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II. On the Laity

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ON THE CONSTITUTION
ON THE CHURCH

On The Laity

ANTONIO V. ROMUALDEZ

AMONG the most pressing problems that face Filipino Catholics, especially those newly graduated from Catholic colleges and universities, is the total commitment demanded of them by secular occupations and professions. Somehow many of them feel, perhaps unconsciously, an uneasiness over their inability to devote more time and energy to what seems to them to be *the* genuinely Christian apostolate, and over the need for them to expend their efforts on what seem to be pursuits hostile, or at best indifferent, to the supernatural. Often, this uneasiness has been resolved only by time (for, indeed, time heals *all* wounds) and in an act of resignation to the 'demands of practicality': the problem is simply lost sight of amidst the demands of more immediate cares. At other times, it is dispelled with the aid of pious organizations and practices indulged in at the expense of either profession or occupation: really salvific activities are performed to make up for the profane routine of worldly pursuits.

The tragedy of the first solution is obvious; a lapse into absolute secularism seems inevitable. That of the second, however, is not as immediately discernible. Some good—much good in fact—has been derived from it. But an undertone of tragedy accompanies it because it avoids the real issue, which is the total realization of the Christian life of the laity. It could be the symptom of a split-personality Christianity, the sign of a lack of perspective, which results in a dualism that

could, at its very roots, be Manichean, a dualism that prevents effective commitment one way or the other.

The Constitution *On the Church (Lumen Gentium)*¹ recently approved by the Fathers of the Council and promulgated on 21 November 1964 by Pope Paul VI offers the perspective by which Catholics may properly understand, appreciate and realize Christian apostleship. This paper is an attempt to present, and comment upon, the doctrine on the laity found in the second ("On the People of God") and fourth ("The Laity") chapters of this Constitution. It is divided into three parts: the first discusses the laity as sharing with the hierarchy and all religious in being God's holy people; the second, the laity as called to a distinct function and dignity in the Church; and the third, the laity as bound to the hierarchy by a relation not of subservience but of interdependence. Occasionally, where it can be accomplished without digression, the special relevance of certain sections of the Constitution to the situation of Catholicism in the Philippines will be indicated.

THE LAITY AS GOD'S HOLY PEOPLE

The chapter on The Laity, significantly enough, opens not with an immediate definition of the nature and proper spirituality of the laity, but with the reminder that "the laity, religious and clergy alike" constitute by their Baptism the People of God, and, thereby, share each in its own way in the "priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ" (art. 31). The Fathers of the Council seem to be underscoring here what scripture and tradition have continually stressed, "the unity of all Christians in the Church"² and the unique spirituality common to all the faithful which con-

¹ All references to this Constitution are from the translation published by St. Paul Publications, Pasay City, Philippines, which is itself based on the unofficial English translation released by the National Catholic Welfare Conference of the Bishops of the United States of America. *Constitution on the Church: Lumen Gentium* (Pasay City: St. Paul Publications, 1965), 98 pp.

² Richard J. Cronin, S.J., *The Theology of the Layman* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1965), pp. 51-52.

sists in life in Christ.³ "Everything that has been said above concerning the People of God," the fourth chapter begins, "is intended for the laity, religious and clergy alike" (art. 30).

To be numbered among the "messianic people," whose head is Christ, is to be lifted from creaturehood to divine sonship, to be informed with the Holy Spirit and filled with the dynamism of Christ's love. For, according to the Constitution, "the state of this people is that of the dignity and freedom of the sons of God, in whose hearts the Holy Spirit dwells as in His temple. Its law is the new commandment to love as Christ loved us" (art. 9). Because all of its proper energies are derived from Christ himself, the life of God's holy people is not self-enclosed; rather, it is dynamic: "its end is the Kingdom of God, which has been begun by God Himself on earth, and which is to be further extended until it is brought to perfection by Him at the end of time, when Christ, our life (cf. Col. 3, 4), shall appear, and 'creation itself will be delivered from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the sons of God' (Rom. 8, 21)" (*ibid.*). That is why, though "established by Christ as a communion of life, charity and truth, it is also used by Him as an instrument for the redemption of all, and is sent forth into the whole world as the light of the world and the salt of the earth (cf. Mt. 5, 13-16)" (*ibid.*). To be one of God's holy People is consequently to be called not only to the divine life but also to Christian apostleship.

The dynamism of the Christian life and apostleship is given orientation by the threefold functions of Christ as Priest, Prophet and King. As God's People, all the faithful have been endowed with the ability to transform all things—to make what are not sacred, sacred—and to offer them as sacrifice to God. "The baptized," the Council Fathers state, "by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, in order that through all those works which are those of the Christian man they may offer spiritual sacrifices and proclaim

³ Cf. Raphael-Louis Oechslin, O.P., "Situación del laico en la iglesia," *Selecciones de Teología*, III, 9 (Enero-Marzo 1964), 13.

the power of Him who has called them out of darkness into His marvelous light (cf. Pet. 2, 4-10)" (art. 10). This they accomplish "through the sacraments and the exercise of the virtues" (art. 11), especially through the "eucharistic sacrifice, which is the fount and apex of the whole Christian life" (*ibid.*). To the body of the faithful has been granted the power to hold and profess, and in a true sense "teach" the Word of God with infallibility.⁴ Indeed, it has been said that the infallibility which is possessed by the pope is that "with which the Redeemer wished his Church to be endowed."⁵ This special property of God's People is made manifest "by means of the whole people's supernatural discernment in matters of faith when 'from the Bishops down to the last of the lay faithful' they show universal agreement in matters of faith and morals" (art. 12). Bound together in a mystically real unity by one Spirit, one love and one Faith, the People of God are made citizens of a heavenly city, which, because it is not of this world, "takes nothing away from the temporal welfare of any people. Rather does it foster and make its own, insofar as they are good, the ability, riches and customs in which the genius of each people expresses itself. Making them its own, it purifies, strengthens, elevates and consecrates them" (art. 13). Thus is the unity of Christians catholic. "By reason of it, the Catholic Church strives constantly and effectively to bring all humanity and all its possessions back to its source in Christ, with Him as its head and united in His Spirit" (*ibid.*). By properly ordering all creation in this manner, the People of God exercise the kingship of Christ.

THE LAITY

If the Constitution is emphatic in pointing out the common privilege of all Christians to be partakers in the divine life and the common duty to be witnesses of Christ, it is no less emphatic in proclaiming that ways of witness may differ.

⁴ Cf. Robert North, S.J., "The Scope of Infallibility," *Continuum*, II (1965), 555-574. See especially the section of this article which explains the statement that "ultimately the Pope gets his infallible information by *interrogating the Church*" (pp. 567-571).

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 569n.

All the faithful are, for example, reminded that the Holy Spirit "distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts He makes them fit and ready to undertake the various tasks and offices which contribute toward the renewal and building up of the Church, according to the words of the Apostle: 'the manifestation of the Spirit is given to everyone for profit' (I Cor. 12, 7)" (art. 12). And so, "if...in the Church everyone does not proceed by the same path, nevertheless all are called to sanctity and have received an equal privilege of faith through the justice of God (cf. II Pet. 1, 1)" (art. 32). Apropos of the life and apostleship of the laity, who at first are described as "all the faithful except those in Holy Orders and those in the state of religious life specially approved by the Church" (art. 31), the Fathers of the Council teach that "there are certain things which pertain in a special way to the laity, both men and women, by reason of their condition and mission" (art. 30).

Following closely the program of reform⁶ initiated by John XXIII, the Fathers of Vatican II have declared that "the special circumstances of our time" have necessitated that the "foundations of this doctrine [the theology of the laity] ... be more thoroughly examined" (*ibid.*). Among these "special circumstances," the Fathers must have had in mind the fact that ours is an age of the laity. It is a secular age, a period in the history of Christendom when the majority of Christians—of mankind indeed—directly devotes most of its time and energies to the pursuit of secular ends. In the modern world, Christians, Moslems, atheists, etc. cooperate in joint ventures, bound by, and working for the welfare of, a common humanity. The Fathers must have been aware too of what has been pointed out by not a few social and anthropological scientists and theologians: that "modern man's most pressing psychological need is an assurance that some successful outcome exists for that progress on earth for which

⁶ On the use of the word "reform" in reference to what is occurring now in the Church, see George Tavard, "Freedom and Responsibility in the Religious Life," *Continuum*, II (1965), 575-586. See especially p. 576.

he knows himself to be responsible.”⁷ Indeed, this age has been characterized as one in which the human person—his value, his dignity and his liberty—has, with its development, come to be appreciated more deeply.

The laity, according to the Constitution, are specifically set apart by their “secular character” (art. 31). They are those who must “by their very vocation seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs...ordering them according to the plan of God” (*ibid.*). The layman lives in the world, in “each and in all of the secular professions and occupations” (*ibid.*). The Fathers state that “by exercising their proper function and led by the spirit of the Gospel they... work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven” (*ibid.*). This then is the apostolate of the laity, the layman’s way of participating in the salutary mission of the Church. “Every layman, in virtue of the very gifts bestowed upon him is at the same time a witness and a living instrument of the mission of the Church itself” (art. 33). For this reason, in passages reminiscent of the “Law of Incarnation” formulated some years ago by Emmanuel Cardinal Suhard in connection with Christian witness,⁸ the Fathers admonish all the faithful to “learn the deepest meaning and value of all creation” (art. 36). Especially noteworthy is the exhortation that “in secular affairs, by their competence and by their activity, elevated from within by the grace of Christ, [the laity]... vigorously contribute their effort, so that created goods may be perfected by human labor, technical skill and

⁷ See, for example, Christopher F. Mooney, S.J. who points out that the problem of modern man described above was observed by Teilhard de Chardin, “The Body of Christ in the Writings of Teilhard de Chardin,” *Theological Studies*, 25 (1964), pp. 576-610. See also Maurice Blondel, *L’Action* (Paris: Librairie Felix Alcan, 1937), 2 vols; cf. especially II, 485 ff. See also Henri Bouillard, S.J., *Blondel et le Christianisme* (Paris, 1961), especially pages 156-165.

⁸ Emmanuel Cardinal Suhard, “Growth or Decline?” *The Church Today: The Collected Writings of Emmanuel Cardinal Suhard*, edited by Rev. Louis J. Putz, C.S.C. and Vincent J. Giese (Chicago: Fides Publishers, 1953), pp. 91-170. See especially pp. 149 ff. See also Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), pp. 23-24.

civic concern for the benefit of all men, according to the design of the Creator and the light of His Word" (*ibid.*).

To be laity, therefore, is not to live a compromise: a half-hearted secular commitment along with a half-hearted religiosity. To be laity is to be Christ as members of His mystical Body, as members immersed in the world. It is to engage wholeheartedly in human affairs—political, economic, social, cultural and professional. In his total commitment to the business of the world lies the layman's salvation. For one called to the vocation of the laity, as Teilhard de Chardin writes, "the most direct way to heaven is not to let go of earth as quickly as possible, as could sometimes appear, but to bring this earth to fulfillment, since we see it now as a much vaster thing, more unfinished than we ever suspected."⁹ Pope Pius XII has been quoted as having said in an address to newly consecrated cardinals on 20 February 1946 that

Today more than ever she [the Church] must live her mission; more energetically than ever she must repulse that narrow and false conception of her spirituality and inward life which would confine her, blind and dumb, to the recesses of the sanctuary. The Church cannot shut herself up, inactive, in the privacy of her churches and thus neglect the mission entrusted to her by divine Providence, the mission to form man in his fullness and so ceaselessly to collaborate in building the solid basis of society. This mission is of her essence. Looking at her from this standpoint, it can be said that the Church is the society of those who, under the supernatural influence of grace, in the perfection of their personal dignity as sons of God and in the harmonious development of every human bent and energy, build up the mighty framework of the community of men.

From this aspect the faithful, more precisely the laity, are in the front line of the Church's life; through them, the Church is the vital principle of human society. Consequently, they particularly must have an ever more clear consciousness, not only of belonging to the Church, but of *being* the Church.¹⁰

⁹ *Quelques réflexions sur la conversion du monde* (1936), pp. 6-7, quoted by Christopher F. Mooney, S.J., "Teilhard de Chardin and the Christological Problem," *The Harvard Theological Review*, 58 (1965), 91-126; quotation is on pp. 91-92.

¹⁰ Quoted by Yves Congar, O.P., *Laity, Church and World* (Baltimore, Md.: Helicon Press, 1960), pp. 48-49.

In the temporal order, it seems, the laity is the Church; in the field of education, for example, the Catholic teacher is the Church. Thus the obligation of the Christian is "to be where he is."¹¹

By placing on the laity the responsibility of "vigorously contributing their efforts" in secular affairs "by their competence and by their activity," the Constitution seems to be encouraging laymen not only to excel in whatever profession or occupation they hold, but also to take all means within their grasp by which excellence and competence can be maintained or even improved. Generally, I dare say, professional organizations constitute such a means which laymen may not ignore—and by "professional organizations" is not meant those sectarian in character which tend rather to isolate Catholic professionals from, than to associate them with, their non-Catholic and non-Christian colleagues. These latter, it must be remembered, certainly contribute much to the advancement of professions and occupations.

Having discussed at considerable length the apostolate proper to the laity, the Fathers of the Council add that besides their specific apostolate, "the laity can also be called in various ways to a more direct form of cooperation in the apostolate of the hierarchy" (art. 33). What is referred to here is clearly lay participation in an apostolate not proper to the laity but to the hierarchy. Among the several ways by which laymen cooperate in the apostolate of the hierarchy is institutionalized Catholic Action. It might be appropriate here to note that perhaps because of the extraordinary need for this form of apostolate among the laity in the Philippines, the tendency has been among many to see in Catholic Action not so much lay contributions in an apostolate properly hierarchical as *the way* by which laymen may fulfill their duty of Christian witness. While in itself a situation like this is not evil, it can nevertheless produce unfortunate results. In several sectors of the country, for example, while Catholic Action seems to thrive, the apostolate proper to the laity seems to suffer sad neglect. The danger this state of affairs

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

poses for the Church lies in that because of it the Church, both clergy and laity, "risks above all a spiritual failure. What must be feared is not so much the danger of persecution as the possibility that the emerging catholic universe might remain outside the World Church. What must be feared is not so much that it shall suffer as that it might fail; not so much that the world might crush it as that the world might pass it by; not so much that the Church's mission might be opposed by others as that it might be left unfulfilled by us."¹²

THE LAITY AND THE CLERGY

The distinction between the ways of witness of the laity and the clergy do not, however, imply absolute autonomy of one from the other. "For the distinction which the Lord made between sacred ministers and the rest of the People of God bears within it a certain union, since pastors and the other faithful are bound to each other by a mutual need" (art. 32). If the laity make the Church "present and operative in those places and circumstances where only through them can it become the salt of the earth" (art. 33); if indeed "upon the laity . . . rests the noble duty of working to extend the divine plan of salvation to all men of each epoch and in every land" (*ibid.*), still the laity must depend on the clergy for their divine dynamism. The Christian life is, after all, a life led according to God's incarnate Word, a life informed, therefore, by scripture, confirmed by tradition and nourished by the Eucharist. The Christian life is life united with the mystical Being of Christ and his Church in the celebration of a communal liturgy. But only through the clergy is the Word of God—both as doctrine and sacrament—made available to the laity. Priests, the Constitution states, have been "consecrated to preach the Gospel and shepherd the faithful and to celebrate divine worship" (art. 28). "They are united with the bishops in sacerdotal dignity" (*ibid.*). "By reason of their particular

¹² Leslie Dewart, *Christianity and Revolution: The Lesson of Cuba* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), p. 185. On the laity and Catholic Action, see Karl Rahner, "The Lay Apostolate," *The Layman in the Modern Church* (Proceedings of the Fourth Archdiocesan Sodality Convention in Manila), pp. 7-32.

vocation [they are] especially and professedly ordained to the sacred ministry" (*ibid.*). The lay apostolate cannot, therefore, succeed unless the laity maintain an effective contact with their pastors. By the parish, which attaches all Christians to the diocese and the bishop, Catholics are formally incorporated into union with the incarnate Word. By the parish in fact Catholics become participants in the history of salvation.¹³

The Fathers of the Council seem clear in their emphasis on the need for a continual rapport and dialogue between the laity and the hierarchy. Rapport. Dialogue. These are elements that thrive only where authority is not made manifest too often in terms of juridical power. While it cannot be too strongly affirmed that the exigencies of their functions as especially ordained teachers, priests and rulers in the Church have placed the hierarchy in a position of considerable power, it must be stressed that power is theirs in order that their service may be better exercised. For authority is primarily service. Biblical scholars have of late reminded us that the vesting of authority, in scriptures, signified a call to service. Attention has been called, for example, to the fact that "the Gospel makes use especially of two important words for the notion of authority, *diakonia* and *exousia*, i. e., service, and . . . the potential and presence of Christian love and authority."¹⁴ Pope John XXIII reminded the world of this when he stated that the attitude of the Church is properly pastoral. Authority, understood in this manner, is creative, not suppressive; it encourages rather than stifles growth; it motivates to action rather than reduces to passivity.

¹³ On the points made in this paragraph concerning the relation between the layman and the clergy and the parish, see *The Liturgy and the Word of God* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1959), especially the paper by Francois Coudreau, S.S., "The Bible and the Liturgy in Catechesis," pp. 98-118.

¹⁴ F. Joseph Smith, "The Demands of Honesty," *Continuum*, II (1964), 212. See also Yves Congar, O. P., *Power and Poverty in the Church*, translated by Jennifer Nicholson (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1964), 157 pp. This book is reviewed elsewhere in this issue by Rev. Catalino G. Arevalo, S.J.

Though mutual dependence binds clergy and laity in a close union, total subservience does not characterize the laity's relationship with the clergy. The Constitution reminds pastors to "recognize and promote the dignity as well as the responsibility of the laity in the Church... [to] willingly make use of their prudent advice" (art. 37). For, the Constitution continues, "the laity have the right, as do all Christians, to receive in abundance from their pastors the spiritual goods of the Church, especially the helps of the Word of God and of the sacraments" (*ibid.*). Laymen "should openly reveal to their pastors their needs and desires with the freedom and confidence which is fitting for children of God and brothers in Christ. They are, according to 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" (*ibid.*). It seems that the laity and the clergy are here enjoined to recognize the need for both to suffer criticism from each other. By criticism is meant the constructive appraisal of each other's needs and shortcomings, done in the spirit of Christ's charity, in order that the growth of Christ's Body be accomplished. "A great many wonderful things," the Fathers of Vatican II state, "are to be hoped for from this familiar dialogue between the laity and their pastors: in the laity a strengthened sense of personal responsibility; a renewed enthusiasm; a more ready collaboration in the projects of their pastors. The latter, on the other hand, aided by the experience of the laity, can arrive at clearer and better decisions regarding both spiritual and temporal matters. In this way, the whole Church, strengthened by each one of its members, will more effectively fulfill its mission for the life of the world" (*ibid.*).

CONCLUSION

Among the schemata that await discussion in the third session of Vatican II is one exclusively devoted to the laity. How the schema will ultimately sound when it appears, one can only surmise. But this much can be said with certainty: perhaps in a more elaborate manner, it will reassure the

laity, especially those who have been bothered by guilt-feelings amidst the extraordinary demands of their professions and occupations, that each man, *in his own unique life*, which itself can be one of Christian perfection, may contribute toward the fulfillment of Christ's Mystical Body. This reassurance, already present in the Constitution *On the Church*, seems to indicate that a shift of emphasis from the eschatological to the incarnational aspects of christian life and apostleship is occurring in the Church.¹⁵ In the past, the tendency was to dismiss this world as valueless or often as detrimental to salvation, because Christ's kingdom is not of this world. The assumption was that the inaccessibility of man's supernatural end to natural human powers rendered the natural development of the human person ineffectual and unnecessary in Christian life. To seek the present reorientation (which is not a rejection, indeed, of the eschatological approach), and to stress incarnationalism is simply to insist on that aspect of St. Paul's doctrine which teaches that all of "creation awaits the revelation of the sons of God...because creation also will be delivered from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the sons of God" (Rom. 8, 19 ff.). If redemption is given only through Christ, then only through the labors of men who are members of Christ's Body can all creation be made sharer in the redemption. Accurately and succinctly, Teilhard de Chardin expresses the incarnationalist position in a letter to Maurice Blondel towards the close of 1919. He writes: "The complete task of the Christian therefore, as I see it, is triple: 1) To collaborate enthusiastically with the human enterprise, knowing that not only by fidelity to obedience but also by the *work* being accomplished, we are building up toward the fullness of Christ and preparing the more or less proximate matter to be transformed into His Plenitude. 2) To accept the hardship involved in this work and in the pursuit of this ever growing ideal as the first form of renunciation, the first victory over an egoism at once slothful and constricting. 3) To cherish, along with the ful-

¹⁵ See Richard J. Cronin, S.J., *op. cit.*, pp. 134-145, where there is a lengthy discussion concerning the eschatological and incarnational positions.

fillments in our life, everything that diminishes us, that is to say, all the passive purifications which Christ has planned for us in order to transform into Himself those elements of our personality which we seek to develop for Him."¹⁶

In conclusion, it might be apropos to observe that the shifts in emphasis within the Church—on the pastoral, for example, rather than the juridical attitude of the hierarchy; on the dynamic rather than the static character of the Christian mission; on the incarnational rather than the eschatological basis for the Christian life—these seem to point to the "ripeness" of the papacy of John XXIII. Looking back over the years, one cannot but exclaim, indeed, "ripeness is all." Etienne Gilson puts it well. Speaking of those who grow impatient over what appears to be a slowness on the part of Christian philosophy (and the Church)¹⁷ to "reform" itself according to contemporary needs, Gilson writes: "Some apologists always seem afraid to miss the last boat, but there is no last boat. From the stern of your boat you always see three or four others ready to sail."¹⁸ The Church will set sail—it always has—"in the fullness of time."

¹⁶ From "Maurice Blondel et le Pere Teilhard de Chardin; Memoires echanges en decembre 1919, presente par H. de Lubac," *Archives de Philosophie*, XXIV (1961), 123-156, as quoted and translated by Christopher F. Mooney, S.J., "Blondel and Teilhard de Chardin: An Exchange of Letters," *Thought*, 37 (1962), 543-562. Teilhard de Chardin develops these three points some seven years later in *The Divine Milieu*.

¹⁷ In his book, *The Philosopher and Theology*, M. Gilson refers only to "apologists" for Christian philosophy; when he mentioned this in a lecture in March 1960 at the Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, Toronto, however, most of the listeners were left with the impression that M. Gilson was also referring to "apologists" for the Church.

¹⁸ Etienne Gilson, *op. cit.*, pp. 232-233.

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