



The relationship between secularity and consecration. A great challenge. Pope Francis. 2/2/22

In preparing the next Assembly, I would like to invite you, to invoke in a special way the Holy Spirit so that he may renew in each member of secular institutes the creative and prophetic power that made them such a great gift to the Church before and after the *Second Vatican Council*.

A great challenge concerns **the relationship between secularity and consecration, aspects which you are called to hold together. Indeed, because of your consecration** it is easy to assimilate you to religious, but I would like your initial prophecy, particularly the baptismal character which marks secular lay institutes, to characterize you. Be inspired, dear members of secular institutes, by the desire to live a "holy secularity", because you are a lay institution. You are one of the oldest charisms and the Church will always need you. But your consecration must not be confused with religious life. **It is baptism that constitutes the first and most radical form of consecration.**

In ancient ecclesial Greek, it was customary to call the baptized faithful "saints". Both the Greek term *hagios* and the Latin term *sanctus* refer not so much to what is "good" in itself, but to "what belongs to God". It is in this sense that Saint Paul speaks of the Christians of Corinth as *hagioi*, despite their turmoil and strife, to indicate not some human form of perfection, but their belonging to Christ. Now, through baptism we belong to Him. We are grounded in an everlasting communion with God and with each other. This irreversible union is the root of all holiness, and it is also the power that can separate us, in turn, from worldliness. **Baptism is therefore the source of every form of consecration.**

On the other hand, your vows are the seal of your commitment to the Kingdom. It is precisely this undivided dedication to the Kingdom that allows you to reveal the original vocation of the world, your being in service to the path of the sanctification of humanity. The specific nature of the charism of the Secular Institutes requires that you are radical and at the same time free and creative, so as to receive from the Holy Spirit the most opportune way of living your Christian witness. **You are institutes, but never become institutionalized!**

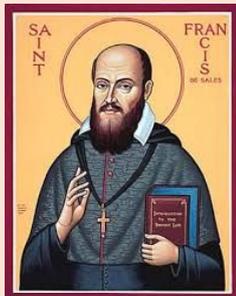
Secularity, your distinctive trait, indicates a precise evangelical way of being present in the Church and in the world: as a seed, a leaven. Sometimes the word "anonymous" has been used to refer to the members of Secular Institutes. I prefer to say that you are hidden within the reality, just like the seed in the earth and the yeast in the dough. And you cannot say that a seed or yeast is anonymous. The seed is the premise of life, the yeast is the essential ingredient for bread to be fragrant. I therefore invite you to deepen the meaning and the way of your presence in the world and to renew in your consecration the beauty and the desire to participate in the transfiguration of reality.

There is a new step to be taken. Originally you chose to "come out of the sacristies" to bring Jesus into the world. Today the movement of going out must be complemented by a commitment to make the world present (not worldliness!) in the Church. Many existential questions have arrived late on the desks of bishops and theologians. You have experienced many changes in advance. But your experience has not yet enriched the Church sufficiently. The movement of prophecy that challenges you today is the next step after your birth. This does not mean returning to the sacristy, but being "receptive antennas, transmitting messages". I gladly repeat: "you are like antennas ready to receive the smallest innovations prompted by the Holy Spirit, and you can help the ecclesial community to take on this gaze of goodness and find new and bold ways to reach all peoples" (*Address to the Italian Conference of Secular Institutes*, 10 May 2014).

In the Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, I recalled that the social and ecological degradation towards which today's world is heading (cf. Chapter 1) is also a consequence of an improper way of living out religiosity (cf. Chapter 2). It is what the Lord emphasizes through the parable of the good Samaritan, in which he does not denounce the wickedness of the robbers and of the world, but rather a certain self-referential and closed religious mentality, disembodied and indifferent. I think of you as an antidote to this. Consecrated secularity is a prophetic sign that urges us to *reveal the Father's love with our lives rather than with words*, to show it daily on the roads of the world. Today is not so much the time for persuasive and convincing discourses; it is above all the time for witnessing because, while apologia is divisive, the beauty of life attracts. **Be witnesses who attract!**

Consecrated secularity is called to put into practice **the Gospel images of leaven and salt**. Be a leaven of truth, goodness and beauty, fermenting communion with the brothers and sisters around you, because only through fraternity can the virus of individualism be defeated (cf. *Fratelli Tutti*, 105). And be salt that gives flavour, because without flavour, desire and wonder, life remains insipid, and initiatives remain sterile. It will help you to remember how proximity and closeness have been the ways of your credibility, and how professionalism has given you "evangelical authority" in working environments.

Dear Sister, you have received the gift of a prophecy that "anticipated" the *Second Vatican Council*, which welcomed the richness of your experience. Saint Paul VI said: "**you are an advanced wing of the Church in the world**" (*Address to the International Congress of Leaders of Secular Institutes*, 20 September 1972). I ask you today to renew this spirit of anticipation of the Church's journey, to be sentinels looking upwards and forwards, with the Word of God in your hearts and love for your brothers and sisters in your hands. You are in the world to testify that it is loved and blessed by God. You are consecrated for the world, which awaits your witness to a freedom that gives joy, that nourishes hope, that prepares the future. For this I thank you and I bless you from my heart, asking you to continue to pray for me.



Alle fonti di San Francesco di Sales

Don Bosco drew inspiration from Saint Francis of Sales recognising him as the teacher of a spirituality that was simple because based on essentials, popular because open to all, attractive because full of human values, and therefore particularly suitable in the work of education. In his fundamental work (*Treatise of the Love of God or Theotimus*) the holy bishop of Geneva speaks about 'ecstasy'. This word does not so much indicate extraordinary spiritual phenomena as, according to the etymology of the word, going out from oneself and being inclined towards the other; it is the experience of someone who allows himself to be attracted, convinced, and conquered by God, entering ever more deeply into His mystery.

For Saint Francis of Sales there are three kinds of ecstasy:

– *intellectual ecstasy*: this is wonder at what God is, but also amazement at the great things He has done in creation and still continues to do in the life of individuals and in the history of humanity; it is a gaze which grows clearer if we use it in meditating on the Word: it is the Word, in fact which opens our eyes so that we can see things as God sees them;

– *affective ecstasy*: this is having a personal experience of the love of God for us, so that the desire to correspond to it grows, and nourished by such a love, we are ready to give our talents and our lives for his glory and the cause of the Kingdom; it presupposes constant vigilance, purification of the heart, the practice of prayer;

– *ecstasy of action and of life*: for Saint Francis of Sales, it is this which crown the other two, because intellectual ecstasy could become pure speculation, and affective simple sentiment. Ecstasy of action, on the other hand, reveals a generosity and a selflessness that can only come from God; and it is transformed into practical and effective dedication to peoples' good in various forms of charity.

The Salesian Family, in its reflection on Don Bosco the Founder, has translated the nature of the spirituality and the mysticism of Saint Francis of Sales into a simple and challenging formula: *everyday spirituality*.

Consecration of the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary

Pope Francis has invited the whole Church community to profound and intense prayer for peace, consecrating the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The prayer of all member groups of the Salesian Family accompanies gestures of solidarity for so many of our brothers and sisters in conflict zones.

Conflict between peoples has not ceased. The invasion of Ukraine decided on by the Russian authorities, promoting a war of incalculable consequences, as is already being perceived, is absurd, indeed, sacrilegious, in the words of the Pope. Behind such decisions lies the mystery of human iniquity, personal sin and structural sin.. "*We have lost the way of peace...we have preferred to ignore God...we have become indifferent to everyone and everything, even to ourselves.... Forgive us, Lord...*".

And in our misery "we turn to you, Mary ... "Queen of Heaven", "Queen of the human family..., Queen of peace..." "We entrust and consecrate the Church, all humanity, especially Russia and Ukraine, and ourselves, to your Immaculate Heart... Open, Mother, the doors of history to the Prince of Peace...".

Let us pray insistently for peace and develop in ourselves and in the environments in which we find ourselves the best conditions for peace.

Opening of the Cause of Akash Bashir, past pupil of Don Bosco

The Diocesan Inquest for the Cause of the Servant of God, Akash Bashir, former pupil of Don Bosco, first Pakistani citizen to be nominated for the the process of Beatification and Canonisation opened on 15 March 2022, in the parish of St John, in Lahore (Pakistan). Just 7 years ago, young Akash Bashir sacrificed himself to prevent a suicide bomber from causing a massacre in St John's Church in Youhannabad, after having also prevented a similar attack in the Protestant church. Akash was 20 years old, a former student of Don Bosco Technical Institute, and had become a security volunteer. The Eucharistic celebration was presided over by the Archbishop of Lahore, in the presence of all the bishops of the country, priests of the parishes, representatives of the congregations, Salesian past pupils, young people from the Don Bosco Institute, and hundreds of faithful. A celebration of God's gift manifested in the martyrdom of Akash, a 20-year-old who demonstrated to the entire world the strength of service and the incalculable value of faith.