

Vatican City, 17 August 2016

Dear Madame Védie¹,

On the occasion of the upcoming Assembly of the World Conference of Secular Institutes the Holy Father wishes to extend to you and all the participants his cordial greetings and assure you of his closeness in affection, pastoral solicitude, and above all prayer so the Holy Spirit may render most bountiful this encounter, whose theme is: “*You are at the heart of the world with the heart of God*”.

The originality and the particularity of secular consecration come to be when secularity and consecration journey together in unity of life. We can say that this synthesis is precisely what constitutes the greatest challenge for secular institutes today.

Blessed Paul VI grasped and clearly expressed the essence of the secular vocation, and we see this in words of his own: “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 recognized 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”. Moreover, “Consecration 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” (*Address to the participants at the International Conference of Secular Institutes*, 20 September 1972, n. 9 and 13).

Requested of secular institutes in our present day and age is a renewed synthesis, with Jesus ever at the center of watchful attention, and at the same time being immersed in the life of the world. Forging synthesis between consecration and secularity means, first and foremost, to keep these two aspects *together, without ever separating them*. It also means *to compose them, not overlap one with the other*. In fact, overlapping could lead to living in a

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formalistic manner, observing certain practices without this bringing about any change in the manner of living relations with fellowmen and with the world. Lastly, forging synthesis also means *to never subordinate* one element to the other: secularity and consecration must journey together, one needs the other. It is not a matter of being a layperson first, and then a consecrated person, or being a consecrated person first, and then a layperson, but rather being a consecrated layperson simultaneously. Stemming forth from this is also a further and most important consequence: needed is *ongoing discernment* that may help to establish equilibrium; an attitude that may help to discover God in all things.

This is why fundamental is the importance of *formation* which must guide the members of secular institutes to respond in full to the mission of their respective institutes, giving rise to an ever new and deep commitment with Christ, who calls and sends forth, and at the same time a readiness to place oneself on the line in the situations, surroundings and reality of today's world. This formation is particularly demanding because it calls for an ongoing effort to forge unity between consecration and secularity, action and contemplation, without the support of any community organization of prayer and work. Nonetheless, if consecrated laypersons strive to remain ever alert and open to the will of God, they will have that gaze of faith that leads to discovering Christ, who is always present everywhere. This is why it is necessary to educate to an intense personal relationship with God, which is enriched with the presence of fellowmen at one and the same time. Community life is not required, but essential is fraternal communion. Life as a whole must be animated and marked by communion with God and neighbor.

The commitment in secularity is breathtaking in scope and moves against the backdrop of vast horizons. Needed, therefore, is constant attention to the signs of the times: history has to be read, understood and interpreted, and it is necessary to become part of it in a constructive and fecund manner in order to leave an evangelical footprint, contributing, each person in keeping with his/her diverse responsibilities, to orienting history towards the Kingdom of God. This vocation therefore entails a constant tension to forge a synthesis between love of God and love of man, living a spirituality able to blend the criteria coming from 'above', from the grace of God, and the criteria coming from 'below', from human history. Growth in love for God inevitably leads to growth in love for the world, and vice versa.

Guided by the Holy Spirit in what you do, you usher the logic of God into the world, helping to bring into being that new humanity He desires. It is God who forges the synthesis between secularity and consecration. By virtue of His grace it is possible to exercise prophecy that implies discernment and creativity kindled by the Spirit. Discernment as the toil implicit in understanding and interpreting the signs of the times, and accepting the complexity, the fragmented nature and the precariousness of our times. Creativity as the ability to imagine new solutions, to invent unprecedented responses better suited to the new situations that arise. Becoming fellow travelers of humanity on the move is a theological

reality for you. Moreover, an essential part of this is the quest for dialogue and encounter, and this calls upon you to be men and women of communion in the world.

Therefore, you are called by Christ to be signs and instruments of God's love in the world, visible signs of an invisible love that foresees everything and wishes to redeem everything in order to restore each and every thing to the Trinitarian communion, the origin and ultimate fulfillment of the world.

In brief, we can say it is especially urgent to attend to *the life of prayer*: being women and men of prayer, of intimate friendship with Jesus, letting Him be the Lord of your life; and attend to *family life*: you are not obliged to live in community, but you must be a burning hearth from which men and women can draw light and warmth for life in the world, as St. John Paul II said to you (*Address to participants at the International Symposium to mark the 50th anniversary of Provida Mater Ecclesia*, 1 Feb. 1997). Precisely because you are dispersed like leaven and salt, you must be witnesses of the value of fraternity and friendship. No human being is an island; we must avoid lapsing into indifference towards others. If your task is to transfigure the world, restoring the order of creation, it is necessary for your life to cry out to man of today just how possible is a new way of being, living, relating with the world and others, being new men and women in Christ. With *chastity* show there is a different way to love with a free heart just like Christ, in self-oblation; with *poverty* react against the consumerism literally devouring the western world in particular, and, with your life and words whenever possible, denounce the many forms of injustice perpetrated against the poor of this planet; with *obedience* be witnesses of interior liberty against individualism, pride and arrogance. Be the "advance guard" of the Church in the new evangelization. No new evangelization is possible, however, if it does not begin from the newness of life which takes upon itself the sentiments of Christ and His oblation unto death itself. Therefore, the greatest challenge of all for secular institutes as well is *to be schools of holiness*. A particular style of holiness should emerge from each institute, holiness incarnated in the activities of each day, in the small and big events where flourishing is the creativity of faith, hope and charity. The Virgin Mary is the perfect model of this incarnated spirituality. Constantly united with her Son in daily life and family concerns, she lived a completely normal life so similar to that of so many other people, and thus collaborated in God's work. By remaining ever united to Her you will certainly be guaranteed that you are striding forth along the pathway of secular holiness.

A further indispensable element for making an effective contribution to new evangelization is *to live fraternal love*. I referred above to the importance of communion: all the members of secular institutes are called to live it in the ordinary situations of the world, on their own, at home, in groups of fraternal life, according to the Constitutions of their respective institutes, and actively participating in the life of the institute. During the Last Supper Christ prayed to His Father for the disciples, asking for the grace of unity to be bestowed upon them. Albeit allowing for human limits, only a community which projects

love among its members is credible and renders visible the love of God, the gratuitousness, fidelity and tenderness of His love. With His incarnation the Son of God brought to man the gift of fraternity. In Christ we are all brothers and children of God. The love each one of us has for all others, from those closest to us to those farthest removed, is the only way Jesus showed us in order to find the way of salvation.

What exactly is the humanity you have before you? Persons who have lost the faith or live as if God did not exist, young persons with neither values nor ideals, broken families, unemployed persons, elderly persons all on their own, migrants. . . “Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest” (*Mt* 11:28). In saying these words, Jesus shows you the way. How many are the faces you come across when going to work or doing your shopping at a local market? How many occasions to ‘give rest’, to encourage, to fan the flames of hope, to bring consolation! This is the life of the world (“*in saeculo viventes*” states Canon 710) which constitutes ‘secularity’, the feature common to all secular institutes, but lived in different ways by the various institutes, especially those of clerics compared to those of laypersons. The secular priest and the layperson are both in the world, but their relationship with the world is different. Secular priests are engaged in cultivating active solicitude towards persons afflicted by various forms of poverty, accompanying all those who live their faith in the heart of human commitments; and above all, through the Eucharist the secular priest participates in a special way in Christ’s offering to His Father, the offering that obtains the grace which comes to regenerate humanity.

This is the way: called by the Lord to follow Him in the world, you bring love for the world by first of all loving Him with your whole heart, and loving each fellowman with a heart both paternal and maternal. Do not fall into the grips of letting things become habitual and customary, thereby becoming “insipid”, “tasteless”. “If the salt loses its taste, how can he be seasoned again?” (*Lk* 14:34).

Dear Madame Védie, these are the reflections and exhortations the Holy Father charged me to convey to you. He accompanies you with a special prayer for you and all the members of secular institutes and, while asking you to please pray for him, wholeheartedly imparts his Apostolic Blessing.

In extending to you my personal best wishes for your Assembly, in due deference I remain,

Respectfully yours

Pietro Cardinal Parolin

Secretary of State