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PAUL VI



APOSTOLIC EFFICACY DEPENDS
OF PERSONAL SANCTIFICATION

To the 1st International Congress
of Secular Institutes

Rome, 26th September 1970



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DES INSTITUTS SECLERS

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Beloved sons and daughters in the Lord,

1. You are welcome indeed and specially welcome because, unrecognised by the world which only sees what appears on the surface you are in fact representing the Secular Institutes, and for this you are gathered in Congress.

2. And we know what has brought you here. Two things are in your minds and hearts, confidence and generosity: confidence which makes you stand up and be counted as consecrated persons in the world; generosity which makes you give yourselves to the Church, perceiving its primary purposes which are, first, the mysterious supernatural union between mankind and God our heavenly Father, brought about by the Master and Saviour Jesus Christ through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and second, a union between men, to be achieved through serving them in all manner of ways and promoting human welfare and that higher destiny which is salvation for ever and ever.

3. This is indeed a meeting dear to mind and heart. It brings home to us the miracles of grace, the hidden riches of the Kingdom, the incalculable resources of virtue and holiness of which the Church disposes even today when, as you well know, there is, above, below, all round us, profane and profaning, a humanity drunk with

its conquests in the temporal sphere, a world whose need of Christ is matched only by its unwillingness to meet him.

4. Criss-cross in the Church today run currents of various kinds. As we think of them in terms of that unity, that truth which Christ wants us to long for, and jealously to guard, we see that not all of them are good and helpful. The Church is a tree, an olive of ancient growth, its old trunk twisted, lacerated with the scars of martyrdom, a picture that might not suggest youthful vitality but geriatric aches and pains. Yet you are a living proof in these our days that this same Church can burgeon fresh and vigorous, can put forth new branches full of the promise of abundant fruit of a kind we had never foreseen. You are a phenomenon of the modern Church, typical, comforting.

For this we greet you, for this we would give you new heart.

5. We could go on from here to explain to you in canonical terms what you mean to the Church, how it is that in these days the Church has come to recognise you, give you canonical existence and standing. We could speak of the theology of Secular Institutes according to the Vatican Council (Lumen gentium 44, and Perfectae caritatis 11), the canonical assessment of the institutional forms which you, living bodies of Christians consecrated to our Lord, are taking in these days, we could spell out for you the place and function of Secular Institutes in the structure of the People of God, the specific distinctive marks, the forms, the dimensions in which they are seen to live and work. But you know all this well enough.

6. We are kept informed of the Congregation's work on your behalf and of their constant concern, care, guidance and assistance. We have also gathered the substance, the gist, of those carefully prepared scholarly reports which you have drawn up at this Congress.

So we will not give you a simple replay of a record so competently made by you yourselves. If we must add a word of our own in this canonical context we prefer to speak, in the light of all the circumstances and without dramatising the subject, about the

psychological and spiritual aspects of your special form of dedication to the following of Christ.

7. What is the origin of this phenomenon which is yourselves what is there inside you, personal, spiritual, what is your call? Your vocation has much in common with other vocations in the Church of God but some features make it different from all others. These must be pinpointed.

8. First of all, note the importance of conscious acts, acts of which you can say that you watch yourself doing them: they mean a lot to us Christians: they are quite fascinating, especially in youth and adolescence when they can decide the shape of things. We call these acts, done with self awareness, conscience, and everyone knows very well the meaning and value of conscience. So many people today are saying so many things about it, some talk of its distant dawn in Socratic philosophy, then of its revival due principally to Christianity (a well-known historian said that under the influence of Christianity "the soul's deep foundation is changed Taine III, 125). We ask you to think only, for a moment, of the unique point of everybody's experience at which psychological conscience, that is, self-awareness, becomes moral conscience (cf. St. Thomas I, 79,13) as it adverts to the cogency of a law proclaimed innerly, written on the heart, but binding in external conduct, in real life, with an accountability beyond the human scene and, at its topmost point, a rapport with God himself. It has then become religious conscience.

9. The Vatican Council refers to it in these terms: "In the depths of conscience man discovers a law, which he has not given himself, but which he ought to obey; its voice is always calling him to love and do good to others and to avoid evil ... Man truly has a law written by God within his heart; to give obedience to this law constitutes his dignity, and he will be judged by it (cf. Rom 2.14 16). Conscience is the most secret kernel and shrine of man, where he is alone with God." (The Council then refers to a marvellous discourse uttered by Pius XII on 23rd March 1952).

10. In conscience, this first stage of acts of self-awareness, is born the senses of accountability, of personality, man becomes aware of who and what he is and what it all means and demands. Following up this line of reflection in the light of the effects of baptism a Christian first gets the idea, deep and firm, of a theology of man, a theology of human beings who know they are children of God, members of Christ, incorporated into the body which is the Church, marked with priesthood of the faithful. From this pregnant doctrine of common priesthood recalled to our attention by Vatican II (cf. *Lumen gentium*, 10 11) comes the common Christian commitment to holiness (cf. *ibid.* 39 40) to the fullness of Christian life and to perfect charity.

11. This same conscience, this commitment, was for you, at a given moment of time, lit up by a glorious grace from God: conscience and commitment were transferred into vocation, vocation was to a total response: to a true, unreserved profession of the evangelical counsels or the priesthood (and in either case the interior magnet is perfection); vocation to consecration, your soul's way of self giving to God, supreme act of will and abandonment. Conscience has become an altar of sacrifice. "Let my conscience", says St. Augustine, "be your altar" (En. in Ps 4 9; P.L. 36, 578): it mirrors the 'Fiat ' of the Annunciation.

12. This is all in the sphere of conscious activity; we call it "the interior life"; it is now no longer one voice but a dialogue: the Lord is present. St. Augustine once more: "Devout conscience, abode of God" (En. in Ps 45, P.L. 36, 520). You speak with your Lord, but what you seek is decision, resolutions, like St. Paul near Damascus, "Lord, what will you have me to do?" (Acts 9.5). Then your baptismal consecration of grace awakes and speaks its conscious word of actual and chosen consecration, deliberately opening out to the evangelical counsels, stretching out to Christian perfection. This is the first, the capital decision, the qualifying decision, deciding what the whole of your life will be like.

13. And what is your second decision? The second decision is the new thing, the original contribution of Secular Institutes. What is it

then, actually? What is your chosen way of living this consecration of yours? It is like this you say: "Shall we give up our life in the world, as we know it, or can we stay as we are? " The Church replies: "Choose. You may do either".

And you have chosen, for many reasons of your own, well weighed. You have made your decision to remain secular, to continue to be "just like everybody else " in the passing show of this world. Then comes the choice of this or that sort of life in the world and here you have, in full accord with the pluralism allowed to Secular Institutes, made your own decisions according to individual preference. Secular, then, are your Institutes, as distinct from the Religious. Both kinds of Institute have the one end in view, Christian perfection. You for your part have made a choice which does not cut you off from this world with all its desecralised life and worldly scale of values, its moral principles often threatened by pressure of temptation, enough to make a man tremble.

14. Discipline, moral discipline, eternal vigilance, is what you need: you must be fending for yourselves all the time: the plumb line straightness of your every act must come from your sense, your realisation of the consecration you have made, and this for twenty four hours of every day. 'Going without and putting up with' is a catch phrase of the moralist. This is what you will have to do all the time. It is a feature of your 'spirituality'. Here we see a new kind of attitude of conscience, a disposition of heart and mind hidden.

15. A vast field of work lies open before you. Here your twofold purpose is to be achieved, your own sanctification, and 'consecration of the world'. This fascinating commitment calls for perceptiveness and tact. The world which is your field is a world of human beings: restless, real, dazzling. It has its virtues and its passions, its opportunities for good, its gravitation to evil, its magnificent modern achievements, the inadequacies underneath it all, its inevitable sufferings. You are walking on an inclined plane. It would be easy to go down, it is hard work to go up, but a challenge. You are spiritual mountaineers with a stiff climb before you.

16. Like combat troops (to change the metaphor) you have your operation planned. Keep three things in mind. First your consecration is not only a commitment, it is also a help, a support; love it, it is a blessing and gives joy to your heart, you can turn to it always: it fills up the voids which your self denial scoops out of your human life, it is compensation, it makes you able to realise the paradox of charity: giving, giving to others means receiving, in Christ. Second, you are in the world, and not of it, but for it. Our Lord has taught us how to find in this play on words both his and our mission for the salvation of the world. Never forget that as members of a Secular Institute you have this mission in the modern world. The world needs you today, it needs in the world itself, pathfinders to salvation in Christ.

17. The third thing ever to be borne in mind is the Church. Church enters into you as part of the awareness, the conscience, which we have just been thinking about. It becomes part of your mind, a meditation unintermittent, your *sensus Ecclesiae*, your 'feel of the Church'. It is within you, the air which your spirit breathes. No doubt you have experienced the exhilarating effects of this inexhaustible source of inspiration, and, blending with it, you have, especially since the Council, the prompting and incentives of theology and of your own spirituality. Of these incentives there is one which should never be missing, the unique quality of your membership of the Church. To your special life as consecrated seculars belongs a special membership of the Church. The Church has every confidence in you, we want you to be quite clear on this point. The Church follows your progress, supports you, accepts you as belonging to the family, favourite children, active responsible members loyal, yet trained for flexible mission, ready for silent witness, for service and, when required, for sacrifice.

18. You are in fact lay people whose open profession of Christianity is a constructive force, supporting both mission and structure, giving life to the charity, the spiritual life of the diocese and especially of Catholic institutions.

19. You are lay people who can know at first hand, better than others, the needs of the Church on earth, and perhaps you are better

placed to see its defects: these you do not take as an opportunity for biting, ungracious criticism, an excuse for standing aloof, a disdainful elite. They only serve to bring out in you a greater love, a humbler and more filial service as sons and daughters coming to her aid.

20. Secular Institutes of today's Church, take with you our greetings, our encouragement, to your brothers and sisters. To each and all of you we give our Apostolic Blessing.