



REVISION OF CONSTITUTIONS

WAY OF REVITALIZATION

4

THE EVANGELICAL  
COUNCIL OF CHASTITY



Rome, 2019-2021

## Constitutions and Chastity

*"Consecrated chastity is a gift from the Father, to whom we surrender our whole person by the action of the Spirit and consecrate our love to him".*

(Const. 16)

Today, we have reached this stage in our **spiritual pathway** of revitalization, where we will address the theme of consecrated chastity. Our Constitutions deal with this vow in numbers 16 to 19, beginning with its basis and objective; they then address our response to this gift of God, and the means to be used to sustain and support our practice of this evangelical counsel. Lastly, they present Mary as the model of Hospitaller virginity.

The inputs for this reflection will enable us to delve more deeply into the anthropological, Biblical, theological and charismatic meaning of "celibacy for the Kingdom of Heaven", in the manner of expressing the way we practise chastity in our consecrated life in a broader and more contemporary form.

We shall also be helped to enrich our way of practising celibacy based on a single and comprehensive understanding of it, encompassing our nature and women and mothers, sufficiently broadly to include the way we relate our lives to gentleness, closeness and unconditional love.

All this will lead us to discover the beauty of consecrated chastity practised through hospitality, and the way we express our discipleship of the compassionate and merciful Jesus, by specifying the experiential dimensions of the vow in community and apostolic terms.

### **Suggested methodology for the First Week:**

1. Present the fact sheet as a whole.
2. Propose the work for the first week, the enlightenment.
2. Dedicate time daily to personal reflection.
3. Set a date for the community meeting to share the reflection.
4. Summarise, in the meeting the two or three aspects that can help us in the renewal

## **I Week: Enlightenment**

### **➤ In the light of the Word**

Chastity is a theme that forms the very core of our Hospitaller Religious Consecration. In addition to being our fundamental choice of Jesus Christ, it is the tangible manifestation of the way we live our lives as His disciples. Let us focus our reflections

above all on the words, "the treasure hidden in a field" and the "pearl of great value" found in Matthew's Gospel.

*"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field which someone has found; he hides it again, goes off happy, sells everything he owns and buys the field. Again the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls; when he finds one of great value he goes and sells everything he owns and buys it" (Mt 13,44-46).*

The essence of both parables lies in the discovery of a precious good, for which it worthwhile "losing" everything else in order to possess it. The man who finds the treasure buried in the field is aware of its incomparable value, and decides to sell all he has, in order to buy the field. Similarly, the pearl merchant sells everything he possesses in order to buy the pearl of great value.

These parables place us before Jesus who is Himself the Kingdom of God already present in the world. Our decision to accept our vocation to follow Him entails our decision to live a life of consecrated virginity, namely, to be totally and exclusively devoted to loving Him and his work. Virginity is therefore essentially Christological. It is only through Jesus and His message that we can understand the deepest and fullest meaning and significance of this evangelical counsel.

But the text also shows us that it is not a personal achievement of ours, but a gift we have been freely given, as Jesus Himself tells us: *"Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only those to whom it is given"* (Mt 19,12). Consecrated chastity is a vocation, it is a call we have received. because it is primarily a grace.

*"You have seduced me, Yahweh, and I have let myself be seduced" (Jr 20,7).  
"Yahweh, my heritage, my cup, you, and you only, hold my lot secure; the measuring line marks out delightful places for me, for me the heritage is superb indeed" (Sal 16,5-6).*

Total self-giving to our Lord means having to set aside everything other than Him and His plan. But chastity is not defined as renunciation, in terms of what is set aside, but rather of the relationship of love which our Lord Himself gives us gratuitously, as an heirloom of inestimable value. Paul reminds us of the beauty of this virginal covenant.

*"An unmarried man can devote himself to the Lord's affairs, all he need worry about is pleasing the Lord; but a married man has to bother about the world's affairs and devote himself to pleasing his wife: he is torn two ways. In the same way an unmarried woman, like a young girl, can devote herself to the Lord's affairs; all she need worry is being holy in body and spirit" (1Cor 7,32-34).*

Only those who have discovered the great value of the Kingdom and its priority over any other value can become prophetic signs themselves, by dedicating the whole of their lives, body and soul, to Our Lord, totally ready and willing to undertake His mission of salvation. Virginity has an evident eschatological dimension by reproducing the permanent state of being called to an eternal marriage, that is to experience "the new heaven and the new earth" (Rev 21,1) inaugurated by Jesus.

## ➤ In the light of our Spiritual Heritage

*“ I would like you to think well in the presence of Our Lord of the great privilege and the great grace with which His Divine Majesty has favoured you by making you his own spouses. This is such a great grace and so outstanding that if well meditated it is sufficient to inflame the heart with Divine Love. But, what am I saying? Not only to inflame it, but to enrapture it and carry it away, intoxicating it in the sweet liquor of gratitude for such Divine Goodness which without any merit of ours has called us to his holy House and to his holy nuptials”<sup>1</sup>.*

This is a letter written by Father Menni five years after his daughters had embarked on the Religious Life. They had already made progress forward and had experienced life. In his letter, he once again emphasises the key aspects of love and relations with our Lord in their consecrated vocation. He urges them to weigh up the essentials, their motivations, and the beauty and the greatness of the gift which He has given us as a wholly undeserved gift.

This letter also urges them to discern whether Jesus was really their deepest treasure in terms of which all things, situations, problems and decisions had to be measured, and for which we must be accountable. He then urges the sisters to contemplate Our Lord who continues to call us today, to see how fervently we love our Lord with grateful thanks and pursue our path following Him faithfully. Chastity expresses total love, encompassing every aspect of our person in all its dimensions.

*“If an earthly King chose a poor little shepherdess as his spouse, what would she do on receiving such a great favour? She would be overwhelmed at not knowing what to do to prove her gratitude. And, what about us, who have been called by the divine mercy to marriage with our Jesus? What should we do to give witness to the gratitude of our heart at being raised to an honour so high that no creature can appreciate the excellence of that dignity? We know that our loving Jesus gives us this favour with generosity. Let us love him with all the ardour of our heart and surrender to him the whole of our being. In proof of our gratitude towards such a generous benefactor let us constantly sacrifice ourselves, doing everything and bearing everything for love of him, even all that most goes against our self-love. He, being God, has given us all; he has even given us Himself. Let us give him whatever he asks of us poor, unworthy servants and slaves”<sup>2</sup>.*

María Angustias offers a simple parable to contemplate this loving relationship, as the basis of our consecrated vocation and chastity. Parables always seek to engage the hearer, talking about things which the hearer is experiencing at the time, something which affects the hearer even though it may not be very clear at the time. She does so in order to “prepare their hearts” for new stage in the path of discipleship of the merciful Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> Letter 19.

<sup>2</sup> RMA 199.

Speaking prophetically, as the mystics have thoroughly explored, she identifies two persons taken from real life to represent the two extremes of social differences: a king and a little shepherdess. She deliberately chose these two characters to emphasise the gap between them, and the difference between them and their social status.

In human terms, the king stands for the highest level of social dignity, possesses all and can choose whatever wife he wishes for himself. At the other end of the scale there is a little shepherdess. María Angustias deliberately refers to her diminutively in Spanish as 'little', implying a combination of tenderness, simplicity and gentleness. A little shepherdess belongs to the poorest social group, one of the simple folk, those who have no power and no authority, and into the bargain those who belong to the group of people who live and work subject to the vagaries of the climate.

The vocation is a loving relationship between these two people, as a result of the initiative taken by the King. He chooses the little shepherdess for his wife, choosing her in preference to all the other possible candidates and therefore choosing her only out of love, to be his bride, to live with her. She emphasises the loving initiative taken by God who, as Pope Francis has said, is the One who has "sought you out first", and wants us to feel amazed at this truth, so that it will lead us to be thankful and committed. María Angustias asks us where the deepest joy of our vocation springs from? Where is the source of the merciful love that we are being called to show towards the poor, and the sick, to the sisters, and all those who are around us? Where does living in chastity spring from, for which we set aside all other loves, relationships and our own children? This presupposes the experience of "finding the hidden treasure" and the freedom to do without any other pearls of value (cf. Mt 13), and consequently feel joy and happiness, and not sadness or frustration.

The relationship between the King and the little shepherdess, which means each and every one of us, continues to show us an internal dynamic at work. It is a call of Love, and freely given gratuitous Love. Being called, and responding to the call, are a matter of attraction, self-giving, fascination, wonder and a deep-seated desire to requite the love of the One who has first loved us by offering the whole of our life to Him.

The meaning and significance of consecrated chastity is precisely that. Speaking of that, Pope Francis refers to the spousal fruitfulness, joyfulness and gratitude that typifies consecrated chastity as the main features of a prophetic Religious Life.

*"The desire which Our Lady's daughters have to offer lovingly all the relief they can to the poor sick patients, must be so extreme that their superiors are obliged to moderate them (...) May be so active that they want only to sacrifice themselves as like solicitous mothers to attend to the poor, mentally sick women who have been entrusted to us"<sup>3</sup>.*

Two features emerge from this text which form part of the practice of chastity and expressed within the field of the Hospitaller apostolic mission. Firstly, the fact that the heart focused on Jesus and totally dedicated to His cause is a heart which reaches beyond itself and offers itself generously, freely and with sacrifice, and which shows gentleness and caring concern. Secondly, the fact that Gospel-based chastity does not cut out love or relationships and affection, and is not castrating, but fruitful.

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<sup>3</sup> RMA 141.

Our Foundresses expressed consecrated chastity by showing a woman's sensitive love for the sick. María Josefa Recio urged the sisters to treat them as true mothers. Love given by practising chastity for the Kingdom is a fruitful love. This text is an invitation to us to analyse the communitarian and apostolic dimension of our chastity: to see whether it opens us up and commits us to others, to the sisters in the community, the people who are suffering and those who are asking for our loving care; to see whether we can be living it maturely and personally or whether, conversely, it closes us up, and makes us increasingly more individualistic and insensitive, with self-interested and only generic relationships, and whether we are increasingly sitting on our laurels and indifferent to the realities of life and the world around us. It questions us personally, but it is also questioning the way of life of our communities, and our commitment to the suffering.

### ➤ In the light of the Magisterium of the Church

The Church has always taught that "celibacy for the Kingdom" is a gift of God, a gift to the Church, which she welcomes gratefully in her consecrated men and women, accompanying its practice until it is fully realised.

The Trinitarian life is perfectly reflected in the practice of the vow of chastity for the Kingdom of Heaven.

*"The chastity of celibates and virgins, as a manifestation of dedication to God with an undivided heart (cf. 1 Co 7, 32-34), is a reflection of the infinite love which links the three Divine Persons in the mysterious depths of the life of the Trinity, the love to which the Incarnate Word bears witness even to the point of giving his life, the love «poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit» (Rm 5, 5), which evokes a response of total love for God and the brethren"<sup>4</sup>.*

Paul VI said that it is only possible to practise chastity in a loving relationship with God who has chosen us, convinced that this loving relationship focuses our hearts on Him, and frees them from other ties and turns us into a sign and a stimulus of apostolic fruitfulness.

*Chastity "when is truly lived, for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, consecrated chastity frees man's heart and thus becomes "a sign and stimulus of charity as well as a special source of spiritual fruitfulness in the world"<sup>5</sup>.*

*"For our part, We must be firmly and surely convinced that the value and the fruitfulness of chastity observed for love of God in religious celibacy find their ultimate basis in nothing other than the Word of God, the teachings of Christ, the life of His Virgin Mother and also the apostolic tradition, as it has been unceasingly affirmed by the Church. We are in fact dealing here with a precious gift which the Father imparts to certain people. This gift, fragile and vulnerable because of human weakness, remains open to the contradictions of mere reason*

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<sup>4</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata* (VC), Rome, 1996, n. 21.

<sup>5</sup> ET 14.

*and is in part incomprehensible to those to whom the light of the Word Incarnate has not revealed how he who loses his life for Him will find it*<sup>6</sup>.

This eschatological projection of the vow of chastity makes the new life present in our world already, and in the fullness to which we are called. Our witness reminds the world of this total love.

*“Through the vow of chastity, consecrated persons share in the economy of the Redemption through the free renunciation of the temporal joys of married and family life; on the other hand, precisely by their “having made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven,” they bring into the midst of this passing world the announcement of the future resurrection and of eternal life: life in union with God Himself through the beatific vision and the love which contains in itself and completely pervades all the other loves of the human heart*<sup>7</sup>.

Practising consecrated chastity in a world that worships the body and seeks immediate emotions, without commitment, runs against the cultural tide, and so our way of life is an alternative that bears witness to the liberating power of God’s love which fills the human heart and brings it happiness, by offering a life of freedom and respect for others in love and nurturing humanising and healing relations which bring us close to the people and enable us to grow in gentleness and compassion.

*“The consecrated person attests that what many have believed impossible becomes, with the Lord’s grace, possible and truly liberating. Yes, in Christ it is possible to love God with all one’s heart, putting him above every other love, and thus to love every creature with the freedom of God! This testimony is more necessary than ever today, precisely because it is so little understood by our world (...) Consecrated chastity thus appears as a joyful and liberating experience. Enlightened by faith in the Risen Lord and by the prospect of the new heavens and the new earth*<sup>8</sup>.

God’s project of love can be fulfilled in two ways; either in marriage or in consecrated chastity, which are mutually complementary, enriching and enlightening.

*“Virginity according to the Gospel (...) makes possible a different kind of motherhood: motherhood “according to the spirit” (cf. Rm 8, 4). (...) A consecrated woman finds her Spouse, different and the same in each and every person, according to his very words: “As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt 25, 40). (...) In virginity this readiness is open to all people, who are embraced by the love of Christ the Spouse*<sup>9</sup>.

Religious chastity is “a singular gift of grace” which predisposes our hearts to total love for God and for our fellow men and women, above all those in greatest need. But practising chastity is also a task, “a daily conquest”<sup>10</sup> which we have to focus on and care for, both for our personal growth and in formation, and also to distance ourselves

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<sup>6</sup> ET 15.

<sup>7</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptionis Donum*, (RD), Rome, 1984, n. 11.

<sup>8</sup> VC 88.

<sup>9</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, Rome, 1988, n. 21.

<sup>10</sup> Const 16.

from everything. It is likely to compromise this freely-taken decision that we have taken out of love.

Chastity requires formation and selection for candidates based not only on the anthropological meaning of sexuality, but also on the importance of the relations with others and with The Other One.

*“The observance of perfect continence touches intimately the deeper inclinations of human nature. For this reason, candidates ought not to go forward, no should they be admitted, to the profession of chastity except after really adequate testing, and unless they are sufficiently mature, psychologically and affectively. Not only should they be warned against the dangers to chastity which they may encounter, they should be taught to see that the celibacy they have dedicated to God is beneficial to their whole personality”<sup>11</sup>.*

### ➤ **Community prayer**

*To listen to God and to place our insights, wishes and concerns in His hands, we suggest setting aside a period for community prayer. Each community can organise this according to their particular situations but it would be interesting to use this week of **Enlightenment** to strengthen the climate of discernment and praise. You could use a particular time of celebration you may have planned already and give it the appropriate spiritual motivation.*

## II Week: Revision

### **Methodological Guidance:**

1. Present the objective of the second week.
2. Motivate the reflection and evaluation of personal and community life.
3. Prepare to share in common.
4. Set the date for the community meeting.

### ➤ **Revision of personal and community life**

Drawing on the fruits of our reflections let us dedicate time to contemplating God’s mercy and conduct a revision of our personal and community life. The following questions may be helpful:

1. What ideas, aspects, enlightenment, desires, record my heart in last week’s reflection?

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<sup>11</sup> CIVCSVA, *Directives on formation in religious Institutes*, Rome, 1990, n.13.



2. What does our practice of chastity as women and on the basis of our charism contribute to the Church?
3. What means can help us to achieve human maturity, to live freely, transparently and joyfully, and to reach beyond ourselves to become only for God?
4. What contributions can enliven and enrich the theme of chastity in the Constitutions?

**Sharing in the community:** convene a community meeting to share two or three aspects which will help us to make further progress along this path of revitalisation.

➤ **Psalm of self-giving** (Ps 16(15))

Yahweh my heritage, The Lord goes with me,	<i>You are my refuge You are my refuge</i>
My fate is in his hands, Who holds fast to the Lord,	<i>You are my refuge You are my refuge</i>
With Him. I shall walk forward, With Him. I shall not die,	<i>You are my refuge. You are my refuge</i>
My heart rejoices, The Lord accompanies me,	<i>You are my refuge You are my refuge</i>
You show me the path, You will never leave me,	<i>You are my refuge You are my refuge</i>
Sing to the Lord, He is our inheritance,	<i>You are my refuge You are my refuge</i>

➤ **Prayer** (from Jeremiah)

*You have seduced me, Yahweh. I have let myself be seduced.  
You have overpowered me and I prevailed.*

Yahweh tells me: Here I am, I place my words on you.  
I give you today all the nations of the world to uproot, build and plant.

Yahweh says: I will make you like a Wall of bronze and ivory.  
They will war against you and never succeed. I am with you, do not fear.

Happy are those who trust in Yahweh and place their love in Him.  
Yahweh says: I set out path of life before you.

## III Week: Contributions

### Suggested methodology:

1. Present the work for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Week.
2. Motivate the reflection and evaluation of personal and community life.
3. Share and take note of the changes that can be sources of motivation for our charism today.
4. Record the situations for changes to each number in the grid.
5. Forward the summary to the Province the following week.

### Consecrated chastity in the Constitutions

Numbers of Constitutions	Inputs
<p><b>16 The basis and object of the vow</b></p> <p>Consecrated chastity is a gift from the Father, to whom we surrender our whole person by the action of the Spirit and consecrate our love to him.</p> <p>In order to become like Christ in the mystery of his virginity, which is a total intimate love for the Father and to the brothers and sisters, we promise, by the vow of chastity, to live perfect continence in celibacy. This celibacy, embraced for the sake of the Kingdom, is a pledge and incentive of charity, a source of apostolic fruitfulness and a sign of the world to come.</p>	
<p><b>17 Our self-giving made possible</b></p> <p>Consecrated chastity enables us to love everyone with the very love of the Heart of Jesus and gives witness to the world of our preferential love for Jesus.</p> <p>Likewise, it frees our heart and prepares it fittingly for our Hospitaller mission to bring the love of Jesus, which is universal, gratuitous, personal and merciful, into the lives of all people, especially to the sick.</p>	

<p><b>18 Means to support our chastity</b></p> <p>Virginity, a call and a gift of God, is also on our part a daily conquest, a joyful and dynamic response, which involves our whole existence. In order to live it we need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- a humble attitude</li> <li>- and an openness to the action of the Spirit;</li> <li>- a personal intimacy with Jesus and an attentive listening to his word;</li> <li>- to take part in the Eucharist and in the sacrament of reconciliation;</li> <li>- a filial prayerful love for Mary and readiness to imitate her life;</li> <li>- a community life where fraternal relationship is encouraged;</li> <li>- mortification and a guard of the senses;</li> <li>- prudence in the use of the mass media;</li> <li>- an integral formation and a constant endeavour to attain interior equilibrium.</li> </ul> <p>All this is necessary, because living in chastity affects the deepest inclinations of our nature and demands serious renunciation.</p>	
<p><b>19 Mary, model of our virginity</b></p> <p>Mary, ever virgin, is the model of our consecrated virginity. She teaches us and help us to live in complete self-giving to God and in free, personal love for our brothers and sisters.</p>	

**IV Week: Celebration**

**Methodology:**

1. *It is very important to celebrate the steps of the way we have walked.*
2. *Prepare a celebration of prayer and another festive celebration.*
3. *We end up giving the 5<sup>th</sup> fact sheet.*