

CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE  
AND FOR SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE

***VERBI SPONSA***  
***Instruction on the Contemplative Life***  
***and on the Enclosure of Nuns***

**INTRODUCTION**

1. The Church as Bride of the Word shows forth in an exemplary way in those dedicated to a wholly contemplative life the mystery of her exclusive union with God. For this reason the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* presents the vocation and mission of cloistered nuns as “a sign of the exclusive union of the Church as Bride with her Lord, whom she loves above all things”, (1) showing how they are a unique grace and precious gift within the mystery of the Church's holiness.

In their undivided attention to the Father's word: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (*Mt* 3:17), and in their loving acceptance of that word, cloistered nuns are always “with Him on the holy mountain” (*2 Pt* 1:17-18). Fixing their gaze upon Christ Jesus, shrouded in the cloud of God's presence, they wholly cleave to the Lord. (2)

Cloistered nuns see themselves especially in the Virgin Mary, (3) Bride and Mother, figure of the Church; (4) and sharing the blessedness of those who believe (cf. *Lk* 1:45; 11:28), they echo her “Yes” and her loving adoration of the Word of life, becoming with her the living “memory” of the Church's spousal love (cf. *Lk* 2:19, 51). (5)

The esteem which the Christian community has always had for cloistered contemplative women has deepened with the rediscovery of the contemplative nature of the Church herself and of the call addressed to every Christian to enter a grace-filled encounter with God in prayer. Nuns, in living the whole of their life as “hidden with Christ in God” (*Col* 3:3), realize in a supreme way the contemplative vocation of the entire Christian people, (6) and thus they become a luminous sign of the Kingdom of God (cf. *Rom* 14:17), “glory of the Church and wellspring of heavenly graces”. (7)

2. Since the Second Vatican Council, various documents of the Magisterium have explored in depth the meaning and value of this way of life, promoting the contemplative dimension of cloistered communities and their specific role in the life of the Church. (8) In particular, the Council's Decree *Perfectae Caritatis* (No. 7 and No. 16) and the Instruction *Venite Seorsum* wonderfully illustrate the evangelical, theological, spiritual and ascetical roots of separation from the world for the sake of a complete and exclusive dedication to God in contemplation.

The Holy Father Pope John Paul II has often exhorted nuns to remain faithful to the cloistered life in keeping with their particular charism; and in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* he decreed that to this end specific norms be given for the

practical regulation of enclosure, continuing the path of renewal already undertaken, so that it may better suit the range of contemplative Institutes and the various monastic traditions. Thus, reborn of the Holy Spirit and faithful to their character and mission, cloistered nuns may move into the future with genuine momentum and renewed vigour. (9)

While reaffirming the doctrinal foundations of enclosure set out by the Instruction *Venite Seorsum* (I-V) and the Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (No. 59), this present Instruction establishes the norms which are to regulate the papal enclosure of nuns who are dedicated to a wholly contemplative life.

## **PART I**

### **THE MEANING AND VALUE OF THE ENCLOSURE OF NUNS**

#### ***In the mystery of the Son in his communion of love with the Father***

3. In a specific and radical way, cloistered contemplatives conform to Christ Jesus in prayer on the mountain and to his Paschal Mystery, which is death for the sake of resurrection. (10)

The ancient spiritual tradition of the Church, taken up by the Second Vatican Council, explicitly connects the contemplative life to the prayer of Jesus “on the mountain”, (11) or solitary place not accessible to all but only to those whom he calls to be with him, apart from the others (cf. *Mt* 17:1-9; *Lk* 6:12-13; *Mk* 6:30-31; *2 Pt* 1:16-18).

The Son is always united with the Father (cf. *Jn* 10:30; 17:11), but during his life there are special moments of solitude and prayer, encounter and communion, when he exults in his divine Sonship. In this way, he shows the loving impulse and ceaseless movement of his being as Son towards the One who begot him from all eternity.

This association of the contemplative life with the prayer of Jesus in a solitary place suggests a unique way of sharing in Christ's relationship with the Father. The Holy Spirit, who led Jesus into the desert (cf. *Lk* 4:1), invites the nun to share the solitude of Christ Jesus, who “with the eternal Spirit” (*Heb* 9:14) offered himself to the Father. The solitary cell, the closed cloister, are the place where the nun, bride of the Incarnate Word, lives wholly concentrated with Christ in God. The mystery of this communion is revealed to her to the extent that, docile to the Holy Spirit and enlivened by his gifts, she listens to the Son (cf. *Mt* 17:5), fixes her gaze upon his face (cf. *2 Cor* 3:18), and allows herself to be conformed to his life, to the point of the supreme self-offering to the Father (cf. *Phil* 2:5 ff.), for the praise of his glory.

The enclosure therefore, even in its physical form, is a special way of being with the Lord, of sharing in “Christ's emptying of himself by means of a radical poverty, expressed in ... renunciation not only of things but also of "space", of contacts, of so many benefits of creation”, (12) at one with the fruitful silence of the Word on the Cross. It is clear then that “withdrawal from the world in order to dedicate oneself in solitude to a more intense life of prayer is nothing other than a special way of living and expressing the Paschal

Mystery of Christ". (13) It is a true encounter with the Risen Lord, a journey in ceaseless ascent to the Father's house.

In watchful waiting for the Lord's return, the cloister becomes a response to the absolute love of God for his creature and the fulfilment of his eternal desire to welcome the creature into the mystery of intimacy with the Word, who gave himself as Bridegroom in the Eucharist (14) and remains in the tabernacle as the heart of full communion with him, drawing to himself the entire life of the cloistered nun in order to offer it constantly to the Father (cf. *Heb 7:25*). To the gift of Christ the Bridegroom, who on the Cross offered his body unreservedly, the nun responds in like terms with the gift of the "body", offering herself with Jesus Christ to the Father and cooperating with him in the work of redemption. Separation from the world thus gives a Eucharistic quality to the whole of cloistered life, since "besides its elements of sacrifice and expiation, [it assumes] the aspect of thanksgiving to the Father, by sharing in the thanksgiving of the beloved Son". (15)

#### ***In the mystery of the Church in her exclusive union with Christ the Bridegroom***

4. The history of God's relationship to humanity is a history of spousal love, prepared for in the Old Testament and celebrated in the fullness of time.

Divine Revelation uses the nuptial image to describe the intimate and indissoluble link between God and his people (cf. *Hos 1-2; Is 54:4-8; 62:4-5; Jer 2:2; Ezek 16; 2 Cor 11:2; Rom 11:29*).

The Son of God presents himself as the Bridegroom-Messiah (cf. *Mt 9:15; 25:1*), come to seal the marriage of God with humanity, (16) in a wondrous exchange of love, which begins in the Incarnation, comes to its summit of self-offering in the Passion and is for ever given as gift in the Eucharist.

The Lord Jesus pours into human hearts his love and the love of the Father, enabling them to respond fully, through the gift of the Holy Spirit who never ceases to cry out with the Bride: "Come!" (*Rev 22:17*). This fullness of grace and holiness is realized in "the Bride of the Lamb ... coming down out of heaven, from God, shining with the glory of God" (*Rev 21:9-10*).

The nuptial dimension belongs to the whole Church, but consecrated life is a vivid image of it, since it more clearly expresses the impulse towards the Bridegroom.(17)

In a still more significant and radical way, the mystery of the exclusive union of the Church as Bride with the Lord is expressed in the vocation of cloistered nuns, precisely because their life is entirely dedicated to God, loved above all else, in a ceaseless straining towards the heavenly Jerusalem and in anticipation of the eschatological Church confirmed in the possession and contemplation of God. (18) Their life is a reminder to all Christian people of the fundamental vocation of everyone to come to God; (19) and it is a foreshadowing of the goal towards which the entire community of the Church journeys, (20) in order to live for ever as the Bride of the Lamb.

By means of the cloister, nuns embody the exodus from the world in order to encounter God in the solitude of “cloistered desert”, a desert which includes inner solitude, the trials of the spirit and the daily toil of life in community (cf. *Eph* 4:15-16), as the Bride's sharing in the solitude of Jesus in Gethsemane and in his redemptive suffering on the Cross (cf. *Gal* 6:14).

Nuns moreover, by their very nature as women, show forth more powerfully the mystery of the Church as “the Spotless Bride of the Spotless Lamb”, rediscovering themselves individually in the spousal dimension of the wholly contemplative vocation. (21)

The monastic life of women has therefore a special capacity to embody the nuptial relationship with Christ and be a living sign of it: was it not in a woman, the Virgin Mary, that the heavenly mystery of the Church was accomplished? (22)

In this light, nuns relive and perpetuate in the Church the presence and the work of Mary. Welcoming the Word in faith and adoring silence, they put themselves at the service of the mystery of the Incarnation, and united to Christ Jesus in his offering of himself to the Father, they become co-workers in the mystery of Redemption. Just as in the Upper Room, Mary in her heart, with her prayerful presence, watched over the origins of the Church, so too now the Church's journey is entrusted to the loving heart and praying hands of cloistered nuns.

### ***The ascetical dimension of the cloister***

5. As an ascetical means of immense value, (23) the cloister is especially well suited to life wholly directed to contemplation. Its totality signals absolute dedication to God, and it therefore becomes a sign of God's holy watchfulness over his creatures and a unique mode of belonging to him alone. It is an archetypal and effective way of living the nuptial relationship with God in the exclusiveness of love and without undue interference from persons or material things, so that the creature, intent on God and absorbed by him, may live solely for the praise of his glory (cf. *Eph* 1:6, 10-12, 14).

The contemplative nun fulfils to the highest degree the First Commandment of the Lord: “You will love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, with all your mind” (*Lk* 10:27), making it the full meaning of her life and loving in God all the brothers and sisters. She moves towards the perfection of charity, choosing God as “the one thing necessary” (cf. *Lk* 10:42), loving him exclusively as All in all. Through her unconditional love of him and in the spirit of renunciation proposed by the Gospel (cf. *Mt* 13:45; *Lk* 9:23), (24) she accomplishes the sacrifice of all good things, “consecrating” every good thing to God alone. (25) This is so that he alone may dwell in the utter silence of the cloister, filling it with his word and presence, and the Bride may truly dedicate herself to the Only One, “in constant prayer and ardent penance” (26) in the mystery of a total and exclusive love.

This is the reason why the earliest spiritual tradition spontaneously associated complete withdrawal from the world (27) and all works of the apostolate with this kind of life, which thus becomes a silent emanation of love and superabundant grace in the pulsing

heart of the Church as Bride. Whether in a place apart or in the heart of the city, the monastery, with its distinctive architectural form, is intended to create a space of separation, solitude and silence, where God can be sought more freely in a life not only for him and with him but also in him alone.

Therefore it is necessary that the person, free from all attachment, disquiet or distraction, interior and exterior, may gather her faculties and turn to God to welcome his presence in the joy of adoration and praise.

Contemplation becomes the blessedness of the pure in heart (*Mt 5:8*). A pure heart is a clear mirror of what lies within the person, purified and unified in love, in whom God is reflected and abides; (28) it is like a polished crystal infused with God's light, giving forth the splendour it has received. (29)

In the light of contemplation, as loving communion with God, purity of heart finds its highest expression in virginity of spirit, because it requires the integrity of a heart not only purified from sin but unified in the movement towards God and which therefore loves completely and undividedly, reflecting the purest love of the Blessed Trinity, called by the Fathers "the first Virgin". (30)

The cloistered desert helps greatly in the pursuit of purity of heart understood in this way, because it reduces to the bare minimum the opportunities for contact with the outside world, lest it disrupt the monastery in different ways, disturbing its atmosphere of peace and holy union with the one Lord and with the Sisters. In this way the cloister eliminates in large part the dispersion which comes from many unnecessary contacts, from the accumulation of images, which are often a source of worldly thoughts and vain desires, of news and emotions which distract from the one thing necessary and dissipate interior harmony. "In the monastery everything is directed to the search for the face of God, everything is reduced to the essential, because the only thing that matters is what leads to him. Monastic recollection is attention to the presence of God: if it is dissipated by many things, the journey slows down and the final destination disappears from view". (31)

Withdrawn from things external in the intimacy of her being, purifying her heart and mind by an ardent journey of prayer, of renunciation, of fraternal life, of listening to the word of God, and exercise of the theological virtues, the nun is called to converse with the divine Bridegroom, meditating upon his law day and night so as to receive as gift the Wisdom of the Word and to become one with him, under the impulse of the Holy Spirit. (32)

This yearning for fulfilment in God, in an uninterrupted nostalgia of the heart which with unceasing desire turns to the contemplation of the Bridegroom, feeds the ascetical commitment of the cloistered nun. Wholly absorbed by his beauty, she finds in the cloister her dwelling-place of grace and an anticipation of the blessedness of the vision of the Lord. Refined by the purifying flame of the divine Presence, she readies herself for the fullness of beatitude, intoning in her heart the new song of the redeemed, on the Mountain of sacrifice and oblation, of the temple and of contemplation of God.

In consequence, the regulation of the cloister, in its practical aspects, must be such that it allows the realization of this sublime contemplative ideal, which implies total dedication, undivided attention, emotional wholeness and consistency of life.

### ***The sharing of contemplative nuns in the communion and mission of the Church***

#### *In the communion of the Church*

6. Through their specific call to union with God in contemplation, cloistered nuns are fully within the communion of the Church, becoming a unique sign of the entire Christian community's intimate union with God. Through prayer, especially the celebration of the liturgy, and their daily self-offering, they intercede for the whole people of God and unite themselves to Jesus Christ's thanksgiving to the Father (cf. *2 Cor* 1:20; *Eph* 5:19-20).

Therefore the contemplative life is the nun's particular way of being the Church, of building the communion of the Church, of fulfilling a mission for the good of the whole Church. (33) Cloistered contemplatives therefore are not asked to be involved in new forms of active presence, but to remain at the wellspring of Trinitarian communion, dwelling at the very heart of the Church. (34)

The cloistered community is also an excellent school of fraternal life; it is an expression of true communion and a force which draws towards communion. (35)

Because of the mutual love involved, fraternal life is a God-filled space in which the mystical presence of the Risen Lord is experienced: (36) in a spirit of communion, nuns share the grace of the same vocation with the members of their own community, helping one another to follow the same path, advancing together towards the Lord, one in heart and soul.

With monasteries of the same Order, nuns have the common duty to grow in faithfulness to their specific charism and spiritual heritage, cooperating if necessary in ways provided for by the Constitutions.

By force of their vocation, which sets them at the heart of the Church, nuns undertake in a special way to have “the mind of the Church (*sentire cum Ecclesia*)”, with sincere adherence to the Magisterium and unreserved obedience to the Pope.

#### *In the mission of the Church*

7. “The pilgrim Church is by her very nature missionary”; (37) therefore mission is also essential to Institutes of contemplative life. (38) Cloistered nuns fulfil that mission by dwelling at the missionary heart of the Church, by means of constant prayer, the oblation of self and the offering of the sacrifice of praise.

Their life thus becomes a mysterious source of apostolic fruitfulness (39) and blessing for the Christian community and for the whole world.

It is charity, poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit (cf. *Rom* 5:5), which makes nuns co-workers of the truth (cf. *3 Jn* v. 8), participants in Christ's work of Redemption (cf.

*Col* 1:24), and through their vital union with the other members of the Mystical Body makes their lives fruitful, wholly directed to the pursuit of charity, for the good of all. (40)

Saint John of the Cross writes that “truly a crumb of pure love is more precious in the Lord's sight and of greater benefit to the Church than all the other works together”. (41) In the wonderment of her splendid intuition, Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus declares: “I understood that the Church had a Heart and that this Heart was ablaze with love. I understood that Love alone enabled the Church's members to act . . . Yes, I found my place in the Church . . . at the heart of the Church, my Mother, I will be Love”. (42)

The insight of the Saint of Lisieux is the conviction of the Church, repeatedly voiced by the Magisterium: “The Church is deeply aware and, without hesitation she forcefully proclaims, that there is an intimate connection between prayer and the spreading of the Kingdom of God, between prayer and the conversion of hearts, between prayer and the fruitful reception of the saving and uplifting Gospel message”. (43)

The specific contribution of nuns to evangelization, to ecumenism, to the growth of the Kingdom of God in the different cultures, is eminently spiritual. It is the soul and leaven of apostolic ventures, leaving the practical implementation of them to those whose vocation it is. (44)

And since those who become the absolute property of God become God's gift to all, the life of nuns “is truly a gift set at the heart of the mystery of ecclesial communion, accompanying the apostolic mission of those who exert themselves in proclaiming the Gospel”. (45)

As a reflection and radiation of their contemplative life, nuns offer to the Christian community and to the world of today, more than ever in need of true spiritual values, a silent proclamation of the mystery of God and a humble witness to it, thus keeping prophecy alive in the nuptial heart of the Church. (46)

Their life, given wholly and in full freedom to the service of God's praise (cf. *Jn* 12:1-8), in itself proclaims and relays the primacy of God and the transcendence of the human person, created in his image and likeness. It is therefore a summons to everyone to “that space in the heart where every person is called to union with the Lord”. (47)

Living in and by the Lord's presence, nuns are a particular foreshadowing of the eschatological Church immutable in its possession and contemplation of God; they “visibly represent the goal towards which the entire community of the Church travels. Eager to act and yet devoted to contemplation”, the Church advances down the paths of time with her eyes fixed on the future restoration of all things in Christ”. (48)

#### *The monastery in the local Church*

8. The monastery is the place guarded by God (cf. *Zach* 2:9); it is the dwelling-place of his unique presence, like the Tent of Meeting where he is met day after day, where the thrice-Holy God fills the entire space and is recognized and honoured as the only Lord.

A contemplative monastery is a gift also for the local Church to which it belongs. Representing the prayerful face of the Church, a monastery makes the Church's presence more complete and meaningful in the local community. (49) A monastic community may be compared to Moses who, in prayer, determined the fate of Israel's battles (cf. *Ex* 17:11), or to the guard who keeps the night watch awaiting the dawn (cf. *Is* 21:6).

The monastery represents what is most intimate to a local Church – its heart, where the Spirit always groans in supplication for the entire community and where thanksgiving rises unceasingly for the Life which he sends forth each day (cf. *Col* 3:17).

It is important that the faithful learn to honour the charism and the specific role of contemplatives, their discreet but crucial presence, and their silent witness which constitutes a call to prayer and a reminder of the truth of God's existence.

As pastors and guides of all of God's flock, (50) the Bishops are the chief guardians of the contemplative charism. Therefore, they must nurture contemplative communities with the bread of the Word and the Eucharist, offering where necessary the spiritual assistance of properly trained priests. At the same time they share with the community the task of keeping watch so that, in today's society marked by dispersion, a lack of silence and illusory values, the life of monasteries, nourished by the Holy Spirit, may remain genuinely and wholly directed towards the contemplation of God.

Only in the perspective of their true and fundamental apostolic mission, which consists in “concerning themselves with God alone”, will monasteries be able – to the extent and in a way conforming to the spirit and tradition of their particular religious family – to welcome those who wish to draw from their spiritual experience or share in the community's prayer. Physical separation however should be maintained, in a way that recalls the meaning of contemplative life and safeguards the conditions for it, in conformity with the norms on enclosure set out in this Document. (51)

In a spirit of freedom and hospitality, “with the tenderness of Christ”, (52) nuns bear in their hearts the sufferings and anxieties of all those who seek their help, and indeed of all men and women. Deeply attuned to the experiences of the Church and of people today, they cooperate spiritually in building the Kingdom of Christ so that “God may be everything to everyone” (*1 Cor* 15:28).

## **PART II**

### **THE ENCLOSURE OF NUNS**

9. From the beginning and in a unique way, monasteries devoted to the contemplative life have found the enclosure a proven help in the fulfilment of their vocation. (53) The particular demands of separation from the world have thus been received by the Church and canonically ordered for the benefit of the contemplative life itself. The discipline of enclosure is therefore a gift, for it protects the foundational charism of monasteries.

Every contemplative Institute must faithfully maintain its form of separation from the world. Such fidelity is fundamental for the life of an Institute, which really endures only



as long as it remains rooted in its original charism. (54) For this reason the vital renewal of monasteries is essentially linked to the authenticity of the search for God in contemplation and the authenticity of the means which foster that search, and it must be considered genuine when it restores its original splendour.

It is the duty, the responsibility and the joy of nuns to understand, maintain and defend, firmly and intelligently, their special vocation, safeguarding the identity of their specific charism from any attempt to alter it, whether coming from within or from without.

### ***Papal enclosure***

10. “Monasteries of nuns who are wholly devoted to the contemplative life must observe papal enclosure, that is, in accordance with the norms given by the Apostolic See”. (55)

Since a stable and binding self-offering to God more fully expresses Christ's union with the Church his Bride, papal enclosure, with its particularly rigorous form of separation, better manifests and brings about the total dedication of nuns to Jesus Christ. The enclosure is the sign, the safeguard and the form (56) of the wholly contemplative life, lived as a total gift of self, embracing the entirety of the individual's intentions and actions, so that Jesus may be truly the Lord, the sole desire and sole happiness of the nun, joyful in her expectation and radiant in the anticipated contemplation of Christ's face.

Papal enclosure, for nuns, is a recognition of the specific character of the wholly contemplative life in its feminine form. By fostering in a unique way within the monastic tradition the spirituality of marriage with Christ, it becomes a sign and realization of the exclusive union of the Church as Bride with her Lord. (57)

Real separation from the world, silence and solitude, express and protect the integrity and identity of the wholly contemplative life, ensuring that it remains faithful to its specific charism and to the sound traditions of the Institute.

The Church's Magisterium has often restated the need for this manner of life, which is a source of grace and holiness for the Church, to be faithfully maintained. (58)

11. The wholly contemplative life, in order to be considered as coming under papal enclosure, must be solely and completely ordered to the attainment of union with God in contemplation.

An Institute is considered to be of wholly contemplative life if:

a) its members direct all their activity, interior and exterior, to the fervent and constant quest for union with God;

b) it excludes external works directed, even in a limited way, to the apostolate, and physical participation in events and ministries of the ecclesial community; (59) such participation therefore should not be requested of nuns, since it would become a counter witness to their true participation in the life of the Church and to their authentic mission;

c) it involves a separation from the world that is practical and effective, (60) and not merely symbolic. Every adaptation of the forms of separation from the outside world must be carried out in such a way “that physical separation is preserved”, (61) and it must be submitted to the approval of the Holy See.

### ***Enclosure according to the Constitutions***

12. Monasteries of nuns who profess the contemplative life but associate some work of the apostolate or charity to the primary purpose of divine worship do not follow papal enclosure.

Such monasteries carefully preserve their principal or predominant character of contemplation by engaging chiefly in prayer, asceticism and fervent spiritual progress, in the careful celebration of the liturgy, in the observance of their rule and in the discipline of separation from the world. They define in their Constitutions an enclosure befitting their specific character and in accordance with sound traditions. (62)

The Superior can give permission to enter or leave the enclosure in accordance with the Institute's particular law.

### ***Monasteries of nuns belonging to the ancient monastic tradition***

13. Monasteries of nuns belonging to the venerable monastic tradition, (63) expressed in the various forms of the contemplative life, when they are entirely devoted to divine worship and live a hidden life within the walls of the monastery, observe papal enclosure; if other activities of service to the People of God are associated with the contemplative life, or if they practice more extensive forms of hospitality in fidelity to the tradition of their Order, their enclosure is defined in their Constitutions. (64)

Every monastery or monastic Congregation either follows papal enclosure or defines its own enclosure in its Constitutions, with respect for its specific character.

## **NORMS FOR THE PAPAL ENCLOSURE OF NUNS**

### ***General Principles***

14. § 1. The enclosure of nuns of the wholly contemplative life is called papal, because the rules governing it must be confirmed by the Holy See, even in the case of norms to be specified in the Constitutions and in other legislative texts of the Institute (Statutes, Directories, etc.). (65)

Given the great variety of Institutes dedicated to the wholly contemplative life and given the variety of their traditions, some aspects of their separation from the world are left to particular law, and are subject to the approval of the Holy See.

Particular law can also lay down stricter norms regarding enclosure.

### *Extent of enclosure*

§ 2. The law of papal enclosure extends to the residence and to all areas, indoors and outdoors, reserved to the nuns.

The means by which the monastery building itself, the choir, the parlours and all areas reserved to the nuns are separated from the outside must be physical and effective, not just symbolic or “neutral”. These means are to be defined in the Constitutions and supplementary legislative documents, with due regard both for the places themselves and for the different traditions of individual Institutes and monasteries.

The participation of the faithful in the liturgy is not a reason for the nuns to leave the enclosure nor for the faithful to enter the nuns' choir. Guests cannot be allowed to enter the monastery enclosure.

### *The obligation of enclosure*

§ 3. *a)* By virtue of the law of enclosure, nuns, novices and postulants must live within the enclosure of the monastery, and it is not permissible for them to leave it, except in cases provided for by law; nor is it permissible for anyone to enter the area of the enclosure of the monastery, with the exception of cases provided for by law.

§ 3. *b)* Norms concerning the separation from the world of extern Sisters are to be defined by particular law.

§ 3. *c)* The law of enclosure entails a grave obligation of conscience both for the nuns and for outsiders.

### *Entering and leaving the enclosure*

15. The granting of permission to enter and to leave the enclosure always requires a just and grave cause, (66) dictated, that is, by genuine need on the part of the individual nun or the monastery: this is required to safeguard the conditions demanded by the wholly contemplative life and, on the part of the nuns, it is a requirement of consistency with the vocation they have chosen. By its very nature then, every entry into or exit from the enclosure must constitute an exception.

The custom of recording entrances and exits in a book may be maintained, at the discretion of the conventual Chapter, also as a contribution to knowledge of the monastery's life and history.

16. § 1. The Superior of the monastery is responsible directly for the custody of the enclosure, for ensuring the practical conditions of separation from the world, and for promoting, within the monastery, the love of silence, recollection and prayer.

It is she who makes a judgement regarding the advisability of entries and exits from the enclosure, weighing with prudence and discretion whether they are necessary in the light of the wholly contemplative vocation, in accordance with to the norms of the present document and of the Constitutions.

§ 2. The entire community has the moral obligation of protecting, promoting and observing papal enclosure, in such a way that secondary or subjective motivations do not take precedence over the purpose of separation.

17. § 1. Permission to leave the enclosure, apart from particular indults of the Holy See or cases of extremely grave and imminent danger, is given by the Superior in ordinary cases involving the health of the nuns, the care of infirm nuns, the exercise of civil rights and needs of the monastery which cannot otherwise be provided for.

§ 2. For other just and grave reasons the Superior, with the consent of her Council or the conventual Chapter, and in accordance with the norms contained in the Constitutions, can authorize a departure for whatever time is needed, not however beyond one week. If the stay outside the monastery has to be further extended, up to three months, the Superior will seek the authorization of the Diocesan Bishop, (67) or the regular Superior if there is one. Should the absence exceed three months, other than in cases of health care, permission must be obtained from the Holy See.

The Superior will also apply these rules in authorizing departures for the sake of taking part, when necessary, in courses of religious formation organized by monasteries. (68)

It should be kept in mind that the norm of Canon 665, 1 concerning residence outside the Institute does not apply to cloistered nuns.

§ 3. To send novices or professed nuns, when necessary, (69) for part of their formation in another monastery of the Order, and to effect temporary or definitive transfers (70) to other monasteries of the Order, the Superior will express her consent, with the intervention of her Council or of the conventual Chapter as required by the Constitutions.

18. § 1. Entry into the enclosure is permitted, apart from particular indults of the Holy See:

– to Cardinals, who may have someone accompanying them; to Apostolic Nuncios and Delegates in places subject to their jurisdiction; to Visitators during a canonical visitation, and to the Diocesan Bishop or the regular Superior, for a just reason.

– § 2. With the permission of the Superior:

– to a priest for the purpose of administering the Sacraments to the sick, assisting those suffering from protracted or serious illness and, when necessary celebrating Holy Mass for them from time to time. When the occasion arises, for liturgical processions and funerals;

– to those whose work or skills are needed to care for the health of the nuns or to provide for the needs of the monastery.

– to the monastery's own aspirants and to visiting nuns, should this be provided for in particular law.

### ***Meetings of nuns***

19. With the prior authorization of the Holy See, meetings of nuns belonging to the same contemplative Institute within the same nation or region can be organized, if motivated by a genuine need for common reflection, provided that the nuns freely agree and such meetings do not take place too frequently. These meetings should preferably be held in a monastery of the Order.

Federations of monasteries are to define in their statutes the frequency and the organization of federal Assemblies, with due respect for the spirit and the demands of the wholly contemplative life.

### ***The means of social communications***

20. Rules regarding the means of social communications in all their present-day forms are aimed at safeguarding the spirit of recollection; contemplative silence can in fact be undermined when noise, news and talk fill the enclosure.

The communications media should be used with moderation and discretion, (71) not only with regard to the content but also the amount and the medium itself. It should be remembered that, inasmuch as contemplatives are accustomed to interior silence, the media have a more powerful impact on their sensitivity and emotions, making recollection more difficult.

The use of radio and television can be permitted on particular occasions of a religious character.

With prudent discernment and for everyone's benefit, in accordance with the decisions of the conventual Chapter, the use of other modern means of communication, such as fax machines, cellular telephones or the Internet, may be permitted in the monastery, for the exchange of information or for reasons of work.

Nuns should make efforts to be duly informed about the Church and the world, not through the great volume of news, but by wise discernment of what is essential in the light of God, in order to make this a part of their prayer, in union with the heart of Christ.

### ***Vigilance over the enclosure***

21. The Diocesan Bishop or the regular Superior are to exercise vigilance over the custody of the enclosure of monasteries entrusted to their care and are to defend it, to the extent of their competence, assisting the Superior, who is responsible for its direct custody.

The Diocesan Bishop or the regular Superior do not ordinarily intervene in the granting of dispensations from enclosure, but only in particular cases, as provided for in the present Instruction.

During the canonical visitation, the Visitor must ascertain whether the norms of enclosure and the spirit of separation from the world are being observed.

The Church, by virtue of her profound esteem for their vocation, encourages nuns to remain faithful to the cloistered life and to express responsibly in their lives the spirit and discipline of enclosure, in order to foster in the community a fuller and more fruitful contemplation of the Triune God.

### PART III

#### PERSEVERANCE IN FIDELITY

##### *Formation*

22. The formation of cloistered nuns is aimed at preparing them for total consecration of self to God in the following of Christ, according to the form of life ordered solely to contemplation, which is proper to their particular mission in the Church. (72)

Formation must influence the individual at the deepest level, aiming at involving the whole person in a progressive journey of conformity to Jesus Christ and to his total self-giving to the Father. The method proper to formation must therefore assume and express the character of wholeness, (73) educating to wisdom of heart. (74) Because it is aimed at the transformation of the whole person, it is clear that this formation never ends.

The particular requirements of the formation of those called to a wholly contemplative life are set forth in the Instruction *Potissimum Institutioni* (Part IV, 72-85).

The formation of contemplative nuns is primarily formation in faith, in which are found “the foundation and first fruits of authentic contemplation”. (75) Through faith the person learns to discern the constant presence of God in order to cleave in charity to his mystery of communion.

To a large extent the renewal of the contemplative life is dependent on the formation given to individual nuns and to the whole community, in order that they may reach the fulfilment of the divine plan by assimilating their specific charism.

23. For this purpose, the formative programme, inspired by the specific charism, takes on particular importance. It comprises, although they are clearly distinct, the initial years up to solemn or perpetual profession and the following years, which should aim at ensuring perseverance in fidelity for the whole of life. To this end, enclosed communities should draw up a suitable *ratio formationis*, (76) which will become part of their proper law, after submission to the Holy See, with the prior deliberative vote of the conventual Chapter.

The cultural context of our time implies that Institutes of contemplative life should ensure a level of preparation suited to the dignity and requirements of this state of consecrated life. Monasteries should therefore require that candidates, before they are admitted to the novitiate, have that degree of personal, affective, human and spiritual maturity which makes them capable of understanding the nature of a life completely directed to contemplation in the cloister and likely to persevere. Individual candidates should be fully aware of the obligations proper to the enclosed life, and they should come to accept them

during the first period of formation, and certainly before the profession of solemn or perpetual vows. (77)

Study of the word of God, the tradition of the Fathers, the documents of the Magisterium, liturgy, spirituality and theology should constitute the doctrinal basis of formation, aiming at presenting the foundations of knowledge of the mystery of God contained in Christian revelation, “scrutinizing in the light of faith all truth stored up in the mystery of Christ”. (78)

Contemplative life must always draw from the mystery of God, hence it is essential to give nuns the foundations and methods for a personal and community formation which is continuous and not restricted to occasional experiences.

24. The general norm is that the entire cycle of initial and permanent formation should be carried out within the monastery. The absence of external activities and the stability of the members ensure that the different stages of formation can be followed gradually and with greater participation. In her own monastery, the nun grows and matures in the spiritual life and arrives at the grace of contemplation. Formation in one's own monastery also has the advantage of promoting the harmony of the entire community. The monastery, moreover, with its characteristic environment and rhythm of life, is the most suitable place for following the course of formation, (79) since the daily nourishment of the Eucharist, the liturgy, *lectio divina*, Marian devotion, ascetic practices and work, the exercise of fraternal charity and the experience of solitude and silence, are essential moments and elements of formation in the contemplative life.

The Superior of a monastery, as the person principally responsible for formation, (80) is to ensure that candidates have a suitable initial course of formation. She is also to promote the permanent formation of the nuns, by teaching them to nourish themselves on the mystery of God who continually gives himself in the liturgy and in the various moments of monastic life, by giving them the necessary instruments for their spiritual and doctrinal formation and, finally, by encouraging them to grow continuously as a requirement of fidelity to the gift of the divine call which is ever new.

Formation is a right and a duty of every monastery, which may also draw on the cooperation of people from outside, especially from the Institute with which they are associated. If it is the case, the Superior may allow courses relating to the material of the formation programme of the monastery to be followed by correspondence.

When a monastery cannot be self-sufficient, some shared instruction may be organized in one of the monasteries of the same Institute, ordinarily of the same geographical area. The monasteries concerned shall determine the form, frequency and duration of these courses, in such a way that the fundamental character of the enclosed contemplative vocation and the obligations of their own *ratio formationis* are respected. The law of enclosure holds also for absences for reasons of formation. (81)

Attendance at courses of formation cannot however substitute for systematic and gradual formation in one's own community.

Every monastery should in fact be able to find within itself the resources to ensure its own vitality and future; for this reason it needs to become self-sufficient, especially in the area of formation, which cannot be directed at only some of its members but should involve the entire community, in order that it may be a place of fervent progress and spiritual growth.

### ***Autonomy of the monastery***

25. The Church recognizes every monastery “sui iuris” as possessing legitimate juridical autonomy of life and government in order that it may have its own discipline and be capable of preserving intact its own heritage. (82)

Autonomy favours stability of life and the internal unity of every community, and guarantees the best conditions for the exercise of contemplation.

This autonomy is a right of the monastery, which is autonomous by its own nature, and therefore cannot be restricted or diminished by external interventions. Autonomy does not however mean independence from ecclesiastical authority, but is just, right and opportune in order to protect the nature and proper identity of a monastery of wholly contemplative life.

The local Ordinary has the responsibility of preserving and safeguarding this autonomy. (83)

The Diocesan Bishop, in monasteries entrusted to his supervision, (84) or the regular Superior, where one exists, exercise their charge according to the laws of the Church and the Constitutions. These laws should indicate what falls within their competence, in particular with regard to presiding at elections, the canonical visitation and the administration of goods.

Since monasteries are autonomous and independent of one another, any form of coordination between them, with a view to the common good, requires the free accord of the monasteries themselves and the approval of the Holy See.

### ***Relations with Institutes of men***

26. Over the centuries the Holy Spirit has given rise in the Church to religious families made up of different branches, essentially united in the same spirituality but distinct from one another and often differing in their way of life.

Monasteries of nuns have had different kinds of bonds with the corresponding Institutes of men, bonds which in practice have been applied in different ways.

A relationship between monasteries and the corresponding Institute of men, as long as the discipline of enclosure is safeguarded, can favour growth in their common spirituality. In this light, the association of monasteries with the male Institute, while respecting the juridical autonomy proper to each, aims at preserving in the monasteries themselves the



genuine spirit of the religious family with a view to its concrete expression in a solely contemplative dimension.

A monastery associated with an Institute of men retains its own rule of life and governance. (85) For this reason, the definition of reciprocal rights and obligations, aimed at the spiritual good, must safeguard the effective autonomy of the monastery.

In the new vision and perspective in which the Church today envisages the role and presence of women, it is necessary to overcome, wherever it may still exist, that form of juridical supervision by Orders of men and regular Superiors which *de facto* limits the autonomy of monasteries of nuns.

Men Superiors are to carry out their task in a spirit of cooperation and humble service, without creating improper submission to themselves, in order that the nuns may make decisions regarding all that concerns their religious life with freedom of spirit and a sense of responsibility.

## **PART IV**

### **ASSOCIATIONS AND FEDERATIONS**

27. Associations and Federations are a means of ensuring support and coordination between monasteries, in order that the latter may properly fulfil their vocation in the Church. Their principal purpose is therefore to safeguard and promote the values of the contemplative life in the monasteries which belong to them. (86)

Such bodies are to be promoted, especially where other effective forms of coordination and help are lacking, and Communities might find themselves in the position of not being able to respond to basic needs of various kinds.

The norms of this document referring to Federations are equally valid for Associations, with due regard for their juridical nature and their own Statutes.

The setting up of any form of Association, Federation or Confederation of monasteries of nuns is reserved to the Holy See, which likewise approves their Statutes, exercises the necessary vigilance and authority over them, (87) associates monasteries with them or separates monasteries from them.

The decision to belong or not to such bodies depends on each community, whose freedom must be respected.

28. The Federation, insofar as it is at the service of monasteries, must respect their juridical autonomy, does not have governing power over them, and therefore cannot decide all matters that refer to the monasteries; nor is it representative of the Order.

Federated monasteries live their fraternal communion in a way that corresponds to their cloistered vocation, not by multiplying meetings and shared experiences, but by their reciprocal support and their promptness in replying to requests for help, contributing according to their possibilities and respecting one another's independence.

In the spirit of evangelical service, Federations are meant to respond to the practical and real needs of Communities, fostering their dedication to the search for God alone, regular observance and the dynamics of internal unity. The help which Federations can offer in solving shared problems chiefly concerns: the appropriate renewal and reorganization of monasteries, formation both initial and continuing, and mutual financial support. (88)

The forms of collaboration between monasteries and the Federation are proposed and determined by the Assembly of the Superiors of the monasteries, who, on the basis of the approved Statutes, indicate the tasks that the Federation should undertake in order to benefit and help the monasteries.

The Holy See usually names a religious Assistant to whom it can delegate, as far as considered necessary or in particular cases, certain faculties and tasks. It is the Assistant's charge: to ensure that the Order's genuine spirit of life entirely dedicated to contemplation is preserved and increased within the Federation; in a spirit of fraternal service to help in the running of the Federation and in economic problems of greater importance; to contribute to the solid formation of novices and professed members.

### ***Formation***

29. Any help which the Federation may offer in the field of formation is subsidiary. (89) The Federations should draw up a *ratio formationis*, containing the practical norms to be applied, (90) which will then become part of the particular law of a monastery, after submission to the Holy See, with the prior consent of the conventual Chapter of the monastery in question.

Each monastery has of right its own Novitiate. However, while avoiding any centralization, the Federation can establish a Novitiate and other educational courses for those monasteries which, because of a lack of candidates or teachers, or for other reasons, are not self-sufficient and freely wish to avail themselves of the same; these formation programmes are to be determined in the *ratio formationis* and should be held in a monastery, ordinarily of the Federation, (91) with respect for the fundamental demands of the cloistered contemplative life.

Federations should aim to make Communities gradually self-sufficient, especially in regard to continuing formation, which involves a spiritual and intellectual commitment which is not intermittent but continuous, and which favours the growth in monasteries of a contemplative culture and outlook.

### ***Renewing and supporting monasteries***

30. Federations can effectively help to give new vigour to monasteries, by revitalizing their vocational drive on the basis of the essential points of their spirituality, in the wholly contemplative dimension of their way of life, and by fostering the fervent observance of the rule and the Constitutions.

Monasteries belonging to a Federation are obliged to help one another, including, when truly necessary and avoiding instability, by means of the exchange of nuns. (92)

Nevertheless, it belongs to each community to decide whether to make a request and how to answer a request, in accordance with its possibilities.

Monasteries which are no longer able to guarantee a regular life, or find themselves in particularly difficult circumstances, can appeal to the President and her Council in order to find a suitable solution.

In the case of a community which is no longer in a position to act in a free, autonomous and responsible way, the President will notify the Diocesan Bishop and the regular Superior where there is one, and submit the case to the Holy See. (93)

## CONCLUSION

31. The intention of this Instruction is to confirm the Church's high esteem for the wholly contemplative life of cloistered nuns, and to reaffirm her concern to safeguard its authentic nature, "that this world may never be without a ray of divine beauty to lighten the path of human existence". (94)

May the Holy Father Pope John Paul II's words of blessing be of support and encouragement to all cloistered contemplatives: "As the Apostles, gathered in prayer with Mary and the other women in the Upper Room, were filled with the Holy Spirit (cf. *Acts* 1:14), so the community of the faithful hopes today to be able to experience, thanks also to your prayer, a renewed Pentecost for a more effective Gospel testimony on the threshold of the Third Millennium. Dear Sisters, I entrust to Mary, faithful Virgin and House consecrated to God, your Communities and each one of you. May the Mother of the Lord grant that from your monasteries a ray of that light which enveloped the world when the Word was made flesh and came to live among us should shine forth again!". (95)

On 1 May 1999, the Holy Father approved this present document of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, and authorized its publication.

*From the Vatican, 13 May 1999, the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord.*

Eduardo Card. Martínez Somalo  
*Prefect*

Piergiorgio Silvano Nesti  
*Secretary*

## INDEX

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Part I – The meaning and value of the enclosure of nuns**

In the mystery of the Son in his communion of love with the Father

In the mystery of the Church in her exclusive union with Christ the Bridegroom

The ascetical dimension of the cloister

The sharing of contemplative nuns in the communion and mission of the Church

## **Part II – The enclosure of nuns**

Papal enclosure

Enclosure according to the Constitutions

Monasteries of nuns belonging to the ancient monastic tradition

### **NORMS FOR THE PAPAL ENCLOSURE OF NUNS**

General Principles

Entering and leaving the enclosure

Meetings of nuns

The means of social communications

Vigilance over the enclosure

## **Part III – Perseverance in fidelity**

Formation

Autonomy of the monastery

Relations with Institutes of men

## **Part IV – Associations and federations**

### **CONCLUSION**

(1) John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Consecrated Life and its Mission in the Church and the World, *Vita Consecrata* (25 March 1996), 59.

(2) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 8; John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (25 March 1996), 14; 32; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 555; Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, 45, 4 ad 2: “The entire Trinity appears: the Father in the voice, the Son in the man, the Spirit in the shining cloud”; Cassian, *Collationes*, 10, 6: *PL* 49, 827: “The sole reason why he withdrew to the mountain to pray was to teach us in this way, giving us an example of the hidden life, so that we too, if we wish to call upon God with pure and undivided tenderness of heart, should similarly withdraw from all human turmoil and confusion”; William of Saint Thierry, *Ad Fratres*

*de Monte Dei*, I, 1: *PL* 184, 310: “The Lord himself lived the solitary life in close union with others when he was with the disciples and was transfigured on the holy mountain, stirring in them such a desire that Peter said immediately: How happy I would be to dwell here for ever!”.

(3) Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (25 March 1996), 28; 112.

(4) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, 63.

(5) Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater* (25 March 1987), 43; Address to Cloistered Nuns, Loreto (10 September 1995), 2: “What is the enclosed life if not an unceasing renewal of a 'yes' which opens the doors of one's being to welcome the Saviour? You speak this 'yes' in a daily assent to the work of God and in tireless contemplation of the mysteries of salvation”.

(6) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 2; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Certain Aspects of Christian Meditation *Orationis Formas* (15 October 1989), 1; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2566-2567.

(7) Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life *Perfectae Caritatis*, 7; cf. John Paul II, Angelus (17 November 1996): “What an inestimable treasure for the Church and for society are communities of contemplative life!”.

(8) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 46; Paul VI, Motu Proprio *Ecclesiae Sanctae* (6 August 1966), II, 30-31; Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, *The Contemplative Dimension of Religious Life* (12 August 1980), 24-29; Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Instruction *Potissimum Institutioni* (2 February 1990), IV, 72-85; John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (25 March 1996), 8; 59.

(9) Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete in Domino* (9 May 1975), VI: “The Church in fact, reborn of the Holy Spirit, in so far as she remains faithful to her task and mission, must be seen as the true 'youthfulness of the world'”.

(10) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 46; *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 577; Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, Instruction on the Contemplative Life and on the Enclosure of Nuns *Venite Seorsum* (15 August 1969), I; John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (25 March 1996), 59; Address to Cloistered Nuns, Nairobi (7 May 1980), 3: “In your lives of prayer, moreover, Christ's praise of his Eternal Father goes on. The totality of his love for his Father and of his obedience to the Father's will is reflected in your radical consecration of love. His selfless immolation for his Body, the Church, finds expression in the offering of your lives in union with his sacrifice”.

(11) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 46; John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (25 March 1996), 14.

(12) John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (25 March 1996), 59.

(13) Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, Instruction on the Contemplative Life and on the Enclosure of Nuns *Venite Seorsum* (15 August 1969), I.

(14) Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* (15 August 1988), 26: “We find ourselves at the very heart of the Paschal Mystery, which completely reveals the spousal love of God. Christ is the Bridegroom, because 'he has given himself': his body has been 'given', his blood has been 'poured out' (cf. *Lk* 22:19-20). In this way, he 'loved them to the end' (*Jn* 13:1). The 'sincere gift', contained in the sacrifice of the Cross, gives definitive prominence to the spousal meaning of God's love. As the Redeemer of the world, Christ is the Bridegroom of the Church. *The Eucharist is the Sacrament of our Redemption. It is the Sacrament of the Bridegroom and of the Bride*”.

(15) John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (25 March 1996), 59; cf. Letter to Cloistered Nuns on the Occasion of the Eighth Centenary of the Birth of Saint Clare of Assisi (11 August 1993): “In reality, Clare's whole life was a *eucharist* because ... from her cloister she raised up a continual 'thanksgiving' to God in her prayer, praise, supplication, intercession, weeping, offering and sacrifice. She accepted everything and offered it to the Father in union with the infinite 'thanks' of the only-begotten Son”; Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity, *Writings*, Retreat 10, 2: “Praise of glory always involves thanksgiving. All its actions, its movements, its thoughts and aspirations, just as they root the praise of glory more deeply in love, are like an echo of the eternal Sanctus”.

(16) Cf. Saint Gregory the Great, *Homiliae in Evangelia*, Homily 38, 3: *PL* 76, 1283: “In fact, then, God the Father celebrated the marriage of God his Son, when in the womb of the Virgin he joined Him to human nature, since he willed that the one who was God before all ages should become man at the end of the ages”; Saint Anthony of Padua, *Sermons*, Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost, I, 4: “Wisdom, the Son of God, has built the house of his humanity in the womb of the Blessed Virgin, a house upheld by seven columns, that is by the gifts of sevenfold grace. This is the same as saying: I celebrated the marriage of his Son”; John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Dies Domini* (31 May 1998), 12: “God reveals himself as the bridegroom before the bride (cf. *Hos* 2:16-24; *Jer* 2:2; *Is* 54:4-8). ... we need to recognize in both the Old and the New Testament the nuptial intensity which marks the relationship between God and his people. Hosea, for instance, puts it thus in this marvellous passage: ‘...I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord' (2:18-20)”.

(17) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life *Perfectae Caritatis*, 12: “...they recall that wonderful marriage made by

God which will appear fully in the age to come and through which the Church has Christ as her only Spouse”; John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (25 March 1996), 3; 34.

(18) Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (25 March 1996), 59.

(19) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 19: “The supreme ground of the dignity of man is his calling to communion with God”.

(20) Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (25 March 1996), 59; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 2.

(21) Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (25 March 1996), 34; Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* (15 August 1988), 20; Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, Instruction on the Contemplative Life and on the Enclosure of Nuns *Venite Seorsum* (15 August 1969), IV.

(22) Cf. Saint Ambrose, *De Institutione Virginis*, 24: *PL* 16, 326-327.

(23) Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (25 March 1996), 59.

(24) Cf. Saint Benedict, *Regula*, 72, 11: “Absolutely nothing is to be placed before Christ”: *CSEL* 75, 5.163; Maximus the Confessor, *Liber Asceticus*, 43: *PG* 90, 953 B: “Let us give ourselves whole-heartedly to the Lord that we may welcome him without reserve”; John Paul II, Letter to the Discalced Nuns of the Order of the Blessed Virgin of Mount Carmel (31 May 1982): “I do not doubt that the Carmelites of today no less than those of the past are moving joyfully towards the goal of this absolute, in order to respond rightly to the deep aspirations which spring from a total love for Christ and an unreserved dedication to the mission of the Church”.

(25) Cf. Saint Gregory the Great, *Homiliae in Ezechielem*, Liber 2, Homily 8, 16: *CCL* 142, 348: “When a person offers to Almighty God all that she has, her whole life, all that she enjoys, she is a holocaust ... And that is what is done by those who leave the world”.

(26) Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life *Perfectae Caritatis*, 7.

(27) Cf. Saint Augustine, *Sermo* 339, 4: *PL* 38, 1481: “No-one would surpass me in love of a secure and tranquil life of contemplation; there is nothing better, nothing sweeter than to ponder the divine treasure far from all clamour. It is sweet and it is good”; Guigo I, “In Praise of the Solitary Life”, *Consuetudines*, 80, 11: *PL* 153, 757-758: “Above all else, solitude is an act which favours sweetness of psalmody, application to reading, fervour in prayer, far-reaching meditation, ecstatic contemplation and the baptism of tears”; Saint Eucherius of Lyons, “De Laude Eremiti”, *Epistola ad Hilarium*, 3: *PL* 50, 702-703:

“Rightly I call the hermit a boundless temple of our God. ... Beyond doubt it must be believed that God is most immediately there, where he is to be found more easily”.

(28) Cf. Saint Basil, *The True Integrity of Virginity*, 49: PG 30, 765: “The soul of the virgin, the bride of Christ, is like a pure spring...; it should not be stirred up by words coming from without and addressed to the ear nor distracted from its serene tranquillity by images which strike the eye, so that, contemplating as in a most clear mirror its image and the beauty of the Bridegroom, the soul may be filled more and more with its true love”.

(29) Cf. Saint John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, 2, 5, 6.

(30) Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, *Poems*, I, 2, 1, v. 20: PG 37, 523.

(31) John Paul II, Address to Cloistered Nuns, Loreto (10 September 1995), 3.

(32) Cf. Saint Bonaventure, “In Honour of Saint Agnes, Virgin and Martyr”, *Sermon 1: Opera Omnia*, IX, 504 b: “When a person tastes the Lord's sweetness, he withdraws from all external activity; then he enters into his heart and opens himself fully to the contemplation of God, turning completely to the eternal splendours; then he becomes radiant and is swept up by the splendour eternal. If the soul sees him who is most incomparably beautiful, not all the bonds of this world can keep the soul from him”.

(33) Cf. Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, *The Contemplative Dimension of Religious Life* (12 August 1980), 26; Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated life and Societies of Apostolic life, Instruction *Fraternal Life in Community* (2 February 1994), 59: “The contemplative type of community (showing forth Christ on the mountain) is centred on the twofold communion with God and among its members. It has a most efficacious apostolic impact, even though it remains to a great extent hidden in mystery”; John Paul II, Address to the Clergy, Consecrated Persons and Cloistered Nuns, Chiavari (18 September 1998), 4: “And now a special word to you, dear cloistered nuns, who are the sign of the exclusive union of the Church as Bride with her Lord who is loved above all else. You are impelled by an irresistible attraction which draws you towards God, the final goal of all that you feel and do. Contemplation of God's beauty has become your inheritance, your life's programme, your way of being present in the Church”.

(34) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 4: “Thus the whole Church appears as ?the people gathered together by the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit”; Saint Cyprian, *De Dominica Oratione*, 23: PL 4, 536.

(35) Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (25 March 1996), 46; Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated life and Societies of Apostolic life, Instruction *Fraternal Life in Community* (2 February 1994), 10: “Fraternal life in common, in a monastery, is called to be a living sign of the mystery of the Church”.



(36) Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (25 March 1996), 42.

(37) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 2.

(38) Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (25 March 1996), 72; Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 23.

(39) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life *Perfectae Caritatis*, 7; John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (25 March 1996), 8; 59.

(40) Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 953; Saint Clare of Assisi, *Third Letter to Agnes of Prague*, 8; *Writings*, SC 325, 102: “And to make my own the words of the Apostle, I esteem you as a fellow-worker of God himself and an upholder of the weak and vacillating members of his ineffable Body”.

(41) *Spiritual Canticle* 29, 2; cf. John Paul II, Homily in the Vatican Basilica (30 November 1997): “I ask the cloistered nuns in particular to set themselves at the very heart of Mission by their constant prayer of adoration and contemplation of the mystery of the Cross and Resurrection”.

(42) Manuscript B, 3v.

(43) John Paul II, Address to Cloistered Nuns, Nairobi (7 May 1980), 2; cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 40: “Institutes of contemplative life, by their prayer, penance and suffering, have a very great importance in the conversion of souls, because it is God who, when beseeched, sends labourers into his harvest (cf *Mt* 9:38), opens the souls of non-Christians to hear the Gospel (cf. *Acts* 16:14), and makes the word of salvation fruitful in their hearts (cf. *I Cor* 3:7)”.

(44) Cf. Blessed Jordan of Saxony, *Letter IV to Blessed Diana d'Andolò*: “What you achieve in your stillness, I achieve by moving from place to place: all this we do for love of him. He is our sole end”.

(45) John Paul II, Address to Cloistered Nuns, Loreto (10 September 1995), 4.

(46) Cf. Saint Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 4, 20, 8f.: *PG* 7, 1037: “It is not only in speaking that prophets prophesied, but also in contemplating and conversing with God and in their every action, accomplishing all that Spirit prompted them to do”.

(47) John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (25 March 1996), 59.

(48) *Ibid.*

(49) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 18.

(50) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 45; Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops *Christus Dominus*, 15; *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 586, 2.

(51) Cf. Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes and Sacred Congregation for Bishops, Directive *Mutuae Relationes* (14 May 1978), 25; Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, *The Contemplative Dimension of Religious Life* (12 August 1980), 26.

(52) Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 46.

(53) Cf. Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, Instruction on the Contemplative Life and the Enclosure of Nuns *Venite Seorsum* (15 August 1969), VII.

(54) Cf. John Paul II, Address at the Plenary Meeting of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes (7 March 1980), 3: “The abandonment of the enclosure would mean loss of what is specific in one of the forms of religious life, with which the Church manifests to the world the preeminence of contemplation over action, of what is eternal over what is temporal”.

(55) *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 667, 3; cf. Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, Instruction on the Contemplative Life and the Enclosure of Nuns *Venite Seorsum* (15 August 1969), Normae, 1.

(56) Cf. Paul VI, Motu Proprio *Ecclesiae Sanctae* (6 August 1966), II, 30.

(57) Cf. Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, Instruction on the Contemplative Life and the Enclosure of Nuns *Venite Seorsum* (15 August 1969), IV.

(58) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life *Perfectae Caritatis*, 7; John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (25 March 1996), 8; 59; Address to Cloistered Nuns, Lisieux (2 June 1980), 4: “Love your separation from the world, perfectly comparable to the desert of the Bible. Paradoxically, this desert is not emptiness. It is there that the Lord speaks to your heart and closely associates you with his work of salvation”; Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, *The Contemplative Dimension of Religious Life* (12 August 1980), 29.

(59) Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 674.

(60) Cf. John Paul II, Address to Cloistered Nuns, Bologna (28 September 1997), 4: “Your life, with its separation from the world expressed concretely and effectively, proclaims the primacy of God and is a constant reminder of the pre-eminence of contemplation over action, of the eternal over the transitory”.

- (61) Cf. Paul VI, Motu Proprio *Ecclesiae Sanctae* (6 August 1966), II, 31.
- (62) Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 667, 3.
- (63) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life *Perfectae Caritatis*, 9; John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (25 March 1996), 6.
- (64) Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 667, 3.
- (65) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life *Perfectae Caritatis*, 16; Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, Instruction on the Contemplative Life and the Enclosure of Nuns *Venite Seorsum* (15 August 1969), Normae, 1 and 9.
- (66) Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (25 March 1996), 59.
- (67) Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 667, 4.
- (68) Cf. Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and for Societies of Apostolic Life, Instruction *Potissimum Institutioni* (2 February 1990), IV, 81; 82.
- (69) Cf. *ibid.*
- (70) For the definitive transfer of perpetually or solemnly professed nuns the directives of Canon 684, 3 must be followed.
- (71) Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 666: “In using the means of social communication, a necessary discretion is to be observed”.
- (72) Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (25 March 1996), 65.
- (73) Cf. *ibid.*
- (74) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Priestly Formation *Optatam Totius*, 16, note 32; Saint Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*: Prologue, No. 4, *Opera Omnia*, V, 296 a: “Let no one believe that it is enough to read without unction, to speculate without devotion, to investigate without wonder, to observe without joy, to act without godly zeal, to know without love, to understand without humility, to study without divine grace, or to reflect as a mirror without divinely inspired wisdom”.
- (75) Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Instruction *Potissimum Institutioni* (2 February 1990), 74.
- (76) Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (25 March, 1996), 68; Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Instruction *Potissimum Institutioni* (2 February 1990), 85.

(77) Cf. John Paul II, Address at the General Audience (4 January 1995), 8: Contemplatives are placed “in a state of personal oblation so lofty as to require a special vocation which must be verified before admission or final profession”.

(78) Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 24; cf. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 22: “The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of him who was to come (cf. *Rom* 5:14), namely, Christ the Lord. Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and his love, fully reveals man to himself and makes his supreme calling clear”.

(79) Cf. Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Instruction *Potissimum Institutioni* (2 February 1990), 81; John Paul II, Address to Cloistered Nuns, Bologna (28 September 1997), 5; “Your cloistered communities, with their own rhythms of prayer and the practice of fraternal charity, where solitude is filled with the Lord's sweet presence and silence prepares the soul to listen to his inner prompting, are the place where you are formed every day by this loving knowledge of the Father's Word”.

(80) Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, Canons 619; 641; 661.

(81) Cf. Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Instruction *Potissimum Institutioni* (2 February 1990), 81.

(82) Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 586, 1.

(83) Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 586, 2.

(84) Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 615.

(85) Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 614.

(86) Cf. Pius XII, Apostolic Constitution *Sponsa Christi* (21 November 1950), VII, 2, 2; John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (25 March 1996), 59.

(87) Cf. Pius XII, Apostolic Constitution *Sponsa Christi* (21 November 1950), VII, 3; 4; 6.

(88) Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (25 March 1996), 59.

(89) Cf. Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Instruction *Potissimum Institutioni* (2 February 1990), 81; 82.

(90) Cf. *ibid.*, 85.

(91) Cf. *ibid.*, 82.

(92) Cf. Pius XII, Apostolic Constitution *Sponsa Christi* (21 November 1950), VII, 8, 3.

(93) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life *Perfectae Caritatis*, 21; *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 616, 4.

(94) John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (25 March 1996), 109.

(95) Address to Cloistered Nuns, Loreto (10 September 1995), 4.