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CARD. EDUARDO F. PIRONIO

*MESSAGE ADDRESSED TO
THE SECOND LATIN AMERICAN
CONGRESS OF SECULAR INSTITUTES*

July 12th, 1979



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CONFERENCE MONDIALE
DES INSTITUTS SECLIERS

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Dear brothers and friends:

1. Welcome to this meeting of grace! The Lord is present for you have been convened as the Church in his Name (Mt 18 20). The Spirit of God which renews all things acts deeply in the heart of each one of you, within every Secular Institute represented. You will emerge renewed and reborn: confirmed in the faith, animated by hope and strengthened by love, so as to fulfil the evangelising mission in our Latin American Continent. Allow me to greet you with the wish expressed by Paul to the Romans: *"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope"* (Rom 15,13).

2. The living God of hope! This is what Latin America needs today. This is what you all proclaim with the strength of a witnessing born of contemplation and of the cross and exercised in the original conditions of family and social life (L.G. 31), and becomes concrete in the manifestation and communication of the Paschal Christ. You are not the witnesses of a distant God, but of a God who rose again and lives and treads the path of men. Neither are you the disincarnate witnesses who indicate to others the road of salvation while you remain on the edge; but committed witnesses with the difficulties and risks of history, radically submerged in the dead and risen Christ, evangelically incorporated in the world in order

to transform it, sanctify it, offer it to God, building thus the new civilisation of love. Like all other laymen but far more by reason of the consecration which animates you *"in the eyes of the world you must be the witnesses of the resurrection and of the life of Our Lord Jesus Christ and signs of the true God"* (L.G. 38).

3. You are meeting to reflect in the light of the Magisterium and of the requirements of a Continent in full effervescence, marked by poverty and the cross but filled with hope on the identity of Secular Institutes in this providential moment of Latin America, in terms of a full evangelization, of an integral advancement of man, of a transformation of culture in line with the civilisation of love.

4. I wish to remind you of three things: your identity, your present state as *"your own way"* of being Church, your profound and vital requirements.

5. 1. - Your Identity. This can be summed up very simply: *"consecrated secularity"*. These are two aspects of a same reality, of a same divine vocation. Both are essential. This was clearly asserted by Paul VI when he said: *"Neither of the aspects of your spiritual nature can be overrated at the expense of the other. They are both equally essential"* (20 IX 72) .

6. In these privileged times of history and of the Church, the Lord calls upon you to live your consecration in the world, from the world and for the world. The world cannot tarnish nor decrease the wealth and fecundity of consecration, neither can consecration wrest you from the commitment and responsibility of the daily task. Totally committed with Christ, your minds are open to what is eternal, you are the witnesses of the Absolute, but always within the sphere of temporal life. The two words *"consecrated laymen"* must be duly stressed and indissolubly united.

7. *"Consecrated"*. That is to say sanctified more deeply in Christ by the one and only Holy One, and by will of the Spirit, so that you may belong totally and exclusively to love. *"You have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all know"* (1 Jn 2,20). This consecration,

which deepens and brings to plenitude the consecration of baptism and confirmation, penetrates your daily life and activities, creating a total availability to the plan of the Father who wishes you to be in the world for the world. Your characteristics are those of men and women of the Absolute and of hope, exclusively open to the one and only Love; poor and disinterested, capable of understanding those who suffer and of giving yourselves evangelically to saving them and transforming the world from within. In his Address of 2 February, 1972, Pope Paul VI asserted: *"Your consecrated life, in the spirit of the evangelical counsels, is the expression of your undivided loyalty to Christ and to the Church, of the permanent and radical striving towards holiness, and the awareness that, in the last analysis, it is only Christ who, with his grace, carries out the work of redemption and transformation in the world. It is deep in your hearts that the world is consecrated to God."*

8. "Laymen". But this special consecration, this special way of belonging to Jesus Christ in virginity, poverty, obedience, does not detract the members of Secular Institutes from the world, nor does it paralyse their temporal action, but gives it life and dynamism, greater realism and efficacy; freeing it of dissatisfactions, interests and quests, which are somehow related to egoism. *"Secular consecration"*: in opening man and woman to the absolute radicalism of the love of God, they are prepared for a deeper incarnation in the world, for a pure, free purifying and liberating secularity.

9. They are not of the world, but they are in the world and for the world. The characteristic of this *"new way"* of being Church is to live precisely in the world the radicalism of the Beatitudes as the light, salt and leaven of God. This secularity, which is far from being superficial naturalism or secularism, indicates *"the proper place of your Christian responsibility"*, the one and only way of sanctification and apostolate the privileged scope of a vocation lived specifically for the glory of God and the service of our brothers. It calls for living in the world in contact with our brothers of the whole world, part as they are of human vicissitudes, responsible as they are for the possibilities and dangers of the earthly city, bearing as they do the weight of a day to day life committed to the construction of society,

involved together with them in the most varied professions at the service of mankind, of the family and of the organization of peoples. Committed, above all to the construction of a new world according to the design of God, in justice, love and peace, as the expression of an authentic "*civilisation of love*". It is not an easy task. It calls for discernment, generosity, courage. Paul VI calls them "*the alpinists of the spirit*" (26-IX-70).

10. 2. Your Actuality. Paul VI, in the manner of his prophetic intuition, referred to Secular Institutes as "*a characteristic and most consoling phenomenon in the contemporary Church*" (26 IX 70). In a way which is original and proper to them, they express and achieve the presence of the Church in the world. They are a valid sign of the relationship of the Church with the world: trust and love, incarnation and presence, dialogue and change. The Council opened up to us an evangelical path, subsequently illuminated by the Magisterium of the Popes, from Paul VI to John Paul II. The Church was repeatedly defined as "*the universal sacrament of salvation*". For Latin America the spirit of God inspired two ecclesial events which strongly marked the redeeming presence of the Church in that Continent: Medellin and Puebla. They gave us a better understanding of the responsibility of Christians in the evangelization and transformation of the world. It is an imperative requirement of the times and a pressing invitation of the Spirit. It is a challenge of history to the commitment of the Church, and more specifically of the laity, to become part of the world so as to transform it. "*In a moment such as this said Paul VI the Secular Institutes, by virtue of their charism of consecrated life in the world, appear as providential instruments to incarnate this spirit and transmit it to the whole Church. If in a certain way, they essentially manifested this aspect even before the Council, by their presence, with all the more reason must they today be specialised, exemplary witnesses to the attitude and mission of the Church in the world*" (2 II 1972). And he adds immediately almost as an exhortation and a challenge: "*For the 'aggiornamento' of the Church today, clear directives or frequent documents are not sufficient: persons and communities, responsibly aware of embodying and transmitting the spirit desired by the Council are required. This*

is the thrilling mission entrusted to you: to be a model giving an indefatigable impulse to the new relationship that the Church is trying to embody before the world and in the service of the world".

11. Secular Institutes, if they are truly faithful to their charism of consecrated secularity, have a very important word to say in the Church today. Their mission is more than ever providential. They will be a privileged means of evangelization, of explicit proclamation of the Love of the Father manifested in Christ, of an authentic and profound human advancement and of a real evangelical liberation, effected in the spirit of the Beatitudes. They will be a concrete means to overcome the tragic dualism between faith and life, the Church and the world, God and man.

12. 3. Your Exigencies. Faithfulness to the Lord who calls us and requires everything of us. I have no doubt that this is a moment of grace for the Secular Institutes of Latin America. Consequently, it is a moment of renewed creation and of hope. There is need for "*renewed creation*" of our Secular Institutes in the Spirit, heeding the Word of God and constantly interpreting the signs of the times. I limit myself to stressing three requirements which in my opinion are fundamental: sense of Church, theological existence, contemplative dimension.

13. Sense of Church: live the joy of being Church today, in this privileged moment of history, in this Continent of possibilities and hope, responding in an original and a specific manner to the divine call. To be fully Church in a new way (as "*consecrated laymen*"), in deep communion with the Pastors and participating fraternally in the evangelising mission of the People of God as a whole. Radically centered in God and evangelically as part of the world. Be Church in authentic communion and participation.

14. Theological existence: live in the world a clear and irreducible theological existence. Live the supernatural normally: live in faith, go forward building in hope, change the world by the force of unrefrained love. This you ask in the beautiful Prayer of the Congress: "*confirmed in Faith, animated by Hope and strengthened by Love*".

The vision of Faith will help you to constantly discover the plan of God, the passing of Christ through history, the vital call of the Spirit of Love. Hope will protect you against the paralysis of discouragement or melancholy. It will be your support in the Paschal Christ, it will actively commit you in the construction of the world. Charity will lead you to live with joy the vital demands of consecration, to center your life in Jesus Christ and embrace his Cross, to serenely become part of the world without superficiality nor fear and to generously serve your brothers.

15. Contemplative dimension: in order to interpret in God the things that occur in the world, to discover the anxieties of men and the demands of God, one must be contemplative.

This means men and women of prayer, who stop in the rhythm of their work to listen to God; who, from time to time dare to retire to the desert to meet Him in solitude; who, above all, know how to create in their innermost self a deep and unchangeable area of active silence. People who experience God in work and in leisure, in anxiety and in joy, in prayer and in worldly activities. "Secular prayer" is not easy, but it is indispensable. It is the only way of life of a member of a Secular Institute: God must be the uninterrupted source of your life while you follow your profession and the hopeful sorrow of humanity. It is difficult, but at times one must have the courage to cut away from everything (in order to subsequently return to the world) and seek a moment and a place for prayer. Above all, we must pray to the Lord with the simplicity of the poor.

16. This message has become too long, but this can be explained in part by the ecclesial love I have for the Secular Institutes; their providential existence, their actual effectiveness as a sign of a hopeful Church, their special responsibility at this time of the evangelization of our Latin American Continent. In part because I have wished to make good the lack of my physical presence, and what I would have liked to say to you personally had I been able to participate in this Congress. God willed it otherwise, blessed be His will!

17. But to you go more than my written words: two beloved friends and two witnesses of the Secular Institutes Rev. Mario Albertini and Mons. Juan José Dorronsoro. They are, as St. Paul would say, *"my personal visiting card"*. Talk with them, consult them without fear and listen to them. They will no doubt say to you the same I have said but better, more briefly, and with greater authority. Mine is the authority of service in Christ and of affection.

18. I cannot conclude without a thought for *"Mary, the model of consecrated secularity, who evangelised with her presence and with her words"* as so splendidly says the Prayer of this Second Congress.

19. Totally consecrated to the Lord through her poverty, virginity and obedience to the Father Mary lived in the world. She fully lived the history of her people sharing their expectations and their hopes, living their poverty and desiring their liberation. She believed in the word conveyed to her in the name of the Lord and was happy. She was a contemplative woman: she lived always *"attentive"* to the word of the Lord, She was the faithful Virgin, the Mother of blessed hope and of beautiful love: the Virgin who engendered Christ and surrendered him in the silence of contemplation and of the Cross. She was the figure and the beginning of the Church: the presence of Christ, the sign of communion and salvation.

20. To her, *"the star of evangelization"* we now recommend the work of this II Latin American Congress of Secular Institutes. We trust in Her and our hopes are centered on Her. We commit everything to the silent and faithful heart of *"Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ"* (Mt 1,16).

With affection and hope I bless you in Christ and in the Blessed Mary.