

Keynote Address:

ROLE OF LAITY IN THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH: VAT II AND LATER DOCUMENTS

General Introduction

My presentation consists of five main divisions. The **first** major part is just an account of the Second Vatican Council's teachings on laity. It is followed by (**second** part) a brief presentation of the Church's teachings on laity as culled from later documents, particularly those that were issued by Popes St. John Paul II and Francis. The **third** part of this paper will try to describe the actual profile of laity as it is concretely found in India, with a view to making it clear that the actual participation of laity in the mission of the Church is far from fulfilling the expectations of the Magisterium. In the **fourth** part, an attempt is made to probe into the causes for the wide gap between the ideal and the actual. The **fifth** and final section attempts to suggest some remedial measures, so that prospects for the laity brightened up and that they would be able to play their due role in the mission of the Church more effectively in the future.

PART I. VAT II on LAITY

The Second Vatican Council's teachings on laity are intimately related with its teachings on mission of the Church, in general. Hence let me, first, try to focus on the council's teachings on the mission of the Church. Since mission is intimately connected with vision, we need to bring out also the Council's new vision of Church. This is attempted in the second subsection of this part of the paper. Then the third subsection proceeds to lay bare the Council's teachings on the laity's mission, directly. This is mainly done in reference to the principal documents of the Council: *Lumen Gentium*, *Gaudium et Spes* and *Apostolicam Actuositatem*.

1.1. The Conciliar View of the Church's Mission

The very purpose of convening of the Second Vatican Council by Pope St. John XXIII was to bring about Renewal of the Church in all respects. Accordingly, the traditional understanding of the Church was revamped in the light of Biblical Sources, re-defining Church's identity and mission. It is important firstly to set forth the vision of the Church as discovered by the Council and unravel its implications on the laity. To understand the new view of the Church it is better to contrast it with the earlier view of the Church.

a) **The former view of the Church** focused on

- Its institutional and hierarchical nature along with its pyramidal structure. Its top most point indicated the Pope and the lowest rung were constituted by the laity. So the internal relationship within the Church was discriminatory, implying high and low.
- Instituted for serving as a life-boat to save the humanity who are struggling in the shipwrecked world.
- The Church's relation with the world as well as other religions was conceived in terms of polarity relations:
 - The Citadel of Salvation *versus* valley of tears and damnation;
 - The Revealed *versus* merely the natural and the human ;
 - Fully the Divine, holy and sacred *versus* satanic, unholy and profane;
 - The perfect Religion *versus* theirs is imperfect;
 - The all Truth *versus* the all untruth;
 - The all Light *versus* the all Darkness;
 - The Life-giving *versus* death-producing;
 - The only right Way *versus* the wrong path and distorted in its core¹.

¹ A. Pushparajan, *The Second Vatican Council on Dialogue*, (Bengaluru: SFS Publication, 2009) 18-19

- Hence its mission was seen to bring as many people as possible into its boundaries, and as quickly as possible.
- The ‘Great Commission’ (Mt.28:19-20) given by Jesus to his disciples before he ascended to heaven was very often understood as the mission of the Church. It meant proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ to people of all nations and bringing as many souls as possible into fellowship with God.
- Thus the mission of the Church was seen as: to conquer & convert. This task was mainly the job of the priests and religious. They were to go to far off lands where native people still practiced cannibalism, superstition, idolatry, completely caught up by the snares of the devil, and destined to eternal damnation.
- Further, the Church as a whole was to serve as a community of worship and fellowship in the world, to sustain the salvation of people.
- The body of believers ought to be prepared and strengthened and equipped for works of ministry, through the Word of God.
 - They need to be trained in such a maturity of faith that they will be able to serve, according to God’s plan, in some aspect of ministry (Rom. 12:6, 1 Cor. 12:14-31), especially as it pertains toward bringing souls to Christ (2 Cor. 5:17).

The urgency of such a mission so sincerely felt by the Church so much that it was ready to employ any means of conversion. Priests and religious of those days were so motivated to spread the Gospel in the way they understood it in their context that they voluntarily made a lot of self-sacrifices. They willingly gave up all their comforts, affluence, prospective careers in life just to save the world in peril. They were willing to forego even their inheritance and wealth. They voluntarily broke away their relationship with their dearest kith and kin. They made bold to live in utter

hardship, not intimidated by even the headhunting tribes. They happily faced all sorts of life-conditions that were totally different from their native life conditions which were healthy both climatically and environmentally. In fact many of the missionaries were killed in the process of their attempt to evangelize such tribes. They learnt languages of the indigenous people, dared write grammars and dictionaries. Their courage was so indomitable and their efforts were unbeatable.

b) **As against such a view of the past Christians**, Second Vatican Council proposed an altogether different new outlook of the Church on the contemporary world, its diverse cultures and other religions. Accordingly,

- The Church is more a movement than an institution. The movement is that of the ‘people of God’, imbued with the spirit of ‘communion’ so much so the laity are said to equally participate in the divine communion and are accorded with the same dignity and the call to holiness as the clergy and religion.
- The Church is a community of believers, who are “united in Christ, led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the Kingdom of their Father” make the ‘joys and the hopes, the grief and the anxieties of the world their own “joys and hopes, the grief and anxieties”. That is why this community realizes that it is truly linked with mankind and its history by the deepest of bonds. (GS 1)
- The Church’s relation with the world is that of solidarity with people, not polarity. No more to shun the world. She is now resolved to meet the world with all its problems and promises Jesus her Master entered this world, became part of it and initiated radical transformation of it. So also the church saw her intrinsically related to all created reality, bound in genuine concern for it and in communion with it. The Council affirmed its respectful affection for the whole human family, by entering into dialogue with it about different problems.

- The conciliar view of Church's mission was also quite different. No doubt the basic point of its mission remained unchanged: church is simply as a continuation of Christ's earthly ministry (John 14:12).
 - With a renewed understanding of Christ's mission as that of a struggling encounter with the world, even to the extent of being victimized by the sinful world and of dying a historicized death which ultimately ended in resurrection, the Church saw its mission also in terms of getting to know the problems of the world from within and struggling with the world to change existing structures through combined efforts and collaborative action, transforming from within, rather than infusing something from without.
- As regards its relation with other religions the Council declared and enunciated a positive approach towards other religions. This involved a deep fellowship and collaboration with people of all religions, treating them as partners in dialogue. Religious believers are all co-pilgrims who share intimate spiritual experiences and reflections with one another with concern and compassion with genuine openness to truth and freedom of spiritual search.
- Church was also seen as a means to represent the interests of the Kingdom of God in the world, and to influence our society with the ideals of the Lord, by being "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" (Mt. 5:13-14). The Church was never to be passive, nor to be confined within four walls of a building, but to be involved as a catalyst of God's high ideals in the world around us so that "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Mt. 5:16).
- The mission of the Church was to be in terms of *service* to human needs in all its realms: the social, economic, and political, as well as the preaching of the word and the celebration of the sacraments.

- To carry out the will of the Father, Christ inaugurated the Kingdom of heaven on earth and revealed to us the mystery of that kingdom. By His obedience He brought about redemption. The Church, or, in other words, the kingdom of Christ now present in mystery, grows visibly through the power of God in the world (LG 5).

It is in this context that the *Lumen Gentium* defines the mystery of the Church as the “sign and instrument” of the Kingdom (LG 1) and that the *Ad Gentes* states that the Church is “a universal sacrament of salvation” (AG 1) as distinct from the ‘particular sacraments’ such as baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist etc.

A catch phrase, found throughout the document on missions *Ad Gentes* is that bishops are primarily responsible for the task of missionary activity. As successors of the Apostles who comprise “the beginning of the sacred hierarchy” of Christ (AG 6), and as vicars of Christ they form the centre of the mystery of the local Church (not simply as the administrative unit of the Church as a whole based at Rome).

No doubt the central theme of the document’s discussion on “mission” is its relationship to service. It speaks of service as the primary motivation of the missionary. Whether it be down the street, in a neighbouring town or in an entirely different culture and lingual context mission is all about outreach to others with the heart of a servant.

However,

- Most active missionaries continue to be represented by religious communities. They are even invited to consider “adapting their constitutions ... (in order to involve their members) as much as possible in missionary activity” (AG 40).
- The contemplative institutes are also asked to contribute “by their prayers, works of penance and sufferings ... [which] have a very great importance in the conversion of souls” (AG 40).

- **Lay people, too, are called** to active missionary work, including “catechists,” who are singled out as “**co-workers** of the priestly order”(AG 17)².
- The final chapter discusses the importance of better collaboration between bishops, priests, the religious **and the laity** in order to contribute to the “work of evangelization”, making it clear that evangelization remains the personal responsibility of **all Catholics** (AG 35).

1.2. The New Vision of the Church

The Vatican II was able to present a collaborative view of mission mainly because it was based upon its new vision of the Church’s nature. The council made use of various descriptions to explain Church’s nature as ‘Mystery’, ‘Sacrament’, ‘Mystical Body of Christ’, ‘People of God’, and ‘Communion’. The two descriptions last mentioned are very pertinent for our theme.

(a) The Church as People of God

‘People of God’ is an Old Testament notion that identified the covenanted people in as much as they accepted God’s sovereignty in their lives collectively. But the same notion is used by NT writers to call the new people gathered by Jesus, as “the chosen race, the royal priesthood, the holy nation, God’s own people” (I Pet.2:9) or the “one people God has called for one hope, one Lord, one faith and one baptism” (Eph.4:5).

Now, by re-claiming this biblical term to describe the Church, the Council proposes a participatory approach in life of the Church. In the former view of the Church laity was considered as the passive, powerless and voiceless lot who were at lowest rung of a hierarchical structure. As against it, the Council now acknowledges that all the members (the laity, clergy and religious alike) are

² Emphasis in this paragraph and in the previous one is added.

“God’s own people”, all participating directly in the life of God in Christ and through the Spirit. “All the members ought to be molded in the likeness of Him, until Christ is formed in them” (LG 7). Further the document acknowledges “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... 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 (LG 40).

By describing the Church as People of God, Vat. II proposes a participatory approach towards the Church’s mission too. Each and every one of the members (the laity, clergy and religious alike) is said to participate directly in the mission of Jesus Christ, the priest, prophet and King (LG 30, 33).

It is significant to note that the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* made a deliberate decision to place ‘People of God’ as Chapter 2, immediately after Chapter 1 on ‘The Mystery of the Church’, discarding the order of chapters found in the preparatory draft. There the ‘Hierarchical Structure of the Church’ was to follow the ‘Mystery of the Church’. The question was not simply the order chapters but of accepting a paradigm shift. The bishops with old ecclesiology and its mentality, wanted to retain the original draft. As opposed to it, the bishops with the new ecclesiology wanted ‘People of God’ to proceed the chapter on Hierarchy. It was indeed after a long and bitter struggle that the Council finally settled in favour of the new ecclesiology. The present form was overwhelmingly approved by a vote of 2,151 bishops in favour, and only five negative.³

³ William Madges, “Formulating a New Understanding of Church” in Eds. William Madges and Michael J. Daley, *Vatican II: Forty Personal Stories*, (Bayard: Twenty Third publications, 2003) 69-76

In fact this vision of the Church is the earliest ecclesiology of the Christian history.⁴ Accordingly it decided to place ‘people of God’ first and then only to deal with hierarchy. It has a lot of implications for the theology of laity.

Of course the chapter on Laity follows the chapter on Hierarchy. But at the very beginning of the chapter, it is stated that ‘Everything that has been said about the People of God is intended for the laity, religious and clergy alike’ (LG 30). This gives the laity rightful place as people of God along with all others: hierarchy, clergy and religious. It also confers on the laity equal dignity common to “all the members deriving from their rebirth in Christ, a common grace as children, a common vocation to perfection, one salvation, one hope and undivided charity” (LG 32). This is directly in opposition to the hierarchical vision of the Church which will be explained in 3.1 below. Thus it was indeed paradigm shift, vindicating the words of Pope Pius XII: “The laity ought to have an ever more clear consciousness **not only of belonging to the Church, but of being the Church - they are the Church.**”⁵

(b) Church as Communion

Communion was another fundamental idea the Council made use of to express the core Mystery of the Church, contributing to renewal of Catholic ecclesiology. Communion is a complex concept with multiple connotations. First and foremost, communion means our sharing in the same source of divine life, given to us in Christ and fostered by the Holy Spirit.⁶ This sharing in the Trinitarian

⁴ S. Karotemprel, “The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Asian Context” in *Indian Missiological Review*, (Shilong Sacred Heart College, Vol. 8 No 3, July 1986)143.

⁵ as quoted by Yves Congar, *Lay People in the Church*, (London: Chapman 1965), emphasis added

⁶ The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation presents revelation in terms of ‘the salvific work of Christ, who, through his words and deeds, makes an invitation to openness to **communion with God** and others’ Cf. *Dei verbum*, Nos. 2, 4, 17. Also 10).

mystery evidently creates solidarity and fellowship among the believers and forms them into a real *eklesia*, Assembly of God's people.⁷ So, communion meant this bond of the Church members as brothers and sisters to one another, founded on faith and Baptism⁸ and nourished in and through the Eucharist.⁹ This ecclesial communion is not to remain in a ghetto. It has to embrace the unity of all the Christian churches¹⁰ as well as all the believers and even non-believers through dialogue and collaboration to establish the reign of God on earth.¹¹

Such a description of the Church as communion opens up rich possibilities for understanding the identity and mission of laity. For, it is all the faithful, the hierarchy and the laity alike that are sharing the Trinitarian mystery, getting incorporated into the body of Christ and are built up into a more intimate communion by the celebration of divine worship and establishing the harmony of life both in both ecumenical circles and in those of wider ecumenism. In other words, the same vocation and mission of Christ is given to all members of the Body of Christ, an organically structured community and "brought into one by the unity of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"(LG 4b).

⁷ F. Wilfred, *Sunset in the East*, (Madras: University of Madras, 1991), p.311

⁸ The dogmatic Constitution on the Church describes the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation, a **sign and instrument of communion** with God and others (*Lumen Gentium* 1, 3, 48. Also Nos. 4, 8, 13-15, 18, 21, 24-25).

⁹ The Constitution on Sacred Liturgy teaches how the Church, on her earthly journey towards the fullness of the Kingdom, finds the source and summit of her **communion of ecclesial life** in the celebration of the Eucharist, the memorial of the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 5-10, 47-48).

¹⁰ The decree on Ecumenism deals with the unity and collaboration **with the Christian churches** (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 2-4, 14-15, 17-19, 22).

¹¹ Finally, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes* describes the specific contribution the Church can make to society in **collaborating for the unity of humanity** by bearing witness to the Church's communion, which is founded in Christ (GS 42. Also, GS 32)

A further implication of the concept of 'Communion' is that there is the intimate union between the local and the universal church. As against the former view that local Church was a sub-unit of the universal Church, now the local Church is recognized to have entire mystery of the Church or the whole reality of what makes the Church 'Church' being one, holy, catholic and apostolic. In this new understanding, every member of the faithful belongs to the universal Church not in a *mediate* way, *through* belonging to a particular Church, but in an *immediate* way; because the local Church is never simply particular unit, but by its very nature is always universal so much so that one's entry into and life in a particular Church is automatically brought about within the universal Church (LG 13b).

1.3. Vat. II Directly on The Mission of Laity

Apart from offering a new vision of the Church, having rich implications for understanding the identity and mission of the laity, Vat. II discussed the subject of laity so extensively that it had something or other to say with reference to laity in all its except two documents.¹² There are three major documents that speak of the laity's mission directly: (a) The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*). (b) The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in Modern World, (*Gaudium et Spes*) (c) The Decree on Laity's Apostolic Activity (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*). The contents of the document last mentioned have been reinforced by Pope John Paul II in Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, almost theme after the theme.¹³ As I intend to elaborately deal with in a separate section on *Christifideles Laici*, here let me be satisfied with focusing of the teachings of the two Constitutions on the Church on laity.

¹² *Perfectae Caritatis* (on religious life) and *Nostra Aetate* (on Church's Relation with other religions)

¹³ the parallels between the two documents are presented in systematic study establishing that the Post Synodal document *Christifideles Laici* is proven to be a commentary on the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, Cf. *Anointed for Others Vocation and Mission of the laity* (Bangalore: NBCLC, 1993)

a) *Lumen Gentium* on Laity

The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* allots a separate chapter for laity. It has 9 articles.¹⁴ The basic principles, propounded in these articles, may be laid bare in the words of the document itself.

1. Recognition of the laity's Charism and services

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. ...it is the noble duty of the sacred Pastors to **recognize** their (laity's) services and charism, so that all according to their proper roles **may cooperate** in this common undertaking with one heart....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" (LG 30).

2. Secularity is the specific field of laity

These (lay) 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. A **secular quality is proper and special to them**...By their vocation they seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and ordering them according to the plan of God. (LG 31).

3. Basic Equality

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....

¹⁴*Lumen Gentium* Chapter 4, articles 30 -38.

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. (LG 32).

4. The Special Mission of the Laity

The laity are gathered together in the People of God and make up the Body of Christ under one head (and are given) 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. (LG 33)

5. The Priestly Role of the laity

The supreme and eternal Priest ... besides intimately linking them to His life and His mission also gives them a sharing in His priestly function of offering spiritual worship for the glory of God and the salvation of men. For this reason ...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.... Thus, as those everywhere who adore in holy activity, the laity consecrates the world itself to God. (LG 34)

6. The Prophetic Role of the Laity

Christ, the great Prophet ... continually fulfills His prophetic office...not only through the hierarchy who teach in His name

and with His authority, but also through the laity... so that the power of the Gospel might shine forth in their daily social and family life...Consequently, even when preoccupied with temporal cares, the laity can and must perform a work of **great value for the evangelization of 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. (LG 35)

7. The Kingly Role of the laity

Christ, becoming obedient even unto death and because of this ... entered into the glory of His kingdom... 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... In this kingdom creation itself will be delivered from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the sons of God...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... 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 **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 ...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. ...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. (LG 36)

8. Responsibility towards the Hierarchy

The laity ...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. ...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. (LG 37)

9. Responsibility of the Hierarchy

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 ... consider with fatherly love the projects, suggestions and desires proposed by the laity. (LG 37)

10. The Laity to be Soul to the World

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. They must **diffuse in the world that spirit**

which animates the poor, the meek, and the peace makers – whom the Lord in the Gospel proclaimed as blessed. In a word, “Christians must be to the world what the soul is to the body. (LG 38)

b) *Gaudium et Spes* on Laity

The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*GS*) declares that the Church should take an active part in ‘the world’, precisely because it is the mission-field of the Church. It takes pains to expound the theme in three especially in Chapters 2, 3 and 4. Now that the dogmatic Constitution on the Church (LG) ascribes ‘the secular’ to the laity, it follows that whatever is said about the Church’s involvement in the world, is applicable to Laity’s mission, too. The most salient points are the following:

1. **Basic Equality of all**

It is significant that *Gaudium et Spes* talks about the equality of the whole of humankind despite the rightful differences among them. If so, it is needless to draw out how much more it is applicable to the basic equality existing among Christians. The diversity of functions will be there, the rightful differences ought to exist, but the hierarchy will have to recognize the basic dignity and equality of the laity and the laity will have to realize it too, so that they will be able to contribute their mite to establishment of God’s reign on earth, militating for social justice, equity and peace.

Since all men possess a rational soul and are created in God’s likeness, since they have the same nature and origin, have been redeemed by Christ and enjoy the same divine calling and destiny, the **basic equality** of all must receive increasingly greater recognition.

True, all men are not alike from the point of view of varying physical power and the diversity of intellectual and moral resources. Nevertheless, with respect to **the fundamental rights of the person**,

every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, color, social condition, language or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent. For in truth it must still be regretted that fundamental personal rights are still not being universally honored. Such is the case of a woman who is denied the right to choose a husband freely, to embrace a state of life or to acquire an education or cultural benefits equal to those recognized for men.

Therefore, although rightful differences exist between men, the equal dignity of persons demands that a more humane and just condition of life be brought about. For excessive economic and social differences between the members of the one human family or population groups cause scandal, and militate against social justice, equity, the dignity of the human person, as well as social and international peace. (GS 29)

2. Gifts to be dedicated for Service

While the Council gives recognition to different charism and diverse gifts, it lays greater emphasis on the dedication required of all to dedicate those gifts to service.

Now, the gifts of the Spirit are diverse: while He calls some to give clear witness to the desire for a heavenly home and to keep that desire green among the human family, He summons others to dedicate themselves to the earthly service of men and to make ready the material of the celestial realm by this ministry of theirs. Yet He frees all of them so that by putting aside love of self and bringing all earthly resources into the service of human life they can devote themselves to that future when humanity itself will become an offering accepted by God. (GS 38)

3. Secular Involvement is Specific to Laity

Secular duties and activities belong properly although not exclusively to lay persons. Therefore acting as citizens in the world, whether individually or socially they will keep the laws proper to each discipline, and labor to equip themselves with a genuine expertise in their various fields. They will gladly work with men seeking the same goals. Acknowledging the demands of faith and endowed with its force, they will unhesitatingly devise new enterprises, where they are appropriate,

and put them into action. Laymen should also know that it is generally the function of their well-formed Christian conscience to see that the divine law is inscribed in the life of the earthly city; from priests they may look for spiritual light and nourishment. Let the layman not imagine that his pastors are always such experts, that to every problem which arises, however complicated, they can readily give him a concrete solution, or even that such is their mission. Rather, enlightened by Christian wisdom and giving close attention to the teaching authority of the Church, let the layman take on his own distinctive role.

Since they have an active role to play in the whole life of the Church, laymen are not only bound to penetrate the world with a Christian spirit, but are also called to be witnesses to Christ in all things in the midst of human society. (GS 43)

4. **Secular Involvement, not an Option but Obligation**

Far too many Catholics in India, living in the multi-religious context as they are, think that religious faith is too private and personal to involve it in the ‘worldly’ affairs. If one does it means that they are not only insensitive to the secular dimension of the modern Indian State but also that they display a sort of arrogance which decent people cannot tolerate. But Vat II makes such a serious connection between the laity’s life as Catholics in the world and their eternal destination that it becomes an obligation to them.

This council exhorts Christians, as citizens of two cities, to strive to discharge their earthly duties conscientiously and in response to the Gospel spirit. They are mistaken who...think that they may therefore shirk their earthly responsibilities. For they are forgetting that by the faith itself they **are more obliged** than ever to measure up to these duties, each according to his proper vocation. Nor, on the contrary, are they any less wide of the mark who think that religion consists in acts of worship alone and in the discharge of certain moral obligations, and who imagine they can plunge themselves into earthly affairs in such a

way as to imply that these are altogether divorced from the religious life. This split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age. ... Therefore, let there be no false opposition between professional and social activities on the one part, and religious life on the other. The Christian who neglects his temporal duties, neglects his duties toward his neighbor and even God, and **jeopardizes his eternal salvation.**¹⁵ (GS 43)

From the above, it is quite clear that the Second Vatican Council made the vocation and the mission of laity quite distinctly and definitely.

- The laity who was formerly considered the lowest rung of the ladder are brought by Vat. II to an **equal footing with the clergy**. To put it differently, the laity that were at the periphery of the Church, as a class, are now drawn **into center of Church's life**.
- The laity who was considered as passive and voiceless are liberated from their passivity and are given a **full share in the active mission** of the Church now.
- The laity who was merely at the receiving end at one time are freed from dependence and are given basic equality in status and mission.

In a word,

- Vatican II has restored the 'call to holiness' of the laity within the world, not separating it from it as it is done in the monasteries. It has officially declared that the laity's **constitutive relationship with the world** permeates their **participation in the Church's primary** mission.

¹⁵ Emphasis added

Part 2. THE LATER DOCUMENTS ON LAITY

This part of the paper tries to present the Church's teachings as found in the post-conciliar documents. The focus is on teachings of St. Pope John Paul II and Pope Francis on Laity's mission in the Church. Thus there are two subsections in this part.

2.1 The Teachings of *Christifideles Laici*

A major document that came after the Vat II on Laity was *Christifideles Laici*, issued by St Pope John Paul II, in 1988. It is a post-Synodal document, emerging from the deliberations and conclusions of the Synod of Bishops, held in Rome, 1-30 October 1987. The very theme of the Synod was on the Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and the World during the Twenty Years after the Second Vatican Council. So the Synod was meant to review the situation and suggest a greater participation of the lay faithful, if needed. Actually many men and women were invited to be in the Synod as representatives of the lay faithful from all parts of the world, from different countries. Their views helped the progress of the Synodal discussions. The bishops did acknowledge that they were profited 'from their experience, their advice and the suggestions offered out of love for the common cause'. In a sense, therefore, this document is fruit of the common endeavour to understand the mission and work that we all have to do.

It is noteworthy that *Christifideles Laici* reiterated many of the teachings by *Lumen Gentium* on laity. In addition to it, this document laid a strong emphasis on the need for **active participation** in the life of the Church and in its mission. Not just being in the Church, sitting around and talking about things, but **Doing** something. It clearly indicates the road of lay participation in the mission of the Church and human society." This Exhortation intends to stir and promote a deeper awareness among all the

faithful of the *gift and responsibility they share*, both as a group and as individuals, in the communion and mission of the Church.”¹⁶

The way it introduces the theme is itself typical. Taking clue from the parable of the workers in the vineyard (Mt.20:1-20) the Pope extends the invitation to the lay faithful who are apathetic to their role in the Church: “he saw others standing idle in the market place; and to them he said, ‘You go into the vineyard too’” (Mt 20:3-4). It is with the aim of invigorating the lay faithful that this document brings out the theology of the lay faithful, explaining the role of lay people in Church as members of one body.¹⁷ Here below let me point out the salient aspects of laity’s participation at various levels.

i) At the Parish Level

The first and foremost of the fields of lay apostolate within the Church is the Parish community. *Christifideles Laici* brings together the many human differences within its boundaries and merges them into unity. Already the Conciliar document *Actuositatem Apostolicam* had declared that ‘the laity should accustom themselves to work in close union with their priests, bringing to the community their own problems regarding salvation and the world-problems (AA 10), examining them together in common, and solving them through “general discussion”. In line with the same viewpoint, *Christifideles Laici* reinstates the importance of the Parish Pastoral Council (CL26). Through these Parish Pastoral Councils, the present day lay faithful can and ought to do very much towards the growth of an authentic ecclesial communion. For in today’s context of social disintegration and de-humanization where the individual is lost and disoriented, but yearns for caring and personal relationships the parish, with the lay

¹⁶ Pope John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on The Vocation And The Mission of The Lay Faithful*

In The Church And In The World Christifideles Laici (1988), 2 (emphasis added)

¹⁷ Cf. *CL*, 9,11,12

faithful's participation, can be a house of welcome to all and a place of service to all, a "place" for the community of believers to gather together as a "sign" and "instrument" of communion. This what Pope John XXIII was fond of saying that the parish is to be the "village fountain" to which all would have recourse in their thirst (CL 27).

In this connection it is good to note that the parish is the best illustration of the 'communion theology' proving to be an authentic ecclesial communion. The parish is not principally a structure, a territory, or a building. Rather it is "the family of God, a fellowship afire with a unifying spirit", "a familial and welcoming home", the "community of the faithful". Plainly and simply, the parish is founded on a theological reality, because it is a *Eucharistic community*, the living source for its up-building and the sacramental bond of its being in full communion with the whole Church, a community of faith and an organic community that is, constituted by the ordained ministers and the lay faithful, in which the pastor is the hierarchical bond with the entire particular Church (CL 26).

Again it is parish that serves as the school for teaching the salvific message of Christ and puts solidarity in practice and works the humble charity of good and brotherly works". Hence, in this indispensable mission of parish, the lay faithful have a great contribution to make. Given the diverse ministries and charism, they all can be put to use in complementary way for the Church to grow, each in its own way. They can bring together their many human differences so as to contribute to the apostolate on the community level draw them into the universality of the Church. The lay faithful should learn to work in close union with their priests in the parish. "Their activity within Church communities is so necessary that without it the apostolate of the Pastors is generally unable to achieve its full effectiveness (CL 26).

ii) At the Diocesan Level

For an adequate participation in ecclesial life the lay faithful must constantly foster a feeling for their own diocese (CL 25).

For, after all, the parish is just a kind of cell of the diocese. It is the diocese which constitutes ‘the particular Church with its *primordial bond* to the universal Church’. The particular Church (diocese) is not really an administrative unit of Rome, or a kind of fragmentation of the universal Church. Nor does the universal Church a corporate organization made up of particular churches by a simple amalgamation or a mere collection of all particular Churches. But the local Church is a particular realization of the universal Christic mystery totally in this locality. As such it has a real, an essential and constant bond uniting each one of the particular churches and this is why the universal Church exists and is manifested in the particular Churches. (CL 25). For this reason Second Vatican Council already said that the particular Churches “are constituted after the model of the universal Church; it is in and from these particular Churches that there come into being the one and unique Catholic Church”(LG 23).

It is by belonging to the diocese, the particular Church that the lay faithful actively live out their Christian fellowship with the universal Church. So, they should be always ready at their bishops’ invitation to participate in diocesan projects. By participating in the Diocesan Pastoral Councils, the lay faithful they can express their “collaboration, dialogue, and discernment” and can certainly broaden resources in consultation. In certain instances their participation in the Diocesan Council can contribute to the process of decision-making too (CL 25).

(iii) At the level of Family

The most important field of lay apostolate is the Family. It is obvious that the family basic expression of the social dimension of the person, and first cell of society, the cradle of life and love, the place in which the individual “is born” and “grows”. So, it is the duty of the lay faithful in the apostolate to make the family aware of its identity as the primary social nucleus, and its basic role in society, so that it might itself become always *a more*

active and responsible place for proper growth and a *primary place of “humanization”* for the person and society.

Above all, the apostolate of laity lies in making his family as domestic Church. The parents fulfilling their duty to the best of their ability a faith-based should lead the way by example and family prayer, will pave a readier path to not only human maturity but also to salvation and holiness imparting religious education forming the children as faithful children of the Church. They in turn, as living members of the family, contribute in their own way to making their parents holy. Not only by responding to the kindness of their parents with sentiments of gratitude, with love and trust, but also standing by them as children should when hardships overtake their parents and old age brings its loneliness..., contribute in their in their own way to the sanctification of their parents (GS 48) The *Christian family*, as the “domestic Church”, also makes up a natural and fundamental school for formation in the faith (CL 62).

2.2. Kinds of Lay Participation in Church’s Mission

The lay faithful may play their role in the Church either because they are asked by the clergy and commissioned by the bishop or because they realize their own responsibility and try out their role on their own individually, or in groups. Thus, there are three main kinds of lay apostolate: (i) Extraordinary or Commissioned (ii) Voluntary and Individual lay apostolate (iii) Group Lay Apostolate

i) The Commissioned Lay Apostolate

When there is particular need and when the bishop finds some lay persons to be experts to fulfill that need, he may entrust to them certain offices and roles that are connected to the required pastoral ministry (CL 23), although there is no clerical order attached to their office. They are commissioned to do that ministry by the local bishop ‘to devote themselves exclusively to apostolic labours’(LG 41). But these are exceptional cases.

ii) The Voluntary & Individual Lay Apostolate

Not all the lay faithful need to wait for such a call or special appointment from the Bishop. The real lay apostolate lies in the voluntary role the lay faithful are ready to take. The proper lay apostolate consists in the lay faithful carrying out their ordinary life and daily work with a spirit of making the Church present and active in situations where they alone can be and act. The very fact that they are made one with Christ they get their mission. The sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation give them the call to be involved in mission. One can cite illustrious examples of such ordinary apostolate. To mention a few examples of such apostolate,

- **Sir Thomas More** (1478–1535) an English lawyer, social philosopher, statesman and an important councillor to King Henry VIII.
- **Jacques Maritain** (1882–1973), French philosopher and political thinker, an influential interpreter of the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas in the twentieth century.
- **Gilbert Keith Chesterton**, (1874 -1936) an English writer, a political thinker, dramatist, journalist, orator, literary and art critic, lay theologian and Christian apologist.
- **Bl. Devasahayam Pillai** originally called Neelakandapillai (1712-1752) married man, a learned man, well versed in Malayalam, Tamil and Sanskrit, an expert in the ancient Indian martial arts. While working in Padmanabapuram palace under King MarthandaVarma, he got converted to Christianity. It led him to face the anger of the Hindu priests and the king. He was imprisoned, scourged, put into starvation and thirst. He accepted every suffering for Christ. To him everything was for Christ. Finally was sentenced to death, which he accepted willingly.
- **Prof. Peter Paradhesi** (1895-1958), born in a village in Madurai District, served a Professor in St. Xavier's College - Palayamkottai. Immediately after the last hour of the college he would go to villages and spend the all the evenings in preaching the villagers. He begged his food and would spend the night

in a commonplace of village, along with other baggers. He had deep faith in Eucharist and love for our Lady of Assumption. He Joined in Franciscan 3rd order in the Year 1944 and became a full time evangelizer in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh for about 14 Years. He strictly followed St. Francis of Assisi in the code-dressing, food, and in all respects of worldly life. All the assets of his life were Bible & Begger's Bowl in his hand bag. His case is also taken up for canonization. He is now 'Servant of God'.

- **Thattipathri Gnanamma**, a young widow. was so sensitive to the inner longing of the girls for liberation in Kilacheri village, near Chennai, in the state of Tamil Nadu, India that in the 1860's she made few attempts to empower a handful of girls in that village in the beginning. That small beginning has now blossomed into the Society of Sisters of St. Anne-Chennai. In 1979 it was raised to Pontifical Congregation. The core identity of the Congregation is sensitivity to the cry of the poor and creative response to the signs of the times and the empowerment of the powerless, especially women and girls, resulting in a powerful drive to engage themselves in liberative, empowering and life-giving mission for the marginalized

iii) Group Lay Apostolate

There are many lay faithful who have been empowered by the Holy Spirit to be involved in their lay apostolate through "formation of groups of the lay faithful for spiritual purposes or for apostolic associations, groups, communities, movements". The rise of such group activity has been so amazing that the Apostolic Exhortation on Laity says "We can speak of a new era of group endeavours of the lay faithful" (CL 29). Alongside the traditional Pious associations like the Marian Sodality or the Franciscan Third Order, and at times coming from their very roots, there have sprouted as many as 150 associations, each with a specific feature and purpose, the capacity of initiative and the generosity of our lay people". So much so that the Pontifical Council for Laity has

officially recognized over 150 groups of lay apostolate, under the name “Ecclesial Movements.” They are “very diverse from one another in various aspects, in their external structures, in their procedures and training methods, and in the fields in which they work. However, they all come together in an all-inclusive and profound convergence when viewed from the perspective of their common purpose, that is, the responsible participation of all of them in the Church’s mission of carrying forth the Gospel of Christ, the source of hope for humanity and the renewal of society” (CL 29).

From the view point of the specific mission of the lay faithful, to be involved in the world and to play an active role in organizing the temporal affairs in the light of the Gospel and in the spirit of the Lord, *Christifideles Laici* spells out a wide variety of scope for the lay faithful to play their missionary role in the world. They may arise either as a manifestation ‘diverse charisms’ of the Holy Spirit or as a response to the varied needs of the Church in history (CL 24). It is up to each one of the lay faithful to discern their charism and respond to the needs actively and creatively. Accordingly the field of their mission in the world would be different.

The areas of the lay involvement were broadly grouped under two main divisions (1) at the individual and (2) at the level of society as a whole.

(a) At the Individual Level

The lay involvement **may be** concerned with (i) safeguarding personal dignity, (ii) right to life and (iii) religious freedom

i) Promoting the dignity of person

The value of the person transcends the entire material world (Mt 8:36). Value comes not from what person “has” as much from what the person “is” (CL 37). The person is created by God in his image and redeemed by Christ’s blood is called to be a “child in the Son” and a “living temple of the Spirit,” and destined for

eternal life. Equality of all people is thus built upon the foundation called the dignity of human person. So, each discrimination constitutes an injustice, a dishonor, inflicted on the dignity of the person (CL 37). The dignity of the person makes each one a unique and unrepeatable and hence not to be crushed or annihilated into anonymity coming from collectivity (CL 37).

ii) Respecting the inviolable right to life

In the context of all offence against the very life of a human person (murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia, suicide), all violations of the integrity of the human person (mutilation, physical and mental torture, and undue psychological pressure), all offences against human dignity, subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, slavery, prostitution), degrading working conditions, treatment of human beings as mere tool for profit etc., it becomes the special responsibility of some lay faithful like parents, teachers, health-workers and those who hold economic and political power to acknowledge the personal dignity of every human being and to defend the right to life (CL 38).

Specially in the face of the enormous development of the biological and medical sciences, gigantic strides accomplished by new technology, endangering the very biological essence of the human species, it is of utmost importance that lay faithful realize their responsibility to take up the task of calling culture back to the principles of an authentic humanism, giving a dynamic and sure foundation to the promotion and defense of the rights of the human being in one's very essence (CL 38).

iii) Defense of Right to Religious Freedom

Implied in the dignity of the human person is the defense and promotion of human rights, including the right to freedom. Gratefully acknowledging the martyr's example and gift, the Document recalls the many brothers and sisters who do not enjoy the right of religious freedom, and who have to face difficulties,

marginalization, suffering persecution and often times death, because of professing faith.

Proclamation of the Gospel and Christian testimony given in a life of suffering and martyrdom make up the summit of the apostolic life among Christ's disciples, just as the love for the Lord Jesus even to the giving of one's life constitutes a source of extraordinary fruitfulness for the building up of the Church (CL 39).

(b) Mission at the societal level

Human individual grows and develops only in the fabric of society. The very purpose of the whole society is geared to the human person. So, the Christian responsibility to serve human being is intimately connected with a responsibility to serve society. The areas in which the lay faithful are called to play their specific role are the following.

(i) Family

The lay Faithfull's duty to society begins primarily in marriage and in family. It is through partnership of man and woman that God created the first form of communion between persons. Jesus restored integral dignity to the married couple by not giving room for divorce (Mt 19:3-9). St. Paul's esteem of marriage was so great as to connect it with the mystery of Christ and the Church (cf. Eph 5:22-6:4; Col 3:18-21; 1 Pt 3:1-7). So, the lay faithful's duty to society begins primarily with conviction of the unique and irreplaceable value that the family has in the development of the Church.

Sociologically also, family is the basic cell of society, cradle of life and love, the primary place of humanization for the person and society. Hence the family is the primary social nucleus. As such then it has so basic a role in society that it has more active and responsible place for proper growth and proper participation in social life. Evidently it is above all the lay faithful's duty in the apostolate (CL 40).

(ii) Social Service

Charity towards one's neighbor, shown through the various forms of spiritual and corporal works of mercy leads to the Christian animation of the temporal order (CL 41). For, charity is the highest gift offered by the Spirit for the building up of the Church (1 Cor 13:13) and it gives life and sustains the works of solidarity that look to the total needs of the human being.

Volunteer work done in various forms of services and activities, when impartially given to the most in need and forgotten by the social services of society itself, becomes an important expression of the apostolate in which lay men and women have a primary role (CL 41).

(iii) Politics

Since the nineteenth century there has been a greater awareness growing in society with regard to the structural injustice and the urgency of building a just social order in which all receive their share of the world's goods justly. As early as 4th century the great Saint Augustine once said, a "State which is not governed according to justice would be just a bunch of thieves".¹⁸ At the same time the Church cannot and must not take upon herself the political battle to bring about the most just society possible. She cannot and must not replace the State. Nor can she remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice. She has to play her part. She will awaken the conscience of people through rational argument. She has to reawaken the spiritual energy of people, because establishment of justice always demands sacrifice. Unless people are reawakened with the spiritual power a just ordering of society cannot prevail and prosper. Though therefore a just society is the achievement of politics, not of the Church, yet the Church will be deeply concerned with the promotion of justice through efforts to bring about openness of mind and will to the demands of the

¹⁸as quoted by Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (2005) 28

common good. In this connection the observation made by Pope Benedict XVI made in his Encyclical is pertinent:

The direct duty to work for a just ordering of society, on the other hand, is proper to the lay faithful. As citizens of the State, they are called to take part in public life in a personal capacity. So they cannot relinquish their participation “in the many different economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural areas, which are intended to promote organically and institutionally the *common good*.” The mission of the lay faithful is therefore to configure social life correctly, respecting its legitimate autonomy and cooperating with other citizens according to their respective competences and fulfilling their own responsibility. (DC No 29)

Thus the lay faithful need to be empowered through participation of the people in determining direction, policies, and projects of the government; be even encouraged to stand for election and become MPs or MLAs, of course with due acquisition of the standards of competence, credibility and commitment.

The basic principles that should govern the Christian’s involvement in politics are the following:

- 1) The pursuit of the common good, or the good of every one and the good of each person taken as a whole ought to be the basic standard.
- 2) Defense and promotion of justice has to be the continuous line of action.
- 3) The spirit of service should be the inspiring and guiding principle for participation in politics. No less important are the necessary competence and efficiency.
- 4) Though the Church is not identical with any political community, nor is tied down by any political system, it bears witness to those human and Gospel values that are intimately connected with political activity itself, such as liberty and justice, solidarity, faithful and unselfish dedication for the good of all, a simple life-style and a preferential option for the poor and the last. This demands that the lay faithful always be more animated by

a real participation in the life of the Church and enlightened by her social doctrines (CL 42).

- 5) The Church must always exercise its prophetic role even in political matters. And it is competent to pass moral judgment in political matters
- 6) When moral and gospel values are at stake both clergy and laity must be involved in politics. However, the role of the clergy should be non-partisan, giving merely guidelines and explaining moral principles on political matters. On the other hand, the lay faithful must actively and directly participate in politics, including partisan politics.

(iv) Socio-Economic Life

The process of globalization and other transformations that have taken place is all a matter of great concern in the world of economics and work. In this context the lay faithful have a special responsibility to work out a solution especially to such serious problem of unemployment and organizational injustice. They should try to make the work place become a community of persons respected in their uniqueness. They are expected to develop a new solidarity among those who participate in a common work (CL 43).

(v) Ecological Concerns

Related to the socio-economic life and work is the ecological concerns. Certainly humanity has received from God the task of “dominating” the created world. But this dominion is not absolute power. No one can speak of a freedom to “use and misuse” or to “dispose of things as one pleases.” The limitation imposed from the beginning by the Creator himself and expressed symbolically by the prohibition “not to eat of the fruit of the tree” (Gen 2:16-17) shows that when we come to the natural world we are subject to biological laws and moral areas. “A true concept of development cannot ignore the use of things of nature, the renewability of resources and the consequences of haphazard

industrialization” (CL 44). Moreover, the Genesis text that talks about the domineering power of human beings (Gen. 1:26), if taken along with another text that speaks of God’s command to ‘take care’ of the earth (Gen. 2: 15), then one will understand the ecological responsibility is inbuilt in the creation story of the Bible.

(vi) Evangelizing culture

Culture, understood as all the factors which go to the refining and developing of humanity’s diverse spiritual and physical endowments, humanization of social life through improvement of customs and institutions and expression of the great spiritual experiences and aspirations, is to be held as the common good of every people, the expression of its dignity, liberty and creativity, and the testimony of its course through history. So Christian faith, which works for the common good, becomes a part of history and the creator of history only from within and through culture (CL 44).

Pastoral urgency, therefore, calls for an absolutely special concern for culture in those circumstances where the development of a culture becomes dissociated not only from Christian faith but even from human values, and in those institutions where science and technology are powerless in giving an adequate response to the pressing questions of truth and well-being that burn in people’s hearts (CL 48). Hence the lay faithful are called upon to be present and act in the privileged places of culture like schools and universities, centers of scientific and technological research, areas of artistic creativity. Their presence is destined for the recognition and purification of the elements that critically burden existing culture and also for the elevation of these cultures through the Gospel values and Christian riches (CL 48). Recalling the memorable words of *Evangelii Nutiandi*: “the split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time,” the document says that “every effort must be made to ensure a full evangelization of culture, or more correctly of cultures” (CL 48).

vii) The field of social communication forms a special field of concern in today's culture. So as a part of cultural responsibility of the lay faithful's mission today they need to be aware of a special responsibility in this field. Today the means of social communication have become not only powerful instrument for the creation and transmission of culture but also are undergoing a rapid and innovative development. This development has an extensive worldwide influence on the formation of mentality and customs. This is all the more the reason for us to consider the world of the mass media as a new frontier for the mission of the Church. As professionals the Christian faithful they must nurture recognition of all its values. This must be sustained by more adequate resource materials, both intellectual and pastoral. It implies a work of educating people in a 'critical sense'. It is animated by a passion for the truth, and inspires one to work of defense of liberty, respect for the dignity of individuals, rejecting every form of monopoly and manipulation. Thus an authentic culture is uplifted (CL 44)

viii) In a multi-religious Context

Ever since Vat. II the Church has been following a positive approach towards other religions. This involved a deep fellowship and collaboration with people of all religions, treating them as partners in dialogue. Religious believers are all co-pilgrims who share intimate spiritual experiences and reflections with one another with concern and compassion with genuine openness to truth and freedom of spiritual search. Similarly there arose the need to dialogue with diverse cultures. For each culture not only provides us with a new approach to the human but also opens up new avenues for understanding the Gospel and its riches. Thus there arose the desire on the part of the Church to meet and to collaborate with all people of good will, walking together on the path of dialogue with other religions as well as other cultures, all in a common effort to transform the world into an abode of

justice, peace and unity and establish the Reign of God. This new relationship to the world in general and other religions as well as cultures in particular is what is called ‘Dialogue’ in the Church. In this over-all context of dialogue it becomes a duty of the lay faithful to know some of the key principles with which the Church has taken up the new approach and put them in their daily life.

If these various aspects and levels are kept in mind then, surely the lay faithful would have certainly responded to ‘their proper and irreplaceable call’ to be involved in the world. Thereby they will have played their role in transforming the world into the Kingdom of God.

Rightly therefore the Synod of Bishops-Special Assembly for Asia (1998) in Rome, in their *Final Message*, declared it in these words described as the **“Age of the Laity.”** To quote their exact words:

The laity has an important role to play in the mission of the Church. Many signs indicate that the Spirit is empowering them for an even greater role in the coming millennium, which could be called the Age of the Laity. Some signs are: their commitment to evangelization, their involvement in ecclesial life, and their active and enthusiastic participation in small Christian communities.¹⁹

2.2. Pope Francis on Laity

First of all, it is important to note that Pope Francis is painfully aware of the sad fact that the present image of the Church is that of a ‘deformed Church’ because it is self-referent, self-complacent, self-glorifying and clerical-centered. Next, he is determined to change it into an authentic spouse of the Master, concerned with recovering of the original Christ-experience and reflecting his light to the world, enthusiastic about sharing that joy with all, especially the existential peripheries, respecting decentralized structures, diversity of cultural forms so that she would be really

¹⁹ “MESSAGE OF THE SYNOD FOR ASIA”
http://www.ewtn.com/new_evangelization/asia/synod/message.htm

a fruitful mother who gains life from joy of evangelizing Church.²⁰ By the term ‘existential peripheries’ he means the poor, the suffering, and the oppressed, the women and young, and even ‘sinners’.

Thus Pope Francis projects an ‘inclusive vision’ of the Church. The very fact that he envisions a Church to be reaching out to the ‘existential peripheries’ indicates a significant and anirreplaceable role of the laity in the Church. The laity who have been treated as the lowest of the rung or the bottom of the pyramid will never be considered so in his vision.²¹ From the very fact that Pope Francis envisions a Church to be reaching out to the ‘existential peripheries’ it is clear that the laity who have been treated as the lowest of the rung or the bottom of the pyramid will never be considered so in his vision.

Moreover, it is remarkably significant that Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation, defines laity as the focal point of the hierarchy’s service: “Lay people are, put simply, the vast majority of the people of God. The minority — ordained ministers — are at their service” (EG 102).

Even the Second Vatican Council had defined the laity negatively in the sense that their identity is described in contrast with that of the priests and religious (LG 31). The CCC also follows the same formula (Cf. 897). This negative sort of definition gives an impression that the priests and the religious are the primary members of the Church, in reference to whom the laity are to be understood as non-ordained and non-consecrated. Conceptually then the laity are to be assumed as second class

²⁰ A. Pushparajan, “Embracing the Laity: The Vision of Pope Francis” in Kuruvilla Pandikattu, *Pope Francis: His Impact on and Relevance for the Church and Society* (Pune : Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth & Christian World Imprints, 1918), 117-136

²¹ A. Pushparajan, “Embracing the Laity: The Vision of Pope Francis” in Kuruvilla Pandikattu, op.cit ., 125

members in the Church. Their role is mainly to serve the hierarchy who really constitute the Church. It is on account of such negative way of understanding the laity, real 'vocation' in the Church was understood in the past to mean only to clerical or religious life. And it was implied thereby that the clergy and religious alone have a real mission in the Church and that the laity merely as helpers to the clergy and religious.

All these mistaken and misguided understandings of the laity are washed off by Pope Francis's definition of laity, mentioned in EG 102. In this description laity is made the focal point of Church's very existence the priests and religious are called to serve them. Here, Pope Francis is making a Copernican revolution in the understanding of the Church as against the erstwhile understanding of the Church mainly from the standpoint of the hierarchy, and the laity being defined in terms of the hierarchy. Pope Francis emphasizes that laity form the pivotal point at whose service the call of hierarchy is destined to be.

The Pope reiterates the same idea much more pointedly in a letter to the President of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America.²² First, he asserts sympathetically that "lay people are immersed in those struggles, with their families, trying, not only to survive, but whom, in the midst of contradictions and injustices, seek the Lord and want to witness this". Then he tells the pastors that their task "should be that of seeking a way to be able to encourage, accompany and stimulate all their attempts and efforts to keep hope and faith alive in a world full of contradictions especially for the poorest, especially with the poorest". He further explicates that, they "as Pastors must be committed in the midst of our people and, with our people, sustain their faith and their hope – opening doors, working with them, dreaming with them,

²² The Letter, dated 16 March 2016, is released in *L'Osservatore Romano*, NUMBER 17, (2444), 29 April 2016, with the title: "The Hour of the Laity has Come" p.4. Column 1

reflecting and especially praying with them.”²³ Moreover He invites the pastors to continually “to look at, protect, accompany, support and serve the laity.”

In fact, the very identity of the clergy is defined by Pope Francis only as correlative to that of the laity, rather than identifying laity with reference to the hierarchy. He explains the correlative relationship through a simple but telling illustration. A father is not understood on his own without his children. He might be a very good worker, professional, husband, and a friend. But it is only his children that make him a father. So also, Francis conceives of the priest’s identity only in relation the laity’s. To put it in his own words:

A Pastor is not conceived without a flock, which he is called to serve. The Pastor is Pastor of a people, and the people are served from within. Often one goes forward indicating the path, at other times behind so that no one is left behind, and not infrequently one is in the middle to hear well the people’s palpitation.²⁴

“It is only when the Pastors feel themselves an **integral part of the laity** that they are positioned as pastors in life,” Francis says.²⁵ That alone gives them a proper perspective to address the problems of laity in a different way. Otherwise, there is a danger of the hierarchy falling “into reflections that can be very good in themselves but that end up by functionalizing the life of laity or theorizing somuch that speculation ends by killing action.” In fact Francis believes that the pastors of the Church have already fallen into this danger.

No doubt, Vat. II affirms the specific call of the laity as well as their special role in society (LG 30) “What specifically characterizes the laity is their secular nature... their very vocation, seeks the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by

²³ *L’Osservatore Romano*, NUMBER 17,(2444), 29 April 2016, with the title: “The Hour of the Laity has Come” p.4. Column 4

²⁴ *Ibid*, p.4. Colum 1.

²⁵ *Ibid*

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 are called thereby 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 (LG 31). Likewise CCC says: “By reason of their special vocation it belongs to the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God’s will. . . . It pertains to them in a special way so to illuminate and order all temporal things.” (CCC 898). However, they all remain in paper.

The laity, according to Pope Francis, is not given the necessary autonomy to play their role effectively. It is all because of the ‘clericalism’ that is still dominant in the Church. He is so anxious to remove this ‘deformity’. Hence, his open denouncement of clericalism:

Clericalism leads to the functionalization of the laity, treating them as “messengers,” restricts different initiatives and efforts and I even dare to say the necessary boldness to be able to take the Good News of the Gospel to all the ambits of the social and especially political endeavor. Far from stimulating the different contributions, proposals, little by little clericalism extinguishes the prophetic fire that the Church is called to witness in the heart of her peoples. Clericalism forgets that the visibility and sacramentality of the Church belongs to the whole People of God (cf. LG 9-14), and not just to a few chosen and enlightened.²⁶

Obviously, therefore, Francis warns the clergy and bishop of identifying the ‘Church as an elite of priests, of the consecrated, of the Bishops’. Identifying himself as one belonging to the pastor’s community he tells his fellow-pastors: “it is good to remember... we all form part of the Holy People faithful of God. To forget this brings in its train various risks and deformations both in our own personal as well as in communal living of the ministry that the Church has entrusted to us”.²⁷

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4. Colum 2-3

²⁷ *Ibid*

Further, quoting *Lumen Gentium*, the Pope reminds the clergy that the Church is “the People of God, whose identity is the dignity and the freedom of the children of God, in whose hearts dwells the Holy Spirit as in a temple” (LG 9). From this then draws out his point that the faithful, Holy People of God is anointed with the grace of the Holy Spirit’ and thus, as we (the clergy) reflect, think, evaluate, discern, we must be very attentive to this anointing.”²⁸

As against the pastors, clergy and the bishops, who assume that they alone are consecrated people, Francis urges them to see baptism as the primary sacrament on account of which the whole church has been consecrated as the People of God. Thus, it is good for the pastors ‘to look to the faithful, Holy People of God, and to feel themselves an integral part of the same’, Pope says.²⁹ That alone positions them in life and, therefore, in the themes they treat in a different way. ‘Looking continually at the People of God’, this alone would save the pastors from merely declaring some slogans that are fine and beautiful phrases but are unable to sustain the life of the laity. One such phrase is, as remembered by Pope is this: “The hour of the laity has come” But, Francis plainly acknowledges that “it seems that the clock has stopped.”³⁰

This sad situation has arisen because clericalism was playing a dominant role, making the laity ‘totally clergy-dependent’ and treating them merely as ‘the extended arm of hierarchy’. So, the role of laity cannot be discussed ignoring one of the greatest distortions of the Church:

This approach (clericalism) not only nullifies the character of Christians, but also tends to diminish and undervalue the Baptismal grace that the Holy Spirit put in the heart of our people. Clericalism leads to the homologization (functionalization) of the laity, treating the laity as “representatives”, restricts different initiatives and efforts and I even dare to say the necessary boldness to be able

²⁸ *Ibid*

²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 4. Colum 1, at the bottom

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 4. Colum 2, at the top

to take the Good News of the Gospel to all the areas of the social and above all political sphere. Clericalism, far from giving impetus to the diverse initiatives, efforts, little by little extinguishes the prophetic flame that the entire Church is called to witness in the heart of her peoples. Clericalism forgets the visibility and sacramentality of the Church belongs to the whole People of God (cf. LG 9 -14), and not only to the few chosen and enlightened.³¹

As opposed to it, then, Pope Francis asserts that in virtue of their baptism, the laity “are protagonists in the work of evangelization and human promotion Incorporated in the Church, each member of the People of God is inseparably a disciple and a missionary. Lay movements in their dynamism are a resource for the Church?”³² The same view is expressed by the Pope in his Apostolic Exhortation *GE* much more emphatically.

At one time missionary activity was seen as work of some professionals in the Church. The missionaries’ life-long work was to proclaim the Gospel to other nations and convert the people into our Church. As against it, Pope Francis affirms:

In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19). All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization. It would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients. The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized. Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God’s saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are “disciples” and “missionaries”, but rather that we are always “missionary disciples (EG120).

³¹ Ibid, page 4, Column 3

³² Pope Francis, “Message to the participants at a conference on the laity in Rome” (March 7-8, 2014), held at the Pontifical Lateran University organized under the theme, “The Mission of Lay Christians in the City”

The Pope, further, corroborates his view by citing the first disciples who, after experiencing Jesus' encounter, went forth to proclaim him joyfully. Philip immediately after encountering the gaze of Jesus exclaimed to Nathanael: "We have found the Messiah!" (Jn 1:41). The Samaritan woman became a missionary immediately after speaking with Jesus and many Samaritans come to believe in him "because of the woman's testimony" (Jn 4:39). So too, Saint Paul, after his encounter with Jesus Christ, "immediately proclaimed Jesus" (Acts 9:20; cf. 22:6-21).

Here what the Pope emphasizes two points: (a) It is the real experience of having encountered Christ that should be the real source of our joy which spontaneously exudes in anything one does or speaks. This is precisely what should be the real method of evangelizing, rather than devising an organized plan to be carried out by professionals. ³³(b) Each and every one of the baptized is to be involved in evangelization, by way of expressing one's joy of having experienced the joy of salvation from Jesus. Thus, the role of the laity has now become much more intense and gravely responsible. New-evangelization can be taken up at any time or anywhere, by anybody, provided that one is ready to bring the love of Jesus to others. This can happen unexpectedly and in any place: on the street, in a city square, during work, on a journey (EG127). One can always be respectful and gentle to others, one can enter into personal dialogue, when the other person speaks and shares his or her joys, hopes and concerns for loved ones, or so many other heartfelt needs. Later, if possible one can bring up God's word, perhaps by reading a Bible verse or relating a story, but always keeping in mind the fundamental message: the personal love of God who became man, who gave himself up for us, who is living and who offers us his salvation and his friendship. Of course, this message has to be shared humbly as a testimony on the part of one who is always willing to learn, in the awareness

³³ If at all some professionals pursue oral proclamation, they should always be respectful of the other, prayerful in their approach and humble in their attitude to the other.

that the message is so rich and so deep that it always exceeds our grasp. At times the message can be presented directly, at times by way of a personal witness or gesture, or in a way which the Holy Spirit may suggest in that particular situation. If it seems prudent and if the circumstances are right, this fraternal and missionary encounter could end with a brief prayer related to the concerns which the person may have expressed. In this way they will have an experience of being listened to and understood; they will know that their particular situation has been placed before God, and that God's word really speaks to their lives. (EG128) No doubt, the Pope admonishes that the laity "must also maintain a vital link to the diocese and to parishes, so as not to develop a partial reading of the Gospel or to uproot themselves from the Church".

Pope Francis wants the laity to play an active role in the world, with its complex social and political issues. In a message to the participants of a conference for laity the Pope, citing the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and underscored that the lay faithful, in virtue of their baptism, "are protagonists in the work of evangelization and human promotion".³⁴ Particularly, he urges the laity to work for the 'social inclusion' of the poor, maintaining always priority-attention to religious and spiritual needs. In so doing, they are "to use regularly the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, which he called a "complete and precious tool."³⁵

Still another significant perception of Pope Francis is the genius of women. Already at the beginning of his papacy, Francis remarked:"Women are asking deep questions that must be addressed. The church cannot be herself without the woman and her role. ... We must therefore investigate further the role of

³⁴ Conference, held at the Pontifical Lateran University, was organized under the theme, "The Mission of Lay Christians in the City", March 7-8, 2014, Cf. Vatican Radio, 2014-03-07, "Pope Francis: laity are 'protagonists' in Church's mission" <http://www.news.va/en/news/pope-francis-says-laity-are-protagonists-in-church>, accessed 5.5.2017.

³⁵ Vatican Radio, 2014-03-07, op. cit. above in foot no 33

women in the church. We have to work harder to develop a profound theology of the woman. Only by making this step will it be possible to better reflect on their function within the church. The feminine genius is needed wherever we make important decisions.³⁶ Of course, while he gave a due recognition to the necessity of broadening the opportunities for a stronger presence of women in the church, he was quite clear about the extreme position: “I am wary of a solution that can be reduced to a kind of ‘female machismo,’ because a woman has a different make-up than a man. But what I hear about the role of women is often inspired by an ideology of machismo”.³⁷

Pope Francis, during his visit to Philadelphia, in March 2014, talked about the special role for women. Referring to the call given to Saint Katharine Drexel, the patroness of the local parish church at Pope esteemed the immense work she had realized, even when she was a young girl. He recalled the particular instance in which she was challenged to do her part to which, of course, she responded positively.³⁸

In that connection Pope raised the following pertinent questions regarding the upbringing of the young with challenges.

How many young people in our parishes and schools have the same high ideals, generosity of spirit, and love for Christ and the Church! Do we challenge them? Do we make space for them and help them to do their part? To find ways of sharing their enthusiasm and gifts with our communities, above all in works of mercy and concern for others? Do we share our own joy and enthusiasm in serving the Lord?³⁹

³⁶ Antonio Spadaro, S.J., “A Big Heart Open to God” in *Thinking Faith*, the online journal of the Jesuits in Britain 19th September 2013, http://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/20130919_1.htm accessed 10.11.2016.

³⁷ Antonio Spadaro, S.J., *Ibid*

³⁸ Tom McGRATH, “In Homily, Pope Francis Calls for Greater Role for Laity ... and Women?” <http://www.phillymag.com/news/2015/09/26/pope-francis-philadelphiahomily/#qRcdocpWMcwK7ySE.99> September 26, 2015, accessed 5.10.2016.

³⁹ *Ibid*

Pope Francis is convinced of the transformative power of the laity who are animated by sincere faith because of their genuine experience of the mercy of the Lord. In his address to the Pontifical Council for Laity he publicly stated thus: “The Church should always value the transformative power of faith-filled laity who are willing to serve the Gospel. ... We need well-formed lay people, animated by a sincere and clear faith, whose life has been touched by the personal and merciful love of Christ Jesus”⁴⁰. No doubt, the Pope equally emphasizes on the daring propensity required of the laity: “We need lay people who take risks, who get their hands dirty, who are not afraid of making mistakes, who go forward. We need lay people with a vision of the future, not confined to the little things of life.” Above all, he said that the “Church needs lay people who “dare to dream.”

In sum, Pope Francis’s teachings on laity springs from his plain acceptance of the fact that the Church has failed to shine owing to its self-referent and self-glorifying and clergy-centred approach. As a corrective to it, Pope Francis envisions a new Church in which the role of the laity, including the women and the young, will decisively be the central and focal subject.

In this vision, the laity’s call and mission, arising out of the baptismal vocation, determines even the role of the hierarchy. So the need of the hour is a double pronged change of mind-set, required of both clergy and the laity. On the one hand there is urgency to evoke among the laity realization of their vocation and mission to be carried out on their own, and get them immersed in

⁴⁰ Pope Francis, Address in Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council of the Laity, on June 17, 2016. Cf. “For Pope Francis, the Catholic Laity can transform the World”, *Catholic News Agency*, Vatican City, Jun 18, 2016 <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/for-pope-francis-the-catholic-laity-can-transform-the-world-86987/> accessed 4.6.2017

the struggle of transforming the world into the reign of God in the light of the Gospels. On the other hand the clergy ought to accompany the laity, encourage them and work in their midst, far from separating themselves from the laity, and reflecting on the laity's problems independently of involvement in laity's struggles, still worse 'using them' for their own designs and according to their abstract reflections which are often cut off from their actual involvement.

Now, by way of summing up the consideration made in this Part,

- From the rapid survey it is clear that the teachings of the post conciliar popes have made a tremendous progress from the opening made by Vatican II.
 - While the pre-Conciliar understanding held the laity as the passive and second grade members of the Church, the Vatican II conferred on them the basic equality and dignity to the laity,
 - The later documents of the Church expanded the implications. Thus the Apostolic exhortation by Pope John Paul II spelt out the variety of the active doings the laity could/should carry out in the Church and the world.
 - Pope Francis has actually made a Copernican revolution in the understanding of the laity's place and role in the Church. He views the laity as the focal point of the Church, in reference to whom the vocation of clergy and religious and their ministry is to be defined.
- What is the impact of these revolutionary teachings on the actual profile of the laity in the Church? This is investigated in the next Part.

PART 3. PROFILE OF LAITY'S ACTUAL ROLE IN THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

From the foregoing it is patent that Vat. II and the later documents have given the assurance that the laity shares in the same dignity as clergy and religious and that they share in the triple mission of Jesus Christ, in their own way, equally as the hierarchy. How far has this assurance been realized? This can be assessed only by looking at the reality. It is a matter of gratitude that many attempts have been made to study the existing status of the laity in the Indian Church. It is also matter of appreciation that the Indian hierarchy have taken initiatives to evaluate how much progress the church here has made on lines with the Vat. II.

- As early as in 1986 the CBCI Laity Commission made a scientific Study Aid for the Bishops Synod.⁴¹
- Nearly after a decade, CBCI brought out an *Evaluation Report of the Indian Church* (1995), a section of which devoted to “Lay Participation and Leadership”⁴² and another section on “Action Plan” with reference to lay leadership.⁴³
- Again, on the occasion of the Great Jubilee year 2000, Krista Jayanti National Committee got Survey made by an Evaluation Committee, which also contains quite a lot of material on the existing position of the laity.
- Further, the Laity Commission of the CCBI has made a research-based study on *The Vocation of the Laity in the Life and Mission of the Church* in view of the CCBI Plenary Assembly at Alwaye (Jan. 2007).⁴⁴

⁴¹ Stella Faria, *The Laity's Perception of Their own Status in the Church in India*, (Bangalore: WINA, 1986)

⁴² *CBCI Evaluation Report*, (New Delhi: CBCI Evaluation Committee, 1995)87-95

⁴³ *CBCI Evaluation Report*, (New Delhi: CBCI Evaluation Committee 1995)208-212

⁴⁴ *The Vocation of the Laity in the Life and Mission of the Church* (Bangalore: CCBI Laity Commission) 2007

- Apart from these official data, I undertook a research with the help of my students of theology both at the M.Th. and B.Th. levels.⁴⁵ This research was based upon the Scientific Observation in reference to the role of the Laity across the country.

Here below is given first a summary account of the findings of my Observation-Based Study. Next an attempt is made to cull the principal points of the CBCI Over-all Evaluation and finally of The *Krista Jayanti* Survey Study

3.1 Observation-based Study:

Given the pluriformic nature of the Indian Church, I deemed it proper make the study region-wise to find out the actual position of the laity in their respective contexts. The observers were divided into six zonal groups:

- (1) All those who were born in Syro Malabar and Malankara rites were grouped as **South West Zone**.
- (2) Those who were born and brought up mostly in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh were grouped under **South Zone**.
- (3) Those who were born and brought up in Goa and Mumbai were grouped as **Western Zone**.
- (4) Those who were working in and around the region of West Bengal were grouped as **Eastern Zone**.
- (5) Those who were born and brought up or who had been working in the North Eastern States were separately grouped as **North Eastern Zone**.
- (6) Those who are working in the rest of India were grouped as **North Zone**.

⁴⁵ A. Pushparajan, unpublished paper on “The Laity in the Local Church”, presented in XV Colloquium of Bishops and Theologians (July 8 – 10, 2010), on “Office and Charism within the Understanding of the Church as Participatory Communion” organized by the Doctrinal Commission of the CBCI, at NBCLC

All the groups were served with the following ten questions:

1. What is your impression in general, regarding the participatory role of the laity in the Church structures in your region?
2. Describe specifically the laity's participation in Liturgy?
3. Do the laity in your region have any role to play in the policy-making and decision-taking?
4. What is the role that the laity play in financial matters of the parish?
5. What is laity's participation in the administration of the parish?
6. Do the laity involve themselves in justice and peace work?
7. What role do the laity play in civil / social issues?
8. What part do they take in cultural matters?
9. What is the stand of the laity with regard to the socio-economic issues of the nation today?
10. What is the laity's involvement in politics?

All the groups were to discuss the answers to each of the questions on the basis of their direct observation /involvement in the field or/and firsthand knowledge acquired in their respective region. After collecting the data from each of the members of the group, and a thorough discussion of the same was had in the group itself so as to arrive at a group report. The findings of the group reports were finally tabulated. For our purpose, here, it is sufficient to just to hint at some of the most important points, culled from the consolidated report.

(a) Positive Features

It is indeed laudable that there are many positive developments in the Indian Church contributing to the realization of the promises of Vat. II regarding the laity's role.

1. Liturgically, there is certainly dramatic change in laity's role. Thanks to the efforts the Indian hierarchy taken immediately after the Council, altars were changed and priests began celebrating the Holy Eucharist facing the assembly. The laity could feel that they are part of the celebration. Similarly steps were taken in all the

regions to use the vernacular rather than the Latin. Local music and even dance began to be used according to the local culture. The active participation of the laity is more visible in the Sunday liturgy. People of the different SCCs are involved in planning, carrying out and evaluating the various liturgical activities of each Sunday.

2. Participatory structures: The Laity commission of the CBCI, already since the 1980s has been keen on promoting participatory structures in parishes, especially through formation of Small Christian Communities (SCC). They play a major role in the making of PPC and also in making Sunday liturgy more vibrant. Even those that were traditionally known as Pious Associations of the laity (meant to promote personal piety and devotion) have been successfully incorporated into the PPC structure and which in turn promote to certain extent lay participation in policy-making and decision-taking processes of the parish. It is heartening that the Diocesan Pastoral Council (DPCs) have been created almost in all the dioceses of the South West, South, West and North East, and the lay participation is clearly visible in those structures.

3. In the general administration of the parish lay leadership of the laity is widespread in the South West, West and North East regions. Lay participation is on the increase in most of dioceses in the South where such structures like SCC s, Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) have been implemented.

4. Lay Movements: Over the years the laity in India have acquired a greater awareness that the Church is not constituted by just the clergy and the hierarchy, but that it is of all the baptized believers in the Church. As a result there is a significant growth in ecclesial movements like The Charismatic, The Neo Catechumenate Way, Evangelization Groups, Couples for Christ, Jesus Youth Movement. There has been an extraordinary evidence of laity's thirst for Word of God, and a deep craving for living the Divine

Life among the lay faithful, so much so that many are even tempted to join other Fellowship Movements of the Pentecostal type, where they don't find enough 'pastures' in their parish-ambience.

5. Justice Movements: There is more and more awareness among the laity that the church's ministry requires social action and even direct action for justice and equality. The mushrooming of thousands of action groups all over the country is a good sign. Other people's movements like the Dalit liberation movements have been actively promoting a social and liberative consciousness among the laity

6. Salvation-Consciousness: Again the laity are trained to think that that salvation is available to all, not by simply being Catholics. Formerly we used to think and pray for the conversion of the Protestants, Muslims and Hindus, pagans. Now that practice is no more there publicly.

(b) Areas of Concerns

The lay participation in the Church's renewal process that was gleaned from the profile above has not been a mainstream process. The so called laity's participation in Church's life and mission has been restricted to a committed minority within the local Church. The vast majority of laity still remains passive and inactive.⁴⁶ Like this, there are many points of concern. They may be categorized into three groups: (i) Those that are related to the attitude of laity (ii) Those that are related to their formation (iii) Those that pertain to the clergy and hierarchy

(i) Attitude-related Concerns

1. Ignorance and illiteracy may be the main reason for the lack of awareness regarding the outlook of the Vat II on their identity and mission. Most of the laity in the north are illiterate.

⁴⁶ L. Doohan, *The Lay-Centered Church Theology and Spirituality*, (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1984) 26-61

2. Indifference and apathy of the vast majority of the laity could also be a reason for the lack of lay participation. Many of the laity simply want to be left alone. They want to remain unchanged. They just want the status quo, allowing the priest to take all responsibilities of the parish. They don't want to assume any active leadership role.
3. Insecurity in the sort of changes wrought by Vat. II may be the reason for others to take up active role. They feel safe in the pre-Vatican liturgy, old devotional practice. It may be owing to lack of proper education or lack of understanding of the need

(ii) Formation-related Concerns

4. The implication of all the three points mentioned above is just that there is obviously lack of proper faith education and training of the laity.
5. The Formation Programmes that are already taken up are too academic and information-packed. They lack a pointed focus on spirituality and leadership techniques which can prepare lay people to assume responsible roles in PPCs and other decision making bodies in the Church and in society.
6. Given the multi-religious as the living context of laity in India, do the formation programmes of the laity take this aspect into account? Are they helped to enter into dialogue with others without any compromise to our core of the Faith? Are they taught to what extent one can appreciate the traditional, cultural and spiritual values of other religions and incorporate their ways and wisdom in the process of living in harmony with diversity?⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Final Message of BILA 6: "Second in the Series of BILA's on Formation in Ed. Franz-Josef Eilers, *For All Peoples of Asia, FABC Documents from 19920-1996 Vol.2, (Manila: Claretian Publications 1997)*81-85

7. The Formation programmes attempted in various regions as well as in most of the dioceses do not seem to challenge the laity to make option for justice part of their faith? They don't seem to include a thorough knowledge of the social teachings of the Church so as to be enabled to make the social teachings of the Church part of their daily decisions at their home, workplaces, and streets, contributing to the world a socio-economic development, that serves the people, promote life and protect the environment.⁴⁸

(iii) Clergy/Hierarchy Related Concerns

8. Lay formators and animators, if any, are not given a follow up support by the clergy. Most often training is given at a formation centre either in the regional or at the national level. But when they get back to their parishes, the parish priests never consider their training seriously, leave alone giving them the encouragement they need. They are not given scope by the local parish priest to put their training into practice?
9. It is not merely a grave matter of concern that Church in India is over-institutionalized but also that its structures are manned exclusively by the clergy. It has disappointed laity who took seriously the new understanding of the Church, proposed by Vat. II. In some places it has created a conflict between the parish priests and the 'enlightened' laity.
10. Many others have been alienated by certain crises like the divisive approaches of the hierarchy/ the religious on the basis of caste, or feel a undernourishment for their spiritual life in the Church and so show their protest by leaving the Church and joining the new Pentecostal groups that allow spontaneous religious sharing or faith sharing groups or in some Fellowship Meetings or Assembly of God Churches

⁴⁸ The Message of the Fourth East Asian Regional Laity Meeting, Thailand, See Ed. Franz-Josef Eilers, *For All Peoples of Asia, FABC Documents from 19920-1996 Vol. 2,(Manila: Claretian Publications 1997) 133-135*

11. The so called lay participatory structures like the PPC and DCP have been smothered by the hierarchy, either by outnumbering the laity by nominated members who are either religious sisters or brothers or lay people who are too docile and passive to raise a voice, or by the veto power on the ground that it is only a consultative body. Such an unholy practice of the hierarchy frustrates the well-meaning laity who spent hours of their precious time in discussing the issues threadbare.
12. Lack of recognition and respect by the clergy is another reason for the laity to shun all active participation. Some lay persons who are most experienced and competent, and who serve as top executives in corporate managements, are most often cowed down sometimes by the ‘authority’ of a newly ordained man who may not be any older than their own sons, and who may even be much less competent and knowledgeable. People are legitimate in raising questions like this: “Administration, policy decision, educational techniques, goal planning, financial management, are they part of the grace of the Sacrament of Holy Orders? Do priests have any protection against serious mistakes in these areas?”⁴⁹

3.2. CBCI Research Committee’s Evaluation

The findings of CBCI Evaluation Committee⁵⁰ corroborate the findings of the observation study given above.

Today the Church in India, as a body, is fairly strong with its various structures, institutions, influence etc., the report says. However, this strength and power is primarily in the hands of the clergy and various Religious Congregations of both men and women. The role of the laity in the life of the Church is negligible

⁴⁹ Leonard Doohan, *op. cit.* 33

⁵⁰ *CBCI Evaluation Report* (New Delhi: CBCI Evaluation Committee, 1995) 208

and they are hardly involved as they have been kept out of the mainstream. Some of the discriminations suffered by the laity are:

- o Most of the Church resources are spent for the formation of the clergy and the religious;
- o CBCI organizes seminars and meetings to foster lay leadership mostly at the national level but not at the regional level and as a result the ordinary people are unable to benefit by these programmes;
- o The laity are not involved in the administrative and decision making processes of the Church at different levels;
- o The laity are not given an adequate role in the secular sphere which is proper to them according to the Second Vatican Council;
- o Serious efforts have not been made to train lay leaders and the laity are not encouraged sufficiently.⁵¹

There is a strong feeling among the laity even today that they are meant to pray, pay and obey, and nothing more. In other words, they have the feeling that they are the voiceless and passive members of the Church and not participants in moulding its life or in promoting the Kingdom. They are still at the receiving end and are only beneficiaries rather than partners in the life of the Church.

The respondents, ranging from a near majority to an absolute majority agree that the CBCI should offer lay persons: (a) different positions like Secretaries of Commissions, Directors of different units, etc. (b) opportunities to be actively involved in the decision –making processes of the dioceses and parishes; (c) definite roles in the administrative work of the Church.⁵²

⁵¹ *CBCI Evaluation Report* (New Delhi: CBCI Evaluation Committee 1995), 208

⁵² *CBCI Evaluation Report*, 209

The laity today is destined to **pray, pay and obey**. This should be changed by involving them in the administration of the Church at all levels.⁵³

Many of the dioceses are run by Bishops, priests and the religious and the laity is kept away from the active functions of the Church. Many of the laity don't know about the actual functions of the Church at present. In such a situation they become passive towards the Church.⁵⁴

3.3. The Survey by The Jubilee Committee

On the occasion of the Great Jubilee Year 2000, a national survey was conducted on the impact of Vat. II on the Church in India, by the National Committee of *Yesu Krista Jayanti*. It was carried out during Sep.1999 - July 2000. A total of 1892 respondents from 52 dioceses were covered in the survey. It may be relevant to take into account the findings of this survey, too.

As regards the **familiarity with the teachings of Vat. II** by laity, just a handful of the respondents have given an affirmative answer that is familiar.⁵⁵ Nearly two thirds of the respondents have also said that only a small percentage is familiar. About one fourth of them have said that some of them are familiar.

As regards **faith education**, only less than half of the respondents have said that it is being organized well, while almost an equal number give a negative answer. The rest of them acknowledge that they do not know about it. Of these are included some priest-respondents and some sister respondents. Very strange indeed.⁵⁶

⁵³ CBCI *Evaluation Report*, 89

⁵⁴ CBCI *Evaluation Report*, 90

⁵⁵ Sebastia Raj, "Our Journey from Vatican II to the Great Jubilee 2000", in Paul Puthenangady Ed. *Yesu Krista Jayanti 2000 Towards a New Society*, (Bangalore: National Committee)149

⁵⁶ Sebastia Raj, 149

As regards **the running of the institutions** (schools colleges, hospitals etc.) owned and run by the dioceses or the religious congregations, only about one third of the respondents say that the lay people have a definite say in. But more than two-third of them say that they do not have a definite say in running these institutions.⁵⁷

As regards **the participatory structures**, a little more than half of the respondents say that there is a parish council in their respective parish. But one third of them say they do not have a parish council. It is surprising to note that the rest of the respondents including some priests and nuns do not even know whether there is a parish council or not in their own respective parish.⁵⁸

As regards **finance committee** only about one fourth of the respondents say that there is a finance committee in their respective parish. A little more half of them say that there is no finance committee in their respective parish. One fifth of all the participants are not even aware. Here also are included some priests and nuns.⁵⁹

About **functioning of parish councils**, only less than half of the respondents expressed satisfaction. A little more one fourth says that to some extent they function well. Only a handful of the respondents agree that they function satisfactorily.⁶⁰

Regarding **the life of the Laity**, less than half of the respondents view that the lay people have a positive approach to other religions: tolerant, respectful, understanding their worship etc. One fourth would agree to this view to some extent. Almost one third of them acknowledge that they do not have a positive approach to other religions. ⁶¹

⁵⁷ Sebastî Raj, 150-151

⁵⁸ Sebastî Raj, 151

⁵⁹ Sebastî Raj, 151

⁶⁰ Sebastî Raj, 151

⁶¹ Sebastî Raj, 144

As for **the consumerist life style**, a vast majority from all categories agree that the consumerist values are swallowing up the Gospel values. Exactly half the respondents say that only a small percentage of lay people are able to resist the consumerist values of the market such as power, prestige, comfort, unhealthy competition, excessive profit mindedness, self-centered approach etc. A little more than one third agree with this view to some extent. Only a small number of respondents say that majority of Catholics are able to resist.⁶²

In fine,

Studies of the actual profile of the laity in India suggest that there is clearly a setback in the realization of the original vision of the laity presented in Vat. II. The lived reality of the laity in the Indian Church is not up to the mark. It may even be said that the existing profile of the laity is even far away from the vision of Vat. II, and that promises given by Vat. II have gone woefully unfulfilled.

PART 4. CAUSES OF THE CRISIS

The foregoing assessment clearly establishes that although there are many laudable attempts made in the Indian Church to encourage the laity to play their role yet the laity is still farther away from the ideal set by Vat. II. So it is necessary to probe into the challenges that have caused this crisis.

4.1. Outdated Ecclesiology in Practice

A real major challenge is that the medieval ecclesiology still operative in practice. Specially the ecclesiology was articulated by St. Robert Bellarmine and accepted by the Church as a whole

⁶² Sebastia Raj, 149

maintained that the Church is the perfect society on earth, reflecting the hierarchical society of heaven in earth. Just as in heaven God, angels and saints are all arranged in a pyramidal structure, so too the Church is organized with Pope at the top with fullness of power and shared by the bishops, presbyters and deacons in decreasing degrees. The laity are at the lowest rung, having no power whatsoever. Even a saintly Pope Pius X re-affirmed the medieval views of the Church as an “unequal society” comprising of two ranks: the clergy and the laity. His encyclical letter *Vehementer Nos* 1906 affirms:

It follows that the Church is essentially an *unequal* society, that is, a society comprising two categories of her sons, the Pastors and the flock, those who occupy a rank in the different degrees of the hierarchy and the multitude of the faithful. So distinct are these categories that with the pastoral body only rests the necessary right and authority for promoting the end of the society and directing all its members towards that end; the one duty of the multitude (**laity**) is to **allow themselves to be led, and, like a docile flock**, to follow the Pastors.⁶³

From this sort of thinking there was some improvement with Popes Pius XI and XII. But a complete reversion to the traditional thinking was made by only Vat. II. Since then the former ecclesiology has been given up in theory. In this respect, it is indeed a big success. However, in practice, the former thinking is continued even today. There is clearly a discrimination of the laity by the clergy in all their dealings, behavior and treatment of laity and in management of the institutions and administration of parish. In other words, the pre-Vatican II ecclesiology is in effect in the actual functioning of Church in India. This is particularly visible in the South, and South West regions.

⁶³ No. 8. Emphasis added. The translation here is that the Holy See as found on the Vatican Internet website: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_x/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_11021906_vehementer-nos_en.html

4.2. Exaggerated Emphasis on Ministerial Priesthood

Another challenge is that the pre-Vatican II theology of the Holy Orders is still dominant among all the faithful in Indian Church. Accordingly, the recipient of the Holy Orders⁶⁴ is supposed to become ontologically one with Jesus the High priest so much that he is become ‘another Christ’ really. Such a standpoint obviously implies an essential difference between the clergy and the laity. Further it is considered that this sacrament gives the priest sacred power to perform the threefold ministry of Christ: sanctifying (through administering the sacraments), teaching (through the preaching the Word of God) and governing his people (be it at the parish level or otherwise). In other words, laity are supposed to be just beneficiaries of the bishops, priests and deacons. The laity are denied of any sacred power. Even the present Canon Law stipulates that “the Christian faithful have the right **to receive** assistance from the sacred pastors **out of the spiritual goods of the Church**, especially the word of God and the sacraments.”⁶⁵ A clear division is implied in these words.

It is against this sort of two tier system of the Church of the medieval ecclesiology that Vat. II re-discovered the original perspective that Baptism enables the sharing of all the faithful in the priesthood of Christ and the Church’s mission as a common call given to all and that the mission was collaborative task, involving co-responsibility of both clergy and the laity.

4.3. Ambivalence in Vat. II

No doubt, there is certain ambivalence in the theological stand of the documents of Vat. II. On the one hand LG chapter

⁶⁴ D. Alphonse, “Identity and Mission of Laity in India Today”, in *The Vocation of the Laity in the Life and Mission of the Church*, (Bangalore: CCBI Laity Commission 2007)50-52

⁶⁵ *The Code of Canon Law*, No 213. Emphasis added

2 speaks of the Church as an active presence of Christians in the world and for the world with the consequences it involves for the priesthood and the religious life. On the other hand chapter 4 of *Lumen Gentium* and the whole of the Apostolicam Actuositatem also upholds a clerical approach in which the laity is once again considered as a subordinate, a kind of subject to the hierarchy, despite its attempt to reinstate the original unity, dignity and equality of the laity.

Such an ambivalence of positions is understandable in a Council in which 2600-2800 bishops participated. Given their variety of backgrounds, varied theological outlooks and training of such a vast number of council fathers, the documents also are bound to reflect the different strands of theological positions: conservative as well as progressive. But this is not a problem at all. For the main task of the Council was not meant to create a theological treatise in which many schools of theology will be evaluated to arrive at a correct position. In fact certain pluralism of theological position may be welcome too.

4.4. The New promises in Old structures

But the real problem lies in this that while Vat. II promised to lay people new roles and a new identity, they were not pursued consistently in the Church, with corresponding models to support the new promises. Nor was there any attempt to create such structures as to implement the new roles assigned to the laity by Vat. II. To put it one word: New roles were promised in an old-structured church. With old theological models still prevailing in the Church there has not been any scope for laity to play their roles meaningfully. No new arrangements have been made to uphold the new ideas. Nor new theological models encouraged. Rather the voices of new and valid theological voices seem to have been stifled. Even reactionary responses are cropping up almost with a view restoration of the pre-Vatican II status.

3.5. Abuse of Power in the Hierarchy

Still worse problem is that some of the hierarchy have even dared abuse their special rank, status power and position to inflict wrongs in the Church. The most patent example is the Child-abuse cases of North American Church. This concern is very well corroborated by the following words from the by people related to Laity movement over there:

These [bishops] were people we trusted, as if they were practically God, and they were allowing our children to be raped,” said Anthony T. Massimini, who as a young priest from Philadelphia served as a page during the first session of Vatican II, and now, decades after he left the priesthood and married, is one of many thinkers advising Voice of the Faithful. “We still have no sense of talking to a bishop on an adult-to-adult basis. But something is going to change, because they’re losing the people.”

The bishops, however, are increasingly reasserting their authority as the church’s official teachers, reminding their flock that the church is not a democracy. The most visible evidence is the increasing frequency with which bishops bar Voice of the Faithful from meeting in dioceses in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut, and in parishes in Maine and Massachusetts.⁶⁶

In the Indian Church the abuse of authority may not be as glaring as it is in the West. However, no one can say with certainty that the abuse is not there. But a day may come when it boomerang into a big fiasco. If the Roman proverb “Caesar’s wife should be above suspicion” is applicable to any person who holds a public office, and much more appropriate in ecclesiastical office.

⁶⁶ Michael Paulson, “Citing Vatican II, Laity seeks change” *Boston Globe* on 10/13/2002 http://www.boston.com/globe/spotlight/abuse/stories3/101302_laity.htm

4.6. Clericalism

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* of the states:

In the ecclesial service of the ordained minister, it is Christ himself who is present to his Church as Head of his Body, Shepherd of his flock, high priest of the redemptive sacrifice, Teacher of Truth. This is what the Church means by saying that the priest, by virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, acts *in persona Christi Capitis*:

It is the same priest, Christ Jesus, whose sacred person his minister truly represents. Now the minister, by reason of the sacerdotal consecration which he has received, is truly made like to the high priest and possesses the authority to act in the power and place of the person of Christ himself (*virtute ac persona ipsius Christi*).

Christ is the source of all priesthood: the priest of the old law was a figure of Christ, and the priest of the new law acts in the person of Christ. (Art. 1548)

Now, granted that “the minister ... is truly made like to the high priest and *possesses the authority to act in the power and place of the person of Christ himself*, it could be difficult for the laity to question, criticize or hold a priest to some accountability. In fact, when on committees, people defer to the priest because he is a priest — even when others at the table have more expertise in the matter at hand. And also it happens when experts in education and child development are overruled in parish schools by the pastor, for the simple reason that he is a ‘priest’. Not that this kind of undue special treatment causes all priests to become “clerical.” There are many priests who are humble, grounded and generous good men. But if someone already has a penchant for power and privilege, this treatment could lead to corruption. And the many cases of ‘child abuse’ have been made under this pretext.

This is made worse by the fact that even now many parishes and dioceses have not set up Pastoral councils and finance committees and that the parish priest or bishop acts as the final authority in all matters — business, financial, pastoral. Still more it becomes saddened that there is no accountability for the ordained men who live alone without community how their time is spent and whether or not they are healthy — in every aspect. If he insists that whatever he dictates on the laity is to be taken as a ‘word of God’ by them, and still if he has no support, assistance or someone to act as a check and balance, how are we accept him as a healthy authority specially if he has inadequate psychological screening.⁶⁷

We can say that the discourse shaping the Roman Church— theology, spirituality, liturgy and law—is of the clergy, by the clergy, for the clergy, and answerable to the clergy. If some of the priests and bishops are guilty of serious misbehaviour and still get away easily, it is because the good lay people have accepted the awe and aura with which the clergy have successfully surrounded them.⁶⁸ This is indeed cancer of clericalism to be cut and thrown from the Church.

4.7. Laity to be blamed for Apathy and Ignorance

Most of the time the laity themselves could be blameworthy for the dismal situation of today. The vast majority of the laity in the Indian Church may actually want to remain unchanged according to the expectations of Vat. II. Many of the laity simply prefers to be left alone. They don’t want to assume any active leadership role in the Church. They feel so safe in the pre-Vatican II vision that they are led to a sense of insecurity in the sort of changes

⁶⁷ Nicole Trahan, “Evils of Clericalism”, <https://www.globalsistersreport.org/column/horizons/evil-clericalism-55340>,

⁶⁸ Myron Pereira, “A Cancer in the Body: The Culture of Clericalism”, in *Indian Currents*, 13-19 March 2017,

wrought by Vat. II. They are so satisfied with old devotional practices that they are not at all interested in the challenging roles to play in the new structures, if implemented according to the Vat. II.

4.8. Major share of the Blame by the Hierarchy

However these attitudes of apathy on the part of laity could be traced to lack of proper faith education or sheer ignorance of the need for change. But, given the existing situation in the Church where all power and knowledge and position has been in the hands of the clergy it was principally their responsibility and even duty to have dispersed the knowledge to the laity. At least, the teachings of the Vat. II must have been brought to the notice of the vast majority of the rank and file. There has not been there been tangible attempts made on the part of the hierarchy to have propagated the teachings on their role and call. There have been some silver lines as the voice of Bishop Bosco Penha.

If the laity are a passive and lifeless, if they have no sense of their role/ mission in the Church and in the world, who takes responsibility for this situation? Is it not the leaders of the Church? Unless bishops and priests accept responsibility for the situation and move swiftly and effectively, on a priority basis, to alter this situation, nothing will change.⁶⁹

Thus failure to impart the knowledge of Vat. II to the laity the hierarchy the Indian Church and lack tangible expression in the style of its functioning⁷⁰ could be said to be the most basic cause of the gloomy scenario.

⁶⁹ Bosco Penha, "The Church, Today and Tomorrow: Empowering the Laity-Problems and Possibilities", unpublished paper presented to the CBCI Commission for Laity and Family, 31.3.1989 pp. 5-6

⁷⁰ CBCI *Evaluation Report*, 209-210

PART 5. SUGGESTIONS FOR REMEDIAL MEASURES

In the light of the foregoing sections, this final part attempts at proposing some remedial measures so that the Church in India will be able to realize the ideal vision of Vat. II more concretely and empower the laity to play their role more authentically.

1. Take appropriate steps to ensure that the participatory structures like the PPC and DPC are formed in every diocese.⁷¹
2. As against the exaggerated view of ministerial priesthood, the mystery of missionary communion as hinted at by Vat. II⁷² and elaborated by *Christifideles Laici*⁷³ must be put into practice, in such a way that “a member of the lay faithful ... 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”⁷⁴
3. Encouragement must be given to new theological attempts so that the ambiguity that existed understandably in Vat. II might have resolved by now. It is gratifying to note that that in the Indian Church colloquium of bishops and theologians has been regularly convened once in two years. But in such meetings laity’s participation must be encouraged.
4. It is high time that at least after fifty years new structures and new practices were set up on a top priority basis so that pre-Conciliar ideas, perspectives and old attitudes will cease to persist in the Church. Otherwise they will not only be in conflict with the vision of Vat. II but also will thwart the vision itself. Shall we not take seriously the warning of our Lord “not

⁷¹ CBCI *Evaluation Report*, 211

⁷² *Lumen Gentium*, Nos. 4, 6

⁷³ John Paul II, *Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World, Christifideles Laici*, 1988, Nos. 19-22

⁷⁴ *Cristifideles Laici*, No. 20

to pour new wine into old wine skins? If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined (Mt.9:16-18).

5. In all that the hierarchy do with regard to the Church affairs, let them take the laity into confidence. Otherwise the two water-tight compartments in the Church will continue in the same way.⁷⁵ All the posts in the Church which can be held by non-clerics can be thrown open to the laity. A national policy may be evolved so as to facilitate more responsibilities for lay Catholics in Catholic institutions. The administrative work of the Church may be handed over gradually to the laity at all levels: parish, diocesan, developmental, constructional, and educational.
6. The laity will have to take responsibility for the roles the Vat. II has granted them. The identity of the laity, according to the Council, consists in being Christians but characterized by “secular nature.” It means that they should not want to get into the ladder of clericalization. Rather they should be involved in the ordinary tasks of everyday life as an important part of their Christian vocation. So they have to live out the ordinary tasks of everyday life with extraordinary love for God and love of others, thus establishing a unity or coherence between the faith and the world, between Gospel and culture. For instance the family people need to train their children with due consideration for altruism, sharing and sacrifice, spending even the leisure-time activities with due reference to God and others, not being succumbed to a ferocious consumerism, but always being concerned for the neediest. Professionals and politicians need to direct their service to the common good; businessmen need to be involved in trade with a sense of social justice, the media persons will have to be not selling themselves to that which sells the most, but to be keen on spreading what is valuable before God and the needy.

⁷⁵ CBCI *Evaluation Report*, 90

7. If the mission of the Church as envisioned by Vat. II were to be carried out faithfully, then it is laity who will have to take God into temporal realities such as the family, work, culture, the communication media, politics, sports, technology, etc. They are called to do this from within society, in and for the ordinary realities that make up their lives. This mission they may carry out, personally or along with others. Those others with whom we cooperate may or may not be believers. But we will be cautious to establish coherence between our faith and our lives, with an attitude of dialogue, in search of love and justice, participating in cultural and political life, and with special attention to the neediest people.
8. Let us remember that today we are living in an age of faith crisis. This is the result of many factors: secularist culture spreading fast, social fabric changing into amorphous on account of migration and urbanization, globalized economy, purely a scientific technological approach to life, excessive and often improper influence of media, politicized religious movements becoming militant fundamentalism.⁷⁶ If there is any hope for the Church to meet this crisis successfully, it is the laity who have a greater role to play.
9. For this, the laity need to be trained not only in matters connected with faith, spirituality, theology, social analysis but also in leadership skills, administration techniques. In this connection the CBCI Evaluation Committee also has proposed that “one of the first priorities of the common National Body should be the formation of the laity and the promotion of their active role in the life of the Church at all levels”.⁷⁷ There is need to progressively increase the volume of the budget provisions of the common National Body like the NBCLC for training of the laity.

⁷⁶ *Instrumentum Laboris*, Synod of Bishops, Xiii Ordinary General Assembly on The New Evangelization For The Transmission of The Christian Faith. Nos. 51-67

⁷⁷ *CBCI Evaluation Report*, p.211

Conclusion

It is fact that the Second Vatican Council gave way for a Paradigm Shift in the understanding of both its mission and its mystery. Especially the conciliar's new self-discovery of the Church as 'People of God' and 'Communion' gave the laity their due equal status both in terms of vocation and mission. Besides the Council, by openly and extensively speaking out the Laity's role, has clearly emphasized that the laity are in no way less in dignity or responsibility than the clergy to carry out the saving mission of the Lord Jesus. This is the vision of the laity projected by the Council

Now it is the duty of the hierarchy to acknowledge the laity's due dignity and equality. At least they must visibly show their due recognition of Laity's dignity and equality. It is their obligation to confide in the competence of the laity and give them concrete opportunities to exercise their roles and promote lay participation wherever it is possible.

On the part of the laity it is their responsibility to realize the call of the Second Vatican Council and shed all their diffidence, fear, apathy and indifference and take the ball thrown to them by the Council and begin to play their role actively in in the mission of the Church towards the world.

Thus there is the mutual need of both the clergy and laity to work together in an atmosphere of **co-responsibility and collaboration.**

Certainly in the Indian Church much has been done, but much more could be done to bring about such change that the Council's vision of the laity's role gets realized. Definitely, this is no excuse for being stagnant or indifferent.

A time bound programme with concrete measures and steps must be chalked out as per the ideal. A monitoring committee must be set up to assess the 'action taken' and ascertain new ways of realizing the ideal properly and in time.

Above all, serious efforts must be taken to disseminate the knowledge to all the laity extensively. The vision of the Church by Vat.II with all its implications for laity's role must be kept glowing. Complementarity of laity and the clergy must be encouraged for realization of God's Reign through the Church.

May I end my humble reflections with the memorable words of our Holy Father: "To evoke the faithful, holy people of God is to evoke the horizon to which they are invited to look and from whence to reflect."⁷⁸ If these reflections of mine have awakened you to evoke the horizon to which we, the people of God are invited to look and from whence to reflect, I would deem it a success to have taken the trouble of addressing you. The end result should be realization of the Francis' vision of correlative, cooperative, collaborative, collegial, and co-inclusive People of God with its task of 'mystery of moon,' and 'really radiating the light of her Master, outgoing and evangelizing the world'. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your rapt attention and active listening.

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⁷⁸ *L'Osservatore* NUMBER 17, (2444, 29 April 2016), p. 4 Column1.

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