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JOHN PAUL II



*SECULAR INSTITUTES, FAITHFUL
EXPRESSION OF THE COUNCIL'S
ECCLESIOLOGY*

6 May 1983



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CONFERENCE MONDIALE
DES INSTITUTS SECLIERS

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SECULAR INSTITUTES, FAITHFUL EXPRESSION OF THE COUNCIL'S ECCLESIOLOGY

Allocution to the Plenary Assembly of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and the Secular Institutes, on 6 May 1983.

Reverend brothers and beloved sons and daughters !

I. I thank you for your presence and I express to you my joy for this meeting, and my gratitude for the work that you do to inspire and foster consecrated life. The evangelical counsels, in fact, are a *"divine gift which the Church has received from her Lord and which she ever preserves with the help of his grace"* (LG, 43), and therefore what is done in the Congregation on behalf of their profession is extremely sound and valuable.

The plenary assembly which you are concluding today was held along this line of inspiring and fostering consecrated life. You have taken into particular consideration the identity and the mission of those Institutes which, because of their distinctive mission in saeculo et ex saeculo (Can. 713, 2 New Code), are called *"Secular Institutes"*.

It is the first time that one of your plenary assemblies has dealt with them directly: therefore it was a timely choice, which the promulgation of the new Code has inspired. The Secular Institutes which in 1947 received ecclesial recognition with the Apostolic Constitution *Provida Mater* issued by my predecessor, Pius XII now find in the Code their rightful place on the basis of the doctrine of the Second Vatican Council. In fact, these Institutes are intended

to be faithful expressions of that ecclesiology which the Council reconfirms when it emphasises the universal vocation to holiness (cf. LG, Chap. 5), the inherent tasks of the baptised (cf. LG, Chap. 4; AA), the Church's presence in the world in which she must act as leaven and be the "*universal sacrament of salvation*" (LG, 48; cf. GS), the variety and the dignity of the various vocations, and the "particular honour" which the Church pays towards "*total continence embraced on behalf of the kingdom of heaven*" (LG, 42) and towards the witness of evangelical poverty and obedience (ibid.).

2. Quite rightly your reflection dwelled on the constitutive, theological and juridical elements of the Secular Institutes, keeping in mind the formulation of the canons dedicated to them in the recently promulgated Code, and examining them in the light of the teaching which Pope Paul VI, and I myself with the discourse of 28 August 1980, have confirmed in audiences granted them.

We must express profound gratitude to the Father of infinite mercy, who has taken to heart the needs of mankind and, with the life-giving power of the Spirit, has undertaken in this century new initiatives for mankind's redemption. Honour and glory be to the triune God for this outpouring of grace which the Secular Institutes are, and with which he manifests his inexhaustible benevolence, with which the Church herself loves the world in the name of her God and Lord.

The newness of the gift which the Spirit has made to the Church's everlasting fruitfulness in response to the needs of our times is grasped only if its constituent elements in their inseparability are well understood: the consecration and the secularity; the consequent apostolate of witness, of Christian commitment in social life and of evangelization; the fraternity which, without being determined by a community of life, is truly communion; the external life style itself, which is not separate from the environment in which it may appear.

3. Now it is necessary to know and make known this vocation that is so relevant and, I should say, so urgent, the vocation of persons who consecrate themselves to God by practising the

evangelical counsels and strive to immerse their whole lives and all their activities in that special consecration, creating in themselves a total availability to the Father's will and working to change the world from within (cf. Discourse of 28 August 1980).

The promulgation of the new Code will surely allow this better knowledge, but it must also urge pastors to foster among the faithful an understanding which is not approximate or yielding, but exact and respectful of the qualifying characteristics.

In this way, generous responses to this difficult but beautiful vocation of "*full consecration to God and to souls*" (cf. PC, no. 5) are aroused: a demanding vocation, because one responds to it by carrying the baptismal commitments to the most perfect consequences of evangelical radicalism, and also because this evangelical life must be embodied in the most diverse situations.

In fact, the variety of the gifts entrusted to the Secular Institutes expresses the various apostolic aims which embrace all areas of human and Christian life. This pluralistic wealth is also shown in the numerous spiritualities which animate the Secular Institutes, with the diversity of the holy bonds which characterise various modes of practising the evangelical counsels and the great possibilities of their incorporation in all areas of social life. My Predecessor, Pope Paul VI, who showed so much affection for the Secular Institutes, rightly said that if they "*remain faithful to their vocation, they will be like an experimental laboratory in which the Church tests the concrete modes of its relations with the world*" (Paul VI, Discourse to the International Congress of Secular Institutes, 25 August 1976). Therefore, lend your support to these Institutes that they may be faithful to the original charisms of their foundation recognised by the hierarchy, and be alert to discover in their fruits the teaching which God wants to give us for the life and action of the entire Church.

4. If there is a development and strengthening of the Secular Institutes, the local Churches also will derive benefit from this.

This aspect has been kept in mind during your plenary assembly, also because various episcopates, with the suggestions given with regard to your meeting, have pointed out that the relationship between Secular Institutes and local Churches is worthy of being deepened.

Even while respecting their characteristics, the Secular Institutes must understand and adopt the pastoral urgencies of the particular Churches, and encourage their members to live the hopes and toils, the projects and concerns, the spiritual riches and limitations with diligent participation; in a word, the communion of their concrete Church. This must be a point for greater reflection for the Secular Institutes, just as it must be a concern of the pastors to recognise and request their contribution according to their proper nature.

In particular, another responsibility rests on the pastors: that of offering the Secular Institutes all the doctrinal wealth they need. They want to be part of the world and ennoble temporal realities, setting them in order and elevating them, that all things may be brought into one under Christ's headship (cf. Eph 1 : 1). Therefore, may all the wealth of Catholic doctrine on creation, incarnation and redemption be given to these Institutes that they may make their own God's wise and mysterious plans for man, for history and for the world.

5. Beloved brothers and sons and daughters!

It is with a sentiment of true esteem and also of deep encouragement for the Secular Institutes that today I have taken the opportunity offered me by this meeting to emphasise some aspects treated by you during the past few days.

I hope that your plenary assembly may fully achieve the goal of offering to the Church better information on the Secular Institutes and helping them live their vocation in awareness and fidelity.

May this Jubilee Year of the Redemption, which calls everyone to "a renewed discovery of the love of God who gives himself

(Apostolic Bull, *Aperite Portas Redemptori*, 8) and a renewed encounter with the merciful goodness of God, be particularly for consecrated persons also a renewed and pressing invitation to follow "*with greater freedom*" and "*more closely*" (PC, I) the Master who calls them for the pathways of the Gospel.

May the Virgin Mary be a constant and sublime model to them, and may she always guide them with her motherly protection.

With these sentiments, I gladly impart my intercessory Apostolic Blessing to you present and to the members of the Secular Institutes throughout the world.