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PAUL VI



A LIVING PRESENCE IN THE SERVICE
OF THE WORLD AND OF THE CHURCH

To the first World Congress
of Secular Institutes

Rome, August 25, 1976



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CONFERENCE MONDIALE
DES INSTITUTS SECLERS

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Dear Sons and Daughters in the Lord,

1. We accepted very willingly the request of the Executive Council of the World Conference of Secular Institutes when it duly informed us of its desire for this meeting. It offers us, in fact, the opportunity to express to you, with our esteem, the Church's hopes in the special witness the Secular Institutes are called to bear among men today.

2. It is not necessary to stop to throw light on the particular characteristics which define your vocation. For, in their fundamental features which are "a completely consecrated life, following the evangelical counsels, and a presence and an action intended in all responsibility, to change the world from within", these characteristics can now be considered a certain attainment of your institutional conscience. We recalled all this on the occasion of the twenty fifth anniversary of the Apostolic Constitution *Provida Mater* (Address on 2nd February 1972).

3. In the position that we hold, our desire is to stress rather the fundamental duty which springs from the characteristics just called to mind, that is, the duty of being faithful. This faithfulness, which is not opposition to progress, means, above all, attention to the Holy Spirit who renews the universe (cf. Rev. 21:5). Secular

Institutes, in fact, are alive to the extent to which they take part in man's history, and bear witness, among the men of today, to God's fatherly love, revealed by Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 26) .

4. If they remain faithful to their specific vocation, Secular Institutes will become, as it were, "the experimental laboratory" in which the Church tests the concrete ways of her relations with the world. That is why they must listen to the appeal of the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, as being addressed particularly to them: "Their primary task... is the implementation of all Christian and evangelical possibilities, hidden but already present and active in things of the world. The specific field of their evangelising activity is the vast and complicated world of politics, social matters, economy, but also culture, sciences and arts, international life and the mass media" (no. 70).

5. This does not mean, of course, that Secular Institutes, as such, must undertake these tasks. That normally falls on each of their members. It is therefore the duty of the Institutes themselves to form the conscience of their members to a maturity and open mindedness which drive them to prepare zealously for the profession chosen, in order to face afterwards, competently and in a spirit of evangelical detachment, the weight and the joy of the social responsibilities towards which Providence will direct them.

6. This faithfulness of the Secular Institutes to their specific vocation must be expressed above all in faithfulness to prayer, which is the foundation of strength and fruitfulness. It is a very good thing, therefore, that you have chosen, as the central subject of your Assembly, prayer as the "expression of secular consecration" and the "source of the apostolate and the key to formation". The fact is that you are in search of prayer that will express your concrete situation as persons "consecrated in the world".

7. We exhort you, therefore, to continue this search, endeavouring to act in such a way that your spiritual experience may serve as an example to every layman. In fact, for anyone who

is consecrated in a Secular Institute, spiritual life consists in being able to assume one's profession, social relations, environment of life, etc. as particular forms of collaborating in the coming of the Kingdom of heaven. It consists further in knowing how to impose rest periods on oneself in order to come into more direct contact with God, to thank him and to ask him for forgiveness, light, energy and inexhaustible charity for others.

8. Each of you certainly benefits from the support of his Institute through the spiritual guidance it gives, but especially through the communion that exists among those who share the same ideal under the leadership of those responsible. And, knowing that God has given his Word, the consecrated person will set himself very regularly to listen to Holy Scripture, studied lovingly and accepted with a purified and available soul, to seek in it, as well as in the teaching of the Magisterium of the Church, a correct interpretation of his daily experience lived in the world. In a special way, based on the very fact of his consecration to God, he will feel committed to promoting the efforts of the Council for a more and more intimate participation in the sacred liturgy, aware that a well ordered liturgical life, closely integrated in the consciences and habits of the faithful, will help to keep the religious sense alert and permanent, in our times, and to give the Church a new springtime of spiritual life.

9. Prayer will then become the expression of a mysterious and sublime reality, shared by all Christians, that is, the expression of our reality as children of God. It will be an expression that the Holy Spirit purifies and assumes as his own prayer, urging us to cry with him: "Abba", that is, Father! (cf Rom 8, 14 f; Gal 4,4 f).

10. Such prayer, if it becomes a conscious part of the very context of secular activities, is then a real expression of secular consecration.

11 . These are the thoughts, dear sons and daughters, that we wish to entrust to your reflection, in order to help you in your search for a more and more faithful response to the will of God,

who calls you to be in the world, not to assume its spirit, but to bear witness in its midst in a way that will help your brothers to accept the newness of the Spirit in Christ.

With our Apostolic Blessing.