen Gentium*, 44; *Perfectae Caritatis*, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Cf *Lumen Gentium*, 44; Beyer *loc. cit.*, p 17. Only those sacred bonds which are perpetual carry with them some form of consecration: Cf *Notitiae* 7 (1971), pp 107-10.

<sup>10</sup> Cf *Lumen Gentium*, 44, 46, 47; *Perfectae Caritatis*, *passim*.

*Affirmative opinions*

Our intention is first to examine the opinions of the principal commentators who maintain that religious profession (or its equivalent) constitutes a consecration which adds something new and special to that conferred by baptism.

We begin with the view of Fr R. Régamey O.P., stated with clarity and conviction fifteen years ago.<sup>11</sup> According to the teaching of the Council, he affirms, the perpetual undertaking of a life according to the counsels 'certainly constitutes a special consecration',<sup>12</sup> in virtue of which a person receives a more intimate consecration (*intimius consecratur*), one which is permanent.<sup>13</sup> Its effect comes from God's taking the initiative; for every kind of consecration is a proffer of his to man. In other words, God draws into his own way of holiness those whom he calls, and covers them irrevocably with the shadow of his faithfulness.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, in the terminology of Vatican II, the words 'consecration', 'to consecrate', are employed exclusively of the divine action; whereas words like *mancipatio*, 'to dedicate oneself', indicate the human offering. Furthermore, the Council in several contexts clearly indicates that consecration is primarily the effect of the divine action; and in particular when it says in *Lumen Gentium* (44) that a person 'is more intimately consecrated to the divine service', emphasizing the point by using the passive voice.<sup>15</sup> The Church also exercises its mediating role concerning the special nature of this consecration, in withdrawing those professed from the profane aspects of the world, and in attaching them to the divine service in a more specific manner.

This consecration brings to a person's baptismal dedication a certain specificity divinely granted.<sup>16</sup> And, as the author insists, this second consecration, like the first, is not to be considered merely as an inchoative and transitory act. It is God himself who consecrates the person, in view of a kind of life carrying with it special conditions

<sup>11</sup> Cf *Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione*, tom II, art. 'Consecrazione religiosa' (Rome, 1975), cols 1607-13.

<sup>12</sup> *Perfectae Caritatis*, 5.

<sup>13</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 44.

<sup>14</sup> The scriptural language relating to the divine call is treated by the same author in 'La consécration religieuse', in *Vie Consacrée*, 38 (1968), p 348.

<sup>15</sup> Père Régamey admits that he was led astray on this point, in thinking that the word referred to the person making profession. Cf *Vie Consacrée*, art. cit., pp 345ff. He develops the notion of God as the prime mover in the act of consecration in 'L'exigence de Dieu', in *Vie Consacrée* 38 (1966), pp 346-49.

<sup>16</sup> This appears to be the only place explicitly designated by P. Régamey as 'a new kind of consecration'.

which enable the person 'to live for God alone', and for Christ, as 'the one thing necessary'.<sup>17</sup> Thus it is that God consecrates the entire life of the person who makes profession, both qualitatively and quantitatively. The consecration of sacramental baptism becomes more deeply rooted and more or less perfect in accord with the quality of the profession and with the practice of the counsels.<sup>18</sup>

Fr Jean Galot S.J., also argues from the conciliar declaration that a new consecration takes place in the profession of the counsels.<sup>19</sup> He attributes special significance to the passage in *Lumen Gentium*: 'through the sacred bond by which Christ's faithful take on the obligations of the three evangelical counsels, and are handed over entirely to God, their supreme love' (44). These final words — each one of them endowed with an extraordinary significance — indicate an interior consecration of the person, by which he or she is taken over by God, the supreme object of a personal love, as his permanent property, and becomes his exclusively, without any reservation.

Galot then reflects on the strong relationship, on which his text insists, between this divine action and baptism. The phrase 'more intimately consecrated to the divine service' indicates that the action must be attributed primarily to God himself. Such divine activity has as its purpose the richer fulfilment of the person professed, which adds a quality to one's baptism, in virtue of a 'fresh and special element'. In other words, the fruitfulness of baptismal consecration enjoys increase, but one which reaches out beyond baptismal endowment and responsibility. At the same time, however, the baptismal consecration is itself affected, since the person thus professed is freed from the hindrances which could perceptibly interfere with the fervour of love and the perfection of divine worship. It is God himself who makes the person sacred to him on a deeper level, by lifting up the baptismal dedication to new heights.<sup>20</sup>

Galot thus stresses the threefold aspect of this new consecration in the conciliar documents: christological, ecclesiological and eschatological. The living image of Christ, virginal, poor and obedient, the saviour of humankind, the eternally faithful spouse of the Church, is

<sup>17</sup> Cf *Perfectae Caritatis*, 5.

<sup>18</sup> Cf P. Régamey, 'La consécration religieuse aujourd'hui contestée', in *Supplément de la Vie spirituelle*, 18 (1964), p 389. He cites *Lumen Gentium*, 44: '... and they are more intimately consecrated to the divine service. ...'.

<sup>19</sup> Cf *Les religieux dans l'Eglise, selon la Constitution 'Lumen Gentium'* (Gembloux-Paris, 1966); and *Renouveau de la vie consacrée: le décret du Concile* (Gembloux-Paris, 1966).

<sup>20</sup> Cf *Renouveau* ... pp 48-52 — Galot's comment on *Perfectae Caritatis*, 5.

imprinted as an authentic seal upon the inmost spirit of those who make profession: a seal which at the same time makes its mark upon the Church, affording it visible and invisible increase.<sup>21</sup> This consecration is equally an earnest of the heavenly existence, an especially powerful form of holiness which illuminates the sanctity of the Church with a brighter radiance.<sup>22</sup>

Another author who has dealt at length with these questions is Fr Jean Beyer,<sup>23</sup> who approaches them from his own view-point, and appeals to the conciliar documents for confirmation. His main assertion is on the existential character of the consecration, which naturally derives from the profession of the evangelical counsels:

It follows from the revelation of Christ the Lord that there is a *special call* to a form of life which is more closely assimilated to that of Christ himself: one which develops out of the general christian vocation, and is designed to bring to its perfection the consecration proper to baptism. This call consecrates God's elect under a double title: by a grace which gives increase and brings to its fulness the baptismal consecration, and also by a *special vocational charism*.<sup>24</sup>

The call, then, is itself a consecration, and though it is rooted in the pristine christian vocation, it cannot be called *baptismal* pure and simple, both because of the means which it presupposes, and the charisms which it confers. For it is by a special gift of God that some are chosen from among the baptized for a more radical and immediate following of Christ, to the extent that such persons have conferred upon them a profound sharing in his life. The evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience carry with them this characteristic quality: bestowed by Christ the Lord, they give the best possible expression to the entire gift of himself on the cross to his Father, and offer full conformity with him in his resurrection. In this way they anticipate the death and resurrection of every Christian

<sup>21</sup> Cf J. Galot, *Porteurs du souffle de l'Esprit* (Gembloux-Paris 1967), pp 60-66, 90-92. Here he notes that the profession of the evangelical counsels also brings fulfilment to the consecration conferred by the sacrament of confirmation.

<sup>22</sup> Cf *Lumen Gentium*, 44. The author notes that though this consecration does not belong to the sacramental order, it is endowed with a charism which effects a special relationship with God; this will go on developing through eternity.

<sup>23</sup> Cf *De vita per consilia evangelica consecrata* (Rome, 1969), pp 7-40.

<sup>24</sup> There is a relationship between the evangelical counsels and the special consecration, according to Fr Beyer. He speaks of 'consecration through the counsels', and 'by means of' or 'through the profession of the counsels', Cf 'Religiosi nella Chiesa', in *Vita consecrata*, 12 (1976), pp 2ff.

(which benefit the whole Church), because of a special sharing in the offering which Christ, priest and victim, has achieved for the world's salvation. We must therefore recognize in those Christians who profess these counsels a greater consecration to God in love, which is, at the same time, a deeper union in Christ with the Church. It is a consecration which, rooted in baptism, is, as it were, its ultimate logical and existential consequence.<sup>25</sup>

### *Negative opinions*

Fr G. M. R. Tillard O.P., another prolific writer on the subject of the religious life, never uses the word 'consecration', but adheres to the terms 'religious', 'religious life', 'religious Institute', and so on; even though he often treats of the relationship between the profession of the counsels and baptism. However, he does not consider that religious profession carries with it a new consecration. In his commentary on the phrase in *Perfectae Caritatis* where it is stated that the profession of the evangelical counsels constitutes a special consecration, he writes: 'Religious consecration is none other than baptismal consecration in its most explicit expression'.<sup>26</sup> Tillard considers this 'expression' as an authentic fulfilment, in that religious life involves the practical realization of the life of the sacred priesthood in which every baptized person has a share, in virtue and under the influence of baptismal grace. However, profession adds nothing to the power of the sacramental grace conferred either by baptism or confirmation.<sup>27</sup>

Those who make profession of the counsels fulfil the imperious demands made on them through their baptism, by dying to the world and living for God alone. They take the means which render them capable of living as closely as possible according to the pattern of Christ's own way.<sup>28</sup> Thus, the evangelically professed are most seriously concerned that their baptismal consecration becomes the moving force of their free and conscious living. Such profession, by its religious and fraternal character, constitutes in the Church a most

<sup>25</sup> Cf 'La vita consecrata a Dio nella pratica dei consigli evangelici', in *Vita Consecrata* 11 (1975), pp 641ff. In this article, Fr Beyer examines the counsels under the aspect of Christ as Son of the Father; those who make profession of the counsels are empowered to enter more fully into the mystery of the divine relationship in respect of the paschal mystery of Jesus — cf pp 639ff.

<sup>26</sup> Cf *Les grandes lois de la rénovation de la vie religieuse* (Paris, 1967), pp 129-46.

<sup>27</sup> Cf *Les religieux au cœur de l'Eglise* (Montreal, 1967), pp 13-21.

<sup>28</sup> Cf 'La vie religieuse, sacrement de la présence de Dieu', in *Donum Dei*, 10 (Ottawa, 1965), pp 52ff.

vital reminder of the paschal mystery, in which all believers participate by reason of their baptism.<sup>29</sup>

The profession of the evangelical counsels is therefore to be reckoned as a sign of the baptismal mystery which is of the highest import.<sup>30</sup> It brings into the light what is actually present, in a hidden way, in the heart of all the baptized and of the whole people of God, and is radically directed to the heavenly Kingdom. In fact, religious profession clearly manifests that eternal Kingdom already truly present in the midst of the pilgrim Church, and even now tending towards its plenitude.<sup>31</sup> It is clear, then, that Fr Tillard does, in a variety of ways, speak of a special divine action in the Christian who makes profession of the counsels. The interior force, he says, of baptismal love released by such profession results from God the Father's imprinting the seal of the Lord Jesus and his Pasch upon the interior freedom of the religious.<sup>32</sup> Further, God confers his blessing upon the one who makes profession, *consecrates* and finally draws such a person into his own faithfulness. It would appear, then, that in practice, Fr Tillard holds the same opinion concerning the innovative character of this consecration as the authors cited above.

*Consecration: a theological controversy*<sup>33</sup>

According to Fr A. Boni O.F.M., the profession of the evangelical counsels does not carry with it any new sacred element which differs from baptismal consecration, but is merely a fuller expression of it: a promise, made to God, of dedicating to his worship for the whole of one's life all the theological virtues of baptism. Hence those who make profession are not consecrated by God; rather they consecrate themselves. The reason is that the profession of the counsels is not sacramental, and thus contains no new element.

Fr Paul Molinari S.J., in his turn, has frequently intimated that evangelical profession carries with it a new consecration distinct from that conferred by baptism, and more interiorized; even though it depends on the baptismal consecration and is firmly rooted in it. The reason is that the profession of the counsels constitutes a *life*, in

<sup>29</sup> Cf 'L'avenir de la vie religieuse', in *La théologie de renouveau* (Montreal/Paris, 1968), pp 326, 329-31.

<sup>30</sup> Cf 'Devant Dieu et pour le monde', in *Le projet des religieux* (Paris, 1974), pp 306-08.

<sup>31</sup> Cf 'Nécessité du prêtre et du religieux dans l'Eglise', in *La vocation religieuse et sacerdotale* (Paris, 1968), pp 83, 62 and 66ff.

<sup>32</sup> Cf *art. cit.*, in *Donum Dei* (Ottawa, 1965), pp 62, 66-69, 75.

<sup>33</sup> This occurred in the pages of *Vita Consecrata* in vols 7 and 8 (1971-72).

which a developing relationship between God and the professed is created by a more intimate gift of self in a following of Christ which is as total and all-embracing as possible. The result is a new bond and a more intimate and sacred kind of existence, even though it is non-sacramental; it is the divine action whereby God sets his seal on those who have been called to this life, consecrates them and unites them to himself in a special way.

When it comes to the conciliar documents and the declarations of Paul VI, Fr Boni finds a certain ambiguity in what is said about consecration. As far as *Lumen Gentium* (44) is concerned, the phrase 'profession of the evangelical counsels' refers to the dedication of the self. He also notes that an amendment proposed by one of the conciliar fathers, that the phrase concerning the state of life 'consecrated to God' should be altered to 'by God', was rejected. He goes on to point out that all the translations understand the phrase *divino obsequio intimius consecrantur* as signifying the action of the person making profession. This point, according to Fr Boni, is emphasized both in the Allocution of Paul VI (23 May 1964), and in the decree *Perfectae Caritatis* (5): '(the person) consecrates and dedicates himself entirely to God'; 'the professed consecrate themselves (*se devotent*) to the Lord in a special way'. He also urges that the latter document must be considered for any right understanding of the phrase (in *Lumen Gentium*) which refers to the consecration of the person making profession.

On the other hand, Fr Molinari points out that the Council never changes the natural meaning of the word 'consecration', particularly when it uses a phrase like 'special consecration'. Nor is the term employed ambiguously, but analogically. When Vatican II concerns itself with human activity it speaks, not of 'consecration', but of 'dedicating' or 'handing over oneself'. In addition, the phrase of *Lumen Gentium*, when it speaks of the person making profession of the evangelical counsels as 'being intimately consecrated to the divine service' (44), is of supreme importance. In fact, the theological commission of Vatican II, in considering a proposal to amend this phrase, declared that it was to be understood in the passive sense — consecrated 'by God'. Several vernacular versions did in fact use the passive voice in translating the word *consecratur*, in particular that of Mgr G. Philips, secretary of the theological commission.<sup>34</sup> Several

<sup>34</sup> Cf *L'Eglise et son mystère au IIe Concile du Vatican: Histoire, texte et commentaire de la Constitution, Lumen Gentium* (Paris, 1968), p 130: 'The passive form deserves special notice: a person does not consecrate himself: he receives consecration (*consecratur*)'.



other writers who took an active part in the labours of the Council are in agreement with this view.

As far as Paul's VI's Allocution and the decree *Perfectae Caritatis* go, they do not carry the same weight as the dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*. In addition, these documents speak of the person making profession without ever using the term 'to consecrate oneself' (*se consecrare*).

### Conclusion

It must be emphasized that, in the passage which has received most attention (*Lumen Gentium* 44), it seems unlikely that the word *consecratur* could mean 'consecrate oneself'.<sup>35</sup> It is true also that the Council restricted the use of the word 'consecrate' to God's action. It follows then that through the profession of the counsels a certain consecration results, which is God's work, and something other than what God himself effects in the administration of baptism (and confirmation).

In this divine action, the baptized person is specially called by God — 'more intimately consecrated to the divine service'. The dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* explains: (the Christian) 'is through baptism dead to sin and consecrated to God'; whilst *Perfectae Caritatis* (5) adds: 'he or she is not only dead to sin, but in renouncing the world, lives for God alone'. Certain Christians, therefore, are charismatically gifted by God by this special call, beyond the common state imparted by baptism. By the profession of the three evangelical counsels freely undertaken, and their lifelong practice, a person turns his back on a worldly existence, in following more closely that manner of life undertaken by the Son of God. It is a life which manifests pre-eminently the filial and fraternal virtues; which, in fact, it represents in the Church. It is thus that the whole personality of those who freely make this profession is affected by God at the deepest and most existential level, as he configures them as closely as possible to Christ. This means that through the profession of the counsels, the one who is constituted a person in Christ's Church by baptism is now made over into a living and perfect representation, in the Church and the world, of the person of Christ the Saviour, who emptied himself, taking the form of a slave.

<sup>35</sup> Such a usage is grammatically correct; but the declaration of the Theological Commission rules it out in this case.

Our own view is that this new consecration, through the profession of the evangelical counsels, finds its expression in virtue of the gift of baptism and confirmation.<sup>36</sup> Both the call and the charisms involved in the life of the counsels flow from the vital influence of these sacraments, which are more interiorized according to the way in which these same counsels are lived out. For the rest, it is according to the nature of baptismal consecration to be subject to a variety of further evocations by God, both sacramental and non-sacramental; so that each one of those baptized in the Church receives his own vocation, whether this is to the life according to the counsels, or to another state or ministry.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Cf the emphatic statements in *Evangelica Testificatio*, 13, *loc. cit.*, pp 36-38.

<sup>37</sup> Cf *infra*, p 96.