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# "IN SAECULO ET EX SAECULO". CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SECULAR INSTITUTES

## INTRODUCTION

"Come, follow me!" (Mk 1, 17) - These words, with which Jesus Christ called the first apostles to follow Him more closely, have lost nothing of their relevance or effectiveness. In various forms, people consecrate their lives to God in order to "attain to perfect love in the service of the Kingdom of God and, having become a radiant sign in the Church, to announce the heavenly glory" (c. 573 CIC/1983).

Again and again there have been modifications of existing forms of institutes or ways of consecrated life, such as the eremitical life, which emphasizes prayer and reparation (cf. Ghirlanda, 2006, p. 190s). Or the monastic life that then emerged, which, among other things, strives above all for poverty, dying to the world and contemplation of divine things (cf. *ibid.*, p. 190). Often, all these forms sought to provide answers to the various spiritual or even material concerns, needs or questions of the time. Secular institutes also try to meet this demand by living 'in saeculo et ex saeculo'. They represent a newer and often unknown way of consecrated life in the history of the Church, whose characteristic and mission Pope Francis formulated thus (2017, p. 10): "Ihr sollt auf das Geheimnis Gottes achten, um zu erkennen, wo er sich offenbart: aufmerksam für die Welt mit einem in Gott versenkten Herzen". But how is this connection possible? The following article would like to make a small contribution to answering this question according to the canonical norms.

## I. DEVELOPMENT AND HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

### Beginnings and first legal regulations

Secular institutes, unlike religious congregations or other forms of consecrated life<sup>1</sup>, do not have a very long history. Their specific vocation to a life in a secular institute is a gift of God from the recent past and developed in a more concrete form only in the 20th century (cf. Paolis, 2010, p. 615).

However, precursors similar to the form of life in today's institutes emerged earlier. In the 18th and 19th centuries, various movements and groups sprang up, united in the longing for a consecrated life and simultaneous apostolate in the world. "Ciò che oggi è detto il 'carisma degli Istituti secolari': consacrazione a Dio, secolarità, apostolato" (Beyer, 1954, 51). Two examples of such early communities may be mentioned: in 1844 Sophie Prouvier founded the *Institute of the Vierges de Jésus et Marie*, whose members lived either in community or outside with their families and promised a life according to the three evangelical counsels.<sup>2</sup> In 1865, Catarina Volpicelli founded the *Institute of the Servants of the Sacred Heart of Jesus* in Naples, which provided two options for attachment. The Servants lived in community according to the three evangelical counsels, and the so-called Oblates, who did not live in community but either alone or in their families, but also committed themselves to adopting the three counsels. The life ideal of combining consecrated life in the world was revolutionary at the time and therefore required special legal regulations to enable and protect this way of life (cf. Paolis, 2010, 616).

Before the CIC/1983, there was no overall set of rules that legally regulated the characteristics of secular institutes. Pius XII. (1947) was the first to recognize secular institutes under canon law with the Apostolic Constitution *Provida Mater Ecclesia* of 2 February 1947 and to place them on a legally independent foundation, although due to the novelty of secular institutes much had not yet been clarified or even developed, so that this can be seen as a first step (cf. Pollak, 2006, 1465). However, this was soon consolidated by means of the *Motu Proprio Primo feliciter* of Pius XII. of 12 March 1948, which above all addressed the characteristic of worldli-

1 One example is the life as a hermit, whose beginnings lie in early Christianity and before the emergence of monastic associations (cf. Aymans, Mörsdorf, 1997, p. 550s).

2 For other communities founded at that time, see Lefebvre, 1989, p. 17-20. Some authors see traces of the future secular institutes even earlier. Lefebvre counts among these the foundation of the Ursulines by St. Angela Merici in Brescia in 1535, which wanted to counter cultural, political and economic changes, as well as a progressive de-Christianisation, by means of a consecrated life to transform and infuse these challenges with the Gospel of Christ (ibid., p. 17); "C'est pourquoi elle s'éloigne de la voie monastique et adapte la vie de consécration à Dieu aux conditions ordinaires de l'existence" (ibid.).

ness or secularity as well as the apostolate on the basis of the principle *in saeculo et ex saeculo* (Pius XII., 1948). In addition, Pius XII. pointed out that the legislation of the institutes of religious could not be applied to the secular institutes (cf. *ibid.*, III.). Nevertheless, for the sake of uniformity, these were placed under the “Sacred Congregation for Religious” (cf. *ibid.*, V). Only a few days later, the regulations of *Primo feliciter* were further supplemented by the Instruction *Cum Sanctissimus* by the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes of 19 March 1948, which took up and deepened some of the themes of *Primo feliciter* and *Provida Mater Ecclesia*.

These three sets of rules together formed the legal foundation for secular institutes before the CIC/1983.

## II. SECULAR INSTITUTES ACCORDING TO THE CURRENT CANONICAL SITUATION

After the brief introductory overview of the first legal regulations, the characteristics and canonical norms of secular institutes will now be presented on the basis of the current legal situation according to the CIC/1983. Secular institutes are dealt with in Lib. II. Pars III, Sectio I, Tit. III. of the CIC/1983 in 21 canons, namely in cc. 710-730. Since secular institutes are also institutes of consecrated life, however, not only these specific regulations apply to them, but also the *Normae communes omnibus Institutis vitae consecratae* of cc. 573-606 (cf. Primetshofer, *Ordensrecht*, p. 204), which will not be dealt with in more detail here due to the subject matter.

### Definition according to c. 710 CIC/1983

The introductory c. 710 CIC/1983 contains a definition of secular institutes with significant information on the aim and tasks of secular institutes:

“Institutum saeculare est institutum vitae consecratae, in quo christifideles in saeculo viventes ad caritatis perfectionem contendunt atque ad mundi sanctificationem praesertim ab intus conferre student”.

This definition contains the fundamental characteristics that can be seen as cornerstones, so to speak. First of all, these are two essential elements, namely the consecrated life of the members in itself (*vitae consecratae*) and the simultaneous life in the midst of the world (*in saeculo viventes*). Furthermore, the two fundamental aims of secular institutes are mentioned, which are the striving for perfection in charity (*ad caritatis perfectionem contendunt*) and the endeavor to sanctify the world, especially from within (*ad mundi sanctificationem praesertim ab intus*

*conferre student*) (Meier, 2015, p. 881). While the former, striving for perfection, is basically the primary aim of all consecrated persons and, by extension, of all believers, the latter, sanctifying the world from within, is a distinct characteristic of the members of a secular institute.

### **Way of life and tasks of the members**

The starting point and basis for the members of a secular institute are the characteristics and aims mentioned in c. 710 CIC/1983. The consecrated life according to the evangelical counsels binds them more closely to the following of Christ and the foundation of the consecrated state. But what distinguishes the members of a secular institute above all is their simultaneous life in the midst of the world. According to c. 714, they are to live a life in the ordinary conditions of the world, and this is possible either alone or in one's family or together with other members in a fixed community. This will be determined decisively according to the institute and its constitutions, and already here a diversity becomes apparent on the one hand, which is usually excluded in a monastic association, and on the other hand also a very significant difference. Meier (*ibid.*) correctly notes that „die Nichtexistenz eigentlicher Klöster als Folge der Welthaftigkeit der Säkularinstitute Konsequenzen in anderen Bereichen hat“. It matters whether the member works entirely for the Institute and its apostolates or whether he or she pursues a work outside the Institute, how the financial obligations are regulated, whether the apostolate is characterized by everyday work or above all in special forms of apostolate initiated by the Institute, or whether both are to be fulfilled together, etc. The range is wide and cannot be mentioned exhaustively, since each institute can be oriented differently.

By living in the world, the members of a secular institute do not live in seclusion, do not receive a religious name and do not wear spiritual garb. Both are due to the fact that they should strive “ad instar fermenti, omnia spiritu evangelico imbuere satagunt ad robur et incrementum Corporis Christi” (c. 713). This precludes a certain outward secrecy, which is in principle common to all secular institutes.<sup>3</sup> The members are to live their consecrated state not by outward signs, but by the hidden life of the Gospel and of following Christ in their daily life in the world. This is their way of proclamation. Some institutes devote themselves either entirely or alongside their professional work to one or more specific apostolates or activities, such as in schools, in residential homes, conducting retreats, youth work, adult

3 „Dies schließt nicht aus, dass es einzelne Säkularinstitute gibt, die ein klosterähnliches Gemeinschaftsleben führen; dies ist jedoch gegenüber dem Regelfall atypisch (vgl. dazu ca. 714)“ (Primetshofer, 2003, 204)

catechesis, street mission, supporting the respective diocese by taking on spiritual offerings, etc. Again, there is a great variety here (cf. Meier, 2015, p. 883).

The members of secular institutes are either lay or clerical. Among the laity there are male and female secular institutes, mixed institutes are rather the exception. Clerics can be full members with incardination in an institute, provided this has the right of incardination, or they join an institute as diocesan clerics, which is often done through a priestly community belonging to the institute. Usually it is diocesan priests who join a secular institute. Other faithful who are not members may join or be associated with the institute.

### **Establishment and dissolution**

For the establishment of a secular institute, cc. 710-730 do not provide for their own regulations, so that the norms of general law are to be applied. As with all communities, the beginning of a secular institute lies in an association of some believers who wish to live a life according to the evangelical counsels and at the same time live in the world. As a rule, these persons are united by a common spirituality and a certain charism which they want to realize together. The fact is that before any church-official foundation, it has to be examined over a certain period of time whether the prerequisites for establishing a secular institute are met.

First, the community is established as a private association and is determined according to the provisions of cc. 321-329. After a period of granting and consolidation, the diocesan bishop establishes it as a public ecclesiastical association according to the norms of the cc. 312-320. The last stage in the foundation process is the foundation as a secular institute by the diocesan bishop in whose territory the institute is to be established. The latter must first consult the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (cf. Meier, 2015, p. 885). Only with the papal decree of recognition is he allowed (cf. c. 579) to establish a secular institute (cf. Primetshofer, 2003, p. 207).

The establishment of a secular institute in all steps is within the competence of the diocesan bishop in whose territory the institute is located. The abolition, on the other hand, is not within his competence, but within the competence of the Apostolic See, both if it should be an institute of papal law and of episcopal law (cf. *ibid.*).

### **Leadership**

C. 717 contains concise information on the heads of secular institutes, so that these norms are of a very general nature and the majority is standardized in the Constitutions. This includes the regulation of the manner of leadership, also of his deputy, his election or appointment as well as the term of office. These points

mentioned by § 1, which are to be defined in more detail by the proprietary law, apply to all levels of management, consequently from the head of a concrete branch of the institute or the associated members up to the highest institute management. Henseler therefore sees in c. 717 § 1 „lediglich eine Art Inhaltsangabe dessen, was die Konstitutionen enthalten müssen“ (Henseler, 1986, c. 717, 1).

A more precise norm is contained in § 2 of c. 717, which requires final incorporation into the institute for the highest head of the secular institute. § 3 again contains another more fundamental norm for this, which requires the head to be concerned about maintaining unity in the spirit of the institute and promoting the active participation of the members. The life of the Institute should therefore be characterized by the preservation of fellowship, unity in spirit and the cultivation of genuine fraternity. A decisive criterion with regard to the scope of leadership also lies, on the one hand, in whether the members live in community or alone and, on the other hand, whether in one case or the other, the leader determines the member's profession and place of work or whether leadership is predominantly limited to the spiritual sphere (Meier, 2015, p. 886).

For the question of the powers of the leaders, the norms of c. 596 §§ 1 and 3 are binding, but again with reference to the general rules and the Constitutions. Jurisdictional power for the *forum internum* and *externum*, as § 2 provides for the clerical religious institutes under papal law, is therefore ruled out for the secular institutes (cf. Primetshofer, 2003, p. 207).

### **Asset management**

In the area of asset management of secular institutes, the CIC does not contain any specific regulations, but instead refers in c. 718 to the general provisions of Liber V of the CIC/1983 *De bonis Ecclesiae* and to those of the proper law of the institute concerned. The provisions of Liber V apply because secular institutes are public juridical persons and therefore their property is also ecclesiastical property according to c. 1257 § 1 (cf. *ibid.*, p. 209).

Depending on the organisation of the institute, the proper law has greater or lesser latitude. For it makes a difference whether the members live together in community or whether they live alone and have to provide for their respective livelihoods there. In this context, a distinction must also be made as to whether members are entirely in the service of the institute and work for it or whether they freely choose a profession and pursue work outside their institute. The proprietary right must therefore also regulate the economic obligations, both of the members towards the institute and, conversely, the obligations of the institute towards the members. In this respect, precisely because of the proper constitutions, it can guar-

antee a corresponding flexibility, so that the institutes „je nach ihrer Eigenart und ihrem spezifischen Charisma in der Lage sind, auch die zeitlichen Dinge auf ihre Bedürfnisse zugeschnitten zu regeln“ (Henseler, 1986, c. 718, 1). In this context, if not regulated by state law, adequate social welfare and other insurances must also be provided by the institution (cf. Primetshofer, 2003, p. 209). Regardless of the concrete regulations of the individual institutes, the guiding principle is that the entire administration of the institute’s assets must always “paupertatem evangelicam exprimere et fovere debet” (c. 718).

### Spiritual directives

Since the members of secular institutes are also consecrated persons and live in a spiritual state, it is indispensable to lead a corresponding religious-spiritual life (cf. c. 710). This necessity is also considered by the legislator, who, analogous to religious institutes, also provides a kind of catalogue of spiritual obligations for the members of secular institutes in c. 719.

According to this, members should carefully take time for prayer, contemplation of Holy Scripture, retreats as well as for other spiritual exercises specific to the institute in accordance with its own law (cf. c. 719 § 1). This certainly includes special prayers or devotional forms which the respective founder has prescribed and which are characteristic of the individual institute. In addition, daily attendance at Holy Mass should be part of the spiritual programme as a source and strength. For priests who are members of a secular institute, therefore, the daily celebration of Holy Mass applies, “quantum fieri potest” (c. 719 § 2) (cf. *ibid.*, p. 208). This norm of c. 719 § 2 therefore goes beyond the norm of c. 904, which applies to all priests, namely, that only frequent celebration is ordered (*Sacerdotes ... frequenter celebrent*), while daily celebration is merely recommended, albeit insistently (*immo enixe commendatur celebratio cotidiana*).

In addition to Holy Mass, the frequent reception of the Sacrament of Penance is also part of the spiritual programme of the members. The addition of “libere” in c. 719 § 3 gives an important indication that the members of the institute are free to choose their confessor according to c. 991 and have no limitation in this. According to Primetshofer (2003, p. 208), this also applies if the institute has a confessor or spiritual rector. What is decisive is the extent to which *forum internum* and *forum externum* interlock or are separated.

Finally, c. 719 in § 4 mentions the “necessarium conscientiae moderamen”, the necessary guidance of conscience or spiritual accompaniment. Here too, the



members are free to choose their spiritual director (“libere”)<sup>4</sup>, but they can ask for spiritual advice and guidance from their superiors if they wish. It is possible that spiritual direction is even more important in secular institutes than in religious institutes. Because of life in the world, and perhaps the lack of a monastic community life, it is all the more necessary for orientation to have spiritual direction that gives advice, including on how to combine action and contemplation, which is especially peculiar to secular institutes (cf. *ibid.*).

The spiritual duties set forth here have their counterpart in those of religious institutes (cf. cc. 663, 664 and 630 § 5). In comparison with these, it is noticeable that some elements are not mentioned in the list in c. 719, namely: contemplation (c. 663 § 1), reception of Communion and adoration (c. 663 § 2), celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours (c. 663 § 3, devotion to Mary, among other things by praying the Rosary (c. 663 § 4) and daily examination of conscience (c. 664) (cf. *ibid.*).

### **Admission and incorporation**

In principle, what applies to any institute of consecrated life applies to admission to a secular institute: according to c. 597, any Catholic may be admitted, provided there is right intention, the qualities required by common law and proper law are present, and there is no impediment (§ 1). In addition, an appropriate period of preparation is obligatory (§ 2). The qualities mentioned in c. 597 are taken up by c. 721, which stipulates that the candidate cannot be validly admitted to the aforementioned period of preparation if he or she is not of age, is bound by a sacred bond to an Institute of Consecrated Life or a Society of Apostolic Life, or if there is a marriage bond. The Constitutions of the Institute may impose further obstacles and conditions. In addition to these legal requirements, the candidate for admission must also have the appropriate maturity to be able to adopt the Institute’s way of life with all its rights and obligations. This is indispensable (c. 721 § 3). The existence of this maturity and personal ability is also shown by the probationary period which begins after the admission examination. Admission to this is decided by the higher leader(s) together with the Council, according to the rules of the Constitutions (cf. c. 720).

The probationary period lasts at least two years (cf. c. 722 § 3) and is intended to help candidates to examine their vocation to a life in the institute in question and to practise the spirit and way of life of the institute (cf. c. 722 § 1). This probationary period corresponds to the novitiate among the religious (cf. c. 646). The institute, on the other hand, is obliged to instruct the candidates in the evangelical

<sup>4</sup> „Die Freiheit in Bezug auf das Bußsakrament ebenso wie in Bezug auf die Gewissensführung ist durch das zweimalige ‚libere‘ in den §§ 3 und 4 unterstrichen“ (Henseler, 1987).

counsels and to orientate the life as well as the apostolate to be assumed towards them, namely “*adhibentes evangelizationis formas, quae instituti fini, spiritui et indoli magis respondeant*” (c. 722 § 2).

After the probationary period follows the phase of *prima incorporatio*, provided the applicant is judged suitable and wishes to continue formation in the institute (cf. c. 723 § 1). According to § 2, this first incorporation is always limited in time and covers a period of at least five years (*quinquennio non brevior*). During this time, formation continues in the spirit of the institute (cf. c. 724). Ultimately, formation and the deepening of the divine vocation are not limited to the phases of incorporation, rather it is a lifelong task and formation to live in the discipleship of the Lord. In this context, Meier recommends - and this is undoubtedly not only justified but also sensible - that the members who have taken on the temporal bonds be provided with a leader who acts as a teacher and contact person and accompanies them on the way to final incorporation. Moreover, it is advisable to have this training phase in a common house of the Institute. This is because „eine Prüfung und Auswahl von Kandidaten allein durch Kurse, Tagungen, Wochenenden und gelegentliche Besuche scheint nur schwer denkbar“ (Meier, 2015, p. 887). Only „durch Fernkurse und den sporadischen Kontakt des Einzelnen mit der Leitung und durch jährliche Exerzitien wird kaum eine solche Erziehung und Formung zu erreichen sein, wie sie für die Säkularinstitute gefordert ist, deren Mitglieder lebendige Zellen der Kirche bilden und die sie umgebende Welt auf ihre Weise evangelisieren sollen“ (ibid.). It could not be said more aptly. Therefore, the formation phase during the temporal bonds is especially important (cf. c. 724 § 2).

After the expiry of the temporary integration, the member is free to leave the institute (cf. c. 726 § 1) or to be admitted for permanent integration (c. 723 § 3). This requires a determination of eligibility and the consent of the institute's management and its council, in accordance with regulations governing the institute's own right (cf. c. 720). Otherwise, the management may, after consulting the council, refuse a member admission to final incorporation for just cause (cf. c. 726 § 1). The CIC/1983 equates *incorporatio definitiva* with *incorporatio perpetua* here in terms of legal effects (cf. c. 723 § 4). For the member of the institute, definitive incorporation means the assumption of both rights and duties.

Like the religious, members of secular institutes promise a life of celibacy, poverty and obedience. The assumption of the council of celibacy or a chaste way of life is the same as for the members of the institutes of the religious. However, in the case of members of secular institutes, the vow of celibacy does not constitute a separative impediment to marriage, since c. 1088 only means the impediment arising from the public and perpetual vows of a religious institute (cf. Primetshofer,

2003, p. 212). In contrast, there may be differences in the scope of the other two councils. An important criterion might be the form of the institute's life, in terms of whether the members live together in a house or each alone. This already results in more intensive or less intensive physical community life. Obedience obliges the members to follow the instructions of the Institute leadership in matters concerning the Institute. Here, too, the question arises of the decision-making power of the leader vis-à-vis the member. It must be regulated in the constitutions how and to what extent obedience is to be rendered (cf. *ibid.*).

The situation is similar in the case of living in poverty, where it also plays a role whether the member lives alone or in community and also whether he or she pursues an activity outside the institute or works entirely in the service of the institute. In both cases, the member is obliged to make a financial contribution to the Institute, which may then be higher or lower, but in any case, even if they live alone, members should live simply and not contradict the ideal of poverty (cf. Meier, 2015, p. 888).

### **Resignation, dismissal and transfer**

There are three possibilities for leaving the secular institute: resignation, dismissal and transfer to another institute, a religious institute or a community of apostolic life. "Die hier getroffenen Regelungen stimmen mit denen bei den Religioseninstituten in den angegebenen Parallelkanones substantiell überein" (Henseler, 1987, c. 726, 1). Withdrawal from the institute may be effected after the expiry of the temporary incorporation either voluntarily and without further action on the part of the member, or on the part of the institute's management, if just cause is shown, by not admitting him to final incorporation in the institute (cf. c. 726, § 1). If the member wishes to leave the Institute prematurely before the expiry of the period of temporary incorporation, he or she may apply for an indult to leave to the supreme head of the Institute, who shall grant it with the consent of his or her council. However, there must be a serious reason for granting it (cf. c. 726 § 2).

Apart from during the temporal, a member may also wish to leave the Institute voluntarily after its final incorporation. To do so, it first requires its own personal examination *coram domino*. If the decision to leave is firm, the indult to leave is not given by the supreme director of the institute, but, in the case of an institute of pontifical law, requires a request to the Apostolic See, which then grants the indult to leave (cf. 727 § 1). According to the Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus* Art. 108 § 1, the competent dicastery of the Roman Curia is the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. In the case of institutes of episcopal right, the diocesan bishop issues the indult of resignation (cf. c. 727 § 1).

In the case of a cleric incardinated to the institute, the rule under c. 693 (cf. c. 727 § 2) applies, according to which the indult of resignation may only be granted when the cleric is incardinated to a diocese or at least admitted to it on probation. It is important that the cleric is truly incardinated to the institute and not merely incorporated, as Henseler (1987, c. 729, 8) points out: "Die Inkorporation, die durch die Profess geschieht, betrifft jedes Mitglied. Die Inkardination, die durch die Diakonatsweihe geschieht, und die die vorausgegangene endgültige Bindung an das Institut (also die endgültige Inkorporation) voraussetzt, betrifft nur die Kleriker, die durch eben diese Weihe zu Klerikern werden. ... Das Mitglied eines Säkularinstituts kann nun gemäß 266 § 3, 715 § 1 und 727 § 2 einerseits Mitglied eines bestimmten Instituts sein, dem es inkorporiert ist, andererseits aber der Diözese inkardiniert sein." In each of the cases mentioned, the member's indult of resignation extinguishes all ties and associated rights and duties (cf. c. 728).

Apart from voluntary resignation, a member can also be dismissed by the management of the institute. Henseler agrees that c. 729, which regulates compulsory and punitive dismissal, „fast nur vom Verweis legt, was allerdings recht umständlich geschieht“ (ibid., c. 729, 4). For the *dimissio*, appropriate grounds are required, which must be precisely standardised by the general law as well as by the institute's own law. A member must be dismissed according to general law if he has obviously fallen away from the Catholic faith (cf. c. 694 § 1, n. 1). This would additionally bring about the penalty under c. 1364 § 1. Or it would be dismissed if a marriage was attempted (cf. c. 694 § 1, n. 2). This would result in the interdict *latae sententiae* (cf. c. 1394 § 2). In both cases, the superior, together with his council, must gather evidence to establish and prove the facts. In addition to these two grounds, offences committed can also justify compulsory withdrawal from a secular institute, as can be seen from c. 729, which refers to c. 695. These offences are those under cc. 1397, 1398 and 1395. Some latitude rests with the superior in relation to the offences of c. 1395 § 2, where, depending on the facts and evidence present, he may consider whether dismissal is compulsory or whether there may be other means and ways of reforming the offending member and of restoring justice and reparation. No reference is made to c. 696 for further grounds for dismissal, but the Constitutions of the Institute may lay down further grounds for dismissal in addition to those laid down by general law (cf. Primetshofer, 2003, 215), but provided that they are "proportionate graves, externae, imputabiles et iuridice comprobatae" (c. 729). The procedure for dismissing a member on any of the possible grounds just mentioned must be conducted according to the norms of cc. 697-700.

The third possibility to leave the secular institute is to transfer to another secular institute. According to Aymans-Mörsdorf (1997, p. 707), conversion is

„die rechtlich geordnete Ausgliederung eines Mitgliedes aus seinem bisherigen Verband bei gleichzeitiger Aufnahme in einen anderen kanonischen Lebensverband. Er kann stets nur aufgrund der Initiative des Mitgliedes erfolgen“. The norms of cc. 684 §§1, 2 and 4 and c. 685 apply to the transfer, to which c. 730 refers. Accordingly, the same regulations and procedures apply here as for members of a religious institute. In the case of a transfer from a secular institute to a religious institute or to a society of apostolic life, permission is required from the Apostolic See, which gives appropriate instructions to be followed depending on the individual case. A three-year probationary period is furthermore obligatory (Primetshofer, 2003, p. 172). The same procedure applies to transfers from a religious institute or a society of apostolic life to a secular institute (cf. c. 730).

### **Affiliation of other believers**

C. 725 allows secular institutes to associate other believers through bonds defined in the Constitutions, so that they may likewise strive for evangelical perfection and share in the mission and apostolate of the institute. The proper law must define the manner of this *associatio*, which can vary greatly depending on the institute. As a rule, all the faithful of any state and age who wish to strive to live the spirituality in the different ways and states of life and to be united with the members of the Secular Institute can join (cf. Stoffel, Weigand, 2006, p. 1467). This bond can be limited to a purely spiritual level, e.g. through the performance of certain prayers or participation in retreats, but it can also include regular meetings, lectures and participation in concrete works of the apostolate. It would also be conceivable to found a support association that financially supports the Institute (cf. Meier, 2015, p. 889). Sometimes there are own family circles, youth movements or a priestly community.

These forms of affiliation and attachment to a secular institute have similarities to the so-called world oblates, who live in attachment to a monastic monastery and “ihr Leben in der Welt im Geist der Ordensregel gestalten wollen. Sie gehören der Gebetsgemeinschaft des Klosters an und nehmen z. T. auch an deren geistlichen Privilegien teil“ (Haering, 2006, 964). The so-called Third Orders, which are affiliated to the mendicant orders, should also be mentioned here as a counterpart (cf. *ibid.*).

### **Conclusion**

In the history of the Church, secular institutes are a form of consecrated life that only came into being in the last century, which is why the official Church documents are very obscure. The characteristic of the members of the secular institutes is the so-called worldliness or secularity, which means that the members

live in the consecrated state, but at the same time pursue their work, tasks and daily obligations in the world. They are to be distinguished from consecrated virgins because members of secular institutes are always bound to a concrete community. This community life can be closer or wider, depending on whether all members live together in one house or whether each member lives alone and the bond is limited to regular meetings. There is no particular prototype among the secular institutes, as the design of the individual institutes can vary greatly and the constitutions leave much room for manoeuvre. What all institutes have in common is the realization of consecrated life in the world, without living in seclusion, without a religious name and spiritual garb, which thus fundamentally distinguishes them from institutes of religion. Members can be lay and clerical, other believers can join the institute in different ways. Admission and incorporation into a secular institute takes place in a manner analogous to incorporation into a religious institute, although admission to the secular institute takes a longer period of time until final incorporation. This is probably due to the test of the ability to live a life of action and contemplation, which is a special challenge of life in a secular institute.

It can therefore be summarized that secular institutes remarkably unite different components of consecrated life and perhaps also derive their attraction from this. This can be summarized from the many institutes that have come into being and the growing numbers of members.

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# "IN SAECULO ET EX SAECULO". CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SECULAR INSTITUTES

## SUMMARY

Secular institutes are a form of consecrated life that only came into being in the last century and therefore do not have a long history. For this reason, there are also only a few canonical and ecclesiastical documents. Since the characteristics of secular institutes, in contrast to traditional monastic communities, are rather unknown, this article aims to contribute to making them somewhat better known and to present the regulations on various elements, such as spirituality, community life, governance and asset management. However, the codified norms only form a legal framework here, which leaves concretisation to the institutes' own regulations, so that there is a wide range. What all institutes have in common, however, is the connection between action and contemplation, which is also their main characteristic.

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