

ANTHOLOGY OF DOCUMENTS

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Universal Call to Holiness

Christifideles Laici

16. We come to a full sense of the dignity of the lay faithful if we consider *the prime and fundamental vocation* that the Father assigns to each of them in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit: the vocation to holiness, that is, the perfection of charity. Holiness is the greatest testimony of the dignity conferred on a disciple of Christ.

The Second Vatican Council has significantly spoken on the universal call to holiness. It is possible to say that this call to holiness is precisely the basic charge entrusted to all the sons and daughters of the Church by a Council which intended to bring a renewal of Christian life based on the gospel. This charge is not a simple moral exhortation, but an *undeniable requirement arising from the mystery of the Church: she is the choice vine*, whose branches live and grow with the same holy and life-giving energies that come from Christ; she is the Mystical Body, whose members share in the same life of holiness of the Head who is Christ; she is the Beloved Spouse of the Lord Jesus, who delivered himself up for her sanctification (cf. *Eph* 5:25 ff.). The Spirit that sanctified the human nature of Jesus in Mary's virginal womb (cf. *Lk* 1:35) is the same Spirit that is abiding and working in the Church to communicate to her the holiness of the Son of God made man.

It is ever more urgent that today all Christians take up again the way of gospel renewal, welcoming in a spirit of generosity the invitation expressed by the apostle Peter "to be holy in all conduct" (*1 Pt* 1:15). The 1985 Extraordinary Synod, twenty years after the Council, opportunely insisted on this urgency: "Since the Church in Christ is a mystery, she ought to be considered the sign and instrument of holiness... Men and women saints have always been the source and origin of renewal in the most difficult circumstances in the Church's history. Today we have the greatest need of saints whom we must assiduously beg God to raise up".

Everyone in the Church, precisely because they are members, receive and thereby share in the common vocation to holiness. In the fullness of this title and on equal par with all other members of the Church, the lay faithful are called to holiness: "All the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity" (LG 40). "All of Christ's followers are invited and bound to pursue holiness and the perfect fulfillment of their own state of life" (LG 42).

The call to holiness is *rooted in Baptism* and proposed anew in the other Sacraments, principally in the *Eucharist*. Since Christians are re clothed in Christ Jesus and refreshed by his Spirit, they are "holy". They therefore have the ability to manifest this holiness and the responsibility to bear witness to it in all that they do. The apostle Paul never tires of admonishing all Christians to live "as is fitting among saints" (*Eph* 5:3).

Life according to the Spirit, whose fruit is holiness (cf. *Rom* 6:22; *Gal* 5:22), stirs up every baptized person and requires each to *follow and imitate Jesus Christ*, in embracing the Beatitudes, in listening and meditating on the Word of God, in conscious and active participation in the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church, in personal prayer, in family or in community, in the hunger and thirst for justice, in the practice of the commandment of love in all circumstances of life and service to the brethren, especially the least, the poor and the suffering.

17. (...) The vocation to holiness must be recognized and lived by the lay faithful, first of all as an undeniable and demanding obligation and as a shining example of the infinite love of the Father that has regenerated them in his own life of holiness. Such a vocation, then, ought to be called an *essential and inseparable element of the new life of Baptism*, and therefore an element which determines their dignity. At the same time the vocation to holiness is *intimately connected to mission* and to the responsibility entrusted to the lay faithful in the Church and in the world. In fact, that same holiness which is derived simply from their participation in the Church's holiness, represents their first and fundamental contribution to the building of the Church herself, who is the "Communion of Saints". The eyes of faith behold a wonderful scene: that of a countless number of lay people,

both women and men, busy at work in their daily life and activity, oftentimes far from view and quite unacclaimed by the world, unknown to the world's great personages but nonetheless looked upon in love by the Father, untiring labourers who work in the Lord's vineyard. Confident and steadfast through the power of God's grace, these are the humble yet great builders of the Kingdom of God in history.

Holiness, then, must be called a fundamental presupposition and an irreplaceable condition for everyone in fulfilling the mission of salvation within the Church. The Church's holiness is the hidden source and the infallible measure of the works of the apostolate and of the missionary effort. Only in the measure that the Church, Christ's Spouse, is loved by him and she, in turn, loves him, does she become a mother fruitful in the Spirit.

Again we take up the image from the gospel: the fruitfulness and the growth of the branches depends on their remaining united to the vine. "As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (*Jn 15:4-5*).

It is appropriate to recall here the solemn proclamation of beatification and canonization of lay men and women which took place during the month of the Synod. The entire People of God, and the lay faithful in particular, can find at this moment new models of holiness and new witnesses of heroic virtue lived in the ordinary everyday circumstances of human existence. The Synod Fathers have said: "Particular Churches especially should be attentive to recognizing among their members the younger men and women of those Churches who have given witness to holiness in such conditions (everyday secular conditions and the conjugal state) and who can be an example for others, so that, if the case calls for it, they (the Churches) might propose them to be beatified and canonized".

At the end of these reflections intended to define the lay faithful's position in the Church, the celebrated admonition of Saint Leo the Great comes to mind: "Acknowledge, O Christian, your dignity!" (*Sermo XXI*). Saint Maximus, Bishop of Turin, in addressing those who had received the holy anointing of Baptism, repeats the same sentiments: "Ponder the honor that has made you sharers in this mystery!" (*Tract III de Baptismo*). All the baptized are invited to hear once again the words of Saint Augustine: "Let us rejoice and give thanks: we have not only become Christians, but Christ himself... Stand in awe and rejoice: We have become Christ" (*In Ioann. Evang. Tract., 21,8*).

The dignity as a Christian, the source of equality for all members of the Church, guarantees and fosters the spirit of *communio* and fellowship, and, at the same time, becomes the hidden dynamic force in the lay faithful's apostolate and mission. It is a *dignity*, however, *which brings demands*, the dignity of labourers called by the Lord to work in his vineyard: "Upon all the lay faithful, then, rests the exalted duty of working to assure that each day the divine plan of salvation is further extended to every person, of every era, in every part of the earth" (LG 33).

Lumen Gentium

39. The Church, whose mystery is being set forth by this Sacred Synod, is believed to be indefectibly holy. Indeed Christ, the Son of God, who with the Father and the Spirit is praised as "uniquely holy," loved the Church as His bride, delivering Himself up for her. He did this that He might sanctify her (Eph. 5:25-26). He united her to Himself as His own body and brought it to perfection by the gift of the Holy Spirit for God's glory. Therefore in the Church, everyone whether belonging to the hierarchy, or being cared for by it, is called to holiness, according to the saying of the Apostle: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification" (1 Thess. 4:3; Eph. 1:4). However, this holiness of the Church is unceasingly manifested, and must be manifested, in the fruits of grace which the Spirit produces in the faithful; it is expressed in many ways in individuals, who in their walk of life, tend toward the perfection of charity, thus causing the edification of others (...).

40. The Lord Jesus, the divine Teacher and Model of all perfection, preached holiness of life to each and everyone of His disciples of every condition. He Himself stands as the author and consumator of this holiness of life: "Be you therefore perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48).

Indeed He sent the Holy Spirit upon all men and women that He might move them inwardly to love God with their whole heart and their whole soul, with all their mind and all their strength (Cf. Mc 12:30) and that they might love each other as Christ loves them (Cf. Jn 13:34; 15:2). The followers of Christ are called by God, not because of their works, but according to His own purpose and grace. They are justified in the Lord Jesus, because in the baptism of faith they truly become sons of God and sharers in the divine nature. In this way they are really made holy. Then too, by God's gift, they must hold on to and complete in their lives this holiness they have received. They are warned by the Apostle to live "as becomes saints" (Eph. 5:3), and to put on "as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved a heart of mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, patience" (Col 3:12), and to possess the fruit of the Spirit in holiness (Cf. Gal 5:22; Rom 6:22). Since truly we all offend in many things (Cf. Jas 3:2) we all need God's mercies continually and we all must daily pray: "Forgive us our debts" (Mt 6:12).

Thus it is evident to everyone, that all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity; by this holiness as such a more human manner of living is promoted in this earthly society. In order that the faithful may reach this perfection, they must use their strength accordingly as they have received it, as a gift from Christ. They must follow in His footsteps and conform themselves to His image seeking the will of the Father in all things. They must devote themselves with all their being to the glory of God and the service of their neighbor. In this way, the holiness of the People of God will grow into an abundant harvest of good, as is admirably shown by the life of so many saints in Church history.

41. The classes and duties of life are many, but holiness is one-that sanctity which is cultivated by all who are moved by the Spirit of God, and who obey the voice of the Father and worship God the Father in spirit and in truth. These people follow the poor Christ, the humble and cross-bearing Christ in order to be worthy of being sharers in His glory. Every person must walk unhesitatingly according to his own personal gifts and duties in the path of living faith, which arouses hope and works through charity.

(...) Married couples and Christian parents should follow their own proper path (to holiness) by faithful love. They should sustain one another in grace throughout the entire length of their lives. They should embue their offspring, lovingly welcomed as God's gift, with Christian doctrine and the evangelical virtues. In this manner, they offer all men and women the example of unwearying and generous love; in this way they build up the brotherhood of charity; in so doing, they stand as the witnesses and cooperators in the fruitfulness of Holy Mother Church; by such lives, they are a sign and a participation in that very love, with which Christ loved His Bride and for which He delivered Himself up for her. A like example, but one given in a different way, is that offered by widows and single people, who are able to make great contributions toward holiness and apostolic endeavor in the Church. Finally, those who engage in labor-and frequently it is of a heavy nature- should better themselves by their human labors. They should be of aid to their fellow citizens. They should raise all of society, and even creation itself, to a better mode of existence. Indeed, they should imitate by their lively charity, in their joyous hope and by their voluntary sharing of each others' burdens, the very Christ who plied His hands with carpenter's tools and Who in union with His Father, is continually working for the salvation of all men and women. In this, then, their daily work they should climb to the heights of holiness and apostolic activity.

May all those who are weighed down with poverty, infirmity and sickness, as well as those who must bear various hardships or who suffer persecution for justice sake-may they all know they are united with the suffering Christ in a special way for the salvation of the world. The Lord called them blessed in His Gospel and they are those whom "the God of all graces, who has called us unto His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, will Himself, after we have suffered a little while, perfect, strengthen and establish" (1 Pt 5:10).

Finally all Christ's faithful, whatever be the conditions, duties and circumstances of their lives-and indeed through all these, will daily increase in holiness, if they receive all things with faith from the

hand of their heavenly Father and if they cooperate with the divine will. In this temporal service, they will manifest to all men and women the love with which God loved the world.

42. "God is love, and he who abides in love, abides in God and God in Him" (1 Jn 4:16). But, God pours out his love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, Who has been given to us (Cf. Rom 5:5); thus the first and most necessary gift is love, by which we love God above all things and our neighbor because of God. Indeed, in order that love, as good seed may grow and bring forth fruit in the soul, each one of the faithful must willingly hear the Word of God and accept His Will, and must complete what God has begun by their own actions with the help of God's grace. These actions consist in the use of the sacraments and in a special way the Eucharist, frequent participation in the sacred action of the Liturgy, application of oneself to prayer, self-abnegation, lively fraternal service and the constant exercise of all the virtues. For charity, as the bond of perfection and the fullness of the law (Cf. Col 3:14; Rom 13:10), rules over all the means of attaining holiness and gives life to these same means. It is charity which guides us to our final end. It is the love of God and the love of one's neighbor which points out the true disciple of Christ.

(...) Therefore, all the faithful of Christ are invited to strive for the holiness and perfection of their own proper state. Indeed they have an obligation to so strive. Let all then have care that they guide aright their own deepest sentiments of soul. Let neither the use of the things of this world nor attachment to riches, which is against the spirit of evangelical poverty, hinder them in their quest for perfect love Let them heed the admonition of the Apostle to those who use this world; let them not come to terms with this world; for this world, as we see it, is passing away (Cf. 1 Cor 7:31 ff).

The Call to Communion

Christifideles Laici

8. The Sacred Scriptures use the image of the vine in various ways. In a particular case, the vine serves to express the *Mystery of the People of God*. From this perspective which emphasizes the Church's internal nature, the lay faithful are seen not simply as labourers who work in the vineyard, but as themselves being a part of the vineyard. Jesus says, "I am the vine, you are the branches" (*Jn* 15:5).

(...) The Second Vatican Council, making reference to the various biblical images that help to reveal the mystery of the Church, proposes again the image of the vine and the branches: "Christ is the true vine who gives life and fruitfulness to the branches, that is, to us. Through the Church we abide in Christ, without whom we can do nothing (*Jn* 15:1-5)"(12). The Church herself, then, is the vine in the gospel. She is *mystery* because the very life and love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the gift gratuitously offered to all those who are born of water and the Holy Spirit (cf. *Jn* 3:5), and called to relive the very *communion* of God and to manifest it and communicate it in history (mission): "In that day", Jesus says, "you will know that I am in my Father and you in me, and I in you" (*Jn* 14:20).

Only *from inside the Church's mystery of communion is the "identity" of the lay faithful made known*, and their fundamental dignity revealed. Only within the context of this dignity can their vocation and mission in the Church and in the world be defined (...).

12 . Regenerated as "Children in the Son", the baptized are inseparably joined together as "*members of Christ and members of the body of the Church*", as the Council of Florence teaches (Ecum. Council of Florence, *Decr. Pro Armeniis*, DS 1314).

Baptism symbolizes and brings about a mystical but real incorporation into the crucified and glorious body of Christ. Through the sacrament Jesus unites the baptized to his death so as to unite the recipient to his resurrection (cf. *Rom* 6:3-5). The "old man" is stripped away for a re-clothing with "the new man", that is, with Jesus himself: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (*Gal* 3:27; cf. *Eph* 4:22-24; *Col* 3:9-10). The result is that "we, though many, are one body in Christ" (*Rom* 12:5).

In the words of Saint Paul we find again the faithful echo of the teaching of Jesus himself, which reveals *the mystical unity of Christ with his disciples and the disciples with each other*, presenting it as an image and extension of that mystical *communion* that binds the Father to the Son and the Son to the Father in the bond of love, the Holy Spirit (cf. *Jn* 17:21). Jesus refers to this same unity in the image of the vine and the branches: "I am the vine, you the branches" (*Jn* 15:5), an image that sheds light not only on the deep intimacy of the disciples with Jesus but on the necessity of a vital communion of the disciples with each other: all are branches of a single vine.

18. Again we turn to the words of Jesus: "I am the true vine and my Father is the vinedresser... *Abide in me and I in you*" (*Jn* 15: 1, 4).

These simple words reveal the mystery of communion that serves as the unifying bond between the Lord and his disciples, between Christ and the baptized: a living and life-giving communion through which Christians no longer belong to themselves but are the Lord's very own, as the branches are one with the vine.

The communion of Christians with Jesus has the communion of God as Trinity, namely, the unity of the Son to the Father in the gift of the Holy Spirit, as its model and source, and is itself the means to achieve this communion: united to the Son in the Spirit's bond of love, Christians are united to the Father.

Jesus continues: "*I am the vine, you are the branches*" (*Jn* 15: 5). From the communion that Christians experience in Christ there immediately flows the communion which they experience with one another: all are branches of a single vine, namely, Christ. In this communion is the wonderful reflection and participation in the mystery of the intimate life of love in God as Trinity, Father, Son

and Holy Spirit as revealed by the Lord Jesus. For this *communion* Jesus prays: "that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (*Jn* 17: 21).

Such communion is the very mystery of the Church, as the Second Vatican Council recalls in the celebrated words of Saint Cyprian: "The Church shines forth as 'a people made one with the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit'" (LG 4). We are accustomed to recall this mystery of Church *communion* at the beginning of the celebration of the Eucharist, when the priest welcomes all with the greeting of the Apostle Paul: "The grace of the Lord Jesus, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 *Cor* 13:13).

The Call to Diversity and Complementarity

1 Corinthians 12

⁴There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but they all come from the same Spirit. ⁵There are different ways to serve the same LORD, ⁶and we can each do different things. Yet the same God works in all of us and helps us in everything we do.

⁷The Spirit has given each of us a special way of serving others. ⁸Some of us can speak with wisdom, while others can speak with knowledge, but these gifts come from the same Spirit. ⁹To others the Spirit has given great faith or the power to heal the sick ¹⁰or the power to work mighty miracles. Some of us are prophets, and some of us recognize when God's Spirit is present. Others can speak different kinds of languages, and still others can tell what these languages mean. ¹¹But it is the Spirit who does all this and decides which gifts to give to each of us.

¹²The body of Christ has many different parts, just as any other body does. ¹³Some of us are Jews, and others are Gentiles. Some of us are slaves, and others are free. But God's Spirit baptized each of us and made us part of the body of Christ. Now we each drink from that same Spirit.

¹⁴Our bodies don't have just one part. They have many parts. ¹⁵Suppose a foot says, "I'm not a hand, and so I'm not part of the body." Wouldn't the foot still belong to the body? ¹⁶Or suppose an ear says, "I'm not an eye, and so I'm not part of the body." Wouldn't the ear still belong to the body? ¹⁷If our bodies were only an eye, we couldn't hear a thing. And if they were only an ear, we couldn't smell a thing. ¹⁸But God has put all parts of our body together in the way that he decided is best.

¹⁹A body isn't really a body, unless there is more than one part. ²⁰It takes many parts to make a single body. ²¹That's why the eyes cannot say they don't need the hands. That's also why the head cannot say it doesn't need the feet. ²²In fact, we cannot get along without the parts of the body that seem to be the weakest. ²³We take special care to dress up some parts of our bodies. We are modest about our personal parts, ²⁴but we don't have to be modest about other parts. God put our bodies together in such a way that even the parts that seem the least important are valuable. ²⁵He did this to make all parts of the body work together smoothly, with each part caring about the others. ²⁶If one part of our body hurts, we hurt all over. If one part of our body is honored, the whole body will be happy.

²⁷Together you are the body of Christ. Each one of you is part of his body. ²⁸First, God chose some people to be apostles and prophets and teachers for the church. But he also chose some to work miracles or heal the sick or help others or be leaders or speak different kinds of languages. ²⁹Not everyone is an apostle. Not everyone is a prophet. Not everyone is a teacher. Not everyone can work miracles. ³⁰Not everyone can heal the sick. Not everyone can speak different kinds of languages. Not everyone can tell what these languages mean. ³¹I want you to desire the best gifts. So I will show you a much better way.

Lumen Gentium

32. By divine institution Holy Church is ordered and governed with a wonderful diversity. "For just as in one body we have many members, yet all the members have not the same function, so we, the many, are one body in Christ, but severally members one of another" (Rom 12:4-5). Therefore, the chosen People of God is one: "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph 4:5); sharing a common dignity as members from their regeneration in Christ, having the same filial grace and the same vocation to perfection; possessing in common one salvation, one hope and one undivided charity. There is, therefore, in Christ and in the Church no inequality on the basis of race or nationality, social condition or sex, because "there is neither Jew nor Greek: there is neither bond nor free: there is neither male nor female. For you are all 'one' in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28; cf. Col 3:11).

If therefore in the Church everyone does not proceed by the same path, nevertheless all are called to sanctity and have received an equal privilege of faith through the justice of God (Cf. 2 Pt 1:1). And if by the will of Christ some are made teachers, pastors and dispensers of mysteries on behalf of others, yet all share a true equality with regard to the dignity and to the activity common to all the

faithful for the building up of the Body of Christ. For the distinction which the Lord made between sacred ministers and the rest of the People of God bears within it a certain union, since pastors and the other faithful are bound to each other by a mutual need. Pastors of the Church, following the example of the Lord, should minister to one another and to the other faithful. These in their turn should enthusiastically lend their joint assistance to their pastors and teachers. Thus in their diversity all bear witness to the wonderful unity in the Body of Christ. This very diversity of graces, ministries and works gathers the children of God into one, because "all these things are the work of one and the same Spirit" (1 Cor 12:11).

Christifideles Laici

20. Ecclesial communion is more precisely likened to an "organic" communion, analogous to that of a living and functioning body. In fact, at one and the same time it is characterized by a *diversity* and a *complementarity* of vocations and states in life, of ministries, of charisms and responsibilities. Because of this diversity and complementarity every member of the lay faithful is seen *in relation to the whole body* and offers a *totally unique contribution* on behalf of the whole body.

Saint Paul insists in a particular way on the organic communion of the Mystical Body of Christ. We can hear his rich teaching echoed in the following synthesis from the Council: "Jesus Christ"-we read in the Constitution *Lumen Gentium*-"by communicating his Spirit to his brothers and sisters, called together from all peoples, made them mystically into his own body. In that body, the life of Christ is communicated to those who believe... As all the members of the human body, though they are many, form one body, so also are the Faithful in Christ (cf. 1 Cor 12:12). Also, in the building up of Christ's body there is a diversity of members and functions. There is only one Spirit who, according to his own richness and the necessities of service, distributes his different gifts for the welfare of the Church (cf. 1 Cor 12:1-11). Among these gifts comes in the first place the grace given to the apostles to whose authority the Spirit himself subjects even those who are endowed with charisms (cf. 1 Cor 14). Furthermore it is this same Spirit, who through his power and through the intimate bond between the members, produces and urges love among the faithful. Consequently, if one member suffers anything, all the members suffer it too, and if one member is honoured, all members together rejoice (cf. 1 Cor 12:26)" (LG 7).

One and the same Spirit is always the dynamic principle of diversity and unity in the Church. Once again we read in the Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, "In order that we might be unceasingly renewed in him (cf. Eph 4:23), he has shared with us his Spirit who, existing as one and the same being in the head and in the members, gives life to, unifies and moves the whole body. This he does in such a way that his work could be compared by the Fathers to the function which the soul as the principle of life fulfills in the human body" (LG 7). And in another particularly significant text which is helpful in understanding not only the organic nature proper to ecclesial communion but also its aspect of growth toward perfect communion, the Council writes: "The Spirit dwells in the Church and in the hearts of the Faithful, as in a temple (cf. 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19). In them he prays and bears witness that they are adopted sons (cf. Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15-16, 26). Guiding the Church in the way of all truth (cf. Jn 16:13) and unifying her in communion and in the works of service, he bestows upon her varied hierarchical and charismatic gifts and adorns her with the fruits of his grace (cf. Eph 4:11-12; 1 Cor 12:4; Gal 5:22). By the power of the Gospel he makes the Church grow, perpetually renews her, and leads her to perfect union with her Spouse. The Spirit and the Bride both say to the Lord Jesus, 'Come!' (cf. Rev 22:17)" (LG 4).

Church communion then is a gift, a great gift of the Holy Spirit, to be gratefully accepted by the lay faithful, and at the same time to be lived with a deep sense of responsibility. This is concretely realized through their participation in the life and mission of the Church, to whose service the lay faithful put their varied and complementary ministries and charisms.

A member of the lay faithful "can never remain in isolation from the community, but must live in a continual interaction with others, with a lively sense of fellowship, rejoicing in an equal dignity and common commitment to bring to fruition the immense treasure that each has inherited. The Spirit of the Lord gives a vast variety of charisms, inviting people to assume different ministries and forms of

service and reminding them, as he reminds all people in their relationship in the Church, that what distinguishes persons is *not an increase in dignity*, but *a special and complementary capacity for service*.. Thus, the charisms, the ministries, the different forms of service exercised by the lay faithful exist in communion and on behalf of communion. They are treasures that complement one another for the good of all and are under the wise guidance of their Pastors" (John Paul II, *Homily at the Solemn Eucharistic Concelebration for the Close of the Seventh Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*, 30 October 1987: AAS 80, 600).

The Call to Mission

Christifideles Laici

1. The Lay Members of Christ's Faithful People (*Christifideles Laici*), whose "Vocation and Mission in the Church and in the World Twenty Years after the Second Vatican Council" was the topic of the 1987 Synod of Bishops, are those who form that part of the People of God which might be likened to the labourers in the vineyard mentioned in Matthew's Gospel: "For the Kingdom of heaven is like a householder who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the labourers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard" (*Mt 20:1-2*).

The gospel parable sets before our eyes the Lord's vast vineyard and the multitude of persons, both women and men, who are called and sent forth by him to labour in it. The vineyard is the whole world (cf. *Mt 13:38*), which is to be transformed according to the plan of God in view of the final coming of the Kingdom of God.

2. "And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; and to them he said, 'You go into the vineyard too'" (*Mt 20:3-4*).

From that distant day the call of the Lord Jesus "You go into my vineyard too" never fails to resound in the course of history: it is addressed to every person who comes into this world.

In our times, the Church after Vatican II in a renewed outpouring of the Spirit of Pentecost has come to a more lively awareness of her missionary nature and has listened again to the voice of her Lord who sends her forth into the world as "the universal sacrament of salvation"(LG 48).

You go too. The call is a concern not only of Pastors, clergy, and men and women religious. The call is addressed to everyone: lay people as well are personally called by the Lord, from whom they receive a mission on behalf of the Church and the world (...).

The Council, in particular, with its rich doctrinal, spiritual and pastoral patrimony, has written as never before on the nature, dignity, spirituality, mission and responsibility of the lay faithful. And the *Council Fathers, re-echoing the call of Christ, have summoned all the lay faithful, both women and men, to labour in the vineyard:* "The Council, then, makes an earnest plea in the Lord's name that all lay people give a glad, generous, and prompt response to the impulse of the Holy Spirit and to the voice of Christ, who is giving them an especially urgent invitation at this moment. Young people should feel that this call is directed to them in particular, and they should respond to it eagerly and magnanimously. The Lord himself renews his invitation to all the lay faithful to come closer to him every day, and with the recognition that what is his is also their own (*Phil 2:5*) they ought to associate themselves with him in his saving mission. Once again he sends them into every town and place where he himself is to come (cf. *Lk 10:1*)"(AA 33).

3. The basic meaning of this Synod and the most precious fruit desired as a result of it, is the *lay faithful's hearkening to the call of Christ the Lord to work in his vineyard*, to take an active, conscientious and responsible part in the mission of the Church *in this great moment in history*, made especially dramatic by occurring on the threshold of the Third Millennium.

A new state of affairs today both in the Church and in social, economic, political and cultural life, calls with a particular urgency for the action of the lay faithful. If lack of commitment is always unacceptable, the present time renders it even more so. *It is not permissible for anyone to remain idle (...).*

The voice of the Lord clearly resounds in the depths of each of Christ's followers, who through faith and the sacraments of Christian initiation is made like to Jesus Christ, is incorporated as a living member in the Church and has an active part in her mission of salvation. The voice of the Lord also comes to be heard through the historic events of the Church and humanity, as the Council reminds us: "The People of God believes that it is led by the Spirit of the Lord, who fills the whole world. Moved by this faith it tries to discern authentic signs of God's presence and purpose in the events, the needs, and the longings which it shares with other people of our time. For faith throws a new

light on all things and makes known the full ideal to which God has called each individual, and thus guides the mind towards solutions which are fully human" (GS 11).

It is necessary, then, to keep a watchful eye on this our world, with its problems and values, its unrest and hopes, its defeats and triumphs: a world whose economic, social, political and cultural affairs pose problems and grave difficulties in light of the description provided by the Council in the Pastoral Constitution, *Gaudium et Spes*. *This*, then, is the vineyard; *this* is the field in which the faithful are called to fulfill their mission. Jesus wants them, as he wants all his disciples, to be the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world" (cf. *Mt* 5:13-14) (...).

Who are the Lay Faithful?

Lumen Gentium, Chapter IV

30. (...) Everything that has been said above concerning the People of God is intended for the laity, religious and clergy alike. But there are certain things which pertain in a special way to the laity, both men and women, by reason of their condition and mission. Due to the special circumstances of our time the foundations of this doctrine must be more thoroughly examined. For their pastors know how much the laity contribute to the welfare of the entire Church. They also know that they were not ordained by Christ to take upon themselves alone the entire salvific mission of the Church toward the world. On the contrary they understand that it is their noble duty to shepherd the faithful and to recognize their ministries and charisms, so that all according to their proper roles may cooperate in this common undertaking with one mind. For we must all "practice the truth in love, and so grow up in all things in Him who is head, Christ. For from Him the whole body, being closely joined and knit together through every joint of the system, according to the functioning in due measure of each single part, derives its increase to the building up of itself in love" (Eph 4:15-16).

31. The term laity is here understood to mean all the faithful except those in holy orders and those in the state of religious life specially approved by the Church. These faithful are by baptism made one body with Christ and are constituted among the People of God; they are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ; and they carry out for their own part the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world.

What specifically characterizes the laity is their secular nature. It is true that those in holy orders can at times be engaged in secular activities, and even have a secular profession. But they are by reason of their particular vocation especially and professedly ordained to the sacred ministry. Similarly, by their state in life, religious give splendid and striking testimony that the world cannot be transformed and offered to God without the spirit of the beatitudes. But the laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the world, that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven. They are called there by God that by exercising their proper function and led by the spirit of the Gospel they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven. In this way they may make Christ known to others, especially by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope and charity. Therefore, since they are tightly bound up in all types of temporal affairs it is their special task to order and to throw light upon these affairs in such a way that they may come into being and then continually increase according to Christ to the praise of the Creator and the Redeemer (...).

33. The laity are gathered together in the People of God and make up the Body of Christ under one head. Whoever they are they are called upon, as living members, to expend all their energy for the growth of the Church and its continuous sanctification, since this very energy is a gift of the Creator and a blessing of the Redeemer.

The lay apostolate, however, is a participation in the salvific mission of the Church itself. Through their baptism and confirmation all are commissioned to that apostolate by the Lord Himself. Moreover, by the sacraments, especially holy Eucharist, that charity toward God and man which is the soul of the apostolate is communicated and nourished. Now the laity are called in a special way to make the Church present and operative in those places and circumstances where only through them can it become the salt of the earth. Thus every layman, in virtue of the very gifts bestowed upon him, is at the same time a witness and a living instrument of the mission of the Church itself "according to the measure of Christ's bestowal" (Eph 4:7).

(...) Upon all the laity, therefore, rests the noble duty of working to extend the divine plan of salvation to all men and women of each epoch and in every land. Consequently, may every

opportunity be given them so that, according to their abilities and the needs of the times, they may zealously participate in the saving work of the Church (...).

37. The laity have the right, as do all Christians, to receive in abundance from their spiritual shepherds the spiritual goods of the Church, especially the assistance of the word of God and of the sacraments (Cf. C.I.C. 682). They should openly reveal to them their needs and desires with that freedom and confidence which is fitting for children of God and brothers in Christ. They are, by reason of the knowledge, competence or outstanding ability which they may enjoy, permitted and sometimes even obliged to express their opinion on those things which concern the good of the Church. When occasions arise, let this be done through the organs erected by the Church for this purpose. Let it always be done in truth, in courage and in prudence, with reverence and charity toward those who by reason of their sacred office represent the person of Christ.

The laity should, as all Christians, promptly accept in Christian obedience decisions of their spiritual shepherds, since they are representatives of Christ as well as teachers and rulers in the Church. Let them follow the example of Christ, who by His obedience even unto death, opened to all men and women the blessed way of the liberty of the children of God. Nor should they omit to pray for those placed over them, for they keep watch as having to render an account of their souls, so that they may do this with joy and not with grief (Cf. Heb 13:17).

Let the spiritual shepherds recognize and promote the dignity as well as the responsibility of the laity in the Church. Let them willingly employ their prudent advice. Let them confidently assign duties to them in the service of the Church, allowing them freedom and room for action. Further, let them encourage lay people so that they may undertake tasks on their own initiative. Attentively in Christ, let them consider with fatherly love the projects, suggestions and desires proposed by the laity. However, let the shepherds respectfully acknowledge that just freedom which belongs to everyone in this earthly city.

A great many wonderful things are to be hoped for from this familiar dialogue between the laity and their spiritual leaders: in the laity a strengthened sense of personal responsibility; a renewed enthusiasm; a more ready application of their talents to the projects of their spiritual leaders. The latter, on the other hand, aided by the experience of the laity, can more clearly and more incisively come to decisions regarding both spiritual and temporal matters. In this way, the whole Church, strengthened by each one of its members, may more effectively fulfill its mission for the life of the world.

38. Each individual layman must stand before the world as a witness to the resurrection and life of the Lord Jesus and a symbol of the living God. All the laity as a community and each one according to his ability must nourish the world with spiritual fruits (Cf. Gal 5:22). They must diffuse in the world that spirit which animates the poor, the meek, the peace makers-whom the Lord in the Gospel proclaimed as blessed (Cf. Mt 5:3-9). In a word, "Christians must be to the world what the soul is to the body." (*Epist. Ad Diognetum, 6*)

Christifideles Laici

9. The Synod Fathers have rightly pointed to the need for a definition of the lay faithful's vocation and mission in *positive terms*, through an in-depth study of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council in light of both recent documentation from the Magisterium and the lived experience of the Church, guided as she is by the Holy Spirit.

In giving a response to the question "Who are the lay faithful", the Council went beyond previous interpretations which were predominantly negative. Instead it opened itself to a decidedly positive vision and displayed a basic intention of asserting *the full belonging of the lay faithful to the Church and to its mystery*.

At the same time it insisted on the unique character of their vocation, which is in a special way to "seek the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and ordering them according to the plan of God" (LG 31). "The term 'lay faithful'" -we read in the Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*-"

is here understood to mean all the faithful except those in Holy Orders and those who belong to a religious state sanctioned by the Church. Through Baptism the lay faithful are made one body with Christ and are established among the People of God. They are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ. They carry out their own part in the mission of the whole Christian people with respect to the Church and the world" (ibid.).

Pius XII once stated: "The Faithful, more precisely the lay faithful, find themselves on the front lines of the Church's life; for them the Church is the animating principle for human society. Therefore, they in particular, ought to have an ever-clearer consciousness *not only of belonging to the Church, but of being the Church*, that is to say, the community of the faithful on earth under the leadership of the Pope, the head of all, and of the Bishops in communion with him. These *are the Church ...*" (Discourse to the New Cardinals, Feb. 20, 1946).

According to the Biblical image of the vineyard, the lay faithful, together with all the other members of the Church, are branches engrafted to Christ the true vine, and from him derive their life and fruitfulness.

Incorporation into Christ through faith and Baptism is the source of being a Christian in the mystery of the Church. This mystery constitutes the Christian's most basic "features" and serves as the basis for all the vocations and dynamism of the Christian life of the lay faithful (cf. Jn 3:5). In Christ who died and rose from the dead, the baptized become a "new creation" (*Gal 6:15; 2 Cor 5:17*), washed clean from sin and brought to life through grace.

Therefore, only through accepting the richness in mystery that God gives to the Christian in Baptism is it possible to come to a basic description of the lay faithful.

Sharers in the Priestly, Prophetic and Kingly Mission of Christ

Christifideles Laici

14. Referring to the baptized as "new born babes", the apostle Peter writes: "Come to him, to that living stone, rejected by men and women but in God's sight chosen and precious; and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ ... you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pt 2:4-5, 9).

A new aspect to the grace and dignity coming from Baptism is here introduced: the lay faithful participate, for their part, in the threefold mission of Christ as Priest, Prophet and King. This aspect has never been forgotten in the living tradition of the Church, as exemplified in the explanation which St. Augustine offers for Psalm 26: "David was anointed king. In those days only a king and a priest were anointed. These two persons prefigured the one and only priest and king who was to come, Christ (the name "Christ" means "anointed"). Not only has our head been anointed but we, his body, have also been anointed ... therefore *anointing* comes to all Christians, even though in Old Testament times it belonged only to two persons. Clearly we are the Body of Christ because we are all "anointed" and in him are "christs", that is, "anointed ones", as well as Christ himself, "The Anointed One". In a certain way, then, it thus happens that with head and body the whole Christ is formed" (Saint Augustine, *Ennar. In Ps XXVI, II, 2* CCL 38, 154 ff).

In the wake of the Second Vatican Council (LG 10), at the beginning of my pastoral ministry, my aim was to emphasize forcefully the priestly, prophetic and kingly dignity of the entire People of God in the following words: "He who was born of the Virgin Mary, the carpenter's Son -as he was thought to be-Son of the living God (confessed by Peter), has come to make us 'a kingdom of priests' The Second Vatican Council has reminded us of the mystery of this power and of the fact that the mission of Christ -Priest, Prophet-Teacher, King-continues in the Church. Everyone, the whole People of God, shares in this threefold mission" (John Paul II, *Homily at the Beginning of his Pastoral Ministry as Supreme Shepherds of the Church*, 22 October 1978: AAS 70, 946).

With this Exhortation the lay faithful are invited to take up again and reread, meditate on and assimilate with renewed understanding and love, the rich and fruitful teaching of the Council which speaks of their participation in the threefold mission of Christ.

(...) The participation of the lay faithful in the threefold mission of Christ as Priest, Prophet and King finds its source in the anointing of Baptism, its further development in Confirmation and its realization and dynamic sustenance in the Holy Eucharist. It is a participation given to each member of the lay faithful *individually*, in as much as each is one of the *many* who form the *one Body* of the Lord: in fact, Jesus showers his gifts upon the Church which is his Body and his Spouse. In such a way individuals are sharers in the threefold mission of Christ in virtue of their being members of the Church, as St. Peter clearly teaches, when he defines the baptized as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" (1 Pt 2:9). Precisely because it derives *from Church communion*, the sharing of the lay faithful in the threefold mission of Christ requires that it be lived and realized *in communion* and *for the increase of communion itself*. Saint Augustine writes: "As we call everyone 'Christians' in virtue of a mystical anointing, so we call everyone 'priests' because all are members of only one priesthood" (Saint Augustine, *De Civitate Dei, XX, 10*: CCL 48, 720).

a. Priests

Lumen Gentium

10. Christ the Lord, High Priest taken from among men (cf. Heb 5:1-5), made the new people "a kingdom and priests to God the Father" (cf. Apoc 3:1-6; 5:9-10). The baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, in order that through all those works which are those of the Christian man they may offer spiritual sacrifices

and proclaim the power of Him who has called them out of darkness into His marvelous light (cf. 1 Pt 2:4-10). Therefore all the disciples of Christ, persevering in prayer and praising God (cf. Acts 2:42,47), should present themselves as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God (cf. Rom 12:1). Everywhere on earth they must bear witness to Christ and give an answer to those who seek an account of that hope of eternal life which is in them (cf. 1 Pt 3:15).

Though they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless interrelated: each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ. The ministerial priest, by the sacred power he enjoys, teaches and rules the priestly people; acting in the person of Christ, he makes present the eucharistic sacrifice, and offers it to God in the name of all the people. But the faithful, in virtue of their royal priesthood, join in the offering of the Eucharist. They likewise exercise that priesthood in receiving the sacraments, in prayer and thanksgiving, in the witness of a holy life, and by self-denial and active charity (...).

34. The supreme and eternal Priest, Christ Jesus, since he wills to continue his witness and service also through the laity, vivifies them in this Spirit and increasingly urges them on to every good and perfect work.

For besides intimately linking them to His life and His mission, He also gives them a sharing in His priestly function of offering spiritual worship for the glory of God and the salvation of men and women. For this reason the laity, dedicated to Christ and anointed by the Holy Spirit, are marvelously called and wonderfully prepared so that ever more abundant fruits of the Spirit may be produced in them. For all their works, prayers and apostolic endeavors, their ordinary married and family life, their daily occupations, their physical and mental relaxation, if carried out in the Spirit, and even the hardships of life, if patiently borne—all these become "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pt 2:5). Together with the offering of the Lord's body, they are most fittingly offered in the celebration of the Eucharist. Thus, as those everywhere who adore in holy activity, the laity consecrate the world itself to God.

Christifideles Laici

14. (...) The lay faithful are sharers in the *priestly mission*, for which Jesus offered himself on the cross and continues to be offered in the celebration of the Eucharist for the glory of God and the salvation of humanity. Incorporated in Jesus Christ, the baptized are united to him and to his sacrifice in the offering they make of themselves and their daily activities (cf. *Rom* 12:1, 2). Speaking of the lay faithful the Council says: "For their work, prayers and apostolic endeavours, their ordinary married and family life, their daily labour, their mental and physical relaxation, if carried out in the Spirit, and even the hardships of life if patiently borne—all of these become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (cf. *1 Pt* 2:5). During the celebration of the Eucharist these sacrifices are most lovingly offered to the Father along with the Lord's body. Thus as worshipers whose every deed is holy, the lay faithful consecrate the world itself to God" (LG 34).

b. Prophets

Lumen Gentium

12. The holy people of God shares also in Christ's prophetic office; it spreads abroad a living witness to Him, especially by means of a life of faith and charity and by offering to God a sacrifice of praise, the tribute of lips which give praise to His name (cf. Heb 13:15) (...).

It is not only through the sacraments and the ministries of the Church that the Holy Spirit sanctifies and leads the people of God and enriches it with virtues, but, "allotting his gifts to everyone according as He wills" (1 Cor 12:11). He distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts He makes them fit and ready to undertake the various tasks and offices which contribute toward the renewal and building up of the Church, according to the words of the Apostle:

"The manifestation of the Spirit is given to everyone for profit" (1 Cor 12:7). These charisms, whether they be the more outstanding or the more simple and widely diffused, are to be received with thanksgiving and consolation for they are perfectly suited to and useful for the needs of the Church. Extraordinary gifts are not to be sought after, nor are the fruits of apostolic labor to be presumptuously expected from their use; but judgment as to their genuinity and proper use belongs to those who are appointed leaders in the Church, to whose special competence it belongs, not indeed to extinguish the Spirit, but to test all things and hold fast to that which is good (cf. 1 Thess 5: 12, 19-21).

35. Christ, the great Prophet, who proclaimed the Kingdom of His Father both by the testimony of His life and the power of His words, continually fulfills His prophetic office until the complete manifestation of glory. He does this not only through the hierarchy who teach in His name and with His authority, but also through the laity whom He made His witnesses and to whom He gave understanding of the faith (*sensu fidei*) and an attractiveness in speech (cf. Acts 2:17-18), so that the power of the Gospel might shine forth in their daily social and family life. They conduct themselves as children of the promise, and thus strong in faith and in hope they make the most of the present (cf. Eph 5:16; Col 5:4) and with patience await the glory that is to come (cf. Rom 8:25). Let them not, then, hide this hope in the depths of their hearts, but even in the program of their secular life let them express it by a continual conversion and by wrestling "against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness (Eph 6:12).

Just as the sacraments of the New Law, by which the life and the apostolate of the faithful are nourished, prefigure a new heaven and a new earth (cf. Apoc 21:1), so too the laity go forth as powerful proclaimers of a faith in things to be hoped for (cf. Heb 11:1), when they courageously join to their profession of faith a life springing from faith. This evangelization, that is, this announcing of Christ by a living testimony as well as by the spoken word, takes on a specific quality and a special force in that it is carried out in the ordinary surroundings of the world.

(...) Even when preoccupied with temporal cares, the laity can and must perform a work of great value for the evangelization of the world. For even if some of them have to fulfill their religious duties on their own, when there are no sacred ministers or in times of persecution; and even if many of them devote all their energies to apostolic work; still it remains for each one of them to cooperate in the external spread and the dynamic growth of the Kingdom of Christ in the world. Therefore, let the laity devotedly strive to acquire a more profound grasp of revealed truth, and let them insistently beg of God the gift of wisdom.

Christifideles Laici

14. (...) Through their participation in the *prophetic mission* of Christ, "who proclaimed the kingdom of his Father by the testimony of his life and by the power of his word" (LG 34), the lay faithful are given the ability and responsibility to accept the gospel in faith and to proclaim it in word and deed, without hesitating to courageously identify and denounce evil. United to Christ, the "great prophet" (Lk 7:16), and in the Spirit made "witnesses" of the Risen Christ, the lay faithful are made sharers in the appreciation of the Church's supernatural faith, that "cannot err in matters of belief" (LG 12) and sharers as well in the grace of the word (cf. Acts 2:17-18; Rev 19:10). They are also called to allow the newness and the power of the gospel to shine out everyday in their family and social life, as well as to express patiently and courageously in the contradictions of the present age their hope of future glory even "through the framework of their secular life" (LG 35).

c. Kings

Lumen Gentium

13. (...) Though there are many nations there is but one people of God, which takes its citizens from every race, making them citizens of a kingdom which is of a heavenly rather than of an earthly

nature. All the faithful, scattered though they be throughout the world, are in communion with each other in the Holy Spirit, and so, he who dwells in Rome knows that the people of India are his members"(S. Io. Chrys. *In Io., Hom. 65,1*: PG 59, 361). Since the kingdom of Christ is not of this world (cf. Jn 18:36) the Church or people of God in establishing that kingdom takes nothing away from the temporal welfare of any people. On the contrary it fosters and takes to itself, insofar as they are good, the ability, riches and customs in which the genius of each people expresses itself. Taking them to itself it purifies, strengthens, elevates and ennobles them. The Church in this is mindful that she must bring together the nations for that king to whom they were given as an inheritance (cf. Ps 2:8), and to whose city they bring gifts and offerings (cf. Ps 71(72):10; Is 60:4-7). This characteristic of universality which adorns the people of God is a gift from the Lord Himself. By reason of it, the Catholic Church strives constantly and with due effect to bring all humanity and all its possessions back to its source In Christ, with Him as its head and united in His Spirit. (Cf. S. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer. III, 16,6*: PG 7,925 C).

In virtue of this catholicity each individual part contributes through its special gifts to the good of the other parts and of the whole Church. Through the common sharing of gifts and through the common effort to attain fullness in unity, the whole and each of the parts receive increase. (...). All men and women are called to be part of this catholic unity of the people of God which in promoting universal peace presages it. And there belong to or are related to it in various ways, the Catholic faithful, all who believe in Christ, and indeed the whole of mankind, for all men and women are called by the grace of God to salvation (...).

36. Christ, becoming obedient even unto death and because of this exalted by the Father (cf. Phil 2:8-9), entered into the glory of His kingdom. To Him all things are made subject until He subjects Himself and all created things to the Father that God may be all in all (cf. 1 Cor 15:27-28). Now Christ has communicated this royal power to His disciples that they might be constituted in royal freedom and that by true penance and a holy life they might conquer the reign of sin in themselves (cf. Rom 6:12). Further, He has shared this power so that serving Christ in their fellow men and women they might by humility and patience lead their brethren to that King for whom to serve is to reign. But the Lord wishes to spread His kingdom also by means of the laity, namely, a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace (from the *Preface* of Christ the King). In this kingdom creation itself will be delivered from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the sons of God (cf. Rom 8:21). Clearly then a great promise and a great trust is committed to the disciples: "All things are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's" (1 Cor 3:23).

The faithful, therefore, must learn the deepest meaning and the value of all creation, as well as its role in the harmonious praise of God. They must assist each other to live holier lives even in their daily occupations. In this way the world may be permeated by the spirit of Christ and it may more effectively fulfill its purpose in justice, charity and peace. The laity have the principal role in the overall fulfillment of this duty. Therefore, by their competence in secular training and by their activity, elevated from within by the grace of Christ, let them vigorously contribute their effort, so that created goods may be perfected by human labor, technical skill and civic culture for the benefit of all men and women according to the design of the Creator and the light of His Word. May the goods of this world be more equitably distributed among all men and women, and may they in their own way be conducive to universal progress in human and Christian freedom. In this manner, through the members of the Church, will Christ progressively illumine the whole of human society with His saving light.

Moreover, let the laity also by their combined efforts remedy the customs and conditions of the world, if they are an inducement to sin, so that they all may be conformed to the norms of justice and may favor the practice of virtue rather than hinder it. By so doing they will imbue culture and human activity with genuine moral values; they will better prepare the field of the world for the seed of the Word of God; and at the same time they will open wider the doors of the Church by which the message of peace may enter the world.

Because of the very economy of salvation the faithful should learn how to distinguish carefully between those rights and duties which are theirs as members of the Church, and those which they have as members of human society. Let them strive to reconcile the two, remembering that in every temporal affair they must be guided by a Christian conscience, since even in secular business there is no human activity which can be withdrawn from God's dominion. In our own time, however, it is most urgent that this distinction and also this harmony should shine forth more clearly than ever in the lives of the faithful, so that the mission of the Church may correspond more fully to the special conditions of the world today. For it must be admitted that the temporal sphere is governed by its own principles, since it is rightly concerned with the interests of this world. But that ominous doctrine which attempts to build a society with no regard whatever for religion, and which attacks and destroys the religious liberty of its citizens, is rightly to be rejected.

Christifideles Laici

14. (...) Because the lay faithful belong to Christ, Lord and King of the Universe, they share in his *kingly mission* and are called by him to spread that Kingdom in history. They exercise their kingship as Christians, above all in the spiritual combat in which they seek to overcome in themselves the kingdom of sin (cf. *Rom 6:12*), and then to make a gift of themselves so as to serve, in justice and in charity, Jesus who is himself present in all his brothers and sisters, above all in the very least (cf. *Mt 25:40*).

But in particular the lay faithful are called to restore to creation all its original value. In ordering creation to the authentic well-being of humanity in an activity governed by the life of grace, they share in the exercise of the power with which the Risen Christ draws all things to himself and subjects them along with himself to the Father, so that God might be everything to everyone (cf. *1 Cor 15:28; Jn 12:32*) (...).

41. (...) Through charity towards one's neighbor, the lay faithful exercise and manifest their participation in the kingship of Christ, that is, in the power of the Son of man who "came not to be served but to serve" (*Mk 10:45*).

The "Secular Character" of the Laity

Lumen Gentium

31. (...) What specifically characterizes the laity is their secular nature. It is true that those in holy orders can at times be engaged in secular activities, and even have a secular profession. But they are by reason of their particular vocation especially and professedly ordained to the sacred ministry. Similarly, by their state in life, religious give splendid and striking testimony that the world cannot be transformed and offered to God without the spirit of the beatitudes. But the laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the world, that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven. They are called there by God that by exercising their proper function and led by the spirit of the Gospel they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven. In this way they may make Christ known to others, especially by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope and charity. Therefore, since they are tightly bound up in all types of temporal affairs it is their special task to order and to throw light upon these affairs in such a way that they may come into being and then continually increase according to Christ to the praise of the Creator and the Redeemer.

Christifideles Laici

15. The newness of the Christian life is the foundation and title for equality among all the baptized in Christ, for all the members of the People of God: "As members, they share a common dignity from their rebirth in Christ, they have the same filial grace and the same vocation to perfection. They possess in common one salvation, one hope and one undivided charity" (LG 32). Because of the one dignity flowing from Baptism, each member of the lay faithful, together with ordained ministers and men and women religious, shares a responsibility for the Church's mission.

But among the lay faithful this one baptismal dignity takes on *a manner of life which sets a person apart, without, however, bringing about a separation* from the ministerial priesthood or from men and women religious. The Second Vatican Council has described this manner of life as the "secular character": "The secular character is properly and particularly that of the lay faithful" (LG 31).

To understand properly the lay faithful's position in the Church in a complete, adequate and specific manner it is necessary to come to a deeper theological understanding of their secular character in light of God's plan of salvation and in the context of the mystery of the Church.

Pope Paul VI said the Church "has an authentic secular dimension, inherent to her inner nature and mission, which is deeply rooted in the mystery of the Word Incarnate, and which is realized in different forms through her members".

The Church, in fact, lives in the world, even if she is not of the world (cf. *Jn 17:16*). She is sent to continue the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, which "by its very nature concerns the salvation of humanity, and also involves the renewal of the whole temporal order" (AA 5)

Certainly *all the members* of the Church are sharers in this secular dimension but *in different ways*. In particular the sharing of the *lay faithful* has its own manner of realization and function, which, according to the Council, is "properly and particularly" theirs. Such a manner is designated with the expression "secular character" (LG 31)

In fact the Council, in describing the lay faithful's situation in the secular world, points to it above all, as the place in which they receive their call from God: "There they are called by God". This "place" is treated and presented in dynamic terms: the lay faithful "live in the world, that is, in every one of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very fabric of their existence is woven". They are persons who live an ordinary life in the world: they study, they work, they form relationships as friends, professionals, members of society, cultures, etc. However, the Council considers their condition not simply an external and environmental framework, but as a reality *destined to find in Jesus Christ the fullness of its meaning*.

Indeed it leads to the affirmation that "the Word made flesh willed to share in human fellowship ... He sanctified those human ties, especially family ones, from which social relationships arise, willingly submitting himself to the laws of his country. He chose to lead the life of an ordinary craftsman of his own time and place" (GS 32).

The "world" thus becomes the place and the means for the lay faithful to fulfill their Christian vocation, because the world itself is destined to glorify God the Father in Christ. The Council is able then to indicate the proper and special sense of the divine vocation which is directed to the lay faithful. They are not called to abandon the position that they have in the world. Baptism does not take them from the world at all, as the apostle Paul points out: "So, brethren, in whatever state each was called, there let him remain with God" (1 Cor 7:24). On the contrary, he entrusts a vocation to them that properly concerns their situation in the world. The lay faithful, in fact, "are called by God so that they, led by the spirit of the Gospel, might contribute to the sanctification of the world, as from within like leaven, by fulfilling their own particular duties. Thus, especially in this way of life, resplendent in faith, hope and charity they manifest Christ to others" (LG 31). Thus for the lay faithful, to be present and active in the world is not only an anthropological and sociological reality, but in a specific way, a theological and ecclesiological reality as well. In fact, in their situation in the world God manifests his plan and communicates to them their particular vocation of "seeking the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God". Precisely with this in mind the Synod Fathers said: "The secular character of the lay faithful is not therefore to be defined only in a sociological sense, but most especially in a theological sense. The term *secular* must be understood in light of the act of God the creator and redeemer, who has handed over the world to women and men, so that they may participate in the work of creation, free creation from the influence of sin and sanctify themselves in marriage or the celibate life, in a family, in a profession and in the various activities of society".

The lay faithful's *position in the Church*, then, comes to be fundamentally defined by their *newness in Christian life* and distinguished by their *secular character*.

The images taken from the gospel of salt, light and leaven, although indiscriminately applicable to all Jesus' disciples, are specifically applied to the lay faithful. They are particularly meaningful images because they speak not only of the deep involvement and the full participation of the lay faithful in the affairs of the earth, the world and the human community, but also and above all, they tell of the radical newness and unique character of an involvement and participation which has as its purpose the spreading of the Gospel that brings salvation (...).

17. The vocation of the lay faithful to holiness implies that life according to the Spirit expresses itself in a particular way in their *involvement in temporal affairs* and in their *participation in earthly activities*. Once again the apostle admonishes us: "Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col 3:17). Applying the apostle's words to the lay faithful, the Council categorically affirms: "Neither family concerns nor other secular affairs should be excluded from their religious programme of life" (AA 4). Likewise the Synod Fathers have said: "The unity of life of the lay faithful is of the greatest importance: indeed they must be sanctified in everyday professional and social life. Therefore, to respond to their vocation, the lay faithful must see their daily activities as an occasion to join themselves to God, fulfill his will, serve other people and lead them to communion with God in Christ".

Apostolicam Actuositatem

2. (...) In the Church there is a diversity of ministry but a oneness of mission. Christ conferred on the Apostles and their successors the duty of teaching, sanctifying, and ruling in His name and power. But the laity likewise share in the priestly, prophetic, and royal office of Christ and therefore have their own share in the mission of the whole people of God in the Church and in the world. (LG 31)
They exercise the apostolate in fact by their activity directed to the evangelization and sanctification of men and women and to the penetrating and perfecting of the temporal order through the spirit of the Gospel. In this way, their temporal activity openly bears witness to Christ and promotes the

salvation of men and women. Since the laity, in accordance with their state of life, live in the midst of the world and its concerns, they are called by God to exercise their apostolate in the world like leaven, with the ardor of the spirit of Christ (...).

5. Christ's redemptive work, while essentially concerned with the salvation of men and women, includes also the renewal of the whole temporal order. Hence the mission of the Church is not only to bring the message and grace of Christ to men and women but also to penetrate and perfect the temporal order with the spirit of the Gospel. In fulfilling this mission of the Church, the Christian laity exercise their apostolate both in the Church and in the world, in both the spiritual and the temporal orders. These orders, although distinct, are so connected in the singular plan of God that He Himself intends to raise up the whole world again in Christ and to make it a new creation, initially on earth and completely on the last day. In both orders the layman, being simultaneously a believer and a citizen, should be continuously led by the same Christian conscience. (...)

7. God's plan for the world is that men and women should work together to renew and constantly perfect the temporal order. All those things which make up the temporal order, namely, the good things of life and the prosperity of the family, culture, economic matters, the arts and professions, the laws of the political community, international relations, and other matters of this kind, as well as their development and progress, not only aid in the attainment of man's ultimate goal but also possess their own intrinsic value. This value has been established in them by God, whether they are considered in themselves or as parts of the whole temporal order. "God saw that all He had made was very good" (Gen. 1:31). This natural goodness of theirs takes on a special dignity as a result of their relation to the human person, for whose service they were created. It has pleased God to unite all things, both natural and supernatural, in Christ Jesus "so that in all things He may have the first place" (Col. 1:18). This destination, however, not only does not deprive the temporal order of its independence, its proper goals, laws, supports, and significance for human welfare but rather perfects the temporal order in its own intrinsic strength and worth and puts it on a level with man's whole vocation upon earth.

(...) The laity must take up the renewal of the temporal order as their own special obligation. Led by the light of the Gospel and the mind of the Church and motivated by Christian charity, they must act directly and in a definite way in the temporal sphere. As citizens they must cooperate with other citizens with their own particular skill and on their own responsibility. Everywhere and in all things they must seek the justice of God's kingdom. The temporal order must be renewed in such a way that, without detriment to its own proper laws, it may be brought into conformity with the higher principles of the Christian life and adapted to the shifting circumstances of time, place, and peoples. Preeminent among the works of this type of apostolate is that of Christian social action which the sacred synod desires to see extended to the whole temporal sphere, including culture (...).

The various fields of the Apostolate of the Laity

Apostolicam Actuositatem

7. (...) At the present time, with the development of more rapid facilities for communication, with the barrier of distance separating men greatly reduced, with the inhabitants of the entire globe becoming one great family, these charitable activities and works have become more urgent and universal. These charitable enterprises can and should reach out to all persons and all needs. Wherever there are people in need of food and drink, clothing, housing, medicine, employment, education; wherever men and women lack the facilities necessary for living a truly human life or are afflicted with serious distress or illness or suffer exile or imprisonment, there Christian charity should seek them out and find them, console them with great solicitude, and help them with appropriate relief. This obligation is imposed above all upon every prosperous nation and person.

In order that the exercise of charity on this scale may be unexceptionable in appearance as well as in fact, it is altogether necessary that one should consider in one's neighbor the image of God in which he has been created, and also Christ the Lord to Whom is really offered whatever is given to a needy person. It is imperative also that the freedom and dignity of the person being helped be respected with the utmost consideration, that the purity of one's charitable intentions be not stained by seeking one's own advantage or by striving for domination, and especially that the demands of justice be satisfied lest the giving of what is due in justice be represented as the offering of a charitable gift. Not only the effects but also the causes of these ills must be removed and the help be given in such a way that the recipients may gradually be freed from dependence on outsiders and become self-sufficient.

Therefore, the laity should hold in high esteem and, according to their ability, aid the works of charity and projects for social assistance, whether public or private, including international programs whereby effective help is given to needy individuals and peoples. In so doing, they should cooperate with all men and women of good will (...).

9. The laity carry out their manifold apostolate both in the Church and in the world. In both areas there are various opportunities for apostolic activity. We wish to list here the more important fields of action, namely, church communities, the family, youth, the social milieu, and national and international levels. Since in our times women have an ever more active share in the whole life of society, it is very important that they participate more widely also in the various fields of the Church's apostolate. (...).

13. The apostolate in the social milieu, that is, the effort to infuse a Christian spirit into the mentality, customs, laws, and structures of the community in which one lives, is so much the duty and responsibility of the laity that it can never be performed properly by others. In this area the laity can exercise the apostolate of like toward like. It is here that they complement the testimony of life with the testimony of the word. It is here where they work or practice their profession or study or reside or spend their leisure time or have their companionship that they are more capable of helping their brethren.

The laity fulfill this mission of the Church in the world especially by conforming their lives to their faith so that they become the light of the world as well as by practicing honesty in all their dealings so that they attract all to the love of the true and the good and finally to the Church and to Christ. They fulfill their mission also by fraternal charity which presses them to share in the living conditions, labors, sorrows, and aspirations of their brethren with the result that the hearts of all about them are quietly prepared for the workings of saving grace. Another requisite for the accomplishment of their task is a full consciousness of their role in building up society whereby they strive to perform their domestic, social, and professional duties with such Christian generosity that their manner of acting should gradually penetrate the whole world of life and labor.

This apostolate should reach out to all wherever they may be encountered; it should not exclude any spiritual or temporal benefit which they have the ability to confer. True apostles however, are not content with this activity alone but endeavor to announce Christ to their neighbors by means of the spoken word as well. For there are many persons who can hear the Gospel and recognize Christ only through the laity who live near them (...).

10. A vast field for the apostolate has opened up on the national and international levels where the laity especially assist with their Christian wisdom. In loyalty to their country and in faithful fulfillment of their civic obligations, Catholics should feel themselves obliged to promote the true common good. Thus they should make the weight of their opinion felt in order that the civil authority may act with justice and that legislation may conform to moral precepts and the common good. Catholics skilled in public affairs and adequately enlightened in faith and Christian doctrine should not refuse to administer public affairs since by doing this in a worthy manner they can both further the common good and at the same time prepare the way for the Gospel.

Catholics should try to cooperate with all men and women of good will to promote whatever is true, whatever just, whatever holy, whatever lovable (cf. Phil. 4:8). They should hold discussions with them, excel them in prudence and courtesy, and initiate research on social and public practices which should be improved in line with the spirit of the Gospel.

Among the signs of our times, the irresistibly increasing sense of the solidarity of all peoples is especially noteworthy. It is a function of the lay apostolate sedulously to promote this awareness and to transform it into a sincere and genuine love of brotherhood. Furthermore, the laity should be aware of the international field and of the questions and solutions, doctrinal as well as practical, which arise in this field, with special reverence to developing nations.

All who work in or give help to foreign nations must remember that relations among peoples should be a genuine fraternal exchange in which each party is at the same time a giver and a receiver. Travelers, whether their interest is international affairs, business, or leisure, should remember that they are itinerant heralds of Christ wherever they go and should act accordingly.

Christifideles Laici

33. The lay faithful, precisely because they are members of the Church, have the vocation and mission of proclaiming the Gospel: they are prepared for this work by the sacraments of Christian initiation and by the gifts of the Holy Spirit (...).

34. (...) Many vital traditions of piety and popular forms of Christian religion are still conserved; but today this moral and spiritual patrimony runs the risk of being dispersed under the impact of a multiplicity of processes, including secularization and the spread of sects. Only a re-evangelization can assure the growth of a clear and deep faith, and serve to make these traditions a force for authentic freedom.

Without doubt a mending of the Christian fabric of society is urgently needed in all parts of the world. But for this to come about what is needed is to *first remake the Christian fabric of the ecclesial community itself* present in these countries and nations.

At this moment the lay faithful, in virtue of their participation in the prophetic mission of Christ, are fully part of this work of the Church. Their responsibility, in particular, is to testify how the Christian faith constitutes the only fully valid response-consciously perceived and stated by all in varying degrees-to the problems and hopes that life poses to every person and society. This will be possible if the lay faithful will know how to overcome in themselves the separation of the Gospel from life, to again take up in their daily activities in family, work and society, an integrated approach to life that is fully brought about by the inspiration and strength of the Gospel. (...).

36. In both accepting and proclaiming the Gospel in the power of the Spirit the Church becomes at one and the same time an "evangelizing and evangelized" community, and for this very reason she is made the *servant of all*. In her the lay faithful participate in the mission of service to the person and

society. Without doubt the Church has the Kingdom of God as her supreme goal, of which "she on earth is its seed and beginning" (LG 5), and is therefore totally consecrated to the glorification of the Father. However, the Kingdom is the source of full liberation and total salvation for all people: with this in mind, then, the Church walks and lives, intimately bound in a real sense to their history (...). The person "is the primary route that the Church must travel in fulfilling her mission: the individual is the *primary and fundamental way for the Church*, the way traced out by Christ himself, the way that leads in variably through the mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption" (*Redemptor Hominis*, 14) (...).

37. *To rediscover and make others rediscover the inviolable dignity of every human person* makes up an essential task, in a certain sense, the central and unifying task of the service which the Church, and the lay faithful in her, are called to render to the human family (...).

40. (...) The *lay faithful's duty to society primarily begins* in marriage and in the family. This duty can only be fulfilled adequately with the conviction of the unique and irreplaceable value that the family has in the development of society and the Church herself (...).

41. (...) Mercy to the poor and the sick, works of charity and mutual aid intended to relieve human needs of every kind, are held in special honour in the Church" (148). *Charity towards one's neighbor*, through contemporary forms of the traditional spiritual and corporal works of mercy, represent the most immediate, ordinary and habitual ways that lead to the Christian animation of the temporal order, the specific duty of the lay faithful. Through charity towards one's neighbor, the lay faithful exercise and manifest their participation in the kingship of Christ, that is, in the power of the Son of man who "came not to be served but to serve" (*Mk* 10:45). They live and manifest such a kingship in a most simple yet exalted manner, possible for everyone at all times because charity is the highest gift offered by the Spirit for building up the Church (cf. *1 Cor* 13:13) and for the good of humanity. In fact, *charity gives life and sustains the works of solidarity that look to the total needs of the human being* (...).

42. A charity that loves and serves the person is never able to be separated from *justice*. Each in its own way demands the full, effective acknowledgment of the rights of the individual, to which society is ordered in all its structures and institutions (For the relationship between justice and mercy, see John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Dives in Misericordia*, 12: AAS 72, 1215-1217).

In order to achieve their task directed to the Christian animation of the temporal order, in the sense of serving persons and society, the lay faithful *are never to relinquish their participation in "public life"*, that is, in the many different economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural areas, which are intended to promote organically and institutionally the *common good*. (...).

43. Service to society on the part of the lay faithful finds its essence in the *socio-economic question*, which depends on the organization of *work* (...). The basis for the social doctrine of the Church is the principle of *the universal destination of goods*. According to the plan of God the goods of the earth are offered to all people and to each individual as a means towards the development of a truly human life. At the service of this destination of goods is *private property*, which -precisely for this purpose- possesses an *intrinsic social function* (...). Once again, all of this comes to mind in a particular way in the mission of the lay faithful (...). In the context of the transformations taking place in the world of economy and work which are a cause of concern, the lay faithful have the responsibility of being in the forefront in working out a solution to the very serious problems of growing unemployment; to fight for the most opportune overcoming of numerous injustices that come from organizations of work which lack a proper goal; to make the workplace become a community of persons respected in their uniqueness and in their right to participation; to develop new solidarity among those that participate in a common work; to raise up new forms of

entrepreneurship and to look again at systems of commerce, finance and exchange of technology (...).

44. (...) The Church calls upon the lay faithful to be present, as signs of courage and intellectual creativity, in the privileged places of culture, that is, the world of education - school and university - in places of scientific and technological research, the areas of artistic creativity and work in the humanities. Such a presence is destined not only for the recognition and possible purification of the elements that critically burden existing culture, but also for the elevation of these cultures through the riches which have their source in the Gospel and the Christian faith.

Scalabrini and The Laity

THE PRIESTHOOD OF THE FAITHFUL

"For us the universe is like a great book in which are recorded the innumerable favors of the Creator. It is up to us to read the Word of God's love, wisdom, and omnipotence written on the face of things; the Word of God who for our sake drew all these things from nothing and for our sake keeps them from falling back into nothingness. Given the inability of the other creatures, human beings have received the honor and responsibility of being their spokespersons and priests of the universe, giving voice to inanimate nature in its hymn of glory and universal gratitude to the Creator!"

For the inauguration of the Church of Mt. Carmel in Piacenza, Feb. 17, 1884 (AGS 3018/2).

CITIZEN OF ETERNITY

"What God ultimately has in mind in working thorough human events is the spread and triumph of religion. In this magnificent plan nothing is isolated any longer: one being is related to another, one action to another. All individuals and nations have a role to play; all have a share in the work of building up the edifice. Doing our part means fulfilling the designs of divine Providence. It means weaving, during our lifetime, the eternal crown of justice that, even before his death, St. Paul knew he would receive. On the other hand, doing our part poorly means disturbing the order established by God. It means failing to come up to God's expectations. It means burdening our conscience with the guilt of the servant who buried his talents instead of trading with it."

First annual meeting of the Parish Committees (1882?) (AGS 3018/18)

LAY PEOPLE ARE APOSTLES

" Brothers and sisters, you too must be apostles, that is, people of action and sacrifice, zealous for the honor of God and the Church, aflame with love for souls. Who ever said that, just because you are lay people, you cannot exercise the apostolate of the word in the little world around you by using uplifting speech in your conversations, your instructions, and your admonitions? Who ever said you cannot exercise the apostolate of good example by openly professing your faith, cost what it may! What about the apostolate of charity: helping the poor, visiting the sick, consoling the afflicted, doing good to all? What about the apostolate of civilization: cooperating in the work of destroying sin, which depraves people, and in the work of advancing justice, which brings prosperity to nations? When the fatherland is in supreme need, every citizen becomes a soldier. When the Church is in desperate need, every believer must be an apostle, nay, a fervent and generous apostle."

Panegyric for the Feast of St. Columbanus, Sept. 9, 1894 (AGS 3017/4).

THE APOSTOLIC MISSION OF LAY PEOPLE

"Lay people are soldiers of Christ, too, are they not? They too must take up arms for the support and defense of his kingdom (...). The activity of the clergy has limits beyond which it cannot go either for lack of means or programs or because situations are unfavorable or actually hostile. Lay people can go where a priest cannot. Often an exhortation from a lay person is accepted more readily than from a priest (...). Lay people, too, have their apostolate and, may I say, their apostolic mission."

Il Catechista Cattolico, 1901, v. 1, pp. 257-258.

EVERY CHRISTIAN IS BORN AN APOSTLE

"Not all of you, it is true, have been called to preach the gospel like the Apostles, but all of you have an obligation, in proportion to and in conformity with your state of life, to advance the cause of religion, to defend it, and to promote its glory. In the words of Tertullian, every Christian is born an apostle: an apostle to help keep the promoters of evil from increasing and to prevent desertions from the fields of the Divine Tiller; to keep division and dissensions from erupting; to forestall the growth of that deadly and worse-than-death coldness that keeps people from attending to their duties, to

piety, to the Word of God, to the correction of their morals, and to the exercise of Christian virtues (...).

Whoever does not feel the urge to share in the apostolate for the defense of truth and of the Church obviously has not received the gifts of the Holy Spirit, for the Holy Spirit cannot remain idle once he enters a human heart. He is an active and productive Spirit, full of power and energy. Whoever has this Spirit in his heart speaks willingly of God and of things divine, is full of zeal for the instruction of his brothers and sisters in Christian doctrine, and proclaims his readiness to die at any time for the cause of Jesus Christ and his Church."

Homily for Pentecost, 1876 (AGS 3016/6).

THE SECULAR CHARACTER OF THE LAITY

"If the day when our wayward society returns to the straight path seems far off, you, especially, O good lay people, who are disgusted and horrified by the apostasy of our society, who revere and love the name of God, you can hasten the longed-for hour. You can prepare the hearts of your brothers and sisters for repentance by professing your faith in the sight of all people, by taking pride in being Christians and working with greater alacrity. You feel honored at being able to serve the Lord and to glorify him in your speeches and writings, and in the various events of life.

You can do much because, in the words of a well-known writer, 'You are not declining old age but rising youth.' It is up to you to get hold of society and make it Christian once again by working with bold ideas and firm intentions so that the Catholic spirit will infiltrate everywhere and permeate everything having to do with the intellectual, moral and even physical life of people.

Because of foolish prejudices, so many teachings are viewed with suspicion if they come from priests but make a deep impression if they come from lay people! How many doors closed to God's minister open wide before a man of the world, who could, if he wanted, bring in with him the precious treasure of the faith! Because of your everyday contacts, you have so many ways-which a priest rarely if ever does- to get close to your brothers and sisters, to enlighten them, to speak eloquently of Jesus Christ and the Church. What a precious and fruitful apostolate you could exercise in the midst of society."

Unione, azione, preghiera, Piacenza 1890, pp.8-10.

THEY MADE THE SPIRIT OF JESUS PERMEATE EVERY FIBER OF SOCIETY

Recall the example of your forefathers and mothers (...). They set an example for us to follow even when it comes to public life. They were more concerned with just and holy laws than with politics itself. They were convinced that religion, which is essentially superior to political parties, must be served by all and not be the servant of anyone. They were not so arrogant as to pretend that the Church should be ruled by their lights or by the norms of earthly prudence, which, after all, is so criminally indulgent and misleading vis-a-vis the world. Instead, as true followers of the Redeemer, true disciples of the gospel and true patriots, they made the spirit of Jesus permeate every fiber of society and created the stupendous harmonies of the Christian world and Christian civilization.

Dearly beloved, if that spirit truly burns in you, it will indeed burst into life and turn into action. It will pass on from you to other souls, to your family, to your relatives and friends, to your fellow citizens, to the whole world around you, be it big or small. This priesthood, this lay apostolate, was always a duty and an honor, but today it is a supreme, urgent and absolute need.

Lett. Past. (...) per la Santa Quaresima dell'anno 1893, Piacenza 1893, pp.21-23

THE LAY POWER OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

The activity of lay people must be joined harmoniously to the activity of the clergy (...). The lay Church of Satan must be counteracted not just by priestly power but also by the lay power of Christ's Church. God has always given victory to these two forces (priests and people) when joined together. "The gates of hell shall never prevail against my Church," he assured us. Now, the Church, in its fullest sense, the Church the beloved spouse of Nazarene, the Church the immortal kingdom of the living God, the Church the mystical body of Jesus, is not made up just of priests, nor just of

bishops, nor just the Pope, but of the shepherds and faithful together, even though the latter depend on the former.

Azione Cattolica, Piacenza 1896, pp. 16-17

BE OUR MEDIATORS

There is no question that Jesus Christ could defend and safeguard his Church. But, in his great kindness, he called human beings to the honor of being her helpers. He did not call only the priests but also the lay people. He called men and women, the mighty and the humble. Rich and poor learned and unlearned.

My beloved lay people; you must therefore appreciate the nobility and dignity of your mission and must try to live up to it (...). Be our mediators just as we are God's mediators on your behalf (...). Of what use is it to deplore with endless lamentations the decline of faith and morals and the universal chaos, if we do not do anything to remedy the situation; if, once the battles begins, we abandon the field, run away, and hide? Were we not all marked on our foreheads with the oil of the strong? Were we not all enrolled in the army of Christ?

Ibid., pp. 18-20

EVERYONE IS AN APOSTLE OF THE TRUTH

All of us, with courage, constancy, and discipline, must use all the lawful means at our disposal to influence this society, the majority of which is Catholic, a majority, however, that is ruled by an unconcerned and antichristian minority. I say all of us, because we would make a serious mistake if we thought that the defense of the faith is the exclusive duty of the clergy, whereas it is really the duty of all those who profess it.

The Church, the mystical, body of Christ, is a moral body, made up of many members, different from each other, yet all united in one single body, with a structure and supply network by which all the members can help each other and contribute to its life, vigor, health, and preservation. Now, since the Church is made up of both clergy and laity, the clergy cannot succeed without the laity, nor the laity without the clergy. No, religion is not a patrimony of which the clergy alone are the beneficiaries. Since religion serves everybody, it must be defended by all (...).

No age, office or state of life is exempt from this duty, just as no office, age or state of life is excluded from its benefits. On the other hand, when religion languishes, when consciences demean themselves and freedom dies out, is it the fault of the clergy alone? Do not lay people, too, and all of society suffers great harm when this happens? Moreover, a faith that can look with indifference and insensibility on the spread of evil and that, in the midst of blasphemies and scandals, is able only to focus on itself so as not to perish, is a faith some might consider good. But frankly it is something I find quite hard to understand. Besides, religion is truth. Every person possessing the truth has the duty to spread it, to share it with those who do not know it, and to defend it with all one's energy when it is attacked. In this sense, everyone is an apostle of the truth just as everyone can become a martyr of the truth.

For the inauguration of the diocesan and parochial Committees, April 18, 18881(AGS 3018/18)

LAITY AND CHURCH: TWO SISTERS INDISSOLUBLY UNITED

What a beautiful and consoling spectacle we are witnessing! Standing next their holy shepherds and mingling with an illustrious group of priests, we see an equally illustrious group of lay people, all animated by the desire to do good, all aflame with a lofty zeal for the holiest of causes, namely the cause of the Church (...).

Today, unfortunately, some are trying to erect a wall between laity and Church, between these two realities that are sisters indissolubly united. To better attain this end, what have the followers of modern liberalism done? They have tried to make the Church an object of hatred, painting it in the eyes of the people with dark colors. They have profaned the holiest and most precious terms and given them outrageous meanings so as to turn them against her. Against the Church's members,

things, and liberty, human dignity, science, equality, and progress: terms that, coming from them, are fraudulent and dripping with blood.

Now, to know, love, and obey this Church, to be concerned with her struggles and victories, to spread her teachings and help her ministers, to defend her rights and make up for the harm done to her, to comfort her sorrows, this, especially in our days, is one of the most important duties of Catholics. This is what the united efforts of clergy and laity should aim at.

Opening of the 4th Regional Assembly of the Opera dei Congressi, June 11, 1897 (AGS 30018/18)

TODAY THE LAITY'S FIELD OF WORK IS VAST

What a vast field of activity lay people have in our days: promoting, encouraging, and distributing good literature; creating and organizing Catholic committees and societies; ceaselessly campaigning for religious instruction in our schools and for Sunday rest; contributing to political administration, whenever permissible, by voting in municipal elections; counteracting by word and deed, whenever necessary, the pernicious influence of the Masonic miasma, that has by now penetrated everywhere; whenever possible, getting rid of those bullies, those cowards in the municipalities who sometimes dare to wound the deepest sentiments of their people by letting this faith be ridiculed and their most sacred rights and most cherished traditions trampled underfoot; gathering the youngsters at the Sunday youth centers and schools of Christian doctrine, thus keeping them away from the corruption of the world; coming to the assistance of our august Common Father in his poverty through our filial offerings; supplying our churches with new ministers by our offerings for the support of poor seminarians; setting up credit unions that will root out usury and help those in need, especially among the working class; demanding with dignity and wisdom but with strength, courage, and determination, and always by legal means, real and genuine freedom and independence for the Supreme Pontiff, our head and father, the kind of freedom and independence he, the only judge on the matter, considers necessary. All these works, one more necessary and meritorious than the others, will confound the enemies of the faith, will nourish the flame of divine love in us, and will show that we really are worthy sons and daughters of the Church of Jesus Christ.

Opening of the 4th Regional Assembly of the Opera dei Congressi, June 11, 1897(AGS 3018/18)

Scalabrini and the St. Raphael's Society

A COMMITTEE OF LAY PEOPLE UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF A BISHOP

Your Excellency, I am taking the liberty of sending you a copy of a modest paper of mine on Italian emigration as a small token of my great esteem for you. Since I know this matter is of great concern to you, I hope you will give it your wise and powerful support.

I would say that the idea was received with enthusiasm everywhere. Already a number of rather distinguish priests and lay people have volunteered to set up an appropriate committee to collect funds and asked me to take charge of the committee.

Monsignor, I am convinced we should welcome these generous dispositions, promptly roll up our sleeves, and not let others beat us to the punch. I believe that a committee of lay people under the supervision of a bishop answerable to Propaganda Fide is necessary to prepare the vast work that must precede the realization of the program of evangelization being prepared by the Sacred Congregation.

It is extremely important, first of all, to free our emigrants from the hands of speculating agents who are driving so many poor souls, especially young boys and girls, to eternal ruin. I believe that the help of the secular arm is indispensable for this purpose. A lay, or mostly lay, committee could have freer recourse to it with better hopes of success than would a church commission. Moreover, I think that the lay project dealing with humanitarian assistance should be kept separate from the church organization in charge of spiritual care. As I said before, the lay committee should do all the ground work and provide the means needed to make the mission of the church organization possible.

In agreement with the distinguish Bishop of Cremona, who would also become a board member of the general committee, I would be prepared to open here in Piacenza a house for priests whom God will inspire to dedicate themselves to this work of charity. I have no doubt that the people who will be on this committee and other well-wishers will provide the material means for it; but I trust most of all in divine Providence. In this way, the project of Propaganda Fide will have a clear path ahead and will not come to grief, which might happen if it were to run into obstacles and impediments.

Letter to Mons. D. Jacobini, July 2, 1887 (AGS 1/1)

AN ASSOCIATION OF ASSISTANCE THAT IS AT ONCE RELIGIOUS AND LAY

The needs of our emigrants are of two kinds: moral and material. I would like an Association of Assistance to be organized in Italy, which would be both religious and lay and would thus be fully responsive to both needs.

From the religious point of view, the field of action is very vast; but the economic one is just vast.

As I have already stated, the task of such an association should be to look after the spiritual and material interests of those unfortunate people who leave land of their birth to cross the ocean. In a word;

1. To keep the emigrant from falling victim to the shameful exploitation of certain emigration agents who, in order to make money, morally and materially destroy the poor wretches who fall into their nets;
2. To set up an office that will do what is necessary for the employment of emigrants upon their arrival in America so that whenever an Italian emigrant contacts the association, he will be able to find gainful employment; otherwise, the association should make every effort to convince him not to emigrate in the first place;
3. To provide help in case of emergency or sickness, both during the voyage and after arrival;
4. To declare open war, if I may use this term, on the merchants in human flesh who are prepared to use the most sordid means for the sake of money;
5. To provide religious care during the crossing and after arrival, and in places where the emigrants will be settling.

Regarding the first point: I would like the Association to have not just contributing members but active members as well. The tasks of the latter should be various and well distributed. First of all, we

should set up committees in the main ports of the Kingdom as well as in those foreign countries where our emigrants are embarking, to welcome them, watch over them, counsel them, and defend them. Other committees should be set up in the ports to which the Italian emigrants are heading so as to forestall those very same dangers and problems that all too often are found at the ports of embarkation.

To carry out the second point, the Association should be in contact not only with the Italian Government but also with the American Governments so as to give our Italian emigration a logical and practical direction and thus ensure that, upon arriving in America, the poor peasants will know where to go and avoid making wrong decisions that will usher in an endless chain of troubles for themselves and their families. In this way, we would enable our communities to be more prosperous, better organized, and in a better position to receive help and protection from the national Government.

The third point is also very important and closely related to the previous two. The Association should make sure that, during the voyage, the emigrants are accompanied by a member of the Association or at least are entrusted to a responsible person who will help them in case of need. On the boat, there should always be a priest to minister to everyone, especially the sick.

The Association should also make sure that, where there are masses of Italian settlers, the sick are not abandoned and that those reduced to poverty because of an accident get the help they need. But to reach this goal, we should make sure that emigration is regulated and that Italians do not spread out in small groups over the vast American continent but settle instead in strong and well organized communities.

The fourth point refers to a vigorous suppression of white slavery. To achieve positive results, the Association will need the effective support of the Government, which I believe will be forthcoming if the organization brings to life the wicked things presently going on unnoticed because of general apathy.

As I have already pointed out, all too often heartless and unscrupulous emigration agents dupe families and take their young ladies away, dooming them to moral degradation and disgrace. These truly heartbreaking cases are practically the order of the day. The news media, which love to report the most trivial gossip of city life with gleeful interest, is silent about these abominable crimes. It ignores them or feigns not to know them. An association established for the protection of the emigrants must openly and constantly wage war on this wicked trade. When unable to act alone, this association should have recourse to public opinion and try to stir up people's moral indignation by denouncing at important gatherings the abuses and horrors committed against human and divine law."

"L'emigrazione Italiana in America, Piacenza 1887, pp. 41-44.

A WORK OF RELIGIOUS, PATRIOTIC, AND ECONOMIC LIBERATION

"It was then that, trusting in God and his Providence, I dared to try something. The evils of our emigration, not to mention those that are part and parcel of emigration itself, stem from the neglect in which emigration is left. We can sum them up as follows: loss of faith for lack of religious instruction, a loss of a sense of nationality for lack of any motivation to keep it alive, and financial ruin as a result of shameful exploitation.

So I founded two societies with the purpose of lessening and, if at all possible, eradicating those evils; two societies, one made up of priests, the other of lay people; one religious, the other lay; two societies to help and complement each other. The first is the Congregation of the Missionaries focusing especially on the spiritual welfare of our emigrants, the other on their material welfare. The first attains its purpose by setting up churches, schools, orphanages, and hospitals through priests united family-like by the religious vows of chastity, obedience, and poverty, ready and willing to rush wherever they are sent, as apostles, teachers, doctors, or nurses, according to the needs. The second society carries out its task by discouraging emigration when it is unwise, keeping an eye on the work of emigration agents, seeing to it that they do not violate the law, and, if everything else fails, counseling the emigrants and channeling them toward good destinations.

It is surely a tremendous task for anyone, but even more so for me, bereft as I am of means and ability. I thought-and the facts proved me right-that our indifference was due to the lack of a spirit of initiative, to ignorance of what is going on, and, if you wish, to the fact that our country has lost the habit of undertaking certain ventures, rather than to ill will. I felt that if ever one voice, motivated simply by love of religion and country, were raised to awaken the sleepy and the indolent, it would not be a cry in the desert. I felt that a person firmly determined to eradicate so many evils would also find people with equal determination to fight alongside with him. I felt that Italy, which gives the world heroic missionaries, missionaries who bring the light of the Gospel and civilization to the most inhospitable lands and who lead uncivilized nations to the feet of the Cross; Italy which makes a generous contribution and lends its weight to the abolition of the black slave trade, would not remain indifferent, much less disdainful, to the white slave trade, to this work of religious, patriotic, and economic liberation of our brothers and sisters emigrants."

First Conference on Emigration (AGS 5/3).

FOUNDING JUST AN ECCLESIASTICAL INSTITUTE WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN ENOUGH

"Founding just an ecclesiastical institute would not have been enough to provide adequate care for our emigrants (...).

I am planning an association more or less like the one founded in Germany in 1868, headed by the Prince Isenburg-Birnstern and incorporated under the name of *Raphaels Verein*. [*The Raphaelsverein had been founded by Peter Paul Cahensly*]. The purpose of this association is to defend the emigrants through a well-coordinated protective network from the numerous dangers that surround them as soon as they leave their native country.

My idea found favor and effective support in a rather large group of people who are very close to me. So last year I set up in Piacenza the central committee of the Italian Emigration Welfare Association, headed by Marquis and Attorney General Gianbattista Volpe Landi, who dedicated all his energies and enthusiasm to the association.

The members of this committee come from all walks of life. Though not all sharing the same convictions, they are all universally esteemed, respected, and well known for their warm, genuine love of country and for their enlightened charity.

With the help also of people living in other cities of Italy, provisional by-laws were drafted in which the nature and purpose of the association were formulated. Its purpose is to give appropriate guidance and help to those who have decided to emigrate. The association does this by providing useful information on the countries most suitable for emigration because of their soil fertility, ease of finding jobs, and availability of religious and civil care. The association offers its services free to the emigrants at the ports of embarkation. It recommends them to national committees set up in countries overseas and, above all, to the delegate or his associate who receives them at the port of debarkation. In the foreign land, the delegate begins anew with them the same work of charity, which, rather than just useful, will become necessary in view of the new dangers which they are to face.

The Genoa committee is proud to have the worthy Marquis Vittorio del Carretto di Balestrino as its head. Before the end of this year, it will begin its work of assistance for the emigrants leaving from that port, the most important in Italy. For this purpose, it has decided to open a special aid and information office, staffed by one of its representatives.

Moreover, the committee has seen to it that, beginning this coming January 1892, every time a ship leaves for America, a special religious function will be celebrated in the Church of San Giovanni di Prè, which is very close to the port."

Dell'assistenza alla emigrazione e degli Istituti che vi provvedono, Piacenza 1891, pp. 13-16.

COMMITTEES IN THE AREAS THAT CONTRIBUTE THE MOST EMIGRANTS

"Here in Italy, besides the central committee and the committees already set up or about to be set up in the ports of embarkation, it was necessary to establish others in the more important centers, especially in the areas that contribute the most emigrants. These committees were to enlist

supporters and helpers who would ensure that the work of protection would really reach those who most needed it.

The central committee is turning its attention mainly to this problem. I founded this central committee some time ago and now plan to make it known through a future series of special conferences illustrating the nature and purpose of the organization.

This past winter, I spoke to the good and gracious public of Genoa, Rome, Florence, Turin, and Milan. Committees were founded also in these last four cities, among the most important in Italy. Genoa already had its committee since the end of 1890. Besides soliciting the indispensable funds, like all the others, the Rome committee also has the task of being the Association's information center vis-à-vis the national Government and the congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. This committee is not complete as yet; but a group of intelligent and active young people, headed by Prince D. Luigi Boncompagni Ludovisi, have volunteered to lead it. I am confident that soon, with the help of outstanding people who are not indifferent to the sorrowful plight of the emigrants and see their needs, the Rome committee will be complete and will offer the Association the services the latter rightly expects of it.

The venerable prelate Di Calabiana and the illustrious Cardinal Bausa—who so honors the sacred purple with his doctrine and virtue—have, as Archbishops respectively of Milan and Florence, consented to endorse the committees in their respective cities with their name and with the prestige accruing to them in the Church Hierarchy. Better yet, the latter reserved to himself the chairmanship of the Florence committee. The president of the Milan Committee is General Thaon de Revel, a scion of the ancient Piedmontese aristocracy that has given much service to the country in war and to civil government. The Turin committee is headed by Baron Antonio Manno, also an aristocrat, who bears an honored and respected name.

Other committees are still in the embryonic stage, or are about to be set up, in Treviso, Brescia, Cremona, Bergamo, Lucca, and other cities."

Dell'assistenza alla emigrazione e degli Istituti che vi provvedono, Piacenza 1891, pp. 18-20.

THE DUTIES OF THE LOCAL COMMITTEES

The duties of the local committees will be outlined in greater detail in the final by-laws submitted to the deliberation of a Convention, held in Piacenza this past September, of representatives of committees already existing and of those in the process of being formed. The Convention's decisions are presently being processed in line with instructions received.

Well knowing the mind of the central committee, I can state that it is its intention that the committees in the different Provinces serve as intermediaries and vehicles for a faster and easier communication between the central committee—in which the information service is located—and the emigrants. This will be done through delegates or assistant delegates distributed in all the areas that contribute any amount of emigrants.

The emigrants must know the countries of immigration in their true colors. But everyone must also receive advice in accordance with one's personal and family situation. Now, by multiplying the committees and, through the committees, the delegates and assistant delegates (in the countryside pastors, teachers, and municipal secretaries could assume this task), every emigrant will find a trusted person nearby willing to counsel him with full knowledge of the facts. In turn, the delegates and assistant delegates—through the committees and these through the central committee—seek and receive instructions, news, and information from the surest sources and, above all, verify their reliability through the missionaries living in America. Besides all this, the committees do all they can to obtain the funds that are indispensable to the Association with the help of committees made up of the most distinguished women, like in Turin, Milan, etc."

Dell'assistenza alla emigrazione e degli Istituti che vi provvedono, Piacenza 1891, pp. 20-22.

THE ASSOCIATION NEEDS EVERYBODY'S HELP

"To achieve the favorable results it hopes for, the Association needs the help of all those in whose hearts burns the bright and serene love of country and the fire of a gentle compassion for the

sufferings and needs of their brothers and sisters who have left this common land of ours. It is important that they become supporters and helpers of the Association with their modest offerings or with their own personal work. It is necessary that they contribute their moral or material support and make the work known.

Such a vast, complex and difficult enterprise demands not only persevering effort and total self-sacrifice on the part of the leaders but adequate resources as well. I have full confidence that this appeal will not go unheeded."

Dell'assistenza alla emigrazione e degli Istituti che vi provvedono, Piacenza 1891, pp.22-23.

THE ST. RAPHAEL SOCIETY HAS BEEN FOUNDED IN THE UNITED STATES

"The St. Raphael Society was founded in the United States two months ago.

Article 1 of the by-laws states its goals:

- a) To help the Italian Immigrants upon their arrival in the United States and see to it that they do not fall into the hands of dishonest people;
- b) To help the immigrants find jobs, to the extent possible;
- c) To see to it that they do not lack religious care after debarkation and in the place where they will be living;
- d) To acquire a building, as soon as possible, to provide lodging for poor immigrants, as well as for young boys and girls, until such time as they find a place or have been consigned to their parents.

The sixth and last article provides that the Italian Society of St. Raphael keep in close contact with the analogous society set up in Italy with the name, Italian Emigration Welfare Society.

Thus the good work begun in Italy is complemented in the New World and continues to assist the emigrants in the United States, the only place –among the various American nations our emigrants are heading for- where help and protection are effectively and concretely provided."

Dell'assistenza alla emigrazione e degli Istituti che vi provvedono, Piacenza 1891, pp.16-17.

ASSISTANCE FROM THE PORT OF GENOA TO THE PORTS OF AMERICA

"One of our emigrants' greatest needs was that of getting help at the Genoa port of embarkation, where those poor people were treated as the cheapest merchandise or worse. Even there I spoke in public, in 1888 I think, on the work of the St. Raphael Society. Archbishop Magnasco, the venerable prelate of that See, and the port inspector, Cav. Malnate, begged me with tears in their eyes to send some missionaries to Genoa for the care of those unfortunates, criminally betrayed and exploited in every way. As soon as I could, I satisfied this holy desire, which was also mine, and there I opened a House. The good the missionaries accomplished there so far is unbelievable. For this reason and, above all, to make so many abuses and frauds disappear, they had to expose themselves to the fury of interested parties and Masonic newspapers. But, with the help of God, they overcame everything. Now, their work is appreciated by all, and the name of Fr. Maldotti, the first missionary sent to Genoa, is held in benediction by all.

As soon as the news of the institution of the Missionaries of St. Charles and of the St. Raphael Society for our migrants spread around, people wrote to me from various parts of Italy, pointing out the serious need to assist them during the ocean voyage. At once I contacted the various shipping lines asking for a free round trip ticket for the priests who would like to volunteer for such a great act of charity. But only one, the S/S Veloce, gladly answered my appeal. Still, there were ten or twelve priests who every year left the Port of Genoa to accompany the poor emigrants. On the ship they would celebrate Mass, preach, hear confessions, and assist the sick, of which there were always some. In just one crossing, eighteen people died. Fortunately, a priest was aboard. He was able to assist the dying and comfort the survivors by word and example. This went on for four years. But the S/S Veloce fell into decline and, unfortunately, had to restrict the concession and limit it to just the missionaries of Genoa. If the means were available, how much more could be done!

The mission at the Port [of New York City] calls for special mention. The missionaries assigned to it are recognized as legal representatives for Italian emigration with the Labor Bureau or Public Works

Ministry. Residing in the Barge Office or "The Immigration Office of the Port," they can give their prompt assistance to all the Italian emigrants who land there, especially those who have been recommended to them and come with special papers from the committees of the Welfare Association founded in Italy."

*Report on the Institute of the Missionaries of St. Charles for the Italian Emigrants, Aug. 10, 1900
(AGS 7/5).*

Called And Gifted. The American Catholic Laity¹

INTRODUCTION

(...) In an exercise of our charism of "bringing forth from the treasury of Revelation new things and old" (*Lumen Gentium*, 25), we bishops praise the Lord for what is happening among the laity and proclaim as well as we can what we have been experiencing and learning from them.

While focusing on the laity, we wish to address the whole Church. We affirm the vision of the Second Vatican Council and the importance it gives to the laity. We look forward to what is still to come under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, making the Church more and more the perfect image of Christ. We also acknowledge that these continuing developments may require new concepts, new terminology, new attitudes, and new practices. In prayerful dialogue with all our sisters and brothers we are prepared to make those changes that will aid in building the kingdom.

THE CALL TO ADULTHOOD

As the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity of Vatican II says:

Indeed, everyone should painstakingly ready himself or herself for the apostolate, especially as an adult. For the advance of age brings with it better self-knowledge, thus enabling each person to evaluate more accurately the talents with which God has enriched each soul and to exercise more effectively those charismatic gifts which the Holy Spirit has bestowed on all for the good of others (30).

One of the chief characteristics of lay men and women today is their growing sense of being adult members of the Church. Adulthood implies knowledge, experience and awareness, freedom and responsibility, and mutuality in relationships. It is true, however, that the experience of lay persons "as church members" has not always reflected this understanding of adulthood. Now, thanks to the impetus of the Second Vatican Council, lay women and men feel themselves called to exercise the same mature interdependence and practical self-direction that characterize them in other areas of life.

(...) The adult character of the People of God flows from baptism and confirmation, which are the foundation of the Christian life and ministry. They signify invitation into a community of believers who, according to their state in life, respond to God's call to holiness and accept responsibility for the ministry of the Church.

THE CALL TO HOLINESS

(...) The Second Vatican Council clearly proclaimed the universal call to holiness. Not only are lay people included in God's call to holiness, but theirs is a unique call requiring a unique response, which itself is a gift of the Holy Spirit. It is characteristic that lay men and women hear the call to holiness in the very web of their existence (*Lumen Gentium*, 31), in and through the events of the world, the pluralism of modern living, the complex decisions and conflicting values they must struggle with, the richness and fragility of sexual relationships, the delicate balance between activity and stillness, presence and privacy, love and loss.

The response of lay people to this call promises to contribute still more to the spiritual heritage of the Church. Already the laity's hunger for God's word is everywhere evident. Increasingly, lay men and

¹ USCC, Called and Gifted. The American Catholic Laity. Reflections of the American Bishops commemorating the fifteenth Anniversary of the Issuance of the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity. November 13, 1980

women are seeking spiritual formation and direction in deep ways of prayer. This has helped spur several renewal movements.

These developments present a challenge to the parish because, for the most part, the spiritual needs of lay people must be met in the parish (...).

We call special attention to the effect this should have on liturgy (...).

Whatever else the growing spiritual life of the community entails, it certainly means more intense sharing among the whole People of God of the gifts of the Spirit. And this we wish to reinforce.

THE CALL TO MINISTRY

From the reception of these charisms or gifts, including those which are less dramatic, there arise for each believer the right and duty to use them in the Church and the world for the good of humankind and for the upbuilding of the Church (*Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, 3).

Baptism and confirmation empower all believers to share in some form of ministry. Although the specific form of participation in ministry varies according to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, all who share in this work are united with one another. "Just as each of us has one body with many members, and not all the members have the same function, so too we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually members of one another. We have gifts that differ according to the favor bestowed on each of us" (Rom 12:4-6).

This unity in the ministry should be especially evident in the relationships between laity and clergy as lay men and women respond to the call of the Spirit in their lives. The clergy help to call forth, identify, coordinate, and affirm the diverse gifts bestowed by the Spirit. We applaud this solidarity between laity and clergy as their most effective ministry and witness to the world.

CHRISTIAN SERVICE MINISTRY IN THE WORLD

The laity, by their vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs, and by ordering them according to the plan of God (*Lumen Gentium*, 31)

Christian service in the world is represented in a preeminent way by the laity. It is sometimes called the "ministry of the laity" and balances the concept of ministry found in the ecclesial ministerial services. Because of lay persons, Christian service or ministry broadly understood includes civic and public activity, response to the imperatives of peace and justice, and resolution of social, political, and economic conflicts, especially as they influence the poor, oppressed, and minorities.

The whole Church faces unprecedented situations in the contemporary world, and lay people are at the cutting edge of these new challenges. It is they who engage directly in the task of relating Christian values and practices to complex questions, such as those of business ethics, political choice, economic security, quality of life, cultural development, and family planning.

Really, new situations, especially in the realm of social justice, call for creative responses. We know that the Spirit moves among all the People of God, prompting them according to their particular gifts and offices, to discern anew the signs of the times and to interpret them boldly in light of the Gospel. Lay women and men are in a unique position to offer this service.

Just as by divine institution, bishops, priests, and deacons have been given through ordination authority to exercise leadership as servants of God's people, so through baptism and confirmation, lay men and women have been given rights and responsibilities to participate in the mission of the Church. In those areas of life in which they are uniquely present and within which they have special competency because of

their particular talents, education, and experience, they are an extension of the Church's redeeming presence in the world. Recognition of the lay rights and responsibilities should not create a divisiveness between clergy and laity but should express the full range of the influence of the People of God. We see this and affirm it.

MINISTRY IN THE CHURCH

(...) Since the Second Vatican Council, new opportunities have developed for lay men and women to serve in the Church. We acknowledge gratefully the continuing and increasing contribution of volunteers and part-time workers who serve on parish and diocesan councils, boards of education, and financial, liturgical, and ecumenical committees, as well as those who exercise roles such as special minister of the Eucharist, catechist, and pastoral assistant. We are grateful, too, for the large numbers of lay people who have volunteered and are serving in the missions.

(...) There are also persons who serve the Church by the witness of their lives and self-sacrificing service and empowerment of the poor in works such as administration, housing, job development, and education. All these lay ministers are undertaking roles that are not yet clearly spelled out and that are already demanding sacrifices and risks of them and their families. As lay persons increasingly engage in ecclesial ministry, we recognize and accept the responsibility of working out practical difficulties such as the availability of positions, the number of qualified applicants, procedures for hiring, just wages, and benefits.

Special mention must be made of women, who in the past have not always been allowed to take their proper role in the Church's ministry. We see the need for an increased role for women in ministries of the Church to the extent possible. We recognize tensions and misunderstandings that arise on this question, but we wish to face these as part of a sincere attempt to become true communities of faith.

The combination of all these responses to the challenges of our time proclaims the interrelated oneness of ministry as a gift of the Spirit, and we rejoice in this.

THE CALL TO COMMUNITY

(...) Most lay persons have a primary identification with family. This influences their expectations of and contribution to the Church as the People of God. The family, as a way of life, is often taken as a model for the Church. (...)

Because lay women and men do experience intimacy, support, acceptance, and availability in family life, they seek the same in their Christian communities. This is leading to a review of parish size, organization, priorities, and identity. It has already led to intentional communities, basic Christian communities, and some revitalized parish communities.

It is likely that this family characteristic of the laity will continue to influence and to shape the community of Christians. If it does, this should enable the clergy to give the kind of overall leadership that their office requires. Such trends are welcome in the Church.

CONCLUSION

(...) We are convinced that the laity are making an indispensable contribution to the experience of the People of God and that the full import of their contribution is still in a beginning form in the post-Vatican II Church. We have spoken in order to listen. It is not our intention rigidly to define or to control, to sketch misleading dreams, or to bestow false praise. We bishops wish simply to take our place and exercise our role among the People of God. We now await the next word.

Everyday Christianity. To hunger and thirst for justice. A pastoral reflection on Lay Discipleship for Justice in a New Millennium²

INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest challenges for Christians is as old as our faith, but it takes on special urgency today as we approach the third Christian millennium. How do we connect worship on Sunday to work on Monday? How is the gospel proclaimed not only in the pulpit, but also in the everyday lives of Catholic people? How does the Church gathered on the Sabbath act as the people of God scattered and active every day of the week? How can we best carry the values of our faith into family life, the marketplace, and the public square? How do we love our neighbors, pursue peace, and seek justice in everyday choices and commitments?

In these reflections, we highlight one essential dimension of the lay vocation that is sometimes overlooked or neglected: the social mission of Christians in the world.³ Every believer is called to serve "the least of these", to "hunger and thirst for justice, to be a "peacemaker."⁴ Catholics are called by God to protect human life, to promote human dignity, to defend those who are poor, and to seek the common good. This social mission of the Church belongs to all of us. It is an essential part of what it is to be a believer.

This social mission is advanced in many ways - by the prophetic teaching of our Holy Father; by the effort of our bishops' conference, and by many structures of charity and justice within our community of faith. But the most common - and in many ways, the most important - Christian witness is often neither very visible nor highly structured. It is the sacrifice of parents trying to raise children with concern for others; the service and creativity of workers who do their best and reach out to those in need; the struggle of business owners trying to reconcile the bottom line and the needs of employees and customers; and the hard choices of public officials who seek to protect the weak and pursue the common good. The Church's social mission is advanced by teachers and scientists, by family farmers and bankers, by sales persons and entertainers.

The Catholic social mission is also carried forward by believers who join unions; neighborhood organizations; business groups; civic associations; the pro-life movement; groups working for social justice; or environmental, civil rights, or peace groups. It is advanced by Christians who stand up for the values of the Gospel. The mission is the task of countless Christians living their faith without much fanfare or recognition, who are quietly building a better society by their choices and actions, day by day. They protect human life, defend those who are poor, seek the common good, work for peace, and promote human dignity.

Working for justice in everyday life is not easy. There are complex and sometimes difficult challenges encountered by women and men as they try to live their faith in the world. We applaud the efforts of all Catholics to live the Gospel by pursuing justice and peace in their everyday choices and commitments.

² NCCB-USCC, *Everyday Christianity. To hunger and thirst for justice. A pastoral reflection on Lay Discipleship for Justice in a New Millennium*. November 1998

³ Other major documents address in a more comprehensive way the vocation of the laity (e.g., *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, On the Laity, Called and Gifted, Called and gifted for the Third Millennium*). Catholic teaching also outlines our broader social mission in a series of documents (e.g., *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Justice in the World, On the Hundredth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum, A century of Social Teaching, Communities of Salt and Light, Called to Global Solidarity*).

⁴ Matthew 25:31-46, Matthew 5:1-10.

THE CATHOLIC LAYPERSON: DISCIPLESHIP AND THE PURSUIT OF JUSTICE

Being a believer means that one lives a certain way - walking with the Lord, doing justice, loving kindness, and living peaceably among all people. Christian discipleship means practicing what Jesus preached. Discipleship is found in a relationship with Christ and a commitment to his mission of bringing "glad tidings to the poor. / ... liberty to captives / and recovery of sight to the blind, / to let the oppressed go free."⁵

For Catholics, this takes on special meaning today. According to the Second Vatican Council, "It is the special vocation of the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will. They live in the world, in each and every one of the world's occupations and callings and in the ordinary circumstances of social and family life which, as it were, form the context of their existence. There they are called by God to contribute to the sanctification of the world within, like leaven, in the Spirit of the Gospel, by fulfilling their own particular duties."⁶

We welcome and affirm the growing participation of lay women and men in the internal life of the Church. Service within the Church should form and strengthen believers for their mission in the world. With this pastoral statement we are addressing in a special way the demands of discipleship in the pursuit of justice and peace in everyday activity.

Followers of the Lord Jesus live their discipleship as spouses and parents, single adults and youth, employers and employees, consumers and investors, citizens and neighbors. We renew the warning of the Second Vatican Council, "One of the gravest errors of our time is the dichotomy between the faith which many profess and their day-to-day conduct."⁷ By our baptism and confirmation, every member of our community is called to live his or her faith in the world.

CALLED TO JUSTICE IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Catholicism does not call us to abandon the world but to help shape it. This does not mean leaving worldly tasks and responsibilities but transforming them. (...). Our entire community of faith must help Catholics to be instruments of God's grace and creative power in business and politics, in factories and offices, in homes and schools, and in all the events of daily life. Social justice and common good are built up or torn down day by day in the countless decisions and choices we make. This vocation to pursue justice is not simply an individual task; it is a call to work with others to humanize and shape the institutions that touch so many people. The lay vocation for justice in the world cannot be carried forward alone but only as members of a community called to be the "leaven" of the Gospel.

- Our families are the starting point and the center of a vocation for justice. How we treat our parents, spouses, and children is a reflection of our commitment to Christ's love and justice. We demonstrate our commitment to the Gospel by how we spend our time and money, and whether our family life includes an ethic of charity, service, and action for justice. The lesson we teach our children through what we do as well as what we say determine whether they care for the "least among us" and are committed to work for justice.⁸
- Workers are called to pursue justice. In the Catholic tradition, work is not a burden, not just how we make a living. Work is a way of supporting our family, realizing our dignity, promoting the common good, and participating in God's creation. This means often doing the ordinary well, making the most of our talents and opportunities, treating others fairly and with dignity, and working with integrity and

⁵ Luke 4:18.

⁶ Vatican II, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)*, no. 31.

⁷ Vatican II, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*, no. 43.

⁸ For more teaching, see *On the Family (Familiaris Consortio)*, Pope John Paul II.

creativity. Believers should be encouraged to choose their work based on how they can best use the gifts God has given them. Decisions made at work can make important contributions to an ethic of justice. Catholics have the often difficult responsibility of choosing between competing values in the workplace. This is a measure of holiness. Associations that enable workers, owners, or managers to pursue justice often make the witness of the individual more effective.⁹

- Owners, managers, and investors face important opportunities to seek justice and pursue peace. Ethical responsibility is not just avoiding evil, but doing right, especially for the weak and vulnerable. Decisions about the use of capital have moral implications: are companies creating and preserving quality jobs at living wages? Are they building up community through the goods and services they provide? Do policies and decisions reflect respect for human life and dignity, promote peace, and preserve God's creation? While economic returns are important, they should not take precedence over the rights of workers or protection of the environment. Investors should examine ownership, management, and economic decisions in the light of the Catholic call to protect life, defend those who are poor, and seek the common good. These decisions promote human dignity or undermine it.¹⁰
- As consumers, believers can promote social justice or injustice. In an affluent culture that suggests that what we have defines who we are, we can live more simply. When we purchase goods and services, we can choose to support companies that defend human life, treat workers fairly, protect creation, and respect other basic moral values at home and abroad. We can also make conscious efforts to consume less.¹¹
- All human beings have unique talents, gifts from God that we are called to develop and share. We should celebrate this diversity. People who use their skills and expertise for the common good, the service of others, and the protection of creation are good stewards of the gifts they have been given. When we labor with honesty, serve those in need, work for justice, and contribute to charity, we use our talents to show our love - and God's love - for our brothers and sisters.¹²
- As citizens in the world's leading democracy, Catholics in the United States have special responsibilities to protect human life and dignity, to stand with those who are poor and vulnerable. We are also to welcome the stranger, to combat discrimination, and to pursue peace. Catholic social teaching calls us to practice civic virtues and offers us principles to shape participation in public life. We cannot be indifferent to or cynical about the obligations of citizenship. Our political choices should not reflect simply our own interests, partisan preferences, or ideological agendas but should be shaped by the principles of our faith and our commitment to justice, especially to the weak and vulnerable. The voices and votes of lay Catholics are needed to shape a society with greater respect for human life, economic and environmental justice, cultural diversity, and global solidarity. Catholic involvement in public life and legislative advocacy are important ways to exercise responsible citizenship. Participation in politics is a worthy vocation and a public trust. Believers who serve in public office have unique responsibilities and opportunities to stand up for human life and dignity, to pursue justice and peace, and to advance the common good by the policies, priorities, and programs they support or oppose.¹³

SUPPORTING THE "SALT OF THE EARTH"

Church statements, structures, and initiatives are important for Catholic formation and action. Social ministry programs and structures provide valuable opportunities for believers to learn to act on the justice demands of their faith. Church social ministry efforts should encourage and complement the vital roles of

⁹ For more teaching see *On Human Work (Laborem Exercens)*, Pope John Paul II.

¹⁰ For more teaching see *Tenth Anniversary Edition of Economic Justice for all*, U.S. Catholic Bishops.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² For more teaching, see *To Be a Christian Steward*, U.S. Catholic Bishops.

¹³ For more teaching, see *Octogesima Adveniens*, Pope Paul VI; *Political Responsibility*, U.S. Catholic Bishops.

believers in family, economic, and public life. However, there is simply no substitute for Catholic men and women carrying their faith into the world. Everyday discipleship for justice and the Church's organized social ministry can reinforce one another and help shape a more just society and a more peaceful world. We hope these reflections can serve as an opportunity for increased dialogue on the demands of discipleship in our time.

Parishes are the essential sources of support and encouragement for Christian discipleship. At their best, parishes help believers prepare and go forth to live the Gospel in everything we do. The Sunday liturgy sends us forth to renew the earth and build up God's kingdom of justice and peace. We encourage our pastors and preachers to listen to their parishioners on the challenges of their daily lives and help bring the insight of the Gospel and the principles of Catholic teaching to these experiences. We affirm prayer and worship that help believers apply the Gospel to everyday situations. Across the country, there are examples of Catholic men and women gathering in small groups to examine the moral dimensions of their lives and work. They can enlarge their vision beyond the immediate and the individual experiences when they are enabled to examine the structures and processes that shape social life. Catholic schools and religious education programs provide important lessons about living a life of justice and compassion and promoting participation in civic life. Many parishes participate in legislative networks and community organizing projects that involve parishioners working for justice. And in thousands of other parishes, social ministry efforts provide valuable opportunities to help believers make choices about our time, money, and talents that reflect the justice demands of the Gospel. These parishes are convinced that the mystery of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection unfolds within human life.

We applaud these efforts and urge our parishes to do even more. Our culture often suggests that religion is a private matter, to be tolerated as long as it is detached from our lives as workers and citizens. Catholic men and women look to our parishes to find the support, tools, and concrete help they need to resist this tendency and instead proclaim Christ's love, justice, and peace in everything they do.

The measure of the Church's organized social ministry is not simply the teaching shared, the services offered, or the actions taken but also the support and challenge provided for men and women as they seek to live the Gospel in the world. Our community of faith needs to share its social teaching more clearly and comprehensively so that its principles can help shape the choices and actions of Catholics. Catholics also need to learn and further explore the links between faith and life, between theology and ethics, between what we believe and how we act everyday. Catholics need to support one another as we take up these difficult tasks, helping each other to have the courage of our convictions, to stand up for what we believe, and to practice in our own lives what the Scriptures proclaim. (...).

CONCLUSION

The word of God calls believers to become "the salt of the earth, the light of the world." The pope and the bishops are called to teach and lead, but unless the Church's social teaching finds a home in the hearts and lives of Catholic women and men, our community and culture will fall short of what the Gospel requires. Our society urgently needs the everyday witness of Christians who take the social demands of our faith seriously. The pursuit of justice is an essential part of the Catholic call to holiness, which is our true vocation: to live "in Christ" and to let Christ live and work in our world today.

Christian faith requires conversion; it changes who we are, and what we do, and how we think. The Gospel offers "good news" and guidance not just for our spiritual lives but for all the commitments and duties that make up our lives. Living our faith in the ordinary tasks of everyday life is an essential part of what it means to be holy today.

As the third Christian millennium approaches, the call to live our faith in everyday choices and actions remains at the heart of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. This call takes on renewed urgency as we approach the great jubilee, but it is not new. The task of disciples today was probably best and most simply expressed in the words of the prophet Micah:

"He has told you, o mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Mi 6:8)

IV CONFERENCIA GENERAL DEL EPISCOPADO LATINOAMERICANO

"Nueva Evangelización, Promoción Humana, Cultura Cristiana."
Santo Domingo, 1992

1.3.4. Los fieles laicos en la Iglesia y en el mundo

El Pueblo de Dios está constituido en su mayoría por fieles cristianos laicos. Ellos son llamados por Cristo como Iglesia, agentes y destinatarios de la Buena Noticia de Salvación, a ejercer en el mundo, viña de Dios, una tarea evangelizadora indispensable. A ellos se dirigen hoy las palabras del Señor: "Id también vosotros a mi viña" (Mt 20, 3 -4) y estas otras: "Id por todo el mundo y proclamad la Buena Noticia a toda la creación" (Mc 16, 15; cf. *Christifideles Laici*, 33).

Como consecuencia del bautismo los fieles son insertados en Cristo y son llamados a vivir el triple oficio sacerdotal, profético y real. Esta vocación debe ser fomentada constantemente por los pastores en las Iglesias particulares. (Santo Domingo, Conclusiones 94)

a) Los laicos hoy en nuestras Iglesias

Hoy, como signo de los tiempos, vemos un gran número de laicos comprometidos en la Iglesia: ejercen diversos ministerios, servicios y funciones en las comunidades eclesiales de base o actividades en los movimientos eclesiales. Crece siempre más la conciencia de su responsabilidad en el mundo y en la misión "ad gentes". Aumenta así el sentido evangelizador de los fieles cristianos. Los jóvenes evangelizan a los jóvenes. Los pobres evangelizan a los pobres.

Los fieles laicos comprometidos manifiestan una sentida necesidad de formación y de espiritualidad. (SD, Concl. 95)

Sin embargo se comprueba que la mayor parte de los bautizados no han tomado aún conciencia plena de su pertenencia a la Iglesia. Se sienten católicos, pero no Iglesia. Pocos asumen los valores cristianos como un elemento de su identidad cultural y por lo tanto no sienten la necesidad de un compromiso eclesial y evangelizador. Como consecuencia, el mundo del trabajo, de la política, de la economía, de la ciencia, del arte, de la literatura y de los medios de comunicación social no son guiados por criterios evangélicos. Así se explica la incoherencia que se da entre la fe que dicen profesar y el compromiso real en la vida (cf. Puebla 783).

Se comprueba también que los laicos no son siempre adecuadamente acompañados por los Pastores en el descubrimiento y maduración de su propia vocación.

La persistencia de cierta mentalidad clerical en numerosos agentes de pastoral, clérigos e incluso laicos (cf. DP 784), la dedicación de muchos laicos de manera preferente a tareas intra -eclesiales y una deficiente formación les privan de dar respuestas eficaces a los desafíos actuales de la sociedad. (SD, Concl. 96)

b) Los desafíos para los laicos

Las urgencias de la hora presente en América Latina y el Caribe reclaman:

Que todos los laicos sean protagonistas de la Nueva Evangelización, la Promoción Humana y la Cultura Cristiana. Es necesaria la constante promoción del laicado, libre de todo clericalismo y sin reducción a lo intra -eclesial.

Que los bautizados no evangelizados sean los principales destinatarios de la Nueva Evangelización. ésta sólo se llevará a cabo efectivamente si los laicos conscientes de su bautismo responden al llamado de Cristo a convertirse en protagonistas de la Nueva Evangelización.

Es urgente un esfuerzo para favorecer, en el marco de la comunión eclesial, la búsqueda de santidad de los laicos y el ejercicio de su misión. (SD, Concl. 97)

c) Principales líneas pastorales

- Acrecentar la vivencia de la Iglesia - comunión, que nos lleva a la corresponsabilidad en la misión de la Iglesia. Fomentar la participación de los laicos en los Consejos Pastorales, a diversos niveles de la estructura eclesial. Evitar que los laicos reduzcan su acción al ámbito intra -eclesial, impulsándolos a penetrar los ambientes socio -culturales y a ser en ellos protagonistas de la transformación de la sociedad a la luz del Evangelio y de la Doctrina Social de la Iglesia.
- Promover los consejos de laicos, en plena comunión con los pastores y adecuada autonomía, como lugares de encuentro, diálogo y servicio, que contribuyan al fortalecimiento de la unidad, la espiritualidad y la organización del laicado: estos consejos de laicos son también espacios de formación y pueden establecerse en cada diócesis en la Iglesia de cada país y abarcar tanto a los movimientos de apostolado como a los laicos que, estando comprometidos con la Evangelización, no están integrados en grupos apostólicos. (SD, Concl. 98)
- Incentivar una formación integral, gradual y permanente de los laicos mediante organismos que faciliten «la formación de formadores» y programen cursos y escuelas diocesanas y nacionales, teniendo una particular atención a la formación de los pobres (cf. *Christifideles Laici*, 63).
- Los pastores procuraremos, como objetivo pastoral inmediato, impulsar la preparación de laicos que sobresalgan en el campo de la educación, de la política, de los medios de comunicación social, de la cultura y del trabajo. Estimularemos una pastoral específica para cada uno de estos campos de tal manera que quienes estén presentes en ellos sientan todo el respaldo de sus pastores. Estarán incluidos también los militares, a quienes corresponde siempre estar al servicio de la libertad, la democracia y la paz de los pueblos (cf. GS 79).
- Teniendo presente que la santidad es un llamado a todos los cristianos, los pastores procurarán los medios adecuados que favorezcan en los laicos una auténtica experiencia de Dios. Incentivarán también publicaciones específicas de espiritualidad laical. (SD, Concl. 99)
- Favorecer la organización de los fieles laicos a todos los niveles de la estructura pastoral, basada en los criterios de comunión y participación y respetando «la libertad de asociación de los fieles laicos en la Iglesia» (cf. *Christifideles Laici*, 29 -30). (SD, Concl. 100)

d) Ministerios conferidos a los laicos

El Documento de Puebla recogió la experiencia del Continente en cuanto a los ministerios conferidos a laicos y dio orientaciones claras para que, de acuerdo con los carismas de cada persona y las necesidades de cada comunidad, se fomentase «una especial creatividad en el establecimiento de ministerios o servicios que pueden ser ejercidos por laicos, de acuerdo con las necesidades de la evangelización» (Puebla, 833; cf. 804 -805; 811 -817).

El Sínodo de los Obispos en 1987 y la Exhortación Apostólica «Christifideles laici» han insistido en la importancia de mostrar que estos ministerios «tienen su fundamento sacramental en el Bautismo y en la Confirmación» (*Christifideles Laici*, 23).

Fieles a las orientaciones del Santo Padre, queremos continuar fomentando estas experiencias que dan un amplio margen de participación a los laicos (cf. *Christifideles Laici*, 21 -23), y que responden a necesidades de muchas comunidades que, sin esta valiosa colaboración, carecerían de todo acompañamiento en la catequesis, la oración y la animación de sus compromisos sociales y caritativos.

Consideramos que «nuevas expresiones y nuevos métodos» para nuestra misión evangelizadora encuentran amplios campos de realización en «ministerios, oficios y funciones» que pueden desempeñar algunos laicos (cf. *Christifideles Laici*, 23) cuidadosamente escogidos y preparados. Una forma adecuada podría ser que a una familia completa se le dé el encargo pastoral de animar a otras familias, preparándose debidamente para este oficio. (SD, Concl. 101)

e) Los movimientos y asociaciones de la Iglesia

Como respuesta a las situaciones de secularismo, ateísmo e indiferencia religiosa y como fruto de la aspiración y necesidad de lo religioso (cf. *Christifideles Laici*, 4), el Espíritu Santo ha impulsado el

nacimiento de movimientos y asociaciones de laicos que han producido ya muchos frutos en nuestras Iglesias.

Los movimientos dan importancia fundamental a la Palabra de Dios, la oración en común y la atención especial a la acción del Espíritu. Hay casos también en que, a la experiencia de una fe compartida, sigue siempre una necesidad de comunicación cristiana de bienes, primer paso para una economía de solidaridad.

Las asociaciones de apostolado son legítimas y necesarias (cf. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 18); siguiendo la orientación del Concilio, se reconoce un lugar especial a la Acción Católica por su vinculación profunda a la Iglesia particular (cf. AA 20; ChI 31). Ante los riesgos de algunos movimientos y asociaciones que pueden llegar a cerrarse sobre sí mismos, es particularmente urgente tener en cuenta los «criterios de eclesialidad» indicados en la exhortación post -sinodal «Christifideles laici» n. 30. Es necesario acompañar a los movimientos en un proceso de inculturación más definido y alentar la formación de movimientos con una mayor impronta latinoamericana.

«La Iglesia espera mucho de todos aquellos laicos que, con entusiasmo y eficacia evangélica, operan a través de los nuevos movimientos apostólicos, que han de estar coordinados en la pastoral de conjunto y que responden a la necesidad de una mayor presencia de la fe en la vida social» (Juan Pablo II, Discurso inaugural, 27). (SD, Concl. 102)

f) Los laicos, línea pastoral prioritaria

La importancia de la presencia de los laicos en la tarea de la Nueva Evangelización, que conduce a la promoción humana y llega a informar todo el ámbito de la cultura con la fuerza del Resucitado, nos permite afirmar que una línea prioritaria de nuestra pastoral, fruto de esta IV Conferencia, ha de ser la de una Iglesia en la que los fieles cristianos laicos sean protagonistas. Un laicado, bien estructurado con una formación permanente, maduro y comprometido, es el signo de Iglesias particulares que han tomado muy en serio el compromiso de Nueva Evangelización. (SD, Concl. 103)

**III CONFERENCIA GENERAL DEL EPISCOPADO
LATINOAMERICANO
"La Evangelización en el presente y en el futuro de América
Latina", Puebla 1979**

Tercera Parte: La Evangelización en la Iglesia de América Latina. Comunión y participación. Capítulo 2: Agentes de Comunión y Participación.

3. Laicos

Participación del laico en la vida de la Iglesia y en la misión de ésta en el mundo.

3.1. Situación

Reconociendo en el seno de la Iglesia latinoamericana una toma de conciencia creciente de la necesidad de la presencia de los laicos en la misión evangelizadora, estimulamos a tantos laicos, que mediante su testimonio de entrega cristiana contribuyen al cumplimiento de la tarea evangelizadora y a presentar el rostro de una Iglesia comprometida en la promoción de la justicia en nuestros pueblos. (Concl. 777)

En la actual situación del continente, interpela particularmente a los laicos la configuración que van tomando los sistemas y estructuras que, a consecuencia del proceso desigual de industrialización, urbanización y transformación cultural, ahondan las diferencias socio-económicas, afectando principalmente a las masas populares, con fenómenos de opresión y marginación crecientes. (Concl. 778)

La Iglesia de América Latina después del Concilio y Medellín, en el esfuerzo de aceptar los desafíos, en su conjunto ha tenido experiencias positivas y avances, según lo dijimos en el n. 10ss, y ha sufrido dificultades y crisis (véase nn. 16 -27). (Concl. 779)

Hay crisis que han afectado, naturalmente, al laicado latinoamericano y, en especial, al laicado organizado, que sufrió no sólo los embates de la conflictividad de la propia sociedad- represiones de los grupos de poder-, sino también los producidos por una fuerte ideologización, por desconfianzas mutuas y en las instituciones que llevaron, incluso, a dolorosas rupturas de los movimientos laicos entre sí y con los pastores. (Concl. 780)

Hoy, sin embargo, vemos otro aspecto de la crisis en sus consecuencias positivas: la progresiva ganancia en serenidad, madurez y realismo que se manifiesta en confesadas aspiraciones por promover en la Iglesia estructuras de diálogo, de participación y de acción pastoral de conjunto, expresiones de una mayor conciencia de pertenencia a la Iglesia. (Concl. 781)

Este optimismo, creciente en los movimientos laicos, no desconoce, por otra parte, las tensiones que persisten, tanto a nivel de la comprensión del sentido del compromiso laico hoy en América Latina, como de una apropiada inserción en la acción eclesial. (Concl. 782)

Mientras estas tensiones afectan principalmente a quienes participan en movimientos laicos, grandes sectores del laicado latinoamericano no han tomado conciencia plena de su pertenencia a la Iglesia y viven afectados por la incoherencia entre la fe que dicen profesar y practicar y el compromiso real que asumen en la sociedad. Divorcio entre fe y vida agudizado por el secularismo y por un sistema que antepone el tener más al ser más. (Concl. 783)

Asimismo, la efectiva promoción del laicado se ve impedida muchas veces por la persistencia de cierta mentalidad clerical en numerosos agentes pastorales, clérigos e incluso laicos. (Concl. 784)

Este contexto social y eclesial, así descrito, ha dificultado la participación activa y responsable de los laicos en campos tan importantes como el político, el social y el cultural, particularmente en los sectores obreros y campesinos. (Concl. 785)

3.2. Reflexión doctrinal

El laico en la Iglesia y en el mundo

La misión del laico encuentra su raíz y significación en su ser más profundo, que el Concilio Vaticano II se preocupó de subrayar, en algunos de sus documentos:

- El bautismo y la confirmación lo incorporan a Cristo y lo hacen miembro de la Iglesia;
- participa, a su modo, de la función sacerdotal, profética y real de Cristo y la ejerce en su condición propia;

- la fidelidad y la coherencia con las riquezas y exigencias de su ser le dan su identidad de hombre de Iglesia en el corazón del mundo y de hombre del mundo en el corazón de la Iglesia. (Concl. 786)

En efecto, el laico se ubica, por su vocación, en la Iglesia y en el mundo. Miembro de la Iglesia, fiel a Cristo, está comprometido en la construcción del Reino en su dimensión temporal Concl. 787)

En profunda comunicación con sus hermanos laicos y con los Pastores, en los cuales ve a sus maestros en la fe, el laico contribuye a construir la Iglesia como comunidad de fe, de oración, de caridad fraterna, y lo hace por la catequesis, por la vida sacramental, por la ayuda a los hermanos.

De allí la multiplicidad de formas de apostolado cada una de las cuales pone énfasis en algunos de los aspectos mencionados. (Concl. 788)

Pero es en el mundo donde el laico encuentra su campo específico de acción. Por el testimonio de su vida, por su palabra oportuna y por su acción concreta, el laico tiene la responsabilidad de ordenar las realidades temporales para ponerlas al servicio de la instauración del Reino de Dios. (Concl. 789)

En el vasto y complicado mundo de las realidades temporales, algunas exigen especial atención de los laicos: la familia, la educación, las comunicaciones sociales. (Concl. 790)

Entre estas realidades temporales no se puede dejar de subrayar con especial énfasis la actividad política. ésta abarca un amplio campo, desde la acción de votar, pasando por la militancia y el liderazgo en algún partido político, hasta el ejercicio de cargos públicos en distintos niveles. (Concl. 791)

En todos los casos, el laico deberá buscar y promover el bien común en defensa de la dignidad del hombre y de sus derechos inalienables en la protección de los más débiles y necesitados, en la construcción de la paz, de la libertad, de la justicia; en la creación de estructuras más justas y fraternas. (Concl. 792)

En consecuencia, en nuestro continente latinoamericano, marcado por agudos problemas de injusticia que se han agravado, los laicos no pueden eximirse de un serio compromiso en la promoción de la justicia y del bien común, iluminados siempre por la fe y guiados por el Evangelio y por la Doctrina Social de la Iglesia, pero orientados a la vez por la inteligencia y la aptitud para la acción eficaz. «Para el cristiano no basta la denuncia de las injusticias, a él se le pide ser en verdad testigo y agente de la justicia» (Juan Pablo II, Alocución obreros de Guadalajara 2: AAS 71 p. 223). (Concl. 793)

En la medida en que crece la participación de los laicos en la vida de la Iglesia y en la misión de ésta en el mundo, se hace también más urgente la necesidad de su sólida formación humana en general, formación doctrinal, social, apostólica. Los laicos tienen el derecho de recibirla primordialmente en sus mismos movimientos y asociaciones, pero también en institutos adecuados y en el contacto con sus Pastores. (Concl. 794)

Por otra parte, el laico debe aportar al conjunto de la Iglesia su experiencia de participación en los problemas, desafíos y urgencias de su «mundo secular»- de personas, familias, grupos sociales y pueblos- para que la Evangelización eclesial arraigue con vigor. En ese sentido, será aporte precioso del laico por su experiencia de vida, su competencia profesional, científica y laboral, su inteligencia cristiana, cuanto pueda contribuir para el desarrollo, estudio e investigación de la Enseñanza Social de la Iglesia. (Concl. 795)

Un aspecto importante de esta formación es el que concierne a la profundización en una espiritualidad más apropiada a su condición de laico. Dimensiones esenciales de esta espiritualidad son, entre otras, las siguientes: (Concl. 796)

- que el laico no huya de las realidades temporales para buscar a Dios, sino perseverare, presente y activo, en medio de ellas y allí encuentre al Señor;
 - dé a tal presencia y actividad una inspiración de fe y un sentido de caridad cristiana; (Concl. 797)
 - por la luz de la fe, descubra en esa realidad la presencia del Señor;
 - en medio de su misión, a menudo conflictiva y llena de tensiones para su fe, busque renovar su identidad cristiana en el contacto con la Palabra de Dios, en la intimidad con el Señor por la Eucaristía, en los Sacramentos y en la oración. (Concl. 798)
- Tal espiritualidad deberá ser capaz de dar a la Iglesia y al mundo «Cristianos con vocación de santidad, sólidos en su fe, seguros en la doctrina propuesta por el Magisterio auténtico, firmes y activos en la Iglesia, cimentados en una densa vida espiritual... perseverantes en el testimonio y acción evangélica, coherentes y valientes en sus compromisos temporales, constantes promotores de paz y justicia contra violencia u opresión, agudos en el discernimiento crítico de las situaciones e ideologías a la luz de las enseñanzas sociales de la Iglesia, confiados en la esperanza en el Señor» (Juan Pablo II, Alocución laicos 6: AAS 71 p. 216). (Concl. 799)

El laico organizado

Expresamos nuestra confianza y estímulo decidido a las formas organizadas del apostolado de los laicos porque: (Concl. 800)

- La organización es signo de comunión y participación en la vida de la Iglesia; permite la transmisión y crecimiento de las experiencias y la permanente formación y capacitación de sus miembros. (Concl. 801)
- El apostolado exige muchas veces una acción común, tanto en las comunidades de la Iglesia como en los diversos ambientes. (Concl. 802)
- En una sociedad que se estructura y planifica cada vez más, la eficacia de la actividad apostólica depende también de la organización. (Concl. 803)

Ministerios diversificados

Para el cumplimiento de su misión, la Iglesia cuenta con diversidad de ministerios. Al lado de los ministerios jerárquicos, la Iglesia reconoce un puesto a ministerios sin orden sagrado. Por tanto, también los laicos pueden sentirse llamados o ser llamados a colaborar con sus pastores en el servicio a la comunidad eclesial, para el crecimiento y vida de ésta, ejerciendo ministerios diversos según la gracia y los carismas que el Señor quiere concederles. (Concl. 804)

Los ministerios que pueden conferirse a laicos son aquellos servicios referentes a aspectos realmente importantes de la vida eclesial (v. gr. en el plano de la Palabra, de la Liturgia o de la conducción de la comunidad), ejercidos por laicos con estabilidad y que han sido reconocidos públicamente y confiados por quien tiene la responsabilidad en la Iglesia. (Concl. 805)

3.3. Criterios pastorales

Criterios que orientan al laicado organizado en la pastoral de conjunto

Una renovada pastoral del laicado organizado exige:

- a) vitalidad misionera para descubrir con iniciativa y audacia nuevos campos para la acción evangelizadora de la Iglesia;
- b) apertura para la coordinación con organizaciones y movimientos, teniendo en cuenta que ninguno de ellos posee la exclusividad de la acción de la Iglesia;
- c) canales permanentes y sistemáticos de formación doctrinal y espiritual con actualización de contenidos y pedagogía adecuada. (Concl. 806)

La diversidad de formas organizadas del apostolado seglar exige su presencia y participación en la pastoral de conjunto, tanto por la naturaleza misma de la Iglesia, misterio de comunión de diversos miembros y ministerios, como por la eficacia de la acción pastoral con la participación coordinada de todos. (Concl. 807)

Se requiere la participación del laicado no sólo en la fase de ejecución de la pastoral de conjunto, sino también en la planificación y en los mismos organismos de decisión. (Concl. 808)

Su inserción en la pastoral de conjunto asegurará la necesaria referencia de las formas organizadas de apostolado laical a la pastoral dirigida a las grandes masas del Pueblo de Dios. (Concl. 809)

Las formas organizadas de apostolado laico deben dar a sus miembros ayuda, aliento e iluminación para su compromiso político. Se reconocen, sin embargo, dificultades, a nivel de dirigentes cuando pertenecen a movimientos apostólicos y simultáneamente militan en partidos políticos; dificultades que deberán resolverse con prudencia pastoral teniendo en cuenta el criterio de evitar comprometer su movimiento apostólico con un partido político determinado. (Concl. 810)

Criterios pastorales sobre los ministerios

Características sobre los ministerios que pueden recibir los laicos son las siguientes: (Concl. 811)

- No clericalizan; quienes los reciben siguen siendo laicos con su misión fundamental de presencia en el mundo; (Concl. 811)

- se requiere una vocación o aptitud ratificada por los pastores; (Concl. 812)

- se orientan a la vida y al crecimiento de la comunidad eclesial, sin perder de vista el servicio que ésta debe prestar en el mundo; (Concl. 813)

- son variados y diversos de acuerdo con los carismas de quienes son llamados y las necesidades de la comunidad; pero esta diversidad debe coordinarse por su relación al ministerio jerárquico.

Conviene evitar los siguientes peligros en el ejercicio de los ministerios: (Concl. 814)

a) La tendencia a la clericalización de los laicos o la de reducir el compromiso laical a aquellos que reciben ministerios, dejando de lado la misión fundamental del laico, que es su inserción en las realidades temporales y en sus responsabilidades familiares; (Concl. 815)

b) no deben promoverse tales ministerios como estímulo puramente individual fuera de un contexto comunitario; (Concl. 816)

c) el ejercicio de ministerios por parte de unos laicos no puede disminuir la participación activa de los demás. (Concl. 817)

3.4. Evaluación

Para analizar y evaluar la situación actual y las perspectivas del laicado, es necesario, por una parte, detectar la realidad de la presencia activa en los distintos lugares que configuran la dinámica y, por otra, hacer manifiesta la «calidad» de dicha presencia.

Para este fin, se utiliza un marco de referencia que tiene doble dimensión (Concl. 818):

La primera, que nos permite cuantificar la presencia del laicado, es el crecimiento de los ámbitos funcionales (mundo de la cultura, del trabajo, etc.) frente a los ámbitos territoriales (el barrio, la parroquia, etc.) como consecuencia del proceso de industrialización y urbanización. (Concl. 819)

La segunda nos permite calificar la presencia. En este caso el signo es cómo se comprende la realidad social, el ser y la misión de la Iglesia. (Concl. 820)

Bajo la primera dimensión se observa:

- En el espacio de la «vecindad» (parroquia, barrios), la existencia de numerosos laicos y movimientos de laicos; (Concl. 821)

- en el espacio de «apoyo pastoral» (entendido como tal el que reúne los servicios de formación doctrinal del laicado, invitación al compromiso, espiritualidad, etc.) hay una presencia apreciable, pero con deficiencias en los servicios de formación; (Concl. 822)

- en el espacio de «construcción de la sociedad» (obreros, campesinos, empresarios, técnicos, políticos, etc.) la presencia es muy débil; casi total la ausencia en el espacio de creación y difusión cultural (intelectuales, artistas, educadores, estudiantes y comunicadores sociales) (Concl. 823).

Bajo la segunda dimensión se observa:

- La persistencia de laicos y movimientos laicales que no han asumido suficientemente la dimensión social de su compromiso, tanto por aferrarse a sus intereses económicos y de poder, como por una deficiente comprensión y aceptación de la enseñanza social de la Iglesia. Se percibe también otros

laicos y movimientos de laicos que, por exagerada politización de su compromiso, han vaciado su apostolado de esenciales dimensiones evangelizadoras; (Concl. 824)

- la existencia de movimientos laicos que se distorsionan por una excesiva dependencia de las iniciativas de la jerarquía y también de los que confieren a su autonomía un grado tal, que se desprenden de la comunidad eclesial. (Concl. 825)

Finalmente, resulta de particular gravedad el hecho de un insuficiente esfuerzo en el discernimiento de las causas y condicionamientos de la realidad social y en especial sobre los instrumentos y medios para una transformación de la sociedad. Esto es necesario como iluminación de la acción de los cristianos para evitar tanto la asimilación acrítica de ideologías como un espiritualismo de evasión. Además, así se hace factible descubrir caminos para la acción, superada la mera denuncia. (Concl. 826)

3.5. Conclusiones

Hacemos un llamado urgente a los laicos a comprometerse en la misión evangelizadora de la Iglesia, en la que la promoción de la justicia es parte integrante e indispensable y la que más directamente corresponde al quehacer laical, siempre en comunión con los pastores. (Concl. 827)

Exhortamos a una presencia organizada del laicado en los diversos espacios pastorales, lo cual supone la integración y coordinación de los distintos movimientos y servicios dentro de un plan de pastoral orgánica del sector laico. (Concl. 828)

Invitamos a tener en especial consideración al laicado organizado en orden a la acción eclesial, prestándole la adecuada atención pastoral y el debido aprecio de su papel en la pastoral global de la Iglesia. (Concl. 829)

En particular adquiere especial importancia la constitución o dinamización de los departamentos diocesanos y nacionales de laicos o de otros órganos de animación y coordinación. Asimismo urge el fortalecimiento de los organismos latinoamericanos de los movimientos laicos con apoyo a la labor que en este sentido viene realizando el Departamento de Laicos del CELAM. (Concl. 830)

Igualmente, hacemos resaltar el importante lugar que pueden ocupar los laicos individualmente convocados a prestar servicios en instituciones de Iglesia, particularmente las educativas, los organismos de promoción humana y social y las actividades en zonas de misión. (Concl. 831)

Pedimos que se fomenten centros o servicios de formación integral de laicos que pongan adecuado énfasis en una pedagogía activa, completada por una formación sistemática en los fundamentos de la fe y de la enseñanza social de la Iglesia. Asimismo, consideramos los movimientos organizados como instrumentos de formación con sus proyectos, experiencias, planes de trabajo y evaluaciones. (Concl. 832)

En América Latina, sobre todo en aquellas regiones donde los ministerios jerárquicos no están suficientemente provistos, foméntese bajo la responsabilidad de la Jerarquía también una especial creatividad en el establecimiento de ministerios o servicios que pueden ser ejercidos por laicos, de acuerdo con las necesidades de la evangelización. Especial cuidado debe ponerse en la formación adecuada de los candidatos. (Concl. 833)

II CONFERENCIA GENERAL DEL EPISCOPADO LATINOAMERICANO

"La Iglesia en la actual transformación de América Latina a la luz del Concilio", Medellín 1968

La Iglesia Visible y sus Estructuras: MOVIMIENTOS DE LAICOS (#10)

I. Hechos

Nos proponemos revisar la dimensión apostólica de la presencia de los laicos en el actual proceso de transformación de nuestro continente.

Para una revisión más completa deberán ser tenidas en cuenta otras consideraciones de esta misma Conferencia Episcopal, relativas al compromiso de los laicos, en orden a la Justicia y la Paz, la Familia y demografía, Juventud y otras. (Concl. 10,1)

II. Criterios teológico-pastorales

Recordemos, una vez más, las características del momento actual de nuestros pueblos en el orden social: desde el punto de vista objetivo, una situación de subdesarrollo, delatada por fenómenos masivos de marginalidad, alienación y pobreza, y condicionada, en última instancia, por estructuras de dependencia económica, política y cultural con respecto a las metrópolis industrializadas que detentan el monopolio de la tecnología y de la ciencia (neocolonialismo). Desde el punto de vista subjetivo, la toma de conciencia de esta misma situación, que provoca en amplios sectores de la población latinoamericana actitudes de protesta y aspiraciones de liberación, desarrollo y justicia social.

Esta compleja realidad sitúa históricamente a los laicos latinoamericanos ante el desafío de un compromiso liberador y humanizante. (Concl. 10,2)

Por otra parte, la modernización refleja de los sectores más dinámicos de la sociedad latinoamericana, acompañada por la creciente tecnificación y aglomeración urbana, se manifiesta en fenómenos de movilidad, socialización y división de trabajo. Tales fenómenos tienen por efecto la importancia creciente de los grupos y ambientes funcionales- fundados sobre el trabajo, la profesión o función-, frente a las comunidades tradicionales de carácter vecinal o territorial.

Dichos medios funcionales constituyen en nuestros días los centros más importantes de decisión en el proceso del cambio social, y los focos donde se condensa al máximo la conciencia de la comunidad. Estas nuevas condiciones de vida obligan a los movimientos de laicos en América Latina a aceptar el desafío de un compromiso de presencia, adaptación permanente y creatividad. (Concl. 10,3)

La insuficiente respuesta a estos desafíos y, muy especialmente, la inadecuación a las nuevas formas de vida que caracterizan a los sectores dinámicos de nuestra sociedad, explican en gran parte las diferentes formas de crisis que afectan a los movimientos de apostolado de los laicos.

En efecto, ellos cumplieron una labor decisiva en su tiempo. Pero, por circunstancias posteriores, o se encerraron en sí mismos, o se aferraron indebidamente a estructuras demasiado rígidas, o no supieron ubicar debidamente su apostolado en el contexto de un compromiso histórico liberador.

Por otra parte, muchos de ellos no reflejan un medio sociológico compacto ni han adoptado quizás la organización y la pedagogía más apropiadas para un apostolado de presencia y compromiso en los ambientes funcionales donde se gesta, en gran parte, el proceso de cambio social. (Concl. 10,4)

Pueden señalarse también, entre los factores que han favorecido la crisis de muchos movimientos, la débil integración del laicado latinoamericano en la Iglesia, el frecuente desconocimiento, en la práctica, de su legítima autonomía, y la falta de asesores debidamente preparados para las nuevas exigencias del apostolado de los laicos. (Concl. 10,5)

Finalmente, no es posible desconocer los valiosos servicios que los movimientos de laicos han prestado y continúan prestando con renovado vigor a la promoción cristiana del hombre latinoamericano. Su presencia en muchos ambientes, pese a los obstáculos y a las dolorosas crisis de crecimiento, es cada vez más efectiva y notoria. Por otra parte no puede dejarse de ver el trabajo y la reflexión de muchas generaciones de militantes cristianos. (Concl. 10,6)

En el seno del Pueblo de Dios, que es la Iglesia, hay unidad de misión y diversidad de carismas, servicios y funciones, «obra del único e idéntico Espíritu», de suerte que todos, a su modo, cooperan unánimemente en la obra común. (Concl. 10,7)

III. Recomendaciones pastorales

Los laicos, como todos los miembros de la Iglesia, participan de la triple función profética, sacerdotal y real de Cristo, en vista al cumplimiento de su misión eclesial. Pero realizan específicamente esta misión en el ámbito de lo temporal, en orden a la construcción de la historia, «gestionando los asuntos temporales y ordenándolos según Dios». (Concl. 10,8)

Lo típicamente laical está constituido, en efecto, por el compromiso en el mundo, entendido éste como marco de solidaridades humanas, como trama de acontecimientos y hechos significativos, en una palabra, como historia.

Ahora bien, comprometerse es ratificar activamente la solidaridad en que todo hombre se halla inmerso, asumiendo tareas de promoción humana en la línea de un determinado proyecto social.

El compromiso así entendido, debe estar marcado en América Latina por las circunstancias peculiares de su momento histórico presente, por un signo de liberación, de humanización y de desarrollo.

Por demás está decir que el laico goza de autonomía y responsabilidad propias en la opción de su compromiso temporal. Así se lo reconoce la *Gaudium et spes* cuando dice que los laicos «conscientes de las exigencias de la fe y vigorizados con sus energías, acometan sin vacilar, cuando sea necesario, nuevas iniciativas y llévenlas a buen término... No piensen que sus pastores están siempre en condiciones de poderles dar inmediatamente solución concreta en todas las cuestiones, aun graves, que surjan. No es ésta su misión. Cumplan más bien los laicos su propia función con la luz de la sabiduría cristiana y con la observancia atenta de la doctrina del Magisterio». Y, como lo dice el llamamiento final de la *Populorum progressio*, «a los seculares corresponde, con su libre iniciativa y sin esperar pasivamente consignas y directrices, penetrar de espíritu cristiano la mentalidad y las costumbres, las leyes y las estructuras de la comunidad en que viven». (Concl. 10,9)

Por mediación de la conciencia, la fe que opera por la caridad, está presente en el compromiso temporal del laico como motivación, iluminación y perspectiva escatológica que da su sentido integral a los valores de dignidad humana, unión fraterna y libertad, que volveremos a encontrar limpios de toda mancha, iluminados y transfigurados en el Día del Señor. «Enseña también la Iglesia que la esperanza escatológica no merma la importancia de las tareas temporales, sino que más bien proporciona nuevos motivos de apoyo para su ejercicio». (Concl. 10,10)

Ahora bien, como la fe exige ser compartida e implica, por lo mismo, una exigencia de comunicación o de proclamación, se comprende la vocación apostólica de los laicos en el interior, y no fuera, de su propio compromiso temporal.

Más aún, al ser asumido este compromiso en el dinamismo de la fe y de la caridad, adquiere en sí mismo un valor que coincide con el testimonio cristiano. La evangelización del laico, en esta perspectiva, no es más que la explicitación o la proclamación del sentido trascendente en este testimonio.

Viviendo «en las ocupaciones del mundo y en las condiciones ordinarias de la vida familiar y social, con las que su existencia está como entretejida», los laicos están llamados por Dios allí «para que, desempeñando su propia profesión, guiados por el espíritu evangélico, contribuyan a la santificación

del mundo como desde dentro, a modo de fermento... A ellos corresponde iluminar y ordenar las realidades temporales a las cuales están estrechamente vinculados». (Concl. 10,11)

El apostolado de los laicos tiene mayor transparencia de signo y mayor densidad eclesial cuando se apoya en el testimonio de equipos o de comunidades de fe, a las que Cristo ha prometido especialmente su presencia aglutinante. De este modo los laicos cumplirán más cabalmente con su misión de hacer que la Iglesia «acontezca» en el mundo, en la tarea humana y en la historia. (Concl. 10,12)

Conforme a las obvias prioridades derivadas de la situación latinoamericana arriba descrita, y en armonía con los progresos de la teología del laicado, inspirada en el Vaticano II, promuévase con especial énfasis y urgencia la creación de equipos apostólicos o de movimientos laicos en los ambientes o estructuras funcionales donde se elabora y decide en gran parte, el proceso de liberación y humanización de la sociedad a que pertenece; se los dotará de una coordinación adecuada y de una pedagogía basada en el discernimiento de los signos de los tiempos en la trama de acontecimientos. (Concl. 10,13)

IV. Mociones

Apóyese y aliéntese decididamente, allí donde ya existen, dichos equipos o movimientos; y no se abandone a sus militantes, cuando, por las implicaciones sociales del Evangelio, son llevados a compromisos que comportan dolorosas consecuencias. (Concl. 10,14)

Reconociendo la creciente interdependencia entre las naciones y el peso de estructuras internacionales de dominación que condicionan en forma decisiva el subdesarrollo de los pueblos periféricos, asuman también los laicos su compromiso cristiano en el nivel de los movimientos y organismos internacionales para promover el progreso de los pueblos más pobres y favorecer la justicia de las naciones. (Concl. 10,15)

Los movimientos de apostolado laical, situados en el plano de una estrecha colaboración con la Jerarquía, que tanto han contribuido a la acción de la Iglesia, siguen teniendo vigencia como apostolado organizado. Han de ser, por lo tanto, promovidos; evitando, sin embargo, ir «más allá del límite de vida útil de asociaciones y métodos anticuados». (Concl. 10,16)

Promuévase una genuina espiritualidad de los laicos a partir de su propia experiencia de compromiso en el mundo, ayudándoles a entregarse a Dios en el servicio de los hombres y enseñándoles a descubrir el sentido de la oración y de la liturgia como expresión y alimento de esa doble recíproca entrega. «Siguiendo el ejemplo de Cristo, quien ejerció el artesanado, alégrense los cristianos de poder ejercer todas sus actividades temporales haciendo una síntesis vital del esfuerzo humano, familiar, profesional, científico o técnico, con los valores religiosos, bajo cuya altísima jerarquía todo coopera a la gloria de Dios». (Concl. 10,17)

Préstese el debido reconocimiento y apoyo a los distintos movimientos internacionales de apostolado de los laicos, que a través de sus organismos de coordinación promueven y edifican con tanto sacrificio este apostolado en el continente, atentos a las exigencias peculiares de su problemática social. (Concl. 10,18)

La Segunda Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinoamericano formula votos para que cuanto antes procedan las Conferencias Episcopales Nacionales a la realización de los estudios necesarios para cumplir lo establecido en el número 26 del Decreto Apostolicam actuositatem, en su propio ámbito nacional, para crearse un consejo que ayude a la «obra apostólica de la Iglesia, tanto en el campo de la evangelización y de la santificación, como en el caritativo, social y otros semejantes». (Concl. 10,19)

Y pide al CELAM proceda también a realizar un estudio, en colaboración con los laicos interesados en las diversas naciones latinoamericanas, acerca de la posibilidad, oportunidad, y forma de crear un consejo semejante en el plano regional latinoamericano, como está previsto en el párrafo citado, para disponer de una adecuada plataforma de encuentro, estudio, diálogo y servicio a nivel continental. (Concl. 10,20)

I CONFERENCIA GENERAL DEL EPISCOPADO LATINOAMERICANO

Rio De Janeiro, 1955

TÍTULO IV: AUXILIARES DEL CLERO

Capítulo I: Apostolado de los Laicos en General

La Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinoamericano:

Desea subrayar de manera especial, el papel tan importante que corresponde a los seglares en la realización de la obra salvífica encomendada por Jesucristo a la Iglesia: colaboración apostólica que se hace sentir con mayor urgencia en las regiones de América Latina, por la escasez de sacerdotes, el elevado número de fieles a ellos encomendados, la gran extensión de las demarcaciones parroquiales, y, por último, la dificultad de penetrar en ciertos ambientes. (Concl. 42)

Juzga que para el mayor progreso de la colaboración del laicado católico en la acción apostólica en América Latina, es de suma importancia difundir cada vez más entre los fieles el exacto conocimiento de la posición de los seglares dentro del Cuerpo Místico de Cristo, formando la conciencia de los fieles, de modo que se persuadan prácticamente que el apostolado aun siendo misión propia del sacerdote, no es exclusiva de él, sino que también les compete a ellos, por su mismo carácter de cristianos, siempre bajo la obediencia de los Obispos y de los Párrocos y dentro de las formas y oficios que no son privativos del ministerio sacerdotal. Por tanto es necesario que tales principios sean oportunamente enseñados e inculcados desde el Seminario a los futuros sacerdotes, para que sepan aprovecharse, como conviene, de la preciosa ayuda que les puede venir de la colaboración de los laicos. (Concl. 43)

Desea destacar que el tiempo y trabajo dedicados a la formación de seglares competentes para que colaboren con la Jerarquía Eclesiástica, están muy útilmente empleados; y recomienda con encarecimiento, que esta formación para el apostolado se comience a dar ya en la adolescencia y se intensifique en la juventud, proponiendo a la consideración de los jóvenes la grandeza del ideal de vivir, trabajar y luchar por Jesucristo. (Concl. 44)

Recuerda, finalmente, que el apostolado de los laicos no debe reducirse únicamente a colaborar con el sacerdote en el campo limitado de los actos de piedad, sino que, además de un esfuerzo continuo por conservar y defender íntegramente la fe católica, debe ser un apostolado misionero de conquista para la dilatación del reino de Cristo en todos los sectores y ambientes, y particularmente allí donde no pueda llegar la acción directa del sacerdote. (Concl. 45)

Capítulo II: Diversas formas de Acción Católica y obras coordinadas

La Conferencia:

Expresa su profunda satisfacción al comprobar los frutos alcanzados en América Latina por las diversas organizaciones de Acción Católica, y manifiesta vivamente su deseo de que intensifiquen cada vez más su trabajo apostólico, tan necesario y al mismo tiempo tan grato al corazón del Santo Padre. (Concl. 46)

Reafirma, según el pensamiento de los Sumos Pontífices Pío XI y Pío XII, que la Acción Católica, como colaboración de los seglares en el apostolado jerárquico, constituye medio eficazísimo para la recristianización del pueblo y por lo tanto el cuidado de ella se ha de colocar entre los principales deberes del ministerio pastoral. (Concl. 47)

Recomienda encarecidamente:

- a) que se procure organizar e incrementar la Acción Católica en todas las parroquias de las Diócesis latinoamericanas, según los deseos del Santo Padre Pío XII, y de acuerdo con lo que ya se ha decidido por la Jerarquía Eclesiástica;
- b) que, atendida la importancia de la Acción Católica en la vida de la Iglesia, sean designados, tanto en el orden nacional como en el diocesano, algunos sacerdotes exclusivamente dedicados a ella y convenientemente preparados mediante cursos especiales y asambleas de estudio;
- c) que los educadores católicos recuerden el deber que les incumbe de fundar y mantener vivos en sus establecimientos, centros de Acción Católica; preocupándose de formar en ellos buenos militantes y capacitados dirigentes del apostolado seglar;
- d) que los Superiores y miembros de las órdenes y Congregaciones religiosas e Institutos seculares procuren favorecer eficazmente la organización y progreso de la Acción Católica en los diversos Países. (Concl. 48)

Recomienda que, en cuanto sea posible, a efectos del apostolado externo, todas las Asociaciones católicas- ya sean las que por «sus reglas, su naturaleza, su fin, sus designios y hechos» han de considerarse «pleno iure» como Acción Católica, ya sean otras adheridas o auxiliares- se coordinen parroquial, diocesana y nacionalmente con los respectivos organismos del ordenamiento príncipe, la «Acción Católica», para la unidad y la eficacia de la actividad común de apostolado, manteniendo sin embargo cada una de las asociaciones sus propias características. (Concl. 49)

Aprueba y alaba los esfuerzos realizados por el Secretariado Interamericano de Acción Católica; ve con agrado las «Semanas de Estudio» ya celebradas, que proporcionan la oportunidad de un trabajo coordinado; y, a la vista de los halagüeños resultados obtenidos, desea que se intensifiquen estos encuentros y se les preste el apoyo que por su utilidad e importancia merecen. (Concl. 50)

Capítulo III: Apostolado social y responsabilidad del cristiano en la vida cívico-política

La Conferencia:

- a) recomienda de una manera peculiar a los miembros de organizaciones de Acción Católica que estudien y difundan los principios cristianos y las orientaciones pontificias sobre los problemas sociales, económicos y políticos, con el fin de ayudar eficazmente a formar la conciencia del pueblo en estos aspectos tan importantes de la doctrina de la Iglesia;
- b) hace votos a fin de que la Acción Católica sepa descubrir y suscitar entre sus militantes, verdaderas vocaciones a las actividades sociales y cívicas, y estimularlas a una óptima capacitación, no sólo científica y técnica sino también práctica, para dichas tareas tan importantes para el bien común;
- c) exhorta muy encarecidamente a que la Acción Católica promueva asociaciones y obras para la solución de los problemas sociales que hoy día más apremian en los Países Latinoamericanos. (Concl. 51)

Capítulo IV: Otros auxiliares del clero

La Conferencia, recordando los servicios prestados a la Iglesia por otras formas de auxiliares del Clero, como en particular los «doctrineros» y otros similares colaboradores a la acción del Sacerdote, recomienda que se les agrupe en organizaciones adecuadas para proporcionarles una mejor formación y una orientación más acorde con las directrices del apostolado seglar moderno, relacionándolas con la Acción Católica. (Concl. 52)