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PAUL VI



A NEW AND ORIGINAL FORM
OF CONSACRATION

To the Heads of Secular Institutes

Castel Gandolfo, 20th September 1972



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Beloved sons and daughters in the Lord,

1. Once more I have an opportunity to meet you, heads of Secular Institutes, members and representatives of a portion of the Church which at this historic moment is flourishing, overflowing with vitality.

2. This time the occasion which brings you is the International Congress which you have held and are about to bring to a close here at Nemi close by this summer residence of Castel Gandolfo. In this Congress you have been giving your critical attention to the statutes of the "World Conference of Secular Institutes" which is to be created.

3. I will not attempt to assess your work. I have no doubt that you have worked with the ever attentive participation of the Department concerned, earnestly and with deep reflection. I trust you will bear much fruit and that your numbers will grow. I prefer to linger for a while on a few reflections upon a possible function of Secular Institutes in the mystery of Christ and the mystery of the Church.

4. As I look at you here and think of those thousands upon thousands of men and women that you belong to, I cannot but feel a deep sense of consolation and joy and gratitude to the Lord. The Church of Christ as seen in you, is indeed strong and flourishing!

Our venerable Mother is today the object of sharp and shameless carping, and some of her own children are guilty. Some take a positive pleasure in describing what they imagine to be symptoms of decrepitude. They talk of impending collapse. Here, to give the lie to their foreboding, is a Church of new-found treasures, one after another, new paths of holiness, new holy enterprises, unforeseen, unpredictable. It had to happen, I know, it could not be otherwise: Christ is the divine inexhaustible source of the Church's vitality. Your presence here today is one more proof of it. You bring it home to us.

5. Now, peering more closely at your family likeness in the People of God, I see that (like others in other sectors of the Church's life) you are mirrors of a special way, a "way of your own", of reliving the mystery of Christ in the world, and a way, unlike anyone else's, of making the mystery of the Church visibly present in the world.

6. Christ the Redeemer is a fullness, a plenitude that we shall never be able to comprehend or completely express. He is the All for his Church, and, in it, whatever we are we are through him, simply through him, with him, in him. This means that for you, Secular Institutes, as for all of us, he is ever the ultimate model, the one from whom all inspiration comes, the well spring to which we must go.

7. With Christ the Saviour for foundation and model, you fulfil, in your own distinctive way, an important ecclesial mission. But the Church itself is also, in its own way, like Christ, a plenitude too rich for anyone, or any institution, to comprehend or fully express. Nor could we, who are members of it, ever explore it completely because its life is Christ, and he is God. So the Church and its mission can in real terms only be fully expressed in the multiplicity of its members. It is the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ, the doctrine of gifts and charisms of the Holy Spirit.

8. It will not have escaped your attention that the drift of what I am saying inevitably poses the question: How do we fulfil this special role in the mission of the Church? What is your special

gift, your distinctive role, the new factor you bring to today's Church? Or put it this way. What exactly is your way of "being today's Church? You know the answer. You have made it clear to yourselves and to the Church. We can take it as said.

9. You stand at the confluence of two powerful streams of Christian life and your own life is enriched by both. You are lay people, consecrated as lay people by baptism and confirmation, but you have chosen to underline your consecration to God with the profession of the evangelical counsels, accepted as binding, and the bond is firm and enduring and recognised by the Church. You are still lay people, committed to the secular values of the lay state of life (Lumen Gentium, 31), but with you it is a matter of "consecrated secularity", you are both secular, living as lay people in the world and consecrated .

10. There is a difference between your situation and that of the other lay people. You are indeed committed, as they are, to the secular values but as consecrated persons: that is, your commitment not only asserts the authenticity of human values, it also directs them towards the evangelical beatitudes. On the other hand you are not "Religious": yet there is a similarity between your life and theirs because by your consecration you tell the world that spiritual and eschatological values count more than anything else and that Christian love is your "absolute". Indeed the greater your love the greater its power to show that secular values are but relative and at the same time to help you and everybody to make the most of those values.

11. Neither of these two aspects of your spiritual image can be overestimated without damaging the other. They are essential to each other.

12. "Secularity" means that your place is in the world. But it does not mean simply a position, a function which happens to coincide with life in the world and a "secular" job or profession. It must mean, first and foremost a realisation that you are in the world as "your very own field of Christian responsibility. To be in

the world, that is, to be committed to secular values, is your way of being the Church, of making the Church present, of working out your own salvation and being heralds of redemption. The condition in which you live, your life description in human society becomes your theological self and your way of bringing salvation into the realm of reality for all the world to see. In this way you are an advance guard of the Church "in the world": you are yourselves an expression of the Church's mind: to be in the world in order to shape it and sanctify it "as from within, like leaven in the dough" (Lumen Gentium, 31) a task, remember which falls mainly on the shoulders of the laity. You are a clear, tangible, telling proof of what the Church sets out to do for the building of the world of "Gaudium et spes".

13. "Consecration", on the other hand, indicates the personal, unseen structure supporting your inmost self and all you do. Here is the deep, hidden human potential for which the people you live with have no explanation, often no idea. Your baptismal consecration has been more deeply and strongly rooted by a greater claim of love. It is the stirring of the Holy Spirit. It is not identical with that of Religious. Nevertheless it impels you to a fundamental life option of the beatitudes of the Gospel, so that you are really consecrated and really in the world. "You are in the world and not of the world but for the world" as I said on another occasion. You live a true, genuine consecration according to the evangelical counsels but without the fullness of visibility proper to religious consecration which consists in a more strictly common way of life and the "sign" of the religious habit. Yours is a new and original form of consecration. It was the Holy Spirit that put this idea into the minds of the faithful, so that they could live in this way, still surrounded by the world's realities and that the power of evangelical counsels - the divine values of eternity - should find their way into the heart of human, space time values.

14. The poverty, chastity and obedience which you have chosen are ways of sharing the cross of Christ because like him and with him you give up the things which, without any infringement of law or precept, you could, if you wished, have and enjoy. But they are

also ways of sharing the victory of the Risen Christ because they give you a new freedom. This world's values are always a threat to our openness of soul, complete availability to God.

Your vows take the sting out of it. Your poverty tells the world that it is possible to live with this life's good things and that we can make use of what makes for a more civilised life and progress without becoming slaves to any of it; your chastity tells the world of a selfless love, fathomless as God's own heart from which you draw it. Your obedience tells the world that a man can be happy without digging in his heels over the things which just suit him, and can be always completely open to God's will as seen in the daily grind, in the signs of the times and in the world's need, here and now, of salvation.

15. Hence your activity, whatever it may be, personal, professional, individual or common, is more distinctly signposted "To God": it is in fact all the time interwoven with your consecration and carried along with it. The unique providential way of things in your spirituality has given today's Church a new model secular life lived in consecration, consecrated life lived as secular. The Church is the richer for it.

16. Of all the good things brought into the world by Secular Institutes there is one upon which I would like to dwell for a moment the tributary stream of consecrated ministerial priesthood which flows into the Secular Institutes carrying a goodly band of men who wish to add to their priestly life the bond of self giving which is profession of the evangelical counsels. As I think of these brothers of mine in the priesthood of Christ, I feel that I must encourage them. Here once more I see, and wonder at, the work of the Spirit ceaselessly rousing in men's hearts a restless yearning for greater perfection.

17. All I have said up to now applies to them too, yes, but in them it calls for reflection on a deeper level and careful qualification. They seek and find consecration in the evangelical counsels and commitment to "secular" values not as laymen but as clerics, channels of the sacred to the People of God.

18. Besides Baptism and Confirmation, the fundamental consecration of every lay person in the Church, they have received the differentiating sacrament of Orders and this has given them a specific ministry with regard to the Eucharist and the Mystical Body of Christ.

19. Their "secular" Christian vocation is what it was; they can now find more in it, living it as consecrated in Secular Institutes, but their spiritual life in this condition must be other than what is normally required of the member, and there will be a visible difference in the way in which they follow the Counsels and in their secular commitment

20. In conclusion I want to make a most urgent appeal, as your father: keep, before all else, keep alive and growing in your hearts, your union, communion, in and with the Church. You are living joints in the body of this ecclesial communion you too are the Church. I would never, never weaken those joints. Anything ecclesial is unthinkable outside the Church. Don't be taken off your guard in this. Keep your hearts well clear of the temptation so seductive in these days to think that you can have true communion with Christ and yet be out of tune out of accord, with the ecclesial community governed by lawful pastors. It would be a snare and a delusion. What can an individual do, or a group, with the best of intentions and the highest of ideals, outside this communion? Christ requires it of us as a condition of communion with him, just as he requires our love of each other as proof of our love of him.

21. So you are of Christ and for Christ in his Church; and Church means your local community, your Institute, your parish, but always in communion of faith, of Eucharist, of discipline and of loyal, faithful collaboration with your Bishop and the Hierarchy. Your structures and activities, be you clerical or lay, must never produce divergent orientations, as if you took your bearings from two different points of the compass. They must never create "justified non involvement ", either interior or exterior, nor (worst of all) antagonism against the pastors.

22. These are the things I put before you hopefully: they represent my wishes for your welfare. Thus I hope that you may be, in the midst of the world, true labourers for the one saving mission of the Church, in your very own way to which you have been called and invited. Thus may the Lord help you to prosper yet more, to bring forth yet greater fruit, ever with the Apostolic Blessing which I give you.