

## *Secularity and Professions in the Secular Institutes*<sup>1</sup>

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THE documents of the Holy See concerning Secular Institutes proclaim insistently that *Secularity* is so essential a feature of the modern Secular Institutes that it gives rise to a new juridical state of perfection—i.e. *the secular state of perfection*, which has risen alongside *the religious state*.

In fact the very title of *Secular Institutes*, which was carefully studied, effectively proclaims this secularity; the legislative definition given in Art. I of the *Lex Peculiaris* makes secularity one of the basic juridical elements; the preamble of the Apostolic Constitution *Provida Mater Ecclesia*, in a paragraph of fundamental importance, speaks of perfection practised in the world (not only individually but collectively) in Societies founded for this purpose; and finally with regard both to the raising of Associations of the Faithful to the higher form of Secular Institutes, and to the general and particular ordinances relating to this, the *Motu Proprio Primo Feliciter* (n. II) affirms that one must always keep in mind the necessity that these societies should display the proper and peculiar character of these Institutes—i.e. ‘the secular character, in which lies their whole reason of existence.’

### INACCURATE OR RESTRICTED CONCEPTS OF SECULARITY

With regard to this essential character of the Secular Institutes, which we will attempt to examine in this article, the first point to be noted is that the concept of secularity does not coincide with that of the *lay state*, contrary to what a superficial examination might suggest. To make this mistake would mean to exclude the Sacerdotal Secular Institutes from Secular Institutes in general.

Quite apart from the juridical fact that the Sacerdotal Secular Institutes are explicitly and purposely envisaged by Art. I of the Apostolic Constitution *Provida Mater Ecclesia* (‘*Societates clericales vel laicales . . .*’)—and this is more than sufficient to put this doctrine to which we have referred in glaring contrast with positive law—it is immediately clear in the sure language

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of the law that secular is opposed to religious, not to clerical, while lay is opposed to clerical.

If we understand the relationships between these four juridical concepts (‘religious,’ referring to the cloister, or at least to the flight from the world; ‘secular,’ referring to the world, or better, to being in the world; ‘clerical,’ which indicates an ecclesiastical title to power in the Church; ‘lay,’ which means the lack of this title), it is easy to appreciate how secularity can be common, as in fact it is, to the clergy and to the laity.

Thus we can have secular laity, which means non-religious; and religious laity which means non-secular; and secular clergy who are neither lay nor religious. Secularity is common to the lay person consecrated to our Lord (in Secular Institutes), and to the lay person who is not consecrated, and not only to the secular priest, because all three (leaving aside for a moment their different positions from the point of view of hierarchy) are *de iure* and *de facto* in the world. The consecration of members of Secular Institutes, which juridically is not that of religious, though it is complete, does not take them from the world, in the same way as ordination does not take priests from the world; while religious profession, whether clerical or lay, involves precisely that leaving the world.

We should remember that the term ‘lay’ has nothing to do with ‘profane,’ being derived from ‘laos,’ the people of God; the layman—we refer to the secular layman—is not a profane person: he is a Christian in a profane world. The layman is a Christian who has become a member of the Church through faith and Baptism, and has acquired in the bosom of the community the dignity of a person with all the rights and duties which accompany this position.

However, the layman has not received, in addition to Baptism, Holy Orders which give rise to the power of the ministers of the Church. This power of administering all the means of salvation (preaching, sacrifice, sacraments, direction of the religious community) belongs to the clergy, who are thus distinguished by their sacred power.

The secular person, whether consecrated or not, remains in his former state, as distinct from the religious, and brings a new life to it by the total or partial practice of the evangelical counsels

or through the spirit of the counsels. He remains directly in the world and takes part in its activities, being opposed to it only in so far as it is sinful.

Nevertheless it is not possible to identify secularity—which is something much more profound—with purely temporal or professional activities or even with activities which are only indirectly religious.

To suggest that secularity is nothing more than professionalism would be not only to judge superficially but also to limit the scope of that term without justification, and to give an entirely unauthoritative notion of it.

Indeed, secularity when projected into apostolic activities is as wide in scope as the general vocation of the Christian ; which is to promote and further the sanctifying action of the Church (of which the clergy are the first servants) assuring this sanctifying grace an ever wider acceptance and increasing efficacy.

Now it is obvious that this vast undertaking embraces not only directly apostolic activities but also indirectly apostolic occupations and purely temporal activities.

To limit this wide horizon would mean to hinder the formation of an exact and full apostolic consciousness. And so it is of extreme importance for Secular Institutes—and not only for them—that everyone should realize that the fact of working with a Christian intention does not dispense people from activities expressly apostolic in religious, moral, social and many other fields.

Understanding rightly the meaning of secularity, we see the compatibility of the following : the testimony of a Christian life, which neither should be nor ever can be a sole isolated factor, and which is the duty of every Christian ; those activities which are directly and immediately religious ; those apostolic activities which are mediately or indirectly religious ; and those activities which, although carried out with an apostolic intention, are strictly speaking *temporal* (professions and occupations).

Witnessing, direct apostolate and penetration of the world are all compatible with secularity. These three spheres are proper to the Secular Institutes, as is shown by the fact that there are Secular Institutes, approved by the Holy See, which have all these specific aims.

It is important, since we are dealing with the subject, to note that in those *activities which are mediately or indirectly religious* the object is always of a temporal, not a sacred, nature ; but there is, also, in them a clear reference to religious or moral matters, which is explicit and inherent in the very activity and independent of the supernatural intention of the subject. In the various social, charitable and cultural fields there are countless practical applications of this apostolic work, which is certainly a characteristic work, but not the only one, of Secular Institutes. They form part of an apostolate which has its principal terrain in the field of purely human values ; the world is not indifferent to the great human values—for instance, respect for the individual and for human freedom. To guarantee and to promote these values in the fields of sociology, economics, politics, etc., amounts to preparing the way for the acceptance of the Gospel message.

With regard to *strictly temporal activities*, these possess a religious and redeeming value only by virtue of the supernatural intention and charity of the person who carries them out.

It is worth while here to recall the following general principles : The *objective* apostolic value of those diverse activities enumerated obviously varies. It decreases as we move from activities clearly religious to those of a strictly temporal character. The same can not be said as regards the *subjective* value. The merit and personal value for the subject will depend on grace and on the charity with which his acts are carried out, and is thus independent of the nature of the work.

With regard to the *temporal activities* of the members of Secular Institutes we have to mention yet another principle (which also holds true for others of the faithful) : the more these members work in the temporal sphere (diverse professional activities, politics etc.) the more their personal responsibility—and their autonomy—increases ; and finally it becomes complete. Conversely the responsibility of the Institute, or of the Authorities, decreases, until finally there is only the responsibility of the person who acts, who remains always a Christian and a member of the Church. This means that the member, as one of the ordinary faithful, when he acts on his own initiative and under his own responsibility, will take into account possible directives of the Hierarchy who look after the common good of the Church.

Continuing our investigation concerning the concept of

secularity, we ought once more to observe—although it is oft repeated and rightfully so—that Secular Institutes prefer the *personal forms of apostolic activity*, in so far as these forms are more suitable to their specific nature and to their specific apostolate; but we cannot equate this characteristic of the apostolate of these Institutes with secularity.

Secularity—as we will see later on more clearly—is perfectly compatible with personal and individual apostolates, with collective apostolates, and with apostolic works, provided these are incorporated in the world of to-day through their secularity and provided that they do not become so burdensome and absorbing as to hinder the presence of the individual as such in the world. As regards this, and indeed all the problems posed by the government and apostolate of Secular Institutes, we need to take a broad and balanced point of view. Moreover, there are clear and successful examples of completely secular works directed by these Institutes in various fields of direct and indirect apostolate.

Neither can secularity be identified with *the absence of common life* nor with the fact that members may live alone. Certainly secularity is incompatible with the canonical common life: that is, the life proper to religious, outlined and regulated by the Code of Canon Law. This common life is expressly forbidden to Secular Institutes by their own general law as can be seen in *Provida Mater Ecclesia (Lex Peculiaris, Art. II)*.

The common life proper to Secular Institutes is not canonical for the following reasons: the juridical regulations which control it; the exceptions foreseen in it; and, finally, its formal and external character. This specific common life is not only permitted by the proper law of the Institutes, but is obligatory, according to and within the limits of Art. III, paragraph 4, of the *Lex Peculiaris*.

Now, evidently the legislation proper to Secular Institutes cannot raise secularity to the level of an essential note and at the same time seriously endanger it by a regulation of the *Lex Peculiaris*.

We would be even further from the true notion of secularity if we should make it consist, under whatsoever false pretext,

in a certain social insecurity, i.e. an expressly willed lack of responsibility on the part of the Institute in affairs concerning the members. With regard to this possibility, it seems sufficient to say that such a curious concept of secularity would be in striking contrast with Art. III, paragraph 3, of the Apostolic Constitution *Provida Mater Ecclesia* which prescribes that the bond linking the members to the Institute must be stable, mutual and complete in accordance with the Constitutions, in such a way that the member gives himself entirely to the Institute, and the Institute takes care of and answers for the member. As we have said above, the responsibility of the Institute, deriving from this bond, does not extend to the activities of the member, but only to his maintenance, sickness and old age.

The Church, a most provident mother of her sons, has never approved and can never permit the approval of any Institute which does not give—directly or indirectly—enough guarantees concerning the future of the members who consecrate their lives to God and to the Institute, and through it to the Church herself. What could be thought heroic generosity in the members would mean—and this is simply a hypothesis—lack of justice in the Institute and lack of prudence in the Church.

#### SECULARITY : A POSITIVE JURIDICAL FEATURE

Having made these preliminary considerations in order to remove certain misconceptions, let us now try to establish the positive meaning of secularity.

Secularity is first of all a juridical fact. It is the juridical affirmation that the presence of these persons, consecrated to God in the world, is not a deception or a camouflage: they are perfectly entitled to be and to live in the world with no other limitations than those which spring from the moral and juridical concept of Christian perfection. The members of Secular Institutes are in the world (*in saeculo de iure* and *de facto*).

We might say that secularity is the juridical presence (without canonical limitations and with full rights) of these consecrated souls in the world, and in diverse activities. It is their juridical non-differentiation (*indifferenzazione*) from other faithful, if we think of lay people, or from other priests if we think of clergy. Their secularity consists not so much in what they do, as in what they are.

Their consecration, while complete from the theological point of view, is secular from the juridical point of view—and therefore does not take away their right to live in the world and to practise the professions of the world—because these members do not lose the personality they had in the Church before consecrating themselves to God in the Institute: they remain priests or lay people, according to their hierarchical status.

This juridical fact which we call secularity, has a bearing not only on individual persons consecrated to God but also on the Institutions (Secular Institutes). These, in fact, in the general framework of Canon Law, do not come under the genus of religious institutes, but rather under that of Associations of the Faithful, although within this genus they constitute a new and vigorous species with a proper name (Secular Institutes), and their own law (*Lex Peculiaris*).

All these clarifications are to my mind clearly contained in Article I of the Apostolic Constitution *Provida Mater Ecclesia*; although they are expressed there in a concise and programmatic fashion—as is proper for all legislative texts.

Thus we have that this new juridical fact, i.e. secularity, which previously had been a rather negative concept, is now a positive juridical affirmation in the sphere of states of perfection; and this juridical fact has been determined and required for reasons of apostolate. Secularity means the juridical presence in the world of members of Secular Institutes, a presence which is *specifically apostolic*. Their complete consecration to God is not a religious consecration: on the contrary it remains secular on account of the apostolic aims. The fact of their not being juridically differentiated (*indifferenzazione*) from other members of the faithful is a necessary principle of their apostolic activity.

In order to carry out apostolate in the world, that full apostolate which comes from a complete consecration and a total self-surrender of the individual, a positive juridical feature was required and this the Church has provided—precisely for this reason—by coining a new term, in instituting the Secular Institutes and in creating, by the same exercise of her teaching power and jurisdiction, the state of secular perfection.

The above-mentioned concept of the close relationship between secularity and full apostolate in the new Secular Institutes, is also

expressed clearly—in a legislative manner—in Art. I of the Apostolic Constitution *Provida Mater Ecclesia*.

This secular consecration, or this secularity consecrated to God for reasons of apostolate, gives rise to a series of social manifestations which can be considered, and rightly so, new in the sphere of states of perfection; and also to a particular asceticism; and, above all, it creates a special mental outlook in the person who professes it. This outlook is manifested mainly in a positive appreciation of all human activities which are not evil in themselves, granting these their worth in the designs of God; and in the participation of the members in the life and problems of the world of to-day.

All these characteristics are but a consequence of that juridical fact and positive juridical feature, which is secularity considered in itself; and they may vary and appear more or less prominent in the different Institutes. All the Institutes, however, will have in common secularity as we have explained it.

These specific characteristics mentioned above which spring from the juridical concept of secularity have been summarized by the Holy Father, in a happy expression (in the *Motu Proprio Primo Feliciter*), when he states that the activity of Secular Institutes is to be understood 'non tantum in saeculo, sed veluti ex saeculo'; not only in the world, but, as it were, by means of the world. It is not difficult to see in these words the most authentic and authoritative interpretation, and at the same time simplification of the strictly juridical and legislative content of Art. I of the Apostolic Constitution *Provida Mater Ecclesia*, which has been the basis for our research on the nature and significance of the term secularity.

The secular life, we may add, popularizing the concepts already stated, is a life in harmony with that of the world (*saeculum*) in order to christianize it and to perfect it.

The members of Secular Institutes not only find themselves living in the world, but they behave according to the forms, circumstances, methods, and occupations of the world. That is why the priests who are members of a Secular Institute are not different in their external way of life from diocesan priests; in the same way the laymen belonging to a Secular Institute maintain their social status, carrying out their secular professions, and even taking part in public life, like other citizens; they can also

live with their own families and maintain customary social relations, friendship, etc. The very profession of perfection, truly religious in substance, should be in accordance, as far as possible, with secular life as regards the choice of ways and means of apostolate, the division and distribution of personal activities, daily schedule, etc.

All these characteristics cannot but be reflected in the apostolic activities and in the practice of the evangelical counsels. The exercise of the counsels should be carried out fully, without mitigations and, at the same time, 'secularly,' i.e. drawing its strength and form from the secular life.

Having finished our research, and having tried to establish the concept and the significance of secularity and its theoretical and practical consequences, we think it necessary to recommend a balanced view in the study of these problems in order to avoid excesses and exaggerations which could lead to a dangerous 'laicism.' This balanced view is also necessary to avoid the opposite defect of converting secular vocation and secular apostolate into religious vocation and religious apostolate. To do so would be to place the Secular Institutes in a position contradictory to the directives contained in the pontifical documents, and in addition it could give rise to grave misunderstandings and difficulties for the activity and apostolic efficacy of the members of these Institutes.

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SEEKING GOD. By Bruno S. James. London: Darton, Longman and Todd. 1960. Pp. 80. Price 6s.

THIS is perfectly described as 'a book on prayer in the great tradition—a simple and uncompromising book.' Uncompromising it certainly is when it lays down what is essential for holy living and firmly sets aside all manner of misunderstanding. It is simple too, for it is beamed on beginners; but it demands a certain intellectual and spiritual maturity to be appreciated. And although the last chapters envisage priests and religious the earlier sections are meant for everyone who wishes to pray, and to keep praying.

## *Bishop Power, Ireland's Adopted Son*

BY DR. JAMES A. CROWLEY

FEW Irishmen have done as much for the welfare of Irish people in Canada as did Bishop Michael Power, first bishop of Toronto, Canada, 1841–7. His record stands upon the oldest and finest charity known to man, for he gave his life for his Irish flock who lay dying in the terrible typhus epidemic that decimated thousands of Irish immigrants coming to Canada in 1847.

The son of a sea-captain sailing between Halifax and St. John's, Newfoundland, Bishop Power was born in Halifax in 1804. At twelve he entered the Montreal Seminary of St. Sulpice, later studying at the Grand Seminary, Quebec. He was ordained in 1827. He held various local charges until his appointment in 1833 as Vicar-General of Montreal. Soon a new call beckoned.

Kingston, on Lake Ontario, then the oldest city west of Montreal, was the centre of a very large See, running almost to the prairies of the Canadian West. The new bishop of Kingston, a Bishop Gaulin, in ill health, requested that his See be divided. His request was carried to Rome by Bishop Bourget of Montreal, who visited there accompanied by Father Power, in the latter's capacity as Vicar-General. Pope Gregory XVI readily acquiesced. Later the two Canadians visited London where they interviewed Lord Stanley, Colonial Secretary, to sound this official on the proposed change. The latter suggested the request be put in writing with the reasons for the desired change. Father Power wrote the following missive to Lord Stanley:

Our Bishop's wish is to ascertain whether there should be any objection on the part of Her Majesty's Government, if the proper ecclesiastical authorities thought fit to divide into two distinct Sees the diocese of Kingston, in that part of Canada heretofore known as the Province of Upper Canada (now Ontario). The motive for asking this division is the absolute impossibility of the whole of the existing diocese being properly governed by our Bishop. Your Lordship is perfectly aware of the great extent of that part of Canada and its increasing population; thousands of immigrants from the Mother Country are coming in, and in all probability will continue to proceed to that part of Her Majesty's Dominions for a number of years to come. It therefore becomes urgent that a new See be immediately erected at the other extremity of the Province for the purpose of providing