



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE WORLD CONGRESS OF SECULAR INSTITUTES

Monday, 28 August 2000

Dear Brothers and Sisters,¹ I am pleased to welcome you on the occasion of your congress; the Jubilee celebration currently taking place gives it an orientation and a special encouragement. I greet you all with deep cordiality, extending a particular greeting to Cardinal Eduardo Martínez Somalo, Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, who has warmly expressed your sentiments. In the Year of the Great Jubilee, the Church invites all the laity, but especially the members of secular institutes, to engage in spreading knowledge of the Gospel and in bearing a Christian witness in secular realities. As I said at our meeting for the 50th anniversary of *Provida Mater Ecclesia*, by your vocation and mission you are at the crossroads between God's initiative and the longing of creation: God's initiative, which you bring to the world through love and intimate union with Christ; the longing of creation, which you share in the everyday and secular condition of your fellow men and women (cf. *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. XX/1, 1997, n. 5, p. 232). Consequently, as consecrated lay people you must live contemporary realities with active awareness, because the following of Christ, which gives meaning to your lives, seriously involves you in that world which you are called to transform according to God's plan.² Your world congress focuses attention on the theme of the formation of the members of secular institutes. They must always be able to discern in the complexity and variability of the signs of the times God's will and the paths of the new evangelization in every "today" of history. In my Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, I amply covered the theme of the formation of Christians with their historical and secular responsibilities as well as their direct collaboration in building the Christian community; and I indicated the indispensable sources of this formation: "a receptive listening to the Word of God and the Church, fervent and constant prayer, recourse to a wise and loving spiritual guide, and a faithful discernment of the gifts and talents given by God, as well as the diverse social and historic situations in which one lives" (n. 58). Thus formation embraces the whole life of the consecrated person. It is also nourished by the analyses and reflections of experts in sociology and the other human sciences, but cannot disregard, as its vital centre and criterion for the Christian evaluation of historical phenomena, the spiritual, theological and sapiential dimension of the life of faith, which provides the ultimate, crucial keys to the interpretation of the human condition today and to the choice of the priorities and styles of an authentic witness. The gaze we turn to the realities of the contemporary world, which we would like always to be filled with the compassion and mercy

that our Lord Jesus Christ taught us, does not pause to identify errors and dangers. Of course, it cannot ignore the negative and problematic aspects but is immediately directed to identifying ways of hope and pointing out prospects of fervent commitment for the person's integral advancement, liberation and full happiness.³ In the heart of a changing world in which unheard-of injustices and sufferings persist and are worsening, you are called to give a Christian interpretation to events and to historical and cultural phenomena. In particular, you must be harbingers of light and hope in contemporary society. Do not let yourselves be deceived by ingenuous optimism, but remain faithful witnesses of a God who certainly loves this humanity and offers it the necessary grace to work effectively building a better world, more just and more respectful of the dignity of every human being. The challenge to the faith of contemporary culture seems precisely this: to give up the facile tendency to paint dark and negative scenes, in order to mark out possible paths that are not deceptive, of redemption, liberation and hope. Your experience as consecrated people in secular conditions demonstrates that one must not expect a better world to come about only from the choices of higher responsibilities and from the top of great institutions. The Lord's grace, which can also save and redeem this historical epoch, is born and grows in believers' hearts. They accept, support and encourage God's initiative in history and make it grow from below and from within simple human lives, which thus become true messengers of change and of salvation. It is enough to think in this regard of the action of countless throngs of saints, even those who have not been officially declared as such by the Church, who made a deep mark on the time in which they lived, contributing to its values and energies of goodness whose importance escapes the instruments of social analysis, but is clearly visible to God's eyes and to the thoughtful reflection of believers.⁴ Formation in discernment cannot ignore the basis of every human project which is and remains Jesus Christ. The mission of secular institutes is to "make present in society the newness and power of Christ's kingdom, striving to transfigure the world from within by the power of the Beatitudes" (*Vita consecrata*, n. 10). The faith of disciples thus becomes the spirit of the world, according to the well-chosen image of the letter "To Diognetus", and gives rise to a cultural and social renewal which should be made available to humanity. The more distant and alien to the Gospel humanity is, the stronger and more convincing the proclamation of the truth about Christ and man redeemed through him must be. Of course, attention must always be paid to the methods of this proclamation so that humanity does not feel it is an intrusion and imposition on the part of believers. On the contrary, it will be our task to see that it is ever clearer that the Church, which carries out Christ's mission, cares lovingly for human beings. She does not do so for humanity in the abstract, but for this real, historical human being, in the conviction that "this man is the primary route that the Church must travel in fulfilling her mission ... the way traced out by Christ himself, the way that leads invariably through the mystery of the Incarnation and the Redemption" (*Redemptoris hominis*, n. 14; cf. *Centesimus annus*, n. 53).⁵ Your initial and continuous formation, dear superiors and members of secular institutes, should be nourished by these certainties. It will yield abundant fruit to the extent that it continues to draw from the inexhaustible riches of revelation, interpreted and proclaimed by the Church with wisdom and love. I entrust your journey on the routes of the world to Mary, Star of evangelization, who is an image of the Church beyond compare. May she be close to you, and may her intercession make the work of your congress fruitful and give enthusiasm and renewed apostolic dynamism to the institutions which you represent here, so that the Jubilee will mark the beginning of a new Pentecost and a profound interior renewal. With these wishes I impart my Apostolic Blessing to you all, as a pledge of constant affection. © Copyright 2000 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana