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Address given at the Third World
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Address of His Excellency, Mons. Jean Jérôme Hamer, Pro-Prefect of the S. Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, given at the Third World Congress of the Secular Institutes, held in Rome from the 26th to the 30th August, 1984.

I am happy to be here with you and to have the occasion to meet you as Pro-Prefect of the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, an office I have held for four and a half months.

Before taking up the subject of the Secular Institutes, and, above all, the formation, I want to tell you that, in my opinion, there is not, in all of Rome, a function more interesting than the one I have: being the speaker of the Holy Father for the consecrated life in the Church. Being the speaker of the Holy Father, I am at the same time at your service since if the Holy Father is 'the servant of the servants of God', this is even more true for his collaborators.

I now propose to introduce the subject of formation showing that it must necessarily be conditioned by the nature and specific needs of the Secular Institutes. The Code of Canon Law, recently promulgated, and put into act, has still better evaluated the situation, the level if one can so call it of the Secular Institutes within the Church. They are a form of consecrated life which, as such, finds itself at the same standing as the religious life.

The definition of the consecrated life is realised both in the religious life and, in that of the Secular Institutes. Both are stable forms of life characterised by the profession of the counsels. A form

of life that tries to follow Christ more closely and tends to perfection. The structure itself of Canon Law which deals with the consecrated life, recognises equal value to the religious life and to the Secular Institutes. Two "titles" are reserved, two parts of equal dignity within the section reserved to the Institutes of consecrated life.

The Secular Institutes have four characteristics and each of them reflects on the formation:

1. The consecration through the profession of evangelical counsels;
2. Secularity or secular condition;
3. The apostolate;
4. Fraternal life.

1) The consecration in the Secular Institutes is total. It comprises therefore:

Chastity for the Kingdom of God: the continence in celibacy and the free giving up of genital sexuality;

Poverty; the limitation and the dependence on the use and availability of goods and that in the framework of a life that is really poor;

Obedience: the obligation to renounce one's own will for that of the legitimate superiors in as much as representatives of God.

This consecration is sanctioned with bounds that are: those of vows, oaths, consecrations, promises. Among the three evangelical counsels, chastity receives particular attention from the moment that it must be assumed as a vow, oath or with a consecration, while the promise can be enough for the other two counsels.

2) The important and determining point which has constantly been evidenced, even if not well understood, is the secularity. The

members of a Secular Institute live in the world. They work for the sanctification of the world and they do so from within the world. Such sanctification is contained in the world itself and should come about from within the world rather than from outside it. On this point of secularity I would like to cite some words from the document of Pius XII, *Primo feliciter*. *"They are secular and... this is the real nature of their calling. Everything about them must be clearly secular"*.

"Perfection is to be lived and professed in the world". The consecration in the Secular Institutes does not modify the canonical condition of its members, except for the dispositions of the law regarding the Institutes of consecrated life. The member remains lay or cleric and all the rights and obligations of his state are applied to him. This evidences once again an aspect of secularity.

Another aspect is the way of life. The members of the Secular Institutes live in the ordinary conditions of the world. There are three living situations: to live by oneself; to live in the family or in a group of fraternal life, according to the constitutions, but in full respect of secularity. In this way, like other lay persons, they can take the initiative to live together, if only for practical reasons. This is a very important point that highlights the difference between the Secular Institutes and Religious Institutes, since life in community is per se essential and inseparable to the religious state; essential and indispensable to live under the same roof, under the same superiors and have common activities that are specifically of the 'life together'. This difference must be underlined because it marks considerably all the formation process.

3) The other characteristic is the apostolate. The apostolate derives from consecration itself. To take up again the terms of *Primo feliciter*:

"The whole life of a member of a Secular Institute must become an apostolate". And this apostolate must not only be exercised in the world and here we take up again the terms of *Primo feliciter* which says more explicitly than Canon Law the following *"but it may almost be said to grow out of the world: its existence is in professions,*

activities, forms, places, circumstances of a secular nature and so it must remain".

Canon Law writes about the image used by the Council (LG 31; cf. PC 11) to show how this apostolate acts in the world, in the secular condition, 'ad instar fermenti', like leaven. The apostolate will be different, it is understood, according to whether it is a lay member or a clergyman.

For the lay people, it will come about through the witness of their Christian life and the faithfulness to their consecration. This will contribute to make the temporal realities understood and lived according to the Gospel and the world will be revived by the Gospel. This, however, does not mean that the lay members of the Secular Institutes are more lay than other lay people. In the same way of all the laity, they collaborate in the ecclesial community in the style which they know best; they participate in the preparation of the cult; they will be catechists; they will eventually be extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist, since these functions are accessible to the laity, even if sometimes they are merely a substitution to the clergy, as happens in the case of extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist.

Therefore the apostolate of the lay members is above all as regards temporal realities in which they can put an anticipation of the Kingdom of God.

The apostolate of the clergy, of the priests, will consist in apostolic charity in the help to their confreres: I think, in the first place, of their confreres in the Secular Institutes. It will then be a witness to the consecrated life according to the constitutions of their Institutes; it will be the sanctification of the world through their specific sacred ministry. In fact, becoming a member of a Secular Institute, the priest remains a sacred minister. It is this ministry that he puts at the service of the sanctification of the world.

4) Last characteristic: fraternal life. We saw that community life, per se, under the same roof does not belong to the nature of a Secular Institute, but fraternal life does. Among the members of the same

Secular Institute a special communion exists. Their consecration in a particular Institute creates reciprocal bonds that are manifested in different ways. A solidarity particular to the Secular Institute that is manifested in the relations with the superiors: they are the same superiors for everyone; that is manifested in life: the rules are the same and they create a similarity; it is shown in the meetings: they are recognised necessary by the constitutions in order to safeguard the fraternal life and certain strong times to pass together. There is reciprocal help under different forms, since fraternal communion does not exist without it.

These four characteristics condition the formation. It is, therefore, the task of this Congress, here assembled, to formulate information, suggestions, and in this way stimulate a beneficial emulation. Canon Law has foreseen for you the stages in formation. I would say, of the stages along the development of the consecrated life in a Secular Institute. You know them: we are speaking about basic formation, the first incorporation and then perpetual incorporation in a Secular Institute. This formation will turn at least it seems on three things:

a) it must aim to the consecrated life. The consecrated life in substance does not change. It is the result of a long spiritual tradition in the Church from which it has received its definition, its legitimacy and the conditions for its canonical recognition. Therefore, the formation to the consecrated life is of great importance.

b) Then comes the formation for professional activities about which the Holy Father called attention at your last meeting with him. If you live in the temporary reality with a view to the Kingdom of God, this reality shows specific needs that demand a technical preparation.

c) Finally comes the preparation for the apostolate.

These are the three fields it seems to me that specify formative action.

Who must lead this formation? You can tell me: what is your

experience? It is obvious that for the professional formation the Institute member will not ask for this from his/her superior. He/she will ask, rather, organisms or persons who are competent, at universities, at laboratories, at professional schools. But it is important that the superiors know of this and a canon of Canon Law speaks of this that they have a particular responsibility for the spiritual formation. When one deals with the formation to the consecrated life in a particular Institute, it is here that the superior and his/her collaborators are irreplaceable.

I conclude repeating a well known expression: *"the consecrated life in a Secular Institute is a very difficult choice, but it is also an important choice and of great generosity."*

Rome, 27th August 1984