LUMEN GENTIUM CHAPTER 6

RELIGIOUS LIFE: CONSECRATION, FIDELITY, AND THE DANGER OF WORLDLINESS

Our previous reading considered the universal call to holiness. We now consider those who embrace the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience in a particular form of consecrated life.

Today we read Chapter VI, "Religious," Sections 43-47.

We will continue reading alongside Sacred Scripture, Sacred Tradition, and the Church's perennial teaching. We will also examine the distance between the religious life described here and changes that followed the Council.

The decline in religious vocations, departures from communities, relaxation of observance, revisions of rules and constitutions, and abandonment of religious habits belong within this examination. These developments raise serious questions about what was presented as renewal and what actually preserved the consecration entrusted to religious.

Our question is concrete: Did the changes help religious live more faithfully the life they had professed, or did some changes weaken the very things that made that life a distinctive offering to God?

I. READ

Read Chapter VI, Sections 43-47, "Religious."

YOU WILL FIND THE COMPLETE CHAPTER READING AT THE END OF THIS DOCUMENT.

The section headings below identify the subjects of the Council's text; the explanations that follow are our commentary.

Section 43 – A gift received from Christ

The chapter grounds the evangelical counsels in the words and example of Our Lord. Religious life is presented as a gift received and safeguarded by the Church.

Its forms develop within the Church's authority. The chapter praises stability, sound spiritual doctrine, fraternal association, and obedience as supports for growth in charity.

These are substantial features. A religious family must offer more than shared employment or agreement about social concerns. Its members need a form of life that helps them belong to God.

The statement that religious life is not an intermediate state between clergy and laity concerns the Church's hierarchical structure. A religious priest is both ordained and religious; a religious brother or sister is consecrated without thereby receiving Holy Orders. This distinction does not abolish religious consecration.

The opening English wording about the counsels being "commanded" by apostles and Fathers must also be read with the distinction between counsels and commandments. It does not mean that every Christian is commanded to profess religious vows.

Section 44 – A consecration with a particular purpose

Religious profession brings a new and special dedication to God, rooted in Baptism. The chapter expressly describes a more intimate consecration to divine service.

The universal call to holiness therefore cannot be used to make religious profession unnecessary or indistinguishable from ordinary baptismal obligations.

The chapter also defends the contribution of prayer and contemplation. Religious life witnesses to eternal life and to the priority of God's kingdom.

Where a community measures its purpose entirely by earthly usefulness, this supernatural purpose needs to be recovered. A monastery does not have to become a service agency to justify its existence.

Section 45 – Authority must safeguard the vocation

The hierarchy is charged with regulating religious life and helping institutes flourish according to the spirit of their founders.

Authority therefore has a responsibility to preserve what has been entrusted to it. Approval of revisions calls for careful judgment about whether those revisions serve the institute's vocation.

The chapter recognizes both papal authority over institutes and the rightful pastoral authority of bishops. Exemption from some aspects of local jurisdiction does not mean independence from the Church.

The public acceptance of vows, the Church's blessing, and the Eucharistic setting of profession also show that these commitments are sacred.

Section 46 – Making Christ present through a distinctive life

The chapter presents religious as witnesses to Christ praying, teaching, healing, converting sinners, and obeying His Father.

It expressly defends renunciation. Giving up legitimate goods for God can serve a person's true development.

This matters when sacrifice is dismissed as unhealthy merely because it is difficult. At the same time, genuine religious discipline must respect the person: cruelty and wrongdoing do not become holy through religious language.

The chapter also defends religious who do not mingle directly with society. Their union with Christ can serve others profoundly through prayer.

Section 47 – Perseverance

The final section calls religious to persevere and grow in their vocation for God's glory and the holiness of the Church.

The test of renewal must include this question: Were religious better supported in keeping their commitments?

II. SCRIPTURE

Sacred Scripture gives the counsels their foundation and shows why fidelity matters.

Matthew 19:21 – Leaving possessions to follow Christ

“If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come follow me.”

Our Lord invites a real surrender. Poverty is directed toward following Him. It cannot be reduced to a sympathetic attitude toward the poor while personal attachment to comfort remains unexamined.

Matthew 19:12 and I Corinthians 7:32-35 – Continence for the kingdom

Our Lord speaks of those who embrace continence for the kingdom of heaven. St. Paul explains the freedom for undivided attention to the Lord that this life can provide.

The good of marriage remains. The distinctive offering of consecrated chastity also remains. A religious vocation cannot be adequately explained solely in terms of professional availability.

Philippians 2:8 – The obedience of Christ

“He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross.”

Religious obedience takes its pattern from Christ’s offering to the Father. It requires surrender of self-will within the bounds of legitimate authority.

Acts 5:29 supplies an essential boundary. “We ought to obey God, rather than men.” No superior can authorize sin.

Acts 2:42 – Prayer and common life

The first Christians persevered in apostolic teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayers.

This passage is not a complete rule for every later institute. It does establish that Christian community has a doctrinal, sacramental, and prayerful center. Organization alone cannot sustain that communion.

Romans 12:2 – The danger of conformity

“And be not conformed to this world; but be reformed in the newness of your mind.”

Service to people requires understanding their circumstances. It also requires freedom from whatever contradicts Christ.

A religious community must therefore ask whether adaptation helps it bring Christ to the world or makes it increasingly governed by the world’s standards.

Ecclesiastes 5:3-4 – Promises made to God

Scripture warns against making a vow and failing to fulfill it. Religious promises concern an offering made to God, not simply continued membership in an organization.

Discernment before profession, sound formation, and support afterward are consequently serious responsibilities.

Luke 10:38-42 and Hebrews 13:14 – The priority of God

Our Lord defends Mary’s attention to His word. Hebrews reminds Christians that their lasting city is still to come.

These passages help us understand the chapter’s defense of contemplation and its orientation toward heaven. Religious life loses its direction when prayer becomes whatever can fit around an otherwise secular schedule.

III. REMEMBER – WHAT CAME BEFORE?

Religious life and the need to reform its abuses existed long before Vatican II. Earlier witnesses help us distinguish reform that restores fidelity from changes that dissolve it.

St. Athanasius – The Gospel calls forth a life of renunciation

In the *Life of Antony,* Sections 2-3, Athanasius describes Antony hearing Our Lord’s words about selling possessions and following Him. Antony responds concretely and begins a disciplined life of prayer and renunciation.

The Gospel was received as a summons to a changed life. Religious discipline developed in service of that response.

St. Benedict – A rule to be understood and lived

Chapter 58 of the *Rule* requires careful testing and repeated instruction before profession. The candidate must understand the life being undertaken.

Chapter 72 places Christ above everything and joins that priority to humility, patience, charity, and obedience.

The Rule provides a stable way to seek God together. A community must preserve that purpose when considering alterations to its observance.

St. Francis – The Gospel, poverty, chastity, and obedience

The approved Rule of 1223 begins by identifying the life of the Friars Minor with observing the Gospel in obedience, without possessions of their own, and in chastity.

It also requires reverence and obedience toward the pope and the Roman Church.

Franciscan fidelity includes both evangelical renunciation and communion with the Church. Neither can be removed without damaging the inheritance.

St. Thomas Aquinas – A state directed toward perfection

In the *Summa Theologiae,* II-II, Question 184, Articles 1, 3-5, Thomas locates perfection essentially in charity and distinguishes an obligation to pursue perfection from having already attained it.

In Question 186, especially Article 7, he explains how the three vows serve the religious person's offering to God and remove obstacles to charity.

A religious may fail to live the vocation faithfully. That failure does not make the vocation empty; it reveals the need to recover its purpose.

The Council of Trent – Restoring observance where it has declined

Session XXV, "On Regulars and Nuns," Chapter 1, requires religious to live according to their professed rules and faithfully observe their vows.

It also places responsibility upon superiors to preserve religious discipline. Trent distinguishes restoration of observance from relaxation of its foundations.

This earlier council already recognized the danger of religious life being undermined from within. It answered by requiring fidelity and responsible government.

Our Lady of Good Success – Fidelity amid pressure to relax the Rule

What happened in Quito belongs here, among the witnesses and accounts preceding the Council.

Mother Mariana de Jesus Torres (1563-1635) was a Conceptionist nun in Quito, Ecuador, whose community was under Franciscan direction. The accounts of Our Lady of Good Success place the struggle over religious observance within her own convent, beginning in the late 1500s.

According to these accounts, a faction of sisters wanted to relax the Rule and free themselves from the discipline upheld by the Franciscan Fathers. They worked to have the convent removed from Franciscan jurisdiction and placed under the local bishop. Their efforts succeeded: the Franciscans were forced out of their responsibility for the community, and the sisters lost their direction. The separation brought deep sorrow to Mother Mariana and those who wished to preserve the exact observance of the Rule they had professed.

The conflict did not end with the removal of the Franciscans. Mother Mariana's efforts to correct the growing laxity brought accusations and punishment. She was deprived of her veil and confined in the convent prison. The Spanish founding mothers and other sisters who shared her determination to preserve the exact observance of the Rule also suffered imprisonment. This was no single episode: the accounts describe the faithful sisters being returned to the convent prison during the continuing persecution, and identify four imprisonments of Mother Mariana herself. At one point, the imprisoned group numbered twenty-five sisters.

Their imprisonment matters to our reading. These women were suffering within their own religious house because they sought to preserve its observance. The Quito account portrays

them continuing their prayer and fidelity under that pressure. The conflict concerned the daily obligations of a life already offered to God.

The account also contains a promise of restoration. In the apparition dated January 16, 1599, Our Lady is reported to have consoled Mother Mariana over the separation and foretold that, after centuries, the Franciscans would return to govern the convent. The published text further describes a future prelate who would ask the pope to restore the convent's jurisdiction to the Friars Minor. The promised return concerned the restoration of their responsibility for the community and its religious observance.

The same tradition attributes warnings to Our Lady about a future crisis of faith and morals, corruption among clergy, and failures within religious communities, particularly in relation to the twentieth century. These accounts concern private revelation and are presented here as the devotional tradition records them.

The connection to our study is serious: pressure to relax religious observance did not begin in the twentieth century. Within the Quito account, fidelity required perseverance through the loss of trusted spiritual fathers, calumny, and repeated imprisonment. The promised return of the Franciscans placed hope for restoration alongside the warning of decline.

When Catholics recognize parallels between these reported warnings and later events, those parallels can prompt examination and prayer. They do not by themselves establish the cause of every modern crisis or prove that a particular conciliar passage teaches error.

The spiritual question remains concrete: when a community asks to change its observance, is it seeking to live its consecration more faithfully? Or is it seeking relief from the obligations that give that consecration its daily form?

St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross – Reform through renewed fidelity

The Carmelite reform gives us another essential witness from before the Council. St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), also known as St. Teresa of Jesus, undertook a renewal of religious life rooted in prayer, evangelical poverty, and the pursuit of holiness. In 1562 she founded her first reformed convent in Avila, with the support of the local bishop. Further foundations followed, and her collaboration with St. John of the Cross extended the reform to the friars.

Teresa's understanding of reform reached into the daily life of a community. In *The Way of Perfection,* she taught her sisters to build their contemplative life upon prayer and the

evangelical virtues. Detachment from possessions, humility, and love for one another belonged to that work. Her reform served the Church by forming communities more deeply devoted to Christ. The renewal of observance and the renewal of the interior life belonged together.

St. John of the Cross (1542-1591) joined this work after meeting Teresa in 1567. In 1568 he and his companions began the first community of Discalced Carmelite friars at Duruelo, renewing their profession according to the primitive Rule. Their reform sought a more faithful living of the Carmelite vocation.

The opposition became severe. In 1577 John was seized and imprisoned by Carmelites of the Ancient Observance in Toledo. During months of confinement he endured deprivation and physical abuse. He composed poetry that became part of his *Spiritual Canticle* during this imprisonment, and he escaped in August 1578. His suffering arose within his own religious family amid the conflict over reform. Benedict XVI expressly recalled both the injustice of his imprisonment and the abuse he suffered.

These saints belong in our reading of Chapter VI because they show that religious reform has a history of recovering demanding observance and deepening prayer. Their example gives substance to the question of renewal: what changes will help a community live more faithfully the consecration it has professed? Teresa's foundations and John's suffering also remind us that resistance within a religious family can be directed against those working for its renewal. The holiness of these Doctors of the Church makes their witness indispensable to a study of religious life.

Pius XII – Consecration and sacrifice retain their excellence

In *Sacra Virginitas (*1954), especially Sections 24 and 27-32, Pius XII defends the excellence of virginity consecrated to God and the spiritual fruitfulness of contemplative life.

He also recognizes the holiness attainable in marriage. The excellence of consecrated virginity does not establish the greater personal holiness of every consecrated person.

Chapter VI must be read with this earlier teaching. A universal call to holiness cannot erase the particular value of renunciation for God.

IV. BENEDICT XVI

The Council's text and the "spirit of the Council"

In his address to the Roman Curia on December 22, 2005, Benedict XVI examined an interpretation that set an alleged spirit of the Council against its actual texts. He opposed the treatment of the Council as a rupture and proposed reform within the continuity of the Church.

This directly bears upon religious life. "The Council wanted it" requires evidence. What did the document say? What did competent authority authorize? What decision did a particular community subsequently make?

Secularization within religious communities

On February 28, 2008, Benedict explicitly acknowledged that secularization had entered religious communities. He also described the crisis affecting many longstanding institutes through aging, fewer vocations, and spiritual or charismatic weariness. He recognized signs of renewal and communities attracting vocations through demanding evangelical fidelity.

These observations permit serious criticism of secularization without declaring religious life finished.

The daily foundation

On February 2, 2008, Benedict urged consecrated persons to sustain their days through prayer, meditation, and listening to God's word.

That counsel supplies a practical standard: a proposed renewal must leave a community better able to seek God and live its dedication.

V. PILLARS COMMENTARY

The plumb line is the truth received from Christ and handed down in His Church. Applying it to religious life requires us to make judgments about the changes of the past sixty years. Our conclusion is that adaptations which weakened a community's recognizable consecration, common life, and demanding observance likely contributed to a loss of vocational attraction and perseverance. This is our reasoned assessment of the spiritual consequences of those changes; the membership figures alone cannot measure their share of the decline.

The decline demands an explanation

CARA records 178,740 religious sisters in the United States in 1965 and 33,135 in 2025. Religious brothers declined from 12,096 to 3,290. These are membership totals, affected by deaths, entrances, and departures, rather than a direct count of new vocations. Nevertheless, they reveal an immense contraction in American religious life.

Such losses require serious examination of the renewal undertaken during these decades. We should examine whether the adaptations preserved the very qualities that could draw a person to enter, and sustain a person who had already professed. An account that acknowledges the collapse in numbers but declines to consider the effects of changes within religious communities leaves an essential question unanswered.

How the Council belongs in this history

The connection is concrete. *Lumen Gentium* set out the Council's teaching on religious life; *Perfectae Caritatis* called for its adaptation and renewal. Sections 2-4 directed institutes to revisit their manner of life and revise constitutions and related texts, while preserving their founding spirit and sound traditions. Section 17 provided for changes to habits that did not meet its stated criteria, while affirming the habit as a sign of consecration.

Paul VI's *Ecclesiae Sanctae* then required special general chapters to advance this work and authorized experimental changes to certain constitutional norms, with safeguards for the institute's character. Its instructions expressly connected this undertaking to Chapters V and VI of *Lumen Gentium*. The Council therefore helped initiate an organized process through which religious communities reconsidered their established observance.

That connection makes the consequences of adaptation part of an honest assessment of the Council's reception. Where this process became a reason to discard practices that sustained religious identity, our assessment is that the resulting changes damaged the renewal they were supposed to serve. Decisions by chapters, superiors, and ecclesiastical authorities determined what happened in particular institutes. The Council's call for adaptation and those subsequent decisions belong within the same historical examination.

The habit helped make a vocation recognizable

A religious habit gives outward expression to a life offered to God. It identifies a person as belonging to a particular religious family, with a shared history, Rule, and purpose. John Paul

II emphasized precisely this relationship between the habit, consecration, poverty, and membership in an institute.

For someone discerning a vocation, that visible identity can matter deeply. A young woman may be drawn to a community because she sees women whose whole manner of life declares that they belong to God. The habit makes that dedication recognizable before any conversation begins. For the woman who wears it, it can also be a daily reminder that she has entered a new life with obligations and a common identity.

Where recognizable religious dress was replaced by ordinary clothing, including pantsuits, something significant could be lost. Our assessment is that this loss likely weakened vocational appeal where it accompanied a broader fading of religious distinctiveness. Someone seeking a life set apart for God could find it harder to recognize that invitation in a community increasingly resembling the life she would otherwise lead.

Clothing alone cannot sustain a vocation. Its importance lies in the consecrated life it expresses. When both the sign and the distinctive daily practices disappear, the combined loss deserves to be taken seriously.

Demanding observance can attract generosity

The harder parts of a Rule can give practical expression to love: rising for prayer, keeping silence, accepting correction, practicing penance, sharing possessions, and persevering in common duties. These observances require a person to give more than passing enthusiasm. They train fidelity through repeated acts of self-offering.

A person discerning religious life may desire exactly that discipline. The willingness to undertake something demanding can be part of the attraction because the sacrifice gives concrete form to dedication to the Lord. Removing a difficult observance may therefore remove something a prospective member hoped to embrace. A community can make entry easier while making the life itself less compelling.

Our concern is especially with changes that treated difficulty itself as a sufficient reason for abandonment. Where adaptation diminished prayer, ascetic discipline, and stable expectations, it likely weakened both the invitation to enter and the support needed to persevere. John Paul II's later insistence upon returning to the Rule and recovering ascetic practices gives authoritative weight to the importance of these supports.

Health, age, and the genuine requirements of an apostolate call for prudent provision. The standard remains whether a change helps the community live its dedication to God. Convenience alone cannot carry that judgment.

The early reformers give us a standard

St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross sought renewal through deeper prayer and renewed fidelity to Carmelite observance. John's imprisonment shows how costly that work could become. The Quito tradition likewise presents Mother Mariana and the faithful sisters suffering because they wished to preserve the Rule. Their witness requires us to consider whether an adaptation strengthens the offering already made to God or gradually empties it of daily substance.

Paul VI himself warned in 1971 that arbitrary transformations, distrust of the past, and hasty conformity to contemporary changes were undermining confidence in religious life. The danger was recognized within the very period of postconciliar renewal.

Our conclusion

We conclude that postconciliar adaptations which blurred religious identity and relaxed the practices sustaining consecration likely contributed to the decline of religious life in the communities affected. They could weaken its appeal to those seeking a distinct, disciplined life for God and unsettle those who had entered to live that life. The precise contribution requires evidence from individual institutes; this limitation does not prevent us from identifying a credible and serious cause for concern.

The Council's program of adaptation belongs in this judgment because it provided the occasion and framework for extensive revision. Its accompanying requirements of fidelity also provide grounds for criticizing revisions that eroded an institute's vocation. An assessment of renewal must examine what its provisions enabled in practice and what spiritual goods were lost along the way.

The response should include recovering recognizable consecration, protected prayer, common life, sound formation, and the demanding observance proper to each institute. Religious life needs to offer a clear invitation to give oneself wholly to God. Where adaptations obscured that invitation, restoration is a necessary work of renewal.

VI. REFLECT

1. **What does religious profession ask a person to give to God?**
2. **Why do the Rule, common prayer, and shared life matter to perseverance?**
3. **How can we distinguish an authorized adaptation from a change that weakens an institute's vocation?**
4. **What is lost when religious consecration becomes difficult to recognize publicly?**
5. **What does the Quito account ask us to consider about fidelity under pressure?**
6. **Do we encourage young people who may have a religious vocation?**
7. **How can we support faithful religious communities seeking to restore their observance?**

VII. DEEPER THOUGHTS TO CONCLUDE THIS DAY

A religious profession is made on a particular day. Its fidelity is lived through thousands of ordinary days afterward.

The time set apart for prayer, the discipline of shared possessions, obedience within rightful authority, the care of another member, and perseverance when enthusiasm has passed all give substance to that original offering.

This is why the Rule matters. It helps a community order its days around the gift its members have made to God. Changes to that order require spiritual judgment and accountability.

The decline of religious life should grieve the Church. That grief must lead us to examine what has been lost and to support what remains faithful.

We can pray for perseverance among the professed, wisdom among superiors, courage among those discerning a vocation, and healing where religious authority has been misused.

We can also ask a question of our own lives: when fidelity becomes costly, do we seek the grace to persevere, or begin explaining why the obligation no longer matters?

May Our Lady obtain for religious communities the grace to recognize what God has entrusted to them, to correct what has weakened their fidelity, and to live their consecration with renewed love.

COMPLETE CHAPTER READING

The following is Chapter VI of *Lumen Gentium, Sections 43-47, from the Holy See's English edition*.

CHAPTER VI

RELIGIOUS

43. The evangelical counsels of chastity dedicated to God, poverty and obedience are based upon the words and examples of the Lord. They were further commanded by the apostles and Fathers of the Church, as well as by the doctors and pastors of souls. The counsels are a divine gift, which the Church received from its Lord and which it always safeguards with the help of His grace. Church authority has the duty, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, of interpreting these evangelical counsels, of regulating their practice and finally to build on them stable forms of living. Thus it has come about, that, as if on a tree which has grown in the field of the Lord, various forms of solidarity and community life, as well as various religious families have branched out in a marvelous and multiple way from this divinely given seed. Such a multiple and miraculous growth augments both the progress of the members of these various religious families themselves and the welfare of the entire Body of Christ.(1*) These religious families give their members the support of a more firm stability in their way of life and a proven doctrine of acquiring perfection. They further offer their members the support of fraternal association in the militia of Christ and of liberty strengthened by obedience. Thus these religious are able to tranquilly fulfill and faithfully observe their religious profession and so spiritually rejoicing make progress on the road of charity.(2*)

From the point of view of the divine and hierarchical structure of the Church, the religious state of life is not an intermediate state between the clerical and lay states. But, rather, the faithful of Christ are called by God from both these states of life so that they might enjoy this particular gift in the life of the Church and thus each in one's own way, may be of some advantage to the salvific mission of the Church.(3*)

44. The faithful of Christ bind themselves to the three aforesaid counsels either by vows, or by other sacred bonds, which are like vows in their purpose. By such a bond, a person is totally dedicated to God, loved beyond all things. In this way, that person is ordained to the honor and service of God under a new and special title. Indeed through Baptism a person dies to sin and is consecrated to God. However, in order that he may be capable of deriving more abundant fruit from this baptismal grace, he intends, by the profession of the evangelical counsels in the Church, to free himself from those obstacles, which might draw him away from the fervor of charity and the perfection of divine worship. By his profession of the evangelical counsels, then, he is more intimately consecrated to divine service.(4*) This consecration will be the more perfect, in as much as the indissoluble bond of the union of Christ and His bride, the Church, is represented by firm and more stable bonds.

The evangelical counsels which lead to charity (5*) join their followers to the Church and its mystery in a special way. Since this is so, the spiritual life of these people should then be

devoted to the welfare of the whole Church. From this arises their duty of working to implant and strengthen the Kingdom of Christ in souls and to extend that Kingdom to every clime. This duty is to be undertaken to the extent of their capacities and in keeping with the proper type of their own vocation. This can be realized through prayer or active works of the apostolate. It is for this reason that the Church preserves and fosters the special character of her various religious institutes.

The profession of the evangelical counsels, then, appears as a sign which can and ought to attract all the members of the Church to an effective and prompt fulfillment of the duties of their Christian vocation. The people of God have no lasting city here below, but look forward to one that is to come. Since this is so, the religious state, whose purpose is to free its members from earthly cares, more fully manifests to all believers the presence of heavenly goods already possessed here below. Furthermore, it not only witnesses to the fact of a new and eternal life acquired by the redemption of Christ, but it foretells the future resurrection and the glory of the heavenly kingdom. Christ proposed to His disciples this form of life, which He, as the Son of God, accepted in entering this world to do the will of the Father. This same state of life is accurately exemplified and perpetually made present in the Church. The religious state clearly manifests that the Kingdom of God and its needs, in a very special way, are raised above all earthly considerations. Finally it clearly shows all men both the unsurpassed breadth of the strength of Christ the King and the infinite power of the Holy Spirit marvelously working in the Church.

Thus, the state which is constituted by the profession of the evangelical counsels, though it is not the hierarchical structure of the Church, nevertheless, undeniably belongs to its life and holiness.

45. It is the duty of the ecclesiastical hierarchy to regulate the practice of the evangelical counsels by law, since it is the duty of the same hierarchy to care for the People of God and to lead them to most fruitful pastures.(236) 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.(6*) Furthermore, the hierarchy, following with docility the prompting of the Holy Spirit, accepts the rules presented by outstanding men and women and authentically approves these rules after further adjustments. It also aids by its vigilant and safeguarding authority those institutes variously established for the building up of Christ's Body in order that these same institutes may grow and flourish according to the spirit of the founders.

Any institute of perfection and its individual members may be removed from the jurisdiction of the local Ordinaries by the Supreme Pontiff and subjected to himself alone. This is done in virtue of his primacy over the entire Church in order to more fully provide for the necessities of the entire flock of the Lord and in consideration of the common good.(7*) In like manner, these institutes may be left or committed to the charge of the proper patriarchical authority. The members of these institutes, 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.(8*).

The Church not only raises the religious profession to the dignity of a canonical state by her approval, but even manifests that this profession is a state consecrated to God by the liturgical setting of that profession. The Church itself, by the authority given to it by God, accepts the vows of the newly professed. It begs aid and grace from God for them by its public prayer. It commends them to God, imparts a spiritual blessing on them and accompanies their self-offering by the Eucharistic sacrifice.

46. Religious should carefully keep before their minds the fact that the Church presents Christ to believers and non-believers alike in a striking manner daily through them. The Church thus portrays Christ in contemplation on the mountain, in His proclamation of the kingdom of God to the multitudes, in His healing of the sick and maimed, in His work of converting sinners to a better life, in His solicitude for youth and His goodness to all men, always obedient to the will of the Father who sent Him.(9*)

All men should take note that the profession of the evangelical counsels, though entailing the renunciation of certain values which are to be undoubtedly esteemed, does not detract from a genuine development of the human persons, but rather by its very nature is most beneficial to that development. Indeed the counsels, voluntarily undertaken according to each one's personal vocation, contribute a great deal to the purification of heart and spiritual liberty. They continually stir up the fervor of charity. But especially they are able to more fully mold the Christian man to that type of chaste and detached life, which Christ the Lord chose for Himself and which His Mother also embraced. This is clearly proven by the example of so many holy founders. Let no one think that religious have become strangers to their fellowmen or useless citizens of this earthly city by their consecration. For even though it sometimes happens that religious do not directly mingle with their contemporaries, yet in a more profound sense these same religious are united with them in the heart of Christ and spiritually cooperate with them. In this way the building up of the earthly city may have its foundation in the Lord and may tend toward Him, lest perhaps those who build this city shall have labored in vain. (10*)

Therefore, this Sacred Synod encourages and praises the men and women, Brothers and Sisters, who in monasteries, or in schools and hospitals, or in the missions, adorn the Bride of Christ by their unswerving and humble faithfulness in their chosen consecration and render generous services of all kinds to mankind.

47. Let each of the faithful called to the profession of the evangelical counsels, therefore, carefully see to it that he persevere and ever grow in that vocation God has given him. Let him do this for the increased holiness of the Church, for the greater glory of the one and undivided Trinity, which in and through Christ is the fount and the source of all holiness.