This semester, we have chosen to devote attention to consecration. My remarks today are intended to reflectively engage that theme.

What is consecration?

Consecration is an act by which someone or something is separated from a common and profane use to a sacred use.¹ Thus, when we consecrate persons we dedicate them to the service and worship of God.

How does consecration take place?

The practice of consecrating persons to God’s service and things to serve in the worship of God goes back to ancient times.

In ancient Israel, consecration commonly involved three steps: (1) separating, (2) sanctifying or purifying, and (3) making an offering to God.

As described in Exodus 24, the rite of consecration was even more elaborate and involved four components:

- Erecting an altar and twelve memorial stones (to represent the twelve tribes);

- Selecting twelve youths to perform a burnt-offering;
- Moses read the covenant, and the people made their profession of obedience;
- Moses sprinkled upon the people the blood reserved from the burnt offering.

Later on in Exodus 29 we read of the consecration of the priests — Aaron and his sons— who had been previously elected (Exodus 28). Here the act of consecration consists of purifying, investing, and anointing (Leviticus 8) as a preparation for offering a public sacrifice. The placing of the meat in their hands (Exodus 29: 24, 25) was considered an essential part of the ceremony of consecration. It signified that they were authorized to receive their portions of the offerings. The phrase translated in Judges 17: 5 and 1 Kings 13: 33 as “install” or “consecrate” is literally fill the hand, in other words, invest with priestly prerogatives. Oil was also used in the consecration of priests (Exodus 30: 23-24; 37: 29).

Levites, who represented the first-born of all the tribes, were also consecrated (Numbers 3:6). The rite of their consecration is described in Numbers 8.

Another kind of personal consecration among the Hebrews was that of the Nazarites (Numbers 6). It implied the voluntary separation from certain things, dedication to God, and a vow of special sanctity. The Hebrew word Nazir means “consecrated or separated”.


\[\text{I am indebted to Dr. Mara Crabtree for reminding me of this insight. I am grateful for her careful reading of my manuscript and for her extensive commentary on it.}\]
Consecration also sometimes involved setting aside certain objects for sacred use. The rites of consecration of objects — such as temples, altars, first-fruits, spoils of war, etc. — are minutely described in the Old Testament.

Of interest concerning the consecration of vessels for use in the Tabernacle in the wilderness or in the Temple: even the “holy things” — those crafted or made specifically for a holy use had to be consecrated before use. The fact that they were crafted with a specific, unique use in mind did not render them ready for use in the context of service to God. This speaks clearly in regard to those who are God’s redeemed: those who are God’s “chosen” and “called”: His human “vessels”: they too need to understand and participate in the act of consecration prior to service in any particular context.  

The examples of consecration in the Old Testament remind us that the ceremonies were elaborate in detail and expansive in time, often running on for days. But in all instances, the essential meaning of the act remained constant: consecration involved dedicating someone or something to a sacred purpose. That is the essential meaning of the word and the essential purpose of the act.

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4 Mara Crabtree, January 14, 2013.
5 “All consecration implies a missional reality: one is consecrated “to” and consecrated “for” a purpose—a specific service to God and to the Body of Christ. For example, ordination is an action by which individuals are consecrated, not in a general way, but to a particular call; a specific context of service. Ordination is not valid as a general act of consecrating to service. If valid, it always implies that a person has been examined and found to meet the qualifications for a specific context of ministry/mission at a particular time. For example, ordained/consecrated as pastor of First Church of Jesus Christ, Virginia Beach. The context of service may later change, but the initial consecration is always “to” and “for” service in a specific place, for a specific purpose.” Mara Crabtree, January 14, 2013.
I call attention to this point in order to remind us that in today’s world, consecration need not be elaborate or lengthy. But I do believe that it must be done intentionally, deliberately, and purposefully.

To say that consecration is an intentional act means quite simply that we intend it. What we intend is neither an accident nor a mistake. Accidents are events that are unforeseen or unplanned. (I didn’t plan for my old clunker-car to collide with the neighbor’s brand new Mercedes. But, you see, the street was icy and I accidentally hit him.) Mistakes are events that literally involve mis-taking or confusing one thing for another. (I thought that the blond woman across the way was my wife. But it turned out to be someone else. I was mistaken.) Genuine acts of consecration are neither accidents nor mistakes; we intend them and not something else.

They ought also to be entered into deliberately. To deliberate is to make a choice, having weighed the consequences. A good synonym for deliberate is the word circumspect – meaning to look around and to be present to one’s surroundings. Deliberation is often associated with important life-events: getting married, having children, make important financial decisions, and the like. Granted, people do not always deliberate about these matters, but they should. Similarly, consecration is something that should be entered into thoughtfully and with prayerful attention to the gravity of the act.  

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6 “Yes, in addition, as with ordination, consecration to and for any particular purpose is not of private interpretation. For example, I might say, “God is calling me to plant a church.” Or “God is calling me to become a missionary in Eastern Europe. Or “God is calling me to a master’s program of study in the School of Divinity.” The need for consecration to and for a particular purpose should be confirmed by the Body of Christ—the faith community or in some cases the organization of Christian leaders, brothers and sisters—those to whom the person discerning a call is accountable. Most denominations have a “process of discernment” involving a candidate to ministry’s responsibility to submit to certain individuals in the Body of Christ who, together, seek the Spirit’s guidance to determine if the person’s call to consecration for a particular ministry “seems good (right) to the Holy
Listen to this prayer of covenant and consecration by John Wesley:

I give myself completely to you, God. Assign me to my place in your creation. Let me suffer for you. Give me the work you would have me do. Give me many tasks or have me step aside while you call others. Put me forward or humble me. Give me riches or let me live in poverty. I freely give all that I am and all that I have to you. And now, holy God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you are mine and I am yours. So be it. May this covenant made on earth continue for all eternity. Amen.

Is it conceivable that words like these could be uttered insincerely, whimsically, or without due consideration for what they might entail? Perhaps in the mouths of some, they could. But my reading of Wesley leads me to believe that he prayed these words deliberately and with an earnest heart.

Consecration is also a purposeful act, which is to say that it aims at some good end. Moses’ consecration of the people aimed at identifying them as the People of God. The consecration of Aaron and his sons aimed at installing them in their sacred priestly role.

Similarly, when thinking about our own consecration, we should consider the end. To what purpose are we being consecrated?

Some of us will consecrate ourselves – perhaps for the first time, or again – to fulfill God’s ultimate call on our lives: to follow him. We will do this because we have thought about it, prayed about it, and

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Spirit and to us” (Acts 15:28). This submission to authority guards against errors in discernment and judgment in thinking “I’m called to consecration to a particular ministry” when one is not fully accountability to the community of Christ in one’s context.” Mara Crabtree, January 14, 2013.
concluded that we can respond in no other way. This, I believe, is what Paul is urging us to do in his letter to the Ephesians when he says:

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (4: 1-3).  

Some of us will consecrate ourselves to greater intimacy with God through prayer and fasting. In fact, this consecration, together with

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7 “It is important to note that Paul addressed his comments to the community of believers, but just to individuals, at the church in Ephesus. There is a strong sense of living together in Christ in the passage: that the “calling” was not only to the individual, but to the community, for one could not learn to live “a life worthy” without commitment to others in the context of Christian community. Consecration is not simply private and personal; it is always with and for others: the Holy Trinity and the Body of Christ and those unredeemed to whom one is sent in ministry and mission.

“I also appreciate Watchman Nee’s writings on the *Consecrated Life* he asserts that “with complete consecration comes perfect peace.” He also points to 2 Cor. 5: 14 – 15 as “clearly show[ing] us that the constraining power of the Lord’s love is the basis for God’s children to live unto Him”. He further writes: Merely being constrained by love or acknowledging His legal right does not constitute consecration. After a person has been constrained by the Lord’s love and has acknowledged His right, there is a further step that he should take. This step will bring him on to a new position. Through the Lord’s constraining and based on His purchase, we separate ourselves from every other thing. Henceforth, we live for and unto the Lord. This is consecration. In some instances in the Old Testament, the Chinese Union Version translates the word consecration as “the receiving of the holy service.” To receive the holy service is to receive the ministry of service to God. This is a holy service. This is consecration. Consecration is receiving the ministry of serving God. It is to say to the Lord, “Today I will separate myself from everything to serve You, because You have loved me.”

“According to the original language, the word constrained can be translated "pressed on from all sides," that is, tightly confined on all sides. It means to be tightly bound and wrapped up. Love has bound us up, and we cannot run away. When a person is in love, he will have a sense of bondage. We are bound by Him; we have no way out. He has died for us, and we should live unto Him today. Hence, love is the basis of consecration. A man consecrates himself to the Lord because of the Lord’s love. No one can consecrate himself unless he first touches the Lord’s love. A man must touch the Lord’s love before he can consecrate himself to Him. When one touches the Lord’s love, consecration spontaneously follows.

“Consecration is based on the Lord’s love. But it is also based on the Lord’s right. This is the truth revealed in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20: "You are not your own... For you have been bought with a price." Our Lord gave His own life for us; He even became the ransom to purchase us back to Himself. We are those who are purchased by the Lord. Because the Lord has redeemed us, we willingly lose our own freedom for Him. We are no longer our own; we are the Lord’s. We must glorify God in our bodies because we are not our own; we have been bought by the Lord with a price. The blood which the Lord shed on the cross is the price He paid. Therefore, as far as the Lord’s right is concerned, we belong to the Lord.” Mara Crabtree, January 14, 2013.
answering the fundamental call of Christ, is the beginning point of all other forms of consecration.⁸

In the spirit of the ancient priests and Levites, others of us will consecrate ourselves to a specific task, work, or vocational calling: church planting, chaplaincy, a senior preaching pastoral role, children’s work. The possibilities are virtually limitless. “Also, before ministry is consecration to family-spouse and children if one is married; also consecration to calling and service in one’s faith community.”⁹

Perhaps some of us will renew our covenant with God to develop the gifts he has given us, and we will take more seriously the call to be students of the Word.

I end this address by asking Dr. Mara Crabtree to come forward and lead us in a prayer of consecration. As she prays, I invite you to respond as God has spoken to you.

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⁸ “Mother Theresa was once asked by a reporter about her ministry to the poor, sick and dying of Calcutta. She answered service to them was not her major ministry. Her ministry was first to minister to God; worship God, which she modeled by gathering as the beginning of the day for the Mass with her community, the Sisters of Charity. She stated that service to the people of Calcutta flowed from her first call: to worship her Lord” Mara Crabtree, January 14, 2013.

⁹ Mara Crabtree, January 14, 2013.