



# The Holy See

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MOTU PROPRIO

***PRIMO FELICITER***

1. The first anniversary of *Provida Mater Ecclesia* has come and gone, and it has been a year of blessings. As we look around upon the Catholic scene we now see a multitude of souls "hid with Christ in God"[1] stretching out towards sanctity in the midst of the world, their whole lives joyfully consecrated to God, with "great heart and willing mind"[2] in the new Secular Institutes. We cannot but give thanks to the Divine Goodness for this new host which has come to increase the army of those who profess the evangelical counsels in the world; and also for this great help which in these sad and disturbed times has most providentially strengthened the Catholic apostolate.

2. The Holy Spirit who unceasingly remakes and renews[3] the face of the earth, daily disfigured and blasted by all manner of atrocious evil, by special grace has called a multitude of our sons and daughters - his blessing be upon them! - to the serried ranks of the Secular Institutes, to make of them in this nonsensical shadow-world to which they do not belong[4] but in which, by God's wise ordering, they must live, a salt, a seasoning, kept salt by the vocation given, unfailing,[5] a light which shines out and is not overcome in the darkness of the world,[6] and the little yeast, always and everywhere at work, kneaded into every kind of society, from the humblest to the highest, to permeate each and all by word, example and in every way, until it forms and shapes the whole of it, making of it a new paste in Christ .[7]

It is our desire and intention that these Institutes, so many of them, sprung up all over the world to our great comfort through the outpouring of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,[8] be directed effectively according to the norms of *Provida Mater Ecclesia* and thus fulfill abundantly the promise that is in them of a great harvest of sanctity, and that they be prudently marshaled and wisely deployed to fight the battles of the Lord[9] in the field of common apostolic endeavor and in those which they find for themselves. With this in mind we confirm with great joy and after mature reflection the Apostolic Constitution *Provida Mater Ecclesia*, and hereby enact the following canonical provisions.

4. I. There is no longer any acceptable reason for Societies, cleric or lay, professing Christian perfection in the world, and clearly and fully conforming to the features and requirements prescribed in *Provida Mater Ecclesia* for a Secular Institute to be left, or remain on a purely personal option in the canonical status of ordinary Associations of the Faithful (canons 684-725). They are now to be given the form and status of Secular Institutes, as being most suitable for their nature and needs.

5. II. The transference of an Association of the Faithful to the higher canonical status of a Secular Institute must not obscure, even in special cases, the proper and specific character of the Institutes, namely, that they are secular and that this is the real nature of their calling.

Everything about them must be clearly secular. There will be no paring down of the full profession of the Christian perfection, solidly founded on the evangelical counsels and essentially the same as that of Religious, but perfection is to be lived and professed *in the world*, therefore adapted to secular life, all along the line, i.e. in all things that are lawful and compatible with the duties and apostolate of such a life of perfection.

6. The whole life of a member of a Secular Institute, sacred to God by the profession of perfection, must become an apostolate so continuous and holy, with such sincerity of mind, interior union with God, generous self forgetfulness and courageous self-denial, such love of souls, as to nourish, unceasingly renew and outwardly express the spiritual reality within. This apostolate of one's whole life is so deeply and sincerely experienced in the Secular Institutes as to give the impression that, with the help and guiding wisdom of Divine Providence, the thirst for souls and zeal for their salvation have not only happily given occasion for a consecration of life but have largely imposed their own way and form upon it and, in a way which could not have been predicted, to have created and met a need which is not confined to a specific apostolate but is a new general way of consecrated life. Not only is this apostolate something that happens in the world, but it may almost be said to grow out of the world: its existence is in professions, activities, forms, places, circumstances of a secular nature, and so it must remain.

7. III. Secular Institutes do not come under the canonical discipline of Religious. As a general rule *Provida Mater Ecclesia* neither requires nor allows the application to Secular Institutes of legislation made for Religious. But some features of Religious life may be compatible with the secular nature of Institutes, are no impediment to the total commitment of life and are in keeping with the provisions of *Provida Mater Ecclesia*: these may be retained.

8. IV. Secular Institutes may have inter-diocesan and international structure and organization (art. IX) and this certainly should make for an increase of vital energy, survival value and effectiveness. But in this connection a number of things have to be taken into account, e.g. the aim and purpose of a given Institute, the degree of expansion intended, the Institute's actual stage of development and maturity, its condition and circumstances and so forth. A federal basis is also a possibility not

to be ruled out or under-estimated, implying retention and reasonable encouragement of local characteristics, national, regional, diocesan, provided that these are sound and retain a true sense of the catholicity of the Church.

9. V. Secular Institute life is a life totally consecrated to God and souls, in the world, with the approval of the Church. Its structure extends already in various degrees beyond the bounds of diocese or nation. These features more than justify the classification given to Secular Institutes in *Provida Mater Ecclesia* as states of perfection canonically recognized and structured by the Church itself and their assignment to the competence and responsibility of the Sacred Congregation which has care and government of public states of perfection. Therefore, saving always, according to the tenor of the canons and express requirements of *Provida Mater Ecclesia* (Art. IV, 1 and 2), the rights of the Sacred Congregation of the Council in what concerns pious sodalities and pious unions of the faithful (c. 250 § 2) and of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in what concerns societies of ecclesiastics at the seminaries for foreign missions, all societies wherever they may be - including those which have ordinary or pontifical approval, - as soon as it is clear that they have the features and requirements proper to Secular Institutes, are to be put into this new form, according to the above mentioned norms (cf no. I); and, to preserve unity of direction, they become at the level of universal government the exclusive responsibility and concern of the Sacred Congregation of Religious in which a special Section has been created for this purpose.

10. VI. To Moderators and assistants of Catholic Action and of other associations of the faithful, in which so many excellent young people are learning to lead a thoroughly Christian life and to be apostles, we commend those who feel that God is calling them further, either to Religious life in an Order or Congregation, or to a Society of common life, or, to a Secular Institute. Such holy vocations are to be generally assisted. These providential Secular Institutes are also to be given a helping hand in this way, and their collaboration, where compatible with the rules of existing associations is to be sought and welcomed.

11 . All the provisions and decisions herein contained are the executive responsibility of the respective authorities, i.e. the Sacred Congregation of Religious, the other Congregations here referred to, Local Ordinaries, Directors of Societies.

*Rome, at St. Peter's, 12th March 1948, the beginning of the tenth year of Our Pontificate.*

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[1] Col III, 3.

[2] II Macc. 1-3.

[3] Psalm C III, 30.

[4] Jn XV, 19.

[5] Mt V, 13; Mk IX, 49; Lk XIV, 34.

[6] Jn IX, 5; I, 5; VIII, 12; Eph V, 8.

[7] Mt XIII, 33; 1 Cor V,6; Ca V,9.

[8] Rom VIII, 9.

[9] Cant. VI, 3.