

Consecration, Personal

In the strict sense, consecration signifies the total dedication of a person or thing to God and His service, and its separation from ordinary human use. By the act of consecration a state or stable condition is inaugurated: what is consecrated thereafter belongs exclusively to God. In common Christian usage the term is applied to the conversion of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, to elevation to the episcopate, to the blessing of churches, altars, sacred vessels, and cemeteries. But the idea of consecration is realized also in Baptism, which may indeed be called the fundamental consecration of the Christian life. Through it the baptized person, by a title distinct from that of creation, belongs and is consecrated to God. Confirmation also, and the Sacrament of Orders, involving the Christian more fully in the service of God, can be considered consecrations, or at least as enlargements of the consecration of Baptism.

In addition to this type of consecration, there is another that exists when an individual not only belongs to God, but also sees the relationship and is freely determined by his own choice to accept it, to live in accord with the responsibilities it imposes, and perhaps also to undertake good works or practices that are not obligatory by reason of his baptismal commitment. Thus, from the 4th century, the vow of virginity, accompanied by the liturgical blessing, was called a consecration. Later, the vows of religion were recognized as having a similar character. Similarly, any engagement undertaken by an individual to accept his already existing baptismal obligations, or to enlarge the scope of his service of God, can be considered a kind of consecration, although the idea is less perfectly realized in a determination not stabilized by vow and unratified by the authority of the Church.

Strictly speaking, one can consecrate himself only to God, for only God has the right to man's total dedication and service. Consecration to Christ, to the Sacred Heart, is legitimate because of the Hypostatic Union. But "consecration" to the Blessed Virgin, or even to St. Joseph or to other saints, is not unknown to Christian piety. In the case of St. Joseph or the other saints, this is to be understood as consecration in a broad sense of the term, and it signifies no more than an act of special homage to one's heavenly protector. The case of the Blessed Virgin, however, is not the same. The importance of her role in Christian spirituality is such that formulas of dedication to her appear to have a more profound meaning. Her position in the economy of salvation is inseparable from that of her Son. Her desires and wants are His, and she is in a unique position to unite Christians fully, quickly, and effectively to Christ, so that dedication to her is in fact dedication to Christ. French spirituality has made much of consecration to Mary. Cardinal Bérulle encouraged the vow of servitude to Jesus and Mary. St. John Eudes propagated the devotion of consecration not only to the Sacred Heart, but to the heart of Mary as well. But the practice achieved its strongest expression in the *Traite' de la vraie devotion à la Sainte Vierge* of St. Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort. The act of personal consecration according to De Montfort, is an act of complete and total consecration. It consists in giving oneself entirely to Mary in order to belong wholly to Jesus through her.

Bibliography: L. M. Grignon de Montfort, *Treatise on the True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary*, tr. F. W. Faber (London 1863; rev. ed. Bay Shore, N.Y. 1941). A. Tanqueray, *The Spiritual Life*, tr. H. Branderis (2nd ed. Tournai 1930; repr. Westminster, Md. 1945). A. Royo, *The Theology of Christian Perfection*, ed. and tr. J. Aumann (Dubuque 1962). J. de Finance, *DictSpirAscMyst* 2:1576–83. [N. Lohkamp]