

In the world

Full secularity

Full consecration



Source: www.cmis-int.org (World Conference of Secular Institutes)

“A secular institute is an institute of consecrated life in which Christ’s faithful, living in the world, strive for the perfection of charity and endeavour to contribute to the sanctification of the world, especially from within”

(canon # 710).

What is the secular institute?

Secular institutes are a still young reality in the history of the Church. They emerged in the first half of the nineteenth century and were approved by Pope Pius XII in 1947 through the Apostolic Constitution **Provida Mater Ecclesia** and via the Motu Proprio **Primo Feliciter** in 1948. Until then, all those who wanted to devote themselves to God had to leave the world and enter religion, either in a Religious Order or in a Congregation. Since the appearance of Secular Institutes, lay people who feel the call to live the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience, can consecrate themselves to God, without losing their secular state in the Church, by sanctifying themselves in the world and from within the world itself.

Secularity and consecration

Secular institutes combine secularity and consecration: in fact, the members of a secular institute are fully secular and fully consecrated, joining in themselves two realities that until now were incompatible with each other. They are fully consecrated to God as the religious and they are as secular as the rest of the Christians who are not clerics. The fact that they live in the midst of the world, performing the most varied professions in different social environments, does not diminish their consecration. Nothing loses their secular essence not even the reason of being consecrated to God. The member of a secular institute is not a member of a religious order. He or She is a lay person (a doctor, a teacher, a lawyer, a mechanic ...), a lay person consecrated to God by the following of the evangelical counsels. He or she lives in the world within the ordinary circumstances of family, work and social life, which weave his or her own existence.

Thus, secular institutes unite these two realities which had been previously considered incompatible: secularity (by which its members remain laypeople) and total consecration of the life to God. Hence, it is not easy to understand this is a gift that the Holy Spirit gave to his Church: consecrated secularity.

So, since Pius XII onwards, all the popes have emphasized that secular institutes are the work of the Holy Spirit that constantly renews its Church to meet the needs of today's evangelistic mission in the world. Secular institutes are located in the context of the conciliar way of the Church to rediscover the value of creation and the original call addressed to each person in their mission to care the world and transform it according to the God's will (cf. Gen. 2 15).

Members, lifestyle, and apostleship

Now it is necessary to know and make known this vocation that is so relevant and, I should say, so urgent, the vocation of persons who consecrate themselves to God by practicing the evangelical counsels and strive to immerse their whole lives and all their activities in that special consecration, creating in themselves a total availability to the Father's will and working to change the world from within" said Blessed John Paul II (3/5/83).

Nowadays most of the fields of human activity that rule the world and determine behavioral patterns for all humanity are in the hands of the laity. If there are people consecrated to God, who love the Lord as the only love of their lives and, in turn, are fully competent in the practice of their profession- which they perform as a way of ordering all human realities according to God's will - then it is more likely that the world will be renewed in Christ *"from within like leaven"* (*Lumen Gentium* 31). Thanks to this vital synthesis between consecration and secularity, the member of a secular institute combines in his or her life the passion for God and the passion for humanity. He or she gives himself or herself fully to God and to the world so that the world can perceive the salt of the Gospel, the fragrance of Christ.

The doctrine of the Church also expects that priests to associate to secular institutes. Although due to the sacrament of the Holy Orders they become pastors of the People of God, dedicating their lives to the ministry of the Word and the Sacraments, by no means do they lose their intrinsic relationship with the world. And this fact enables them to participate in the charism of secular institutes by offering this experience of consecration in the world through the evangelical counsels of the presbytery in which they are inserted.

Many are the circumstances and needs of the world. So, many are the kinds of secular institutes. There are only female institutes, which are the majority. Others are only made up of laymen, or include priests too. And finally, there are secular institutes that combine the three branches: laymen, laywomen and priests.

As for their lifestyles, many members of secular institutes live with their families or alone. Others form small groups of common life. Some secular institutes have their own apostolic works, while others reject them by rule. In short, there exists within these institutes a healthy and rich pluralism that the Church has always kept and defended.

The charisma of secular institutes expresses clearly some of the basic guidelines outlined by the Second Vatican Council: the universal call to holiness, the presence in the world to sanctify it from within, etc. *"If they remain faithful to their vocation, they will be like an experimental laboratory in which the Church tests the concrete modes of its relations with the world"* (Paul VI, March 25th, 1976).

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