

[www.cmis-int.org](http://www.cmis-int.org)

CARD. EDUARDO MARTINEZ SOMALO

Opening Address to the International  
Symposium to celebrate the 50th  
Anniversary of the  
*Provida Mater Ecclesia*

January 31st, 1997



**cmis**  
CONFERENCE MONDIALE  
DES INSTITUTS SECLIERS

---

## CARD. EDUARDO MARTINEZ SOMALO

### Opening Address to the International Symposium to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the "Provida Mater Ecclesia", January 31st, 1997

My dear participants at this Symposium,

I thank the Lord for the auspicious opportunity to meet such a large number of members of the various Secular Institutes, gathered at the Pontifical University which, for over 400 years, has been among the leaders in prestigious, highly qualified theological research and culture.

I thank all those who worked so hard to plan this Symposium: the World Conference of Secular Institutes, whose Executive Council organised these meetings to celebrate a very significant date in the life of all Secular Institutes: the 50th anniversary of the Apostolic Constitution *Provida Mater*, promulgated on February 2, 1947 by the late Holy Father Pius XII.

It has also been fifty years since the Dicastery, to which Mons. Dorrnsoro and I belong, has been responsible for this form of consecrated life. By now, it is a consolidated way of life which has determined its specific mission in the large family of the Church.

Our joy and our gratitude to the Holy Trinity are undoubtedly shared by those who, in the consoling mystery of the Communion of Saints, already live forever in God, and participate with us in the joys of the entire Church. It is herewith necessary to recall the wise and enlightened author of the event we are celebrating, the venerable Father Arcadio Larraona, of the Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Missionaries (Claretians). Later raised to Cardinal, Fr. Larraona at the time held the post of Under-secretary of the Sacred

Congregation of Religious. His memory continues to live on in many of us. In 1941, the Supreme Pontiff Pius XII gave him the task of studying these new Institutes, creating a Commission composed of members of the former Sacred Congregations of the Holy Office and Religious, to help determine adequate legislation. This was followed by the publication of the Pontifical document that outlined the theological and juridical foundations of the Secular Institutes and the particular laws which govern them.

The following year, Pius XII also defined the doctrine concerning the new form of consecrated life in the *Motu Proprio Primo feliciter*. The same year, the Sacred Congregation of Religious highlighted several points in the Instruction *Cum Sanctissimus*.

We can say the Church has been enriched by these documents in that those people who choose to remain in the world may be recognised as being wholly consecrated, thus uniting secularity and consecration as integral elements of the new Institutes. Full consecration and complete secularity are declared not only compatible, but are also considered reciprocal aids which respond to the needs of modern times; the images of salt and yeast, which lend flavour and expand, are emphasised together with the classic evangelical references to the city on the mountain top and the light of the candelabrum.

Papal teachings later confirmed the doctrine and practices of the Secular Institutes; thus, the Second Vatican Council recommended them to preserve their unique identity and dedicate their energies to divine and human teachings (cf. PC 11). Moreover, Pontifical teachings recognised that consecrated seculars are very effective in missionary work, offering a sign of complete dedication to the evangelization of the world (cf. AG 40). And in celebrating this solemn anniversary twenty-five years ago, Pope Paul VI encouraged you to offer witness to consecrated secularity so that the Church may assume the new attitude or approach that the world demands today! (cf. Pope Paul VI, discourse for the XXVth anniversary of *Provida Mater*, Rome February 2, 1972).

The illustrious speakers who will soon present their discourses will delve deeper into these issues, tracing the main themes and events of the past fifty years which led us to the post synodal Apostolic Exhortation on Consecrated Life. In that document, the Holy Father Pope John Paul II again invites the world's consecrated persons to release into society the new energy of Christ's Kingdom, to transfigure the world with the power of the Beatitudes (cf. VC 10). In the Exhortation, the Holy Father reflects further on the magnificence of Christ's undivided succession, generating amongst us a true feeling of filial gratitude.

Not much left remains for me to say, save to offer all of you my sincerest wishes and prayers. My best wishes and prayers are with you so that the Secular Institutes may always remain faithful to their charism, aiming for the right balance between secularity and consecration; that they may tap the source of their spirituality, and accurately and courageously interpret the wishes of their Founders. It is they who responded to inspiration from the Spirit of Truth and began this holy mission adopted by the Church. All those who serve in this mission are certain to respond generously to the divine call.

I am sure that in the new evangelization marking the Third Christian Millennium all of you will be committed and active protagonists in proclaiming the world's Salvation through Jesus Christ, Who remains the same yesterday, today and forever, and Whom we glorify and offer thanks!

Rome, 31st January 1997