

Life of the Spirit

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JUST two years ago His Holiness, Pope Pius XII, issued the Apostolic Constitution which established canonically those groups of laity who had banded themselves together for the same purposes as those in religious Orders but without the external structure of religious life. This recognition of Lay or, as they are more commonly known, Secular Institutes is of considerable importance both for these groups of laity themselves and for the whole Church in keeping her contemporary, abreast of the times and adapting her apostolic mission to the changing conditions of modern life. Readers of *LIFE OF THE SPIRIT* have shown great interest in this document on this account and have in particular wanted to know the principles upon which this new form of dedicated life rests. Many have evidently hoped that these principles would enable the whole gamut of religious life, both contemplative and active, to be reproduced under essentially lay conditions. But, as several contributions in the last few months have shown, there has been considerable confusion as to the wording and precisions of the Constitution. We have therefore determined to give readers the opportunity of reading the whole document in English. For absolute accuracy they must turn to the Latin itself which is hard to render into readable and precise English. But the following translation will help to settle many points. In particular the document declares that Secular Institutes in their new canonical form are those only which seek 'to attain Christian perfection and the full exercise of the Apostolate' and that these come under the Congregation of Religious while all other associations of the Laity come under another congregation. Nevertheless, in view of the Church's teaching on the apostolate as growing out of contemplation, it would not seem to be a great step to extend these new privileges to purely contemplative groups, particularly as the vow of chastity and the vow of obedience seem to be integral to the structure of a Secular Institute. However, at present the whole purpose of this new form of the life of perfection is evidently to particularise in one instance the great movement of Catholic Action which was set on foot in the last Pontificate. It is intended to form apostles who will live in the world.

THE EDITOR.