

"CONSECRATED LIFE IS A VERB, NOT A NOUN" FIVE LETTERS ON CONSECRATED LIFE TEN YEARS LATER

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INTRODUCTION

1. Greetings and thanks

Hello everyone, to all the Redemptorist family! I know that I am addressing a great missionary Congregation spread throughout the world and present in 79 countries. You are the expression of the dream of the great prophet of Mercy, St Alphonsus Liguori. You are the harvest of that humble seed. Remember those prophetic words of St. John Paul II in "Vita Consecrata"

"You have not only a glorious story to remember and tell, but a great story to build! Set your eyes on the future, to which the Spirit impels you to continue to do great things with you" (VC, 110).

I thank Fr. General Rogério Gomes for his invitation to address you in preparation for the day of Consecrated Life that we will celebrate on February 2, 2025.

2. The title

The title I have chosen may seem unusual: "Consecrated Life is a Verb, Not a Noun: Five Letters... Ten Years Later." In 2015, we celebrated the Year of Consecrated Life. The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life—now called a Dicastery—sent five letters to

Religious. Each of them carried a title in the imperative form: Rejoice! Scrutinize! Proclaim! Contemplate! And the last letter also bore an imperative expression: *New Wine in New Wineskins!*

Inspired by the famous song by the Guatemalan artist Ricardo Arjona, *Dios es verbo, no sustantivo* (God is a Verb, Not a Noun), I applied this concept to this reflection: "Consecrated Life is a Verb, Not a Noun." Other authors have echoed this idea, such as the writer R. Buckminster Fuller, and in his well-known novel *The Shack*, Paul Young attributes to the Holy Spirit the phrase: "I am a verb. I am who I am... always active and moving... Verbs give life to the universe."

And so, I thought: why not affirm that "consecrated life is a verb, not a noun"? This was the inspiration behind the five letters: Rejoice! Scrutinize! Proclaim! Contemplate! *New Wine in New Wineskins!* This will be the theme of our reflection.

3. Today... a new and unexpected context!

But from 2015 to today 2025, 10 years have passed. In this time, we have to ask ourselves: do we live "in the verb mood" or "in the substantive mood"? Are we what we are or are we moving towards what we will be?

And even more: 10 years have passed and we have to ask ourselves: "are we a verb but "in a contemporary way"? The five letters also need to be "updated" – an upgrading. Because let's look at what has happened in the last ten years!

- We have already talked about Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning (which machines learn). We interact with a world – hitherto unknown – the digital world.
- 5G technology has revolutionized everything: telemedicine, smart cities, communication, the financial system.
- Pope Francis' Encyclicals speak to us not only about theology, but also about integral ecology, about climate change; We are not only talking about sexuality, but about gender theory, equality, justice,

mental health... Movements like #MeToo have influenced our way of understanding Ethics, Morality. We are accused of sexual abuse, abuse of power, economic abuse: the complete opposite of the evangelical counsels! What will acceptance of sexual, racial, and cultural diversity mean for us?

4. "2025" - The new Context

"Religious life is a verb, not a noun." And now we find ourselves with new contexts that speak to us of "responsible consumption", "circular economy", "teleworking", "migration crisis", "persistent armed conflicts", "loss of biodiversity".

Finally, if we think about the future of our institutes, we can ask ourselves: will today's children and young people – the so-called *Beta Generation* – a term coined by the Australian demographer Mark McCrindle – be attracted to our way of life and mission? Will our communities be habitable spaces for them?

This is the new context that awaits us to live religious life "in a contemporary way". It's time to be a verb and not a noun! The five letters invited us to do so in five aspects of our lives: discernment, rejoicing, proclaiming, contemplating, new wine-new wineskins. Let's return to them, remember their message, reinterpret them in the new horizon of 2025!

THE FIRST LETTER - SCRUTINIZE! "STATIO"

The letter "Scrutinize" invited us to make a "statio", that is, an active pause that is both stillness and movement, to discern the signs of God in the present time.

This practice, inspired by an ancient Roman liturgical tradition, seeks to generate in us an attentive and reflective look at the current reality. It is a stop: let us stop to contemplate the path we have travelled and the one we still have to take.

Scrutinize! It is the time to **listen to the whisper of the Spirit** and rediscover the traces of God in the past and present. The "statio" is not an end, but a new beginning, a threshold towards a renewed mission, where the eyes are opened to the mystique of the everyday.

To understand today's world, the letter invites us to "**stop**" to "**discern**" and look at reality with "open eyes" to recognize both the seeds of life and the obstacles. There are **signs of God** in this time! Just as the cloud of the Exodus led the People through the desert to the Promised Land, so today the Holy Spirit guides us to the peripheries and humble places. Just as the prophet Elijah was God's passionate seeker and advocate, so too we must be recognized as passionate seekers of God. Let us remember that when someone entered a monastery the abbot asked him: What are you coming for? And the postulant answered: "To seek God."

There are people in today's consecrated life who are "anonymous atheists," affected by "interior atheism." They are disconnected from God, even though their outward appearance is that of a believer, or a religious. The inner atheist is like a mobile phone with no coverage, no connection.

The letter concludes that consecrated life must be an **active "verb"** in response to the call to scrutinize the signs of God. This pause, the sacred "statio", is a moment to renew purpose and passion, and to rediscover our consecrated life as a living and dynamic action in the world. Guided by the Spirit, consecrated life is called to write a new chapter in the history of God's love. To renew the mission – opening our eyes to the mysticism of the everyday – we have to re-invent our "statio"... But let's not forget the saying that goes:

"There is no path without a shortcut, and no shortcut without a detour"

THE SECOND LETTER: "REJOICE!" GAUDETE"

The letter "Rejoice!" invites us to rediscover joy as the essence of the consecrated vocation, a profound joy that springs from the encounter with the divine. And that meeting was foretold by Karl Rahner when he said: the Christian of the twenty-first century will either be a mystic or he will be nothing.

Ten years later, in the context of 2025, this invitation resonates with a new urgency. In a world marked by uncertainty and accelerated technological changes, joy is presented not only as a personal experience, but as a vital and contagious testimony.

The **digitally native "Beta Generation"** seeks authenticity and depth, turning this genuine joy into a beacon of hope. Consecrated life, therefore, is called to be a living example of this joy, radiating the peace that comes from the certainty of God's love and providence, which must be described today as the "sustainability" that God offers us.

The re-reading of "Rejoice!" in 2025 must emphasize the dynamic dimension of vocation, understood as a "*via amoris*" in constant search of God. This search is inspired by the Song of Songs, where the relationship between God and the soul is described as a passionate encounter. In its best moments, religious life always resorted to this book of Scripture. Why not today?

Consecrated persons, like "*Mebassers*" – a Hebrew word applied not to prophets of misfortune, but to the prophet of Joy – must take this joy to the "frontiers", creating a culture of encounter, especially with the poor and vulnerable, using technology as a tool to amplify its impact.

In 2025, joy cannot be understood as a passive and individual feeling, but as a **transformative force** that drives action. Consecrated life, called to be an active and dynamic "word", finds its driving force in joy. This joy is nourished by fraternity, mutual listening and sharing a journey of faith.

Joy is the essence of vocation, a dance of God's heart that transforms the world. Pope Francis said, "Where religious are, there is joy." An old saying put very realistically:

*"You can't stop the bird of sadness from flying over your head,
but you can stop it from nesting in your hair."*

THE THIRD LETTER: ANNOUNCE! "PROCLAMATIO"

The letter "Announce!" presents the mission as a call to be "***Mebasser***", joyful messengers of the Gospel, in a world marked by meaninglessness, consumerism and disenchantment. This proclamation is not a simple transmission of ideas, but a transformative encounter that must bring comfort and hope to every corner of the earth. Yes, it must be repeated: to every corner of the earth!

The consecrated life must be "**contemplative in mission**", serving the Word from witness, liturgy and diakonia.

This movement is guided by the Holy Spirit, who impels us to leave things as they are and to seek new ways to proclaim the Gospel.

Mission refers not only to traditional evangelization, but also to ***the "Samaritan mission"*** of healing, the apostolate of prayer, and innovation in evangelizing processes. The weakness of evangelizers is recognized, but it is also affirmed that God's strength is manifested in them. The community is seen as the first structure of evangelization, a space where communion is lived and mission is persevered.

Announcing in 2025 requires great "missionary intelligence" with the Beta Generation in mind

In the context of 2025, the proclamation of the Gospel must take into account the impact of technology, the "Beta Generation" and new social challenges. Consecrated life must ***use technology*** to reach more people and adapt to different

cultural contexts, but without losing sight of its contemplative and prophetic essence.

Communication and Interaction: Generation Beta naturally uses 5G technology and other digital tools, which requires religious communities to adapt their forms of internal and external communication. Consecrated life must **use technology to strengthen its mission** and vocation, reaching more people in different cultural contexts.

Education and Formation: Innovative formative itineraries **are needed** that recognize the uniqueness of each person and foster their spiritual growth, adapting to contemporary challenges. Training should integrate the technological skills of Generation Beta.

Spirituality and Contemplation: In a world of "contemporary vertigo" caused by technology, contemplation becomes an essential refuge. Consecrated life must **be reinvented to show that God is real**, discovering his presence in this new digital context.

Adaptation to a "Verb Mode": The Beta Generation encourages religious communities to reflect on whether they are living their vocation in a dynamic ("verb mode") or a static ("noun mode") way. Consecrated life must be an **active "verb"**, in constant search and transformation, rather than a static "noun".

In short, Generation Beta is a catalyst for profound changes for consecrated life in 2025. It requires not only technological adaptation, but also a revision of mission, spirituality and the way of relating to the world and among its members. Consecrated life must embrace innovation and creativity to respond to the challenges of this new generation, while maintaining its evangelical essence and commitment to humanity.

We have to be people and communities going out to announce. As the saying goes:

"He who does not leave his house, does not know the world."

THE FOURTH LETTER: BEHOLD: "CONTEMPATIO"

The letter "Contemplate!" invites us to rediscover the **contemplative essence** of consecrated life, presenting contemplation as an **essential refuge** in a world marked by speed and superficiality.

In the context of 2025, where technology and "contemporary vertigo" intensify the pace of life, this letter urges us to stop to find depth and transcendent meaning.

Contemplation is not limited to contemplative institutes, but is a call for all, a way to *discover divine beauty* and to be transformed by it by contemplating it. It is a "**statio orante**", a sacred space where we actively seek God, fixing our gaze and heart on Him, allowing His beauty to transform us.

Inspired by the Song of Solomon, the letter describes the search for God as a "*path in the footsteps of beauty*." This beauty is manifested in Jesus, the "fairest of men", and in creation, which reflects the divine greatness. Contemplation brings us closer to this beauty, generating wonder, praise and also vulnerability.

In 2025, contemplation is a response to the disorientation and vertigo caused by the accelerating changes in the world. Consecrated life is called to be "**homo viator et contemplativus**", a traveller and seeker in times of disorientation, showing that God is real in an increasingly digital and fast-paced world.

We will ask ourselves: how to adapt contemplative practices to the reality of a hyperconnected young religious life? Well, by integrating technology into contemplative practice: technology is not the problem, but how it is used; to create spaces for silence, reflection and prayer in the virtual world; connecting contemplation with beauty and art; to offer spaces of "statio orante", brief moments of contemplation to escape from contemporary vertigo. And thus, connect contemplation with mission and service. As the saying goes:

"Silence is the best mirror to see the soul."

THE FIFTH LETTER: "A NEW WINE NEW WINESKINS – TRANSFORMATIO

The letter "To new wine, new wineskins" is an urgent call **to the transformation** of consecrated life, especially relevant in the context of this year 2025 and in the face of the reality of the Beta Generation.

The central metaphor of the new wine, which needs new wineskins, urges us to leave behind **obsolete customs and traditions**, which impede the vitality of the Gospel. This renewal implies a profound discernment to identify those "old wineskins" that are no longer useful and to open up to **new forms of life**, both at the personal, community and structural levels. The key is adaptation, creativity, and an attitude of openness to the action of the Spirit.

The letter proposes concrete paths for transformation, recognizing that *renewal must be comprehensive*.

On a personal level, innovative training methods **are needed** that recognize the uniqueness of each person and foster their spiritual growth, adapting to contemporary challenges, including the impact of technology and the digital culture of the Beta Generation.

At the community level, equitable relationships based on mutual respect **are promoted**, creating spaces to listen to the voice of the Spirit in community gatherings.

At the structural level, a new type of participatory leadership **is proposed**, where authority is understood as a shared service, and transparent economic management, focused on the common good, is urged.

In the context of 2025 and the presence of Generation Beta, transformation is even more crucial. This generation, digitally native, requires consecrated life to adapt to their hyper-connected reality, using technology in creative ways to strengthen their mission and vocation.

The call to transformation is not only a matter of adaptation, but of **profound renewal of heart**, allowing the Gospel to breathe in communities and manifest

itself in bold and prophetic service to the world. It is time to be a "verb" and not a "noun", it is time to embrace "**new wine**" with "**new wineskins**".

The Beta Generation, with its worldview, invites us to reimagine consecrated life to make it attractive and relevant in the 21st century. Well, as the saying goes:

"Either renew or die"

CONCLUSION:

THE MARIAN PARADIGM FOR CONSECRATED LIFE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

1. Inspired by Mary

The Mother of Perpetual Help is your inspiration on this journey. She embodies joy, service, contemplation and mission: she is the "Woman of the New Wine". Her figure and presence invites us to live with joy and discernment the challenges of the twenty-first century. She, *as the main associate and helper of the Holy Spirit*, inspires us and helps us to face the challenges of the twenty-first century.

- The first letter, "Scrutinize!", calls us to make a "statio", an active pause to discern the signs of God in today's world. Like Mary, we must learn to **look with our hearts**, with "open eyes" to reality, to recognize the seeds of the Word and the guidance of the Spirit. This active discernment allows us to relocate and find our place in a complex world.
- The second letter, "Rejoice!", reveals to us that joy is the essence of the consecrated vocation, a profound joy that arises from the encounter with the divine. Following Mary's example, we must live

our vocation as a "via amoris", a journey of constant search for the face of God.

- The third letter, "Announce!", urges us to be "*Mebasser*", joyful messengers of the Kingdom, bringing comfort and hope to the peripheries. Like Mary, we must be bold in mission, adapting to different cultural contexts and responding to the urgencies of our time, being an "outgoing Church".
- The fourth letter, "Contemplate!", invites us to rediscover the contemplative dimension of our lives, seeking divine beauty in the midst of "contemporary vertigo". Mary, **a woman of contemplation**, inspires us to pause, to look with our hearts, to seek God in creation and to allow ourselves to be transformed by his beauty.
- The fifth letter, "To new wine, new wineskins!", calls us to the profound transformation of consecrated life, leaving behind the obsolete to welcome the new that the Spirit offers us. Like Mary, the **"Woman of the New Wine"**, we must be receptive to the Spirit's appeals, allowing our communities to flourish in this new time, innovating and creating boldly.

The five letters offer us a way to renew our vocation, to face the challenges of the contemporary world and to witness to God's love with joy, boldness and profound humanity.

Mary, associate of the Holy Spirit, is our model for living a consecrated life that is a "verb" and not a "noun." A Verb in the new times and the new generations. Mary is a "source of inspiration" to bring the "new wineskins" that the consecrated life needs for a new wine. She was "the influencer" who caused the miracle and will continue to cause new miracles. She, the contemplative, will free us from "contemporary vertigo". She will be "the connection" we need the most. Mary is the mystic with her eyes open, the one who holds the key to the cellars, that is, to where the best wine is.

FINAL GREETING

We have explored together how our consecrated life is **a vibrating verb, a moving path, not a comfort zone noun**. The five letters, which are now 10 years old, have not lost an iota of their "new wine" flavour, because we have reread them in the 2025 mode, in the "Beta Generation" mode, that is, in the current mode, in the "here and now" mode... in "new wineskins".

We have seen that

- **To scrutinize** is to stop to look with "open eyes", like someone looking for treasure on a map.
- **to rejoice** is to be infected by that joy that springs from the encounter with the divine and that is shared in community, as when we score a goal in the World Cup final!
- **To advertise** is to go out on the field with the "*Mebasser*" shirt, bringing the Good News to all corners, even to those who do not have WiFi!
- **Contemplating** is like recharging one's batteries in the "statio orante" to return to the mission with renewed strength, as after a good coffee!
- **To transform** is to open ourselves to the new, like someone who changes clothes to go to a party, leaving behind the "old wineskins" that no longer suit us!

And on this path, our "influencer" is Mary, the "Woman of the New Wine", who teaches us to be contemplatives in action, dynamic in search, and joyful in service.

So, brothers, to continue to be a **verb**, to continue walking, to continue transforming and to continue enjoying this adventure that is consecrated life in 2025! A fraternal embrace from the Andes to the Mekong! May the Spirit continue to inspire us!

Original Text: Spanish

English Translation: Joseph Ivel Mendanha, C.Ss.R.

FINAL SONG

[...]