

VENITE SEORSUM

Instruction on the Contemplative Life and on the Enclosure of Nuns

15 August 1969

“Come away by yourselves to a lonely place” (Mk 6:31). Numerous are those who have heard this call and have followed Christ, withdrawing into solitude to worship the Father there.

It was by this inspiration of the Spirit (1) that some were led to establish institutions dedicated to contemplation alone, among which convents of nuns occupy a position of great distinction.

With vigilant and maternal care, the Church has always watched over virgins consecrated to God, considered by St. Cyprian as “a more illustrious part of Christ's flock” (2), and it is particularly on this account that she has defended their separation from the affairs of the world by issuing a considerable number of regulations regarding papal enclosure. (3) Since the Second Vatican Council likewise manifested its concern about this matter, (4) it is the purpose of this Instruction to continue its work by legislating the norms which in the future will regulate the enclosure of nuns wholly dedicated to contemplation. These norms are prefaced by certain fundamental considerations regarding enclosure itself.

I

Withdrawal from the world for the sake of leading a more intense life of prayer in solitude is nothing other than a very particular way of living and expressing the paschal mystery of Christ, which is death ordained toward resurrection.

This mystery is portrayed in Holy Scripture in terms of a passage of Exodus, which without doubt constitutes the most important event in the development of Israelite history, inasmuch as it forms the basis of Israel's faith (5) and of her more intimate life with God, (6) an event which the Church recognizes as a certain prefiguration of Christian salvation. (7) Certainly no one is unaware to what degree the sacred liturgy and the tradition of the Fathers—as the Apostles and Evangelists themselves had already done—evoked biblical themes of Exodus in order to penetrate and expound the mystery of Christ. (8) From the dawn of the Chosen People's history, Abraham is depicted as being called to leave his country, his family and his father's house, while the Apostle repeatedly teaches that the same calling was the beginning of a long mystical journey to a homeland which is not of this world. (9)

What in this way was merely prefigured in the Old Testament, becomes a reality in the New. Coming from the Father and entering the world (cf. Jn 16:28) to arouse a people “that walked in darkness” (Is 9:2; Mt 4:16), the Word of God delivered us from the domination of darkness (cf. Col 1:13), that is from sin, and through His death (cf. Jn 13:1; 16:28; and Heb 9:11-12, 10:19-20) He set us on the return road to the Father, who “raised us up with him and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6; cf. Col 2:12-13, 3:1). Herein lies the true-essence of the paschal mystery of Christ and the Church.

But the death of Christ demands a real type of solitude, as the Apostle himself understood it, (10) and many

Fathers and Doctors of the Church after him.(11) They attributed in fact this significance to certain episodes in Christ's life: while considering Him withdrawing into solitude or into the desert to engage in battle "with the ruler of this world" (cf. Mt 4:1; Jn 12:31;13:30),(12) but especially when He withdrew to pray to His Father, to whose will He was totally submitted.(13) In this way He presignified the solitude of His passion, (14) which the Evangelists represent to us as a new exodus. (15)

Hence to withdraw into the desert is for the Christian tantamount to associating himself more intimately with Christ's passion, and it enables him, in a very special way, to share in the paschal mystery and in the passage of Our Lord from this world to the heavenly homeland. It was precisely on this account that monasteries were founded, situated as they are in the very heart of the mystery of Christ.

Certainly the faithful are called to follow Christ in the proclamation of His gospel of salvation, and they should at the same time contribute to the construction of the earthly city, thus becoming, as it were, a leaven by which it is transformed into the household of God. (16) It is in this sense that the follower of Christ is said to remain in the world (cf. Jn 17:15). Yet with this mission the fullness of the mystery of the Church is not expressed, since Church, though established for the service of God and man (17) is likewise-and even more especially-the aggregate of all who are redeemed, that is, of those who through Baptism and the other sacraments have already passed from this world to the Father. (18) The Church is indeed "eager to act," yet at the same time she is no less "devoted to contemplation," in such a way that in her "the human is directed and subordinated to the divine, the visible likewise to the invisible, action to contemplation." (19)

It is therefore both legitimate and necessary that some of Christ's followers, those upon whom this particular grace has been conferred by the Holy Spirit, (20) should give expression to this contemplative character of the Church by actually withdrawing into solitude to lead this particular type of life, in order that "through constant prayer and ready penance they give themselves to God alone". (Perfectae Caritatis, 7) (21)

On the other hand, it should be quite evident that a certain degree of withdrawal from the world and some measure of contemplation must necessarily be present in every form of Christian life, as the Second Vatican Council rightly declared in reference to priests and religious dedicated to the apostolate. (22) Indeed it is true that even outside the monastic setting there are some who through the grace of the Holy Spirit are elevated to contemplation. But just as a certain invitation of this type is extended to all Christians, so too a certain degree of separation from the affairs of this world is necessary to all, even though all do not withdraw to the desert in the same way.

Monks and nuns, however, retiring to a cloistered life, put into practice in a more absolute and exemplary way an element essential to every Christian life: "From now on... let those who deal with the world (live) as if they had no dealings with it. For the form of this world is passing away." (1 Cor 7: 29, 31). (23)

II

To the foregoing concepts, elicited from the paschal mystery of Christ in the way that the Church participates in it, those must be added which bring to light the importance of recollection and silence in rendering intimacy with God in prayer safer and easier. (24) The way of life of those who are totally dedicated to contemplation, aiming as it does at eliminating all that might divide the spirit against it self in any way, enables them to achieve that fullness of their personalities whose hallmark is unity, and permits them to devote themselves more thoroughly to the

quest for God their goal, (25) and to attend to Him more perfectly.

Such a quest for God, moreover, for which man should renounce everything he possesses, (cf. Lk 14, 33) is furthered to the utmost by reading and meditating on Holy Scripture (cf. *Perfectae Caritatis*, n. 6). Reading of the Bible should therefore accompany prayer, “so that God and man may talk together; for we speak to Him when we pray; we hear Him when we read the divine saying” (cf. *Const. Dei Verbum*, n. 25; St. Ambrose, *De Officiis Ministrorum*, I, 20, 88: ML 16, 50).

And by studying Holy Scripture, which is “like a mirror in which the pilgrim Church on earth looks at God, from whom she has received everything” (*Dei Verbum*, n. 7), each one “inflamed with love of God burns to contemplate His beauty” (II, II, q1. 180, art. 1, in corpore).

In such a way love and contemplation aid one another reciprocally. “The love of God is understanding Him: He is not known unless He is loved, nor is He loved unless He is known; and in reality He is known only to the degree that He is loved, and loved to the degree that He is known” (William of St. Thierry, *Expositio in Cant.*, c. I: ML 180, 499, C).

Thus in silence and solitude “resolute men are able to recollect themselves and, so to speak to dwell within themselves as much as they please, cultivating the buds of virtue and feeding happily on the fruits of paradise. Here one strives to acquire that eye by whose limpid glance the bridegroom is wounded with love, and in whose purity alone may God be seen. Here one is occupied in busy leisure, and rests in quiet activity. Here, for fatigue undergone in strife, God grants His athletes the reward they have longed for, namely a peace unknown to the world and the joy of the Holy Spirit... This is the better part that Mary chose, that shall not be taken away from her.” (26)

III

It must not be thought, however, that monks and nuns, because they are separated from the rest of mankind, are cut off, as it were, from the world and the Church and are aloof from them. On the contrary, they are united with them “in a more profound sense in the heart of Christ,” (27) since we are all one in Christ (cf. 1 Cor 10:17; Jn 17:20-22). (28)

Apart from the traditional contribution of monasteries in the cultural and social domain, conclusive and unshakable evidence exists bearing witness to the great love with which men and women dedicated to contemplation alone harbor in their hearts the sufferings and anguish of all men.

From Scripture, moreover, it is evident that it was in the desert or in a mountain solitude that God revealed hidden truths to man (cf. Gen 32:25-31; Ex 3; 24:1-8; 34:5-9; 1 Kings 19:8-13; Lk 2:7-9; Mt 17: 1-8). These in fact are places in which heaven and earth seem to merge, where the world, in virtue of Christ's presence, rises from its condition of arid earth and becomes paradise anew (cf. Mk 1:13). (29) How then can contemplatives be considered alien to mankind, if in them mankind achieves its fulfillment?

But however much as contemplatives are entrenched, so to speak, in the heart of the world, still more so are they in the heart of the Church. (30) Their prayers, particularly their participation in the Eucharistic sacrifice of Christ and their liturgical recitation of the Divine Office, constitute the fulfillment of a function essential to the ecclesial community, namely, the glorification of God. This in fact is the prayer that rendered to the Father, through the Son and in the Holy Spirit, “a choice sacrifice of praise.” (31) Those who worship in this way are admitted to the

intimacy of the ineffable conversation which Our Lord has unendingly with His heavenly Father, and in whose bosom He pours out His infinite love. This, in a word, is the prayer which is like an apex toward which converges the universal activity of the Church. (32) In this way contemplative religious, bearing witness to the intimate life of the Church, are indispensable to the fullness of its presence. (33)

Furthermore, by vivifying the entire Mystical Body by the fervor of their love, and by bolstering the various efforts of the apostolate, which are indeed nothing without charity (cf. 1 Cor 13:1-3), contemplatives raise the level of the spiritual life of the whole Church. "In the heart of the Church, my Mother, I shall be love," exclaimed the Saint who, without ever having stepped outside of her convent, was nevertheless declared by Pope Pius XI Patroness of all the Missions. (34) Did not God through His charity, manifested in such proportions as to entail the sacrifice of His Son on the Cross, deliver all men from sin? Therefore, when one steepes himself in this paschal mystery of the supreme love of God for man (cf. Jn 13:1; 15:13), he necessarily participates in the redemptive mission of Christ's passion, which is the beginning of every apostolate. (35)

Finally, religious engaged in contemplation alone sustain through their prayers the missionary activity of the Church, "for it is God who sends workers into His harvest when He is asked to do so, who opens the minds of non-Christians to hear the Gospel, and who makes the word of salvation fruitful in their hearts." (36) In solitude, where they are devoted to prayer, contemplatives are never forgetful of their brothers. If they have withdrawn from frequent contact with their fellowmen, it is not because they were seeking themselves and their own comfort, or peace and quiet for their own sake, but because, on the contrary, they were intent on sharing to a more universal degree the fatigue, the misery and the hopes of all mankind. (36)

IV

Truly great, therefore, is the mystery of the contemplative life. And whereas its eminent role in the economy of salvation emerges along general lines from the foregoing remarks, the mystery is seen to be enacted in a very special way in the case of cloistered nuns. These women, in fact, by their very nature, portray in a more meaningful way the mystery of the Church, the "spotless spouse of the spotless Lamb" (38) and, seated at the Lord's feet and listening to His teaching (cf. Lk 10:39) in silence and withdrawal, seek and savor the things that are above where their lives are hidden with Christ in God, until they appear in glory with their Spouse. (39) It is woman's role to receive the word rather than to carry it to the far ends of the earth, even though she can be summoned successfully to the latter vocation. It is her place to become thoroughly and intimately acquainted with the word and to render it fruitful, in a very clear, vivid and feminine way. For, in fact, once she has attained full maturity, woman intuits more keenly the needs of others and the assistance which they hope for. Hence, she expresses more clearly the fidelity (40) of the Church toward her Spouse, and at the same time is endowed with a more acute sense of the fruitfulness of the contemplative life. On this account the Church, as is apparent from her Liturgy, (41) has always had particular regard for the Christian virgin. Highlighting the divine jealousy surrounding her, (42) the Church has safeguarded with special solicitude her withdrawal from the world and the enclosure of her convent. (43)

At this point it is impossible to pass over in silence the Blessed Virgin Mary, who welcomed into her bosom the Word of God. "Full of faith, and conceiving Christ first in her mind before in her womb," (44) a garden enclosed, a sealed fountain, a closed gate (cf. Song 4:12; Ez 44:1-2), "in faith and charity she is the Church's model and excellent exemplar." (45) The Blessed Virgin exhibits herself as a splendid model of the contemplative life, and a

venerable liturgical tradition, both in the Eastern Church and the Western, appropriately applies to her these words from the Gospel: “Mary has chosen the better part” (Lk 10:38-42). (46)

V

Still another aspect intrinsic to the mystery of the contemplative life must be illustrated, namely the importance of the sign and witness by which contemplatives, though especially commissioned by God to pray, are not for that reason excluded from the “apostolate of the word,” (47) well through they do not engage in direct public preaching.

If present-day society, which so easily reflects God and denies His existence, the life of men and women completely dedicated to the contemplation of eternal truth constitutes an open profession of the reality of both His existence and His presence, since such a life seeks that loving intimacy with God which “bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom 8:16). Hence, whoever leads such a life can efficaciously reassure both those who suffer temptations against faith and those who through error are led to be skeptical as to whatever possibility man might, have of conversing with the transcendent God. (48)

Through such wondrous conversation with God men and women dedicated exclusively to contemplation in silence and solitude, and to the practice of charity and the other Christian virtues, proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes. And indeed, so much the more do they proclaim it, since their entire life, dedicated to an unremitting quest for God, is nothing other than a journey to the heavenly Jerusalem and an anticipation of the eschatological Church immutable in its possession and contemplation of God. Furthermore, contemplatives do not only preach to the world the goal to be reached, that is, eternal life, but they likewise indicate the way that leads to it. If the spirit of the beatitudes, which animates the discipleship of Christ, is to vivify any and every form of Christian life, (49) the life of the contemplative testifies that such can be put into practice even during one's earthly existence. This witness will exercise a more forceful influence on men of our times to the degree that it is collective, or rather, social. It is not, in fact, the witness of the individual that attracts the men of today, but the witness, fruit of a life led together with others, of a given community, or better still, of a given society already firmly established, which, in virtue of its continuity and vigor, confirms the validity of the principles upon which it is founded. Such indeed is the witness of the contemplative community, which Paul VI appropriately described at Monte Cassino, speaking of “a small, ideal society in which at last reign love, obedience, innocence, freedom from created things, and the art of turning them to good use, in which prevail the spirit, peace, and-in a word-the Gospel.” (50)

VI

Yet it is easy to understand that the specific and definite commitment which is assumed in the cloistered life cannot originate from, and still less thrive in, any ephemeral type of fervor whatever. On the contrary, it must be the product of mature reflection and unfaltering decisiveness which enable one to renounce certain social advantages known and esteemed at their true value. Such maturity is required in order that this type of life be chosen with perfect liberty of spirit in which the religious consumes his entire earthly existence clinging to Christ alone and occupied with the affairs of heaven. On this account, vocations for the cloistered life of nuns must be placed under lengthy and careful probation, in order that the motives by which they are led become clearly discerned, and those candidates be duly excluded who, perhaps unknowingly, are not inspired by sufficiently clear

and supernatural considerations, which as a result may well stand in the way of their spiritual and human development. (51) The useful precautions prescribed by the statutes of each Institute are to be observed, not only for the admission of postulants but especially before the religious pronounce their perpetual vows.

All that is set forth in this Instruction is applicable to every Institute dedicated wholly to the contemplative life. Every religious family, nevertheless, has its own particular characteristics, determined in many instances by the Founder himself, and these must be faithfully respected. Nor is the possibility denied that within the Church, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, new forms of the contemplative life may originate in the future.

Thus the elements that distinguish one Institute from another are indeed recognized as legitimate, since they constitute a splendid array of variety, arising principally, as is evident, from the practical importance which each Institute attributes to mental prayer or to liturgical worship, to life led in common or characterized by elements of eremitical solitude, these being factors of diversity readily compatible with the structures of monasticism.

Differences without doubt further depend on the manner in which each Institute conceives and observes material separation from the world by means of enclosure.

⇒ Section VII (Norms) have been replaced by the norms given in the 2018 Instruction Cor Orans. ⇐

Rome, 15 August 1969, Feast of the Assumption of our Lady

H. Card. ANTONIUTTI, Prefect

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FOOTNOTES

(1) Cf. Pachomius, *Vies Coptes*, Cod. Bo. n. 17 (Lefort, p. 91). *Gaudium et spes*, 38, and Mt 4:1.

(2) Cyprian, *De habitu virginum* 3, ML 4, 455.

(3) Already from the sixth century; cf. Caesarius of Arles, *Reg. ad Virg.* (Approved by Pope Hormisdas) 1, ML 67, 1107; Conc. Epaonen. (517 AD) c. 38, CC ser. Lat. 148 A, p. 34. Cf. also Boniface VIII, Const. *Periculoso* (1298 AD), Council of Trent, session 25, decree *de Regularibus*, c. 5; C.I.C. cc. 597-603; 2342; Pius XII, Const. Apost. *Sponsa Christi*; Sacred Congregation for Religious, Instructions *Inter praeclara* and *Inter cetera*.

(4) Second Vatican Council, decree *Perfectae Caritatis*. 16: “The papal cloister for nuns totally dedicated to contemplation is to be retained. Still, it should be modified according to the conditions of time and place, and outdated customs done away with. In such matters, consideration should be given to the wishes of the monasteries themselves.”

(5) Cf. *Decalogue*: “I am Yahweh your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no gods except me” (Ex 20:2-3). And with reference to the covenant made at Shechem: “We have no intentions of deserting Yahweh and serving other gods. Was it not Yahweh our God who brought us and our ancestors out of the land of Egypt, the house of slavery, who worked those great wonders before our eyes and preserved us all along the way we travelled and among all the peoples through whom we journeyed?” (Jos 24:16-17). Idolatry, on the contrary, consists in saying: “Here is your god Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt” (Ex 32:4). Expressions of this type are frequent.

(6) Thus in the prayer of Israel, as may be inferred from the Psalms. Likewise anniversary feasts commemorating episodes of the exodus became liturgical celebrations. The promise or covenant was made in the desert, during the exodus. When hardships were inflicted on Israel because of her sins, she remembered the miracles performed by God in the past and placed her hope in them, since God who does not change is always capable of repeating the same miracles. Cf. *Deut* 20:1; *Is* 43:16-21; 63:10-14; *Bar* 2:11; *Sir* 36:5. But it will be necessary to pass again through the desert that purifies (*Hos* 2:16-25): then it will no longer be a question of delivering the people from external enemies, but from the slavery of sin. The real exodus is a spiritual conversion.

(7) Second Vatican Council, Decl. *Nostra aetate*, 4: "(The Church) professes that all who believe in Christ, Abraham's sons according to the faith, are included in the same patriarch's call, and likewise that the salvation of the Church was mystically foreshadowed by the chosen people's exodus from the land of bondage". Cf. 1 *Cor* 10:11: "All this happened to them as a warning, and it was written down to be a lesson for us who are living at the end of the age". And Irenaeus: "The departure from Egypt that God made His people undertake was in all its detail an image and prefiguration of the exodus through which the Church of the future was to evolve out of paganism" (*Adv. haer.* 4, 30. - *Sources chrét.* 100, p. 784).

(8) According to the New Testament: A) Christ puts into effect the new exodus: *Mt* 2:15; 4:4 (cf. *Ex* 16); 4:7 (cf. *Ex* 17); 4:10 (cf. *Deut* 32, 48-53); 5, 21-22 ff; 11, 10 (cf. *Mal* 3, 1-2 and *Ex* 23, 20); 26, 28 (cf. *Mk* 10, 38; *Ex* 24, 8; *Heb* 9, 18-28). *Lk* 9, 31; 12, 50 (*Mk* 10, 38; cf. 1 *Cor* 10:2). *Jn* 1:17; 3:14; 6:31-33, 49-50, 58; 7:37-39 (cf. *Ex* 17:1-7); 19, 36. B) The Christian life as a new exodus: 1 *Cor* 10, 1-11; 2 *Cor* 3, 6-18; *Heb* 4, 1-9; 8, 1-13; 9; 12, 18-24; 1 *Pt* 1, 16; 2, 9; *Rev* 1, 6; 15, 3; 2,17; 21, 2-3 (cf. *Hos* 2, 14-24; *Ex* 25,8). For the evidence of the Fathers and the liturgy, cf. R. Le Deaut and J. Lecuyer, *Exode*, in *Dict. de spirit.* 4, 1973-1995.

(9) *Heb* 11, 13-16: "All these died in faith, before receiving any of the things that had been promised, but they saw them in the far distance and welcomed them, recognizing that they were only strangers and nomads on earth. People who use such terms about themselves make it quite plain that they are in search of their real homeland. They can hardly have meant the country they came from, since they had the opportunity to go back to it; but in fact they were longing for a better homeland, their heavenly homeland".

(10) *Heb* 13, 12-14: "Jesus... suffered outside the gate... Let us go to Him then, outside the camp, and share His degradation. For there is no eternal city for us in this life but we look for one in the life to come."

(11) "My God, my God, why have you deserted me?" (*Mt* 27, 46). "Truly the Cross of Christ is called a desert because it is inhabited by a few, and Christ our God is a true hermit by Whom the Cross is carried" (author from the beginning of the 13th century, in *Arch. d'histoire doctr. et litt. du Moyen Age* 31, 1964, 41).

(12) Cf. Origen, *In Matth.* 12, 8-9, CGS 10, 200.

(13) Cf. *Mt* 14:23 (*Mk* 6:46); *Mk* 1:35; *Lk* 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28 (*Mt* 17:1), 11:1, especially *Lk* 22:41-44: "Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw away, and knelt down and prayed. 'Father,' he said, 'if you are willing take this cup away from me. Nevertheless let your will be done, not mine' In his anguish he prayed even more earnestly." - The prayer of Moses on the hilltop, isolated from the battle which was being waged on the plain (*Ex* 7, 8-13), is, according to the Fathers, a foreshadowing of Christ on the Cross outside the gates of Jerusalem. Cf. *Epist. Barnabae* 12, 2-4 (Hemmer. 74); Justin, *Dial. cum Triph.* 90, 4-5; 91, 3; 97, 1; 111, 1-2; 112, 2; Irenaeus, *Demonstrat.* 46.

(14) Hilary: "(The Evangelist says that) when evening came He was alone: this presignifies Christ's solitude during His passion", *In Matth.* 14, 23, *ML* 9, 1001.

(15) Cf. above note (8).

(16) Second Vatican Council Const. Past. *Gaudium et spes* 40: "The Church... serves as a leaven and as a kind of soul for human society as it is to be renewed in Christ and transformed into God's family" (cf. n. 3 of the same Constitution).

(17) The Church is at the service of men in their earthly undertakings: Second Vatican Council Const. *Gaudium et spes*, 3 and 40-45; decree *Ad gentes divinitus*, n. 12: "She claims no other authority than that of

ministering to men with the help of God, in a spirit of charity and faithful service.” -But it is especially in view of their eternal salvation that she serves them: cf. *Lumen Gentium* 48: “Christ... has established His body, the Church, as the universal sacrament of salvation”. Cf. n. 5.

(18) Cf. Second Vatican Council Const. *Lumen gentium*, nn. 2, 7, etc.

(19) Cf. Second Vatican Council Const. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 2.

(20) Cf. Second Vatican Council Const. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 38: “Now the gifts of the Spirit are diverse. He calls some to give clear witness to the desire for a heavenly home and to keep that desire green among the human family...”

(21) According to the tradition of the Fathers, the contemplative life portrays the prayer of Christ in solitude or on the mountain top, which in its turn prefigured the contemplative life. Cf. Cassian: “Yet He withdrew into the hills by Himself to pray, thus giving us an example of withdrawal...so that we likewise retire into solitude” (*Conlat.* 10, 6, 4, *ML* 49, 826); Jerome: “Seek then Christ in solitude, and pray alone with Jesus in the hills” (*Ep. ad Paulinum*, 58, 4, 2, *CSEL* 54, 532), Isidore: “But the fact that He passed the night praying in the hills, entails a foreshadowing of the contemplative life” (*Different.* lib. 2, 2, 34, *ML* 83, 91); Pseudo-Jerome: “When He prayed, He typified the contemplative life; when He sat to teach, He exemplified the active life... Going out to the hills to pray and going out toward the multitude, He portrayed the union of both lives” (*ML* 30, 571); Wilfrid Strabo: “When He ascended the mountain, He typified the contemplative life” (*Expos. in IV Evang.*, *ML* 114, 872); Paschasius Radbertus: “In order that we attend to God alone, in contemplation, that is on the mountain top” (*Expos. in Matth.*, *ML* 120, 522); William of St. Thierry: “(The solitary life) was intimately patronised by our Lord Himself and longed for in His presence by His disciples. When they who were in His company on the holy mountain saw the glory of His transfiguration, immediately Peter... decided that it would be good for him to stay there forever” (*Ad fratres de Monte Dei*, I, 1, *ML* 184, 310); Amadeus of Lausanne: “(God) established for us a vantage-point on the mountain top with Moses and Elias, thus enabling us to see unveiled what we are seeking” (*Hom* 3, ed. Bavaud, *Sources chrét.* 72, 90-92); Second Vatican Council, Const. *Lumen gentium*, n. 46: “Religious should carefully consider that through them, to believers and non-believers alike, the Church truly wishes to give an increasingly clear revelation of Christ. Through them Christ should be shown contemplating on the mountain... and always obeying the will of the Father who sent Him”

The exodus theme is likewise applied to the monastic life by John Climacus for the East (*Scala Paradisi*, 1st step, *MG* 88, 632-644), and from the time of Ambrose for the West (*Ep.* 27, 1-3, and 28, 1, 8, *ML* 16, 1047, 1051, 1053). Cf. also Jerome ad Eustochium: “Follow Moses into the desert, and you will enter the promised land” (*Ep.* 22, 24, *ML* 22, 410).

(22) Cf. Second Vatican Council Const. *Lumen gentium*, n. 41: “(The priest must not) be undone by his apostolic cares, dangers, and toils, but rather led by them to higher sanctity. His activities should be fed and fostered by a wealth of meditation”; decree *Perfectae Caritatis*, n. 5: “Therefore the members of each institute, as they seek God before all things and only Him, should combine contemplation with apostolic love. By the former they adhere to God in mind and heart”.

(23) The text is cited in Const. *Lumen gentium*, n. 42. Cf. the same Const. n. 44: “For the people of God has no lasting city here below but looks forward to one which is to come...”, n. 6: “The Church on earth while journeying in a foreign land away from her Lord, regards herself as an exile...”

(24) *Hos* 2, 14: “I am going to lure her and lead her out into the wilderness and speak to her heart”. Augustine: “It is difficult to see Christ in the crowd: a certain degree of solitude is necessary for our spirit; God is seen in a certain undistracted seclusion. The crowd is noisy; this vision demands isolation” (*In Io. Tract.* 17, 5, *ML* 35, 1533); Guigues the Carthusian: “Who, when His passion was imminent, left His apostles to pray alone, showing us particularly with this example how much solitude favors prayers, since He did not want to pray in anyone's company, not even the apostles” (*Consuetudines*, 80, 10, *ML* 153, 758). John of the Cross: “(For prayer) it is good to choose a place that is solitary, and even wild, so that the spirit may resolutely

and directly soar upward to God, and not be hindered or detained by visible things... For this reason our Savior was wont to choose solitary places for prayer, and such as occupied the senses but little, in order to give us an example. He chose places that lifted up the soul to God, such as mountains, which are lifted up above the earth". (*Ascent III*, 39, 2; *Canticle B*, 35, 1).

(25) Cf. Paul VI All. October 24, 1964: "May St. Benedict return to help us to recuperate the personal type of life which today we anxiously look for; which the development of modern-day living, on whose account we feel the exasperated desire to be ourselves, suffocates while promoting, deludes while making us conscious of it...Commotion, din, feverish activity, outward appearances and the crowd all threaten man's inner awareness. He lacks silence with its genuine voice speaking in the depths of his being; he lacks order, he lacks prayer, he lacks peace, he lacks himself" (A.A.S. 56 [1964] 987).

(26) Bruno, *Ad Radulphum*, 6 (*Sources chrét.* 88, p. 70-72).

(27) Second Vatican Council, Const. *Lumen gentium*, n. 46. - Cf. Evagrius: "The monk is he who is separated from all and united to all." (*De Oratione* 124, for French text see I. Hausherr, *Les leçons d'un contemplatif*, p. 158); Peter Damian: "Though we seem to be separated far from the Church through physical solitude, we are forever and most intimately in her presence through the inviolable mystery of unity" (*Opusc.* XI, L. qui appellatur *Dominus vobiscum*, 10, ML 145, 239). With words of great fervor St. Teresa presented that ideal to the nuns of the first convent she founded: "Oh my sisters in Christ! Help me to entreat this of the Lord, Who has brought you here together for that very purpose...this is your vocation; this must be your business; these must be your desires; these your tears; these your petitions" (*Way of Perfection* 1,5).

(28) Cf. Peter Damian: "Therefore, if all who believe in Christ are one in Him, wherever any member is bodily present, there too will the entire body be by reason of the sacramental mystery...Hence if we all form the same body of Christ, even though we appear to be scattered physically, spiritually however, it is impossible that we be separated one from the other since we remain in Him" (*Opusc.* XI L. qui appellatur *Dominus vobiscum*, 6, ML 145, 236-238); Paul VI: "You are not separated from the great communion of Christ's family, you are specialists, and your speciality is today, no less than yesterday, beneficial and edifying for the entire Church, and indeed even for the whole of society" (All. to the superiors of the Benedictine nuns, September 28, 1966, A.A.S. 58 [1966] 1159-1160).

(29) Cf. *Is* 11, 6-9; in the opposite sense, *Gen* 9:2. For the comparison of the monastery with paradise, cf. Jerome: "You have a cell for paradise: pick the various fruits of the Scriptures" (*Ep.* 125 *ad Rusticum* 7, ML 22, 1075); Anselm, *Ep.* 3, 102, ML 159, 140; Peter Damian, *Ep.* 6, 3, ML 144, 374; William of Malmesbury, *De gestis Pont. Angliae* 4, ML 179, 1612-1623; Bernard, *Sermo de diver.* 42, 4, ML 183, 663; William of St. Thierry, *De natura et dignitate amoris*, 25, ML 184, 396; Peter of Celle, *Ep.* 75, ML 202, 522. Cf. J. Leclercq, *La vie parfaite*, Turnhout 1948; G. M. Colombas, *Paraiso y vida angelica*, Montserrat 1958.

(30) Cf. Paul VI: "We want these islands of withdrawal, of penance, and of meditation to bear in mind... that they are neither forgotten nor detached from the communion of God's Church, but rather that they make up its heart, they multiply its spiritual wealth, they render its prayer sublime, they sustain its charity, they participate in its suffering, its fatigue, its apostolate, its hopes, they increase its merits" (All. of February 2, 1966, *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, [1966] p. 56).

(31) Second Vatican Council decree *Perfectae caritatis*, n. 7. John of the Cross: "A little of this pure love is more precious before God and the soul, more beneficial for the Church, than all those works together. For this reason Mary Magdalen...hid herself in the desert for 30 years to dedicate herself wholly to this love...in view of how much a little of this love benefits the Church and is important to Her....In a word, it was for this love that we were created" (*Canticle B*, 29, 2-3).

(32) Cf. Second Vatican Council Const. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 10: "The glorification of God, to which all other activities of the Church are directed as toward their goal"; cf. also Const. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 76; decree *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 2.

(33) Cf. Second Vatican Council decree *Ad gentes*, n. 18: "For the contemplative life belongs to the

fullness of the Church's presence, and should therefore be everywhere established." Cf. John XXIII: "The contemplative life! It constitutes one of the fundamental structures of the Holy Church, it has been present during all the phases of her bimillenary history" (All. to the Cistercians of the Strict Observance, September 20, 1960, A.A.S. 52 [1960] 896).

(34) "Charity gave me the key to my vocation. I understood that if the Church had a body, composed of different members, the most necessary, the noblest of all, would not be lacking. I understood that the Church had a heart and that this heart was burning with love. I understood that love alone makes the members of the Church act, that if love should be extinguished the apostles would no longer preach the Gospel, the martyrs would refuse to shed their blood...Yes, I have found my place in the Church...in the heart of the Church, my Mother, I shall be love" (*Autobiographical manuscripts*, ms B, Lisieux 1957, p.229).

(35) Cf. John XXIII: "For the apostolate, in the true sense of the word, consists in participation in the salvific work of Christ, which is possible only through assiduous prayer and personal sacrifice. In fact it was particularly through his prayer to the Father and through His self-immolation that the Savior redeemed the human race which was bound and crushed by sin. Hence it is that whoever endeavors to follow Christ in this essential aspect of His saving mission, even though he abstains from external action, exercises the apostolate nevertheless in a most excellent way" (Ep. *Causa praeclara* July 16, 1962, A.A.S. 54 [1962] 568).

(36) Second Vatican Council decree *Ad gentes* divinitus, n. 40. Cf. Const. *Umbratilem* (A.A.S. 16 [1924] 389), and the decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites super tuto for the canonization of B. Teresa Margaret Redi, February 18, 1934: "...the soul truly crucified with Christ in the supreme martyrdom of the spirit, acquires for itself and for others the superabundant fruits of redemption. Such are the purest and most exalted souls in the Church who by suffering, loving and praying exercise an apostolate which, though silent, benefits everyone to the utmost" (A.A.S. 26 [1934] 106).

(37) Cf. Paul VI: "Does this material, external and social seclusion separate you from the Church? I am here to tell you that the Church keeps you in mind. You are not forgotten, and for this reason that separation which would be the most desolating-the spiritual kind-does not exist. Why? Because you are the objects of special attention, of particular awareness, and even more. The Church is watching you, you have dedicated yourselves to this kind of life in order to speak unendingly with our Lord, to be able to understand His voice better, and-to sum up our poor human words with greater clarity and emphasis: you have turned this contact between heaven and earth into the one and only program of your entire life. You as contemplatives have dedicated yourselves to this absorption of your souls by God. You see, the Church perceives in you the fullest expression of itself; in a certain way you are placed at its peak" (All to the Camaldolese nuns on the Aventine, February 23, 1966, in *Vita Monastica*, n. 85, p. 68); "in the Catholic Church you have been assigned not only a place but also a function, as the Council says; you are not separated from the great communion of Christ's family, you are specialists..." (All. to the superiors of the Benedictine nuns, October 28, 1966 A.A.S. 58 [1966] 1159-1160). And the Second Vatican Council firmly declares: "Let no one think that by their consecration religious have become strangers to their fellowmen or useless citizens of this earthly city. For even though in some instances religious do not directly mingle with their contemporaries, yet in a more profound sense these same religious are united with them in the heart of Christ and cooperate with them spiritually. In this way the work of building up the earthly city can always have its foundation in the Lord and can tend toward Him. Otherwise, those who build the city will perhaps have labored in vain" (Const. *Lumen gentium*, n. 46). Such is the apostolic content of the contemplative ideal according to St. Teresa of Jesus: "Persuade the sisters to busy themselves constantly in beseeching God to help those who work for the Church" (*Way of Perfection*, title to chapter 3). "If we can prevail with God in the smallest degree about this, we shall be fighting His battle even while living a cloistered life. If your prayers and desires and disciplines and fasts are not performed for the intentions of which I have spoken, reflect and believe that you are not carrying out the work or fulfilling the object for which the Lord has brought you here" (Ibid., nn. 5,10).

(38) Second Vatican Council Const. *Lumen gentium*, n. 6.

(39) Ibid.

(40) Cf. Second Vatican Council Const. *Lumen gentium*, n. 6: “The Church. . . whom He unites to Himself by an unbreakable covenant...once she had been purified, He willed her to be joined unto Himself and to be subject to Him in love and fidelity.”

(41) The liturgy in the West adapts and applies nuptial metaphors only to holy women, illustrating their holiness as the splendor of the spiritual betrothals plighted with our Lord their Spouse. Conversely, never for them-as for men-does it ever employ themes relating to the new man, or to other motifs indicating a relationship with Christ as priest, pastor or prophet. Likewise, from the 4th century, the religious profession of women entailed a special ceremony distinct from that used by monks; this was the taking of the virginal veil, thought to have been adopted from the marriage veiling of brides, and which therefore signified a form of marriage.

(42) Cf. *Deut* 4, 24; *2 Cor* 11, 2: “The jealousy that I feel for you is God's own jealousy: I arranged for you to marry Christ so that I might give you away as a chaste virgin to this one husband.”

(43) Cf. the citations in note (3).

(44) Cf. Augustine *Serm.* 215, 4, *ML* 38, 1074.

(45) Second Vatican Council Const. *Lumen gentium*, n. 53.

(46) Such New Testament pericopes, like the gospel selections for certain solemnities of our Lady, are used from the 6th century, e.g. for the feast of the Dormition or Assumption, both in the East and the West (cf. B. Capelle, *La fete de l'Assomption dans l'histoire liturgique*, in *Ephemer. theol. Lovan.* 3 [1926] 33-45).

(47) Cf. *Acts* 6:2-4: “It would not be right for us to neglect the word of God so as to give out food...we will continue to devote ourselves to prayer and to the service of the word.”

(48) Cf. Message de moines contemplatifs to the 1st synod of bishops in the *L'Osservatore Romano* of September 12, 1967.

(49) Cf. Second Vatican Council Const. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 72.

(50) “A small, ideal society in which at last reign love, obedience, innocence, freedom from created things, and the art of turning them to good use, in which prevail the spirit, peace, and-in a word-the Gospel” (A.A.S. 56 ,1964] 987).

(51) Cf. Second Vatican Council Const. *Lumen gentium*, n. 46: “Finally, everyone should realize that the profession of the evangelical counsels, though entailing the renunciation of certain values which undoubtedly merit high esteem, does not detract from a genuine development of the human person. Rather, by its very nature it is most beneficial to that development.” Cf. also decree *Perfectae caritatis*, n.12.