

What Are Secular Institutes?

THE HOLINESS OF A LAYMAN like Señor Isidoro Zorzano (see the review of *God's Engineer*, p. 63 of this issue) is an invitation to the everyday man who feels the desire to find God in his daily work—his *opus Dei*. Holy Mother Church, ever solicitous of new means to bring Christ more vitally into the life of her members, has realized the value of secular institutes. On February 2, 1947, the present Holy Father issued his Apostolic Constitution *Provida Mater Ecclesia* in which secular institutes are given a definitive form and juridical status. He singled out these institutes as excellent means for "Christian renovation of families, professions and civil society." In the same month the secular institute, called *Opus Dei*, received the Papal Decree of Praise.

In his *motu proprio* of March 12, 1948, entitled *Primo feliciter*, His Holiness described secular institutes as being "in a state of perfection, based upon the counsels." He specifies that the members do not lead a common life externally regulated, but are bound to their institute by an oath of consecration, or by private or semi-public vows which oblige in conscience.

The *Opus Dei* received its final approbation on June 16, 1950, and thus became the first pontifically approved secular institute. Fr. William Porras, a director of *Opus Dei*, describes its general aim as "the sanctification of its members through the practice of the evangelical counsels and the observance of its constitution; the specific aim is to work so that intellectuals may accept and fulfill the precepts of Jesus Christ, and to spread and encourage the life of perfection in the world among persons of all social classes."

As Fr. Hartdgen points out in his article in *Religious Community Life of Men in the United States*, 1953, "Charity is the essential feature of the members of the *Opus Dei*, so that it may reach not only those who already love God but especially those who as yet do not even know Him." (page 52)

Fr. A. Gutierrez, C.M.F., explains in his thorough article in *De Institutis Saecularibus* that all secular institutes, by their constitutions, profess a complete and total state of evangelical perfection. There are three elements in this—consecration of life, a moral bond with God, and stability.

Members do not merely tend to ordinary holiness but to *complete evangelical sanctity*. They are really bound to God by vows which oblige

under grave sin and they bind themselves to per-severe. In fact, according to an article of Fr. Creusen, S.J., in *Periodica* of 1948, the practice of the evangelical counsels can be and is demanded in certain secular institutes with greater rigor than in certain so-called "Societies of Common-Life."

In the strong yearning of today's masses for the grace of Christ, God has raised up secular institutes of men and women. Their members go unobtrusively into schools, offices and factories in the same dress as their fellow-workers. Their only distinction is their Christ-like charity which they radiate by their example of self-sacrifice. What a rich harvest of souls waits for these unsung heroes of God! How welcome they would be as parish helpers, as teachers for the under-privileged and delinquents! What Christ-like work they could do among the poor, the ignorant and "minority groups!"

In America, at present, we are fortunate in having houses of the *Opus Dei* in Chicago and Boston. The Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary of the Catholic Apostolate have a house in Madison, Wisconsin. This Institute has nearly 2,000 sisters throughout the world. Plans are now being made for the introduction into America of the Company of St. Paul, the Institute of Our Lady of Life and the Daughters of St. Catherine of Siena.

The Company of St. Paul aims to bring about more effective collaboration between laity and clergy in the apostolate. The Institute of Our Lady of Life has for its purpose "the formation of the contemplative life in the world." The Daughters of St. Catherine of Siena is an institute for single women and widows. A Teresian Institute founded by Dom Pedro Castroverde in Spain began as an academy for students at teachers' colleges. Today it functions as a source of Christ-like teachers. The "Missionaries of the Kingship of Christ" form an intellectual institute at the disposal of the Catholic University of Milan. Many of the Institute's members are professors on the faculty of the University.

As Fr. Hartdgen points out, "In the education of youth lies a most fertile field for secular institutes in the United States" (page 56). For those who are interested in knowing more about secular institutes, Fr. Joseph Haley, C.S.C., of Notre Dame University, South Bend, Indiana, conducts a clearing house of information and publishes a periodical bulletin.

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