

2013

Brief Historical Overview of Consecrated Life

M. Jean Frisk
University of Dayton

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.udayton.edu/ml_studies



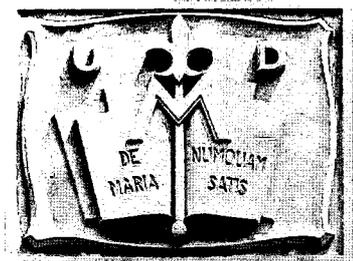
Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

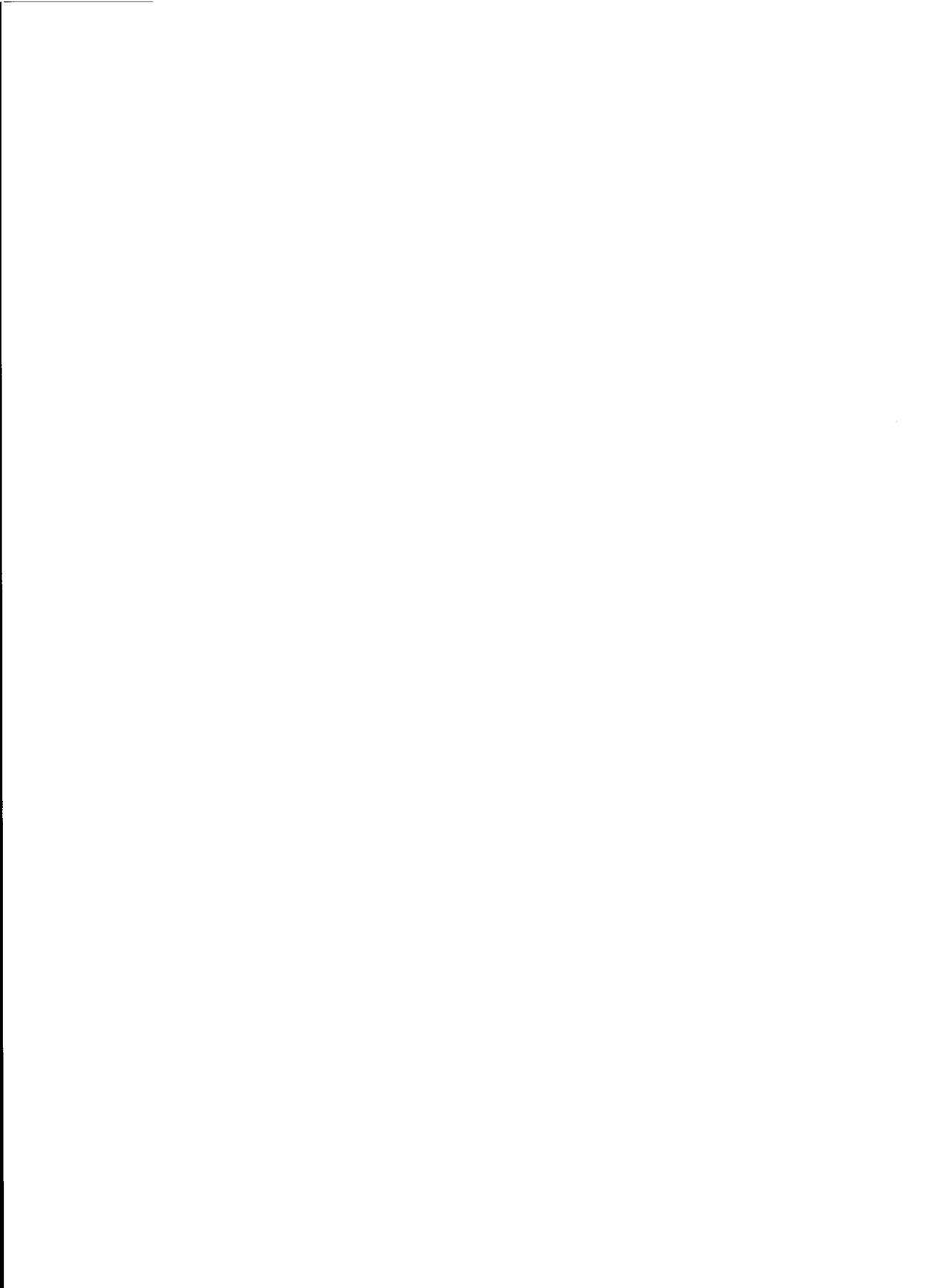
Frisk, M. Jean (2013) "Brief Historical Overview of Consecrated Life," *Marian Library Studies*: Vol. 31, Article 17, Pages 11-28.

Available at: https://ecommons.udayton.edu/ml_studies/vol31/iss1/17

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Marian Library Publications at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Marian Library Studies by an authorized editor of eCommons. For more information, please contact frice1@udayton.edu, mschlangen1@udayton.edu.



**THE MARIAN CHARISM
IN THE CHURCH**



BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF CONSECRATED LIFE

Introduction

The Code of Canon Law published on January 25, 1983, under the authority of Pope John Paul II, and in effect since November 27, 1983, treats what has been commonly called religious life or the common life (life in common). The canons covering these aspects of the Church are found in Book II, The People of God, Part III, Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. One-hundred seventy-three paragraphs (rules called canons) define and regulate this form of life.

There are literally hundreds of such forms of “life in common” in the Roman Catholic Church.¹ To define the red thread stitching these forms of life together, Canon 573 states:

§1. Life consecrated by the profession of the evangelical counsels is a stable form of living by which 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 dedicated themselves to His honor, the upbuilding of the Church and the salvation of the world by a new and special title, they strive for the perfection of charity in service to the Kingdom of God and, having become an outstanding sign in the Church, they may foretell the heavenly glory.

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

Institutes do not usually come about by sitting at a table drafting a scheme or mapping out a plan of how to live Christ’s counsels well. Rather, they normally begin with the inspiration of one or more persons who has the desire to live, love, serve, work, praise, and pray – to focus on a living God, a divine reality, as understood, in particular, by the teachings in the New Tes-

¹ For a listing of Institutes of Consecrated Life in the United States see Official Catholic Directory, New Providence, NJ : P.J. Kenedy & Sons, a serial published annually.

² The Code and quotes used for this study: James A Coriden, et al., The Code of Canon Law: A Text and Commentary Commissioned by The Canon Law Society of America (New York/ Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1985). [Hereafter: author, then CODE].

tament. Commentators on church law governing consecrated life point out that the usual way organized common living came into existence is via imitation of a person (founder) or a small group of persons. The founders, whose Christian lives are lived in total giving of oneself to Christ, his instructions, and service, are “different, unique, one of a kind, holy.”³ Holiness draws like a magnet; it is irresistible, it is attractive, it calls for followers. These band together; they want to give testimony of Christ’s love, service, and joy in life. Life in common testifies to complete abandonment to Christ, his ways, his message, his Church.

Origins

The Church has known forms of consecrated life since its foundation. However, the phenomena that people band together for the sake of religion and with the idea that good things and happiness can come about by these bonded lifestyles can be traced to ancient cultures. There is early evidence in pre-Christian classical cultures of small social groups that band together for the sake of religious belief. The examples and types of common life listed below by no means touch the immense range of such bandings and bindings. The point is simply to give brief examples.

Early Evidence in Classical Cultures – Banding Together of Social Groups for Religious Purposes

To illustrate with one example, Wikipedia presents an extensive article on Vestal Virgins with an excellent bibliography.⁴ The following paragraphs are excerpts:

In ancient Roman religion, the Vestals or Vestal Virgins (*Vestales*, singular, *Vestalis*), were priestesses of Vesta, goddess of the hearth. The College of the Vestals and its well-being was regarded as fundamental to the continuance and security of Rome. They cultivated the sacred fire that was not allowed to go out. The Vestals were freed of the usual social obligations to marry and bear children, and took a vow of chastity in order to devote themselves to the study and correct observance of state rituals that were off-limits to the male colleges of priests. ...

Their tasks included the maintenance of the fire sacred to Vesta, the goddess of the hearth and home, collecting water from a sacred spring, preparation of food used in rituals and caring for sacred objects in the temple’s sanctuary. By maintaining Vesta’s sacred fire, from which anyone could receive fire for household use, they functioned as “surrogate housekeepers”, in a religious sense, for

³ Unfortunately, the source for this quote has been lost. It is, however, a hand caligraphied card that has been in the author’s possession for several years.

⁴ Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vestal_Virgin.

all of Rome. Their sacred fire was treated, in Imperial times, as the emperor's household fire.

The Vestals were put in charge of keeping safe the wills and testaments of various people such as Caesar and Mark Antony. In addition, the Vestals also guarded some sacred objects, including the Palladium, and made a special kind of flour called *mola salsa* which was sprinkled on all public offerings to a god.... The College of the Vestals was disbanded and the sacred fire extinguished in 394, by order of the Christian emperor Theodosius.⁵

Consecrated Life Among Pre-Christian and First Testament Peoples

Harems were a type of sacred communal living. Again, Wikipedia presents a well-grounded article with a rich bibliography on harems:

The word has been recorded in the English language since 1634, via Turkish harem, from Arabic *haram* [meaning] "forbidden because sacred/important", originally implying "women's quarters", literally "something forbidden or kept safe", from the root of *harama* "to be forbidden; to exclude". The trilateral *H-R-M* is common to Arabic words denoting forbidden. The word is a cognate of Hebrew *herem*, rendered in Greek as *haremi* (ha-re-mi) when it applies to excommunication pronounced by the Jewish Sanhedrin court; all these words mean that an object is "sacred" or "accursed"... It is being more commonly acknowledged today that the purpose of harems...was for the royal upbringing of the future wives of noble and royal men. These women would be educated so that they were able to appear in public as a royal wife.⁶

The story of Jewish Esther represents the women in the harems of the Persian kings.

Let beautiful young virgins be sought out for the king. And let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom to gather all the beautiful young virgins to the harem in Susa the capital, under custody of Hegal the king's eunuch who is in charge of the women; let their ointments be given them. And let the maiden who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti.

[A]fter being twelve months under the regulations for the women, since this was the regular period of their beautification...then the maiden went in to the king.... [S]he was given whatever she desired to take with her from the harem to the king's palace.... [I]n the morning she came back to the second harem [with the] concubines.⁷

⁵ Ariadne Staples, *From Good Goddess to Vestal Virgins: Sex and Category in Roman Religion* (Routledge, 1998). Electronic source: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vestatvirgins.

⁶ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harem>

⁷ "Esther," *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version* (London: Catholic Ruth Society, 1965), 450 [Hereafter biblical quotes are from RSV].

Jewish Culture - the Essenes

According to early writings, the Essenes led a strictly communal life similar to Christian monasticism.

Many of the Essene groups appear to have been celibate, but Josephus speaks also of another “*order of Essenes*” that observed the practice of being engaged for three years and then becoming married. According to Josephus, they had customs and observances such as collective ownership, electing a leader to attend to the interests of the group, obedience to the orders from their leader. Also, they were forbidden from swearing oaths, and from sacrificing animals. They controlled their tempers and served as channels of peace, carrying weapons only for protection against robbers. The Essenes chose not to possess slaves but served each other and, as a result of communal ownership, did not engage in trading.⁸

Christian Communal Life

The first evidence of a structured communal life among Christians is documented in the New Testament itself:

Acts 2: 41-47

So those who received his word [Peter's] were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship [communal life], to the breaking of bread and the prayers.... [A]ll who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people.

Acts 4:32

Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and one soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common.

We know, of course, that this didn't last long. With the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE and the dispersion of the Jewish Christians, the first that we ascertain the communal life of Christians is in Egypt some two-hundred years later.⁹

⁸ Sources: Josephus (c. 75). *The Wars of the Jews*. book II, chap.8, para.13; Josephus (c. 94). *Antiquities of the Jews*. 18.20.; see also the extensive pros and cons by the writers of the Wikipedia bibliography: en. wikipedia.org/wiki/Essenes.

⁹ For an excellent review of the theological meaning of common life in the Church, see the canon law commentary of Sharon L. Holland, IHM, CODE in Appendix.

The Desert Fathers of Egypt and Early Common Life

A contemporary work by Peter H. Gorg briefly delineates the growth of what we understand as a life called to respond fully to the gospel by setting oneself aside for that work and life style. He defines this radical commitment as has been done for centuries, as someone who leaves the world. Someone who “renounces all natural ties and at the same time frees himself from those temptations that accompany material possession.”¹⁰ He goes on to explain that this is what is meant by asceticism, a choice for the counsels given by Christ to live simply, obediently, and purely.

The ascetical way of life was realized in the first two Christian centuries chiefly in two forms. First there was itinerant asceticism, which was based primarily on the Scripture passages about the sending forth of the first disciples (see Luke 10:1-12) who roamed the world on missionary journeys. These ascetics are said to have been influential well into the early medieval period, although they were not always regarded favorably by the Church because of their sometimes disorderly way of life. The other and most common form was exemplified by those ascetics who lived in the family and the Christian community and formed, so to speak, their inner circle and spiritual center. They led an unmarried life, ready to give to the poor and to the community everything beyond what they needed to support themselves. Abstinence from wine and meat can be found in this early phase also, and among the ascetical women, who probably originated with the enrolled widows, one can discern a special vow of continence.¹¹

Gorg then traces what he calls a movement to leave family and social surroundings so as to focus on ascetical values. “This was the origin of eremitical monasticism, which was already accompanied by a certain monastic garb that was distinguished by its simplicity.”¹² The prime example for this way of life, soon imitated by others, is “Abbas Anthony, who is also known as Anthony the Hermit [and Anthony the Abbot and Anthony the Great].”¹³ Gorg’s following chapters de-mystify the life and activities of Anthony, which at the same time illustrates the activity of the contemplative life and the beginnings of structure. Gorg explains along the way such terms as eremitic and anchoritic (alone, solitary). He tells of other desert fathers such as Paul of Thebes, whose life story was written by Jerome.

¹⁰ See: Peter H. Gorg, *The Desert Fathers: Anthony and the Beginnings of Monasticism*, trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011), xff.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, x-xi.

¹² *Ibid.*, xi.

¹³ *Ibid.*

The Monastic Life

Another Egyptian, Pachomius, well educated and having lived the structured life of a soldier, established what is thought to be the first regulated monastery.

Around the year 325 Pachomius was inspired by God to found in or near Tabennesi the first monastery in which the monks lived together under one roof and lived according to a common Rule, which Pachomius composed at the time of his first foundation. ... In particular it emphasizes poverty, fasting, common prayer, collaboration at work, silence, moderation, and discretion in eating, and the institution of a general chapter.

So many men thronged to the newly established monastery that soon almost one hundred monks had assembled. Thereupon Pachomius decided to found additional monasteries, seven or eight in all.... Two women's communities were also founded by the saint on the other bank of the Nile; Pachomius' sister was the first to enter the new foundation.... By the time of Pachomius' death on May 14, 348, the number of monks is said to have reached almost seven thousand.¹⁴

Europe's Monasticism

Even though the following information might be considered common knowledge, it is included here to briefly give the development of common life. The Benedictine heritage is generally acknowledged as the most numerous source of consecrated life in the Western Church, therefore a lengthier summary is given as the prime example of such foundations.

Benedict and Scholastica

The story of Benedict of Nursia and his sister Scholastica is generally well known to western Catholics. The notorious, but excellent Wikipedia gives us the following information.

Benedict of Nursia (Italian: *San Benedetto da Norcia*) (c.480-543) ... founded twelve communities for monks at Subiaco, Italy, about forty-five miles east of Rome, before moving to Monte Cassino in the mountains of southern Italy. There is no evidence that he intended to found a Roman Catholic religious order.¹⁵ The Order of St. Benedict is of later origin and, moreover, not an "order" as commonly understood but merely a confederation of autonomous congregations.¹⁶

¹⁴ Ibid., 83.

¹⁵ An edit to Wikipedia asks for a citation to prove this comment.

¹⁶ Wikipedia gives the following source for this presupposition: Arthur G. Holder, (2009-07-29). *Christian Spirituality: The Classics*. Taylor & Francis. p. 70. ISBN 9780415776028. Retrieved 24 November 2012. "Today, tens of thousands of men and women throughout the

Benedict's main achievement is his "Rule of Saint Benedict", containing precepts for his monks. It is heavily influenced by the writings of John Cassian, and shows strong affinity with the Rule of the Master. But it also has a unique spirit of balance, moderation and reasonableness (*ἐπιεικεία, epieikeia*), and this persuaded most religious communities founded throughout the Middle Ages to adopt it. As a result, his Rule became one of the most influential religious rules in Western Christendom. For this reason, Benedict is often called the founder of western monasticism.¹⁷

St. Margaret Clarke, O.S.B. [Order of St. Benedict] tells the story somewhat differently. Both perspectives give us an appreciation of the men and women who are considered not only founders of small groups locally established in the name of religion, but are groups that essentially co-formed the Christian culture of Europe and beyond.

Our only source of information on the life of Benedict of Nursia (480?-547?) is the second book of the *Dialogues* of Pope Gregory the Great (540-604). This work dates from less than 50 years after the death of Benedict and is based upon the reminiscences of persons who knew the Abbot, yet it is not history or biography in our modern sense. Instead it is intended as an edifying and didactic tale illustrating the means by which humans journey towards God.

Benedict, whose name in Latin means "Blessed," was born to a Christian family in the mountains to the northeast of Rome. The Roman Empire was crumbling and the Goths and Vandals controlled Italy. As a youth, he was sent to Rome for schooling and there experienced a religious awakening which caused him to renounce corrupt secular society and to join a band of Christian ascetics. He later became a hermit, living in the hill region of Subiaco. His fame as a holy person grew until he was importuned to become the abbot of a group of monks, who eventually became so peeved by his reforming zeal that they attempted to poison him. Benedict left them to their evil ways and began organizing groups of his own followers into small monasteries. In about AD. 529, he and a few disciples came to the mountain above the city of Cassino where they established the monastery now known as Montecassino. This is probably where he wrote the monastic Rule, the only document which remains to us from his hand. Benedict's death occurred about 547, and tradition tells us he died standing before the altar, supported by his brothers, a model of fidelity and perseverance for all of his followers.

Scholastica is, according to tradition, the twin sister of Benedict. She is a shadowy figure whom we know from a single charming story in the *Dialogues*. She led some form of consecrated life with a group of Christian women. Gregory tells us that yearly she journeyed to meet her brother at a small house

world profess to live their lives according to Benedict's Rule. These men and women are associated with over two thousand Roman Catholic, Anglican, and ecumenical Benedictine monasteries on six continents."

¹⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benedict_of_Nursia

midway between their residences. On one momentous occasion, as evening fell, Benedict packed up his monks to return to the monastery from which, according to his own Rule, he was not permitted to be absent overnight. Scholastica begged him to make an exception and stay over so that they could continue their holy conversation. When Benedict refused, Scholastica wept and prayed and immediately such a torrent of rain fell that no one could leave the house. As Gregory says, the woman's prayers prevailed with God because her love was the greater. When Scholastica died, Benedict had her body brought to Montecassino and placed in his own tomb. Scholastica's name means "she who has leisure to devote to study." Some skeptical historians have suggested that she is only a literary device: a personification of the Benedictine practice of reflective study. She remains very real, however, to Benedictine women, with the reality which can transcend simple historical existence, as a model of the feminine aspects of Benedictine monasticism, and an example of the power of the soul who loves God.¹⁸

The Mendicants in Europe

In contrast to those who settled down in a stable place (monastery) and actually helped to create the culture surrounding them, the so-called beggars in the name of religion who wandered through Europe tried to establish more flexible forms of lifestyle. Having a home base, which were to be simpler but similar to a monastery, the members served outside of the walls to bring the Christ message. Such members did not have personal property or establish large complexes. Another term frequently associated with this form of consecration is friar, a poor student attempting to teach about Christ. As time went on, the mendicants also established large central houses for formation and retirement. In contrast to the large Benedictine complexes, the mendicants establish smaller, simpler houses affiliated to the large central or governing location.

A review online of a contemporary essay by James M. Powell, emeritus professor of medieval history at Syracuse University (2008) sums the origin of the mendicants this way:

The present essay briefly examines evidence for the development of the mendicant orders, focusing on their relationship to important members of the middle and upper classes in the communes as one of the chief ways in which they

¹⁸ Sr. Margaret Clarke, O.S.B., www.css.edu/About/Mission-Integration/St-Benedict-and-St-Scholastica.html. For additional information: Terrence Kardong, O.S.B., translator and commentator, *The Life of Saint Benedict* by Gregory the Great (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2009); *The Rule of Benedict* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1981).

gained popularity and public support. These orders came into existence between the late twelfth century and the latter half of the thirteenth. Their increased involvement with the laity was both a direct product of their concern with the needs of the contemporary church and a source of conflict between them and the existing monastic and diocesan clergy. The experience of the *Humiliati* in various dioceses in northern Italy illustrates an important point, namely the growing divisions within the church and the tendency to label various groups as heretical. The condemnation of the *Humiliati* and other groups by Pope Lucius III in Verona in 1183 is a sign of the increasing sensitivity to the danger of heresy among the laity within the leadership of the church.

With the election of Pope Innocent III in 1198, there was a recognition that the divisions within the church threatened to drive many good Christians into the arms of the heretics. Innocent and his allies in the hierarchy began to embrace some elements in the popular religious movements. Among the earliest beneficiaries were the Humiliati, the Trinitarians, and the founder of the Hospital of the Holy Spirit in Rome. It was shortly after this that Francis of Assisi, with the support of his bishop, approached Innocent. In this same period, Dominic de Guzman with his bishop undertook missionary work among Catharist heretics in the Midi. These seemingly separate occurrences were the beginning of a new approach to the problems that were besetting the church. The formation of the mendicant orders was the result not only of their founders but also of the recognition by the papacy of the role that they might play in a divided church.¹⁹

The above essay lists several orders developing at that time. The author distinguishes differences in terms of law and, as he writes: "This essay moves away from the emphasis on the internal history of the orders and focuses on their relationship to the laity. It focuses on the reason for the success of the mendicants as well as the failure of some to survive."²⁰

Francis and Clare

Saint Francis of Assisi (c.1181-1226) established a new way of spreading the Gospel that can be compared to modern day de-cluttering. With every attempt to be free of material possessions, big buildings, and vast tracts of land, he and his followers wanted to be free for the proclamation of the Good News in every nook and cranny of society.²¹

¹⁹ James M. Powell, "Mendicants, the Communes, and the Law," Church History 77:3 (September 2008), 557-573. This article is online at: journals.cambridge.org.

²⁰ Ibid., 557.

²¹ Literally hundreds of resources are available for research. The material in Wikipedia, with its lengthy bibliography, is a good starting point: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Francis_of_Assisi.

Francis founded the men's Order of Friars Minor (Franciscan Order), the women's order (later called the Order of St. Clare), and the lay third orders for those who could not live the itinerant form of journeying from place to place (now called Third Order of Saint Francis - both men and women's separate branches). Francis chose not to become a priest, which actually strengthened the notion of consecrated single men living in the world - but not of it - for the sake of the gospel.

He established the young woman Clare as head of a women's branch with the same inner ideals, but considering the norms of the times for all women, the members were to be safe in the enclosure of the monastery.

Originally, the so-called Third Order, although autonomous, was meant to give a solid spiritual life to laity who lived supportive roles to the mendicants and the women enclosed. Over time, many Third Orders developed into entirely independent communities while retaining the founding spirit of the original Order.

Dominic

Saint Dominic (Spanish: *Santo Domingo*), also known as Dominic of Osma and Dominic of Caleruega, often called Dominic de Guzman and Domingo Felix de Guzman (1170 - August 6, 1221), is the founder of the Order of Preachers, better known as the Dominican Order. Born into a family of status and wealthy enough for Dominic to have studied art and theology for ten years, he believed that the Catholic faith needed to be transmitted through solid learning.

An online article (likely taken from other sources) gives a brief history of this well-known founder:

St. Dominic petitioned the Pope for the right to establish a new religious order dedicated to preaching. Having others besides priests being able to preach was a new idea at the time, and St. Dominic carried it farther by requesting that these new preachers be able to cross diocesan boundaries. His idea was to preach the Gospel to people wherever they needed it. He was known to travel by foot, often barefoot, living a very austere life wherever he roamed, but preaching with great fervor. In 1215 the Bishop of Toulouse offered the use of a house and church in Toulouse, and it was here that the original Dominican order was founded. By the time of his death only six years later in 1221, the Dominican order had spread widely and friaries could be found in most larger cities in western Europe. Thirteen years after his death, in 1234, he was canonized by Pope Gregory IX.²²

²² Beverly Johnson Roberts, www.stdominic.webhero.com.

Carmelites

The Order of the Brothers of Our Lady of Mount Carmel or Carmelites (sometimes simply Carmel *bysynecdoche*; Latin: *Ordo Fratrum Beatissimae Virginis Mariae de Monte Carmelo*) is traced to the 12th century. Historical records are few. Though not developed here, an interesting note is that this group does not incorporate the name of a founder as such. Communities begin to identify themselves with their devotional or faith focus, which is how the group wished to articulate its identity.

Both monastics and mendicants express their consecrations in the form of public vows taken before Church and Church-appointed monastic authorities.

Institutes of Simple Vows Dedicated to a Wide Variety of Works (Congregations)

Canons 577 & 578 state effectively what would take volumes to list and assess when tracing the development of committed consecrated life in the Church over the second millennium.

§577 In the Church there are very many Institutes of consecrated life which have different gifts according to the grace which has been given them: They follow Christ more closely as He prays, announces the Kingdom of God, performs good works for people, shares His life with them in the world, and yet always does the will of the Father.

§578 The intention of the founders and their determination concerning the nature, purpose, spirit, and character of the institute which have been ratified by competent ecclesiastical authority as well as its wholesome traditions, all of which constitute the patrimony of the institute itself, are to be observed faithfully by all.

Said simply, Christians banded together, but also spread to the ends of the earth. Some formed communal life to strengthen and support one another in living Christ's teachings while focusing on aspects a founder deemed essential. The styles of the banding and the bonds changed much in accord with the way various cultures were developing. It would be a fascinating study to see if these communities helped to change culture and social views or vice versa. In most cases, it appears as though a founder sought freedom to exercise a style, a work, or a reason for a unique and separate existence within and under the protection of the universal Church.

Clearly, to select religious life signified one's desire to publically make a choice for a stable and approved form of living. Over time, many Church laws defined this stability with rules meant to assure its formation process, own-

ership of property, and lines of authority. A founder could examine the Rules of other founders and constitute his or her own community according to that pattern. It wasn't and isn't uncommon for communities to share the same formation process. For example, in Limburg, Germany in the late 1800s, a Jesuit was the novice master of the Pallottine Society.²³ Today, various American congregations belonging to central organizations, train their novices together.

Secular Institutes

Secular Institutes are an example of immense diversity within the Church. As a member of such an institute and longtime member of the United States Conference of Secular Institutes, to my knowledge there simply are no two alike.²⁴ The moment one begins to describe what such institutes are, another will give the nays and buts. Church law prior to the 1984 code consisted of only four canons. This type of institute was given papal approval in 1947.²⁵ Their consecrated but also secular character is explained per Constitutions in 1948 with *Provida Mater Ecclesia*.²⁶

§710 A secular institute is an institute of consecrated life in which the Christian faithful living in the world strive for the perfection of charity and work for sanctification of the world especially from within.

Although this type of consecrated life finds its roots from the sixteenth century on,²⁷ it came to the foreground in France and Italy in the 18th and 19th centuries. One example: During the French Revolution, when for instance, the Jesuits were suppressed and many clerics fled in exile, a French Jesuit Père Pierre-Joseph Picot de Clorivière (1735-1820) “envisioned a new type of religious...[which] consisted essentially in the profession of the three evangelical counsels. Observances, cloister, habit, and common life were seen as secondary. [M]embers of his societies could fully live in the world and exercise civil professions.... His members were religious before God but not before people.”²⁸

²³ See Engelbert Monnerjohn, *Joseph Kantenich: A Life for the Church*, Seán O'searcaigh trans. (Cape Town: Schoenstatt Publications, 2001).

²⁴ US Conference of Secular Institutes: www.secularinstitutes.org.

²⁵ Pius XII, Pope, *Provida mater ecclesia : Apostolic Constitution on Secular Institutes* (Washington, DC: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1945).

²⁶ An excellent and brief history of Secular History written by Sharon L. Holland, IHM, is found in the CODO

(see prior references). Only initial canons are cited here.

²⁷ Consider Saint Angela Merici, Italy, who imagined women who would be apostolic in the world without wearing a uniform dress or living in common. CODE, 525.

²⁸ Ibid.

A strong spokesman for this type of secular commitment to the gospel was Agostino Gemelli (1875-1959). As an Italian, he could convincingly lay out this form of life and assist, among others, in winning approval for it in the Church. Gemelli was a Franciscan who saw the laity of the Church drifting away without considering it their responsibility to carry this faith forward. He founded the Missionaries of the Kingship of Christ. These were committed associations of laity, consecrated to God in the world. Later, he also founded a community of priests who would associate in this same way.

Sharon L. Holland, IHM, writes:

His [Gemelli] classic *Pro Memoria* (1939), an apologia for this new form of consecrated life in the Church, expressed its uniqueness in a phrase later to be echoed in papal and conciliar documents. Members of institutes, stated Gemelli, did not work from "outside the world"; they rather worked on the world from, "as it were, within the world." This phrase appeared late in *Primo feliciter*, which spoke of the apostolate of members being exercised "not only *in the world*, but as it were, as *originating in the world*." Therefore it must correspond to their secular condition. At the time of the Second Vatican Council, this phrase again appeared in *Perfecta Caritatis*. And now appears essentially intact, in the canons.²⁹

In our contemporary 21st century experience of the common life in institutes of consecrated life, it is generally difficult to understand how religious life and the life in a secular institute differ. Bound as we are by the visual, "religiousness" could formerly be seen in externals: living in one household, wearing uniform clothing, praying together at specific times. Today, these are not necessarily signs of life lived in the spirit of the evangelical counsels. Nonetheless, religious institutes generally can trace their roots to times when these signs were significant.

In Dayton, the Marian Library/International Marian Research Institute had a large collection of so-called nun dolls. It is fascinating to examine the unique dress (habit) of the communities. Often there are tensions between those institutes which keep such a tradition and those who do not. It is even more confusing to the public when some secular institutes have and wear a common uniform dress, as do many secular organizations in society. A study of the canons and of the intentions of founders is necessary to make the distinctions clear.

²⁹ Ibid.

Canon 607 defines religious life (which is a part of consecrated life but separate from the secular institutes which are also part of consecrated life):³⁰

§1. Religious life, as a consecration of the whole person, manifests in the Church a wonderful marriage brought about by God, a sign of the future age. Thus religious bring to perfection their full gift as a sacrifice offered to God by which their whole existence becomes a continuous worship of God in love.

§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 when they have lapsed, and live a life in common as brothers or sisters.

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

Canon 710 begins the definition of secular institutes (see above). Perhaps two phrases explain the difference: "separation from the world" and "sanctification of the world especially from within." Members of religious institutes will be conscious of having dropped their nets and left everything behind to follow the Lord. They stepped into a new way of life expressed by ritual and vows (common bonds). Members "entered" in a sense to "leave the world" and proclaim a new kingdom to come. Assuredly, they served the world in hundreds of forms, but from within the shelter, safety, and mutual support of strong communal bonds and lifestyles.

Members of secular institutes were not to leave the secular society, but to embrace it and bring the gospel values and message to, so-to-speak, every nook and cranny. In the words of the founder of my institute, members are to learn not so much to put the world behind us but to transform it into modern day Bethlehem, Nazareth, and Jerusalem living life as did the Holy Family in the context of civil society. True, as Jesus himself did in the desert, members withdraw for a time of formation and education to make ready for those public years.³¹

³⁰ CODE, 470.

³¹ Canon 713 expresses it this way: §1. The members of these institutes express and exercise their own consecration in their apostolic activity and life. As leaven they strive to imbue all things with the spirit of the gospel for the strengthening and growth of the Body of Christ §2. Lay members share in the Church's evangelizing task in the world and of the world through their witness of a Christian life and fidelity toward their consecration, and through their efforts to order temporal things according to God and inform the world by the power of the gospel. Also, they cooperate in serving the ecclesial community, according to their particular secular way of life. §714 Members are to lead their life according to the norm of the constitutions, in the ordinary conditions of the world, either alone or each in their respective families, or in a group of brothers or sisters.

Societies of Apostolic Life

Consecration, radical commitments of life and service throughout the long centuries of the Church have helped to keep the living waters flowing. The Church, at least in the verses of canon law, is ever open to new forms of committed life. Perhaps that is why the final section in the canons regarding the consecrated life is devoted to Societies of Apostolic Life, although such societies have been in existence even for centuries.

Canon 731- §1. Comparable to institutes of consecrated life are societies of apostolic life whose members without religious vows pursue the particular apostolic purpose of the society. and leading a life as brothers or sisters in common according to a particular manner of life, strive for the perfection of charity through the observance of the constitutions. §2. Among these there are societies in which the members embrace the evangelical counsels by some bond defined in the constitutions. This form of consecrated life is generally defined by the work the society undertakes, in other words, the apostolate. Their founders called them into existence for the sake of the work at hand. The lifestyle and forms within that society are set down to secure that the task is accomplished. To distinguish them, the word society usually appears in the full title of the institute.³²

Again, it is difficult for the usual Catholic to discern the unique difference between these societies and other forms of consecrated life. The specialty here is to know the founder's intentions, the purpose of the society, and how that is expressed in its constitutions.

Conclusion

The point of this paper was to briefly explain the history of *call* and *consecration* within the Catholic Church and to explain the manifestations of *call* and *consecration* through the centuries. The remainder of the papers in this volume will seek for traces of a consecration that includes the Blessed Virgin Mary. Church law as written in the Code begins the sections by assuring the reader in canon 573, that taking the step to become part of such a consecrated way of life "is a vocation – a life entered under the influence of the Holy Spirit."³³

Why is one urged to go here and another there? Why is one given the gift to preach and another to write music? Why do some folks love to gather

³² An example of such a society founded by Saint Vincent Pallotti (1796-1850) is given the official name Society of the Catholic Apostolate, commonly known as the Pallottine Fathers. Pallotti wanted his followers to find ways to serve the Church, to go out and proclaim the Good News wherever possible. It is not unusual to find a Pallottine Father as chaplain at airport chapels or in prisons.

³³ CODE, 454.

around the campfire together and others to walk alone in the forest! Why are some devoted to Mary more specifically and others not?! These are the mysteries not explained, but experienced in the phenomena of God's amazing and diverse calls and gifts. Why was Jesus trained as a carpenter and yet he is the great and eternal High Priest!

The WORD was made flesh and dwelt among us with reasons he alone explains in his final discourse recorded in John 17. There, in a prayer expressed to his Abba, he tells why he came, why he was in the world but not of it, where he is going and how we want all of us to one day be there, too. He wants nothing more than our joy, as he prays,

I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.... They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I do not pray that you should take them out of the world.... As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be consecrated in truth. I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one (John 17:13-21).

Sharon L. Holland, IHM, Commentary: Canon 573 ... seeks to give a comprehensive description of the consecrated life. She writes:

It is, fundamentally, a life consecrated through profession of the evangelical counsels. In harmony with the [Second Vatican] Council's emphasis on the radical consecration of every Christian in baptism ... this is a dedication by a new and special title. This new and special consecration is rooted in, and more fully expresses, that of baptism. It may be seen as a further specification of the Christian vocation....

Religious (p.454) profession has long been viewed in the Church as a sort of second baptism, an entering more profoundly into Christ's dying and rising, and so an entering into a more radical identification with Him. In professing a life of evangelical poverty, chastity, and obedience, the consecrated Christian – either religious or secular – takes up this closer following. All of this...is motivated by charity. Love of God is supreme and total, yet simultaneously linked with the love which is expressed in prayer and service of others. The life of consecration is seen as honoring God and furthering the mission of the Church. The terminology of perfection of charity is frequently avoided today. There is a concern that it could suggest a pride quite unsuitable to Christians.

At root, however, the canon deals with the fundamental law of the gospel which requires of every Christian a constant growth in the twofold love of God and others. As they pursue this in their lives of chastity, poverty, and obedience, the members of institutes of consecrated life become signs of the life to come. ... This initial canon emphasizes the historical fact that a consecrated life is born of the Spirit and has been approved by church leadership throughout the centuries, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. [p.455]