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CARD. EDUARDO F. PIRONIO

*OPENING DISCOURSE TO THE
SECOND INTERNATIONAL
CONGRESS OF SECULAR INSTITUTES*

August 25th, 1980



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CONFERENCE MONDIALE
DES INSTITUTS SECLIERS

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Dear friends:

1. These are the simple words of hope of a person who believes to know you and who loves you; and who, in the name of Pope John Paul II, has the privilege and the responsibility of serving you. Allow me to greet you with the words of Saint Paul to the Philippians: *"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God for all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all, making my prayer with joy, thankful for your partnership in the Gospel, from the first day until now"* (Phil 1,2 5).

2. Your Congress opens under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the protection of Mary, a model of secular consecration in a privileged moment for the mission of the Church: a world who thirsts for the Word of God, who feels the need for the transforming presence of the Church, who expects from the Church the justification of its hope, who questions the Church regarding truth and love, justice and peace, liberty and communion. The world challenges the Church in what is proper and essential to her. The explicit transmission of the Good News of Jesus for the conversion of hearts and the construction of a new society.

3. It is precisely here, in the mystery of a communion Church, that fits the providential lay ministry of the Secular Institutes: in the essential relationship of a Church made for the salvation of Man of Man as a whole and of all men and for transforming the world from within for the glory of the Father. *"Inspired by no earthly ambition, the Church seeks but a solitary goal: to carry forward the work of*

Christ Himself under the lead of the befriending Spirit. And Christ entered this world to give witness to the truth, to rescue and not sit in judgment, to serve and not to be served" (G. S., 3).

4. At the outset of this Congress which I consider of transcendental importance for the future of Secular Institutes, (their interior vitality, the effectiveness of their mission and the indispensable awakening of new vocations) allow me to remind you of three things: faithfulness to your own identity as consecrated laymen, the ecclesial sense of your life and evangelising mission, the urgency of a profound life in Christ, the Envoy of the Father and the Saviour of men.

I. Faithfulness to your own identity

5. Be fully yourselves. Do not fear to lose your unforegoable identity as laymen by fully living in the world the interior liberty and plenitude of love derived from the evangelical counsels.

6. Consecration does not separate you from the world: it only makes you more deeply part of the Paschal Christ, raising to greater maturity and plenitude the essential consecration of Baptism. For a consecrated laymen living one's Baptism fully means committing himself in a new way to be in the world a legible "*letter from Christ*", "*written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts*" (2 Co 3,3).

7. Be faithful to your "*consecrated secularity*". That is to say live the unbreakable unity of this one and only and original vocation in the Church. Do not feel yourselves diminished laymen, second class laymen, clericalized laymen, a strange mixture of laymen and religious: feel yourselves fully laymen but directly committed in the construction of the world in a radical follow up to Jesus Christ. For this work of evangelization, so closely linked with the integral advancement of man and the full liberation in Jesus Christ, it is indispensable that you live generously and daily the two expressions of an indivisible vocation: "*secular consecration*". It is for this that you are loved and have been chosen, consecrated and sent.

II. Ecclesial meaning of your life and evangelizing mission

8. In recent years, the Church as a whole has welcomed the gift of the Secular Institutes. From Pius XII to John Paul II we recall in particular the messages of Paul VI, so enlightened and full of human warmth and of ecclesial meaning.

9. "*Secular consecration*" is a privileged way of being Church. Particularly Church as "*universal sacrament of salvation*". You therefore belong to the holiness of the Church. Not to its structure, but to its life.

10. The members of Secular Institutes must live intensely the mystery of the Church: both at the universal and at the private level. Discover, love and assume all the problems and hopes, the missionary emergencies of the various local Churches. The evangelising vitality of a Secular Institute depends on a profound and concrete sense of Church.

11. Hence the need to move forward in the direct transmission of the Good News to the poor with the Pastors, in effective communion with their guidelines and with the demands and expectations of all the People of God.

12. The Secular Institutes are a providential way of being Church; which means two things: that their specific identity is recognised and respected and their mission is fulfilled from within a Church essentially communion and participation sent by Jesus Christ to the world to proclaim the Good News to the poor.

III. A life lived deeply in Christ, the Envoy of the Father

"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2,19 20)

13. The life and growth of a Secular Institute depends essentially on two factors: on its historical realism (authentic commitment with

the life of the city: family and work, culture, society and politics) and on its profound relationship with Christ. For a member of a Secular Institute, this means the following: being a radical follow up to Christ through the evangelical councils (while remaining still in the historical context of the world) and a progressive configuration with Christ through prayer, the cross, the daily fulfilment of the will of the Father.

14. Prayer takes place always in a "*secular*" context and not religious nor monastic. Which does not mean that it is not authentic. It is always a positive and perfect communion with the will of the Father. It takes place in the world, under the normal conditions of life. But it undergoes difficult and hard moments of separation and isolation. One cannot live in a permanent climate of contemplation, but only at special and exclusive times of prayer.

15. To live in Christ for the transformation of the world. To draw life from Christ for the clear and sound prophecy of man: Jesus "*our blessed hope*", is born.

Conclusion

16. Dear friends: your sessions are about to begin. Look at the world in which you are submerged as light, as salt, as leaven and which calls you; face the world with realism and hope.

17. Listen and welcome Christ who elects you, consecrates you and sends you. Listen to Christ with a spirit of poverty and availability. Love the Church and express its presence in the world.

18. Be sincere in love, rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer (Rom 12,9,12).

19. "*May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly*" (I Thess. 5,23) and may you always be accompanied by Mary, the Virgin of hope and of the road, of fidelity and of service, of radical surrender to God through Christ in the heart of the world.