

ON RELIGIOUS DRESS

Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes

This Sacred Congregation has been receiving reports from various countries that religious men and women, in ever greater numbers, are abandoning the religious habit and even any distinctive external sign of consecration. On the other hand, many inquiries are being made as to just what is the mind of the Holy See in this regard.

It seems opportune to inform you of the type of reply this Sacred Congregation gives in such cases, trusting that Your Excellency will find ways of making this known whenever circumstances require it.

"First of all, it is appropriate to state again that the religious habit has been considered by the Second Vatican Council as a sign of consecration for those who have embraced in a public way the state of perfection of the evangelical counsels. (*Perfectae caritatis*, n. 17).

"Moreover, this concept has also been confirmed by the recent apostolic exhortation of His Holiness, (*Evangelica Testificatio*, n. 22).

"Nevertheless, religious institutes, in their General Chapters, may, and in some cases ought to, modify the traditional habit in accord with practical requirements and the needs of hygiene but *they may not abolish it altogether or leave it to the judgement of individual Sisters*.

"The basic criterion to be observed is that the habit prescribed by Religious Institutes, even as modified and simplified, should be such that it distinguishes the religious person who wears it.

"On the other hand, purely secular clothes, without any recognizable exterior sign, can be permitted, for particular reasons, by the competent Superiors to those Sisters to whom the use of the religious habit would constitute an impediment or obstacle in the normal exercise of activities which should be undertaken in certain circumstances. Even in this case the dress of the religious women should not depart from the forms of poverty, simplicity and modesty proper to the religious state. It should always be, in some way *different from the forms that are clearly secular*". (*Evangelica Testificatio*, n. 22).

The foregoing applies, *mutatis mutandis* also to male religious who should always be distinguishable from seculars by the use of the Roman collar or by some other visible and appropriately distinctive sign.

I welcome this occasion to send you my very best wishes, and I remain.

AGOSTINO MAYER,
Titular Archbishop of Sacrianum,
Secretary

Yours faithfully in Our Lord
Card. **ILDEBRANDO ANTONIUTTI,**
Prefect.