

DR. LEA VERSTRICHT

The Consecrated Life at a Turning Point

Foreword

Within the framework of the project *Monastic Pastoral Care*, there has been theological research into what the Christian consecrated life can mean today for Western Europe. The accompanying field research has been carried in large parts of Germany, the Netherlands, and Flanders.

In a time in which the consecrated life seems to be dying, this study may be too late for some. In previous decades, various congregations and communities were confronted with the question how they could prepare and process their death in the best way possible. It was viewed as irresponsible to accept new vocations. Various testimonies that reflect this can be read in the report on the field research that Paul Wennekens carried out. But it is more than likely that this project will never be too late. As has already proved to the case more often, it is always darkest before the dawn, before a bit of new light can be admitted or detected.

This theological research starts in the 1960s. The Second Vatican Council opened the windows and doors, with its well-known “aggiornamento,” and also asked the religious to renew their life and give it a contemporary form. The document *Perfectae Caritatis* and the sixth chapter of *Lumen Gentium* posed some particulars in 1965 for rethinking the life of the religious. That is where we will start with the exercise before us. For some, that is the cause of the “decline” of the consecrated as that has been perceived since then. In the meantime, time has not stood still, and the consecrated has been faced with still other challenges. It is not too late but rather a good time to examine this way of life.

I would like to thank those who have contributed to this project: Paul Wennekens, Pierre Humblet (KNR), Wim Vandewiele (KULeuven), Mattias Henckelmann (ZAP Bochum), Peter Unterberg (Porticus). And I would also like to thank all the religious who live the life that presents the vision of another world.

Introduction

This study started with the question where and how the religious are actively present as an answer to the pastoral and spiritual needs of people of today. It proved quite quickly to be the case that this question was too broad for the many vulnerable religious communities in Germany, the Netherlands, and Flanders. Rather, it should have concerned who the religious are today in a world that is rapidly changing, becoming more and more complex, and that has gone through a process of modernization and secularization. The historical forms of the consecrated no longer appear to have appeal: many left in the 1960s and 1970s, and there were barely new vocations. In the meantime, the communities – many of which consisted of large groups – had to learn to deal with this new situation. This staring into the face of the end of these communities' existence cuts deep. The sense of a world that no longer appears to be receptive to the presence of the religious simply adds to the pressure. Unexpected changes occurred both internally and from without. The search that occurred in previous decades was thus also one of trial and error, an attempt to find form and content that linked up with the rich tradition *and* the changing context. That whole process was not a simple one.

We studied what was published in recent years, studies that also testify to searching for and often finding a provisional and limited answer. We will limit ourselves here to the Christian religious traditions.

This article consists of three parts. In the first part, we look for elements that can define the consecrated life. With the aging and decreasing size of existing communities and traditions, their members began new projects and engagements to prevent the rich tradition from being lost. In the second part, we look at the paradigms that are shifting from modernity to postmodernity. The third part discusses some challenges that confront the consecrated life and that reach beyond the traditional consecrated life. All believing Christians and communities can draw lessons from this.

PART I. THE CONSECRATED LIFE: ELEMENTS OF A DEFINITION

The consecrated life in the Christian tradition has been guided through time and space by various inspirations and has found just as many expressions. The spectrum ranges from a solitary life in the desert on the one end to a community in the middle of a city on the other. That in itself makes it a complex undertaking to define the consecrated life. In this first section we will limit ourselves to the elements that have been indicated in the church documents since Vatican II. One of the last documents from that council deals with the consecrated life, *Perfectae Caritatis*. Together with the sixth chapter of *Lumen Gentium*, *Perfectae Caritatis* calls the religious to renewal and to connect with the modern world. Thirty years later, in 1996, John Paul wrote the report of a synod on the consecrated life: *Vita Consecrata*, and not quite two decades later, in 2014, Pope Francis proclaimed a year of the consecrated life and wrote an apostolic letter to all the religious: '*Gaudeamus...*'. These texts will serve as a basis for our definition. In the second section of this part we will explore the location of the consecrated life. Do they flee from the world, or do they situate themselves in the midst of it? This issue primarily says a great deal about how the religious see and experience their mission. In the final section of this part, we will look at the four elements that David Kinnear Glenday, secretary general of the Union of General Superiors, cites in an interview in *Tertio*.

1.1. The church documents since Vatican II

1.1.1. The documents from Vatican II and the consequences

The highest aim of the consecrated life is the *imitatio Christi*, the imitation of Christ, in the love of God. This rule yields a variety of lifestyles that *Perfectae Caritatis* sees as the wealth of the tradition. There are the contemplative communities that devote themselves completely to prayer and to the love of Christ, and there are communities that strive for a clear apostolate for advancing the Kingdom of God in the world. All – in their own way – advance the life of the Church and are, in their own way, living centers where traditions can be lived and renewed. All live according to the three vows of poverty, celibacy, and obedience and share a common life that becomes visible in daily practices of prayer, clothing, formation, etc. The council calls the religious to be renewed and adapt to the world in which they live and carry out their mission. To that end, they have to learn to understand the signs of the time, develop a missionary mindset, and also renew themselves spiritually. This rethinking also needs to be reflected in their external forms: their clothing (especially the women religious), the training they undergo. Here, it is indeed important that they remain faithful to their vocation and calling and sincerely continue to search for God. In that way, they serve the Church. They show Christ in the world and make the Church more authentic. They are a sign of the holiness of the Church without their being part of the hierarchy of the Church.

This call to renewal and reconception of their life thus still occurs in a clear framework that is the Church. In *Lumen Gentium* we read, for example:

[S]ince it is the duty of the same hierarchy to care for the People of God and to lead them to most fruitful pastures. The importance of the profession of the evangelical counsels is seen in the fact that it fosters the perfection of love of God and love of neighbor in an outstanding manner and that this profession is strengthened by vows. (LG 45)

At the same time, the religious,

in fulfilling their obligation to the Church due to their particular form of life, ought to show reverence and obedience to bishops according to the sacred canons. The bishops are owed this respect because of their pastoral authority in their own churches and because of the need of unity and harmony in the apostolate. (LG 45)

These quotes inform us that the expected renewal of the religious is conceived in a lucid and clear framework that the institution of the Church is, in close interplay with its hierarchy and representatives of that hierarchy. The creative and prophetic dynamic, which is characteristic of the consecrated life, is thus strongly limited. The adaptation to the world thus should thus primarily promote the credibility of the Church. That is the priority of the council fathers.

Perfectae Caritatis goes further in this perspective with respect to the various forms of the consecrated life and new, lay and secular, institutions. Although spiritual renewal has priority, attention is also bestowed on the clothing of the religious, the isolation of the contemplative orders, and the organization of the religious in unions and conferences.

The call to renewal initiated a process of reflection in many communities on the inspiration and identity of the religious, of their mission and translation of the vows. That optimistic start, however, soon revealed a shadow side. The decrease in the numbers of the religious was striking. People left the orders, and there were fewer and fewer candidates for this way of life. While the call of the council meant a liberation for some from an all too constricting framework that no longer fit the time and mentality of many religious, others experienced this as the removal of a framework that gave their consecrated life form. The way of life and the experience of spirituality were so closely attuned that the removal of the one led to the severe tottering of the other. Sandra Schneider remarked at the end of the previous century that the religious were asked to catch up on 400 years of history in three decades.¹ Aware of the dangers of the periodization of history, she argues that the consecrated life took shape when the Church was a dominant player and provided an unambiguous worldview in which the hierarchy of the Church was also mirrored

in family, political, and cultural life. This unity has been under pressure since the fourteenth century through the development of modernity in which the world was viewed more and more as a separate entity that could also exist apart from God (and his guardians on earth). The Church responded by building a wall around itself. For believers, this quickly meant a spiritual life within the walls of the church and a secular life in the world outside. For the religious, however, that life within the walls went on for centuries in the form it had acquired in the Middle Ages. When the windows and doors were opened in *Gaudium et spes*, it soon became clear that no fresh wind could be expected from modernity. That period then came up against its own limits by the experience of two world wars, the growing social malaise and poverty that divided the world into North and South, into the Third and Fourth World, the ecological crisis, the ethical developments, etc. This all occurred within the extremely protected space that the Church had been until then. The disorientation of the religiousⁱⁱ has to be placed in this light, even though the Vatican attributed the malaise to, among other things, the laxity or lack of faithfulness of the religious.ⁱⁱⁱ The focus from the Church agencies would then also be directed at the spiritual aspect rather than the form of the consecrated life.

1.1.2. Vita Consecrata

In 1996, a good 30 years after the Second Vatican Council, John Paul II wrote his report about the synod on the consecrated life. The synod can be seen as an evaluation of the dynamic that the Council produced. John Paul II felt it was necessary to describe the unique character of the consecrated life in its different forms, to come to a deeper understanding of the consecrated life and the passion for renewal.

On the one hand, the consecrated life is placed in a broader perspective. In addition to the imitation of Christ and the love of God, the Holy Spirit is also involved. The Trinity embraces the consecrated life as a whole, whereby the Spirit represents creative faithfulness, renewed trust, prayer, and the strength of asceticism.

On the other hand, the consecrated life is more strongly anchored in the Church and its structures. Concrete attention is given to the relationship in and with the Church. The religious can, through their character of testimony, renew the joy of the whole people of God. They are a sign of connectedness in the Church and should properly maintain their relation with the Church. At the same time, the renewal of the consecrated life is accompanied by the call to remain faithful to the Church and thus to keep the future open. The evangelical counsels are here seen as challenges for the modern world and as the eschatological end to which everything is heading. The religious are therefore also to look further than the borders of the existing Church. They are the privileged partner for promoting the ecumenical dialogue between the Christians, interreligious dialogue, and dialogue with secular world. All of this happens under the authority of the Church so that the unity of vocation and mission is preserved.

This document by John Paul II was primarily intended to explain the spiritual power of the consecrated life. It was not that Vatican II did not do that, but the renewal as articulated in the Council documents sounded somewhat more concrete. Then (certainly among women religious) there were strong initiatives for retraining with respect to concrete life, which was visible in clothing, prayer, visibility, and community formation. There was the danger that the external changes would adversely affect the link to the spiritual life. It is precisely that which John Paul II wanted to correct in the *Vita Consecrata*.

1.1.3. "To all consecrated people"

The intention of Pope John Paul II was not able to reverse the negative evolution of the number of vocations and admissions to the consecrated life after Vatican II in the West.

That did not prevent Francis from proclaiming a year of the consecrated life in 2014, 50 years after *Perfectae Caritatis*. He wrote an apostolic letter to the "brothers and sisters" in the consecrated life. That letter is written in an entirely different style. It is a strong invitation with three aims: 1) to look to the past with gratitude; 2) to live the present with passion; and 3) to embrace the future with hope. The pope asks

for a communal reflection on the consecrated life and a study of that life in the light of the Gospel. He calls the first characteristic of the consecrated life to rid ourselves of every deed that is not from or for God. He abandons the path of loyalty to the Church and chooses completely for loyalty to the Gospel. Two other things are conspicuous.

First, Francis asks us to view the world from a contemplative perspective. Contemplation rests on various elements. Francis wants the religious to renew their existence on the basis of the Gospel, with all their heart. Passion is translated into a restlessness of the search for the truth. But it also rests on joy as a foundation of human life. That joy is a characteristic of the religious themselves, but it has to be communicated to others. It requires all to undergo being born again, to experience a “continuing conversion,” an “exodus” from an existing pattern. The pope also finds comfort in the essential characteristic of the consecrated life. That comfort expresses itself in tenderness and love for one another, in opening the door and following the path to those who need them in trust and mutual belonging. That comfort humanizes the communities. The contemplative view is practiced in prayer as a source of fruitfulness for the mission, and it thus increases the prophetic nature of the consecrated life.

A second striking given in the letter from the pope is the relation with the world. That was indeed also the opening of the aggiornamento of the Second Vatican Council. But, 50 years later, the world has changed in such a way that another relation is needed. It is no longer a question of opening the doors but of going into the world themselves. Or rather: the religious should no longer practice hospitality but should “wake up the world,” “renew the world.” And they do that by witnessing to a different way of acting and living. The pope wants them to become “brave men and women on the margins.” He dreams of houses of the religious that are places of nearness, of knowledge and dialogue, of building bridges to whoever lacks joy and needs comfort.

1.1.4. Characteristics of consecrated life according to the documents

The Vatican documents are children of their time. The objectives and the approaches differ, just as the world has changed during the last 60 years. Read in that way, they challenge us to reflect on the possibilities of the consecrated life in the world and the Church of today. In summary, they yield the following elements for a definition of the consecrated life today.

The *sequela Christi* is primary. It is the ultimate basis for speaking of the consecrated life. Just like Christ, the religious want to live in the love of God, full of expectation of the Kingdom of God. The Gospel is their guide in this.

This requires continuous conversion. As long as the Kingdom of God has not yet been realized, a spiritual change is necessary. The religious live their lives in community and in accordance with the vows of poverty, celibacy, and obedience, and in some communities stability as well. In this way they give shape to a different way of living and acting. Prayer determines the rhythm of the day. All their activities are situated in and on the basis of this framework.

The imitation of Christ and living in the love of God take on different forms. The contemplative form bestows a great deal of time on and attention to prayer. The active form follows Christ in his attention to and care for people on the margins. These two forms are complementary and not mutually exclusive.

The documents of the Church situate the consecrated life within its structures. The religious stimulate the life of the Church. They are praised for their witness, their strength, their prayer, their presence in the Church. At the same time, they are also present in the world as a prophetic voice to renew and wake up the world, to witness to another possible world, namely, the Kingdom of God that is promised us and proclaimed by Jesus. To be able to do this, they need to be inculturated and flexible.

In summary, we could formulate it as follows: Consecrated life is the imitation of Jesus Christ and living in the love of God in the light of the Gospel from a specific location. This means a life in community in

accordance with the vows, which witnesses to a different way of living and acting, to another possible world, in the Church as well. It requires continuous renewal or conversion. The touchstone is their (age-old) tradition.

1.2. The location of the consecrated life

The places where the monasteries or abbeys have been established are not really treated in the documents or are not thematized. Nevertheless, attention for this is not an unnecessary luxury. The buildings are often situated in recognizable places like an isolated sanctuary in the Church and society or as an anchorage for a spiritual search. They are places where spirituality and the traditions are embodied in people, in community with each other and the outside world, in material (buildings and finances), and time (tradition, the daily rhythm of prayer, work, and rest). Pope Francis calls in his letter especially for making the religious houses places of knowledge and wisdom, tradition and dialogue.

1.2.1. In the world or flight from the world?

The consecrated life began, as it were, in the desert, far away from the inhabited world. Until the present, most monasteries and abbeys are places that witness to an isolated existence behind walls, that can only be reached via gates. That can be interpreted in a double way, namely as flight from the world or precisely as an opportunity to form another life in service to the world. It is in this tension that the consecrated life is lived. And that is also apparent from the locations and the architecture of the buildings.

1.2.2. Buildings as sacred places

Ever since Saint Benedict wrote down his ideal of an abbey, most abbeys have been built following his advice. An abbey is a complex of various buildings in which the church is often the center. There are some buildings for contact with the outside world; others are intended to give the relationship with God all their attention. The building complex is meant to provide a place for the consecrated life in all its facets: prayer, (communal) life, work, and death. The abbeys were set up to be self-sustaining: food, medicinal herbs, study and reading material, the reception of guests – all this happened within the walls. Those walls which were originally intended as a protective factor, also immediately made clear that there was an inside and an outside.

Wim Vandewiele undertook a (literal) research journey of what the postulant sees and experiences when he enters the abbey.^{iv} The gate marks the literal border. Knocking on the door here means the first contact between the outside world and the inside world. He also distinguishes between places that bring the outside world into the inside world, such as the guesthouse, and places that carry the inside world into the inside world, such as the church and the cloister. At the same time, this division cannot be sustained – he remarks in the concluding chapter of his book that the so-called outside world also comes in with new postulants who enter the monastery and “infect” the so-called inside world with the new spirit of the times. It may be clear that the walls for protection or isolation are very porous. This fact does not make the consecrated life in a post-secular context any less complex. And it takes place in a border area.

1.2.3. Liminality or life on the margins

Diarmud O’Murchu introduced the term *liminality*, which Jacques Haers adopted in his *Geloften aan de grens*.^v Over against the dominant patriarchal concepts of God with a preference for the “warrior” and the spiritual “mythical hero,” O’Murchu starts from the idea of non-violence as a divine attribute that was also proclaimed by Jesus as the heart of the Kingdom of God. In that non-violence, which he sees defended throughout the centuries by all kinds of movements in the Christian traditions, he perceives a radical engagement to realize God’s dream for this world and for human beings. For him, this is clear in

the new theology of the consecrated life in which the option for the margins is explicitly present. He calls that liminality. He sees the revival of these values often first appears in movements outside the religious institutions where they are recognized as divine creativity in the world. It is precisely the subversive power that is experienced by the monastic communities in the vows of poverty, celibacy, and obedience. Living out these vows, the religious become connected with what and who is marginalized in society: the victims of violence, exploitation, and oppression. For O'Murchu, this liminal life is thus also the power of the monastic presence in community to influence the surrounding culture. The continuing translation and study of the vows confirm to him that the consecrated life is a liminal prophetic calling. That is, the consecrated life is a dynamic in which people develop "liminal movements" to ground their God-given orientation and to live so that life can receive meaning and significance. This life on the margins, liminality, gives the consecrated life an enormous potential to touch the heart of people. The stability and continuity of the consecrated life is, according to him, to be found in the liminality that provides a ground and a context to justify this form of life. It presupposes a flexibility and courageous creativity to surrender to God's recklessness. In that way, a monastic community becomes a kind of energy center that embodies the deep human values by holding before society a mirror for the life that is lived. Liminality thus concerns values and not rules or laws. It searches for answers to the question how we can inculturate these values in constantly changing contexts, and they perceive new possibilities for God's creation.

The institutionalization, however, applies the brakes to this creative and prophetic dynamic and, according to O'Murchu, that is also one of the causes of the crisis in the consecrated life.^{vi} At the same time, however, he notes that this liminal dynamics did not allow themselves to be muzzled. He discovers them in all kinds of alternative movements that surface within and outside the religious institutions, such as the feminist and ecological movements. He also worked out this link with social and global movements in a previous work on paradigm shifts in which consecrated life must again be tested if it is to have significance. We will come back to this later.

1.3. On mission

1.3.1. The location of mission

Mission is an essential characteristic of the consecrated life. The bond with Christ, who sent his disciples into the world, means that religious are also sent into the world. The variety in the consecrated life, which we can roughly divide into active and contemplative orders, also points to the healthy tension that made the consecrated life dynamic for centuries. Is the orientation to Christ and the community around him central in mission, or is it more a matter of being in the world and working there on the realization of the Kingdom of God? Something can be said for both interpretations. The difference cited above is also found in the different interpretations of the evangelists themselves. Let us, for instance, compare the mission of the disciples in the gospel of Matthew to the sending by Christ in the gospel of John. The former is the most well known and that has been most applied in the history of the church. Matthew expresses the last words of Jesus to his disciples as follows:

Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And look, I am with you always; yes, to the end of time. (Mt 28:19-20)

Here the commission is clearly one of going out into the world, making the world acquainted with Jesus Christ and his message. This is different from the twentieth chapter of the gospel of John:

[A]nd he said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so am I sending you.' After saying this he breathed on them and said: 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven; if you retain anyone's sins, they are retained.' (Jn 20:21-23)

In this second version, the accent lies more on mutual solidarity, certainly if other fragments from the gospel are placed next to it. The relation of God to the world, of God to Jesus and his disciples, of the

disciples among themselves, etc. are given much more attention in the fourth gospel. Relationality is never far away in this gospel. Forming an inspiring community is then also more central than going out to “all peoples” to make them disciples.

In the comparison alone between these two short fragments, it should not come as a surprise that the consecrated life has developed in different ways over the course of the centuries, whereby the emphasis came to lie on the mission in the world on the one hand and on the development of a community that is focused on the relationship with Christ in the Trinity on the other. Both kinds of community have a mission in the world. “The Good News that the religious proclaim is the Risen Lord Himself” is found in the introduction to a book on religious service.^{vii} A few contributions in that book hold that a shift is occurring in the understanding of service among the religious. In their self-understanding, “who they are” is more important than “what they are,” Brian Hefferman says for example,^{viii} and that has been sought intensely in recent decades. This search, which began with the acknowledgement of the shrinking of the communities and the growing understanding of finitude and vulnerability – and thus the impossibility to maintain these activities – produced a reminder of their mission for many. And for Catherine M. Harmer, this brought to light that for many congregations confusion arose between “mission’ and “ministry.”^{ix} “Mission” indicates why a group started, namely, to fulfill the mission of Jesus. “Ministry” or concrete service then indicates how a congregation gives concrete shape to the mission. It is the latter that changes over the course of time. Reflection on mission also indicates what is to be done concretely in a specific (temporal) context. So, for example, the Dutch Friars Minor-Franciscans came to the conclusion after reflection that Francis’ adage was “holy service and holy obedience.” And it is that idea that the congregation today wants to translate anew into who they are and what they do in relation to the surrounding world and culture: obedient and “humble in all circumstances.”^x

1.3.2. Four elements

On the occasion of the start of the Year of the Consecrated Life, an interview appeared in *Tertio* from November 2014 with David Kinnear Glenday, the secretary general of the Union of General Superiors.^{xi} He confessed that, for him, a religious community had purpose only “if it was the result of a deep experience of God.” This quotation clearly indicates what has priority in the discussion on religious community; the following of Christ requires a form of radicality. And this has meaning only if it is embodied in a concrete historical and cultural context. Spirituality and the materialized form complement each other. For Glenday, some things come to the surface. We detect some similarity with the call of Pope Francis in his letter *Gaudeamus!*

The religious fulfill a prophetic role in the Church. “Being prophetic means first and foremost an attentive search for the presence of God in the world, and being available to work with Him.” Being prophetic requires a form of flexibility. And without the radicality of the *sequela Christi* and the necessary flexibility, it is impossible to go to the margins, to the place where the religious belong. At the same time, the religious have the advantage of living in a community as a sign of “fruitful collaboration” and the “fraternal community life” in a world that is characterized by individuality. In what follows we will list the four elements that are characteristic of the consecrated life, and we will fill them in with the most important aspects from the literature on contemporary monastic life.

a) Being prophetic

Glenday describes the prophetic character of the religious as a way of looking at the world, which is connected with service. The attention to spirituality and the renewed search for the inspiration of the founders can be seen as a way of viewing the world with new eyes. The majority of the religious today entered the monastery in a time in which God was more visible and tangible in the world. This

obviousness belongs to the past. And that requires new traces to God, to spirituality, and a new translation of the tradition.

In “The future of past spiritual traditions,” Bernard McGinn remarks that we should not lose the plurality of traditions if we want to see a future for the Christian tradition(s). “It’s our task to learn how to present spirituality or mysticism in all its rich diversity.... There is no future without risk.”^{xii} There is no certainty or safety to be found in the past. Prophets are people who risk reality and trace God in the world. In that sense, spirituality or being prophetic cannot be viewed in terms of laws or rules that are to be followed, but it concerns values and following a path.

b) Flexibility

We learned that spirituality is always an embodied spirituality, which means it cannot be separated from other dimensions of human existence. Embodied spirituality presupposes a flexible relation with a changing historical and cultural context.

In the introduction to “Monasticism in Modern Times,” Isabelle Jonveaux and Stefania Palmisano point to the given that the greatest part of contemporary reflection is drawn from the monastic identity of “practitioners,” people who experience and bring it to life in practice: monks and nuns, theologians and laypeople. In practice, they learn both about diversity in Christian monastic life and how the Christian tradition is related to the world in which they dwell and live. Then Jonveaux and Palmisano discuss a “practical utopia” linked to the culture and spirit of the times. They call monastic life a “practical utopia.” That is to say, it is a radical protest to society by another presentation of life and action on the one hand, and the monastic life remains a search for a relationship between tradition and innovation on the other.^{xiii}

The plurality of translations of the vows that appeared after Vatican II also show the flexibility of the consecrated life in an constantly changing world.^{xiv} This flexibility is also ingrained in the consecrated life itself. Chittister speaks of “a confusion of Spirit” or calls it a “messy, untidy thing in the heart of the church”, where this life thus always devoted itself to being a sanctuary to follow the spirit.^{xv} Other than being under the control of the church hierarchy, in her view, the consecrated life has to be released precisely so that it can fulfill its “prophetic dimension.”

c) Service on the Margins

The third element that Glenday cites in the description of the consecrated life shows two different matters: its role in society and its location.

A distinction is often made here between contemplative and active orders. Active communities are linked with serving people. The presence of the contemplative is more isolated. Nevertheless, both forms have their own way of serving the world. In the consecrated life, activity and contemplation are not opposites. Loving God and one’s neighbor are one and the same command. Both forms have to imitate Christ and give shape to this imitation.

These margins are the favorite place of Pope Francis. He regularly repeats the call to all Christians to come to the periphery. It is where we encounter fragility and vulnerability. Diarmud O’Murchu and, following him, Jacques Haers speak of “liminality” in their translation of the vows. The margin (limit) is the place where we can live and where we come into contact with those who different from who or what is part of us. It is not the place we visit for our pleasure, but the place God calls us to. The margins are the challenge for spirituality and a place of new possibilities, where the Spirit of God can be experienced. Haers translated the vows as boundary markers and the religious as frontier workers who give shape to the tension between the loyalty to God and their loyalty to the world.

The location is an important theme for the consecrated life. We can perhaps state that abbeys and monasteries are locations on the margins. They erect margins in our society by making clear that another way of living and acting is possible by offering a place of rest and quiet in a world of chaos and noise. According to O'Murchu, monasteries have a mirror function or are centers of energy where the deeper values of people are experienced. Understood that way, his "going to the margins" and "stability" are not opposites. Living in a place where the margins are experienced (in poverty, celibacy, and obedience) special attention can be created for values and people who live on the margins of society.

d) Community and the individual

For Glenday, living in a community is an essential element of the consecrated life. Other writers also call community one of the pillars of the consecrated life. Nevertheless, this element is given little attention in the literature or in church documents. It seems to be self-evident, not explicitly stated. But "community" is perhaps one of the least clear themes in the practical consecrated life.^{xvi}

The relation between community and the individual requires new attention in reflection on the consecrated life. The consecrated life has arisen in communities that follow a rule and usually have a hierarchical structure that gives a strict order to the daily life. Community was a clear reality that was visible in customs, clothes, rituals, the rhythm of the day, etc. When Vatican II asked for the consecrated life to be renewed, some of these elements began to totter. A practical foundation had been removed.

At the same time, the emancipation of or appreciation for the individual was growing in society. It did not appear to be self-evident to deal with these developments in strictly ordered communities. Here and there, congregations or communities were searching for how they could integrate these new facts into the consecrated life. Here are a few examples. In a monastery in Spain, the novitiate was changed from the traditional model – the novitiate as a process of expropriation – to a model of the novitiate as a process of appropriation.^{xvii} The latter meant that novices were stimulated to use their own talents and skills for the mission or the development of the community. Elsewhere, novices were encouraged to be oblates, rather than monks, so that their talents could be used in society. These examples demonstrate that diversity is stimulated in the community, even though it is not self-evident in the concrete consecrated life. This requires a true rethinking of the meaning or basis of a community. The community may be a pillar of the religious, but what are the pillars of the community itself? The rule? The tradition? The search for spirituality?

This topic certainly deserves the necessary attention in further research.

PART II: AT A TURNING POINT: SHIFTING TIMES AND PARADIGMS

The spirit of the times in which consecrated life was and is given shape also penetrates the walls of the *claustrum*. In this second part we will describe some shifts in the experience of time and history that have also had an impact on the developments of the consecrated life in recent decades. In Part I we looked at the Vatican documents, beginning with the Second Vatican Council. The first documents testify to a different spirit of the times than the last documents from Pope Francis. There has clearly been a transition from “modernity” to “postmodernity.” In the first section here we will look at what is understood by this. In the second section, we will investigate, with Diarmund O’Murchu as our guide, how the paradigm shifts have influenced the consecrated life.

2.1. Modernity and postmodernity

The Second Vatican Council, with its call to open the windows and doors and to adapt the consecrated life to the world came at a time that the world was preparing itself for a change. While, for a long time, the Church resisted the developments that characterized modernity and the accompanying secularization, reason began to play an increasingly larger role. Faith and religion were banished to the private realm. Those developments, with functionalization, instrumentalization, and urbanization as dominant character traits, come up against their limits when reflection on World War II made clear that they offered no answer to fundamental questions and did not automatically bring “the good life” any closer.^{xviii} The postmodern context no longer banishes religion and even sees it as a partner in building up society.^{xix} The question is whether Vatican II anticipated this, but, after a few decades, the collaboration with the secularized world does not appear to be self-evident. It is clear that religion cannot return to the public realm as long as it acts as if the world has stood still and has left modernity behind it. To the contrary, religion is also presupposed to have gone through the process of modernity and to have integrated the achievements of modernity into its insights and practices. The transformation of religion is a necessity if it is to play a role in contemporary society.^{xx} That is not an easy task for the Church because it has to let go of things or rethink them in the light of the modernity it has denied for so long. Vatican II was pioneering on that score, but the question remains as to whether it could foresee what was actually asked of faith communities, of the Church leadership, or of the consecrated life. That this was more than an adaptation of externalities, of a retranslation of the vows, became clear only gradually. More than a liberation from a straitjacket, it became a test in the consecrated life to be able to endure in strongly transformative times.

2.2. Shifting paradigms: Diarmuid O’Murchu

Diarmuid O’Murchu understood this when he explored the paradigms in which the consecrated life operated in a wider context and saw how the world was evolving. He applied this to the consecrated life and asked for a more radical change than had happened until then.^{xxi}

He had earlier introduced the term “liminality” into the discourse on the consecrated life.^{xxii} In his book on monastic vows, he criticized the fact that the consecrated life was too strongly institutionalized and had thus neglected its “liminal” capacities. The experience of the limit/boundary and the ability to live on the margins are still of vital importance for the consecrated life. It is also on those margins that the religious can perceive the changes in the spirit of the times and order their life according to that.

The paradigm shifts are also occurring at the margins. In his book *Consecrated Religious Life* O’Murchu investigates what influence the paradigm shifts have on the consecrated life and what consequences or points of interest are connected with that. These are changes in the mindset that do not fall under human control and thus constantly invoke the needed resistance from the dominant powers and institutions. Because of that alone, it is important for a life that appeals to a prophetic calling to not live too close to the center of power and to be active on the limit. Together with Joan Chittister, he sees that the

consecrated life was never intended to be a labor force in the Church but “a searing presence, a paradigm of search, a mark of human soul and a catalyst to conscience in the society in which it emerged.”^{xxiii} In order to realize this again and again, it is necessary to read the signs of the time.

What *challenges* does O’Murchu see? He lists seven. He describes the changes that he already sees happening. What the consecrated life should abandon concerns the concept of God that has developed over the last 2000 years, patriarchal religion, the power of dualisms, the ecclesial and canonical control, the assumption of a sinful world, the valuation of the soul above that of the body and “obedience until death.” In leaving these behind, “risk” and “promise” are two important elements. The past is not what we need to hold on to as a certainty, but the uncertainty of the lure of the promise of the Kingdom of God calls us to a future.

Those challenges are accompanied by just as many *transitions*. O’Murchu proposes (1) a new form of Catholicism. He notes this, for example, by the fact that Catholicism has evolved away from Western White imperialism and that more than 75% of the Catholics worldwide live in the so-called “two-thirds world.” Also, most Catholics are laypeople, including increasingly lay theologians, who pose questions that go further than the internal church issues and are close involved with wider society. A (2) shift from religion to contemporary spirituality means that people are searching and live more with questions than answers. A wider horizon of meaning than church doctrine is being sought. The success of pilgrimages can be related to this. This also raises questions for the consecrated life. How living is the tradition in which the religious stand? And what room does this life offer for the personal journey of individuals? A third transition is (3) the love for creation (versus the flight from the world). A new feeling of solidarity with the whole earth, people, and other creatures deserves to be developed so that we can all live as brothers and sisters of one Father. It confronts the religious with the challenge of looking at the world in a different way and taking a different position in the world. Also, (4) attention for women and their struggle for equality and emancipation cannot be denied. How is feminism to be experienced and reflected in the consecrated life? That (5) the Church is not the only place of salvation and that attention can be better focused on the coming Kingdom of God does justice to the original intention of the consecrated life. In that way, the greater challenges to society and the planet are also included in religious engagement. This also has consequences for the view of our theological horizon (6) and to the vision to the mission (7) of the religious. This change also entails (8) new forms of leadership. Power and the abuse of power give way to solidarity with local networks. The consecrated life could take the lead here as a counter-model for contemporary society.

Those insights also create the desire for and a space for the translation of the vows. How do poverty, obedience, and celibacy fit within these changes? Even though objections can be made to O’Murchu’s ideas, he does make clear why the religious have devoted themselves in recent decades to their identity and have gone much further than the requested “adaptations” to the world of today as articulated in the Vatican documents. The multiple translations or rephrasings of the vows that have appeared in recent decades fit the paradigm shifts that O’Murchu sees happening. How fundamentally do the religious deal with these changes? Do they go no further than rephrasing the vows so that they once again sound good? Or does this also entail structural and missionary consequences?

It is one thing to cite the challenges; it is another entirely as to how they can be met. A clear future is not outlined, nor is a concrete program for how spiritual traditions can fit into a contemporary, post-secular context. According to Bernard McGinn, much will depend on the choice that believers or the religious dare to make, standing as they do in a specific tradition. For him, it is a question of recognizing spirituality in all its diversity and knowing that the tradition does not offer any certainty – and that there is no future possible without taking risks.^{xxiv}

In this last part we will look at two challenges from close by. First is the worldwide solidarity with the whole creation. Here anthropocentrism gives way to ecocentrism, and the relation with Christ is placed in a wider context than that of the marriage spirituality in which the religious are seen as the bride of Christ. A second challenge is how we should understand community in a society that has focused on the individual in recent centuries and is increasingly anonymous and polarized in its internal connectedness. The two themes cohere closely and are important if the consecrated life is to retain the role of prophetic presence in the 21st century.

3.1. Ecospirituality: Living in God's creation

Various works pointed to the need to broaden the relation of the religious with Christ and God. The anthropocentric approach of the love relation with Christ is broadened into a relationship that sees Christ as the center or completion of the creation. Through that, the whole religious relation with the world stands in a different light.

Our first note on that can be found in Diarmuid O'Murchu. In the paradigm shift, it is called "the assumption of a sinful world." Starting from the theology of original sin, this world was viewed negatively. Augustine's theology of the city of man and the city of God was read in a dualistic and chronological way, in which the former was the sinful, bad world that was to be avoided and the latter the city to which we are on our way, the city to be desired. For a long time, eschatology was viewed theologically as having to do with the hereafter. This world was seen as a necessary and evil passage to an eternal and heavenly dwelling. The consecrated life did not escape this either, and it was often understood as the ultimate means to flee this world.

The attention for the state of our world and the ecological movement that arose around that also compels a new look at creation and creation theology. The world, as created by God, is fundamentally good. O'Murchu will also rather speak of an "original blessing" instead of "original sin." Translated, that would sound like the replacement of original sin by the original blessing. Humans are then made participants in creation, they are made co-creators. That is why the appeal to be present in the world and to work at the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth is becoming louder. To that end, the alienation of creation must be undone in order to be able to see where justice and love are still lacking *and* to live justice and love.

O'Murchu connects these ideas with the vow of celibacy. Sexuality was also demonized for a long time and placed in a negative light. He calls for sexuality to be placed in a wider context of human (and divine) relations.^{xxv} Through that, it can be stripped of a purely instinctive approach, and it can also acquire a spiritual meaning that has been ingrained in human existence since creation. A holistic approach to sexuality also affects the man-woman relation, adult life, a supportive community, etc. Thus, sexuality and celibacy appeal to being creative, responsible, and generous in life.^{xxvi}

For Sandra Schneider as well, our humanity is an entry to God. In *Buying the Field*, the third part of her trilogy about the consecrated life, she investigates how "the world" can be understood from a biblical and Christian perspective.^{xxvii} She strongly emphasizes the need for an ecospirituality or creation spirituality and sees it as an challenge for the religious because it presupposes a new way of looking. Creation and incarnation are placed beside each other. She also wants to shift the accent from original sin to a participation in the divine work of creation. In the incarnation she sees an assumption by Christians of a reality that includes the world in thinking and living. God comes to us in Jesus, who is one of us. In that way, history also becomes an element of religious experience, and it becomes a historical task to help shape the world, to help create the world according to God's intention. This also requires a positive approach to the body that has had life breathed into it by God. That bodiliness has consequences in turn

for the understanding of the world and humanity in all its diversity and difference. Our humanity and all life on earth is therefore a *locus theologicus*, a place to find God in the world. She sees the contribution by the religious to the reversal of the ecological degradation of that world and the promotion of a sustainable way of life as a work in service to Christ.

Since the publication of *Laudatio Si'* at any rate, ecological spirituality has become a task for all Christians.^{xxviii} How such spirituality can be worked out and become the vocation of the religious is a topic that can certainly be researched further. Now that climate protests demand the needed attention for the state of the earth and the cosmos, the religious and Christians cannot remain behind.^{xxix} Their contribution is primarily to point to the spiritual and existential crisis to which the climate crisis testifies.

3.2. Community as a remedy to dying individualism

The second subject is the religious community. People have always come together for mutual support or protection of themselves and each other over against forces that threaten humankind. The biblical narrative also occurs between the creation narratives. Here we most often remember the sentences (“male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27) and “It is not right that the man should be alone” (Gen 2:18) on the one hand and the city where God lives among his people in the book of Revelation (Rev 21:2-3) on the other. In the meantime, God enters into a covenant with a people, sends His Son who selects a group of disciples who will help develop the Church, etc. Community thus has both a natural and a religious basis. And it is that double basis that has also inspired the consecrated life in past millennia to become established and to order life in more or less closed and/or open communities.

The concept of community is under pressure today or at least ready for reinterpretation. Because of the emphasis on autonomy and the individuality of the human being, through the mobility and the extent of the living environment of contemporary people, because of developments that give us the impression of no longer being dependent on each other, because of a complex mixture of evolutions, people often have little idea of which community they belong to or if they belong to one at all. Our world is becoming larger and at the same time shrinking. Religious communities do not escape this either.

3.2.1. Communities arise in the tension of time and space

Christian communities experience a tension in time, just like all communities: they exist already before people join them, and the tradition was cast in that earlier period in an historical form. But a Christian community is not characterized so much by a common path or that specific historical form as by a common starting point that points to a future. That common starting point is Jesus' time on this earth, his life, death, and resurrection. That relation to Christ and his Father, God, is the source of every Christian community. That core also determines mutual *and* external relations. A Christian community is grafted onto the idea of the incarnation and on the promise in the book of Revelation that God comes to live among his people. That faith means that Christianity is a religion that becomes inculturated and thus also is found in the midst of the time and space in which it is located.

Since Vatican II, religious communities have “adapted” to the times with minor external adjustments that have had, perhaps more than expected, an enormous impact on their view of or dealing with the community itself. Community or *communio* was never a topic as such, and in a few years it deteriorated into a given that had to be actively experienced and maintained. People submitted themselves to each other rather than to Christ. In that way, it could nevertheless be sensed. As soon as community life was thematized, it came to light how fragile and unexperienced and perhaps even immaturely it was approached. Community seems to be a word that comes easily to our lips but proves to be more difficult to realize.

3.2.2. Concentration on the community itself.

A Christian religious community, with Christ at its center, does not have a model to which it can orient itself. A community of the religious has nothing to do with a blood tie; think of Jesus' question: "Who are my mother and my brothers?" (Mk 3:33-35) or of the statement, "Anyone who comes to me without hating father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, yes and his own life too, cannot be my disciple." (Lk 14:26). Nor does one become a member of a religious community for the sake of someone else, and it is also not necessary for one's salvation. How can such a religious community be understood?

We already cited the gospel writer John who makes mutual relations central to his gospel. He is often complicated on this topic. For him, a relationship has various levels, and they are always about more than simply you and me, about two individuals. It concerns God, Jesus, his disciples, the whole world, the Spirit, and it is in that complex that mutual relationships also occur. We read:

For this is how God loved the world: he gave his only Son (Jn 3:16); The Son has a special bond with people and the Father, and because of that people are also connected to the Father; think of the metaphor of the vine (Jn 15:1-11). That Son also commanded people to love one another and to give their life for their friends (Jn 15:12-16), after which He also called his disciples his friends and asked them to bring forth fruit that would last. When he was no longer there, he would send the other Helper, who was anchored in Him, the Spirit of truth who would lead his disciples, but for which the world was not waiting (John 14:16-17; 16:13-15)

Through our shared Father, we are all children of God. That fact connects us all as brothers and sisters. Those brothers and sisters have a spiritual connection and are never independent. It is a communal given. You are not a child of God on your own, but we are all together the child of God. Knowing that we are the child of God means forming a community with the others. That is the basis for friendship as Jesus explained it to his disciples. Evangelical friendship has various features. We see *a*) an equality and a mutuality: friends who are ready to serve each other, and every inequality is eliminated. The foot washing can serve here as an example (Jn 13:1-20); *b*) it exists only in the shared free love that continues to develop. In the consecrated life this comes to expression in the sharing of life, in poverty, in celibacy, and obedience towards each other and in full dependence on each other. A friendship is *c*) directed towards individuals, friendship concerns people and is strongly dependent on the person in question. Friendship maintains itself in the tension between the individual and the community.

This means that a religious community, which allows itself to be led by friendship as Jesus prescribed it, presupposes a life that can be shared with each other, where structures of domination and hierarchy are reversed or undermined. And it means that from out of the lived friendship of Jesus, His Father, and His Helper, a mission to the world is undertaken that knows a love for the whole world. Living in a community of friendship and equality is primary. If that is good, the inspiration for that continues to have an impact so that it can awaken a desire in others for peace and friendship. An ecological involvement and a prophetic mission are logical consequences that flow out of that.

In that way, community becomes a sign and witness in a world that sometimes seems to be completely at a loss with respect to faith, hope, or love.

In a world that is increasingly polarized and in which people often lead an isolated existence, the topic of community is not self-evident, but that means it is all the more necessary to develop solidarity on all levels. This topic also deserves further study, and the search of the religious during past decades can be of use.

Conclusion

The impact of the call of the Council to adapt the consecrated life to the needs of the time was enormous, certainly in women religious communities. They underwent a change in a matter of decades that the world

had taken centuries for. The heart of their lives remained the same, namely, the *imitatio Christi*. But the reflection on their relation to the world, on their mission, on their being a community, and on external signs, also had an influence on how the imitation of Christ must be understood. This process of reflection is not yet finished. Abandoning historical forms is not a matter of course, and the consequences go much further than anyone dared to expect. It became increasingly clearer that the consecrated life cannot be controlled as in previous centuries. The Spirit does her work, and it is not always easy to see where the Spirit is bringing the consecrated life.

When the religious received a letter from Pope Francis in 2014 with the call to wake the world, that call did not appear self-evident either in a world that has become complex and non-transparent, whereas most communities come up against their limits/boundaries. How is one to be prophetically present in that world with communities that have become small and vulnerable? In this study the focus has thus also shifted from the mission of the religious to the understanding of what it means to be religious today. Understanding the world and the challenges of seeing the time is one thing; relating to it as a religious is another.

That is why the challenges of our society are also faced by the consecrated life. Further study of the ecological crisis as a spiritual crisis and the community in a polarized world can also throw new light on the identity and the mission of the religious in their vulnerable situation – and expanding that to the whole world.

Dr. Lea Verstricht is theologian and researcher at KU Leuven on Monastic Pastoral Care and in the diocese of Antwerp on Religion in the City. She has coached several religious orders.

ⁱ Sandra SCHNEIDER wrote a trilogy on the religious life, *Religious Life in a New Millennium*, in which she closely searched for the sources of and a translation for the consecrated life about 30 years after Vatican II's call to renewal. These works are: *Finding the Treasure. Locating Catholic Religious Life in a New Ecclesial and Cultural Context*, New York, Paulist Press, 2000; *Selling All: Commitment, Consecrated Celibacy, and Community in Catholic Religious Life*, New York, Paulist Press, 2001; *Buying the Field: Catholic Religious Life in Mission to the World*, New York, Paulist Press, 2013. For this point, see *Finding the Treasure*, pp. 99ff.

ⁱⁱ Schneider regularly reminds us that she is describing the situation of women religious primarily. They experience the changes more intensely because they have always lived in a position that subordinates them to the (male) hierarchy of the Church.

ⁱⁱⁱ For this, Schneider refers to the *Letter of His Holiness John Paul II to the Bishops of the United States*, April, 1983.

^{iv} Wim VANDEWIELE, *Langs het pad van de postulant. Binnenkijken in de trappistenabdij van West-Vleteren*, Halewijn, 2016. For his doctoral research, he lived for a few months in the abbey and was able to experience the location from the inside out. In the book that he wrote on the basis of his research, the abbot of the Saint Sixtus Abbey in West-Vleteren, Dom Manu Van Hecke, and the abbot of the Maria Toevlucht Abbey in Zundert, Dom Daniël Hombergen, also speak about their experience of the space of the abbey.

^v Diarmud O'MURCHU, *Poverty, Celibacy and Obedience. A Radical Option for Life*, Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998; Jacques HAERS, *Geloften aan de grens*, Averbode, 2000.

^{vi} This is also the tone of the much-lauded book by Joan CHITTISTER, *The Fire in these Ashes and Companion Study Guide*, Sheed & Ward, Kansas, 1998.

^{vii} Anton MILH and Stephan VAN ERP (eds.), *Met nieuwe ogen en een nieuw hart. Religieuze dienstbaarheid in beweging*, Halewijn, 2017, p. 8. This book is a collection of the lectures that were held at a study day at KU Leuven in December 2017.

^{viii} Brian HEFFERNAN, *Dienstbaarheid in vernieuwing. Een blik op de recente geschiedenis van Nederlandse religieuzen*, in *Ibid.*, pp. 25-36.

^{ix} For this, see Anton MILH, *Kan uw dienaar in vrede heengaan? Over de blijvende betekenis van religieuze dienstbaarheid*, in *Ibid.*, p. 13-24, here specifically pp. 18-19.

^x See Rob HOOGENBOOM o.f.m., *Tussen heiligheid en slordigheid. Het apostolaat van de Nederlandse minderbroeders-franciscanen*, in *Ibid.*, pp. 49-57.

^{xi} *Spiritualiteit, zending en broederlijkheid blijven waarmaken. Secretaris-generaal Unie hogere oversten over Jaar van de religieuzen*, in *Tertio* 772, November 2014.

^{xii} BERNARD MC GINN, *The future of past spiritual traditions*, in *Spiritus*, 1/2015, pp. 1-18.

^{xiii} ISABELLE JONVEAUX & STEFANIA PALMISANO (eds.), *Introduction. Monasticism: crucial questions*, in IDEM., *Monasticism in Modern Times*, London Routledge, 2017, pp. 1-7.

^{xiv} Frans Maas speaks of an “anchored spirituality.” FRANS MAAS, *Het krediet van de klassieke kloosterspiritualiteiten*, in *Tijdschrift voor Geestelijk leven*, 71(2015), 1.

^{xv} Chittister, pp. 40 and 29.

^{xvi} T.J. VAN BAVEL, *De kern van het religieuze leven. Evangelische spanning die onze gemeenschap drijft*, Lannoo, 1973. Not ten years after Vatican II, he wrote that “community” does not exist in the religious life.

^{xvii} See Anna CLOT, *Current Mutations of the Monastic Novitiate: Emerging Institutional Imperatives, New Forms of Obedience*, in *Monasticism in Modern Times*, pp. 29-45.

^{xviii} The evolution in the books by Harvey Cox are characteristic of this. In the 1960s he wrote *The Secular City. Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective*, Princeton University Press, 1965. *Religion in the Secular City. Toward a Postmodern Theology*, Simon & Schuster, 1985 followed in the 1980s. In the latter he explores what has changed in the attitude towards religion and what theologians have to concentrate on if they do not want to lose their connection to society. The work by Rowan WILLIAMS, *Faith in the Public Square*, Bloomsbury, 2015, also presents the needed insights in modernity/postmodernity, in addition to many others.

^{xix} On this, see, among others, Justin BEAUMONT, Arie MOLENDIJK & Christoph JEDAN, *Exploring the postsecular. The Religious, the Political and the Urban*, Leiden, Brill, 2010; and Paul CORTOIS en Guido VANHEESWIJCK, *Religie onder kritiek. De plaats van religie in de seculiere samenleving*, Leuven, Acco, 2016.

^{xx} This is worked out well by Andre CLOOTS, *Wat heeft de moderniteit met de religie gedaan?*, in, *Religie onder kritiek. De plaats van religie in de seculiere samenleving*, Leuven, Acco, 2016, pp. 15-30.

^{xxi} DIARMUID O’MURCHU, *Consecrated Religious Life. The Changing Paradigms*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 2006.

^{xxii} ID., *Poverty, Celibacy and Obedience*. See also footnote 5.

^{xxiii} ID., *Consecrated Religious Life*, p. 15, with a reference to Chittister p. 2.

^{xxiv} Bernard McGINN, *The Future of Past Spiritual Traditions*, <https://csstudies.org/2015/05/02/article-the-future-of-past-spiritual-traditions-by-bernardmcginn/> (sept 2020).

^{xxv} With reference to, for example, Theresa of Avila and Bernard who had an erotic and passionate relation with Christ.

^{xxvi} How the religious themselves have experienced this can be read in, among others, Annelies VAN HEIJST, *Zusters, vrouwen van de wereld. Actieve religieuzen en haar emancipatie*, Amsterdam, SUA, 1985.

^{xxvii} Sandra SCHNEIDER, *Buying the Field*, pp. 50ff.

^{xxviii} Pope FRANCIS, *Laudato Si! Praise be to you. On Care for Our Common Home*, San Francisco, Ignatius, 2015.

^{xxix} In 2018-2019, protest demonstrations by young people arose worldwide that put the climate issue on the political and social agenda. Greta Thunberg, the Swedish student, who began a protest action on her own, is their leader and guide.