

Thy Kingdom come!

CENTRAL COMMISSION FOR THE REVISION OF THE STATUTES OF REGNUM CHRISTI

Theme for Study and Reflection Number 2

Identity and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World, II. The Apostolate of the Laity

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Objective

We continue to try to better understand the identity and mission of the laity. Now we stop to consider how the lay faithful are called to participate in the mission of the Church, that is, the mission that the laity have in the Church and in the World.

We will see that the laity can cooperate in the apostolate proper to the ecclesiastical hierarchy, that is, that of the clergy, but that they also must develop a specific apostolate proper to them, the lay apostolate.

Above all, we are going to seek to understand better what the mission of the Church consists in and in what manner the lay apostolate contributes to this mission.

Outline

A. The mission of the Church: The mission of the Church is to continue the mission of Jesus Christ in the world, that is, to evangelize. Evangelization means to make the Kingdom of God present in the world. The Church evangelizes in union with Christ as Priest, Prophet and King. The evangelizing action of the Church has three forms: pastoral, new evangelization and the mission *ad gentes*.

B. The apostolate of the lay faithful: The laity is responsible – in harmony with its nature – for the mission of the Church because it is part of the Church. Its “lay nature” prepares it in a specific way for the lay apostolate, that is, to order temporal realities according to the plan of God in such a way that they support the discovery and promotion of the dignity of the children of God. Through these realities the laity can give glory to God and merit in Christ their salvation.

Key Concepts

Evangelization

Kingdom of Christ

Lay Apostolate

Temporal Realities

Pastoral Action

“New Evangelization”

Mission *ad gentes*

A. The Mission of the Church

The Church has as her mission the extension or continuation of the mission of Jesus Christ since she is his Mystical Body and is united to him as his Spouse.¹ The Church is an instrument of Christ and through her, he ‘simultaneously manifests and exercises the mystery of the love of God for men.’²

Through the Church, God wanted us to become children of God in Christ. He also wanted to make us participants in Christ’s own mission.³ What is this mission? It is the mission of the Son, of being loving children who do the will of the father. The will of the Father is “that all be saved and come to the knowledge of the Truth.”⁴

“As the ‘convocation’ of all men for salvation, the Church in her very nature is missionary, sent by Christ to all the nations to make disciples of them.”⁵ Therefore, the Church accomplishes her mission by calling us to the love of God and making us live as children of God who, for love of our Father and seeking his glory desire to make all peoples sharers in salvation. Thus, motivated by love for God, The Church fulfills her purpose of bringing all peoples to communion with God and with each other: “the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race.”⁶

The Church “receives the mission to proclaim and to spread among all peoples the Kingdom of Christ and of God and to be, on earth, the initial budding forth of that kingdom.”⁷ This means that her presence in the world anticipates the “new earth” mentioned in Revelation,⁸ working to make the life of men and women on the earth correspond to their dignity as children of God and to make social relationships harmonize with what God desired for his children. This means that the Church is the active seedling of the civilization of Christian justice and love, making the Kingdom of God present. Thus, through the Church, Christ accomplishes the plan of God that all peoples will be united under him.⁹

1. What does ‘evangelizing’ mean?

¹ Cf. Ephesians 5:25-27.

² Vatican II Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 45. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 776

³ Cf. John Paul, II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, 11-13.

⁴ 1 Timothy, 2:4.

⁵ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 767. Cf. Matthew 28: 19-20; Vatican II Ecumenical Council, Decree *Ad gentes*, 2, 5-6.

⁶ Vatican II Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 1.

⁷ Ibid. 5.

⁸ Cf. Revelation 21:1.

⁹ Cf. Ephesians 1:10. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 772.

Jesus Christ preached the good news: “The Kingdom of God is at hand.” It has arrived, is present in the world and therefore is within reach of everyone; and, with his works, he manifested and accomplished this Kingdom, specifically through his Incarnation. In him, in his person, the Kingdom of God – that is, the life of God’s grace that makes us his children – becomes present on the earth.¹⁰ Jesus has come, and with him, we have in our reach the true life that God offers us. Thus, the “good news” is the saving presence of Jesus. The gospel that Jesus preached first and his disciples later preached is Jesus himself. To evangelize is to carry this good news to others, that is, to transmit Jesus, announce him and communicate him to others. It consists not only in saying, but above all in manifesting, witnessing, sharing that “Jesus is Lord” (the *kerygma*) – that Jesus is the Son of God incarnate who loves us, has given his life for our salvation, is living, accompanying us and who reconciles us with the Father, making us new men and women – and in really communicating the presence of Jesus to the entire world, a presence that renews all things.

Evangelizing is not simply informing someone about something. For the Christian, announcing means witnessing and communicating means making others participants in his own experience – the encounter with the living Christ. In this way, evangelizing is not only giving knowledge but giving the experience of Christ’s salvation and therefore, it is not only preaching, but also transforming hearts and lives (one’s own first of all and through witness and the word, helping others to let themselves be transformed by Christ) to the point of making the whole world rise to the dignity of the children of God for his glory. The goal of evangelization is that all our life, personal and social, and all of creation, finding its meaning in Christ, corresponds to the plan of God’s love and glory and so reaches fullness.

This is why Pope Francis says that “evangelizing is making present the Kingdom of Christ in the world.”¹¹ This is what Jesus did and continues to do through the Church, that is, through us.

We are all called to be apostles by our baptism and by our confirmation because Jesus in making us children of the Church sends us, like he sends the whole Church, to the evangelizing mission. The Church is missionary communion and the mission that generates communion. Therefore, the Pope affirms that each Christian should say, “I am a mission on this earth, that is why I am here in this world.”¹² This demands from us coherence between words and life because the apostolate is contagious and fruitful witnessing of holy Christian living: of a life reconciled with the God who renews the world. In fact, the best witness of the Gospel is the martyr. Only the saint can become a fully fruitful apostle, since only the saint can be a truly docile instrument of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the perfect example of Christian coherence between words and life since in him (being the Word of God) person and mission coincide.¹³ The Christian apostle should seek coherence between words and works, making sure that his evangelizing words are not accompanied by actions that fail to witness to Jesus Christ. We evangelize like Jesus, with works and with words: with eloquent works – so that seeing our good works all glorify our Father¹⁴ – and with words in action – so that, announcing the Lord explicitly, we do his will¹⁵ – like Jesus, the Son, the Word, who “went about doing good and healing all that were

¹⁰ Cf. Joseph Ratzinger – Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth, From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, Doubleday, New York 2007. Chapter 3 “The Gospel of the Kingdom of God”.

¹¹ Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 176.

¹² *Ibid.* 273.

¹³ “In Jesus, person and mission tend to coincide: all Christ’s saving activity was, and is, an expression of his ‘filial consciousness’ which from all eternity stands before the Father in an attitude of loving submission to his will.” (Benedict XVI, Letter, June 16, 2009).

¹⁴ Cf. Matthew 5:16.

¹⁵ Cf. Matthew 7:21 and Luke 6:46.

oppressed by the devil” making it obvious that “God was with him.”¹⁶ In this way we will evangelize by attraction and not by proselytism: taking the first step, being involved, supporting, bearing fruit and rejoicing.¹⁷

Here’s how the Second Vatican Council presents the evangelizing mission of the Church:

The Church was founded for the purpose of spreading the kingdom of Christ throughout the earth for the glory of God the Father, to enable all men to share in His saving redemption, and that through them the whole world might enter into a relationship with Christ.¹⁸

It goes on to define evangelizing activity as “apostolate”:

All activity of the Mystical Body directed to the attainment of this goal is called the apostolate, which the Church carries on in various ways through all her members. For the Christian vocation by its very nature is also a vocation to the apostolate.¹⁹

2. What is the Kingdom of God?

It is necessary to go deeper into the rich theological concepts of “Kingdom of God” and of the “Kingdom of Christ” because we have said that evangelization consists precisely in making present the Kingdom of God or in propagating the Kingdom of Christ in the entire world, and because they are core concepts of the charism of the Movement.

The “Kingdom” indicates the reach of the salvation communicated by God. It does not refer to any political or geographic reality but to the Lordship of God over souls.²⁰ It indicates the effective dominion of the love of God who through his salvation frees us from the dominion and slavery to sin and from death in order to introduce us into the kingdom of his love, in which we live in the freedom of the children of God who for love fulfill all God wants. The Kingdom of God (or kingdom of the heaven) is the full accomplishment of the saving plan of God, which will have its culmination in eternity. Christ has already brought the Kingdom of God to this earth through his work of Redemption. Therefore, to enter into the Kingdom of Christ is to accept his Redemption and to begin already here in this temporal world to experience the primacy of God’s love and to live the life of the new man and woman redeemed by Christ. The Kingdom of Christ is an anticipation on this earth of the Kingdom of God. Jesus Christ founded the Church as his instrument to communicate Redemption, that is, to extend his Kingdom and anticipate the Kingdom of God through it. “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

¹⁶ Acts of the Apostles 10:38.

¹⁷ Cf. *Evangelii gaudium*, 14 and 24.

¹⁸ Vatican Council II, Degree *Apostolicam actuositatem*, 2.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ We are using Kingdom to translate the Greek word *basileia* and the Hebrew word *malkut*; which indicate the exercise of dominion, of being Lord. So we are not referring to a future kingdom awaiting establishment, but the sovereignty of God over the world. Cf. Joseph Ratzinger – Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth. From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, Chapter 3. The preface for the solemnity of Christ the King describes his Kingdom like this: “a kingdom eternal and universal, a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace”.

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.”²¹

“From this source the Church, equipped with the gifts of its Founder and faithfully guarding His precepts of charity, humility and self-sacrifice, receives the mission to proclaim and to spread among all peoples the Kingdom of Christ and of God and to be, on earth, the initial budding forth of that kingdom.”²² “But the Lord wishes to spread His kingdom also by means of the laity.”²³ “On this earth that Kingdom is already present in mystery. When the Lord returns it will be brought into full flower.”²⁴ “The expectation of a new earth must not weaken but rather stimulate our concern for cultivating this one. For here grows the body of a new human family, a body which even now is able to give some kind of foreshadowing of the new age. Hence, while earthly progress must be carefully distinguished from the growth of Christ's kingdom, to the extent that the former can contribute to the better ordering of human society, it is of vital concern to the Kingdom of God.”²⁵

3. *The Threefold Office of Christ and the Mission of the Church*

If the mission of the Church is prolonging the work of Christ, spreading his Kingdom, we must remember that theology speaks of a threefold office of Christ. He is Priest, Prophet and King. With these three Old Testament terms, we are trying to express what Christ's being the Messiah consists in – that is, his saving mission.

The Church participates in this threefold office of Christ, making Christ present in the world, since she is already his Mystical Body. Participating in the Priesthood of Christ, the Church sanctifies, distributes supernatural grace, and reconciles man with God. Participating in the Prophetic Office of Christ, the Church teaches, preaches, and calls to conversion. Participating in the Kingship of Christ, the Church serves, heals, practices charity, and restores social relationships as well as the whole world in God.

4. *The Three Expressions of Church Apostolate*

The apostolate of the Church has three expressions according to the situation in which evangelization takes place.²⁶

-Pastoral Action: This is the apostolic activity directed towards the baptized and practicing faithful with the goal of helping them grow in their Christian life. In pastoral action the administration of the sacraments, the official teaching of Christian doctrine and the promotion of public worship occupies an eminent place.

-The new evangelization: In its strict sense, it is the apostolate directed towards baptized persons who don't live the demands of baptism and towards those places that once were Christian and now are secularized or dechristianized. It seeks to present the Gospel anew to persons and societies that already

²¹ *Lumen Gentium*, 3

²² *Ibid.* 5

²³ *Ibid.* 36

²⁴ *Gaudium et spes*, 39

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Cf. *Ad Gentes*, 6; John Paul II, Encyclical *Redemptoris missio*, 33-34, and Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 14.

received the preaching of the Gospel, but where the mutual influence between faith and culture is lost. The creativity of the lay apostolate will find here ample room for expansion.²⁷ By “new evangelization” we also understand in a wide sense the new spirit and new methods for doing apostolate in our time, in response to contemporary challenges, as much in pastoral work as in the re-evangelization of dechristianized societies in the mission *ad gentes*.

-Mission *ad gentes*: This is the traditional meaning of the missionary apostolate of the Church, which seeks to present the Gospel to those who haven't heard it yet with the goal that they will be converted by it and imbue their societies or surroundings with it, that is, that they join the Church, enriching it with their own gifts. All Christians should cooperate in the evangelization of those who are separated from Christ, since this is always the primary task of the Church.²⁸

There are not clear borders between these three expressions of the apostolate. Nevertheless, it is important to distinguish them conceptually in order to understand how to insert our apostolate into the apostolate of the Church.

Lay people committed to their missionary vocation are necessary in all three cases.

B. The Apostolate of the Lay Faithful

The lay person participates in the threefold office of Christ, fulfilling the mission of Christ according to a specific lay vocation.²⁹ The fact of being a lay person prepares one in a specific way for the evangelizing mission, so that the lay state represents a necessary value for the Church to be able to make Christ present in the world and so fulfill its reason for being: “The apostolate of the laity derives from their Christian vocation and the Church can never be without it.”³⁰ Without the laity, just as without ordained ministers, the world would be left without the Church and without Christ.

The Second Vatican Council explained how Christ performs his priesthood, his prophetic office and his kingship through the laity.³¹ In the lay person the duty to make the mission of Christ and of the Church one's own – the duty to evangelize – is born from the moment we are inserted into Christ through our baptism and confirmation. That is why the Code of Canon Law, canon 225 s1 establishes:

Since, like all the Christian faithful, lay persons are designated by God for the apostolate through baptism and confirmation, they are bound by the general obligation and possess the right as individuals, or joined in associations, to work so that the divine message of salvation is made known and accepted by all persons everywhere in the world.

There is a type of apostolate that is proper to the laity and that represents the specific way they are called to contribute to the mission of the Church. “Lay people, whose particular vocation places them in the midst of the world and in charge of the most varied temporal tasks, must for this very reason

²⁷ Cf. *Christifideles laici*, 34

²⁸ Cf. *Redemptoris missio*, 34, and *Evangelii gaudium*, 15

²⁹ Cf. *Christifideles laici*, 14

³⁰ *Apostolicam actuositatem*, 1

³¹ *Lumen gentium*, 34, 35 and 36, and *Apostolicam actuositatem*, 10. These are numbers of the Magisterium that it is necessary to read and reflect on personally and as a group.

exercise a very special form of evangelization.”³² When we say that the laity is called to evangelize the world from within, we refer to the world as a conglomeration of persons, societies and created realities that is the immense field where the Kingdom of God has to grow – that is, to the positive meanings of the word, “world”. In fact, to evangelize, the lay person counts in a special way on the genius of the “secular nature”, that is, on being rooted in the world in such a way that the lay person evangelizes from within like leaven.³³

Besides fulfilling the lay apostolate that characterizes them, the lay faithful also can and should cooperate with the apostolate that is proper to the clergy and with the apostolate that is accomplished through the ecclesiastical structures governed by the clergy.³⁴ The laity should contribute to the building up of the Church participating in the life of their own parish and diocese.³⁵

The Council also placed special value on the generous self-giving of the laity to the apostolate of the Church when it entailed deeper levels of commitment:

Deserving of special honor and commendation in the Church are those lay people, single or married, who devote themselves with their professional experience, either permanently or temporarily, to the service of associations and their activities. There is a source of great joy for the Church in the fact that there is a daily increase in the number of lay persons who offer their personal service to apostolic associations and activities, either within the limits of their own nation or in the international field or especially in Catholic mission communities and in regions where the Church has only recently been implanted.

The pastors of the Church should gladly and gratefully welcome these lay persons and make sure that the demands of justice, equity, and charity relative to their status be satisfied to the fullest extent, particularly as regards proper support for them and their families. They should also take care to provide for these lay people the necessary formation, spiritual consolation, and incentive.³⁶

Today it is necessary for us all to be aware of the responsibility that the laity should assume in the mission of the Church. Pope Francis tells us:

A clear awareness of this responsibility of the laity, grounded in their baptism and confirmation, does not appear in the same way in all places. In some cases, it is because lay persons have not been given

³² Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 70

³³ Cf. *Lumen gentium*, 31, and *Christifideles laici*, 15

³⁴ Cf. *Lumen gentium*, 33, and *Code of Canon Law*, canon 228

³⁵ Cf. *Christifideles laici*, 25-27

³⁶ *Apostolicam actuositatem*, 22. Note that in this passage, devoting oneself refers to full dedication in a stable or secular form. Therefore, it does not mean consecration in the sense of those who profess the evangelical counsels (vows) with the radicality of Christ. John Paul II explains: “However, by reason of the above-mentioned principle of discernment, these forms of commitment cannot be included in the specific category of the consecrated life. Worthy of praise are those forms of commitment which some Christian married couples assume in certain associations and movements. They confirm by means of a vow the obligation of chastity proper to the married state and, without neglecting their duties towards their children, profess poverty and obedience. They do so with the intention of bringing to the perfection of charity their love, already “consecrated” in the Sacrament of Matrimony [*Gaudium et spes*, 48]. This necessary clarification regarding the nature of such experiences in no way intends to underestimate this particular path of holiness, from which the action of the Holy Spirit, infinitely rich in gifts and inspirations, is certainly not absent.” (*Vita consecrata*, 62)

the formation needed to take on important responsibilities. In others, it is because in their particular Churches room has not been made for them to speak and to act, due to an excessive clericalism which keeps them away from decision-making. Even if many are now involved in the lay ministries, this involvement is not reflected in a greater penetration of Christian values in the social, political and economic sectors. It often remains tied to tasks within the Church, without a real commitment to applying the Gospel to the transformation of society. The formation of the laity and the evangelization of professional and intellectual life represent a significant pastoral challenge.³⁷

The lay mission, in fact, demands a continuous formation that measures up to the needs of the mission.³⁸ “Lay persons are bound by the obligation and possess the right to acquire knowledge of Christian doctrine appropriate to the capacity and condition of each in order for them to be able to live according to this doctrine, announce it themselves, defend it if necessary, and take their part in exercising the apostolate.”³⁹

The laity, like all the faithful, have to remember that one is only a missionary in the measure that one is a disciple of the Lord. The sincere and growing welcome of the Gospel in one’s own life is a necessary condition to transmit it through apostolic activity. We are missionary disciples.⁴⁰

1. Lay Apostolate

The lay apostolate, which is the apostolate proper to lay people, is oriented toward organizing temporal realities according to the plan of God.

What are temporal realities? With this term, we refer to all that which pertains to the secular world in which man walks as a pilgrim toward the definitive encounter with God. Some temporal realities are:

- all the levels of social life, such as: the family, the neighborhood, the city, the region, one’s nation, the international community;
- professional and social services in all their fullness and variety, such as education, scientific research, the economy, business, international relations, social justice, public order, medicine, media, art, shows, charitable institutions, etc.

³⁷ *Evangelii gaudium*, 102. Cf. Francis, Speech, March 22, 2014: “there would be no clericalism if there weren’t laymen who wanted to be clericalized.” Video message to the participants in the pilgrimage to the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Guadalupe (November 16, 2013): “The temptation of clericalism, which does so much damage to the Church in Latin America, is an obstacle for the development of maturity and the Christian responsibility of a good part of the laity. Clericalism implies a self-referential posture, a group posture, which impoverishes the projection towards the encounter with the Lord, which makes us disciples, and toward the encounter with the men who await the proclamation. [...] Moreover, a formation of quality requires solid and lasting structures, which prepare to address the challenges of our days and is able to take the light of the Gospel to the different situations that the presbyters, the consecrated men and women, and the laity will meet in their pastoral action.” And *Gaudium et spes*, 53

³⁸ Cf. *Apostolicam actuositatem*, 28-32, and *Christifideles laici*, 57-63

³⁹ Code of Canon Law, canon 229 s.1

⁴⁰ Cf. *Evangelii gaudium*, 120 “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’.”

- the circumstances of life, such as joys, illnesses, loss of loved ones, recreation, sports, social events, food, etc.
- the states of life, such as, infancy, childhood, adulthood, old age;
- culture in all the breadth of its meaning⁴¹

All these realities should be formed and transformed by the love of God for man manifested in Jesus Christ and so, renewed according to the dignity of the children of God, making them instruments for the glory of God; that is, they should become means for the expression of our love for God as his children.

In the midst of these temporal realities, each one not only should strive in order to receive the eternal salvation that Christ offers in heaven, but also and above all to accomplish the mission of cooperating with God so that the world will recover its original meaning⁴² and returning to unity under Christ,⁴³ all creatures will give glory to God by achieving their final goal.⁴⁴ That is, by managing temporal realities, the lay person makes his apostolic contribution in the construction of the civilization of justice and love according to the loving plan of God: sanctifying the world by reconciling humanity and creation with God, announcing the truth of the Gospel to his brothers and to creatures, and submitting, serving and healing the world to the Lordship of God.

Explaining this, the Second Vatican Council teaches:

The laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the world, that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven. They are called there by God that by exercising their proper function and led by the spirit of the Gospel they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven. In this way they may make Christ known to others, especially by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope and charity. Therefore, since they are tightly bound up in all types of temporal affairs it is their special task to order and to throw light upon these affairs in such a way that they may come into being and then continually increase according to Christ to the praise of the Creator and the Redeemer.⁴⁵

Canon law affirms the obligation of each lay person to accomplish this properly lay apostolate as leaven. "According to each one's own condition, they are also bound by a particular duty to imbue and perfect the order of temporal affairs with the spirit of the gospel and thus to give witness to Christ, especially in carrying out these same affairs and in exercising secular functions."⁴⁶

Also, there are places in the world and circumstances of life where the Church can only make herself present and announce Christ through the laity.⁴⁷ That is why the missionary obligation "is even more

⁴¹ On the concept of "culture", cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 53

⁴² Cf. Genesis 1:28

⁴³ Cf. Colossians 1:18

⁴⁴ Cf. Revelation 21:1

⁴⁵ *Lumen gentium*, 31

⁴⁶ *Code of Canon Law*, canon 225 s. 2

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 33

compelling in those circumstances in which only through them can people hear the gospel and know Christ.”⁴⁸

The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* is a valuable instrument for understanding what the Church expects from the laity in the evangelization of society and of its different parts.

The Council reminds us that in our time it is also necessary for the laity to consider their apostolate in a framework that goes beyond the geographic limits of the local Churches, reaching out nationally and internationally.⁴⁹

We are dealing with an apostolate called to acquire very diverse forms and means and that the laity can engage in either in as an individual or as members of a group.⁵⁰

With this apostolate of restoring the temporal order, the laity make the Church present in the world, given that this task forms an undeniable part of the evangelizing mission of the Church⁵¹ and in fact, “evangelization is for no one an individual and isolated act; it is one that is deeply ecclesial.”⁵² The laity assume the exercise of this apostolate of evangelization of temporal realities on their own responsibility and achieve it in their own name; as a consequence, in the programming and carrying out of this apostolate, they are the protagonists, respecting the jurisdiction and authority of the Pope, of the bishops and of parish pastors according to the laws of the Church.

The Second Vatican Council taught that priests and religious should support in the lay apostolate in a way that can be very significant; but this apostolate remains the responsibility of the laity, who carry it out in virtue of their vital union with Christ.⁵³ The clergy therefore should not restrict the just freedom of the laity in the evangelization of secular affairs.⁵⁴ So, for example, in the family – which is the ‘domestic Church’ – the primary responsibility for the religious education of the children belongs to the parents and in this mission they cannot be replaced, but only assisted by priests and religious. In the same way, in the promotion of social justice and in political activity, it is the mission of the laity to cooperate with other citizens, motivated by charity and under their own responsibility.⁵⁵ In the same way, in the evangelization of the other temporal realities, the layperson cannot defer his responsibility to priests or consecrated persons, in whom he can find support, but never a substitute.

Even when the layperson exercises his apostolate through activities done on his own without involving Church authority at all, he is still a witness and a protagonist of the Church in its missionary outreach towards all the “peripheries” that need the light of the Gospel.⁵⁶

⁴⁸ Ibid. 225 s.1

⁴⁹ Cf. *Apostolicam actuositatem*, 10 and 14

⁵⁰ Cf. Ibid. 15-21

⁵¹ Cf. Ibid. 5

⁵² *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 60

⁵³ Cf. *Apostolicam actuositatem*, 4, 10, 24 and 25

⁵⁴ Cf. *Lumen gentium*, 36 and 37; *Apostolicam actuositatem*, 13 and 24; *Code of Canon Law*, canons 215, 216, 225, 227, 275; *Evangelii gaudium*, 104: “Even when the function of ministerial priesthood is considered ‘hierarchical’, it must be remembered that ‘it is totally ordered to the holiness of Christ’s members’. Its key and axis is not power understood as domination, but the power to administer the sacrament of the Eucharist; this is the origin of its authority, which is always a service to God’s people.”

⁵⁵ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, 29

⁵⁶ Cf. *Evangelii gaudium*, 20, 45 and 46

2. Cooperation in the Priests' Mission

It is also proper to the faithful to give their support to the tasks and institutions headed by the hierarchy of the Church, under its direction; supporting priests in a greater and more penetrating pastoral action.⁵⁷ We refer to the collaboration in the liturgical and sacramental pastoral apostolate, in the promotion of public worship, in the teaching of doctrine through parroquial catechesis or teaching in seminaries and other ecclesial centers, in the promotion of Christian life through pastoral action in parishes or other ecclesial institutions. This collaboration can be occasional or more habitual. It can be done under the supervision of a priest or it can be done in virtue of the reception of a ministry (lectorate or extraordinary eucharistic minister, for example) or a special mission within the Church (teaching in an ecclesial university, for example).

Referring to apostolic commitment in the parish, the Second Vatican Council says: "The laity should accustom themselves to working in the parish in union with their priests, bringing to the Church community their own and the world's problems as well as questions concerning human salvation, all of which they should examine and resolve by deliberating in common. As far as possible the laity ought to provide helpful collaboration for every apostolic and missionary undertaking sponsored by their local parish."⁵⁸

3. Conclusion

Pope Paul VI masterfully synthesized the essential elements of the lay apostolate, telling the laity that:

Their primary and immediate task is not to establish and develop the ecclesial community- this is the specific role of the pastors- but to put to use every Christian and evangelical possibility latent but already present and active in the affairs of the world. Their own field of evangelizing activity is the vast and complicated world of politics, society and economics, but also the world of culture, of the sciences and the arts, of international life, of the mass media. It also includes other realities which are open to evangelization, such as human love, the family, the education of children and adolescents, professional work, suffering. The more Gospel-inspired lay people there are engaged in these realities, clearly involved in them, competent to promote them and conscious that they must exercise to the full their Christian powers which are often buried and suffocated, the more these realities will be at the service of the kingdom of God and therefore of salvation in Jesus Christ, without in any way losing or sacrificing their human content but rather pointing to a transcendent dimension which is often disregarded.⁵⁹

Study Questions for Team Reflection

1. What have I learned from studying this guide? (To be shared with team members)

⁵⁷ Cf. *Apostolicam actuositatem*, 24; *Christifideles laici*, 23, and *On Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priests* (1997)

⁵⁸ *Apostolicam actuositatem*, 10

⁵⁹ *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 70. In this text, by "ecclesial community" we understand the Church itself. We are not referring to associations of the faithful or particular ecclesial communities that laypeople might belong to, whether consisting of only laypeople or of laypeople with clergy and consecrated persons.

2. Why do the lay faithful have an obligation and right to work so that the Gospel will be known and accepted by the entire world? What does this obligation arise from? Why is it a right?
3. What is the specific contribution the laity bring to the apostolate of the Church according to the definition of *Apostolicam actuositatem* 2? What is the difference between the lay apostolate and the apostolate of priests?
4. Do I grasp the difference between “doing apostolate” and being an apostle? In reference to the vocation to the lay apostolate, how is the world made more Christian through daily activities?
5. What would be some examples (real or imaginary) of lay apostolic initiatives for the evangelization of the different cultural environments of the world?
6. As members of this reflection team, what temporal realities do we feel called to evangelize?
7. Do we think we have the necessary formation to fulfill our evangelizing mission? Do we concern ourselves with receiving ongoing formation?
8. How can priests help us in accomplishing lay apostolates?
9. How can religious help us in accomplishing lay apostolates?
10. How can lay consecrated men and women help us in accomplishing lay apostolates?
11. How can the lay faithful help our priests in fulfilling their priestly apostolate?

Recommended Readings

Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 836 – 856, and 863 – 865

Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*

Second Vatican Council, Decree *Apostolicam actuositatem*

John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, nos. 32 – 44 and 57 – 64

Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*

John Paul II, Encyclical *Redemptoris mission*

Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*

John Paul II, Collection of Catecheses on the Laity, Catecheses 11 – 27 ⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Translator’s note – Most of the other documents are relatively easy to find, either as a hard copy or on the Vatican website. This one is a little more difficult. It is published in English as part of *Catechesis on the Creed*,

Letter to Diognetus (Second Century AD)

Joseph Ratzinger – Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth. From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, Doubleday, New York 2007, Chapter 3 “The Gospel of the Kingdom of God”

Compendium of the Social Teaching of the Church

Volume 4 – The Church, Mystery, Sacrament, Community. The individual catecheses can also be found on the Vatican website. The catecheses listed comprise those given by John Paul II between March 23, 1994 to September 21, 1994 during his Wednesday audiences and can be found on his webpage under Audiences (udienze). A link to the Vatican Website that groups these audiences can be found at the ‘catechesis of the popes’ website at [http://catechesisofthepopes.wikispaces.com/The+Church#General Audiences-4](http://catechesisofthepopes.wikispaces.com/The+Church#General+Audiences-4). The Role of the Laity. On this page, go to 4. The Role of the Laity. The catecheses referenced are numbers 11-27.