

## Divine origin of every vocation

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### Introduction: Divine Origin of Religious Life

In the book “*Ars Participandi*” of Fr. Buela, Part III about “The Church,” Chapter VII, the first point that is explained is “**The religious life belongs to the divine constitution of the Church.**” Following the Second Vatican Council and the *Vita Consecrata*, Fr. Buela explains that Consecrated Life is a state of life willed by Jesus Christ as constitutive for His Church, it belongs to the very essence of the Church itself, and is not a secondary or accidental aspect of it. The existence on the Church of the profession of the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience as an imitation of Jesus Christ’s way of life is thus an element of divine institution and divine will.

The Second Vatican Council, in the *Lumen Gentium* 44d, affirms: “**the state which is constituted by the profession of the evangelical counsels, though it is not of the hierarchical structure of the Church, nevertheless, undeniably belongs to its life and holiness.**” St. John Paul II echoes this statement in two places; first, in the *General Audience* with which he opened the series of talks about religious life, on September 28, 1994; and in his *Vita Consecrata*.

In that *General Audience*, commenting the words “**undeniably belongs to its life and holiness**”, St. John Paul the Great said: “**This adverb ‘undeniably’ means that all the blows that can disturb the Church’s life will never be able to eliminate the consecrated life characterized by the profession of the evangelical counsels. This state of life will endure as an essential element of the Church’s holiness. According to the Council, this is an ‘unshakable’ truth... Indeed, today more than ever, the way of the evangelical counsels offers great hope for the future of the Church.**” (5.6)

And in his *Vita Consecrata*, the Pope reaffirms once more: “**the profession of the evangelical counsels undeniably belongs to the life and holiness of the Church. This means that the consecrated life, present in the Church from the beginning, can never fail to be one of her essential and characteristic elements, for it expresses her very nature... Jesus himself established this type of life... The idea of a Church made up only of sacred ministers and lay people does not therefore conform to the intentions of her divine Founder, as revealed**

**to us by the Gospels and the other writings of the New Testament.” (29)**

According to the *Lumen Gentium*, generally speaking there are in the Church three main vocations or forms of life: the **Clergy** (Bishops, Priests and Deacons); the **Religious Consecrated**; and the **Lay People**. By baptism, there is a *participation in the divine nature*, which is confirmed by the sacraments of Holy Chrism, nourished in the Eucharist, and ordered to the transmission of life in society by the Sacrament of Marriage; then, there is a special consecration to God accepting the counsels of Jesus Christ to look for “more”, *participating on His own consecration and way of life*; and finally, there is a *participation in the office of Shepherd and Head of the Mystical Body*, through the sacrament of Holy Orders, which constitutes the Hierarchical aspect of the Church.

Thus, the Church that Jesus Christ wanted is conformed by three main vocations or ways of life: lay people, Consecrated state, and Clergy, all of them positively willed by Jesus Christ for His Church.

Since our talk’s name is “Divine origin of every vocation,” we will stress once and again that Religious Life is a structure of divine institution which belongs to the Church, because:

- It was the Fathers’ divine will to send the Son into the world to be incarnated in a human nature, thus every initiative comes from the Father and leads to the Father;
- It was the Incarnate Word’s will to choose for himself “this” way of life, and no other possible and valid forms of life, in obedience to the Father’s will;
- It was Jesus Christ’s will to choose and invite some men and women to follow “this” way of life, “his” way of life, and to imitate him more closely;
- Thus, this “apostolic way of life” mirrors the form of life that the Apostles learned directly from Jesus Christ, and handed on to the Church.

These will be the main points which will lead this talk.

### **I. “*A Patre ad Patrem*. God’s initiative.”**

In the formula for the profession of our religious vows, among some sentences taken from *Vita Consecrata*, there is one taken from the number 21 which say: “love for the Father, the first origin and supreme goal of the consecrated life.” The form of life of the First Consecrated, Jesus, was all in obedience to the Father’s initiative, becoming the first origin and last goal of consecrated life in itself, as it was for Jesus’ mission: “*I came from the Father and entered the*

*world. Now I am leaving the world and going to the Father.” (Jn 16:28)*

The *Vita Consecrata* says in the number 22: **“In the light of Jesus’ consecration, we can see in the initiative of the Father, the source of all holiness, the ultimate origin of the consecrated life. Jesus is the One whom ‘God anointed... with the Holy Spirit and with power’ (Acts 10:38), the One ‘whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world’ (Jn 10:36)”**.

St. John Paul II says: **“This is the meaning of the call to the consecrated life: it is an initiative coming wholly from the Father (cf. *Jn 15:16*), who asks those whom he has chosen to respond with complete and exclusive devotion. The experience of this gracious love of God is so deep and so powerful that the person called senses the need to respond by unconditionally dedicating his or her life to God, consecrating to him all things present and future, and placing them in his hands. This is why, with Saint Thomas (Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 186, a. 1), we come to understand the identity of the consecrated person, beginning with his or her complete self-offering, as being comparable to a genuine holocaust.” (V.C. 17)**

Some paragraphs before, St. John Paul the Great had insisted once more on this idea of the initiative of the Father: *This special way of “following Christ”, always have at the origin the initiative of the Father* (cf. V.C. 14b). Concluding with a commentary on these texts, Fr. Buela says: **“Consecrated life is an initiative of God, which comes from the Father and goes to the Father. It is a vocation that is born of the Father.”** (*Ars Participandi*, 70)

## **II. The Incarnate Word’s way of life**

As the Second Vatican Council said, the evangelical counsels are **“based upon the words and examples of the Lord”** (*Lumen Gentium* 43). It means that Jesus Christ himself lived and instituted the evangelical counsels: **“In this sense, He is the founder of religious life and of every similar state of consecration,”** explains St. John Paul II in his third *General Audience* about religious life (12 October 1994, 1).

*Vita Consecrata* number 29, says: **“The profession of the evangelical counsels is intimately connected with the mystery of Christ, and has the duty of making somehow present the way of life which Jesus himself chose... Jesus himself, by calling some men and women to abandon everything in order to follow him, established this type of life which, under the**

**guidance of the Spirit, would gradually develop down the centuries into the various forms of the consecrated life.”**

There were some people who opposed the idea that religious life was instituted by Jesus Christ himself, thus being of divine institution. They say that religious life is a structure of ecclesiastic law, it means of human institution, whit all the consequences that this affirmation involves. Talking about *Lumen Gentium*, Fr. Buela explains: **“Moreover, those who at the Council sustained that the consecrated life is a structure in the Church by ecclesiastical right and not by divine right, wanted religious people not to have a separate chapter dedicated to them, but to be treated, in the schema *De Ecclesia* of 1963, at the end of the chapter on the ‘universal vocation to holiness in the Church’ insofar as it was to be considered only as a form of life, although an eminent one, for attaining holiness.”** (*Ars Participandi*, 390) Finally, the final redaction had a special chapter about religious, which affirms precisely the opposite to this trend, that is, affirms that consecrated life belongs to the structure of the Church by divine institution. This doctrine had a special development of clarity in the Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, which affirms that religious life is of divine institution, hence it is an essential structure of the Church, as we have already highlighted.

In his *General Audience* of October 12, 1994, St. John Paul the Great clearly states: **“Some have doubted this basis by considering the consecrated life as a *purely human institution* that arose from the initiative of Christians who wanted to live the Gospel ideal more deeply. Now, it is true that Jesus did not directly found any of the religious communities that gradually grew up in the Church, nor did he determine the particular forms of consecrated life. However, what he wanted and established is the state of consecrated life in its overall value and essential elements<sup>1</sup>. *There is no historical evidence that can explain this state as a later human initiative.* Nor can one readily conceive that consecrated life did not stem from the founding will of Christ. If we carefully explore the Gospel testimonies,**

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<sup>1</sup> “The Church regards certain elements as essential to religious life: the call of God and consecration to him through profession of the evangelical counsels by public vows; a stable form of community life; for institutes dedicated to apostolic works, a sharing in Christ’s mission by a corporate apostolate faithful to a specific founding gift and sound tradition; personal and community prayer; asceticism; public witness; a specific relation to the Church; a life-long formation; and a form of government calling for religious authority based on faith.” *Sacred Congregation for religious and for secular institutes*, Essential elements in the Church’s teaching on Religious Life as applied to Institutes dedicated to works of the apostolate, 31 May 1983, 4.

**we will discover that this will can be seen very clearly.”** (1) This is an idea stressed in many different places of *Vita Consecrata*, that the way of life practiced personally by Jesus, in chastity, poverty and obedience, and proposed by him to his disciples, is the origin of the consecration that Religious persons do when embracing the evangelical counsels. (cf. *Vita Consecrata* 31d) What is more, this is the last reason why, amid so vary and rich forms of sanctification which belong to the Church’s holiness, **“it is to be recognized that the consecrated life, which mirrors Christ’s own way of life, has an objective superiority. Precisely for this reason, it is an especially rich manifestation of Gospel values and a more complete expression of the Church’s purpose.”** (32) Talking about those who oppose to this *objective superiority* of the Religious Life, Fr. Buela says: **“Some have wasted liters of ink because they believed that there was no distinction to be made between the laity and religious, others suppose that these are excesses of language. They forget that at the origin of the difference there is a call from God who gives special graces to those he calls. They do not like to speak of ‘better’, of ‘more’, of ‘fullness’, of ‘perfection’, of ‘excellence’, of ‘particular, special, singular, new gift’... they want to correct Jesus Christ plan. A vain attempt. There is an ontological fact that they cannot change with their blah blah blah... the objective excellence of consecrated life (V.C. 18) is a reality that does not originate in any human ability, but is the fruit of an irrevocable gift of God.”** (*Ars Participandi*, 392)

### **III. “Follow me”**

St. John Paul the Great says: **“The Gospel shows that from the beginning of his public life Jesus called men to follow him... the most characteristic expression of the call are the words: ‘Follow me’ (Mt 8:22; 9:9; 19:21; Mk 2:14; 10:21; Lk 9:59; 18:22; Jn 1:43; 21:19). It shows Jesus’ initiative.”** (12 October 1994, 2).

It was Jesus will to invite, since the beginning of his public ministry, some chosen men and women to follow him “more closely.” As it is shown in the narrations of the New Testament, Jesus demanded from them many sacrifices and self-denials, which were not demanded in the whole Old Testament, even for those who perfectly kept the Ten Commandments and the Law. It was an open invitation to “more”, that is, to imitate the way of life which the Incarnate Word chose for himself: poor, *“the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head;”* (Mt 8:20) chaste, *“some... have renounced marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven;”* (Mt 19:12) and

obedient to the Father, “*I came down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of the one who sent me.*” (Jn 6:38) This was understood and lived literally by the Apostles, as it is seen in the dialogue between Peter and Jesus, “*We have given up **everything** and followed you... everyone who has given up houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children for the sake of my name...*” (Mt 19:27).

**“In calling men and women to abandon everything in order to follow him, Jesus inaugurated a state of life which would gradually develop in the Church in the various forms of consecrated life expressed in religious life... From gospel times to our own day, Christ’s founding will has continued to be at work, the will expressed in that very beautiful and holy invitation addressed to so many souls: ‘*Follow me!*’” (12 October 1994, 7).**

#### **IV. *Apostolica vivendi forma* (Apostolic form of life)**

The way of life that the Incarnate Word wanted for himself, and taught to those men and women He specially chose for following him closer, was in its turn transmitted down to the coming generations of Christians by the Apostles themselves. That is why Religious Life has been called *apostolica vivendi forma*. St. John Paul II says, “**Indeed, we can say that the religious state makes the form of life assumed by the incarnate Son of God present in this age just as it has done throughout Christian history... Those who now follow Jesus, leaving everything for his sake, call to mind the apostles who gave up everything in answer to his invitation. As a result, it has become traditional to speak of religious life as an *apostolica vivendi forma*. Indeed, after the example of Peter, John, James, Andrew and the other apostles, religious imitate and reproduce the form of evangelical life lived and taught by the divine Master.**” (*General Audience*, 8 February 1995, 2)

Later on, when writing the Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, St. John Paul II will brought again the same idea twice: “**This is the path marked out from the beginning by the Apostles, as testified to in the Christian tradition of the East and the West: ‘Those who now follow Jesus, leaving everything for his sake, remind us of the Apostles... as a result, it has become traditional to speak of religious life as *apostolica vivendi forma*’**” (93b) Later, He says that is this *apostolica vivendi forma*, as can be found in the Gospels and other writings of the New Testament, that Founders and foundresses were inspired to when discerning the

charism and mission of their Institutes. (cf. 94a)

**“The life of that community (the apostles) and, even more, the experience of complete sharing with Christ lived out by the Twelve, have always been the *model to which the Church has looked* whenever she has sought to return to her original fervour and to resume with fresh evangelical vigor her journey through history.” (V.C. 41) Commenting these words, Fr. Buela says: “Therefore, the Exhortation clearly teaches us that Jesus not only incarnated in himself a program of life totally consecrated to the Father, but that he also wanted a group of his contemporaries to carry out the same program of life. He wants that after his death and ascension, the evangelical witness of a life totally consecrated to the kingdom of Heaven should continue to live on through the Apostles. As the Exhortation teaches, Jesus left the spiritual patrimony of the apostles’ way of life as an inalienable heritage to the whole Church.” (Ars Participandi 521-522)**

## **V. Conclusion**

We have seen how religious life is, first of all, an *initiative of the Father*, the ultimate origin of the religious life, who consecrated the Son and sent him into the world; in obedience to his Father’s will, the Incarnate Word our Lord Jesus Christ *chose for himself a way of life in poverty, chastity and obedience*, becoming the First Consecrated and the founder of religious life; for this reason, *He called those he wanted to follow him* in a more intimate way, inviting them to “gave up everything” for the sake of the Kingdom; this new state of life was learned by the Apostles from Jesus Christ himself, and then handed on to the successive generations of those who, as the Apostles, were called to become a *living memorial of Jesus’ way of living and acting*.

Now, all we have said in general about religious life in itself, can and must be applied, first of all to *our own Religious Family*, which after almost 2000 years of Church’s life, was chosen to have as central mystery the “Incarnation” of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Then, we must applied what we have said to *our personal religious vocation*: it was the Father’s initiative to call us from nothing to being, to participate to us his life, natural and supernatural, and to send us to the world to become another humanity of the Word, another incarnation; it was Jesus’ will to call us to follow him, and renounce to everything for the sake of the Kingdom, imitating with our life that same way of life which the Incarnate Word chose for himself, and the Apostles

lived, and millions of chosen have lived during history.

For this reason, we should always recall the divine origin of our vocation, because the devil knows that the vocation is the first source of all the graces God has planned to give us during our whole life, and that is why all devil's temptations, directly or indirectly, are directed at the end, against the vocation. But, as Father Buela says, at the origin of every vocation, there is an ontological fact that cannot be changed by nothing: God is the one who called us, and He is faithful for giving us the graces we need to persevere until the end.

Father Buela invites us to examine our religious life:

**“You are entirely an initiative of the Father, what attention do you pay to this in your life?  
...In a positive sense, we have been consecrated by the Father, who sends us on a mission,  
do I adequately value the choice made of me by the Father?**

**...Do I follow the examples of the ‘Consecrated of the Father,’ model of all consecration?**

**...Do I acknowledge that Jesus’ chaste, poor and obedient way of life is the most radical way of living the Gospel on this earth?”** (cf. *Ars Participandi*, 713-717)

Speaking about the Virgin Mary as model of consecration, St. John Paul the Great says:

**“Chosen by the Lord, who wished to accomplish in her the mystery of the Incarnation, she reminds consecrated persons of the primacy of God’s initiative. At the same time, having given her assent to the divine Word, made flesh in her, Mary is the model of the acceptance of grace by human creatures.”** (*V. C.* 28)

Let us commend our religious family and our personal vocation to Mary Mother of the Incarnate Word.