

The Evangelical Counsels in the Life of the Diocesan Priest

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Contemporary priestly spirituality has tended to make little reference to the Evangelical Counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. As a consequence, many a diocesan priest has responded to a question about poverty with, "I'm not a religious, we didn't take that vow". However, as I shall attempt to indicate in this article, and as the Tradition and Magisterium of the Church insist, these counsels are a necessary part of the life of every diocesan priest.

Any talk of poverty so closely affects a priest's lifestyle that it is likely to generate major controversy, and so I will attempt to indicate how what I am saying is based both in the Tradition and in recent Magisterial documents. It is only if we are clear about the principles that we can then face practical questions like: What type of car is compatible with living 'simplicity of life'? What type of vacation? What frequency of vacation? What décor in the presbytery? What type of TV? And, most crucially: When my parishioners compare my lifestyle to theirs, do they see me living priestly poverty, living poverty in a way that the laity are not called to do? Or do they perceive the 'secular' diocesan priest to be a man not in the world and yet still of the world!

I intend to address this issue by returning to the basics. I want to start by considering the nature of the Evangelical Counsels themselves, and the fact that all Christians are called to live them. I then outline the way in which religious are consecrated in them by vows. And finally I will note the connection between the consecration of priesthood (that every diocesan priest has received) and the specifically priestly call to live the counsels.

The Evangelical Counsels

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, before it teaches about Religious Life, teaches that "Christ proposes the evangelical counsels, in their great variety, to every disciple" (CCC n.915). And it goes on to add that every Christian is called to the perfection of charity –which is the natural context to speak of the counsels since they are means to growth in charity.

St. Thomas Aquinas teaches that charity is the measure of Christian perfection, and he writes about the evangelical counsels when he considers those things that are contained within the New Law. In the *Summa Theologica* I-II q.108 a.4, he notes that “certain definite counsels” are contained in the New Law, and that as Christ is our wisest and best friend his counsels are to be considered “supremely useful and becoming”. The commandments are obligatory, of their very nature. The counsels, however, are not redundant because they “are about matters that render the gaining of this end [i.e. eternal bliss] more assured and expeditious”. Man is placed between the things of this world and the spiritual goods of eternal happiness, and the more man cleaves to one the more he must withdraw from the other. The commandments prevent us from cleaving to the things of this world as an end, as doing so would make us fall from spiritual goods. But renouncing the things of this world entirely leads to a more speedy attainment of man’s end, and this is what the evangelical counsels propose to us.

Earlier in the *Summa* (I-II q.77 a.5) Thomas describes the concupiscence of the flesh, concupiscence of the eyes and the pride of life as causes of sin, because inordinate self-love is the source of every sin (I-II q.77 a.4) and this includes the inordinate desire of good, because man desires good for the one he loves. These three causes of sin relate to all of the different ways that goods come into use in human life. But the evangelical counsels offer a remedy for each of these causes of sin: “[With respect to concupiscence of the eyes] riches are renounced by poverty; [With respect to concupiscence of the flesh] carnal pleasures by perpetual chastity; and the pride of life by the bondage of obedience” (I-II q.108 a.4).

For our purposes it is important to note that these counsels can be observed absolutely (as in the case of consecrated religious) or in a restricted sense (as in the case of some living the counsel of poverty in an act of giving money to the poor). Thus the call of Vatican II and the Catechism for all Christians to live the counsels reiterates the Tradition that we find in the likes of Thomas, that the “counsels, considered in themselves, are expedient to all” (I-II q.108 a.4 ad.1), though they are more fitting for some to follow in certain ways than for others.

In discussing the priesthood, the great Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange sums up the spirit of the evangelical counsels by saying that the spirit of the counsels is “the spirit of mortification”.^[1] In each of them we are practicing self-denial, and

between the three we practise self-denial in all the various aspects of life. Self-denial is an essential part of being a Christian, it was the call Christ addressed not to some of his disciples but to all of them, as it says in Mark 8:34: "If anyone would be my disciple, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me." Hence, while particular forms of penance and self-denial vary for each vocation, all are called to die to self that we might live to Christ.

In order to better see what the counsels are about, and how they affect a man's life, I want to next examine the way that they are practised by religious, and in particular the link between consecration and the vows. Once I've outlined how they are practised by religious, I think it will be more evident why it is anomalous for a diocesan to practise celibacy but not practise poverty and obedience.

Religious Consecration

All Christians, lay, priests, religious, receive their primary consecration to God by their baptism, and they are thus called to holiness and perfection. However, with respect to the evangelical counsels a further distinction can be made. The consecrated life covers all those who undertake to live the evangelical counsels "in spirit and in fact"[2] whereas the laity live the counsels mainly in spirit. The consecrated life is thus referred to as 'total' consecration (to quote Lumen Gentium n.44, Canon 573.1 of the Code of Canon Law, and Thomas in the Summa Theologica II-II q.186 a.1), a consecration that can be made either by vows or by solemn promises. A religious lives poverty 'in fact' because he owns nothing himself but lives in dependence on his order (however the rule of a particular order, congregation or secular institute expresses this). In contrast, a diocesan can live simplicity of life, but he does still own things, and thus is not living poverty 'in fact'. As I've already indicated, the three counsels cover all the different aspects of human life, and so in vowing these three the religious is living in 'totality'.

Having said the above, I want to return to what I said about the spirit of the counsels being a spirit of mortification –because the vows and counsels both affect how we relate to goods. It is important to note both that a vow is more than just a promise, and, also, that it is very different to the type of resolution that we make, for example, in a purpose of amendment in Confession (which rejects sin but does not choose a higher good over a lower good). In contrast, a vow is an act of the virtue of religion by which one chooses a higher good over a lower

good, and in which “one gives what is vowed to the worship and service of God” (ST II-II q88 a5) (this being what defines the virtue of religion).

The vows, however, are not an end in themselves, they are a means to growth in charity, growth in the virtues. The direct object of the three vows of religion is negative in renunciation, whereas the direct object of the virtues is positive: a virtue is a habit inclining a human faculty towards its object in such a way that it fulfills that aspect of the person. The same goal of the virtuous life applies to all of us (union with God), but the means to this goal varies for each person’s particular vocation. The laity pursue their vocation in the midst of the world using, in particular, the three goods of: marriage and family, possessions, and the power of human self-determination.[3] Hence married laity share in the mystery of Christ’s marriage to his Church by means of their love for their spouse, and this is a good. In the consecrated life this good is set aside for a higher good (c.f. CIC 1191.1; CCC n.2102). Virginity is a more direct share in the mystery of Christ’s marriage to his Church since, as John Paul II says, it is a direct cleaving to him, not through the intermediary of a spouse. Similarly with poverty and possessions, and obedience and self-determination. Because this means of pursuing the vocation is more direct, not through an intermediary, it is referred to as the state of perfection. This means that those in this state are in a state that uses more perfect means to holiness, it does not mean that they are necessarily perfect themselves.

Chastity

Having said this about the state of perfection and the vows, I want to describe how this relates to each of the vows in turn. The traditional Thomistic ordering of the vows puts poverty before chastity, as Basil Cole O.P. summarises it, “The classical theological order began with the least personal and proceeded toward the essential center of personal consecration –from poverty to chastity to obedience- and this is still a meaningful approach” [my emphasis].[4] However, Vatican II and John Paul II, consider chastity to be primary, as the motivation of the consecrated life, because it is through the vow of chastity that consecrated persons become spouses of God and thus renounce all worldly goods to live with him in poverty, and thus choose to obey him.

In chastity, the particular aspect of the person that is consecrated by this vow is his sexuality. I’ve noted that these vows are means to holiness, but not all means

are equally efficacious. The Church teaches that cleaving to the Lord with an 'undivided heart' (I Cor 7:25 -38) in vowed chastity is a more effective means than sacramental marriage for growth in charity. Pius XII in *Sacra Virginitas* n.32 summarised this as the teaching of Trent, and Vatican II in *Optatam totius* n.10 reiterates that virginity has a "surpassing excellence" when compared to the good of marriage. John Paul II articulates the reason for this when he says that whereas marriage introduces the spouses into the mystery of Christ's union with his Church, celibacy enables a more direct share in the mystery of this marriage of Christ and his Church, because "virginal love goes directly to the person of Christ through an immediate union with him, without intermediaries: a truly complete and decisive spiritual espousal"[5] (c.f. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* n.16). Thus marriage and virginity are not equal paths to holiness. It is important to note this if we are to see the value of virginity –otherwise we would be expecting a virgin to renounce the good of marriage for something that was not a greater good. Little wonder that few understand celibacy today, and diocesan priests struggle to live it.

John Paul II notes that the properly ordered love involved in living virginity can be seen as a form of therapy for the disordered loves of our age (John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* n.87). Such 'therapy' links easily with the notion of virginity being a unique way of making present the future eschatological age where all such disordered love of goods will be remedied.

Poverty

As the Code of Canon Law says, the vow of poverty consists in the renunciation of possessing (CIC 600), a renunciation that freely returns to God the exercise of the instinct and the natural right to possess. The consecration of this aspect of the human person thus becomes a sacred means towards the possession of God and his Kingdom as the final fulfilment of all our needs.

While the Vatican II ordering of the vows clearly relates love and chastity, poverty is just as truly related to charity. John Paul II makes an interesting note about the relationship between poverty and contemplation –contemplation being itself ordered to growth in charity. All of the evangelical counsels are a means to that perfection which is charity, and voluntary poverty is thus such a means. The possession of goods can lead a man away from charity, but voluntary poverty frees a man from thinking of worldly goods and so helps habituate and deepen

the exercise that best increases charity: contemplation of Divine Truth. John Paul II thus says:

“From the Christian point of view, poverty has always been experienced as a state of life that makes it easier to follow Christ in contemplation, prayer and evangelization.”[6]

And Thomas’s teaching explains why this is the case:

“It is abundantly clear that the human heart is more intensely attracted to one object, in proportion as it is withdrawn from a multiplicity of desires. Therefore, the more a man is freed from solicitude concerning temporal matters, the more perfectly he will be empowered to love God.”

(Thomas Aquinas, *De Perf. Spirit. Vitae.*, ch. 6)

In the light of this focus on the desires of the heart, it seems obvious why Thomas would discuss poverty before chastity. Chastity is thus a very particular way of living with an undivided heart, according to the way that poverty calls a consecrated person to do in a more general way.

Obedience

In both the Conciliar and the Thomistic framework, obedience ranks as the high point of the evangelical counsels: obedience, the counsel by which a person surrenders himself to God. Pope John Paul II references Thomas on this point as he says, “religious obedience [is] the most perfect form of imitating Christ... Obedience thus holds the chief place in the holocaust of religious profession (c.f. ST II-II, q.186, aa.5,7,8)”[7]

To repeat, each of the religious vows consecrates a different aspect of a man’s humanity to God. Poverty consecrates the instinct and right to possess temporal goods, while chastity consecrates a person’s sexuality. Obedience, however, does not consecrate an aspect of a person to God, but, by surrendering the will, obedience consecrates a man’s very self –thus it is the heart of a personal consecration to God. In obedience a man’s interior and exterior good, his spirit,

body and possessions, all become, to quote Thomas, a “perfect holocaust” (ST II-II q186 a7) of sacrificial worship to God. It is the possession of a free-will that makes man different from the animals (a consequence of his having an intellect), and it is through total obedience in faith that man returns to God what he essentially is: a free, intelligent person. The Scriptures reveal God as one who calls his people, and obedience, drawing its meaning from the Latin oboedire ‘to listen to’, is about listening to the call of God.

Such obedience is said to be lived ‘in fact’ by consecrated persons, and while the exact form of this varies hugely, every consecrated person resolves to obey according to the rules and constitutions of his order, congregation or institute. For those who take a vow (and not just a sacred promise), the vow makes a person’s obedience an act of religion, transforming the living of the virtue of obedience, so that “all obedient actions within this new scope of obligation are also acts of the virtue of religion”.^[8]

Additionally we can think of obedience as a means to charity by thinking of the transforming union with God that is the goal of Christian life. To love someone is to will what they will, and the self-surrender of obedience causes the human and the Divine will to be consistently the same.

Thinking of the vows and promises and counsels, the diocesan priest might thus be pleased that if he is to only take one counsel as a sacred promise, obedience seems to be the ‘best’ and most comprehensive one to take, and it is precisely this that we promise to the Bishop.

Priestly Consecration

But what then of the diocesan’s relationship to these vows and counsels? I’ve noted that each of the vows consecrates a different aspect of a person’s humanity to God, and that between them the whole person is consecrated to God. In what follows I will argue that there is an obligation on the diocesan that flows from his ordination. Holy Orders consecrates a whole person to God, and brings with it an obligation to live the counsels in a particularly priestly way. For the diocesan, it is not vows that oblige him to live the counsels but his priestly

consecration, so that for him they are not just expedient, they are morally necessary.

In contrasting priestly consecration with the consecration of the vows, it is important to note that a priest's consecration is a different type of consecration: it is not of an aspect of a person's humanity, as an aid to his own salvation, nor as an aid to his own relating to God. The Catechism, in introducing the sacraments of Holy Orders and Matrimony, speaks of them as "Sacraments at the Service of the Church". They are "directed towards the salvation of others; if they contribute as well to personal salvation, it is through service to others that they do so. They confer a particular mission in the Church and serve to build up the people of God" (CCC 1534).

What then is the consecration of priesthood? It is a consecration "in Christ's name 'to feed the Church by the word and grace of God' (Vatican Council II, Lumen Gentium n.11.2)" (CCC 1534). It continues the mission entrusted by Christ to the 12 Apostles (CCC 1536). It thus relates to a person's mission rather than to a particular aspect of his humanity. But as an ontological character is conferred with the sacrament it changes the whole orientation of the person so consecrated –it does not just change a person at some particular moments while he is exercising his mission, in the way that a 9-5 job might.

Earlier, I noted that Vatican II and John Paul II altered the traditional ordering of the three vows by seeing spousal adherence to God as the basis of the consecrated life. John Paul II does something similar with his treatment of the priest as spouse, because the Pope relates the priest's role as head and shepherd to his role as spouse.

Two pivotal texts of John Paul II's *Pastores dabo vobis*[9] are worth quoting:

"The priest, by virtue of the consecration which he receives in the Sacrament of Orders is sent forth by the Father through the mediatorship of Jesus Christ, to whom he is configured in a special way as Head and Shepherd of his people, in order to love and work by the power of the Holy spirit in the service of the Church for the salvation of the world." [emphasis added](n. 12b)

Thus, the priest's consecration comes by his receiving holy orders, not by an additional vow or promise. His consecration is for his mission, for what he is sent

forth to do. And this consecration configures him to Christ not in some general way, not just so that he acts in persona Christi, but in a special way: as Head and Shepherd, so the priest can act in persona Christi Capitis (CCC 1548).

It is pastoral charity that leads Christ to be Head and Shepherd of the Church, and the “essential content of this pastoral charity is the gift of self, the total gift of self to the Church” (PDV n.23b). Love as self-gift is a central and repeated theme of John Paul II, and this notion has its completion in spousal love, particularly the spousal love of Christ for the Church. The Church is the Body of which Christ is the Head. Just as Eve was taken from the body of Adam to become his Bride, so the Church is “the Bride who proceeds like a new Eve from the open side of the Redeemer on the Cross” (PDV n.22c). Thus spousal love is the origin behind Christ’s relationship to the Church as Head, and of his pastoral concern for the Church as Shepherd.

Similarly, for the priest:

“The priest is called to be the living image of Jesus Christ, the Spouse of the Church... In virtue of his configuration to Christ, the Head and Shepherd, the priest stands in this spousal relationship with regard to the community. Inasmuch as he represents Christ, the Head, Shepherd and Spouse of the Church... In his spiritual life, therefore, he is called to live out Christ’s spousal love towards the Church, his Bride.”(PDV n. 22c)

But the motive for the priest’s love is not primarily for the Church, it is primarily for Christ. Jesus commissioned Peter to care for the sheep in response to Peter’s declaration that he loved Christ (PDV n.23e), a point important enough to be made three times. “Do you love me?... Feed my sheep” (Jn 21:17). It is the priest’s bond with Christ that causes his bond to the Church, a bond that is ontological and a bond of love. As configured to Christ, the priest is thus the icon of Christ, a living icon of Christ the Spouse (PDV 13).

What then can we say of the evangelical counsels? The priest is not consecrated in these, as such. However, the consecration he receives in his ordination imposes a particular obligation on him to live the counsels as means of acquiring the spousal charity that corresponds to the spousal priestly character he received

in ordination. All Christians are obliged to live the evangelical counsels as means to increase their charity, but the priest receives this obligation in a priestly way: to increase his spousal charity for the Church:

“Jesus Christ... is both the model and source of the virtues of obedience, chastity and poverty which the priest is called to live out as an expression of his pastoral charity for his brothers and sisters.” (PDV n.30g)

The diocesan priest is thus called to live the evangelical counsels in a way that is particularly priestly. So, his obedience is not the obedience of a religious, nor the obedience of a layperson. It is to be lived for a priestly motive and in a priestly manner, expressed, at a pastoral level, in his attitude of listening to the needs and demands of the people entrusted to him. Similarly with his chastity and poverty –he is called to live these because he is a priest, and so the way he does so should be priestly, rather than pretending to be a religious.

Priestly chastity connects very obviously with his spousal love for the Church:

“The Church, as the Spouse of Jesus Christ, wishes to be loved by the priest in the total and exclusive manner in which Jesus Christ her Head and Spouse loved her. Priestly celibacy, then, is the gift of self in and with and to his Church and expresses the priest’s service to the Church in and with the Lord.” (PDV 29d)

As with religious, the secular priest’s celibacy enables him to cleave to the Lord with an undivided heart, as the Congregation for the Clergy notes in its Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests (n.58). But the secular’s motivation is different: it is primarily rooted in an apostolic spirituality rather than in a spirituality directed towards his own sanctification.

Similarly, the diocesan priest is called to live poverty. Such poverty is part of loving the Lord with an undivided heart, a heart that is not dissipated by a love of

material goods, such a heart will be able to love the Church with the “self-detachment” (PDV n.22d) that the priestly spousal character demands.

This call to live poverty is not just found in *Pastores dabo vobis*. Canon Law states: “Clerics are to follow a simple way of life and avoid anything which smacks of worldliness” (CIC 282.1). The Directory n.67 has an even more explicit call to poverty. It first links poverty with pastoral care by saying that, “A priest could hardly be a true servant and minister of his brothers if he were excessively worried with his comfort and well-being”. It notes that the priest is called to follow Christ’s example, he who became poor for our sakes. Using an Old Testament image from the book of Numbers (18:20), it says that the priest’s “inheritance is the Lord”. It concludes by citing Canon Law and Vatican II’s *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, saying that the priest, “although not having assumed poverty as a public promise, must lead a simple life and avoid anything which could have an air of vanity (CIC 282.1), voluntarily embracing poverty to follow Christ more closely (PO n.17d). In all aspects (living quarters, means of transportation, vacations, etc.), the priest must eliminate any kind of affectation and luxury (PO n.17e).”

Many laymen might seriously question whether they see this reflected in their diocesan clergy. Gisbert Greshake, in *The Meaning of Christian Priesthood*,^[10] comments on this in speaking of the need for the various counsels to be lived as a unity. Most Catholic clergy are quite happy to accept celibacy. But having renounced the great good of marriage, this good all too easily gets replaced by an attachment to many worldly goods and possessions. As I cited Garrigou-Lagrange as saying, the three counsels fit together because they are all part of a spirit of mortification. Celibacy without this spirit of self-denial is rightly observed to be an anomaly.

The Promise of Obedience

In the above I have indicated how the consecration of priesthood obliges the diocesan to live the counsels, an obligation that, in a certain sense, comes from outside of him in that it flows out of the priestly character imprinted by God on his soul. However, there is an additional obligation to live the counsels that flows out of an act of the ordinand himself: his promise of obedience, because this promise implies many things, including a promise to live the counsels.

I noted earlier that obedience has an integrating role in the life of a religious, because by a religious' vow of obedience all of his acts become part of his obedience: by offering his will in obedience he offers his very self to God. Dominicans and Benedictines take only one vow, that of obedience, with poverty and chastity being included in the rule that they are agreeing to be obedient to. Similarly, the diocesan's promise of obedience implies obedience to a whole way of life. All of his future acts, and in particular, all the acts of self-denial involved in a priest's living of the counsels, have this obedience to his spouse the Church (for Christ's sake) as their unifying feature.

The Directory notes that obedience is a particularly priestly characteristic: The priestly sacrifice of Christ on the Cross was primarily the sacrifice of his obedience, offering his will to the Father, so "that obedience to the Father is the very heart of the Priesthood of Christ" (Directory n.61) and is thus the very heart of our own priesthood. More specifically, my promise of obedience to my ordinary includes obedience to the Church's teachings, laws and liturgical rubrics (Directory nn.61-6). Such obedience thus includes living the counsels in the fashion indicated by the teaching of the Church. Thus, while not covered by the same conditions and graces that accompany the vowed living of the counsels, a diocesan would seem to have some type of related graces to help him live the counsels (not to mention the fact that he has the grace of state), because his promise of obedience seems to approach a consecration of his very self to this way of life, a way of life that includes poverty, chastity and obedience. His promise of obedience consecrates his will to the Church's service in the same ceremony in which the sacramental ordination will consecrate the ordinand's very nature to priestly service.[11]

Charism

I want to return to the question of a priest's motive for living the counsels, with the notion that they are lived for others not for the purpose of his own sanctity, and I want to make this point by referring to charisms (the priesthood being a charism).

Charisms are given to an individual, not for his own sake, but for the sake of the Church (CCC nn. 799; 2003). A man may be sanctified while using his charism, but not in a direct sense, only in a secondary way. Similarly, the gift of priesthood

to a man is not directly for his own sanctification. As with every Christian, his particular vocation is his means to sanctity, and so living his priesthood is his means to sanctity. But whereas a religious' vow is ordered towards his own sanctification by consecrating each aspect of his humanity to God, the consecration of the priest is not ordered to his own sanctification but to the "service of the Church and for the salvation of the world" (PDV n.12b). This consecration configures him in a unique relationship to Christ and thus to Christ's Spouse the Church, and this in turn places a unique obligation on him to live out the spousal character he has had imprinted on his soul. His 'character', as a quality of his personality, has to match the sacramental spousal character imprinted on him by ordination. This means that he has a particularly priestly obligation to live out the evangelical counsels, while not vowed in living them. He lacks the specific graces that come from vowing the evangelical counsels and so he does not have this help in living them out. But, with the graces of state (c.f. CCC n.2004) that come from ordination, he has other graces that assist him in his priestly obligation to live the evangelical counsels, for the sake of Christ's Spouse, the Church. Thus the notion of 'charism' helps to differentiate the differing motivation that the diocesan and the religious have in living out the counsels.

Contemplation

In what might seem to be in contrast with the motivation for celibacy that I have outlined, Paul VI taught that the primary motive for celibacy is contemplation, that priestly celibacy helps achieve a balance between the active and contemplative aspects of our vocation (*Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* n.70). However, while John Paul II and the priestly Directory do not quote this rationale of Paul VI, the two motivations of contemplation and spousal love are nonetheless intimately related.

With respect to contemplation and action, Thomas teaches that contemplation is more excellent than activity. Among the reasons he gives for this is that contemplation involves what is best in man, namely his intellect (ST II-II q.182 a.1 c), and because contemplation, ultimately in the beatific vision, is the whole goal of the Christian life (ST II-II q.180 a.4). However, while contemplation is more excellent than action, the two are mutually ordered to each other: we perform those actions proper to us as a result of contemplating the truth, but we become better able to contemplate by means of performing good acts, because good acts form the moral virtues that better dispose us to contemplate, calming the vehemence of the passions that can oppose our contemplation (ST II-II 180

a.2). Contemplation relates to charity in that it is the greatest means available to man to grow in charity because it is in contemplation that the intellect ponders the God that the will is then better able to love.

Priestly celibacy can be related to contemplation because it is by means of contemplation that the priest grows in charity and is thus better able to live his spousal charity for the Church. As I quoted earlier with respect to poverty, John Paul II says:

“From the Christian point of view, poverty has always been experienced as a state of life that makes it easier to follow Christ in contemplation, prayer and evangelization.”

If celibacy is a form of poverty, then a priest's celibacy makes him better able to contemplate, and his spousal love for the Church follows. It might be said that celibacy, even for the diocesan, should have cleaving to the Lord with an undivided heart as its primary motive, enabling him to love by enabling him to contemplate. But in the context of the priest's priestly consecration, his celibate love for the Lord leads him to love Christ's Church with a spousal and pastoral love -a love that he is only free to give because he is celibate. Thus contemplation and apostolic spousal love can be seen as harmonious reasons calling for the diocesan priest to be celibate.

Conclusion

As I have indicated, all Christians are called to live the evangelical counsels in spirit, regardless of their particular vocation, and this spirit can be summed up as a spirit of mortification, regulating our use of created goods.

Consecrated persons are consecrated by the vows or promises that they make, with each vow consecrating a different aspect of the person's humanity to God, so that the three together consecrate the whole person to God in such a way that he becomes 'totally' dedicated to the Lord, living the counsels 'in fact' and not just in spirit.

Diocesan priests are consecrated to God by their ordination. This consecration is of the nature of a charism, in that it is ordered towards the sanctification and salvation of others, not directly to the sanctification of the priest himself. This consecration brings with it a particular obligation to live the evangelical counsels, in order that he might grow in his spousal love for Christ's Church. This is not an obligation to live the counsels 'in fact' in the way that religious do. However, it is an obligation that implies a living of them that is in addition to what is generally required of the laity. Chastity must be lived by diocesans in the same manner as religious live it. Obedience must be lived in a manner similar to religious: religious obey according to the rule of their order, seculars obey according to the law of the Church. Poverty for seculars is not presently specified in an exact form by the law of the Church, but it does not seem to me that it would be impossible for the law of the Church to be altered, at least in some respect, in this way. Regardless, the spirit of these three counsels, the spirit of mortification, must be lived by every priest, so that the priest who offers sacrifice at the altar is also offering the sacrifice of his own life.

[1] Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange O.P., *Priesthood and Perfection*, trans. E. Hayden (Westminster, Md: Newman Press, 1955), 49.

[2] Basil Cole OP & Paul Conner O.P., *Christian Totality: Theology of the Consecrated Life* (New York, Alba House, 1997), 27. My understanding of both St. Thomas and of Religious Life is heavily indebted to the teaching I have received from Fr. Cole.

[3] *Ibid.*, 36; 54.

[4] *Ibid.*, 75.

[5] John Paul II, *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition Nov 30, 1994 , 19, n.4.

[6] John Paul II, *L'Osservatore Romano* December 7, 1994 , 11, n.1.

[7] John Paul II, *L'Osservatore Romano* December 14, 1994 , 11, n.3.

[8] Cole, 216.

[9] c.f. Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests* (London, CTS, 1994), nn.57-60.

[10] Gisbert Greshake, *The Meaning of Christian Priesthood*, trans. Peadar MacSeumais S.J. (Westminster, Md.: Christian Classics, 1989) p.131ff

[11] On a more speculative note, it might be said that the diocesan could gain additional graces by vowing his counsels. The Church teaches that God gives 'sufficient' grace to everyone for his state of life, but this does not mean that there are not other graces possible, such as those that come with a vow. Gustave Thils (*The Diocesan Priest. The Nature and Spirituality of the*

Diocesan Clergy Trans Albert La Mothe (Notre Dame, Indiana: Fides Publishers, 1964) p.319ff) notes the distinction between apostolic vows and vows of religion. Apostolic vows have the same matter (e.g. poverty, chastity, obedience) as vows of religious, but not the same end, object and limits. Thus the vow of poverty that a religious takes has the worship of God as its end, and the sanctification of the religious for the glory of God as its object, and has limits prescribed by the particular way of life of a specific religious order. A vow of poverty taken by a diocesan would be rooted in his priestly charism not in a religious charism. I would thus suggest that it would have the salvation of souls as its end, his own sanctification for the sake of the people he is to serve as its object, and limits prescribed by a diocesan way of life.

We already oblige diocesans to do something like this with respect to celibacy, so that in their declaration of freedom before ordination they say of celibacy, "This I promise; this I vow; this I swear". Similarly for poverty, even without this being the standard practise of the Church, individuals or societies of clergy are still able to take such a vow or promise. Such a vow would need to bear in mind that (as with a religious vocation) to live a vowed life one has to be responding to a call from God. A diocesan would need to be certain that his taking of a vow of poverty was a call from God, not just a good idea he'd come up with himself.