1. Is it true that the *Ordo Consecrationis virginum* is reserved to nuns of solemn vows, to members of women’s secular institutes, and to virgin women living in the world, whereas the *Ordo Professionis religiosae* is the only rite which can be used for religious of simple vows?

2. If the religious of simple vows were to use the *Ordo Professionis religiosae*, can they be considered consecrated in the same way as women who receive the *consecrationis virginum*? Can it be said that there is a hierarchy of consecration? And if so, what is it that constitutes the ultimate or higher degree, the rite used or the nature of the vows?

3. Is the vow necessary to the consecration, or is any commitment accepted by the Church sufficient, like the promise?

4. Does the consecration occur with temporary profession or with perpetual profession?

5. Is the rite of *consecratio* restricted to women, or can it be used also for men belonging to secular institutes? If it is reserved only for women, what is the reason for this? For historical and cultural reasons, or is this aspect of consecration based on the nature of women?

6. In the article appearing in *L’Osservatore Romano* on the new rite of religious profession, it is said that this rite is a true and proper “consecration”. Now that oil is not used in the new rite, what is the explanation for how the consecration takes place in the strict sense?

7. Does the prayer of blessing of the *Ordo professionis religiosae* have the same value, in essence, as that of the *Ordo Consecrationis virginum*?

On 1. The *Ordo Consecrationis Virginum* (= OCV) is effectively reserved to nuns (*moniales*), to women of secular institutes and also to other laywomen. This is the correct reading of n. 3 of the *Praenotanda* to the OCV. It may seem surprising that nowadays a category of religious (nuns) may be admitted to the *Consecratio Virginum* and another (sisters) excluded, while members of secular institutes and laywomen are admitted. The proposal that even sisters of institutes of perpetual vows be given the possibility of choosing, if they so wish, the *Ordo professionis religiosae* (= OPR) or the OCV, was declined.
The decision is certainly based on valid and well considered reasons which did not support the acceptance of the proposal for now. But it seems just and reasonable to envisage a development of the current approach in the future. Since this is ecclesiastical law, expressed for now only in the new Pontifical, exceptions could be made following requests from individual institutes.

Still, the fact that the OCV, a rare privilege until recently, may be extended also to laywomen is considered a noteworthy achievement.

Regarding the second part of the question, the matter should be seen in a different way: the OPR is the Ordo for all religious (in fact, many nuns of solemn vows prefer to follow the OPR). On the other hand, experts of the Consilium were advised by the S.C. for Religious that very probably in the future Code of Canon Law, the distinction between simple vows and solemn vows will disappear. The OPR was therefore drafted without regard to such distinction. The OPR expects perpetuity and totality of the gift.

On 2. Of course. Religious who, having perpetual vows, use OPR, are, according to the intention of the Church and the words of the rite, truly consecrated.

As for the second part of the question: there does not seem to be greater or lesser degrees of consecration determined by the use of different rites. The consecratory terminology of OPR, chapter III, is not less “strong” than that of the OCV, chapter II.

On 3. Strictly speaking, a “vow” is unnecessary, in the technical sense that this term has acquired in the last century, for determining the consecration. Instead, it is indispensable that the subject has the intention of offering herself to God totally and perpetually, and that such intention be accepted by the Church. Such is the criterion that seems to inspire n. 5c of the Praenotanda to the OCV.

On 4. A person is consecrated by perpetual profession and by the concomitant liturgical action of the Church (prex consecratoria). The very nature of the consecration requires it, which presupposes totality and perpetuity. On this liturgists and canonists today are in agreement. Chapter II of the OPR (temporary profession) never uses the term “consecratio”, “consecrari” … which are reserved exclusively in chapter III (perpetual profession).

On 5. There is progress in OPR as regards men. On them too, if they have embraced the religious life, the Church pronounces on the day of their perpetual profession a solemn prayer of consecration, and thus considers them consecrated men (on this matter the Constitution Lumen gentium, chapter IV, offers a good doctrinal basis).
However, for laymen, a rite parallel to that of the *Consecratio Virginum*, which can receive laywomen, has not been developed. Undoubtedly, this is due largely to historical and cultural reasons, and a tradition that goes back almost to the sub-apostolic age.

We do not know the future. It may be that later the mentality of the faithful will evolve and lead to a consecration for laymen similar to that for virgins. For now the circumstances for it do not seem to arise. Probably the Church thinks so too, both pastors and faithful. We are not aware that a request in this matter has ever been advanced.

On 6. Effectively the OPR and OCV rites have the nature of true consecration. The term consecration should not be restricted to those in which oil is used.

To determine whether or not a rite contains a consecration, it is necessary to look first at the whole intention of the Church and see if there exist in the thing or person the requisites necessary to the concept of consecration (total and permanent dedication to God…). Therefore, the fact that oil is used or not, is by itself secondary. The use of oil in most consecrations is because the Church considers the anointing an eloquent rite, demonstrative of her intention. In fact, in the liturgy oil is often a sign expressive of consecration already made in virtue of other liturgical actions. In the rites of baptism and priestly ordination, for example, the true consecration precedes the respective anointing of the head of the newly-baptised and the hands of the newly-ordained, the anointing of which shows very well the interior effects produced by the descent of the Spirit. The only New Testament anointing, of clearly divine-apostolic institution, the anointing of the sick, does not come within the ambit of a properly consecratory rite.

The *Consecratio Virginum* is always considered a true consecration, also from the canonical point of view, even though as a rule oil has never been used. Similarly, in the ordination of deacons, in which the character of consecration cannot be denied, oil is not used.

On 7. Such has always been the intention of the persons responsible for the liturgy in this area.