

APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION
REDEMPTIONIS DONUM



OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO MEN AND WOMEN RELIGIOUS ON
THEIR CONSECRATION IN THE LIGHT OF
THE MYSTERY OF THE REDEMPTION.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus !

I GREETING

1. The gift of the Redemption, which this extraordinary Jubilee Year emphasizes, brings with it a particular call to conversion and reconciliation with God in Jesus Christ. While the outward reason for this extraordinary Jubilee is of an historical nature for what is being celebrated is the 1950th anniversary of the crucifixion and resurrection-at the same time it is the interior motive that is dominant, the motive that is connected with the very depth of the mystery of the Redemption. The Church was born from that mystery, and it is by that mystery that she lives throughout her history. The period of the extraordinary Jubilee has an exceptional character. The call to conversion and reconciliation with God means that we must meditate more deeply on our life and our Christian vocation in the light of the mystery of the Redemption, in order to fix that life and vocation ever more firmly in that mystery.

While this call concerns everyone in the Church, in a special way it concerns you, men and women religious, who, in your consecration to God through the vows of the evangelical counsels, strive towards a particular fullness of Christian life. Your special vocation and the whole of your life in the Church and the world

take their character and their spiritual power from the same depth of the mystery of the Redemption. By following Christ along the "narrow and...hard" way,¹ you experience in an extraordinary manner how true it is that "with him is plenteous redemption" : *copiosa apud eum redemptio*.²

2. Therefore, as this Holy Year moves towards its close, I wish to address myself in a particular way to all of you, the men and women religious, who are entirely consecrated to contemplation or vowed to the various works of the apostolate. I have already done so in numerous places and on various occasions, confirming and extending the evangelical teaching contained in the whole of the Church's Tradition, especially in the Magisterium of the recent Ecumenical Council, from the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium* to the Decree *Perfectæ caritatis*, in the spirit of the indications of the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelica testificatio* of my Predecessor, Paul VI. The Code of Canon Law, which recently came into force and which in a way can be considered the final conciliar document, will be for all of you a valuable aid and a sure guide in concretely stating the means for faithfully and generously living your magnificent vocation in the Church.

¹ Cf. Mt.7:14.

² Ps. 130 [129]:7.

I greet you with the affection of the Bishop of Rome and Successor of St. Peter, with whom your communities are united in a characteristic way. From the same See of Rome there also reach you, with an unceasing echo, the words of St. Paul : "I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband."³ The Church, which receives after the Apostles the treasure of marriage to the divine Spouse, looks with the greatest love towards all her sons and daughters who, by the profession of the evangelical counsels and through her own mediation, have made a special covenant with the Redeemer of the world.

Accept this word of the Jubilee Year of the Redemption precisely as a word of love, spoken by the Church for you. Accept it, wherever you may be : in the cloister of the contemplative communities, or in the commitment to the many different forms of apostolic service : in the missions, in pastoral work, in hospitals or other places where the suffering are served, in educational institutions, schools or universities-in fact, in every one of your houses where, "gathered in the name of Christ," you live in the knowledge that the Lord is "in your midst."⁴

May the Church's loving word, addressed to you in the Jubilee of the Redemption, be the

³ Cf. 2 Cor. 11:2.

⁴ Cf Mt. 18:20.

reflection of that loving word that Christ Himself said to each one of you when He spoke one day that mysterious "Follow me"⁵ from which your vocation in the Church began.

II VOCATION

"And Jesus, Looking Upon Him, Loved Him"

3. "Jesus, looking upon him, loved him,"⁶ and said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven ; and come, follow me."⁷ Even though we know that those words, addressed to the rich young man, were not accepted by the one being called, their content deserves to be carefully reflected upon, for they present the interior structure of a vocation.

"And Jesus, looking upon him, loved him." This is the love of the Redeemer : a love that flows from all the human and divine depths of the Redemption. This love reflects the eternal love of the Father, who "so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."⁸ The Son, invested with that love, accepted the mission from the Father in the Holy Spirit and became the Redeemer of the world. The Father's love was

⁵ Cf. Mt. 19:21; Mk. 10:21; Lk. 18:22.

⁶ Mt. 19:21.

⁷ Mk. 10:21.

⁸ Jn. 3:16.

revealed in the Son as redeeming love. It is precisely this love that constitutes the true price of the Redemption of man and the world. Christ's Apostles speak of the price of the Redemption with profound emotion : "You were ransomed...not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot,"⁹ writes St. Peter And St. Paul states : "You were bought with a price."¹⁰

The call to the way of the evangelical counsels springs from the interior encounter with the love of Christ, which is a redeeming love. Christ calls precisely through this love of His. In the structure of a vocation, the encounter with this love becomes something specifically personal. When Christ "looked upon you and loved you," calling each one of you, dear religious, that redeeming love of His was directed towards a particular person, and at the same time it took on a spousal character : it became a love of choice. This love embraces the whole person, soul and body, whether man or woman, in that person's unique and unrepeatable personal "I." The One who, given eternally to the Father, "gives" Himself in the mystery of the Redemption, has now called man in order that he in his turn should give himself entirely to the

⁹ 1 Pt. 1:18-19.

¹⁰ 1 Cor. 6:20.

work of the Redemption through membership in a community of brothers or sisters, recognized and approved by the Church. Surely it is precisely to this call that St. Paul's words can be applied : "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit... ? You are not your own ; you were bought with a price."¹¹

Yes, Christ's love has reached each one of you, dear brothers and sisters, with that same "price" of the Redemption. As a consequence of this, you have realized that you are not your own, but belong to Christ. This new awareness was the fruit of Christ's "loving look" in the secret of your heart. You replied to that look by choosing Him who first chose each one of you, calling you with the measurelessness of His redeeming love. Since He calls "by name," His call always appeals to human freedom. Christ says : "If you wish...." And the response to this call is, therefore, a free choice. You have chosen Jesus of Nazareth, the Redeemer of the world, by choosing the way that He has shown you.

"If You Wish To Be Perfect..."

4. This way is also called the way of perfection. Speaking to the young man, Christ says : "If you wish to be perfect..." Thus the idea of the "way of perfection" has its motivation in the very Gospel source. Moreover, do we not hear, in the Sermon on the Mount : "You,

¹¹ 1 Cor. 6:19-20.

therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect"¹²? The calling of man to perfection was in a certain way perceived by thinkers and moralists of the ancient world and also afterwards, in the different periods of history. But the biblical call has a completely original nature : it is particularly demanding when it indicates to man perfection in the likeness of God Himself.¹³ Precisely in this form the call corresponds to the whole of the internal logic of Revelation, according to which man was created in the image and likeness of God Himself. He must therefore seek the perfection proper to him in the line of this image and likeness. As St. Paul will write in the letter to the Ephesians : "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."¹⁴

Thus the call to perfection belongs to the very essence of the Christian vocation. On the basis of this call we must also understand the words which Christ addressed to the young man in the Gospel. These words are in a particular way linked to the mystery of the Redemption of man in the world. For this Redemption gives back to God the work of creation which had been

¹² Mt. 5:48.

¹³ Cf. Lv. 19:2; 11:44.

¹⁴ Eph. 5:1-2.

contaminated by sin, showing the perfection which the whole of creation, and in particular man, possesses in the thought and intention of God Himself Especially man must be given and restored to God, if he is to be fully restored to himself. From this comes the eternal call : "Return to me, for I have redeemed you."¹⁵ Christ's words : "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have, and give to the poor,..." clearly bring us into the sphere of the evangelical counsel of poverty, which belongs to the very essence of the religious vocation and profession.

At the same time these words can be understood in a wider and, in a sense, essential way. The Teacher from Nazareth invites the person He is addressing to renounce a program of life in which the first place is seen to be occupied by the category of possessing, of "having," and to accept in its place a program centered upon the value of the human person : upon personal "being" with all the transcendence that is proper to it.

Such an understanding of Christ's words constitutes as it were a wider setting for the ideal of evangelical poverty, especially that poverty which, as an evangelical counsel, belongs to the essential content of your mystical marriage with the divine Spouse in the Church. Reading Christ's words in the light of the superiority of "being"

¹⁵ Is. 44:22.

over "having," especially if the latter is understood in a materialistic and utilitarian sense, we as it were touch the very anthropological bases of a vocation in the Gospel. In the framework of the development of contemporary civilization, this is a particularly relevant discovery. And for this reason the very vocation to "the way of perfection" as laid down by Christ becomes equally relevant. In today's civilization, especially in the context of the world of well being based on consumerism, man bitterly experiences the essential incompleteness of personal "being" which affects his humanity because of the abundant and various forms of "having"; he then becomes more inclined to accept this truth about vocation which was expressed once and for all in the Gospel. Yes, the call which you, dear brothers and sisters, accepted when you set out on the way of religious profession touches upon the very roots of humanity, the roots of man's destiny in the temporal world. The evangelical "state of perfection" does not cut you off from these roots. On the contrary, it enables you to anchor yourselves even more firmly in the elements that make man man, permeating this humanity-which in various ways is burdened by sin-with the divine and human leaven of the mystery of the Redemption.

"You Will Have Treasure in Heaven"

5. Vocation carries with it the answer to the question: Why be a human person-and how? This answer adds a new dimension to the whole of life and establishes its definitive meaning. This meaning emerges against the background of the Gospel paradox of losing one's life in order to save it, and on the other hand saving one's life by losing it "for Christ's sake and for the sake of the Gospel," as we read in Mark.¹⁶

In the light of these words, Christ's call becomes perfectly clear: "Go, sell what you possess, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."¹⁷ Between this "go" and the subsequent "come, follow me" there is a close connection. It can be said that these latter words determine the very essence of vocation. For a vocation is a matter of following the footsteps of Christ (sequi-to follow, hence sequela Christi). The terms "go...sell...give" seem to lay down the precondition of a vocation. Nevertheless, this condition is not "external" to a vocation but is already inside it. For a person discovers the new sense of his or her humanity not only in order "to follow" Christ but to the extent that he or she actually does follow Him. When a person "sells what he possesses" and "gives it to the poor," he discovers that those possessions and the comforts he enjoyed were

¹⁶ Mk. 8:35; cf. Mt. 10:39; Lk. 9:24.

¹⁷ Mt. 19:21.

not the treasure to hold on to. The treasure is in his heart, which Christ makes capable of "giving" to others by the giving of self. The rich person is not the one who possesses but the one who "gives," the one who is capable of giving.

At this point the Gospel paradox becomes particularly expressive. It becomes a program of being. To be poor in the sense given to this "being" by the Teacher from Nazareth is to become a dispenser of good through one's own human condition. This also means to discover "the treasure." This treasure is indestructible. It passes together with man into the dimension of the eternal. It belongs to the divine eschatology of man. Through this treasure man has his definitive future in God. Christ says: "You will have treasure in heaven." This treasure is not so much a "reward" after death for the good works done following the example of the divine Teacher, but rather the eschatological fulfillment of what was hidden behind these good works here on earth, in the inner "treasure" of the heart. Christ Himself, in fact, when He invited His hearers in the Sermon on the Mount¹⁸ to store up treasure in heaven, added: "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."¹⁹ These words indicate the eschatological character of the Christian vocation. They indicate even more the

¹⁸ Cf. Mt. 6:19-20.

¹⁹ Mt. 6:21.

eschatological nature of the vocation that is realized through spiritual marriage to Christ by the practice of the evangelical counsels.

6. The structure of this vocation, as seen from the words addressed to the young man in the synoptic Gospels,²⁰ is traced little by little as one discovers the fundamental treasure of one's own humanity in the perspective of that "treasure" which man "has in heaven." In this perspective the fundamental treasure of one's own humanity is connected to the fact of "being, by giving oneself." The direct point of reference in such a vocation is the living person of Jesus Christ. The call to the way of perfection takes shape from Him and through Him in the Holy Spirit, who continually "recalls" to new people, men and women, at different times of their lives but especially in their youth, all that Christ "has said,"²¹ and especially what He "said" to the young man who asked him : "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life ?"²² Through the reply of Christ, who "looks upon" His questioner "with love," the strong leaven of the mystery of the Redemption penetrates the consciousness, heart and will of a person who is searching with truth and sincerity.

²⁰ Cf. Mt. 19:21; Mk. 10:21; Lk. 18:22.

²¹ Cf. Jn. 14:26.

²² Mt. 19:16.

Thus the call to the way of the evangelical counsels always has its beginning in God : "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide."²³ The vocation in which a person discovers in depth the evangelical law of giving, a law inscribed in human nature, is itself a gift! It is a gift overflowing with the deepest content of the Gospel, a gift which reflects the divine and human image of the mystery of the Redemption of the world. "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins."²⁴

III CONSECRATION

Religious Profession Is a "Fuller Expression" of Baptismal Consecration

7. Your vocation, dear brothers and sisters, has led you to religious profession, whereby you have been consecrated to God through the ministry of the Church, and have been at the same time incorporated into your religious family. Hence, the Church thinks of you, above all, as persons who are "consecrated" : consecrated to God in Jesus Christ as His exclusive possession. This consecration determines your place in the vast community of the Church, the People of

²³ Jn. 15:16.

²⁴ 1 Jn. 4:10.

God. And at the same time this consecration introduces into the universal mission of this people a special source of spiritual and supernatural energy : a particular style of life, witness and apostolate, in fidelity to the mission of your institute and to its identity and spiritual heritage. The universal mission of the People of God is rooted in the messianic mission of Christ Himself-Prophet, Priest and King-a mission in which all share in different ways. The form of sharing proper to "consecrated" persons corresponds to your manner of being rooted in Christ. The depth and power of this being rooted in Christ is decided precisely by religious profession.

Religious profession creates a new bond between the person and the One and Triune God, in Jesus Christ. This bond develops on the foundation of the original bond that is contained in the Sacrament of Baptism. Religious profession "is deeply rooted in baptismal consecration and is a fuller expression of it."²⁵ In this way religious profession, in its constitutive content, becomes a new consecration : the consecration and giving of the human person to God, loved above all else. The commitment undertaken by means of the

²⁵ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree *Perfectæ caritatis*, no. 5; cf. also Document of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, *Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching on Religious Life as Applied to Institutes Dedicated to Works of the Apostolate* (May 31, 1983), nos. 5ff.

vows to practice the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience, according to the determinations proper to each religious family as laid down in the constitutions, is the expression of a total consecration to God and, at the same time, the means that leads to its achievement. This is also the source of the manner proper to consecrated persons of bearing witness and of exercising the apostolate. And yet it is necessary to seek the roots of that conscious and free consecration and of the subsequent giving of self to God as His possession in Baptism, the sacrament that leads us to the Paschal Mystery as the apex and center of the Redemption accomplished by Christ.

Therefore, in order to highlight fully the reality of religious profession, we must turn to the vibrant words of St. Paul in the letter to the Romans : "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ...we too might walk in newness of life"²⁶ ; "Our old self was crucified with him so that...we might no longer be enslaved to sin"²⁷ ; "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."²⁸

²⁶ Rom. 6:3-4.

²⁷ Rom. 6:6.

²⁸ Rom. 6:11.

Upon the sacramental basis of Baptism in which it is rooted, religious profession is a new "burial in the death of Christ" : new, because it is made with awareness and by choice ; new, because of love and vocation ; new, by reason of unceasing "conversion." This "burial in death" causes the person "buried together with Christ" to "walk like Christ in newness of life." In Christ crucified is to be found the ultimate foundation both of baptismal consecration and of the profession of the evangelical counsels, which-in the words of the Second Vatican Council-"constitutes a special consecration." It is at one and the same time both death and liberation. St. Paul writes : "Consider yourselves dead to sin." At the same time he calls this death "freedom from the slavery of sin." Above all, though, religious consecration, through its sacramental foundation in holy Baptism, constitutes a new life "for God in Jesus Christ."

In this way, simultaneously with the profession of the evangelical counsels, in a much more mature and conscious manner, "the old nature is put off" and likewise "the new nature is put on, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness," to use once more the words of the letter to the Ephesians.²⁹

A Covenant of Spousal Love

²⁹ Cf. Eph. 4:22-24.

8. Thus, then, dear brothers and sisters, all of you who throughout the Church live the covenant of the profession of the evangelical counsels: renew in this Holy Year of the Redemption your awareness of your special sharing in the Redeemer's death on the cross-that sharing through which you have risen with Him, and continually rise with Him to a new life. The Lord speaks to each of you, just as He once spoke through the prophet Isaiah :

"Fear not, for I have redeemed you ;
I have called you by name,
you are mine."³⁰

The evangelical call: "If you would be perfect, ... follow me"³¹ guides us with the light of the words of the divine Teacher. From the depth of the Redemption there comes Christ's call, and from that depth it reaches the human soul. By virtue of the grace of the Redemption, this saving call assumes, in the soul of the person called, the actual form of the profession of the evangelical counsels. In this form is contained your answer to the call of redeeming love, and it is also an answer of love: a love of self-giving, which is the heart of consecration, of the consecration of the person. The words of Isaiah-"I have redeemed you...you are mine"-

³⁰ Is. 43:1.

³¹ Mt. 19:21.

seem to seal precisely this love, which is the love of a total and exclusive consecration to God.

This is how the special covenant of spousal love is made, in which we seem to hear an unceasing echo of the words concerning Israel, whom the Lord "has chosen as his own possession."³² For in every consecrated person the Israel of the new and eternal covenant is chosen. The whole messianic people, the entire Church, is chosen in every person whom the Lord selects from the midst of this people ; in every person who is consecrated for everyone to God as His exclusive possession. While it is true that not even the greatest saint can repeat the words of Christ : "For their sake I consecrate myself"³³ in the full force of these words, nevertheless, through self-giving love, through the offering of oneself to God as His exclusive possession, each one can through faith stand within the radius of these words.

Are we not reminded of this by the other words of the Apostle in the letter to the Romans that we so often repeat and meditate upon : "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship"³⁴ ? These words are as it

³² Ps. 135 [134]:4.

³³ Jn. 17:19.

³⁴ Rom. 12:1.

were a distant echo of the One who, when He comes into the world and becomes man, says to the Father : "You have prepared a body for me.... Lo, I have come to do your will, O God."³⁵

In this particular context of the Jubilee Year of the Redemption, let us then go back again to the mystery of the body and soul of Christ, as the complete subject of spousal and redemptive love : spousal because it is redemptive. For love He offered Himself, for love He gave His body "for the sin of the world." By immersing yourselves in the Paschal Mystery of the Redeemer through the consecration of the religious vows, you desire, through the love of total giving, to fill your souls and your bodies with the spirit of sacrifice, even as St. Paul invites you to do in the words of the letter to the Romans, just quoted : "to offer your bodies as a sacrifice."³⁶ In this way the likeness of that love which in the heart of Christ is both redemptive and spousal is imprinted on the religious profession. And such love should fill each of you, dear brothers and sisters, from the very source of that particular consecration which on the sacramental basis of holy Baptism-is the beginning of your new life in Christ and in the Church : it is the beginning of the new creation.

Together with this love, may there grow deeper in each one of you the joy of belonging

³⁵ Heb. 10:5, 7.

³⁶ Rom. 12:1.

exclusively to God, of being a particular inheritance of the most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Now and then repeat with the psalmist the inspired words :

"Whom else have I in heaven ?
And when I am with you,
the earth delights me not.
Though my flesh and my heart waste away,
God is the rock of my heart
and my portion for ever."³⁷

or :

"I say to the Lord, my Lord are you.
Apart from you I have no good.
O Lord, my allotted portion and my cup,
You it is who hold fast my lot."³⁸

May the knowledge of belonging to God Himself in Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of the world and Spouse of the Church, seal your hearts,³⁹ all your thoughts, words and deeds, with the sign of the biblical spouse. As you know, this intimate and profound knowledge of Christ is actuated and grows deeper day by day through the life of personal, community and liturgical prayer proper to each of your religious families. In this too, and especially so, the men and women religious who are dedicated essentially to contemplation are a powerful aid and a

³⁷ Ps. 73 [72]:25-26.

³⁸ Ps. 16 [15]:2, 5.

³⁹ Cf. Sg. 8:6.

stimulating support for their brothers and sisters devoted to the works of the apostolate. May this knowledge of belonging to Christ open your hearts, thoughts and deeds-with the key of the mystery of the Redemption to all the sufferings, needs and hopes of individuals and of the world, in the midst of which your evangelical consecration has been planted as a particular sign of the presence of God for whom all live,⁴⁰ embraced by the invisible dimension of His kingdom.

The words "Follow me," spoken by Christ when He "looked upon and loved" each one of you, dear brothers and sisters, also have this meaning: you take part, in the most complete and radical way possible, in the shaping of that "new creation"⁴¹ which must emerge from the Redemption of the world by means of the power of the Spirit of Truth operating from the abundance of the Paschal Mystery of Christ.

IV EVANGELICAL COUNSELS

The Economy of Redemption

9. Through your profession, the way of the evangelical counsels opens up before each one of you. In the Gospel there are many exhortations that go beyond the measure of the commandment, indicating not only what is

⁴⁰ Cf Lk. 20:38.

⁴¹ 2 Cor. 5:17.

"necessary" but what is "better." Thus, for example, the exhortation not to judge,⁴² to lend "expecting nothing in return,"⁴³ to comply with all the requests and desires of our neighbor,⁴⁴ to invite the poor to a meal,⁴⁵ to pardon always⁴⁶ and many other invitations. If, in accordance with Tradition, the profession of the evangelical counsels has concentrated on the three points of chastity, poverty and obedience, this usage seems to emphasize sufficiently clearly their importance as key elements and in a certain sense as a "summing up" of the entire economy of salvation. Everything in the Gospel that is a counsel enters indirectly into the program of that way to which Christ calls when He says : "Follow me." But chastity, poverty and obedience give to this way a particular Christocentric characteristic and imprint upon it a specific sign of the economy of the Redemption.

Essential to this "economy" is the transformation of the entire cosmos through the heart of man, from within : "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God... and will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty

⁴² Cf. Mt. 7:1.

⁴³ Lk. 6:35.

⁴⁴ Cf. Mt. 5:40-42.

⁴⁵ Cf. Lk. 14:13-14.

⁴⁶ Cf. Mt. 6:14-15.

of the children of God."⁴⁷ This transformation takes place in step with that love which Christ's call infuses in the depth of the individual—that love which constitutes the very substance of consecration : a man or woman's vowing of self to God in religious profession, on the foundation of the sacramental consecration of Baptism. We can discover the bases of the economy of Redemption by reading the words of the first letter of St. John : "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If any one loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust of it ; but he who does the will of God abides forever."⁴⁸

Religious profession places in the heart of each one of you, dear brothers and sisters, the love of the Father : that love which is in the heart of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of the world. It is love which embraces the world and everything in it that comes from the Father, and which at the same time tends to overcome in the world everything that "does not come from the Father." It tends therefore to conquer the threefold lust. "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life" are hidden within man as the

⁴⁷ Rom. 8:19-21.

⁴⁸ 1 Jn. 2:15-17.

inheritance of original sin, as a result of which the relationship with the world, created by God and given to man to be ruled by him,⁴⁹ was disfigured in the human heart in various ways. In the economy of the Redemption the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience constitute the most radical means for transforming in the human heart this relationship with "the world" : with the external world and with one's personal "I"-which in some way is the central part "of the world" in the biblical sense, if what "does not come from the Father" begins within it.

Against the background of the phrases taken from the first letter of St. John, it is not difficult to see the fundamental importance of the three evangelical counsels in the whole economy of Redemption. Evangelical chastity helps us to transform in our interior life everything that has its sources in the lust of the flesh ; evangelical poverty, everything that finds its source in the lust of the eyes ; and evangelical obedience enables us to transform in a radical way that which in the human heart arises from the pride of life. We are deliberately speaking here of an overcoming as a transformation, for the entire economy of the Redemption is set in the framework of the words spoken in the priestly prayer to the Father : "I do not ask you to take

⁴⁹ Cf. Gn. 1:28.

them out of the world, but to guard them from the evil one."⁵⁰ The evangelical counsels in their essential purpose aim at "the renewal of creation": "the world," thanks to them, is to be subjected to man and given to him in such a way that man himself may be perfectly given to God.

Participation in the Self-emptying of Christ

10. The internal purpose of the evangelical counsels leads to the discovery of yet other aspects that emphasize the close connection of the counsels with the economy of the Redemption. We know that the economy of the Redemption finds its culminating point in the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ, in whom there are joined self-emptying through death and birth to a new life through the resurrection. The practice of the evangelical counsels contains a deep reflection of this paschal duality⁵¹: the inevitable destruction of what in each of us is sin and its inheritance, and the possibility of being reborn each day to a more profound good hidden in the human soul. This good is manifested under the action of grace, towards which the practice of chastity, poverty and obedience renders the human soul particularly sensitive. The entire economy of Redemption is realized precisely through this sensitivity to the mysterious action

⁵⁰ Jn. 17:15.

⁵¹ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree *Perfectae caritatis*, no. 5.

of the Holy Spirit, the direct Author of all holiness. Along this path the profession of the evangelical counsels opens out in each one of you, dear brothers and sisters, a wide space for the "new creation"⁵² that emerges in your human "I" precisely from the economy of the Redemption and, through this human "I," also into the interpersonal and social dimensions. At the same time it emerges in humanity as part of the world created by God: that world that the Father loved "anew" in the eternal Son, the Redeemer of the world.

Of this Son St. Paul says that "though he was in the form of God...he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men."⁵³ The characteristic of self-emptying contained in the practice of the evangelical counsels is therefore a completely Christocentric characteristic. And for this reason also the Teacher from Nazareth explicitly indicates the cross as the condition for following in His footsteps. He who once said to each one of you "Follow me" has also said: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me"⁵⁴ (that is to say, walk in my footsteps). And He said this to all His listeners, not just to the disciples. The law of

⁵² 2 Cor. 5:17.

⁵³ Phil. 2:6-7.

⁵⁴ Mk. 8:34; Mt. 16:24.

renunciation belongs therefore to the very essence of the Christian vocation. But it belongs in a particular way to the essence of the vocation linked to the profession of the evangelical counsels. To those who walk the way of this vocation even those difficult expressions that we read in the letter to the Philippians speak in a comprehensible language: for him "I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him."⁵⁵

Renunciation therefore-the reflection of the mystery of Calvary-in order "to be" more fully in the crucified and risen Christ; renunciation in order to recognize fully in Him the mystery of one's own human nature, and to confirm this on the path of that wonderful process of which the same Apostle writes in another place: "Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day."⁵⁶ In this way the economy of the Redemption transfers the power of the Paschal Mystery to the level of humanity, docile to Christ's call to life in chastity, poverty and obedience, that is, to a life according to the evangelical counsels.

V CHASTITY POVERTY OBEDIENCE

Chastity

⁵⁵ Phil. 3:8-9.

⁵⁶ 2 Cor. 4:16.

11. The paschal character of this call makes itself known from various points of view, in connection with each individual counsel.

It is indeed according to the measure of the economy of the Redemption that one must also judge and practice that chastity which each of you has promised by vow, together with poverty and obedience. There is contained in this the response to Christ's words, which are at the same time an invitation: "There are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to receive this, let him receive it."⁵⁷ Prior to this Christ had emphasized: "Not all men can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given."⁵⁸ These last words clearly show that this invitation is a counsel. To this also the Apostle Paul devoted a special reflection in the first letter to the Corinthians.⁵⁹ This counsel is addressed in a particular way to the love of the human heart. It places greater emphasis on the spousal character of this love, while poverty and still more obedience seem to emphasize primarily the aspect of redemptive love contained in religious consecration. As you know, it is a question here of chastity in the sense "of making themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven," a question, that is, of

⁵⁷ Mt. 19:12.

⁵⁸ Mt. 19:11.

⁵⁹ Cf. 1 Cor. 7:28-40.

virginity or celibacy as an expression of spousal love for the Redeemer Himself. In this sense the Apostle teaches that they "do well" who choose matrimony but they "do better who choose virginity."⁶⁰ The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord,"⁶¹ and "the unmarried woman or girl is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit."⁶²

There is contained neither in the words of Christ nor in those of Paul any lack of esteem for matrimony. The evangelical counsel of chastity is only an indication of that particular possibility which for the human heart, whether of a man or of a woman, constitutes the spousal love of Christ Himself, of Jesus the "Lord." "To make themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven" is not in fact merely a free renunciation of marriage and family life, but a charismatic choice of Christ as one's exclusive Spouse. This choice not only specifically enables one to be "anxious about the affairs of the Lord" but-when it is made "for the kingdom of heaven"-it brings this eschatological kingdom of God close to the life of all people in the conditions of temporality, and makes it in a certain way present in the midst of the world.

⁶⁰ Cf. 1 Cor. 7:38.

⁶¹ 1 Cor. 7:32.

⁶² 1 Cor. 7:34.

In this way, consecrated persons accomplish the interior purpose of the entire economy of the Redemption. For this purpose expresses itself in bringing near the kingdom of God in its definitive, eschatological dimension. Through the vow of chastity, consecrated persons share in the economy of the Redemption through the free renunciation of the temporal joys of married and family life ; on the other hand, precisely by their "having made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven," they bring into the midst of this passing world the announcement of the future resurrection⁶³ and of eternal life : life in union with God Himself through the beatific vision and the love which contains in itself and completely pervades all the other loves of the human heart.

Poverty

12. How very expressive in the matter of poverty are the words of the second letter to the Corinthians which constitute a concise synthesis of all that we hear on this theme in the Gospel ! "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich."⁶⁴ According to these words poverty actually enters into the interior structure of the redemptive grace of Jesus Christ. Without

⁶³ Cf. Lk. 20:34-36; Mt. 22:30; Mk. 12:25.

⁶⁴ 2 Cor. 8:9.

poverty it is not possible to understand the mystery of the gift of divinity to man, a gift which is accomplished precisely in Jesus Christ. For this reason also it is found at the very center of the Gospel, at the beginning of the message of the eight beatitudes : "Blessed are the poor in spirit."⁶⁵ Evangelical poverty reveals to the eyes of the human soul the perspective of the whole mystery, "hidden for ages in God."⁶⁶ Only those who are "poor" in this way are also interiorly capable of understanding the poverty of the one who is infinitely rich. The poverty of Christ conceals in itself this infinite richness of God ; it is indeed an infallible expression of it. A richness, in fact, such as the Divinity itself could not have been adequately expressed in any created good. It can be expressed only in poverty. Therefore it can be properly understood only by the poor, the poor in spirit. Christ, the God-man, is the first of these : He who "though he was rich became poor" is not only the teacher but also the spokesman and guarantor of that salvific poverty which corresponds to the infinite richness of God and to the inexhaustible power of His grace.

And thus it is also true-as the Apostle writes-that "by his poverty we have become rich." It is the teacher and spokesman of poverty who makes us rich. For this very reason He says to the

⁶⁵ Mt. 5:3.

⁶⁶ Eph. 3:9.

young man of the synoptic Gospels : "Sell what you possess and give...and you will have treasure in heaven."⁶⁷ In these words there is a call to enrich others through one's own poverty, but in the depths of this call there is hidden the testimony of the infinite richness of God which, transferred to the human soul in the mystery of grace, creates in man himself, precisely through poverty, a source for enriching others not comparable with any other resource of material goods, a source for bestowing gifts on others in the manner of God Himself. This giving is accomplished in the context of the mystery of Christ, who "has made us rich by his poverty." We see how this process of enrichment unfolds in the pages of the Gospel, finding its culmination in the paschal event ; Christ, the poorest in His death on the cross, is also the One who enriches us infinitely with the fullness of new life, through the resurrection.

Dear brothers and sisters, poor in spirit through your evangelical profession, receive into the whole of your life this salvific profile of the poverty of Christ. Day by day seek its ever greater development ! Seek above all "the kingdom of God and his righteousness" and the other things "shall be yours as well."⁶⁸ May there be accomplished in you and through you the

⁶⁷ Mt. 19:21; cf. Mk. 10:21; Lk. 18:22.

⁶⁸ Mt. 6:33.

evangelical blessedness reserved for the poor,⁶⁹
for the poor in spirit!⁷⁰

Obedience

13. Christ, "though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross."⁷¹

Here, in these words of the letter of St. Paul to the Philippians, we touch the very essence of the Redemption. In this reality is inscribed in a primary and constitutive way the obedience of Jesus Christ. Other words of the Apostle, taken this time from the letter to the Romans, confirm this: "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous."⁷²

The evangelical counsel of obedience is the call which derives from this obedience of Christ "unto death." Those who accept this call, expressed by the words "Follow me," decide-as the Council says-to follow Christ "who, by an obedience which carried Him even to death on

⁶⁹ Lk. 6:20.

⁷⁰ Mt. 5:3.

⁷¹ Phil. 2:6-8.

⁷² Rom. 5:19.

the cross, redeemed humanity and made it holy."⁷³ By living out the evangelical counsel of obedience, they reach the deep essence of the entire economy of the Redemption. By fulfilling this counsel they desire to gain a special sharing in the obedience of that "one alone" by whose obedience all "will be made righteous."

It can therefore be said that those who decide to live according to the counsel of obedience are placed in a unique way between the mystery of sin⁷⁴ and the mystery of justification and salvific grace. They are in this "place" with all the sinful background of their own human nature, with all the inheritance "of the pride of life," with all the selfish tendencies to dominate rather than to serve, and precisely by means of the vow of obedience they decide to be transformed into the likeness of Christ, who "redeemed humanity and made it holy by his obedience." In the counsel of obedience they desire to find their own role in the Redemption of Christ and their own way of sanctification.

This is the way which Christ marked out in the Gospel, speaking many times of fulfilling the will of God, of ceaselessly searching for it. "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to

⁷³ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree *Perfectae caritatis*, no. 14.

⁷⁴ "Mysterium iniquitatis"; cf. 2 Thes. 2:7.

accomplish his work."⁷⁵ "Because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me."⁷⁶ "He who sent me is with me ; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him."⁷⁷ "For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me."⁷⁸ This constant fulfilling of the will of the Father also reminds us of that messianic confession of the psalmist in the Old Testament : "Behold, I come ; in the written scroll it is prescribed for me. To do your will, O my God, is my delight, and your law is within my heart."⁷⁹

This obedience of the Son-full of joy-reaches its zenith in the face of the passion and cross : "Father, if it is your will, take this cup from me ; yet not my will but yours be done."⁸⁰ From the prayer in Gethsemane onwards, Christ's readiness to do the will of the Father is filled to the very brim of suffering, becoming that obedience "unto death, even death on a cross" spoken of by St. Paul.

Through the vow of obedience consecrated persons decide to imitate with humility the obedience of the Redeemer in a special way. For

⁷⁵ Jn. 4:34.

⁷⁶ Jn. 5:30.

⁷⁷ Jn. 8:29.

⁷⁸ Jn. 6:38.

⁷⁹ Ps. 40 [39]:8-9; cf. Heb. 10:7.

⁸⁰ Lk. 22:42; cf. Mk. 14:36; Mt. 26:42.

although submission to the will of God and obedience to His law are for every state a condition of Christian life, nevertheless, in the "religious state," in the "state of perfection," the vow of obedience establishes in the heart of each of you, dear brothers and sisters, the duty of a particular reference to Christ "obedient unto death." And since this obedience of Christ constitutes the essential nucleus of the work of the Redemption, as is seen from the words of the Apostle quoted above, therefore, also in the fulfilling of the evangelical counsel of obedience we must discern a particular moment in that "economy of the Redemption" which pervades your whole vocation in the Church.

From this derives that "total availability to the Holy Spirit" who is at work above all in the Church, as my Predecessor Paul VI puts it in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelica testificatio*,⁸¹ and who is likewise manifested in the constitutions of your institutes. From this derives that religious submission which in a spirit of faith consecrated persons show to their legitimate superiors, who hold the place of God.⁸² In the letter to the Hebrews we find on this theme a very significant indication: "Obey your leaders and submit to them; for they are keeping watch

⁸¹ Cf. *Evangelica testificatio*, no. 6: AAS 63 (1971), p. 500.

⁸² Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree *Perfectae caritatis*, no. 14.

over your souls, as men who will have to give account." And the author of the letter adds : "Let them do this joyfully, and not sadly, for that would be of no advantage to you."⁸³

On the other hand, superiors will bear in mind that they must exercise in a spirit of service the power conferred on them through the ministry of the Church, and they will show willingness to listen to their brothers or sisters in order to discern more clearly what the Lord asks of each one. At the same time they retain the authority proper to them to decide and order what they consider appropriate.

Hand in hand with submission-obedience thus conceived goes the attitude of service which animates your whole life after the example of the Son of Man, who "came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."⁸⁴ And His Mother, at the decisive moment of the Annunciation-Incarnation, entering from the very beginning into the whole salvific economy of the Redemption, said : "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord ; let it be to me according to your word."⁸⁵

Remember also, dear brothers and sisters, that the obedience to which you committed yourselves by consecrating yourselves without

⁸³ Heb. 13:17.

⁸⁴ Mk. 10:45.

⁸⁵ Lk. 1:38.

reserve to God through the profession of the evangelical counsels is a particular expression of interior freedom, just as the definitive expression of Christ's freedom was His obedience "unto death": "I lay down my life, that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord."⁸⁶

VI LOVE FOR THE CHURCH

Witness

14. In the Jubilee Year of the Redemption the entire Church wishes to renew her love for Christ, the Redeemer of man and of the world, her Lord and also her divine Spouse. And so in this Holy Year the Church looks with special attention to you, dear brothers and sisters, who, as consecrated persons, occupy a special place both in the universal community of the People of God and in every local community. While the Church wishes also your love for Christ to be renewed through the grace of the extraordinary Jubilee, at the same time she is fully aware that this love constitutes a special possession of the whole People of God. The Church is aware that in the love that Christ receives from consecrated persons, the love of the entire Body is directed in a special and exceptional way towards the Spouse, who at the same time is the Head of this Body. The Church expresses to you, dear brothers and

⁸⁶ Jn. 10:17-18.

sisters, her gratitude for your consecration and for your profession of the evangelical counsels, which are a special witness of love. She also expresses anew her great confidence in you who have chosen a state of life that is a special gift of God to the Church. She counts upon your complete and generous collaboration in order that, as faithful stewards of this precious gift, you may "think with the Church" and always act in union with her, in conformity with the teachings and directives of the Magisterium of Peter and of the pastors in communion with him, fostering, at the personal and community level, a renewed ecclesial awareness. And at the same time the Church prays for you, that your witness of love may never fail,⁸⁷ and she also asks you to accept in this spirit the present message of the Jubilee Year of the Redemption.

Precisely in this way the Apostle Paul prayed in his letter to the Philippians, "that your love may abound more and more...with all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruits of righteousness...."⁸⁸

Through the work of Christ's Redemption "God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to

⁸⁷ Cf. Lk. 22:32.

⁸⁸ Phil. 1:9-11.

us."⁸⁹ I constantly ask the Holy Spirit to grant to each one of you, according to your own gift,⁹⁰ to bear special witness to this love. May "the law of the Spirit that gives life in Christ Jesus..." be victorious within you, in a way worthy of your vocation, that law that has "set us free from the law of death."⁹¹ Live then this new life in the measure of your consecration and also in the measure of the different gifts of God which correspond to the vocation of your individual religious families. The profession of the evangelical counsels shows each of you how with the help of the Spirit you can put to death⁹² everything that is contrary to life and serves sin and death; everything that is opposed to true love of God and others. The world needs the authentic "contradiction" provided by religious consecration, as an unceasing stimulus of salvific renewal. "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."⁹³ After the special period of experimentation and renewal provided for by the *Motu Proprio Ecclesiae sanctae*, your institutes have recently received or

⁸⁹ Rom. 5:5.

⁹⁰ Cf. 1 Cor. 7:7.

⁹¹ Rom. 8:2.

⁹² Cf Rom. 8:13.

⁹³ Rom. 12:2.

are preparing to receive the Church's approval of your renewed constitutions. May this gift of the Church encourage you to know them, to love them and, above all, to live them in generosity and fidelity, remembering that obedience is an unambiguous manifestation of love.

It is precisely this witness of love that the world today and all humanity need. They need this witness to the Redemption as this is imprinted upon the profession of the evangelical counsels. These counsels, each in its own way and all of them together in their intimate connection, "bear witness" to the Redemption which, by the power of Christ's cross and resurrection, leads the world and humanity in the Holy Spirit towards that definitive fulfillment which man and-through man-the whole of creation find in God, and only in God. Your witness is therefore of inestimable value. You must constantly strive to make it fully transparent and fully fruitful in the world. A further aid to this will be the faithful observance of the Church's norms regarding also the outward manifestation of your consecration and of your commitment to poverty.⁹⁴

Apostolate

15. From this witness of spousal love for Christ, through which the entire salvific truth of the Gospel becomes particularly visible, there also comes, dear brothers and sisters, as something

⁹⁴ Cf. CIC, Canon 669.

proper to your vocation, a sharing in the Church's apostolate, in her universal mission which is accomplished contemporaneously in every nation in many different ways and through many different charisms. Your specific mission is in harmony with the mission of the Apostles, whom the Lord sent "to the whole world" to "teach all nations,"⁹⁵ and it is also linked to the mission of the hierarchical order. In the apostolate which consecrated persons exercise, their spousal love for Christ becomes, in an organic way as it were, love for the Church as the Body of Christ, for the Church as the People of God, for the Church which is at one and the same time Spouse and Mother.

It is difficult to describe, or even to list, the many different ways in which consecrated persons fulfill their love for the Church through the apostolate. This apostolate is always born from that particular gift of your founders, which, received from God and approved by the Church, has become a charism for the whole community. That gift corresponds to the different needs of the Church and the world at particular moments of history, and in its turn it is extended and strengthened in the life of the religious communities as one of the enduring elements of the Church's life and apostolate. In each of these elements, in each field-both of contemplation, so

⁹⁵ Cf. Mt. 28:19.

fruitful for the apostolate, and of direct apostolic action-the Church's constant blessing accompanies you, as does at the same time her pastoral and maternal solicitude, with regard to the spiritual identity of your life and the correctness of your activity in the midst of the great universal community of the vocations and charisms of the whole People of God. Through each of the institutes separately and through their organic integration in the whole of the Church's mission, special emphasis is given to that economy of the Redemption, the profound sign of which each one of you, dear brothers and sisters, bears within himself or herself through the consecration and profession of the evangelical counsels.

And thus, even though the many different apostolic works that you perform are extremely important, nevertheless the truly fundamental work of the apostolate remains always what (and at the same time who) you are in the Church. Of each one of you can be repeated, with special appropriateness, these words of St. Paul: "For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God."⁹⁶ And at the same time this "being hidden with Christ in God" makes it possible to apply to you the words of the Master Himself: "Let your light so shine before men, that they

⁹⁶ Col. 3:3.

may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."⁹⁷

For the sake of this light with which you must "shine before men," of great importance among you is the witness of mutual love, linked to the fraternal spirit of each community, for the Lord has said: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."⁹⁸

The fundamentally community nature of your religious life, nourished by the teaching of the Gospel, by the sacred liturgy and above all by the Eucharist, is a special way of accomplishing this interpersonal and social dimension: by caring for one another, by bearing one another's burdens, you show by your unity that Christ is living in your midst.⁹⁹ Important for your apostolate in the Church is every kind of sensitivity to the needs and sufferings of the individual, which are seen so clearly and so movingly in today's world. For the Apostle Paul teaches: "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ,"¹⁰⁰ and he adds that "love is the fulfilling of the law."¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Mt. 5:16.

⁹⁸ Jn. 13:35.

⁹⁹ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree *Perfectae caritatis*, no. 15.

¹⁰⁰ Gal. 6:2.

¹⁰¹ Rom. 13:10.

Your mission must be seen ! Deep, very deep must be the bond which links it to the Church !¹⁰² Through everything that you do, and especially through everything that you are, may the truth be proclaimed and reconfirmed that "Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her"¹⁰³ : the truth that is at the basis of the whole economy of the Redemption. From Christ, the Redeemer of the world, may the inexhaustible source of your love for the Church pour forth !

VII CONCLUSION

The Eyes Enlightening the Heart

16. This exhortation which I address to you on the Solemnity of the Annunciation in the Jubilee Year of the Redemption is meant to be an expression of that love which the Church has for men and women religious. You, dear brothers and sisters, are truly a special treasure of the Church. And this treasure becomes more understandable through meditation on the reality of the Redemption, for which the present Holy Year offers a continuous opportunity and a welcome encouragement. Recognize, therefore, in this light, your identity and your dignity. May the Holy Spirit-through Christ's cross and resurrection-"having the eyes of your hearts

¹⁰² The Code of Canon Law explicitly mentions this with regard to apostolic activity: cf. Canon 675, par. 3.

¹⁰³ Eph. 5:25.

enlightened," enable you "to know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints."¹⁰⁴

These "eyes enlightening the heart" the Church unceasingly asks for each one of you who have already taken the road of the profession of the evangelical counsels. The Church, together with you, asks for the same "enlightened eyes" for many Christians, especially for young men and women, that they may discover this way and not be afraid to enter upon it, that-even in the midst of the adverse circumstances of life today-they may hear Christ's "Follow me."¹⁰⁵ You too must strive for this through your prayer and also through the witness of that love whereby "God abides in us and his love is perfected in us."¹⁰⁶ May this witness become present everywhere and universally clear. May the people of our times, in their spiritual weariness, find in it both support and hope. Therefore, serve your brethren with the joy that wells up from a heart in which Christ has His dwelling. "And may the world of our time...be enabled to receive the Good News not from evangelizers who are dejected and discouraged...but from ministers of the Gospel

¹⁰⁴ Eph. 1:18.

¹⁰⁵ Lk. 5:27.

¹⁰⁶ 1 Jn. 4:12.

whose lives glow with fervor, who have first received the joy of Christ."¹⁰⁷

The Church, in her love for you, does not cease "kneeling before the Father,"¹⁰⁸ that He may effect in you "...the strengthening of the inner nature,"¹⁰⁹ and as in you, so also in many others of your baptized brothers and sisters, especially young people, so that they may find the same way to holiness which in the course of history so many generations have traveled together with Christ, the Redeemer of the world and Spouse of souls, often leaving behind them the bright radiance of God's light against the dark and gray background of human existence.

To all of you who travel this road in the present phase of the history of the Church and the world there is addressed this fervent hope of the Jubilee Year of the Redemption, that "you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have the power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, no. 80: AAS 68 (1976), p. 75.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Eph. 3:14.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Eph. 3:16.

¹¹⁰ Eph. 3:17-19.

Message of the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord

17. On the feast of the Annunciation in this Holy Year of the Redemption, I place the present exhortation in the heart of the immaculate Virgin. Among all persons consecrated unreservedly to God, she is the first. She-the Virgin of Nazareth-is also the one most fully consecrated to God, consecrated in the most perfect way. Her spousal love reached its height in the divine Motherhood through the power of the Holy Spirit. She, who as Mother carries Christ in her arms, at the same time fulfills in the most perfect way His call : "Follow me." And she follows Him-she, the Mother-as her Teacher of chastity, poverty and obedience.

How poor she was on Bethlehem night and how poor on Calvary ! How obedient she was at the moment of the Annunciation, and then-at the foot of the cross-obedient even to the point of assenting to the death of her Son, who became obedient "unto death" ! How dedicated she was in all her earthly life to the cause of the kingdom of heaven through most chaste love.

If the entire Church finds in Mary her first model, all the more reason do you find her so-you as consecrated individuals and communities within the Church ! On the day that calls to mind the inauguration of the Jubilee of the Redemption, which took place last year, I address

myself to you with this present message, to invite you to renew your religious consecration according to the model of the consecration of the very Mother of God.

Beloved brothers and sisters! "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."¹¹¹ Persevering in fidelity to Him who is faithful, strive to find a very special support in Mary! For she was called by God to the most perfect communion with His Son. May she, the faithful Virgin, also be the Mother of your evangelical way: may she help you to experience and to show to the world how infinitely faithful is God Himself!

With these hopes I bless you with all my heart.

From the Vatican, on March 25, in the Jubilee Year of the Redemption, 1984, the sixth of my Pontificate.

JOHN PAUL II

¹¹¹ 1 Cor. 1:9.