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ON THE RENEWAL OF THE
RELIGIOUS LIFE
APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION
POPE PAUL VI

JUNE 29, 1971

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APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION
ON THE RENEWAL OF THE RELIGIOUS LIFE
ACCORDING TO THE TEACHINGS OF THE
SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL
EVANGELICA TESTIFICATIO

POPE PAUL VI

June 29, 1971

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APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE PAUL VI
ON THE RENEWAL OF THE RELIGIOUS LIFE
ACCORDING TO THE TEACHING OF THE
SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

INTRODUCTION
EVANGELICAL WITNESS IN THE MIDST
OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD

1 Evangelical witness

Beloved sons and daughters in Christ,

The evangelical witness of the religious life clearly manifests to men the primacy of the love of God; it does this with a force for which we must give thanks to the Holy Spirit. In all simplicity—following the example given by our venerated predecessor, John XXIII, on the eve of the Council¹—we would like to tell you what hope is stirred up in us, as well as in all the pastors and faithful of the Church, by the spiritual generosity of those men and women who have consecrated their lives to the Lord in the spirit and practice of the evangelical counsels. We wish also to assist you to continue in your path of following Christ in faithfulness to the Council's teaching.

2 The Council

By doing this, we wish to respond to the anxiety, uncertainty and instability shown by some; at the same time we wish to encourage those who are seeking the true renewal of the religious life. The boldness of certain arbitrary transformations, an exaggerated distrust of the past—even when it witnesses to the wisdom and vigor of ecclesial

traditions—and a mentality excessively preoccupied with hastily conforming to the profound changes which disturb our times have succeeded in leading some to consider as outmoded the specific forms of religious life. Has not appeal even unjustly been made to the Council to cast doubt on the very principle of religious life? And yet it is well known that the Council recognized “this special gift” as having a choice place in the life of the Church, because it enables those who have received it to be more closely conformed to “that manner of virginal and humble life which Christ the Lord elected for himself, and which his Virgin Mother also chose.”² The Council has also indicated the ways for the renewal of religious life in accordance with the Gospel.³

3 The tradition of the Church

From the beginning, the tradition of the Church—is it perhaps necessary to recall it?—presents us with this privileged witness of a constant seeking for God, of an undivided love for Christ alone, and of an absolute dedication to the growth of his kingdom. Without this concrete sign there would be a danger that the charity which animates the entire Church would grow cold, that the salvific paradox of the Gospel would be blunted, and that the “salt” of faith would lose its savor in a world undergoing secularization.

From the first centuries, the Holy Spirit has stirred up, side by side with the heroic confession of the martyrs, the wonderful strength of disciples and virgins, of hermits and anchorites. Religious life already existed in germ, and progressively it felt the growing need of developing and of taking on different forms of community or solitary life, in order to respond to the pressing invitation of Christ: “There is no one who has left house, wife, brothers, parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God who will not be given repayment many times over in this present time, and, in the world to come, eternal life.”⁴

Who would venture to hold that such a calling today no longer has the same value and vigor? That the Church could do without these exceptional witnesses of the transcendence of the love of Christ? Or that the world without damage to itself could allow these lights to go out? They are lights which announce the kingdom of God with a liberty which knows no obstacles and is daily lived by thousands of sons and daughters of the Church.

4 Esteem and affection

Dear sons and daughters, you have wished by means of the practice of the evangelical counsels to follow Christ more freely and to imitate him more faithfully, dedicating your entire lives to God with a special consecration rooted in that of baptism and expressing it with greater fullness: could you but understand all the esteem and the affection that we have for you in the name of Christ Jesus! We commend you to our most dear brothers in the episcopate who, together with their collaborators in the priesthood, realize their own responsibility in

regard to the religious life. And we ask all the laity to whom "secular duties and activities belong properly, although not exclusively" to understand what a strong help you are for them in the striving for that holiness, to which they also are called by their baptism in Christ, to the glory of the Father.⁶

5 Renewal

Certainly many exterior elements, recommended by founders of orders or religious congregations are seen today to be outmoded. Various encumbrances or rigid forms accumulated over the centuries need to be curtailed. Adaptations must be made. New forms can even be sought and instituted with the approval of the Church. For some years now the greater part of religious institutes have been generously dedicating themselves to the attainment of this goal, experimenting—sometimes too hardily—with new types of constitutions and rules. We know well and we are following with attention this effort at renewal which was desired by the Council.⁷

6 Necessary discernment

How can we assist you to make the necessary discernment in this dynamic process itself, in which there is the constant risk that the spirit of the world will be intermingled with the action of the Holy Spirit? How can what is essential be safeguarded or attained? How can benefit be obtained from past experience and from present reflection, in order to strengthen this form of evangelical life? According to the singular responsibility which the Lord has given us in his Church—that of confirming our brethren⁸—we would like to encourage you to proceed with greater sureness and with more joyful confidence along the way that you have chosen. In the "pursuit of perfect charity"⁹ which guides your existence, what attitude could you have other than a total surrender to the Holy Spirit who, working in the Church, calls you to the freedom of the sons of God?¹⁰

THE RELIGIOUS LIFE

7 The teaching of the Council

Dear sons and daughters, by a free response to the call of the Holy Spirit you have decided to follow Christ, consecrating yourselves totally to him. The evangelical counsels of chastity vowed to God, of poverty and of obedience have now become the law of your existence. The Council reminds us that "the authority of the Church has taken care, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to interpret these evangelical counsels, to regulate their practice, and also to establish stable forms of living according to them."¹¹ In this way, the Church recognizes and authenticates the state of life established by the profession of the evangelical counsels: "The faithful of Christ can bind themselves to the three previously mentioned counsels either by vows, or by other sacred bonds which are like vows in their purpose.

Through such a bond a person is totally dedicated to God by an act of supreme love. . . . It is true that through baptism he has died to sin and has been consecrated to God. However, in order to derive more abundant fruit from this baptismal grace, he intends, by the profession of the evangelical counsels in the Church, to free himself from those obstacles which might draw him away from the fervor of charity and the perfection of divine worship. Thus he is more intimately consecrated to divine service. This consecration will be the more perfect to the extent that, through more firm and stable bonds, the indissoluble union of Christ with his Spouse the Church is more perfectly represented."¹²

This teaching of the Council illustrates well the grandeur of this self-giving, freely made by yourselves, after the pattern of Christ's self-giving to his Church; like his, yours is total and irreversible. It is precisely for the sake of the kingdom of heaven that you have vowed to Christ, generously and without reservation, that capacity to love, that need to possess and that freedom to regulate one's own life, which are so precious to man. Such is your consecration, made within the Church and through her ministry—both that of her representatives who receive your profession and that of the Christian community itself, whose love recognizes, welcomes, sustains and embraces those who within it make an offering of themselves as a living 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 . . . more adequately manifesting to all believers the presence of heavenly goods already possessed in this world."¹³

I—FORMS OF THE RELIGIOUS LIFE

8 Contemplative life

Some of you have been called to the life which is termed "contemplative." An irresistible attraction draws you to the Lord. Held in God's grasp, you abandon yourselves to his sovereign action, which draws you toward him and transforms you into him, as it prepares you for that eternal contemplation which is the common vocation of us all. How could you advance along this road and be faithful to the grace which animates you if you did not respond with all your being, through a dynamism whose driving force is love, to that call which directs you unswervingly towards God? Consider, therefore, every other immediate activity to which you must devote yourselves—fraternal relationships, disinterested or remunerative work, necessary recreation—as a witness rendered to the Lord of your intimate communion with him, so that he may grant you that unifying purity of intention which is so necessary for encountering him in prayer itself. In this way you will contribute to the building up of the kingdom of God by the witness of your lives and with a "hidden apostolic fruitfulness."¹⁴

9 Apostolic life

Others are consecrated to the apostolate in its essential mission, which is the proclaiming of the Word of God to those whom he places along their path, so as to lead them towards faith. Such a grace requires a profound union with the Lord, one which will enable you to transmit the message of the Incarnate Word in terms which the world is able to understand. How necessary it is therefore that your whole existence should make you share in his passion, death and glory.¹⁵

10 Contemplation and apostolate

When your vocation destines you for other tasks in the service of men—pastoral life, missions, teaching, works of charity and so on—is it not above all the intensity of your union with the Lord that will make them fruitful, in proportion to that union “in secret”?¹⁶ In order to be faithful to the teaching of the Council, must not “the members of each community who are seeking God before all else combine contemplation with apostolic love? By the former they cling to God in mind and heart; by the latter they strive to associate themselves with the work of redemption and to spread the kingdom of God.”¹⁷

11 The charisms of founders

Only in this way will you be able to reawaken hearts to truth and to divine love in accordance with the charisms of your founders who were raised up by God within his Church. Thus the Council rightly insists on the obligation of religious to be faithful to the spirit of their founders, to their evangelical intentions and to the example of their sanctity. In this it finds one of the principles for the present renewal and one of the most secure criteria for judging what each institute should undertake.¹⁸ In reality, the charism of the religious life, far from being an impulse born of flesh and blood¹⁹ or one derived from a mentality which conforms itself to the modern world,²⁰ is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, who is always at work within the Church.

12 External forms and interior driving force

It is precisely here that the dynamism proper to each religious family finds its origin. For while the call of God renews itself and expresses itself in different ways according to changing circumstances of place and time, it nevertheless requires a certain constancy of orientation. The interior impulse which is the response to God’s call stirs up in the depth of one’s being certain fundamental options. Fidelity to the exigencies of these fundamental options is the touchstone of authenticity in religious life. Let us not forget that every human institution is prone to become set in its ways and is threatened by formalism. It is continually necessary to revitalize external forms with this interior driving force, without which these external forms would very quickly become an excessive burden.

Through the variety of forms which give each institute its own individual character and which have their root in the fullness of the

grace of Christ,²¹ the supreme rule of the religious life and its ultimate norm is that of following Christ according to the teaching of the Gospel. Is it not perhaps this preoccupation which in the course of the centuries has given rise in the Church to the demand for a life which is chaste, poor and obedient?

II—ESSENTIAL COMMITMENTS

13 Consecrated Chastity

Only the love of God—it must be repeated—calls in a decisive way to religious chastity. This love moreover makes so uncompromising a demand for fraternal charity that the religious will live more profoundly with his contemporaries in the heart of Christ. On this condition, the gift of self, made to God and to others, will be the source of deep peace. Without in any way undervaluing human love and marriage—is not the latter, according to faith, the image and sharing of the union of love joining Christ and the Church?²²—consecrated chastity evokes this union in a more immediate way and brings that surpassing excellence to which all human love should tend. Thus, at the very moment that human love is more than ever threatened by a “ravaging eroticism,”²³ consecrated chastity must be today more than ever understood and lived with uprightness and generosity. Chastity is decisively positive, it witnesses to preferential love for the Lord and symbolizes in the most eminent and absolute way the mystery of the union of the Mystical Body with its Head, the union of the Bride with her eternal Bridegroom. Finally, it reaches, transforms and imbues with a mysterious likeness to Christ, man’s being in its most hidden depths.

14 A source of spiritual fruitfulness

Thus, dear brothers and sisters, it is necessary for you to restore to the Christian spirituality of consecrated chastity its full effectiveness. When it is truly lived, for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, consecrated chastity frees man’s heart and thus becomes “a sign and stimulus of charity as well as a special source of spiritual fruitfulness in the world.”²⁴ Even if the world does not always recognize it, consecrated chastity remains in every case effective in a mystical manner in the world.

15 A gift of God

For our part, we must be firmly and surely convinced that the value and the fruitfulness of chastity observed for love of God in religious celibacy find their ultimate basis in nothing other than the Word of God, the teachings of Christ, the life of his Virgin Mother and also the apostolic tradition, as it has been unceasingly affirmed by the Church. We are in fact dealing here with a precious gift which the Father imparts to certain people. This gift, fragile and vulnerable because of human weakness, remains open to the contradictions of mere reason and is in part incomprehensible to those to whom the

light of the Word Incarnate has not revealed how he who loses his life for him will find it.²⁵

16 Consecrated poverty

Observing chastity as you do in the following of Christ, you desire also, according to his example, to live in poverty in the use of this world's goods which are necessary for your daily sustenance. On this point, moreover, our contemporaries question you with particular insistence. It is certainly true that religious institutes have an important role to fulfill in the sphere of works of mercy, assistance and social justice; it is clear that in carrying out this service they must be always attentive to the demands of the Gospel.

17 The cry of the poor

You hear rising up, more pressing than ever, from their personal distress and collective misery, "the cry of the poor."²⁶ Was it not in order to respond to their appeal as God's privileged ones that Christ came,²⁷ even going as far as to identify himself with them?²⁸ In a world experiencing the full flood of development this persistence of poverty-stricken masses and individuals constitutes a pressing call for "a conversion of minds and attitudes,"²⁹ especially for you who follow Christ more closely in this earthly condition of self-emptying.³⁰ We know that this call resounds within you in so dramatic a fashion that some of you even feel on occasion the temptation to take violent action. As disciples of Christ, how could you follow a way different from his? This way is not, as you know, a movement of the political or temporal order; it calls rather for the conversion of hearts, for liberation from all temporal encumbrances. It is a call to love.

18 Poverty and justice

How then will the cry of the poor find an echo in your lives? That cry must, first of all, bar you from whatever would be a compromise with any form of social injustice. It obliges you also to awaken consciences to the drama of misery and to the demands of social justice made by the Gospel and the Church. It leads some of you to join the poor in their situation and to share their bitter cares. Furthermore, it calls many of your institutes to rededicate for the good of the poor some of their works—something which many have already done with generosity. Finally, it enjoins on you a use of goods limited to what is required for the fulfilment of the functions to which you are called. It is necessary that in your daily lives you should give proof, even externally, of authentic poverty.

19 Use of the world's goods

In a civilization and a world marked by a prodigious movement of almost indefinite material growth, what witness would be offered by a religious who let himself be carried away by an uncurbed seeking for his own ease, and who considered it normal to allow himself without discernment or restraint everything that is offered him? At a time

when there is an increased danger for many of being enticed by the alluring security of possessions, knowledge and power, the call of God places you at the pinnacle of the Christian conscience. You are to remind men that their true and complete progress consists in responding to their calling "to share as sons in the life of the living God, the Father of all men."³¹

20 Life of work

You will likewise be able to understand the complaints of so many persons who are drawn into the implacable process of work for gain, of profit for enjoyment, and of consumption, which in its turn forces them to a labor which is sometimes inhuman. It will therefore be an essential aspect of your poverty to bear witness to the human meaning of work which is carried out in liberty of spirit and restored to its true nature as the source of sustenance and of service. Did not the Council stress—in a very timely way—your necessary submission to "the common law of labor"?³² Earning your own living and that of your brothers or sisters, helping the poor by your work—these are duties incumbent upon you. But your activities cannot derogate from the vocation of your various institutes, nor habitually involve work such as would take the place of their specific tasks. Nor should these activities in any way lead you towards secularization, to the detriment of your religious life. Be watchful therefore regarding the spirit which animates you: what a failure it would be if you felt yourselves valued solely by the payment you receive for worldly work!

21 Fraternal sharing

The necessity, which is so imperative today, of fraternal sharing must preserve its evangelical value. According to the expression in the *Didache*, "if you share eternal goods, with all the more reason should you share the goods that perish."³³ Poverty really lived by pooling goods, including pay, will testify to the spiritual communion uniting you; it will be a living call to all the rich and will also bring relief to your needy brothers and sisters. The legitimate desire of exercising personal responsibility will not find expression in enjoyment of one's own income but in fraternal sharing in the common good. The forms of poverty of each person and of each community will depend on the type of institute and on the form of obedience practiced in it. Thus will be brought to realization, in accordance with particular vocations, the character of dependence which is inherent in every form of poverty.

22 Evangelical exigency

You are aware, dear sons and daughters, that the needs of today's world, if you experience them in heart-to-heart union with Christ, make your poverty more urgent and more deep. If, as is evident, you must take account of the human surroundings in which you live, in order to adapt your life style to them, your poverty cannot be purely and simply a conformity to the manners of those surroundings. Its

value as a witness will derive from a generous response to the exigencies of the Gospel, in total fidelity to your vocation—not just from an excessively superficial preoccupation for appearing to be poor—and in avoiding those ways of life which would denote a certain affectedness and vanity. While we recognize that certain situations can justify the abandonment of a religious type of dress, we cannot pass over in silence the fittingness that the dress of religious men and women should be, as the Council wishes, a sign of their consecration³⁴ and that it should be in some way different from the forms that are clearly secular.

23 Consecrated obedience

Is it not the same fidelity which inspires your profession of obedience, in the light of faith and in accordance with the very dynamism of the charity of Christ? Through this profession, in fact, you make a total offering of your will and enter more decisively and more surely into his plan of salvation. Following the example of Christ, who came to do the will of the Father, and in communion with him who “learned to obey through suffering” and “ministered to the brethren,” you have assumed a firmer commitment to the ministry of the Church and of your brethren.³⁵

24 Evangelical fraternity and sacrifice

The evangelical aspiration to fraternity was forcefully expressed by the Council. The Church was defined as the People of God, in which the hierarchy is at the service of the members of Christ united by the same charity.³⁶ The same paschal mystery of Christ is lived in the religious state as in the whole Church. The profound meaning of obedience is revealed in the fullness of this mystery of death and resurrection in which the supernatural destiny of man is brought to realization in a perfect manner. It is in fact through sacrifice, suffering and death that man attains true life.

Exercising authority in the midst of your brethren means therefore being their servants,³⁷ in accordance with the example of him who gave “his life as a ransom for many.”³⁸

25 Authority and obedience

Consequently, authority and obedience are exercised in the service of the common good as two complementary aspects of the same participation in Christ’s offering. For those in authority, it is a matter of serving in their brothers the design of the Father’s love; while, in accepting their directives, the religious follow our Master’s example³⁹ and cooperate in the work of salvation. Thus, far from being in opposition to one another, authority and individual liberty go together in the fulfilment of God’s will, which is sought fraternally through a trustful dialogue between the superior and his brother, in the case of a personal situation, or through a general agreement regarding what concerns the whole community. In this pursuit, the religious will be able to avoid both an excessive agitation and a preoccupation for making

the attraction of current opinion prevail over the profound meaning of the religious life. It is the duty of everyone, but especially of superiors and those who exercise responsibility among their brothers or sisters, to awaken in the community the certainties of faith which must be their guide. This pursuit has the aim of giving depth to these certainties and translating them into practice in everyday living in accordance with the needs of the moment; its aim is not in any way to cast doubt on them. This labor of seeking together must end, when it is the moment, with the decision of the superiors whose presence and acceptance are indispensable in every community.

26 In the needs of daily life

Modern conditions of life naturally have their effect on the way you live your obedience. Many of you carry out part of your activity outside your religious houses, performing a function in which you have special competence. Others join together in work teams having their own pattern of life and action. Is not the risk which is inherent in such situations a call to reassert and reexamine in depth the sense of obedience? If the risk is to have good results, certain conditions must be respected. First of all, it is necessary to see whether the work undertaken conforms with the institute's vocation. The two spheres ought also to be clearly marked off. Above all, it must be possible to pass from external activity to the demands of common life, taking care to ensure full effectiveness to the elements of the strictly religious life. One of the principal duties of superiors is that of ensuring that their brothers and sisters in religion should have the indispensable conditions for their spiritual life. But how could they fulfill this duty without the trusting collaboration of the whole community?

27 Freedom and obedience

Let us add this: the more you exercise your responsibility, the more you must renew your self-giving in its full significance. The Lord obliges each one to "lose his life" if he is to follow him.⁴⁰ You will observe this precept by accepting the directives of your superiors as a guarantee of your religious profession, through which you offer to God a total dedication of your own wills as a sacrifice of yourselves.⁴¹ Christian obedience is unconditional submission to the will of God. But your obedience is more strict because you have made it the object of a special giving, and the range of your choices is limited by your commitment. It is a full act of your freedom that is at the origin of your present position: your duty is to make that act ever more vital, both by your own initiative and by the cordial assent you give the directives of your superiors. Thus it is that the Council includes among the benefits of the religious state "liberty strengthened by obedience,"⁴² and stresses that such obedience "does not diminish the dignity of the human person but rather leads it to maturity through that enlarged freedom which belongs to the sons of God."⁴³

28 Conscience and obedience

And yet, is it not possible to have conflicts between the superior's authority and the conscience of the religious, the "sanctuary of a person where he is alone with God, whose voice echoes in the depths of his being?"⁴⁴ Need we repeat that conscience on its own is not the arbiter of the moral worth of the actions which it inspires? It must take account of objective norms and, if necessary, reform and rectify itself. Apart from an order manifestly contrary to the laws of God or the constitutions of the institute, or one involving a serious and certain evil—in which case there is no obligation to obey—the superior's decisions concern a field in which the calculation of the greater good can vary according to the point of view. To conclude from the fact that a directive seems objectively less good than it is unlawful and contrary to conscience would mean an unrealistic disregard of the obscurity and ambivalence of many human realities. Besides, refusal to obey involves an often serious loss for the common good. A religious should not easily conclude that there is a contradiction between the judgment of his conscience and that of his superior. This exceptional situation will sometimes involve true interior suffering, after the pattern of Christ himself "who learned obedience through suffering."⁴⁵

29 The Cross—proof of the greatest love

What has been said indicates what degree of renunciation is demanded by the practice of the religious life. You must feel something of the force with which Christ was drawn to his Cross—that baptism he had still to receive, by which that fire would be lighted which sets you too ablaze—⁴⁶ something of that "foolishness" which Saint Paul wishes we all had, because it alone makes us wise.⁴⁷ Let the Cross be for you, as it was for Christ, proof of the greatest love. Is there not a mysterious relationship between renunciation and joy, between sacrifice and magnanimity, between discipline and spiritual freedom?

III—LIFE STYLE

30 A witness to give

Let us admit, sons and daughters in Jesus Christ, that at the present moment it is difficult to find a life style in harmony with this exigency. Too many contrary attractions lead one to seek first of all for a humanly effective activity. But is it not for you to give an example of joyful, well-balanced austerity, by accepting the difficulties inherent in work and in social relationships and by bearing patiently the trials of life with its agonizing insecurity, as renunciations indispensable for the fullness of the Christian life? Religious, in fact, are "striving to attain holiness by a narrower path."⁴⁸ In the midst of troubles, great or small, your interior fervor enables you to recognize the Cross of Christ and assists you to accept these troubles with faith and love.

31 Following Christ's example

It is on this condition that you will give the witness which the People of God expect. It is the witness of men and women capable of accepting the abnegation of poverty, and of being attracted by simplicity and humility; it is that of those who love peace, who are free from compromise and set on complete self-denial—of those who are at the same time free and obedient, spontaneous and tenacious, meek and strong in the certainty of the faith. This grace will be given to you by Christ Jesus in proportion to the fundamental gift which you have made of yourselves and which you do not retract. The recent history of many religious in various countries who have suffered generously for Christ gives eloquent proof of this. While we express to them our admiration, we hold them up as an example for all.

32 Strengthening the inner man

Along this path a precious aid is offered you by the forms of life which experience, faithful to the charisms of the various institutes, has given rise to. Experience has varied the combinations of these forms, never ceasing to put forward new developments. No matter how different their expressions are, these forms are always ordered to the formation of the inner man. And it is the care you have for strengthening the inner man which will help you to recognize, in the midst of so many different and attractive possibilities, the most suitable forms of life. An excessive desire for flexibility and creative spontaneity can in fact give rise to accusations of rigidity directed against that minimum of regularity in activities which community life and personal maturity ordinarily require. Disorderly outbursts, which appeal to fraternal charity or to what one believes to be inspirations of the Spirit, can also lead to the breakup of communities.

33 Importance of life surroundings

As you know from experience, the importance of the surroundings in which one lives should not be underestimated either in relation to the habitual orientation of the whole person—so complex and divided—in the direction of God's call, or in relation to the spiritual integration of the person's tendencies. Does not the heart often let itself cling to what is passing? Many of you will in fact be obliged to lead your lives, at least in part, in a world which tends to exile man from himself and to compromise both his spiritual unity and his union with God. You must therefore learn to find God even under those conditions of life which are marked by an increasingly accelerated rhythm and by the noise and the attraction of the ephemeral.

34 Being strengthened in God

Everyone can see how much the fraternal setting of an ordered existence with freely undertaken discipline of life helps you to attain union with God. This discipline is increasingly necessary for anyone who "returns to the heart,"⁴⁹ in the biblical sense of the term, something deeper than our feelings, ideas and wishes, something imbued with the idea of the infinite, the absolute, our eternal destiny.

In the present disarray it is especially necessary for religious to give witness as persons whose vital striving to attain their goal—the living God—has effectively created unity and openness in the depth and steadfastness of their life in God. This is accomplished by the integration of all their faculties, the purification of their thoughts and the spiritualization of their senses.

35 Necessary withdrawal from the world

To the extent therefore that you carry on external activities it is necessary that you should learn to pass from these activities to the life of recollection, in which the vigor of your souls is renewed. If you truly do the work of God, you will of your own accord feel the need for times of retreat which, together with your brothers and sisters in religion, you will transform into times of fullness. In view of the hectic pace and tensions of modern life it is appropriate to give particular importance—over and above the daily rhythm of prayer—to those more prolonged moments of prayer, which can be variously spread out in the different periods of the day, according to the possibilities and the nature of your vocation. If according to your constitutions the houses to which you belong widely practice fraternal hospitality, it will be for you to regulate the frequency and mode of that hospitality, so that all unnecessary disturbance is avoided, and so that your guests are helped to attain close union with God.

36 Spiritual initiation

This is the meaning of the observances which mark the rhythm of your daily life. An alert conscience, far from looking upon them solely as obligations imposed by a rule, judges them from the benefits that they bring, inasmuch as they ensure a greater spiritual fullness. It must be affirmed that religious observances demand, far more than intellectual instruction or training of the will, a true initiation with the purpose of deeply christianizing the individual in the spirit of the evangelical beatitudes.

37 Doctrine of life

The Council considers “a proven doctrine of acquiring perfection”⁵⁰ as one of the inherited riches of religious institutes and one of the greatest benefits that they must guarantee. And since this perfection consists in advancing ever further in the love of God and of our brethren, it is necessary to understand this doctrine in a very concrete way, that is as a doctrine of life that must be effectively lived. This means that the pursuit to which the institutes devote themselves cannot consist only in certain adaptations to be carried out in relation to the changing circumstances of the world; they must instead assist the fruitful rediscovery of the means essential for leading a life completely permeated with love of God and of men.

38 Forming the new person

In consequence the necessity makes itself felt, both for the communities and for those who constitute them, of passing from the

psychological level to the level of that which is truly "spiritual."⁵¹ Is not the "new man" spoken of by Saint Paul perhaps like the ecclesial fullness of Christ and at the same time the sharing by each Christian in this fullness? Such an aim will make of your religious families the vital environment which will develop the seed of divine life—the seed which was planted in each of you at baptism and which your consecration, if lived to the full, will enable to bear its fruits in the greatest abundance.

39 Cheerful simplicity of community life

Even if—like every Christian—you are imperfect, you nevertheless intend to create surroundings which are favorable to the spiritual progress of each member of the community. How can this result be attained, unless you deepen in the Lord your relationships, even the most ordinary ones, with each of your brethren? Let us not forget that charity must be as it were an active hope for what others can become with the help of our fraternal support. The mark of its genuineness is found in a joyful simplicity, whereby all strive to understand what each one has at heart.⁵² If certain religious give the impression of having allowed themselves to be crushed by their community life, which ought instead to have made them expand and develop, does this perhaps happen because this community life lacks that understanding cordiality which nourishes hope? There is no doubt that community spirit, relationships of friendship and fraternal cooperation in the same apostolate, as well as mutual support in a shared life chosen for a better service of Christ, are so many valuable factors in this daily progress.

40 Small communities

From this point of view, there are emerging certain tendencies aiming at the establishment of smaller communities. A sort of spontaneous reaction against the anonymity of the great urban centers, the necessity of adapting the living quarters of a community to the cramped environment of modern cities and the very need to be closer, in one's living conditions, to the people to be evangelized—these are among the reasons that lead certain institutes to plan by preference the foundation of communities with a small number of members. Such small communities can in addition favor the development of closer relationships between the religious and a shared and more fraternal undertaking of responsibility. Nevertheless, while a certain structure can in fact favor the creation of a spiritual environment, it would be vain to imagine that it is sufficient for making it develop. Small communities, instead of offering an easier form of life, prove on the contrary to make greater demands on their members.

41 Large communities

On the other hand it remains true that communities containing many members particularly suit many religious. Communities of this sort may likewise be called for by the nature of a charitable service,

by certain tasks of an intellectual nature or by the contemplative or monastic life. May perfect unity of hearts and minds be always found there, in exact correspondence to the spiritual and supernatural goal which is pursued. Besides, whatever their size, communities large or small will not succeed in helping their members unless they are constantly animated by the Gospel spirit, nourished by prayer and distinguished by generous mortification of the old man, by the discipline necessary for forming the new man and by the fruitfulness of the sacrifice of the Cross.

IV—RENEWAL AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH

42 Desire for God

Dear religious, how could you fail to desire to know better him whom you love and whom you wish to make manifest to men? It is prayer that unites you to him. If you have lost the taste for prayer, you will regain the desire for it by returning humbly to its practice. Do not forget, moreover, the witness of history: faithfulness to prayer or its abandonment are the test of the vitality or decadence of the religious life.

43 Prayer

The discovery of intimacy with God, the necessity for adoration, the need for intercession—the experience of Christian holiness shows us the fruitfulness of prayer, in which God reveals himself to the spirit and heart of his servants. The Lord gives us this knowledge of himself in the fervor of love. The gifts of the Spirit are many, but they always grant us a taste of that true and intimate knowledge of the Lord. Without it we shall not succeed either in understanding the value of the Christian and religious life or in gaining the strength to advance in it with the joy of a hope that does not deceive.

44 The spirit of prayer permeating fraternal life

The Holy Spirit also gives you the grace to discover the image of the Lord in the hearts of men, and teaches you to love them as brothers and sisters. Again, he helps you to see the manifestations of his love in events. If we are humbly attentive to men and things, the Spirit of Jesus enlightens us and enriches us with his wisdom, provided that we are imbued with the spirit of prayer.

45 Need for interior life

Is not perhaps one of the miseries of our times to be found in the imbalance “between the conditions of collective existence and the requisites of personal thought, and even of contemplation”?⁵³ Many people, including many of the young, have lost sight of the meaning of their lives and are anxiously searching for the contemplative dimension of their being. They do not realize that Christ, through his Church, can respond to their expectations. Facts of this kind should cause you to reflect seriously on what men have the right to expect of you—you who have formally committed yourselves to a life in the

service of the Word, "the true light that enlightens all men."⁵⁴ Be conscious then of the importance of prayer in your lives and learn to devote yourselves to it generously. Faithfulness to daily prayer always remains for each one of you a basic necessity. It must have a primary place in your constitutions and in your lives.

46 Silence

The interior man is aware that times of silence are demanded by love of God. As a rule he needs a certain solitude so that he may hear God "speaking to his heart."⁵⁵ It must be stressed that a silence which is a mere absence of noise and words, in which the soul cannot renew its vigor, would obviously lack any spiritual value. It could even be harmful to fraternal charity, if at that moment it were essential to have contact with others. On the contrary, the search for intimacy with God involves the truly vital need of a silence embracing the whole being, both for those who must find God in the midst of noise and confusion and for contemplatives.⁵⁶ Faith, hope and a love for God which is open to the gifts of the Spirit, and also a brotherly love which is open to the mystery of others, carry with them an imperative need for silence.

47 Liturgical life

Finally, there is surely no need to remind you of the special place occupied in your community life by the Church's liturgy, the center of which is the Eucharistic sacrifice, in which interior prayer is linked to external worship.⁵⁷ At the moment of your religious profession you were offered to God by the Church, in close union with the Eucharistic sacrifice.⁵⁸ Day after day this offering of yourselves must become a reality, concretely and continuously renewed. Communion in the Body and Blood of Christ is the primary source of this renewal;⁵⁹ by it may your will to love truly, and even to the sacrifice of your lives, be unceasingly confirmed.

48 The Eucharist as the heart of the community and source of life

Your communities, since they are united in Christ's name, naturally have as their center the Eucharist, "the Sacrament of love, the sign of unity and the bond of charity."⁶⁰ It is therefore normal that these communities should be visibly united around an oratory, in which the presence of the Holy Eucharist expresses and at the same time makes real that which must be the principal mission of every religious family, as also of every Christian assembly. The Eucharist, through which we do not cease to proclaim the death and resurrection of the Lord and to prepare ourselves for his coming again in glory, brings back constantly to mind the physical and moral sufferings by which Christ was afflicted, and which he had indeed freely accepted, even to his agony and death on the Cross. May the trials which you encounter be for you an opportunity for bearing in union with the Lord, and of offering to the Father, the many misfortunes and unjust sufferings which

weigh upon our brothers and sisters; to these the sacrifice of Christ can alone—in faith—give meaning.

49 Spiritual fruitfulness for the world

In this way, the world too is present at the center of your life of prayer and offering, as the Council has explained with force: "Let no one think that religious by their consecration have become strangers to their fellowmen or useless citizens of this earthly city. For even though in some instances religious do not directly serve their contemporaries, yet in a more profound sense these same religious are united with them in the heart of Christ and spiritually collaborate with them. In this way the work of building up the earthly city can always have its foundation in the Lord and can tend towards him in such a way that those who build this city will not have labored in vain."⁶¹

50 Sharing in the Church's mission

This sharing in the Church's mission, the Council insists, cannot take place without openness to collaboration in "her enterprises and objectives in such fields as the scriptural, liturgical, doctrinal, pastoral, ecumenical, missionary and social."⁶² While anxious to take part in the pastoral activity of the whole, you will surely do so keeping in mind the particular character of each institute. And you will always recall that exemption applies chiefly to internal structure; it does not dispense you from submission to the jurisdiction of the bishops in charge, "insofar as the performance of their pastoral office and the right ordering of the care of souls require."⁶³ Besides, must not you more than others untiringly recall that the Church's activity continues that of the Saviour, for the good of men, only by entering into the activity of Christ himself, who brings all back to his Father: "All are yours; and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's"⁶⁴ God's call in fact orients you, in the most direct and effective manner, towards the eternal kingdom. Through the spiritual tensions which are inevitable in every truly religious life, you "give splendid and striking testimony that the world cannot be transfigured and offered to God without the spirit of the beatitudes."⁶⁵

CONCLUDING APPEAL

51 For authentic renewal of the religious life

Dear sons and daughters in Christ, the religious life, if it is to be renewed, must adapt its accidental forms to certain changes which are affecting with growing rapidity and to an increasing extent the conditions of life of every human being. But how is this to be attained while maintaining those "stable forms of living"⁶⁶ recognized by the Church, except by a renewal of the authentic and integral vocation of your institutes? For a living being, adaptation to its surroundings does not consist in abandoning its true identity, but rather in asserting

itself in the vitality that is its own. Deep understanding of present tendencies and of the needs of the modern world should cause your own sources of energy to spring up with renewed vigor and freshness. It is a sublime task in the measure that it is a difficult one.

52 Need for evangelical witness in today's world

A burning question of the present day preoccupies us: how can the message of the Gospel penetrate the world? What can be done at those levels in which a new culture is unfolding, where a new type of man is emerging, a man who no longer believes he needs redemption? Since all men are called to the contemplation of the mystery of salvation, you can understand how these questions create such a serious obligation in your lives and such a challenge to your apostolic zeal! Dear religious, according to the different ways in which the call of God makes demands upon your spiritual families, you must give your full attention to the needs of men, their problems and their searchings; you must give witness in their midst, through prayer and action, to the Good News of love, justice and peace. The aspirations of men to a more fraternal life among individuals and nations require above all a change in ways of living, in mentality and in hearts. Such a mission, which is common to all the People of God, belongs to you in a special way. How can that mission ever be fulfilled if there is lacking an appreciation of the absolute, which results from a certain experience of God? This does but emphasize the fact that authentic renewal of the religious life is of capital importance for the very renewal of the Church and of the world.

53 Living witnesses of the love of the Lord

Today more than ever, the world needs to see in you men and women who have believed in the Word of the Lord, in his resurrection and in eternal life, even to the point of dedicating their lives to witnessing to the reality of that love, which is offered to all men. In the course of her history, the Church has ever been quickened and gladdened by many holy religious who, in the diversity of their vocations, have been living witnesses to love without limit and to the Lord Jesus. Is not this grace, for the man of today, a refreshing breeze coming from infinity itself, and foreshadowing man's liberation in eternal and absolute joy? Open to this divine joy, live generously the demands of your vocation, renewing the affirmation of the realities of faith and in its light interpreting in a Christian way the needs of the world. The moment has come, in all seriousness, to bring about a rectification, if need be, of your consciences, and also a transformation of your whole lives, in order to attain greater fidelity.

54 Appeal to all religious

As we contemplate the tenderness of the Lord when he referred to his followers as the "little flock" and reassured them that his Father was pleased to grant them the kingdom,⁶⁷ we make this appeal to you: keep the simplicity of the "least ones" of the Gospel. May you

succeed in discovering this anew in an interior and closer relationship with Christ and in your direct contact with your brethren. You will then experience through the action of the Holy Spirit the joyful exultation of those who are introduced into the secrets of the kingdom. Do not seek to be numbered among the "learned and clever" whose numbers seem inclined by a combination of circumstances to increase. Such secrets are hidden from these.⁶⁸ Be truly poor, meek, eager for holiness, merciful and pure of heart. Be among those who will bring to the world the peace of God.⁶⁹

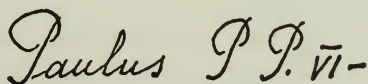
55 Fruitful radiation of joy

The joy of always belonging to God is an incomparable fruit of the Holy Spirit, and one which you have already tasted. Filled with the joy which Christ will preserve in you even in the midst of trial, learn to face the future with confidence. To the extent that this joy radiates from your communities, it will be a proof to everyone that the state of life which you have chosen is helping you by the three-fold renunciation of your religious profession to realize the greatest possible expansion of your life in Christ. Seeing you and the life you lead, the young will be able to understand well the appeal that Jesus never ceases to make among them.⁷⁰ The Council, in fact, brings this to mind: "The example of your life constitutes the finest recommendation of the institute and the most effective invitation to embrace the religious life."⁷¹ There is no doubt, moreover, that by showing you profound esteem and great affection, bishops, priests, parents and Christian educators will awaken in many the desire to follow in your footsteps, in response to that call of Jesus which never ceases to be heard among his followers.

56 Prayer to Mary

May the most beloved Mother of the Lord, after whose example you have consecrated your lives to God, obtain for you in your daily journeying that lasting joy which Jesus alone can give. May your life, following her example, give witness to that "maternal love, which should animate all those who, associated in the apostolic mission of the Church, collaborate in the regeneration of men."⁷² Beloved sons and daughters, may the joy of the Lord transfigure your consecrated life and may his love make it fruitful. With deep affection we bless you in his name.

From the Vatican, on the Feast of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, 29 June 1971, in the ninth year of our Pontificate.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Paulus P. P. VI-". The signature is written in dark ink on a light background.

Paulus P. P. VI

FOOTNOTES

- ¹Exhortation *Il tempio massimo*, 2 July 1962, A.A.S. 54, 1962, pp. 508-517.
- ²*Lumen Gentium*, VI, 46, A.A.S. 57, 1965, p. 52.
- ³*Perfectae Caritatis*, A.A.S. 58, 1966, pp. 702-712.
- ⁴Lk 18:29-30.
- ⁵Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 43, A.A.S. 58, 1966, p. 1062.
- ⁶Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, V, A.A.S. 57, 1965, pp. 44-49.
- ⁷Cf. *Motu Proprio Ecclesiae Sanctae*, 6 August 1966, A.A.S. 58, 1966, pp. 757-ff.; *Renovationis Causam*, 6 January 1969, A.A.S. 61, 1969, pp. 103 ff.
- ⁸Cf. Lk 22:32.
- ⁹Cf. *Perfectae Caritatis*, 1, A.A.S. 58, 1966, p. 702.
- ¹⁰Cf. Gal 5:13; 2 Cor 3:17.
- ¹¹*Lumen Gentium*, 43, A.A.S. 57, 1965, p. 49.
- ¹²*Ibidem*, 44, p. 50.
- ¹³*Ibidem*, pp. 50-51.
- ¹⁴*Perfectae Caritatis*, 7, A.A.S. 58, 1966, p. 705.
- ¹⁵Cf. Phil 3:10-11.
- ¹⁶Cf. Mt 6:6.
- ¹⁷Cf. *Perfectae Caritatis*, 5, A.A.S. 58, 1966, p. 705.
- ¹⁸Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 45, A.A.S. 57, 1965, pp. 51-52; *Perfectae Caritatis*, 2 b, A.A.S. 58, 1966, p. 703.
- ¹⁹Cf. Jn 1:13.
- ²⁰Cf. Rom 12:2.
- ²¹Cf. 1 Cor 12:12-30.
- ²²Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 48, A.A.S. 58, 1966, pp. 1067-1069; cf. Eph 5:25, 32.
- ²³Cf. Address to the Equipes Notre-Dame, 4 May 1970, A.A.S. 62, 1970, p. 429.
- ²⁴Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 42, A.A.S. 57, 1965, p. 48.
- ²⁵Cf. Mt 10:39; 16:25; Mk 8:35; Lk 9:25; Jn 12:25.
- ²⁶Cf. Ps 9:13; Job 34:28; Prov 21:13.
- ²⁷Cf. Lk 4:18; 6:20.
- ²⁸Cf. Mt 25:35-40.
- ²⁹*Gaudium et Spes*, 63, A.A.S. 58, 1966, p. 1085.
- ³⁰Cf. Mt 19:21; 2 Cor 8:9.
- ³¹*Populorum Progressio*, 21, A.A.S. 59, 1967, p. 268.
- ³²*Perfectae Caritatis*, 13, A.A.S. 58, 1966, p. 708.
- ³³*Didache*, IV, 8; cf. Acts 4:32.
- ³⁴Cf. *Perfectae Caritatis*, 17, A.A.S. 58, 1966, p. 710.
- ³⁵Cf. *ibidem*, 14, p. 709; Jn 4:34; 5:30; 10:15-18; Heb 5:8; 10:7; Ps 40(39):8-9.
- ³⁶Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, chaps. I-III, A.A.S. 57, 1965, pp. 5-36.
- ³⁷Cf. Lk 22:26-27; Jn 13:14.
- ³⁸Mt 20:28; cf. Phil 2:8.
- ³⁹Cf. Lk 2:51.
- ⁴⁰Cf. *ibidem*, 9:23-24.
- ⁴¹Cf. *Perfectae Caritatis*, 14, A.A.S. 58, 1966, p. 708.
- ⁴²*Lumen Gentium*, 43, A.A.S. 57, 1965, p. 49.
- ⁴³*Perfectae Caritatis*, 14, A.A.S. 58, 1966, p. 709.
- ⁴⁴*Gaudium et Spes*, 16, A.A.S. 58, 1966, p. 1037.
- ⁴⁵Heb 5:8.
- ⁴⁶Cf. Lk 12:49-50.
- ⁴⁷Cf. 1 Cor 3:18-19.
- ⁴⁸Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 13, A.A.S. 57, 1965, p. 18.
- ⁴⁹Cf. Is 46:8.
- ⁵⁰Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 43, A.A.S. 57, 1965, p. 49.
- ⁵¹Cf. 1 Cor 2:14-15.
- ⁵²Cf. Gal 6:2.

- ⁵³*Gaudium et Spes*, 8, A.A.S. 58, 1966, p. 1030.
- ⁵⁴*Jn* 1:9.
- ⁵⁵*Cf. Hos* 2:16 (14).
- ⁵⁶*Cf. Venite Seorsum*, 15 August 1969, A.A.S. 61, 1969, pp. 674-690; Message of contemplatives to the Synod of Bishops, 10 October 1967, *La Documentation Catholique*, 64, Paris 1967, coll. 1907-1910.
- ⁵⁷*Cf. Sacrosanctum Concilium*, A.A.S. 56, 1964, pp. 97-134.
- ⁵⁸*Cf. Ordo Professionis Religiosae*.
- ⁵⁹*Cf. Perfectae Caritatis*, 15, A.A.S. 58, 1966, p. 709.
- ⁶⁰*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 47, A.A.S. 56, 1964, p. 113.
- ⁶¹*Lumen Gentium*, 46, A.A.S. 57, 1965, p. 52.
- ⁶²*Perfectae Caritatis*, 2 c, A.A.S. 58, 1966, p. 703.
- ⁶³*Christus Dominus*, 35, 3, A.A.S. 58, 1966, p. 691.
- ⁶⁴*1 Cor* 3:22-23; *cf. Gaudium et Spes*, 37, A.A.S. 58, 1966, p. 1055.
- ⁶⁵*Lumen Gentium*, 31, A.A.S., 57, 1965, p. 37.
- ⁶⁶*Cf. ibidem*, 43, p. 49.
- ⁶⁷*Cf. Lk* 12:32.
- ⁶⁸*Cf. ibidem*, 10:21.
- ⁶⁹*Cf. Mt* 5:3-11.
- ⁷⁰*Cf. ibidem*, 19:11-12; *1 Cor* 7:34.
- ⁷¹*Cf. Perfectae Caritatis*, 24, A.A.S. 58, 1966, p. 712.
- ⁷²*Lumen Gentium*, 65, A.A.S. 57, 1965, p. 65.

