

# Irrevocability Of Religious Consecration

## Etimology

ir·rev·o·ca·ble, it is an adjective. Irrevocable means something not able to be changed, reversed, or recovered, something that is final.

It is coming from the Latin words:

IN = not

REVOCARE → REVOCABILIS = able to be revoked

IRREVOCABILIS = not able to be revoked

From Latin *irrevocabilis*, from *in-* 'not' + *revocabilis* 'able to be revoked' (from the verb *revocare* ).

Similar words are: irreversible, unrectifiable, irremediable, irreparable, unrepairable, beyond repair, unalterable, unchangeable, immutable, final, binding, absolute, permanent, lasting, peremptory, unappealable.

Opposite: reversible, temporary.

## Introduction

As we have been listening during the different talks, we see that the Religious Consecration is coming from God the Father since the beginning and to Him it is addressed. God is the beginning and the end of the Religious Consecration. And in this perspective the Church looks at it since the beginning of Christianity.

The ecclesiology emanated from the Second Vatican Council considers the Church as a communion organized on the basis of the simultaneous presence of all the members of the Church. The Church as a communion organized on the basis of the simultaneous presence of two principles, **the principle of equality and the principle of diversity and complementarity of vocations**, charisms and conditions of life. And each member in the Church has a vocation and a Divine Mission inside the Church

**The principle of equality** has its foundation in baptism, where all of us have been called by God to follow Jesus. **The principle of diversity** is based fundamentally on sacramental factors - ordained and non-ordained faithful, but the diversity is coming also from different charisms that determine a special vocation and a particular consecration distinct from sacramental consecrations, existing also among those who profess the evangelical counsels.

Communion in the Church is not uniformity, but it is realized through different charisms which grow in many different conditions of life, especially those that have their origin in the three classic vocations, the vocation to the lay life, to the ordained ministry and to the consecrated life.

The religious consecration cannot be explained without recognizing its Divine Origin. The baptized person that decides to follow Jesus in a special way through the Evangelical Council cannot be moved without the vocation, it means a calling from God is moving that person. Each vocation is a mystery and a gift. A mystery between God and the person and a gift because nobody deserves to be chosen by God to follow Him more closely through the Evangelical Council.

Being conscious that the religious vocation has a Divine Origin, the Church since the beginning looks at the Religious Consecration as AN STABLE STATE OF LIFE, AN UNIQUE WAY OF LIFE that some baptized are called by God to follow Jesus more closely until the end. The Church knowing that Religious Consecration is a special consecration of a baptized person to God, Consecrated Faithful are located in the heart of the Church.

### **Evolution of the Consecrated Life**

#### **a) First historical forms of consecrated life (until the 12th century)**

Here we cannot speak of institutionalized public forms of consecration, but from the beginning there were real consecrations.

Historians of religious life situate at least the first germs of consecrated life in the forms of life that assume virginity or celibacy, thus imitating Jesus' way of life: virgins, celibates and ascetics. In the middle of the third century, a new way of living the Christian life and tending to holiness, characterized by a secluded life in solitude, separated from family life and secular tasks, in order to dedicate oneself entirely to God in prayer - hermits or anchorites. From the fourth century onwards, the eremitic life was gradually transformed into a cenobitic life, a life in common. St. Anthony Abbot retired to the desert of Egypt, and groups of faithful gathered around him that gave birth to monasticism. With St. Pachomius monastic life organized, a common life under a superior and a rule started. From this first Rule appeared others approved and recognized by the Church -Saint Basil, Saint Augustine, Saint Benedict-. St. Benedict's Rule will mark the historical development of monastic life. The peculiarity of this first stage, which marks the birth and development of the forms of religious life and virginity as a fundamental element and monastic life as separated from the world, living in common under a Rule, preoccupied in their own sanctification. And just for these moments of Religious Life, we can see a strong desire to identify it as a stable state of life, never as something temporary but as state of life that will go to be for ever, until the end.

#### **b) New forms of religious life open to apostolic activity (XII-XVI centuries).**

Along with the flourishing of monastic life, a new form of religious life was starting that will try to combine contemplative life with apostolic and pastoral life.

On this time was founded the Canons Regular, who achieved their greatest splendor in the 12th century with the foundation of the canons regular of St. Augustine. Although their canonical organization resembled the monasteries of monks, it was the first time that the active apostolate constituted an integral element of a religious form of life.

In the 13th century, in addition to specific norms of the Lateran Council IV on religious life to avoid the anomalous and arbitrary multiplication of religious institutions, the mendicant orders - Franciscan, Dominicans, Augustinians, Carmelites... - appeared. Their members were no longer monks, but friars who lived a fraternal community life while at the same time engaging in an intense apostolic and teaching activity. At the same time, female branches of monasteries of nuns were born - Dominican, Carmelite, Poor Clare's... -. The mendicant orders introduced a fundamental change demanded by the form of life open to the apostolate. A centralized regime was initiated; the convents of friars are not independent or autonomous, but depend on a centralized organization. The religious does not enter into a house, but into a religious order.

In the 16th century, a new form of religious life appeared, constituted by the so-called regular clerics- new apostolic goals and further accentuate the separation from the monastic life -teaching, dedication to the sick, Escolapious, Brothers of St. John of God, Camillian, Jesuits, etc..

In this period, outside of the religious sphere, other associations were born to develop apostolic activities that were impeded by the religious way of life of the time, solemn vows, regular life, and enclosure for the religious life of women. Some associations profess vows not recognized by the Church, in others there were no vows at all -Oratorians, Sulpicians, Eudists, White Fathers. - An association founded by Angela de Merici also started, which included women who lived the religious spirit in the world but without obligatory vows, common life or external signs such as the habit.

### **c) The stage of religious congregations (16th century - 17th century)**

Up to this time, the solemnity of the vows and, in the case of religious sisters with strict enclosure was the only form of attachment to religious life allowed.

With the Jesuits and the deepening of the theological-canonical doctrine, the solemnity of the vows was no longer essential, but the publicity of the vows.

Together with the religious orders - solemn vows - religious congregations appeared -simple vows- The apostolic constitution *Conditae a Christo* (8-12-1900) of Leo XIII supposes the definitive approval of religious congregations.

The apostolate prevails over the practices of personal sanctification.

The CIC 1917, is offering a varied ways of expression like contemplative life and active -apostolic life - and juridical regimes – monastic regime, centralized regime-, it gathers together many centuries of history of religious life.

We find here together religious orders with solemn vows, the religious congregations with simple vows, whose members are considered to be true religious.

He will distinguish between orders and religious congregations, between profession of solemn vows and profession of simple vows, assigning to each form different canonical effect.

The CIC 17 also admits, in the context of religious life, another type which it called societies of common life without vows. They had a structure, common life and regime analogous to religious congregations, so that they fall within the scope of religious associations.

#### **d) From the 1917 Code to the present day**

Anti-clerical and anti-religious movements led to the proliferation of secular forms of religious life in the Church that is to say, forms of life that are not containing the traditional elements as common life, habit, public vows, public performance. These types of associations or secular forms of religious life did not find a place in the promulgated Code of 1917.

They will be the germ of the phenomenon that matures later on under the name of secular institutes, officially approved by Pius XII in 1947 with the apostolic constitution *Provida Mater Ecclesia* (2-2-1947). Consecration and secularity will be two essential elements of this new form of consecrated life, differentiating it from the consecration proper to religious life.

The 1983 Code represents a firm point of arrival that respects the great variety and multiplicity of diverse forms of consecrated life, some of them new, others formalized as they have been present throughout history.

At the same time, it leaves the door open to possible new forms of consecrated life as the existence of non-associative or individual forms of consecrated life.

What is clear in this brief presentation, that Consecrated Life has been present in the 2000 year of Church History. And also it is clear that the church has always recognize it as an stable way of life, as an answer for those faithful people that chosen by God decided to follow Him in a more perfect and closest way of life professing the Three Evangelical Council until the end of their life through their final or perpetual profession.

#### **Essential Elements of Consecrated Life**

**The theological, doctrinal and spiritual elements are** condensed in these four elements:

- 1) It is a state or way of life of total dedication to God;
- 2) It is characterized by a close following of God.
- 3) Characterized by a close following of Christ through the practice of the evangelical counsels; the perfection of charity and dedication to the edification of the Church and the salvation of the world.
- 4) With a deep eschatological significance.

**The juridical elements,** on the other hand, necessary for consecrated life to exist in an institute are:

- 1) The stability of this form of life;
- 2) The profession of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience vow or other sacred bond;

- 3) In an institute erected by competent authority;
- 4) In conformity with the laws proper of an institute.

Gathering together all the elements presented we can offer this definition of consecrated life:

***Can. 573 §1. The life consecrated through the profession of the evangelical counsels is a stable form of living by which the faithful, following Christ more closely under the action of the Holy Spirit, are totally dedicated to God who is loved most of all, so that, having been dedicated by a new and special title to His honor, to the building up of the Church, and to the salvation of the world, they strive for the perfection of charity in the service of the kingdom of God and, having been made an outstanding sign in the Church, foretell the heavenly glory.***

***§2. The Christian faithful freely assume this form of living in institutes of consecrated life canonically erected by competent authority of the Church. Through vows or other sacred bonds according to the proper laws of the institutes, they profess the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience and, through the charity to which the counsels lead, are joined in a special way to the Church and its mystery.***

En the c. 607 will present theological categories more essential and specific:

***Can. 607 §1. As a consecration of the whole person, religious life manifests in the Church a wonderful marriage brought about by God, a sign of the future age. Thus the religious brings to perfection a total self-giving as a sacrifice offered to God, through which his or her whole existence becomes a continuous worship of God in charity.***

***§2. A religious institute is a society in which members, according to proper law, pronounce public vows, either perpetual or temporary which are to be renewed, however, when the period of time has elapsed, and lead a life of brothers or sisters in common.***

***§3. The public witness to be rendered by religious to Christ and the Church entails a separation from the world proper to the character and purpose of each institute.***

And here I want to do reference to the term: **a wonderful marriage brought about by God.** The religious consecration has the character of the spousal union with God. And in this direction is the whole formation of the faithful that having the calling from God, decided to follow Him is a special way of life, donating himself completely with sacrificial character and converting his own life a constant cult to God in the practice of charity.

From the Postulancy Period up to the Perpetual Profession the whole formation is always in direction to see if the candidates is capable to commit himself for the whole life in a determine charism and style how to live the Religious Consecration. And all this happen because the Church is conscious that the Religious Consecration is an STABLE STATE OF LIVE, than after profession the temporal periods for no more than 9 years, the Faithful commit himself

perpetually to God in a spousal union with God and the Congregation that we embrace as the way of life chosen to live the evangelical council.

Because the Religious Consecration of irrevocable the c. 642 said: **With vigilant care, superiors are only to admit those who, besides the required age, have the health, suitable character, and sufficient qualities of maturity to embrace the proper life of the institute. This health, character, and maturity are to be verified even by using experts, if necessary...**

**Religious Consecration is a vocation to LOVE TO THE END.** "Having loved his own who were in the world, **he loved them to the end.** And during supper ... Jesus rose ... and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded" (*Jn* 13:1-2,4-5). Love to God that is ONE with the love to our neighbor.

John Paul II said: *In the washing of feet Jesus reveals the depth of God's love for humanity: in Jesus, God places himself at the service of human beings! At the same time, he reveals the meaning of the Christian life and, even more, of the consecrated life, which is a life of self-giving love, of practical and generous service. In its commitment to following the Son of Man, who "came not to be served but to serve" (Mt 20:28), the consecrated life, at least in the best periods of its long history, has been characterized by this "washing of feet", that is, by service directed in particular to the poorest and neediest. If, on the one hand, the consecrated life contemplates the sublime mystery of the Word in the bosom of the Father (cf. Jn 1:1), on the other hand it follows the Word who became flesh (cf. Jn 1:14), lowering himself, humbling himself in order to serve others. Even today, those who follow Christ on the path of the evangelical counsels intend to go where Christ went and to do what he did. He continually calls new disciples to himself, both men and women, to communicate to them, by an outpouring of the Spirit (cf. Rom 5:5), the divine agape, his way of loving, and to urge them thus to serve others in the humble gift of themselves, far from all self-interest. ...The quest for divine beauty impels consecrated persons to care for the deformed image of God on the faces of their brothers and sisters, faces disfigured by hunger, faces disillusioned by political promises, faces humiliated by seeing their culture despised, faces frightened by constant and indiscriminate violence, the anguished faces of minors, the hurt and humiliated faces of women, the tired faces of migrants who are not given a warm welcome, the faces of the elderly who are without even the minimum conditions for a dignified life. The consecrated life thus shows, with the eloquence of works, that divine charity is the foundation and stimulus of freely-given and active love. Saint Vincent de Paul was deeply convinced of this when he explained to the Daughters of Charity this programme of life: "The spirit of the Society consists in giving yourselves to God in order to love our Lord and to serve him in the person of the materially and spiritually poor, in their houses and elsewhere, in order to teach poor young girls, children, in general anybody whom Divine Providence sends you". Today, among the possible works of charity, certainly the one which in a special way shows the world this love "to the end" is the fervent proclamation of Jesus Christ to those who do not yet know him, to those who have forgotten him, and to the poor in a preferential way. (VC 75)*