

DECREE ON THE ADAPTATION AND RENEWAL OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

PERFECTAE CARITATIS

OCTOBER 28, 1965

Religious orders arose to meet the particular spiritual and/or temporal needs of their age. Over time, however, many of them failed to adapt to a changing world and came to be seen as relics of a bygone era, rather than effective witnesses for today. The Council Fathers call for a renewal of religious life, to make religious orders relevant once again.

Religious orders are urged to:

1. recommit to the following of Christ as the highest rule
2. return to their “founders’ spirit and special aims” [*or charism*]
3. contribute to the life of the Church
4. promote among their members a knowledge of social conditions and needs
5. rededicate themselves to living the evangelical counsels [*i.e., the vows*] (#2)

The religious habit

Each religious order had its own distinct manner of dress, which generally had not changed since its foundation, centuries earlier. Some of these “habits” were wildly inappropriate for the work that the religious were now called to do. To modern eyes, some of them seemed ostentatious or bizarre, rather than simple and modest. The Council Fathers urge that religious garb be more functional and suited to modern times. (#17) In response, many communities either stop wearing a habit entirely, or restrict its use to more solemn occasions.