

INVOLVEMENT OF LAITY IN THE TEACHING OFFICE OF THE CHURCH

In the words of Pope John Paul II, the Code of Canon Law could be understood as a great effort to translate the conciliar ecclesiology into canonical language. It is the ecclesiology of communion that is central and fundamental to the doctrine of Vatican II. The Church is the people of God and a communion that is nourished by the Word of God and sacraments. No part of the structure of a living body is merely passive but has a share in the functions as well as the life of the body (Eph. 4:16). The Holy Spirit endows the Christ's faithful with diverse charisms and the pastors of the Church have to recognize them and channelize them for the building up of the community. Particularly since Vatican II, the Church has called for a renewal in the life and role of the laity. Yet often there remains a fundamental lack of understanding of the lay vocation and its role in the Church's mission. Many think that only the priests and religious are called to serve and that the role of the laity is to help out around the parish and that they are not called to play an integral part in the mission of the Church. But in fact, the actual teaching of the Church is that laypeople have a distinct and very real role in the spreading of the Gospel. The Church desperately needs them to carry out with authority, creativity, and power what the Holy Spirit has given them in Baptism. The millennium of the laity has already dawned and their participation in the life and mission of the Church is not the result of volunteerism on their part or concession from the hierarchy but a right and responsibility arising from their baptismal consecration. When we examine the recently promulgated Statutes of the Dicastery for Laity Family and Life¹, we can understand the emphasis placed on the laity in the Church.

¹ This Statute is approved *ad experimentum*. It was promulgated through its publication in *L'Osservatore Romano* and then published also in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, entering into force on 13 May 2018. Articles 5-8 describe elaborately the role of the Dicastery towards the laity.

Who is the laity?

The Latin Code gives only a negative definition of the laity as non-clerics. Canon 207 says, “By divine institution, among Christ’s faithful there are in the Church sacred ministers, who in law are also called clerics; the others are called lay people”. Though during the early stages of the process of the revision of the Code, there was an attempt to formulate juridically all the aspects of the identity of the laity,² the plan was given up towards the end. However, we cannot ignore *Lumen Gentium*, the dogmatic Constitution of Vatican II on the Church, when it states that the laity are “all the faithful except those in Holy Orders and those who belong to a religious state approved by the Church. They are the faithful who by Baptism are incorporated into Christ, are placed in the people of God, and in their own way share the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ, and to the best of their ability carry on the mission of the whole Christian people, in the Church and in the world”. The same Constitution further underlines the secular character of the laity which is proper and peculiar to them. The Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici, Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium*³ and the Catechism of the Catholic Church follow *Lumen Gentium* very closely in their description of laity.

² “In canonibus huius Codicis, nomine laicorum intelleguntur omnes christifideles, iis exceptis qui, ordine sacro recepto, ad ministerium divinum sunt deputati aut qui in Instituto ab Ecclesia sancito statum religiosum assumpserunt; christifideles scilicet, sive viri sive mulieres, qui in saeculo viventes et vitae saecularis consortes missionem Ecclesiae salvificam pro parte sua, etiam canonibus determinanda, exercent, videlicet vitam divinam Ecclesiae participantem, atque fidem quam a Deo per Ecclesiam receperunt verbo et opere confitentem ac propagantes, specialiter in rebus temporalibus gerendis et in muneribus saecularibus exercendis Christi testimonium reddentes”:*Communicationes*, 18 (1986) 351

³ The Code of Canon law for the Eastern Churches defines the laity more positively. Canon 399 says, “In this Code, the name of lay persons is applied to the christian faithful whose proper and special state is secular and who, living in the world, participate in the mission of the Church, and are not in holy orders nor enrolled in the religious state”.

The magisterium of the Church on the role and mission of the laity with reference to the hierarchy can be summarized thus:

1. Through baptism all Christ's faithful are incorporated into Christ and are constituted people of God. Each of the baptized participates in his or her own way in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ. Each is called to exercise the mission entrusted to the Church according to his or her particular condition in accordance with the law (c. 204 #1).
2. The bishops together with the presbyters and the deacons received the ministry of the community in order to preside over the flock of which they are pastors in the name of God, as teachers of doctrine, priests of divine worship and ministers endowed with authority.
3. The sacred pastors should know that they are not created to assume solely for themselves the salvific mission of the Church, but must, likewise, recognize the services and charisms of the laity in such a manner that all should cooperate unanimously in the common work of the Church.
4. There is a genuine equality of dignity and action among all Christ's faithful and all have the right and obligation to contribute to the building up the Body of Christ (c. 208).
5. There are lay persons who either through personal initiative or through hierarchical invitation, consecrate themselves temporarily or perpetually to the apostolate of the hierarchy in accordance with the law by engaging in the service of its various institutions and work.⁴

Pope Francis in his letter of 19 March 2016 to Cardinal Marc Querlet, President of Pontifical Commission for Latin America, affirms the fundamental identity of each Christian when he says, "Looking at the People of God is remembering that we all enter

⁴ Confer. J.M Tinoko, "The Ministry of the Laity", *Philippiniana Sacra* 26, No. 78 (1991) 435-450.

the Church as lay people. The first sacrament, which seals our identity forever, and of which we should always be proud, is Baptism. Through Baptism and by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, (the faithful) “are consecrated as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood” (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 10). Our first and fundamental consecration is rooted in our Baptism. No one has been baptized a priest or a bishop. They baptized us as lay people and it is the indelible sign that no one can ever erase. It does us good to remember that the Church is not an elite of priests, of consecrated men, of bishops, but that everyone forms the faithful Holy People of God”.

Laity in the Parish

Inspired by *Christus Dominus*, Canon 515 of the 1983 Code⁵ gives a new definition of the parish which has a profound pastoral and ecclesiological emphasis. “A parish is a certain community of Christ’s faithful stably established within a particular church, whose pastoral care, under the authority of the diocesan Bishop, is entrusted to the parish priest as its proper pastor.” The definition makes it clear that there are two essential elements to an understanding of the parish: a personal element, which is *a community of faithful* and an institutional element in the person of *the parish priest*. Though territoriality is an important element, it is not however an essential element since there can be personal parishes on the basis of nationality, language, rite or some other criterion.

The new understanding of the role of the parish priest too is more theological and pastoral than merely juridical. Canon 519 says, “The parish priest is the proper pastor of the parish entrusted to him. He exercises pastoral care of the community entrusted to him under the authority of the diocesan Bishop, whose ministry of Christ he is called to share, so that for this

⁵ CCEO c. 279

community he may carry out the offices of teaching, sanctifying and ruling with the cooperation of other priests or deacons and with the assistance of lay members of Christ's faithful, in accordance with the law". The law of the Church thus highlights the preeminent role of the parish priest who is the proper pastor of the parish that is entrusted to him. At the same time, the canon asserts that parochial ministry necessarily entails some form of collaboration⁶. The parish priest cannot remain isolated in the exercise of pastoral care. Vertically, he is the principal collaborator of the diocesan Bishop and he functions under his authority, keeping always intact the hierarchical communion. Horizontally, he is to exercise his ministry in fraternal communion and collaboration with other priests, deacons and the laity. The other priests may be assistant parish priests (cc.545-552), rectors of churches (cc.556-563), chaplains (cc.564-572) and even other priests who have domicile or quasi domicile in the parish. The principle of cooperation of all priests is rooted in the unity of their consecration and mission with their bishop⁷.

Assistance of the laity

The canon recognizes the contribution of the laity to parish life with the words *with the assistance (operam conferentibus)* of the laity. While the sacrament of orders links the other priests and deacons very closely with the parish priest and enables them a higher level of participation, the unique value of the mission of the laity cannot be undermined.

It was long thought that the activity of the parish priest consists in *giving* the faithful the goods of salvation and that of the faithful in *receiving* the same. Thus the parish priest proposes the

⁶ Confer. A.Borras, *La Parrocchia, Diritto Canonico e prospettive pastorali*, Bologna, Edizione Dehoniane Bologna, 1997, pp.99-102.

⁷ The corresponding canon 281 of the CCEO does not mention the 'tria munera' explicitly and the collaboration with other priests, deacons and laity in the definition of the parish priest.

truth when he teaches; administers the sacraments and other acts of worship in his sanctifying mission; directs the parochial life with various acts of charity and offers the faithful spiritual and material helps. On the other hand the faithful receive from the parish priest the above mentioned goods: the truth, worship, directives and the spiritual and material helps. However, the faithful are active not only in receiving but also in giving (CIC c. 204; CCEO c. 7). They participate in their own way in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ. They are called each according to his or her particular condition, to exercise the mission, which God entrusted to the Church to fulfill in the world. The activity of the parish priest consists not only in giving the faithful the goods of salvation but also in enabling them to give the same to others. The parish priest is not to take upon himself all that the laity can do for the building up of the community. The whole community is to be involved in those pastoral activities that do not require the sacrament of order. The parish priest is to help the laity to discover their charisms and vocations. He is to coordinate the resources available and stabilize them for the good of the parish.

F. Coccopalmerio raises the question whether the *operam conferentibus* of the laity is for an activity proper to the parish priest or to the laity themselves⁸. It appears that the laity support or help the activity which is proper to the parish priest. Canon 528 #1 says: “With the collaboration of Christ’s faithful, he is to make every effort to bring the gospel message to those also who have given up religious practice or who do not profess the true faith”. This recalls Canon 225 #1 which underlines the obligation and right of the lay people to strive so that the divine message of salvation may more and more reach all the people at all times and all places⁹. This obligation is all the more insistent in circumstances

⁸ F.Coccopalmerio, *De Paroecia*, Roma, Editrice Pontificia Universitas Urbaniana, 1991, p.28.

⁹ CCEO 289 #1, 401, 406.

in which only through them people are able to hear the Gospel and to know Christ. However, we cannot limit the activity of the laity to those who have given up religious practice or those who do not profess the true faith. The parish priest is to recognize and promote the specific role which the lay members of the Christ's faithful have in the mission of the Church, fostering their associations which have religious purposes (c.529 #2).

Though the active role of the laity in the parish is not denied, it does not appear to be sufficiently emphasized. It is unfortunate that there is not a single Canon in the section on parish that is wholly dedicated to describe the role of the laity. Regarding catechism too, the Code does not explicitly affirm that the laity are the subjects of the activity. Though their role is pointed out in cc.774 and 776 it would have been fitting to affirm the same in the section on parish. It is also strange that nothing is said of their role in works of charity. With the exception of Canon 517 #2, the Code is almost silent in this section with regard to the governing function of the laity. Even in the case of the parish pastoral council, it is described in very general terms, and in fact the universal law does not make it obligatory. Yet we can reconstruct the role of the laity in the teaching office of the laity with the ample material available in the other parts of the Code and the magisterium of the Church.

Laity in the teaching office

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. It is their obligation and right to ensure that the divine message of salvation reaches more and more all people of all times and all places (CIC c. 211; CCEO c. 14). They have the right to promote and support apostolic action (CIC c. 216; CCEO c.19). This obligation and right are reiterated in Canon 225 with reference to the lay

members of Christ's faithful whether they act individually or in associations. This obligation is all the more insistent in circumstances in which only through them are people able to hear the Gospel and to know Christ. The special obligation to permeate and perfect the temporal order of things with the spirit of the Gospel is also very important. The laity are called upon to witness to Christ in conducting secular business and exercising secular functions. Undoubtedly, they have the necessary freedom in secular affairs with due regard for magisterium of the Church (CIC c. 227; CCEO c.402). Under the chapter "The teaching function of the Church in general", CCEO speaks of the relevance of other sciences (c.602), literature and arts to the proclamation of the Gospel(c. 603).Indeed in many cases the lay persons are well versed in these disciplines. It also dwells elaborately on the responsibility of theologians which surely includes the lay persons (c.606).

The ministry of the divine Word

After highlighting the role of the Roman Pontiff and the College of bishops, individual bishops, priests, deacons and members of institutes of consecrated life, the legislator describes that of the laity in Canon 759 of the CIC: 1.The foundation of their participation is baptism and confirmation. 2. They witness to the good news by their words and by the example of their Christian life. 3.They can be called upon to cooperate in the exercise of the ministry of the word.

The witness of life extends beyond their family, to the arena of work, and to social and political involvements. They can be empowered for such effective witness by their ongoing nourishment at the tables of the Word and the Eucharist and by the enlivening action of the Spirit.

Preaching the Word of God

Canon 1342 #2 of the 1917 Code forbade the laity including the non clerical religious to preach. However according to Canon

766 of the 1983 Code, “The laity may be allowed to preach in a church or oratory if in certain circumstances it is necessary, or in particular cases it would be advantageous, according to the provisions of the Bishops’ Conference and without prejudice to Canon 767 #1”.

The laity is empowered to preach in a church or oratory subject to two conditions. 1. It may be necessary in certain circumstances (certain peculiar situations in mission lands or in the case of persecution or due to clergy shortage). 2. In particular cases it would be advantageous (perhaps the persons concerned are specialists in doctrine or have the esteem and admiration of the people, known for their impeccable character). Such preaching may include instructions, exhortations, devotional or doctrinal sermons, explanation of biblical texts, mission talks or sacramental preparations.

It is also interesting to note that while the priests and deacons can obtain the *faculty* to preach, the laity has only the possibility of *being admitted* to preach. The use of the terminology faculty is directly related to the exercise of some form of the powers of orders and of ecclesiastical governance, which in this instance is teaching.

The term laity here would include all those who are not ordained whether they be men or women. There is a specific mention of ‘can be permitted’ (*admitti possunt*) in the canon which implies someone’s permission is required. This has to be determined according to the provisions of the Bishop’s Conference. One should not forget the need of a suitable age and appropriate training. The particular norms of the CCBI are as follows:

“Competent lay people may be allowed to preach during liturgical services if on special occasions it is necessary or in particular cases it would be advantageous, keeping in mind the following criteria:

1. Lay people who are invited to preach are to be persons who are living exemplary Christian lives, known for their fidelity to the Magisterium of the Church and-prepared through a formation in Christian doctrine or Scripture;
2. These lay people can be invited to preach on occasions such as:
 - a) When the liturgy of the Word is celebrated without the presence of the priest or deacon;
 - b) When there is no priest or deacon available who know the language of the people, keeping in mind that the preaching is to be done at the end of the Eucharistic celebration;
- 3) Lay people can also be invited to speak to the assembly in certain special circumstances when it is deemed appropriate by the parish Priest. However, this type of preaching is to be done only at the end of the Eucharistic celebration and never instead of the homily which is to be given by the priest or deacon after the Gospel in conformity with Canon 767".

According to CIC 1983, the canonical mission or mandate is not required for such preaching. A simple permission is sufficient with due regard for the norms of the Conference of Bishops and the Diocesan Bishop. However, CCEO considers lay preaching only in extraordinary circumstances, especially to supply for scarcity of clerics. It calls for a mandate from the eparchial bishop when a lay person is to preach (c.610 #4).

Reservation of the homily to priest or deacon

Canon 767 #1 states that the most important form of preaching is the homily, which is part of the liturgy itself, and is reserved to a priest or deacon. The homily cannot be delivered by a lay person in any manner even in the form of a shared homily. *Ecclesiae de mysterio*, the interdicasterial instructionm is categorical in rebutting all practices that permit a lay person to give a homily. Homily is a special form of preaching which is part of the

Eucharistic liturgy. While every homily is a form of preaching, every preaching is not a homily. The diocesan bishop cannot dispense from the requirement of Canon 767 #1 and permit a lay person to preach the homily¹⁰. *Redemptionis Sacramentum* reaffirms the above norms concerning the homily.

1. Within the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy, the reading of the Gospel, which is “the high point of the Liturgy of the Word”, is reserved by the Church’s tradition to an ordained minister. Thus it is not permitted for a layperson, even a religious, to proclaim the Gospel reading in the celebration of Holy Mass, nor in other cases in which the norms do not explicitly permit it.
2. The homily, which is given in the course of the celebration of Holy Mass and is a part of the Liturgy itself, “should ordinarily be given by the Priest celebrant himself. He may entrust it to a concelebrating Priest or occasionally, according to circumstances, to a Deacon, but never to a layperson. In particular cases and for a just cause, the homily may even be given by a Bishop or a Priest who is present at the celebration but cannot concelebrate”.
3. It should be borne in mind that any previous norm that may have admitted non-ordained faithful to give the homily during the eucharistic celebration is to be considered abrogated by the norm of canon 767 §1. This practice is reprobated, so that it cannot be permitted to attain the force of custom.
4. The prohibition of the admission of laypersons to preach within the Mass applies also to seminarians, students of theological disciplines, and those who have assumed the function of those known as “pastoral assistants”; nor is there to be any exception for any other kind of layperson, or group, or community, or association.

¹⁰ Confer. Pontifical Council for the authentic interpretation of legislative texts: AAS 79 (1987)1249. CCEO c. 614 #4.

Without prejudice to the above restrictions concerning the homily, pastors will do well to remember that without the collaboration of the laity, the word of God cannot reach those faithful who cannot avail themselves of the ordinary pastoral care or even totally deprived of it or non believers.

Teaching role of the laity during the liturgical celebrations

Following the liturgical renewal promoted by the second Vatican council, the lay faithful themselves have acquired a more lively awareness of the texts that they fulfill in the liturgical assembly and its preparation, and have become more widely disposed to fulfill them. Liturgical celebration is in fact a sacred action not simply of the clergy, but of the entire assembly. It is therefore natural that the tasks not proper to the ordained ministers be fulfilled by the lay faithful. In spite of the riches of the ministries and the diverse tasks of the ministers, the whole assembly of the faithful remains the celebrating subject.

The Church therefore earnestly desires that Christ's faithful when present at this mystery of faith, should not be there as strangers or silent spectators. On the contrary through a good understanding of the rites and prayers they should take part in the sacred action, conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full collaboration. The commentators at the liturgical celebration fulfill a praiseworthy function in facilitating the community to participate more meaningfully and actively.

Every ministry instituted must be appreciated for its intrinsic value and not simply because it fills the vacuum caused by the scarcity of clerical vocations. The lay ministers are not called to simple substitutions, delegation or execution of that which is proper to the pastors but to an exercise of an ecclesiastical office which is proper to them and thus respond to their fundamental Christian vocation.

The lectors are for instance called upon to proclaim the word of God in the liturgical assembly. They are to educate the children and the adults and guide them to receive the sacraments worthily. They have to prepare the faithful who are temporarily appointed to read the scriptures. The parish priest is to ensure that all the ministers (the cantors, acolytes, lectors, collectors of offerings, and communion – distributors) play their role with due diligence and preparation.

The ministries of lector and acolyte can be conferred on lay men with requisite qualities in a stable manner by means of a liturgical rite¹¹. The temporary function for the fulfillment of certain proper acts of these two mentioned ministries can be granted to lay persons as well as the functions of commentator cantor and similar actions (c. 230 #2). When the need of the Church so demands and when there is a lack of ministers, lay persons even without the institution through a liturgical rite can also be called upon to exercise the ministry of the word, leadership in liturgical prayers, the administration of baptism, and the distribution of Eucharist with a less stable character (c. 230 #3).

Laymen as Catechists

The care for catechesis extends to all the members of the Church and especially to the parents with regard to their children. As stated by *Catechesi Tradendae*, "Education in the faith by parents, which should begin from the children's tenderest age, is already being given when the members of a family help each other to grow in faith through the witness of their Christian lives, a witness that is often without words but which perseveres throughout a day-to-day life lived in accordance with the Gospel. This

¹¹ The exclusion of women from permanent liturgical installation in the ministries of acolyte and lector has been questioned throughout the process of revising the Code. However the limitation has been retained in the canon taking into account perhaps their close link with the ordained ministries. Confer. *Communicationes*, 13 (1981) 321.

catechesis is more incisive when, in the course of family events (such as the reception of the sacraments, the celebration of great liturgical feasts, the birth of a child, a bereavement) care is taken to explain in the home the Christian or religious content of these events”. In the words of Pope Francis, “The faith we have received was a gift that came to us in many cases from the hands of our mothers, from our grandmothers. They were the living memory of Jesus Christ within our homes. It was in the silence of family life that most of us learned to pray, to love, to live the faith”

The second Vatican Council recognized the important role of lay persons who serve as catechists calling them co-workers of the priestly order¹². Pope John Paul II paid them rich tributes to them:

“I am anxious to give thanks in the Church’s name to all of you lay teachers of catechesis in the parishes, the men and the still more numerous women throughout the world, who are devoting yourselves to the religious education of many generation. Your work is often lowly and hidden but it is carried out with ardent and generous zeal and it is an eminent form of lay apostolate, a form that is particularly important where for various reasons children and young people not receive suitable religious training at home”¹³.

It is true that catechesis can be given anywhere, but Pope stresses in accordance with the desire of very many bishops, that the *parish community* must continue to be the *prime mover and pre-eminent place for catechesis*. The new Code has canonized the ministerial figure of the catechist in mission territories attributing to them liturgical and teaching functions especially that of proclaiming

¹² “In our days when there are so few clerics to evangelize such great multitudes and to carry out the pastoral ministry, the role of the catechists is of the greatest importance. Therefore, their training must be in keeping with cultural progress and such that, as true co-workers of the priestly order, they will be able to perform their tasks as well as possible, a task which involves new and greater burdens”. *Ad Gentes*, no. 17.

¹³ *Catechesi Tradendae*, no. 66.

the evangelical doctrine, of organizing liturgical acts and initiating works of charity (c.785 #1). In the fulfillment of his catechetical responsibility, the parish priest is to enlist the support of different groups of persons: 1. Clerics attached to the parish that is, priests and deacons each according to his possibilities; 2. Both male and female religious and members of the societies of apostolic life. 3. Lay persons especially catechists and parents. The Code calls for collaboration of all of these persons with the parish priest in catechetical tasks (CIC c. 776; CCEO c.624). It is not a simple possibility or a pious exhortation to the parish priest to enlist the cooperation. The parish priest has a serious obligation to ensure the catechetical formation of all who are entrusted to him and to this end he has to involve the lay persons who have sufficient skills and qualities¹⁴.

Due attention needs to be given to the proper training of catechists, their permanent formation. They must have sufficient knowledge of the teachings of the Church and the principles of pedagogy in order to communicate effectively (Canons 779-780).

Lay as missionaries

The Holy Father Francis, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, recalls that: “If something should rightly disturb us and trouble our consciences, it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are living without the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them, without meaning and a goal in life.”

Because the whole Church is of its nature missionary and the work of evangelization is to be considered a fundamental duty of the people of God, all Christ’s faithful must be conscious of the

¹⁴ For an elaborate study of the role of parents and catechists confer : Jaime González Argente, “Algunos retos de la catequesis y de la educación católica en el derecho eclesial” *Anuario de Derecho Canonico* 1 Supl. 1 [December 2012], 71-99.

responsibility to play their part in missionary activity. Lay people should cooperate in the Church's work of evangelization and share in its saving mission both as witnesses and as living instruments. It is pertinent that the description of missionaries in canon 784 includes lay members of Christ's faithful. According to Canon 784,

“Missionaries, that is, those who have been sent by the competent ecclesiastical authority to engage in missionary activity, may be chosen from the indigenous population or from others, be they secular clergy, or members of institutes of consecrated life or of a society of apostolic life, or other lay members of Christ's faithful”

The role of the catechists in missionary works is emphasized in Canon 785. They should be outstanding in living their Christian life and should have been properly formed. They are to present the Gospel teaching, engage in liturgical worship and in works of charity (AG 17). The lay missionaries may in certain circumstances be in a better position for establishing a sincere dialogue with those who do not believe in Christ, taking into account their native character and culture. The spiritual and financial contribution of the laity to missionary endeavors can never be undermined (AG1, 41; AA 27).

In the context of the abandonment of faith, a phenomenon progressively more manifest in societies and cultures which for centuries seemed to be permeated by the Gospel, the role of the laity is pertinent for the New Evangelization. In fact the Apostolic letter, *Ubicumque et semper* speaks of the responsibility of the Pontifical Council for New Evangelization to animate not only the members of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic life but also the initiatives of the laity in this regard¹⁵.

¹⁵ M. Pilar Rio, “Il dinamismo apostolico dei laici e l'originaria autoscienza ecclesiale, elementi e prospettive per la nuova evangelizzazione” **Il fedele laico, Realta e Prospettive**, Milano, Giufre Editore 2012.

In recent times there are a number of groups of laity committing themselves to evangelization. While the members no doubt are zealous and gifted, they would do well to work in due collaboration with the hierarchy and in accordance with the norms given for the purpose. The charismatic gifts need to be discerned based on certain criteria. They need to keep in mind the following principles a) The Primacy of the vocation of every Christian to holiness. b) Commitment to spreading the Gospel. c) Profession of the Catholic Faith. d) Witness to a real communion with the whole Church. e) Recognition of and esteem for the reciprocal complementarity of other charismatic elements in the Church. f) Acceptance of moments of trial in the discernment of charisms. g) Presence of spiritual fruits such as charity, joy, peace and a certain human maturity h) The social dimension of evangelization¹⁶.

Laity as teachers

Gravissimum Educationis speaks at the very outset of the right of all men of every race, condition and age, to have an inalienable right to an education. It affirms subsequently the right to Christian education when it states, “Since all Christians have become by rebirth of water and the Holy Spirit a new creature so that they should be called and should be children of God, they have a right to a Christian education”. *Christifedes Laici* speaks of the formation of the laity as one of top priority of diocese and that all the efforts and gifts of the community must be coordinated for this purpose. Canon 229 speaks of the right and duty of laity to acquire the knowledge of the Christian teaching even by attending lectures in ecclesiastical universities or faculties (CCEO c.404).

Who then are those responsible for this formation? There is no doubt that parents have a special role with regard to the formation of the children. The dioceses, parishes and various

¹⁶ Cf. CDF Letter **Iuvenisit Ecclesia**, 15 May 2016.

organizations must strive for the same under the direction of the competent pastors of the church. The role of the laity in catholic education cannot be undermined. They work in the schools as teachers and can contribute to the holistic formation of children with due collaboration with the parents (c. 796 #2). When it comes to teachers of religion in schools, the local ordinary is to appoint only those outstanding in true doctrine, in the witness of their Christian life and in their teaching ability (CIC c. 804 #2; CCEO c. 639). When they are duly qualified, the laity can receive a mandate to teach theological subjects in catholic and even ecclesiastical universities (cc. 229 #3; 812; 818).

The establishment of the *Gravissimum Educationis* Foundation on 28 October 2015 manifests the concern of the Holy Father for the apostolate of education. He asks all those involved in the ministry to accompany those in the formation: “Do not be discouraged by the difficulties that the educational challenge presents! Educating is not a job, but an attitude, a way of being; to educate, you have to get out of yourself and stay among the youth, accompany them in the stages of their growth, standing by their side”.

The laity has their own role in politics and movements working for social justice. Always conscious of their duty to permeate the temporal order with the values of the Gospel, they should not compromise for the sake of false peace on questions of faith and morals. As Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith has stated, “When political activity comes up against moral principles that do not admit of exception, compromise or derogation, the Catholic commitment becomes more evident and laden with responsibility. In the face of *fundamental and inalienable ethical demands*, Christians must recognize that what is at stake is the essence of the moral law, which concerns the integral good of the human person¹⁷”.

¹⁷ CDF Doctrinal Note, “On some questions regarding the participation of Catholics in political Life” 24 November 2002.

Laity and the means of social communication

The Church recognizes that media, if properly utilized, can be of great service to mankind, since they greatly contribute to men's entertainment and instruction as well as to the spread and support of the Kingdom of God (IM2). While it is the duty of Pastors to instruct and guide the faithful with regard to the use of the media, the laity especially must strive to instill a human

And Christian spirit into these media and assist pastoral action diligently, so that they may fully measure up to the great expectations of mankind and to God's design (IM 3; canon 822 #3). Canon 652 #1 of CCEO emphasizes appropriate formation of the Christ's faithful for using the media critically and advantageously and on the training of experts. The focus on appreciating the good books rather than on censure and condemnation of evil is praiseworthy. While respecting the necessary freedom of the laity in writing or in the use of the means of social communication, pastors are to be vigilant to safeguard the integrity of faith and morals. Writings concerning these are to be submitted to their judgment (CIC c. 823 #1 CCEO c. 652 #2). It is significant that unlike the 1917 code, the 1983 Code does not require that a censor is to be a cleric. A lay person can also be appointed to this office provide he or she can fulfill the tasks described in canon 823.

Participation in the pastoral care

An important innovation in the new Code is the participation of the lay persons in the exercise of pastoral care because of a shortage of priests. In this case a priest is appointed with the powers and faculties of the parish priest (c. 517 #2). Obviously the lay person who shares in the pastoral care of the parish cannot perform those functions which require the power of Order. However, he or she *participates in the exercise of pastoral care* in a special and significant way. He is to work in close collaboration with the priest moderator who on his part encourages the former's initiatives for the building up of the community.

It is necessary that the person is sufficiently qualified to undertake the pastoral care. We can expect from him, a great concern for people; formal theological training combined with a good sense of the Church; a great deal of stamina for pastoral experience; a knowledge of counselling, leading prayer and planning; a keen financial sense and a healthy Christian spirituality. This provision shows the anxiety of the Church to provide for the pastoral needs of the faithful. The lay persons, who share in the pastoral care in accordance with the norms of Canon 517 #2, are to fulfil all the functions concerning the teaching office mentioned in Canon 528 #1 without prejudice to Canon 767 #1.

Associations of the laity

The Code exhorts the parish priest to foster the associations which have religious purposes such as public worship, promotion of Christian doctrine, evangelisation, works of piety and works of charity (c. 529 #2). The multiple charisms given to the Church by the Spirit are in operation through these associations. While the Church benefits from steadfast and embracing territorial structures, there may be simultaneously a certain lack of community feeling, and especially a lack of active and committed community effort in organising worship, reflecting on faith and dealing with problems of mission, justice and peace.

There can be in the parish other groups that can leaven the general practicing community. These groups can well be of three broad kinds: (1). Neighborhood groups that meet for prayer, for more intimate celebration of the Eucharist and for neighborly support; (2) Development groups that are animated by a concern for peace and justice; that are oriented towards works; and that organise to serve the poor within and the poor without; (3) Groups who are willing to explore the intellectual and spiritual implications of the faith (charismatic, liturgical and study groups). In the words of Pope John Paul II, the growth of small Christian communities especially within the boundaries of the parishes is

both a means of formation for lay people and an impetus for mission in the world. In most cases, these communities serve to enliven parish life by being active instruments for evangelization and mission¹⁸.

Conclusion

The laity has within the Church and in the world their own assignment in the mission of the whole people of God. Both the laity and clerics share a common commitment to the welfare of the Church and to its presence in the world. We can say that the Church is not fully alive unless there is a genuine laity existing and working alongside the hierarchy. It is for the pastors to recognize and promote the mission of the laity in a spirit of co-responsibility. As Pope Francis says, “It is the faithful Holy People of God, to whom the pastors are continually called to look, protect, accompany, support and serve. Many times they go ahead to lead the way, at other times they retrace their steps lest anyone be left behind, and, not infrequently, they stand in the middle to know the pulse of the people”. All are partners in the global mission of salvation and the pastors have to animate the community, permitting it to exist, extending its possibilities, and representing the wonderful diversity of its charisms. We have to acknowledge the fact that the new code has greatly enhanced the role of the laity. Even if there were thousands of priests and religious in all parts of the world, the participation recognized and ordained as proper of the laity through diverse services and ministries would always be necessary for the realization of the mission of the Church. In the words of Pope John Paul II, “There is so much need today for mature Christian personalities, conscious of their baptismal identity, of their vocation and mission in the Church and in the world!”¹⁹

Rev Dr Arulselvam Rayappan

¹⁸ *Communicationes* 25 (1993) 169.

¹⁹ Pope John Paul II, *Message for the World Congress of Ecclesial Movements and New Communities* May 30, 1998.