

religious gives unquestioning obedience. Certainly he does not at every order question its validity; but it is part of his obedience that he should give the co-operation of his intelligence. And this may involve not only the right, but the duty of making representations to his superior when it may appear that there are factors known to him that might affect the superior's decision. '*The religious gives up his own will . . . leaves it to the superior to take the decisions.*' As we have seen, he gives up the wayward inclinations of a will disposed to rebel against God; but he does this to gain a mastery, a wilfulness and purposiveness that he will gain in no other way. The religious is not a man without will; he ought to be a man with the strongest will in the world, a will strengthened by the will of God. Certainly, the superior takes the decisions, but the decision to put those decisions into effect remains, and must remain, the subject's. '*He simply obeys.*' But what a wealth of complexity there is in that simplicity.



SECULAR INSTITUTES: I In the World

TERESA MELIA

YOU live in an age that is twisted out of its true pattern and among such people, you shine out, beacons to the world, upholding the message of life.' (Phil. ii, 15.) These words of St Paul to the Philippians might be addressed to members of Secular Institutes at the present time. It would be difficult to find in the world a nation, a city, a family, living its life according to the true pattern, the pattern of Christ. He is 'the Way, the Truth and the Life', yet how small is the number, even amongst Christians, of those who follow him. The message of life is unheeded, unrecognized even, jammed as it is by powerful propaganda, lies, secularization, false values and materialism—the 'message of death. The profound meaning of the Incarnation' the 'sanctification of the profane', the divinization of humanity, this has become obscured and mankind throughout the world searches gropingly and often unwittingly for the realization of

Christ's message: 'I have come that they may have life and may have it more abundantly'.

As St Paul says, 'To live is Christ'. That is the pattern, and it is to draw all to follow this pattern, 'to restore all things in Christ' that members of Secular Institutes are specially called.

Pope Pius XII in *Primo Feliciter* (1948) paraphrased, as it were, the text of St Paul. 'The Holy Spirit who unceasingly re-creates and renews the face of the earth which in these days has been made desolate and unsightly by so many such great evils, has called to union with himself by a great and special grace, many dear sons and daughters, whom we lovingly bless in the Lord, so that gathered together and co-ordinated in Secular Institutes, they may be the ever fresh salt of an earth which has lost its savour, and is shrouded in darkness . . . that they may be the light which shines amid the darkness of that world, and is not extinguished, and a modest but efficacious leaven which working always and everywhere and dispersed among all classes of people from the lowest to the highest, strives by example and in every way, to reach out and permeate all and each, until it so informs the entire mass that the whole is leavened in Christ.'

What then are these Secular Institutes which are called by Christ's Vicar on earth to be the 'leaven in the mass'? In Article I of *Provida Mater Ecclesia* (1947) they are described as 'Societies, whether clerical or lay, whose members profess the evangelical counsels in the world as their aim, in order to attain Christian perfection and the full exercise of the apostolate'. The Church has declared Secular Institutes to belong to the 'state of perfection' because their members, though living and working *in* the world, practise the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. For this reason, they come under the care of the Sacred Congregation for Religious, within which a special office for dealing with Secular Institutes has been set up.

But though the Church guards and protects their state of perfection, the essence of which is the practice of the vows, it insists strongly on the secular nature of these Institutes. Secular, because they are meant to live *in* the world, work for the world and by the methods of the world, though in spirit they are *not of* the world. Repeatedly the late Holy Father urged this emphasis on the secular aspect of the Institutes to distinguish them from religious congregations. Members of Secular Institutes do not

change their status. They are *not* therefore 'religious in the world', though this description is often erroneously applied to them. They are seculars, dedicated to God in the world by the evangelical counsels; they belong to a self-governing society approved by the Church, and their whole life is given to the lay apostolate. 'Set apart, not by way of life and activities but rather by a state of conscience and inward consecration, they are fully human so as to remain near men and bring them to God, but equally fully given to God so as to transmit him to their brethren.' (Fr Perrin, O.P.)

II

In the World

Throughout the whole history of the Church there has been the call for sanctity in the world, a call, answered by the shining lives of thousands of lay people, many of them canonized, as St Catherine of Sienna, St Joan of Arc, St Benedict Labre, besides the countless cloud of witnesses in the early days of Christianity. What is new in the Church is the creation of an institution to serve this vocation in the world, a way of life declared by the Church to be a state of perfection and enjoying the benefits and guarantees bound up with the Church's approval.

In the dawn of Christianity, the Church recognized and blessed virginity consecrated in the world. Since the middle ages, third orders or tertiaries have spread the ideals of their founders, without obliging their members to observe the three vows. In 1535 St Angela de Merici founded the Ursulines with the idea of having them living and teaching in the world in lay dress, but consecrated to God by vows. Later, however, the Church considered it necessary to enforce community life as religious. In the seventeenth century St Francis de Sales attempted to bring nuns more into contact with the world. His Order of Visitation nuns was originally a group of lay women dedicated to God, visiting the poor and sick in their homes. This innovation in religious life was not approved of by Rome, which insisted upon the grille and strict enclosure. Yet another attempt was made by a saint—Vincent de Paul—whose vision and strength of purpose at last secured a new kind of dedicated life for women. The Sisters of

Charity were allowed to take annual vows and have no enclosure, thus ensuring closer contact with the world—the poor, the sick, the needy. It was not till 1791, however, that the idea of a Secular Institute as known today was brought to birth by the French Jesuit, Fr de Clorivière.

Religious having been driven out of France by the Revolution, Fr de Clorivière founded the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary, the forerunner of all Secular Institutes. Here were women, for the first time since the early days of the Church, living in their own homes, wearing no religious habit, yet consecrating themselves after a period of probation to lifelong obligations of poverty, chastity and obedience. The new society had as immediate end, to save the religious life, whose very existence was menaced by the dissolution of religious Orders in France, and secondarily to procure the blessing and grace of the religious life under a new form, more particularly adapted to the actual needs of the Church and the aspiration of souls. 'Their special aim', wrote Fr de Clorivière, 'is to practise evangelical perfection in their own milieu, even in the world—as did the Apostles and their disciples in the early days of the Church.'

This, then, was the beginning, but it is only during the last thirty to forty years that the seed has sprung up all over the world, to flower in divers ways as Secular Institutes for men and women and clergy.

Nor has the Church been inattentive to this movement so evidently inspired by the Holy Ghost. Serious discussions took place in Rome concerning the status of these Institutes, but though various views were aired, the Code of Canon Law showed its customary caution, waiting for experience to indicate more clearly the character of this new type of society, striving after evangelical perfection in the world. Despite the reticence of Canon Law, this new life in the Church continued to develop. Pope Pius XI never ceased to show his sympathy with these new Institutes. It was he who charged Fr Gemelli to assemble at St Gall (Switzerland) the leaders of twenty of these modern Institutes, so as to study what they had in common. In Fr Gemelli's words, 'In the year of our Lord 1938, on the 20th May, was held at St Gall in a room of the Episcopal Curia, an assembly, little known indeed, but important in the religious history of the Church. Twenty delegates of ten different nationalities openly proclaimed

their aspirations for and their experiences of a new kind of life consecrated to God. In these countries, these movements sprang into being simultaneously, without one knowing of the existence of the other. With what astonishment did they discover and confirm the identity of their views and of their organization.' The Holy Spirit himself was indeed at work and within another ten years the Church set its seal of approval on Secular Institutes by the Apostolic Constitution *Provida Mater Ecclesia* (1947).

That Pope Pius XII took a keen personal interest in these new Institutes is certain. Collaborating with Cardinal Gasparri as Secretary of the Commission of Revision of the Code of Canon Law, he had first-hand knowledge of these Institutes and the problems they posed. Not content merely to show interest, he, as Supreme Pontiff, definitively declared their status. The Roman Congregation worked 'not only by his order but under his personal direction'. This Apostolic Constitution *Provida Mater* brought to a close the long doctrinal controversy. Pope Pius XII placed these Institutes not primarily among the works of the apostolate, but among Institutes of 'perfect life and in the community of souls totally consecrated to God'. As Fr Gemelli notes on this point, 'The Apostolate is not only for members of these Secular Institutes its occasion of consecrating themselves to God, but it is a constant universal engagement which is an *effect* of *their consecration* to God'. Secular Institutes then belong to the state of perfection, since they possess the essence and core—a complete life-long consecration to God by the evangelical counsels.

While declaring them to belong to the state of perfection like religious congregations, Pope Pius XII laid great stress on their *secular* vocation. We quote from *Primo Feliciter* (1948): 'It must always be borne in mind that the proper and peculiar character of such institutes, namely that they are *secular*—and in this lies the whole reason for the existence of such institutes—must stand out clearly in everything. Nothing will be withdrawn from the full profession of Christian perfection, solidly based on the evangelical counsels, and truly religious as to its substance, but this perfection is to be exercised and professed in the world; and consequently this perfection must be adapted to secular life in all such things as are lawful and not opposed to the duties and exercise of this same perfection.' And again: 'The apostolate of Secular Institutes is to be faithfully exercised not only *in the world*, but as

originating *from the world*, and consequently its profession, exercises, forms, places and other circumstances must correspond to this secular condition.'

This insistence by the late Holy Father on the *secular* nature of these Institutes indicates that theirs is not an adulterated religious life, not a compromise between the world and the cloister, not an imitation of existing states of perfection, but a wholly new vocation. In books or talks on vocations, it is strange that there is seldom any mention of this way of life. There seems, indeed, to be some suspicion of Secular Institutes. But they are fully approved by the Church as a way of life in the practice of perfection by the three vows. A vocation to a Secular Institute is as truly a vocation as that to a religious congregation or order. Adopting a negative attitude towards them, many people fail to recognize the absolute value of Secular Institutes. They compare them with religious congregations and find so much missing that they conclude, wrongly enough, that they are merely a poor substitute for the familiar ways of dedicated life. They are not a substitute. The religious life as known will always have its needed place in the Church. But Secular Institutes should be considered and valued for their own positive and intrinsic worth, for they have most definitely their rôle in the spiritual and apostolic life of the Church. Their distinctive characteristic, as we have said, is that the vocation to a Secular Institute must be realized in the world and by the ordinary ways of the age. As the leaven in the mass, they must be immersed, as it were, in the world around them. Every sphere of life, every profession compatible with a Christian life, must be entered into and sanctified. The methods of the age must be used—the press, radio, television—all can be channels of the apostolate of Secular Institutes. But the hidden way of penetration, of life shared with one's fellow workers—witnessing in every detail of daily life to the spirit of the Gospel—this is the very essence of the vocation: to divinize all that is human. Dostoevsky says in one of his books, 'We must take the *whole* of us into heaven'. We are soul and body, and both must be sanctified, even in this life. Wherever we are, we must use the whole of ourselves to re-christianize the surroundings, to show by our everyday life that imitation of Christ is not limited to those called to religious life, but is for every individual. Factories, offices, schools, hospitals, homes, all must produce their saints.

III

Ways in the World

In practice, how do members of Secular Institutes live in the world? They may live in a group or small centre, or in their own homes, or in lodgings. Since they are not religious, no enclosure or community life is required. This, of course, widens considerably the sphere of their apostolic influence. They dress as seculars according to the customs of their country and the status to which they belong. Nothing external ought to distinguish them in the world from their neighbours, so that they can mix freely amongst their fellow-workers as one of them, and not as a being in some way set apart. In the matter of dress, women should regard it as a duty to maintain a standard of good taste, simplicity and elegance without infringing on the practice of poverty. Christian life should be and feel at home in the world: that is the message they have to bring to the world. Moreover, great harm can be done to the apostolate by dedicated women who appear frumpish and dowdy. Religion and the right use of nature's gifts should go hand in hand. St Francis de Sales wished that in any assembly of women, a daughter of the Visitation (it was not yet an order of nuns) should be the best-dressed. Though personality is more important than outward appearance, nevertheless, as a beautiful casket adds to the value of the contents, so attractiveness in a woman can be used in the apostolate for the glory of God. For there should be no shadow of angelism or manicheism in those who live dedicated lives in the world. As in the matter of dress, so in work there should be the 'sanctification of the profane'. They should be living examples of St Paul's words: 'In eating, in drinking, in all that you do, do everything as for God's glory' (1 Cor. i, 31).

Members of Secular Institutes should not only sanctify their daily work by prayer, but also realize the redemptive 'quasi-sacramental' value of time and work. The modern attitude to work is in general so debased, its accomplishment often so slipshod and dishonest, that even the carrying out of one's job as perfectly as possible is in itself an apostolate. Work can be not only the overflow of contemplation, but by its own intrinsic 'be-ing' can forge the links of close union with God. Moreover,

work engages man directly with his fellow-men, with the community, the head of which is Christ himself. Not only does a social solidarity develop from this, but because of a strong living faith in the Mystical Body of Christ, there are formed close ties of friendship, human enough to be personal and interested, yet spiritual enough to be all-embracing and disinterested. And through this 'experimental' love of one's neighbour, the outcome of the contacts in ordinary daily work, the soul grows in an increasing love of God. Fr Perrin, O.P., describing an apostle, says: 'There is no humanity for him without Christ, and no humanism without the Incarnation'.

Hand in hand with this ideal of work must go the practical competence demanded by the particular job. Mediocrity in one's profession is fatal for an apostle in the world. Talents must be used not buried (subject of course to obedience). A high standard of responsibility and competence rather than mere efficiency is essential in members of Secular Institutes. They should do all as if everything depended on them, but hope for results as if everything depended on God. A slipshod fulfilment of one's task is not worthy of an apostle who aims at drawing people to God more by example than by speech. As Fr Beyer says in *Les Instituts Séculiers*, 'To exercise authority, one should be an authority'. Consequently Secular Institutes should keep abreast of the times in every branch of life.

Naturally, with the thought of work, rises the question of recreation. Can dedicated persons in the world recreate like other seculars in the world? Within the limits of reason and prudence, most certainly. Not only should they, but they must, in order to keep a true physical and psychological balance. There are many innocent forms of recreation open to all. How much recreation one needs depends on the individual, and on the type of work in which he is engaged. A mature judgment as well as a spirit of self-denial is essential here, so that members may behave like normal people without being drawn into the welter of worldliness surrounding them. Difficulties in this matter will probably arise, but with prayer, and advice from Director or Superior, they should not prove insuperable.

So members of Secular Institutes are called to be lights in the darkness of this dechristianized world. In imitation of Christ and his Blessed Mother, of St Joseph and the Apostles, they are to live

in the midst of the world, bringing the 'good news' to all with whom they come in contact by the very strength of their dedication to God. Our Lord's prayer for his Apostles after the Last Supper can be applied particularly to these modern apostles in Secular Institutes: 'I am not asking that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them clear of what is evil. . . . Thou hast sent me into the world on thy errand, and I have sent them into the world on my errand: and I dedicate myself for their sakes, that they too may be dedicated through the truth.' (John xvii, 15-19.)



THE FIRST-BORN OF MANY BRETHREN: I

He came down from heaven

MARK BROCKLEHURST, O.P.

THE death of Pope Pius XII made the Catholic Church and the Papacy a headline news item for several days. Through the newspapers, the radio and the television we had a glimpse of the Church's world-wide embrace, and of its ancient origins. For instance, the vast body of people in the two-mile long procession from Castel Gandolfo and lining the route, were only a symbol of the millions all over the world who look to the Pope as their spiritual father and acknowledge his authority as the successor of St Peter. And one was reminded how the Pope himself during the years of his pontificate received many of these millions there in Rome, and spoke to many of them in their own language. During the course of the procession the body of the Pope was borne through ancient Rome, past the ruins of the Colosseum and the Roman Forum; the body of him who as the latest of an unbroken line of Popes which began long before the world of the Colosseum and the Forum had come to an end. The facts so presented, Catholics gratefully interpreted in the light of the divine commands and promises to the Apostles: Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church and the gates of