

THE REVOLUTION OF LOVE
To realize it, committed laypersons are
indispensable

Priests and Laity together for the Humanization and
the Evangelization of The World

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Society of the Missionaries of the Holy Apostles
American Province 2016

Printing authorized by:
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Printed by St. Martin of Porres Lay Dominican Community in New Hope, Kentucky, United States of America.

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THE REVOLUTION OF LOVE

In order to succeed, a committed laity is indispensable

INTRODUCTION

The entire history of the world is one of revolutions: either of love or of hatred. The human family is a garden of wheat or of chaff; they love or hate each other. There is a constant struggle, a battle field constantly covered with numerous and new victims. The greatest battle is fought first of all in each one of us; it is the struggle against our personal selfishness. The greatest victory in the world is the victory over our personal selfishness, always persistent and that knows well how to disguise itself with motives that seem at times spiritual and disinterested.

The Lord tells us¹:

- *I give you a new commandment: love one another as I have loved you (Jn 13,34)*
- *But to you who hear I say, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. (Lk 6,27)*
- *Do to others whatever you would have them do to you. This is the law and the prophets. (Mt 7,12)*
- *If anyone says, 'I love God', but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. (1Jn 4,20)*
- *Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer. (1Jn 3,15)*
- *Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift. (Mt 5, 23-24)*

To undertake this revolution of love, the only true and enduring one, the laity is as necessary as are priests and religious. It is everyone's task and each one must go all out in doing it. The hardest is the one who loves the most and not necessarily the one with the most important task. If there is a hierarchy of functions that last for a while, there is a hierarchy of love that lasts forever. "My strength is my love", says St. Augustine. My measurement is my love. When we speak of laity, we mean Christian laity, committed and resolved in living their baptism and in following Christ Jesus.

During the first centuries of the Church, Christian faith became widespread especially through committed laypersons who also made up the great number of martyrs.

¹ The Holy Bible, NAB: All the references will be taken from here.

- *Now you are Christ's body, and individually parts of it.* (1 Cor 12-27)
- *All the people rose as one man...* (Jgs 20,8)

These days, certain authors who want to sound modern write: The laity is also the Church! This seems as strange if not as ridiculous as to say: A soldier is also the army! Vatican II has clearly reminded us of this elementary truth. We insisted so much on the hierarchy, its rights, its power and importance that we had practically forgotten the Christians, as if the ecclesiastical dignitaries did not exist solely to serve their brothers. It is a fact that in our Church, certain structures had become so heavy that the community was exempt or prevented from getting involved. Christians had a mentality of working-class persons: they belonged passively to an enterprise that managed without them.

THE MOST IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS OF VATICAN II CONCERNING THE LAITY ARE THE FOLLOWING²:

- *Lumen Gentium* develops its teaching concerning the laity in the context of the People of God; laypersons are “the faithful who, after having been incorporated in Christ through Baptism and associated as the People of God and thus become in their manner participants of the sacerdotal, prophetic and royal office of Christ, exercise the mission given to the entire Christian population.”
- The Decree *Apostolican Actuositatem* underlines among others the active and responsible participation of the laity in the salvific mission of the Church as belonging to them “in a proper and absolutely necessary manner”: “The apostolate of the laity is a necessary component in the Church, for it is a result of their Christian vocation.”
- The Decree *Ad Gentes* stresses the importance, and even the irreplaceable role of the laity in the missionary activity of the Church: “The Church is not really grounded, is not the perfect sign of Christ among mankind if an authentic laity does not exist and is not working with the hierarchy.”
- The Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* places the commitment of the laity as the significant and decisive moment in the relationship of the Church with the world of today.

² Vatican Council II, Volume 1, *The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, General Editor Austin Flannery, O.P., 1975, Castello Publishing Company, Northport, New York, Dominican Publications, Dublin, Ireland.

FOR THE TRIUMPH OF THE CIVILIZATION OF LOVE, A COMMITTED LAITY IS NECESSARY.

Vatican II, thanks to its new view of the Church and of its mission in the world, has opened a completely new and splendid horizon to the laity and to its commitment in the Christian community and society.

After twenty years, the Church feels the need to ask herself about the situation that has developed within her communities as well as with the world in such a rapid and profound transformation.

It needs to recognize the fruits that have ripened after the Council and thus face the challenges and new problems that the development of history has brought forth and continues to present. It has to decipher the expectations and sollicitations that present themselves. Such are the preliminary situations and the actual conditions that are needed so that the Church may not only be faithful to the teachings of the Council, but also make the extraordinary treasure bear fruit in the face of “demands” requested of Her today.

The Holy Spirit “is making today the laity more and more aware of their proper responsibility and is encouraging them everywhere to serve Christ and the Church”. The presence and action of the Spirit in the soul of the laity is seen by the fruits of spiritual and apostolic vitality that is enriching the post-conciliar heritage of the Church.

The Council has favored a more “incarnate” spiritual life in the daily existence of the laity: “This spirituality of the laity must show particular characteristics according to the living conditions of each person: married and family life, celibacy and widowhood, in sickness, in professional and social activities”. It has renewed the apostolic and pastoral dynamism of the laity.

From this, a rich blossoming has opened up to new groups, movements and associations destined to assure a courageous and efficient presence in different structures of society and in different centres where modern culture is elaborated.

The variety and vitality of these groups of laypersons, often spontaneous and informal, need pastors with greater awareness and the ability to discern and recognize the gifts of the Spirit. “The priests must listen willingly to the laity, take into account their wishes, recognize their experience and their competence in different areas of human activity, in order to discover with them the signs of the times³. By testing the spirits to see whether

³ Third General Conference of The Latin American Episcopate: address of His Holiness John Paul II, *Puebla, Mexico, Sunday, 28 January 1979: Evangelization now and in the future in Latin America.*

they are of God, they will be able to discover and discern through faith the charisms of the laity in all their shapes and forms, the modest ones as well as the more important ones. They will recognize them joyfully and develop them ardently.”

CHAPTER ONE

TO BE A COMMITTED LAYPERSON IS A VOCATION

An astounding development of the active role of the laity in the Church, during the fifties, finally led us to see in the status, life and activities of the laity a vocation that is as true, worthy and significant as any other.

Also, the language has begun to change. It is very often the result of current ideas and situations⁴.

The expression “vocation of the laity” makes its way in theological and spiritual writings, in the teachings of the Popes and finally in the documents of the last Vatican Council: “...these laypersons who are following their own particular vocation...” (AA 4); “Because of their vocation, it is up to the laity to seek the Kingdom of God...” (LG 31); “The Bishops help, on the journey to sanctity, priests, religious and the laity according to each one’s vocation” (CD 15); “...may each faithful be led by the Holy Spirit to develop his specific vocation according to the Gospel...” (PO 6); “...the eminence of the vocation of the faithful in Christ and their obligation to bear fruits of charity for the life of the world” (OT 16).

Moreover, the idea of a special vocation of the laity finds its place in the ecclesial importance that comes from the ensemble of the Vatican II documents. To be a layperson is therefore the answer to a calling of the Lord to live accordingly. Strictly speaking, to become a layperson is to be conscious of this calling and to respond to it: to live one’s baptism.

We all have the same vocation: TO LOVE

- *So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect. (5) (Mt 5,48)*
- *Jesus said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments (Mt 22, 37-40).*

Our vocation is rooted in baptism: it is the beginning of all the rest, because all the rest is founded on it. This question is brought up in Vatican II, at the beginning of the Constitution on the Church. Before speaking of the hierarchical structure of the Church, of the ministry of the bishops and priests, before mentioning the different ecclesial

⁴ Neves, Lucas Moreira, *Vocation of the laity*. Église Canadienne, 1978, p. 332. April 1978, 32 pp. ISBN 0789.

functions, the Council looks at the foundations of our condition as Christians: in a grandiose chapter, it presents the call to become part of the People of the God of the New Testament as a proper vocation of the Christian.

It is our own vocation, the highest dignity that can be given us. It is here and nowhere else upon which is founded in the Church the right to be respected. The Pope is not a Christian of a higher degree than a baptized laborer or the mother of a Catholic family. We all have the same vocation. If there are differences, they must be found in the different manner in which this vocation concretely exists.

One of the most explicit texts of the Bible is when Saint Peter tells the People of God: *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were no people but now you are God's people; you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy* (1 Pt 2, 9-10).

In quoting this text and others found in Holy Scripture and Tradition, the Council has elaborated a theology of Christian life that is able to free the layperson from all his inferiority complexes.

As if to avoid all misunderstandings, the Council underlines once more in the chapter on the laity (ch. 4) that in the Church of Christ, there are different situations and multiple functions and vocations, but no classes nor privileges: *One body and one Spirit, as you were also called to the one hope of your call; one Lord, one faith, one baptism* (Eph 4,5) “One is the dignity of its members because of their regeneration in Christ; one is the grace of filial adoption; one is the vocation to perfection; there is but one salvation, one hope, one indivisible love” (n°32).

“The state of perfection” – an ill chosen term to designate the religious – is not the religious state, but the state of the Christian. All the baptized are included. Christ’s words designate everyone without exception: *Be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect* (Mt 5, 48).

In this context also, the Council qualifies its statements. It does not add to the chapter on religious (ch.5) a few general considerations on the tendency to holiness of the “non-religious”, but begins with a fundamental chapter (ch.5): the universal call to holiness in the Church. Then, the individual structures of different religious orders no longer appear as particular expressions of this holiness.

Holiness – still actual?

Unfortunately, the words “saint” and “holiness” are as depreciated in our current language as the word “perfection”. In reality, holiness is totally different from religious fanaticism; it has nothing to do with the excess and extravagances found in certain lives of saints. “To be holy” means in positive terms: to be open to God who is holiness, goodness, perfection. This is why we are only able to understand Christian holiness by beginning with God in whom there is no evil, nothing obscure for He is pure light⁵.

In the Old Testament, God has always manifested himself in his transcendence. God: completely other! Yet, in the Incarnation of his Son, he becomes so close to us that in Him, we participate in the fullness of his Spirit, in his life, in his love.

In catechism, we learned that this gift of divine life is called “sanctifying grace”. Just as the mystery of the condescending love of God, this expression has become something usual, even a common reality. We were not born to become saints; we were born holy at the precise moment of our regeneration. This holiness is a pure gift; it is not our due and we do not merit it. “Called by God, not because of their works, but because of his generous design, justified in Jesus our Lord, the disciples of Christ have truly become, through the baptism of faith, sons of God, participants of his divine nature and, consequently, truly saints” (*Const. on the Church* n° 40).

Without causing surprise, Paul was able to speak to the “saints” of Rome, Ephesus, Corinth, even though, among the Christians of these cities, everything was not in conformity with the ideal of sanctity.

Precisely, the two letters to the community of Corinth show that the first Christians needed to work on themselves. They too, after their baptism, had to work against their evil tendencies and had trouble ridding themselves of their bad habits. And yet, in the eyes of Paul, they are “saints”; that is, persons sanctified by their baptism, graced by God in his Spirit and in his life: *You have had yourselves washed, you were sanctified* (1 Cor 6,11). Truly, this vocation must be seen in life through the imitation of Christ. “This sanctification they have received must be preserved and completed, with the grace of God, throughout their lives.” (*Const. on the Church* n° 40).

To live as a Christian

An animal functions as an animal. It will never accomplish an intelligent act: it does not have what is required to do so. Man, on the contrary, besides his corporeal aptitudes, has spiritual faculties. It is up to him to use them by leading a real human existence.

⁵ Schlosser F., *Lebensformen de Christen*, Ed. Pustet, Regensburg, pp. 8-ss.

In the same manner, the Christian must live his Christian life from the new existence that God willingly gave him at baptism. Not that he ceases being human. God has sanctified him, removed him from the evil sphere and drawn him to Himself. If his actions are under the movement of God's love, he is on the road of his human accomplishment. For to tend towards sanctity is to tend towards our complete and integral fulfillment; it is to tend towards perfect equilibrium. For man is one who can only find his supreme accomplishment in God alone. To live a holy life is nothing else but being oriented towards God. To commit sin is to live in reverse, it is to deviate from the good direction. Our human nature is oriented towards our Christian condition that identifies itself with holiness.

We have trouble establishing this equation. Why? Because we have falsified the data. According to the current mentality, the Christian is one who must absolutely avoid dying in the state of mortal sin; the saint, on the contrary, is a religious genius, an oddball, a child prodigy. Saints seem to be sports cars with powerful cylinders fabricated by God; the rest are old jalopies that don't reach destination if they break down or reach their goal very late.

We have to blame this conception on the fact that we have reserved the title of saints uniquely to those who have been recognized as such by the Church, though they represent only a minimal number in comparison with *the great multitude that no one could count* (Rev 7,9). We do not have the right to bring the terminology of Holy Scripture – this “divine language” – to the narrow limits of the Church's language that considers as saints only those She has recognized as such with the help of the Holy Spirit. Why is the Church so selective? One thing sure is that She does not want to distribute “diplomas of sanctity”; the saints would be the last ones to consider them important. She rather wants to show us models of Christianity. If, for example, the Church canonized the English Chancellor, Thomas More, it is in order to tell Christians in the world and politicians that in such a sector of life, we can live as Christians.

There remains the wish that from now on, the heavy weight of canonizations of popes, bishops, religious be better counterbalanced by models of the laity; family, fathers and mothers, doctors and technicians. A shorthand typist would be embarrassed to find a celestial model. By establishing the feast of Saint Joseph the Laborer (May first), we wanted to give a celestial patron saint to laborers. But didn't we go a bit far to find him? Without doubt, one thing is not about to change: silent, humble and modest souls, the poor in spirit that Jesus proclaimed blessed, will not draw the attention that a holy founder, a martyr or another saint who had the projectors of news shine on him.

Against false idealizations

Quite often, we consider as essential in the life of saints certain extraordinary phenomena that have been greatly embellished. People with a sane judgment are more repulsed than attracted by these prodigies. They lose their wish to “tend towards sanctity” because the saints are shown to them as pale, without ambition and temptations, as not having their two feet on the ground. If we read in the lives of certain saints that they observed days of fasting before having been weaned and that on Friday, they refused their mother’s milk, we have reason to find this misplaced. These hare-brained ideas have contributed to limit the call to holiness to a few exceptional specimens.

Let us not believe that the spirit of sacrifice, selflessness, self-control, the spirit of prayer and fraternal love came to them like roast chicken. No, they did not live in a country of abundance; on the contrary! Their lives evolved in the monotony of daily life; at times, it was depressing. To Paul, discouraged, God answers: *My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness* (2 Cor 12,9). It was in binding up all his energies that Augustine realized his conversion: with the help of grace, others also succeeded; why wouldn’t I?

Succeed in what? In being a Christian! No more, no less; for this is what “holiness” is about. God does not select someone from the crowd and ask him to do something supererogatory: “You, Justin the philosopher, you, Henry the emperor, you, Countess Elizabeth, and you, little Maria Goretti, I have my eye on you: I want you to be a saint.”

Whether it is the dissolute student Augustine, the sabre-rattler and go-getter Ignatius of Loyola, the brilliant lawyer Alphonse of Liguori or any other among us, God simply wants us to live according to our Christian vocation in the different situations of our lives, to encounter Christ each day, to put into practice his Gospel. All He expects from us is that we accept the marvels He offers us, like Saint Francis of Assisi who lived Christianity according to the originality of his temperament and who remained attentive to the demands of his environment. He was a child of his times, a man like each one of us. Thus, he gave to his life a clear-cut orientation and opened the road not only to Franciscans and religious, but to all Christians. He lived according to the Gospel in a radical and coherent manner while maintaining his powerful originality. Saints do not furnish us with cheap clichés. We must imitate them according to their mentality and Christian commitment without trying to copy them.

Called by our name

Fortunately, the fabrication of tasteless statues made of plaster has gone bankrupt. Our times are in the process of removing them from their niches and make them evolve among human beings. There have never been ready-made saints. God does not like to

make Christians on an assembly line. He calls each one individually. He calls each one by name, that is, with his originality, his qualities, his temperament and resources. It is in adapting to all these elements that God distributes his graces. They develop in different ways this new being, born at baptism, and brings the body of Christ, that is the Church to its completion. A special call is made not only to priests and religious but also to all of us. The call to live in the world, to the vocation of marriage, is situated on the same level as a religious call.

We are all capable since baptism *to share in the inheritance of the holy ones in light* (Col 1,12). Perhaps we don't even know the date when God called us by our name. It would be a good thing for us to become more aware of our Christian dignity. The Council declares: "It is therefore evident for us that the call to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity is for all those who believe in Christ, whatever state or form of life they may have. In an earthly society, this holiness contributes in promoting more humanity in our existence" (*Const. on the Church*, n° 40). The Christian is neither diminished nor a superman; he is a person just as God sees him: someone who wants to follow Jesus, and who accepts the precepts and counsels of the Gospel.

CHAPTER TWO

TO BE A COMMITTED LAYPERSON IS TO TAKE ONES ROYAL PRIESTHOOD SERIOUSLY

Come to him, a living stone, rejected by human beings but chosen and precious in the sight of God, and, like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ...(6) (1 Pt 2, 4ss)⁶.

Saint Peter – or rather the Holy Spirit – speaks to the Christians of Rome and of the world of his time and ours. To the faithful and to the leaders of communities, he says: “Come to Christ the Priest...”

“Come to Christ.” He is the chosen One of God, “chosen and precious” because he is the Son, his Only Son.

Thus Jesus is forever the beloved and, with this title, the irresistible Mediator, the unique Priest, “the corner stone” upon which the house of God, the Church, stands in one piece. To express the same reality with another image: he is the Head of the Body, the Head which makes it one, coherent, giving him Glory, *the glory as of the Father’s only Son* (John 1, 14).

But aren’t all Christians his members...?

If the Head is “chosen and precious before God”, will its members be contemptible and rejected?

If the Beloved Son is the head, won’t the members of the Son be beloved members, “agreeable to God through Jesus Christ”?

To be sure, they will each and everyone be “chosen” like him, “precious” like him. But “chosen and precious” because of him: “agreeable to God through Jesus Christ”, our divine Mediator. *We worship through the Spirit of God, we boast in Christ Jesus and do not put our confidence in flesh* (Phil 3,3).

⁶ Rey-Mermet, Th., Croire (To live ones faith in the sacraments), pp.264-ss. Editor: Droguet (1977), Français, ASIN: B0018O764K.

It is baptism that “glues” us to Jesus Christ in a single construction, that “incorporates” us to him in the Church, giving us life through Him, participants in all that He has.

If Christ the Priest is the “foundation block” upon which the entire house is built - the Church - if he is the “corner stone” by which the whole building stays together, isn’t each stone one with him?... If he is “the living stone,” risen to the life of God, you too, built upon him and united to him, “you also are living stones”, already risen with him, making up together with him this “house in which the Holy Spirit dwells”, Church of the baptized, a “sacerdotal community”.

A sacerdotal and royal community

When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim (Act 2, 1-4).

Saint John writes to the Churches of Asia: *He who loves us – Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead and ruler of the kings of the earth – has freed us from our sins by his blood and has made us into a kingdom, priests for his God and Father (Rev 1, 5-6).*

A kingdom, priests..., transposed into our times where political structures are no longer as then, exclusively monarchical, this means: “a population of priests”, “a sacerdotal community”.

This expression may make us think of an assembly at Mass. But it is rather about the universal Church, and, on the other hand, it is through baptism more than through the Eucharist that we refer to the sacerdotal dignity of the laity. “What makes a layperson a priest is his baptism,” says Saint Jerome.

That is especially true of the anointing with holy chrism following the immersion. “It isn’t only the Head (of the Mystical Body) that received the anointing, but the body as well, and we are the body. Jesus incorporates us to him, makes us his members, so that in him, we are also Christ. This is why the anointing that makes kings and priests belongs to all Christians as well” (St. Augustine).

The main reality of the People of God does not reside in the differences: clergy and laity, high clergy and lower clergy... “Just as there are not two degrees of belonging to Christ,

there are not two kinds of Christians. There aren't even two degrees of priesthood. To be a Christian and to be a priest is the same: we are Christian and we are priest by our baptism" (François Varillon).

Of course, all baptized Christians do not exercise the same ministry, but all baptized Christians have the same dignity: that of children of God; the same freedom: the one given by the Holy Spirit; the same mission: to proclaim the Gospel.

Didn't the Holy Spirit fall as tongues of fire on each of the one hundred and twenty persons, women and men, who were praying in the Cenacle with the Apostles?... *There is no partiality with God*, says Saint Paul (Rm 2, 11).

But frequently, he also says that the body is varied. The gift of the Holy Spirit to each member of the People of God is the foundation for the common responsibility of all Christians and, at the same time, for the diversity of their ministries:

There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each individual the manifestation of the spirit is given for some benefit... It is the one and the same Spirit who produces all of these, distributing them individually to each person as he wishes (1 Cor 12, 4-11).

A house inhabited by the Spirit

He is the first Animator, the first person responsible for the People, the one of whom Jesus says, quoting Isaiah: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me*. Every baptized christian is normally possessed by the Spirit.

By the Spirit who lives in him since Jesus, dying and risen, gave it to him, each baptized Christian is able to go, without an usher, straight to the Father. He is a child of the house. *It is through Jesus Christ that we both have access in one Spirit to the Father* (Eph 2, 18).

Speaking to the Father, prayer, is a normal part of his life. Like Christ, isn't the baptized Christian a Temple inhabited by the Spirit who launches towards God a filial cry of adoration: Father? *Through him, let us continually offer God a sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name* (Hb 13, 15).

"God's People also participate in the prophetic function of Christ... The faithful, having been anointed by the Holy One (cf. 1 Jn 2, 20 and 27), cannot err in their faith. The particular gift it has is manifested by the supernatural sense of the faith that is found in God's People when, from the bishops to the last lay person, it carries a universal consent

to the truths concerning faith and morals, thanks to this sense of faith that is awakened and sustained by the Spirit” (Vatican II).

Finally, “the faithful incorporated into the Church through Baptism have received a character that appoints them to religious Christian worship” (Vatican II), especially to the Eucharist.

Prayer, faith, worship... we might fear that the Holy Spirit is shutting up the sacerdotal community in an intimate sharing of his treasures. On the contrary! The Fire of Pentecost breaks open the bolts of the Cenacle and throws the fearful into the street... *As my Father sent me, I also send you, says Jesus. You will be my witnesses throughout the world...* (Act. 1,8).

This is to say that Christians can only honor their common priesthood by assuming the triple mediation of the priesthood of Christ: to go from God to man, - meet up with and assemble mankind -, rise up together to the Father in the pascal sacrifice of our whole lives and of our accepted death.

CHAPTER THREE

TO BE A COMMITTED LAYPERSON, IS TO COLLABORATE ACTIVELY IN THE MINISTRY OF THE PRIESTHOOD

The priest is your brother

Who would dare say: “My brother Bishop?”... And yet, bishops and priests call us: “My brothers”... Should we take them seriously?...

For the last eight hundred years, theology has strived to label ideas and persons. To define them precisely, it has separated them from their insertion, isolating the Pope from the bishops, the bishops from ordinary priests, religious consecration from baptism, the priest from the faithful, the Blessed Virgin from the other saints and the Church in general, the seven sacraments from the ensemble of the sacramental acts in the Church... We take the mechanics apart to better understand its parts.

Now, the movement is in reverse: We are together the mechanics by replacing the pieces in their ensemble: the Pope into the college of bishops and into the Church (Peter is one of the Twelve, and the Twelve are also the totality of God’s People), the priest (bishop or the ordinary priest) into the community of the faithful, religious life into baptismal life, the sacraments into the Church, entirely sacramental, the Virgin Mary into the mystery of Christ and the Church... A healthy movement that brings us back to the Gospel, to the teachings of the Fathers and of the great Councils, to its living organism.

For the priest in particular, the present development of history joins theology to make him “join the ranks”.

On one hand, the layperson sees a re-evaluation of his role within society and the Church. With the generalization of culture, the priest is no longer, as in the past, the sole possessor of knowledge. The layperson is also “clerical”, that is, a knowledgeable and competent person. Even in theology, biblical science, some of the faithful have a string of diplomas. As for spirituality, baptized Christians are now recognized as masters: they animate groups and persons on retreat with authority and a radiance that many priests can envy.

On the other hand, in our secularized society, the priest has no longer a social role: He is no longer a gearwheel of the human community. He is no longer recognized as a member of “the sacerdotal tribe”, he has no reserved place on the podium nor among the ranks. And the priest does not regret it. On the contrary! He is happy to be living among his brothers as Christ did. He is no longer a public figure, and doesn’t wish to be. He does

not accept that his ordination remove his rights as a man: the right to work, the right to political choices (without getting involved politically!), the right to wear ready-made clothes, etc. Just as Christ, he refuses to be isolated. *The Father sent his Son into the world* (Jn 3,17); Christ *sent his apostles into the world* (Jn 17,18), as men among men.

The priest is therefore my brother; I am his brother, his sister, as a human being and a Christian. With him, I am a member of Christ. A temple of the Holy Spirit. Together, People of the priesthood through the grace and mediation of the unique Priest, Jesus: *For there is one God, one mediator between God and the human race, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself as ransom for all* (1 Tm 2, 5-6)

All the others – bishops, priests, deacons and the baptized – only participate in the unique priesthood of Christ.

But the priest has a proper function: his ministerial priesthood

One must not fall from one gap into another, from separation to confusion.

Because we belong to the same body doesn't mean that we exercise the same function. The ear is not the eye; the heart is not the brain... Under the pretext that we belong to the same divine organism, we do not belong to the same living cell. The Church is not a protozoan, that is, a rudimentary animal made up of a single cell, as the amoeba... In the past, by distinguishing the bishop, the priest and the faithful, we risked separating them, even opposing them and thus dislocate the living Body of Christ. Today, by wanting to unify everything, we risk confusion and paralysis⁷.

In the Church, the People of God, the Body of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit are One, but not in the same manner nor type. The faithful act according to the title of their baptism and their natural gifts and grace – “the charisms” – that the Lord gave them to serve the community. Ordained ministers use these same human and Christian gifts as the baptized; but they also act according to their sacramental ordination. Saint Paul (Eph 4, 11-13) inspires us in the following words: *And he gave some as apostles, others as prophets, others as evangelists, others as pastors and teachers, to equip the holy ones for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...to the extent of its full stature.*

Everyone contributes in building the Church, that is, to increase its numbers and improve its quality. This is for everyone the work of ministry. One of the best contemporary models of this dynamic collaboration is the Montrealer, Mister Hector Durand, a married man with a family, and co-founder of the Work of the Holy Apostles. This sacerdotal apostolate, begun in Montreal, Canada, in 1946, was realized thanks to the substantial,

⁷ Rey-Mermet, Th., *Croire* (To live ones faith in the sacraments), pp. 280-ss.

material and spiritual help given by this great Christian to whom the Lord gave an exceptional love for the Eucharist and a unique respect for the priesthood.

Besides donating his entire fortune, he consecrated his life, his work and talent during more than 23 years, that is, until his demise. Following the advice of the Founder, Mister Durand and a few friends, a civil corporation, accepted to be the owners of these houses, seminaries and prayer centers, in order to allow priests of the apostolate of the Holy Apostles to devote themselves as much as possible to prayer and to preaching the Word of God.

We can say today that this committed layman helped give to the People of God more than 800 priests spread out in 35 different dioceses and 30 different Religious Communities. The specific ministry of the “ordained” Christian, priest or bishop, is to equip, organize, sanctify and train this community of service and work: “allow the saints to accomplish their ministry” as parents, educators, spouses, Christians, joyfully and with hope among their struggles.

The Church is inhabited by someone else

But why are there special ministers to help the faithful “accomplish well their service” as baptized Christians? Can’t they do it themselves? by helping one another?

No. No one can save himself alone; no one can save another, that is, make him a good Christian alone. Only Christ can because he is the Son. *He is the Head who brings about the body’s growth and builds itself up in love* (Eph 4, 15-16). He is the Head from whom the entire body receives the Spirit: the Spirit who makes us sons and daughters of God, the Spirit who assembles us into one body in Christ.

A community alone cannot constitute itself as a “Christian” assembly; this is done by “Christ” and him alone. It cannot receive itself as “Christian” except by “Christ”; it cannot be saved except by the Savior; it cannot be in communion with the Father except by the Mediator. Thus, Christ the Head must be personally present as Head of his Church. He does this through the priest.

The priest is the sign of Him whose presence is invisible since his Ascension. He is the efficient sign. When the priest announces the Word, it is Christ who speaks. When the priest consecrates the bread and the wine, it is Christ who, through the Spirit, consecrates the bread and the wine. When the priests reconcile, it is Christ who reconciles... The priest is not another Christ. He is the sign of Christ’s presence; the sacrament of Him who lives within his Church and who acts personally within Her, especially in the sacraments.

Also, the priest, taken from the community, recognized by it, perhaps chosen by it, is not however delegated by it. He is exclusively delegated by God.

“If the priest is not designated by the community of the baptized, it is because it is not humanity “reaching out” to God, but God who “descends” in order to bring it back to Him. Humanity cannot open up a road between itself and God...Christ, the supreme Mediator, is not someone who “reached out” to God in order to bring with Him his human brothers. He is the Word made flesh to bring all flesh back to the Father” (François Varillon).

It is always He, personally, who enters the priest through ordination. And the “service” that the ordained minister renders us is to allow him to enter personally into his Church.

It is good to insist on the word “personally”. The community must not be confused about the persons involved. There is but “one God” in the Trinity. The Three Persons remain distinct. Otherwise, there will be “no one”! In the same way, in the unity of the Body of Christ, the Church, one member is different from the other; *a fortiori*, no member is personally the Head. This ministry of Christ the Head cannot be, evidently, the ministry of the whole Body. The deacon, priest, bishop are “ordained” by the will of Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit during the imposition of the hands at the sacrament of Holy Orders.

By baptism as Christians, they are “one” as a community, not more or less perfect than you and I, born and instructed by it, baptized, confirmed, forgiven and ordained by it through the ministry of another. They are not mediators between Christ and the Christians. They are members of the Body, among others, with a diversity of functions. They did not have their own little Pentecost. The Apostles received the Holy Spirit through the tongues of fire that fell on each of the brothers and sisters.

But by their ordination, they are also “the Other” of the community. He who is of divine origin and who guarantees his authenticity; He who gives him life and growth. It is the Twelve (minus Judas), and not to all the disciples, that the Risen One called to the mountain of Galilee: *Jesus approached and said to them, “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age”* (Mt 28, 16-20).

APPENDIX: Decree on the apostolate of the laity: “*Apostolicam actuositatem*” published by Paul VI on the 18th of November 1965.

- The apostolate of Christian laypersons is all the more **urgent** as was normally stated the autonomy of numerous sectors of human life, leading to, at times, a certain neglect of the moral and religious order. A member who does not contribute according to his possibilities to the growth of the body must be considered useless to the Church and to himself.
- Laypersons have by their very union with Christ the duty and right to be apostles. The Holy Spirit, besides, grants the faithful **particular gifts**; from this, there results for each believer **the right and duty of exercising these gifts...**in the freedom of the Holy Spirit, in communion with their brothers, with their pastors who judge of the authenticity and good use of these gifts.
- The richness of the lay apostolate depends on their **vital union with Christ**, according to this statement of the Lord: “Without me, you can do nothing”. Only the light of faith and the meditation of the Word of God can allow always and everywhere to recognize God, **discern** Christ in all men close or far, judge the real meaning of temporal realities in themselves and related to man’s ultimate goal... This spirituality must take on particular characteristics **according to the living conditions** of each one: married and family life, celibacy and widowhood, in sickness, professional and social activity. May they value highly the **virtues of social life** such as honesty, justice, sincerity, gentleness, strength of character: without these, there is no true Christian life. The Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of the Apostles, is the perfect example of this spiritual and apostolic life.
- Laypersons exercise their apostolate on a spiritual level as well as on the temporal level. **Though these levels are distinct, they are tied together.** The layperson who is a member of the People of God and of the City of Man has but one Christian conscience.
- It is in the hearts of all that these words of the Apostles must resonate: “Woe to me if I do not evangelize”. At a time where very serious errors appear, the Council urgently exhorts the laity to play a more active role in the in-depth study and defense of Christian principles, according to the problems of our times. The laity will be concerned by the requirements of the **People of God throughout the world**, in particular by the missionary works by bringing them material aid, even their personal help.
Christian spouses are for one another, for their children and other members of their family, cooperators of grace and witnesses of faith. It is their duty to manifest by their entire lives the indissolubility and holiness of marriage; to affirm

the right and duty given to parents and tutors to raise their children Christianly, to defend the dignity and legitimate autonomy of the family.

(The family that is) like a sanctuary of the Church at home (will open up to) different family apostolates. Let us mention in particular: adopting abandoned children, welcoming strangers, helping at school, counselling and helping teenagers, fiancés in their preparation for marriage, helping in catechism, helping spouses and families in their material and moral difficulties, providing for the elderly the just fruits of economic progress. It could be a good thing for families to create an association for a better apostolate.

Catholics will enter into a **dialogue** with all men of good will. Those who travel abroad must remember that they are messengers of Christ everywhere they may be.

By the apostolate of the **word**, absolutely necessary in certain circumstances, the laity announces Christ. The laity will enliven their lives with charity, public worship and personal prayer, with penance and free acceptance of toil and the hardships of life that render them in accordance with the suffering Christ, Savior of the whole world.

An organized apostolate corresponds to the human and Christian condition of the faithful. Otherwise, those they are caring for will often be unable to resist the pressure of public opinion or of institutions.

The necessary bond with ecclesial authority being assured, the laity has the right to found associations, to manage them and give them a name on condition of avoiding the dispersion of energies.

No initiative can pretend bearing the name of Catholic without the consent of the legitimate ecclesial authority.

The Hierarchy can choose and promote certain associations and apostolic institutions aiming directly at a spiritual goal and assuming a particular responsibility without taking away from laity the necessary ability of acting on their proper initiatives. This act from the hierarchy has received the name of **“mandate”**...

As for the apostolates and institutions of a temporal nature, the role of the Hierarchy is to teach and interpret the moral principles to be followed.

- Besides the spiritual formation and a solid doctrinal knowledge... It is also convenient to favor the development of authentic human values.
We must learn gradually and prudently to see all things, to judge them in the light of faith, with the constant concern of respecting the human person in order to preserve and intensify its harmonious balance.

- The laity must learn the true meaning and **value of temporal goods** considered in themselves as well as in their rapport with all the goals of the human person; they must be well trained to use things while remaining attentive to the common good by following the principles of the moral and social doctrine of the Church.

The right and duty of exercising the apostolate are common to all the faithful, the clergy or the laity. There should be counsel-organisms to serve and promote the lay apostolate.

CHAPTER FOUR

TO BE A COMMITTED LAYPERSON IS TO LIVE A REAL SPIRITUALITY ROOTED IN THE REALITY OF EACH DAY

The primitive Church did not develop a special spirituality for the laity. The proximity of the Parousia (the second coming of Jesus) did not encourage the undertaking of a Christian transformation of structures: the advice was to remain in the condition in which God's calling had found you: a slave or free, married or a celibate, circumcised or not circumcised, since time was short and the world in its present form was passing away (1 Cor 7, 17-31)⁸.

But the laity, if it had always been governed, nourished, instructed by "ministers" whose authority came from the Lord, yet had a dignity, an activity and a responsibility that it lost at times and since. We knew in the Church only one call to perfection: baptism; a Christian law: the Beatitudes and one common spirituality for all: the Gospel!, the spirituality of the Mystical Body of Christ:

As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit.

Now the body is not a single part, but many. If a foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand I do not belong to the body', it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God placed the parts, each one of them, in the body as he intended.

If they were all one part, where would the body be? But as it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I do not need you', nor again the head to the feet, 'I do not need you'. Indeed, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are all the more necessary, and those parts of the body that we consider less honorable we surround with greater honor, and our less presentable parts are treated with greater propriety, whereas our more presentable parts do not need this. But God has so constructed the body as to give greater honor to a part that is without it, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the parts may have the same concern for one another. If one part suffers, all the parts

⁸ Evely, L., *Spiritualité des Laïcs*, 1963, B005VD0PGA, pp. 5-ss.

suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy. Now you are Christ's body, and individually parts of it (1 Cor 12, 12-27).

The role of the laity

Because *Lumen Gentium* indicated secularity as being what characterized the laity, a few theologians immediately defined the laity as functioning in the world with its temporal commitments: is a layperson is a Christian who deals with political, social or scientific questions. It was basically a sociological definition. A more profound study of the Constitution on the Church and other conciliar documents revealed quite another perspective. Also, many theologians do not hesitate to correct their own outlook and to affirm today that it is “beginning with its relationship to the Church, People of God” (E. Schillebeeckx: The typological definition of the Christian layperson in “The Church of Vatican II” Cerf, 1966, p. 1030), that we must first define the laity. I have said it before; he is by its profound nature a man of the Church and within the Church (cf. Yves Congar: Laity in the Church, in “Laity and the mission of the Church” Ed. du Centurion, 1962).

But this Church of which the theology of Vatican II speaks does not exist for itself. It is a Church for God and his Reign and, all at once, a Church for the world and in the world. And it is in the current of the Church that the layperson is also for the world and in the world.

A Church for the world and in the world; not – must we repeat? – a Church that is confounded and identified with the world, as some would like who react at an old concept of the Church distant from the world and hostile to the world and that falls into an error as serious as the one they reject. No, the Church is not the world. She wants what the world wants – man's success – but She places in this success a content, a dimension and requirements that does not exhaust the ambition of the world but surpasses it. This is why its ultimate goal and existence – the Kingdom of God – is not necessarily realized when the aim of the world is accomplished: well-being, progress or development, what can be obtained from justice and laws, etc.

Immersed in the world but distinct from it, the Church has a singular role to play: She must be the evangelical conscience of the world. She will always question the world either to stimulate it, for God so loved the world as to give His Son (Jn 3,16) or to say NO, for it is, in certain aspects, the enemy of Christ (Jn 15,18ss) (cf. Yves Congar: The calling of God, conference at the III World Congress of the Apostolate of the Laity, Rome, 1967). A Church that would be identical to the world by being one with it and would not be able to question it, to put it “on the spot”, to interpellate it nor denounce its sin in an evangelical manner would no longer be the Church of Christ.

And yet, let us admit it once more, the Church is really made of the same matter as that of the world. We can apply to it, in its ensemble, what François Mauriac said of each Christian taken individually: it is down to earth, word for word; “a creature molded from clay, the kind of mud upon which the Holy Spirit breathed and from which gushed forth a marvellous human being” (Was the Christian of the earth? In “Mauriac, the Christian”, coll. Recherches et Débats, Desclée de Brouwer, 1971, p. 23).

The Church is in the world and its history is almost always one with the sinuous contours of human history itself. And most of all, the Church is for the world. The Church is always turned towards her Savior and towards the world in order to serve it.

To radiate ones faith

At the beginning of the Church, one was converted by seeing how the faithful lived. Today, it is often a great obstacle for faith. Gandhi would say: “Christianity is good but Christians are not”.

For, a serious indifference of the laity in the Church was rapid, progressive and profound. Our Christianity became too clericalized.

We can say that Christ did not want to found a “religion”. He wanted worshippers in spirit and in truth. To the pagans who would reproach them for not having priests, sacrifices or temples, the first Christians would proudly retort that they had one priest, Christ, in whom they were all priests, that they were the real Temple of God, made of living stones, and that their sacrifices were not cows and bulls, but a sacrifice of praise (*sacrificium laudis*), spiritual (*rationabilem*), rendered at all times and in all places, by their whole life.

But in a very short time, Christianity competed with paganism, built Temples, had rites, ceremonies, incense, fasting and feasts, and above all its specialists, the clergy who seized a lot of what belonged to the People of God. Without noticing it, laity was somewhat excluded from the liturgy by the language and the rites it no longer understood. The Church had invented from the beginning active methods, the audio-visual. The sacred came to you through the eyes, the ears, the nose, the mouth, the feet (processions), gestures. It was impossible to take part in a Sacrament without realizing what was going on.

But little by little, the “visible sign” became insignificant and insensible to the laity, and we began explaining it in religion courses and sermons that passed so high over the heads of the listeners that Christians still “practice” but don’t understand and know very little about their faith.

Modern spirituality is like a lifeboat: the captain calls everyone on deck and puts them to work. The passengers of luxury cabins will lend a hand to the coal-trimmers. Those in first class will polish the deck. Others will row! The situation is desperate. We are not left alone. We were so comfortable in yesterday's Church. The pagans who were unchurched or the modern Christians cannot fathom how well off we were to be able to spend one hour a week in silence, thinking about nothing, having nothing to do, with sometimes some background music...

We are decolonizing, deproletarizing, democratizing... and also declericalizing religion.

For modern man can no longer put up with clericalism. He wants to be an adult, major, active and responsible, and finds in this a Christian authenticity that we do not find among professional and routine believers.

The Spirit of God works in all men, even the pagans, even the atheists, and speaks through the mouths of today's children and contemporary events.

Are you attentive to the signs of times? *Christ said to the crowds, 'When you see a cloud rising in the west you say immediately that it is going to rain – and so it does; and when you notice that the wind is blowing from the south you say that it is going to be hot – and so it is. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky; why do you not know how to interpret the present time?'* (Lk 12, 54-57)

Are you passionately interested by your present time? Do you watch out for signs, the direction of God's action, the callings and inspirations of the Holy Spirit *who has come even among the Gentiles* (Act 11,44), the illuminations of the Word *who enlightens everyone coming into the world and whoever is of the truth hears his voice?* (Jn 1,9 and 18,37).

To believe in God is to believe in the salvation of the world. To hope in God is to hope in the salvation of the whole world, as you ask for it each day at Mass. And to love God is to love the world, for we love a God who so loved the world that He constantly draws us to him.

And Heaven

For, the interest of our contemporaries is completely misplaced. It is transferred from Heaven to earth, from the eternal to the temporal and from the religious to the layperson.

Few persons who consider themselves normal Catholics think about Heaven, imagine with nostalgia what life is like in Heaven or are anxious to go there.

In the past, in our churches during Lent, we would read a summary of Christian life: “Kingdoms are crumbling, empires are falling down, the only thing that counts is to save our soul; because of this, everything else pales or disappears...” Well! These apologetics don’t work today. We shy away more and more from speaking about saving our soul and especially about “future life”.

For Christians do not believe in a future life. Future life is the opium of the people. We, Christians, believe in eternal life, and it only takes a moment of reflection to understand that, if it is eternal, it has already begun, it is not about the future!

Eternal life is actual. We are living it here on earth, and this is why today’s life excites us and it should be so.

Now this is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ, the God-man, the incarnate Word (Jn 17,3). Those to whom this knowledge and this love have not given them any joy on earth, won’t give them any in the next life. Everything begins now, Hell and Heaven.

In Hell, we are awaiting a future life, we wish that it will change. And in Heaven, we wish that it will last. Are you in Heaven or in Hell?

Have you discovered during your life something good enough to want it to last forever?

Do you love a person, or persons enough to want them to be eternal?

Your fellowship, your marriage, do you wish it to last forever?

Heaven will not be conjugal or fraternal vacations, freedom from our marriages or our brotherhood. Don’t be mistaken! “They” will always be there, “she” will still be there, “they” will be our companions. So may as well begin right now to get along forever.

In Hell, we wish to change wives, husbands, parents, children, neighbors, brothers and sisters; or, at least, we impatiently wait for them to change. In Heaven, we love them enough to love them forever.

In the past, we valued only the intemporal. “What good is it if it’s not eternal!” The temporal would be scorned; it was temporary. The ideal was what was stationary.

But today, we have learned with Péguy that even the supernatural is carnal, and that the eternal is lived in the temporal. We no longer believe that action and movement are something inferior. On the contrary, we look for an indefinite evolution, endless progress.

What corresponds, in the creature, to the infinite perfection of the Creator is an indefinite perfectibility. If we were immobilized, we would be imprisoned in our finiteness, we would be contradicting our most fundamental tendency: to perfect ourselves indefinitely. The eternity of a creature cannot be identical to the eternity of God, and the resurrection of the body promises us the existence of time in our celestial condition: an endless instant remains an instant.

Worshippers “in spirit and in truth”

And finally, interest in modern things has greatly turned away from the religious properly speaking (monks and priests) in order to consider the laity. In the past, when a layperson discovered religion, he would immediately consider entering a convent or at least a third-order. Now, modern religious orders have become secularized.

Hermits have been replaced by cenobites; the latter give way to secular Institutes, and we may ask ourselves if the twenty first century will not see religious orders with married people!

Thus, the religious person shall have become totally a layperson, and the layperson totally a religious. And Christ shall have succeeded in his religious revolution: to create worshippers in spirit and in truth who do not depend either on places (“Is it in Jerusalem or on Garizim?, in a cloister or in the world that we must worship God?”), or costumes, or state of life, but in being perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect.

It is these changes in our times that, for some, seem a step backwards, a scandal, a frightful decadence, are exactly an answer to what Christ has done: it is he who brought down heaven on earth forever, the eternal into the temporal, and the religious into the profane.

Christ has desacralized the religious, the sacred, worship. But he has sacralized man.

He has desacralized the Temple (“it is neither in Jerusalem, nor on Garizim”, “Destroy this Temple and I will rebuild it in three days”), his Body, (made up of innumerable members), the Sabbath (made for man and not man for the Sabbath), fasting (“do not put new wine in old wineskins”), the priest and the levite (a charitable heretic is worth more than a pastor who is not) and even worship (“I want mercy and not sacrifices”, “when you bring your offering to the altar, if you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering and go...”).

Man is sacred like Jesus

Yes, man is sacred. You shall be judged not by your worship, on your attitude towards God: you will be judged on your attitude towards your neighbor.

I looked for my soul, but was unable to find it.

I looked for my God, but my God escaped me.

I looked for my brother, and I found all three of them.

Read Matthew 7, 21-23: *Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord', will enter the kingdom of heaven..., not even those who prophesy, drive out demons or do mighty deeds* . We will not be judged on purely “religious” actions. Luke says it even better: *After the master of the house has arisen and locked the door, then will you stand outside knocking and saying, 'Lord, open the door for us'. He will say to you in reply, 'I do not know where you are from'. And you will say, 'We ate and drank in your company (we attended Mass each Sunday and received Communion, perhaps did adoration before the Blessed Sacrament), and you taught in our streets (we heard many sermons, and went on retreats...’* But he will answer: *'I do not know where you are from. Depart from me, all you evildoers!'* (Lk 13, 25-27).

We could say that we can be saved without “worship”: Matthew 25 says so in the parable of the Last Judgment for all those who have loved and served their neighbor without knowing the Lord. It would be unfortunate not to have known, of course. It would be a short cut to salvation. This is not what Christ did whose whole life was love and thanksgiving to the Father.

However, it is possible. On the other hand, what is impossible is to be saved without our brothers: *You did not feed me, clothe me, visit me, smile or console me... Depart from me into the eternal fire.*

Every sacrament has a substitute: baptism in blood or desire, spiritual communion or perfect contrition. But love of neighbor has no substitute. The rich man can very well implore, weep, beg... He who excommunicated himself from loving his brother is excommunicated from God forever.

You will not be judged on your love of God in heaven, but on the love of God for your brother. You have the same relationship with God as you have with your neighbor.

The sacred is no longer comfortably put away in worshipping God; it is spread out in our entire lives. We no longer have a religion of Temples or priests, a greenhouse religion, but a fresh air religion, in spirit and in truth, a religion of the laity.

Someone like Father de Foucauld can help us build this spirituality of the laity.

Powerfully, on condition we follow him on his “itinerary”, and look at the stages he overcame.

He began his journey deeply grounded in a medieval mystique: a mystique of the Crusades, of pilgrimages to the Holy Land, of the literal imitation of Christ (with a reconstruction of the landscape). A spirituality of Nazareth: to go where He lived, imitate His actions, touch the objects He touched, kiss the earth He trod.

But he loved Christ so sincerely, so truly that he overcame this romanticism to attain and create a modern spirituality: the mystique of the apostolate.

He understood that the real Nazareth is not in Palestine (which he left), but everywhere where the Church is small, obscure, ignored, without light nor heat, that the real Nazareth where we must go and work is our parish, our family, our fraternity, our profession, and particularly the milieux that are poorest, those that are the most abandoned.

To live the public life of Christ, for us, is to preach, teach, heal, build roads and houses, irrigate the deserts, prepare the ground. To participate in the Passion of Christ is not to go on pilgrimage to the Garden of Olives, but to support one’s family, one’s working companions, one’s pastor, to suffer with more faith and not be surprised for being persecuted as the Master was.

To live the Resurrection is to believe that forgiveness, and reconciliation are possible. The Resurrection for the Church of our times is the Vatican Second Council. May it be your devotion! Father de Foucauld understood this so well that he ended up renouncing temporarily the real Presence he so venerated in order to help out the Touaregs.

He realized that the presence of a living person of Christ was more important and more efficient than the presence of the Host, that the Host by itself does not have that magical activity that too many Christians have in the Benedictions of the Blessed Sacrament. The Host does not send out wave lengths, it isn’t a center of beneficial fragrance.

The fragrance was him, baptized, a member of Christ living and invigorating. He went towards man to bring him the living Christ in his own flesh. “You did not want sacrifices nor offerings, but you gave me a body. Therefore, I said: Here I am!”

Modern spirituality is in direct contrast with this medieval mystique that Father de Foucauld helped us overcome: a mystique of cloisters, solitude, at times platonic, one must say. To save our soul: four errors in four words, for it is God who saves us, we must save others, and we believe in the resurrection of our bodies. “Terrena despiciere”: to

despise earthly things, when we are responsible for the redemption of the world (Rm 8, 19).

Spirituality of commitment

We have gone from a spirituality of detachment to a spirituality of commitment. It is scandalous to be “detached”.

I remember this girl! She was at least 26 and was close to death. Her confessor was consoling her, preparing her: “My child, renounce everything, abandon this earth, give back everything to the Lord”. Suddenly, the girl, coming out of her semi-coma said: “Father, I am not attached to anything or anyone”. The priest had a human reaction: “This is scandalous!”, he said.

He was right. In twenty-six years, she had found nothing to which she was attached! And she is still this way, for she did not die. She wasn't worthy. She wasn't mature enough! In spite of appearances! What a sad homage she would have given the Creator for not having found anything interesting in His creation. And what a sad realization of “Love one another!”: “I am not attached to anything or anyone”. And she thought she had reached the summit of holiness!

We must be neither attached nor detached. We must be well adjusted! We must love the world in order to save the world; believe in the same Father who created the world and who saved the world and collaborate with Him in order to complete this creation and this redemption.

The extent of this task is unbelievable.

We must permeate the temporal realities with the transforming energy of the Gospel. The Church knows that these realities have their proper consistency, are regulated by proper internal laws, have their own autonomy, their proper goals that aren't religious. She wishes to respect all these dimensions and recognizes that the temporal realities need to be fulfilled. And yet, She is certain that these same realities, in their most intimate being, tend towards an absolute: the Absolute God in whom they find a certain “super-fullness”. This is where we have the groaning and labor pains that Saint Paul speaks of (Rm 8). The Church proclaims this new dimension of the temporal: its tendency towards a reign of justice, peace, love, brotherhood which is the Kingdom of God.

It is the whole family, conjugal, professional, national, international, economical and political life that needs to be redesigned and renovated.

At the heart of the masses

I was reading, recently, the Acts of the Apostles and a sentence struck me: “They (the Christians) powerfully witnessed to the Resurrection of Christ”.

I was imagining spectacular miracles, sensational preaching, irrefutable demonstrations. But further on, I read: “There were no destitute persons among them”. No one, among them, was without bread, friendship, a presence, help, care and attention!

In order for them to overwhelm their society, transform their structures, it really had to be that Christ had risen among them.

If we came to establish a society where no one would go hungry, be without friends, health, understanding, respect, culture... we would render a powerful witness that Christ is risen.

“For the Christians are not distinguished from other men, nor by their country, language or clothing. They do not inhabit cities that are proper to them, they do not speak an extraordinary dialect, their way of life has nothing singular (...). They are spread out in Greek or foreign cities according to each ones circumstances; they conform to local customs for their clothing, food and manner of living while manifesting the marvellous and paradoxical character of their spiritual existence (...). They are loyal to their duties as citizens (...). Every foreign land is their country and every country their foreign land. They get married like everyone else, they have children (...). They obey the established laws, and their manner of living is in perfect accordance with the laws. In other words, what the soul is to the body, the christians are to the world (...). Their function that God has assigned to them is so noble that they are not allowed to desert it”: this admirable description of the vocation of the laity can be found, as you may have noticed in the letter to Diognetus (chap. V and VI).

I will add this word written by Tertullian: “We are recent and already we have invaded the world and all that belongs to it: cities, islands, forts, municipalities, villages, the army, politics, administration...” And he adds with a touch of irony: “We have only left you the temples”. (*Apologeticum*, 37, 4). These are two texts written in the second century and that unite our present reflections and preoccupations to those of our most foreign ancestors. It shows that, if at certain moments the awareness of the vocation of the laity seems lost, as we saw at the outset of these reflections, it is, on the other hand, very much alive in the origins of the Church.

Each layperson will be able to see himself as “God’s witness in the desert of the world”, to the extent where he is called to live and proclaim the Gospel in a world that is often

quite foreign to the Gospel. But, by this evangelical witness, at times silent, at times clear and explicit, the layperson will help this “land of humans” find its “super-fullness” in God. This is where we discover what Jean Daniélou used to call “the serious temporal tasks” (cf. *The Laity and the Mission of the Church*, Ed. du Centurion, p. 119) and defined as “taking charge, by the Christian laity, of civilization, culture, and the city, and leading them to the goals that are theirs according to God’s plan” (ibid.).

Do you like your life?

The real question to ask a Christian is: do you like your life? Do you believe in your work? Do you have respect and love for your existence?

You do not have more love and respect for God than you have for your daily work. For you do not have more love and respect for God than you have for His will, for the mission He has given you and that you alone are able to fulfill.

Each Sunday, at Mass, you solemnly say that it is just and worthy, right and salutary to give thanks to God at all times and everywhere. Then, you go back to “your monotonous existence”, to your “family and its problems”, to your “work that is often difficult”, to your “sad surroundings” where you have never given thanks.

There are those who protest, but I know especially those who detest: they detest their existence, they detest their family, they detest their work, they only yearn to change, and sometimes they dare to say they are devoted to the Eucharist!

For it is God who has called you to this life, or at least to a love that can permeate your work, your neighborhood and your lifestyle.

In your work, in your family, in your existence, Christ would like to enter whereas you would like to leave it, and He would work with such love, He would live your life with such faith, He would treat others with such patience and tenderness that you would be amazed in seeing Him at the mission He gave you and in which all that was missing was to believe because you wouldn’t know how to thank Him enough.

Ask an average Christian: “How do you accomplish your religious obligations?”

You can be sure very often to get stupid or insignificant answers, even among the so-called fervent ones.

- Ah! My morning prayers, I always forget them, but at night, I say my three “Hail Marys”. I go to Mass almost every Sunday, I receive Communion whenever I can and go to Confession every...
- And you believe that those are your religious obligations?

- But Father, what more can I do? I'm a married man with a family, I can't go to Mass every day. It's not like when I was young!
- Yes, but what are the important religious obligations?
- To go to Mass...
- What I mean is, in the Gospel, what is the great commandment of Christ? (After a short hesitation, we can guess that he is searching for something else)
- To love one another.
- Well! You are married? Do you love your wife?
- Of course!
- When did you last tell her that? When was the last time you brought her flowers? That you noticed her new dress, that you thanked her for a good meal, for her decorations? How long have you been reading during meals, have you stopped listening to her when she speaks and invited her to speak when she is quiet?
- Those are my religious obligations?!!!

Never has a man accused himself to me of not having accomplished the conjugal act as an act of love and attention. As long as he does it "according to the rules", nothing can be said. And it has nothing to do with religion... Yet, love does have something to do with religion!

- And what about your work? Do you love your work?
- Oh! my work isn't very interesting. I'd like to see you: the office, the factory... I don't see what someone can love in that!
- Therefore, you are not fulfilling your religious obligations! What about your children? Do you have any children?
- Yes, but it is my wife who looks after them. I give her total freedom in this area.
- Here again you are failing in your duties.
- But Father, I go to Mass every Sunday!

A Christian 24 hours a day

The principal religious duties do not take place at the church.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You pay tithes of mint and dill and cummin, (you put on touching little "religious" demonstrations), and have neglected the weightier things of the law: judgment and mercy and fidelity (Mt 23, 23).

These elements, these religious duties par excellence, do not take place in churches. The most important Church is the family, "the domestic Church," says Vatican II. Religion is found in our daily lives – hypocrisy consists in confining it in churches. Nothing is profane: life is either religious or profane.

What would you think of someone who, being asked: “How are you, how is your work, your family?” would answer: “Great! I eat four times a day!”

This however is what Christians answer when they believe accomplishing their religious duties by discharging themselves of these exercises. To go to Mass, to go to Communion, to pray to better love God and neighbor.

One must eat to live – a life of love must be nourished and enlightened, but one must not live to eat. Many speak and live as if our union with God is only realized by prayer and the sacraments; outside of this, we can just about save the acquired union. But union with God is strengthened especially by love. It is by loving that we learn to better love.

Ask yourself the question for you and for those you know well: what is missing for them to lead a truly Christian life? To add on a few prayers, or to become aware and proud of their baptismal vocation?

To pray should be evidently before anything else to become conscious of this plan and of God’s calling. But a wrong idea of “religious exercises” that is quite widespread (to measure the religious value of someone, not by his charitable actions but by his pious devotions), can multiply prayers without changing a thing in your life.

On the contrary, this awareness of being called, this pride of being responsible, this intimacy in collaborating, this is what will spontaneously make us prayerful, multiply our Eucharists and will allow us to find in God the love that He wants us to give others.

Work becomes a prayer when it is done with love and respect, as a mission that God has given us. But it does not excuse us from an explicit prayer, on the contrary; just as a true collaboration does not take place without mutual consultation, an exchange of advice and services and , from time to time, a celebration of friendship.

Priestly Ministry

But we must still define how this work of the laity in the world can be called sacerdotal.

The action that is the most sacerdotal in Christianity is the celebration of the Eucharist, and the laity does so at all times and in all places in union with the unique Sacrifice of the Cross present on the altar by the ministry of the priest.

Indeed, the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and in the Eucharistic Celebration has always consisted in preferring the will of his Father to his own. He was obedient until death and

death on the cross. And I also, united with Christ, I can make of my life a Mass, a perpetual Eucharist by trying to conform myself in all things to the will of God.

Jesus came to do the will of his Father: *Therefore I said: Here I am, for it is of me that the book speaks, to do, ô God, your will* (Rm 10, 7).

Mary clearly stated her answer:

I am the servant of the Lord; may it be done, ô God, according to your word (Lk 1, 38).

The Eucharist is the recognition that all we have, comes from God, that God loved us and warned us, called us into existence and filial adoption, and this recognition is expressed by a joyful restitution, a consecration to God of all that we have received from Him. It is the greatest religious act, for it is an act of adoration.

The Christian has the mission to place the world in a thanksgiving mode, in a state of grace, in a eucharistic action. He is the universal priest.

The real worship that God desires is this worship in spirit and in truth by which the laity will fill their homes, their work place and their lives with love.

“What I want, says God, is mercy (that is a love that goes as far as atoning, repairing sins), and not sacrifices (understood as a “religious” demonstration)! Therefore, you can fully understand what Saint Thomas meant: “The faithful by their baptism (and confirmation) are deputized as God’s worshipers”.

This worship, this sacrifice, this Eucharist by which we inspire others with the love that we aspired in God, in which we share with them the bread and the forgiveness we received (for the only way to render them to God is by giving them to our brothers!), we accomplish them “at all times and in all places”.

Such is the spiritual priesthood, the interior sacrifice of which the religious sacrifice, the clerical sacrifice, is the Sacrament: the sign and the source.

For deep sentiments must be expressed, the meaning of our lives must be expressly signified and celebrated, life must be sung, this immense need to praise that is the most profound content of the being and which is often repressed without mercy must be exalted in a warm and fraternal assembly.

A meaningful sign

But in order to accomplish the sign worthily, there must evidently be something to signify! So that the religious sacrifice can be meaningful, the lives of the faithful must

first of all be meaningful which requires them impetuously to hurriedly enter into the Eucharistic celebration with songs of thanksgiving. Otherwise, they are only useless ceremonies, a make believe.

The real worship that God expects from us is not swinging censers before Him, but to give Him thanks at all times and in all places!

Unfortunately, the Church who at the beginning used her authority to remove the unworthy (those who had nothing to be thankful for), had to, in our times, oblige the faithful!

They come to rejoice out of obligation; they come to give thanks under pain of sin! They are punished with a Sunday obligation!

How do you celebrate with a “commandeered” person? Religion is such a sacred thing that it must only be inspired by free acts. Nothing good can come by constraint. We don’t even want “professionals” – only “amateurs”.

If a Christian does not live a life of thanksgiving, he has no reason to give thanks. If he does not know that he is called, chosen, loved, and responsible for all those around him, there is no room for him at the Eucharist.

Throughout the Bible, God complains about “sacrifices” that are untrue, “worship” without love and justice.

So, if the priest alone transsubstantiates the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, all the faithful are “celebrating” Mass, or should be celebrating it! The priest says Mass, not in his own name, but in the name of the Church, in the name of his community. If the latter remains passive, if it does not become part of this action, if it does not delegate him to speak and act in its name, the priest has an “empty” celebration, and his Mass no longer being the sign of our union with God and our union among ourselves, will neither be the source.

Look at what Christ chose as a symbol of his Body, as a sign of his presence: bread. What does bread represent if not the toil and pain of man? To make bread, you need the collaboration of many of people: not only the farmers, but mechanics who make the machines, the miners, petroleum engineers, transporters and merchants; and in the past, it was the women who made the bread.

Well, what kind of bread are we going to consecrate? If this bread that you bring to the altar is your work of the week, what value, what taste will this bread have? If it is the bread of your life, what does your existence taste like? It would be a terrible thing if you brought it to me in order to consecrate it as a bread of hatred and bitterness, perhaps a bread of idleness, laziness, of lies, of dishonesty and of fraud, a bread of injustice and of disgust!

It is with your bread that Christ wished to multiply His own; it is your bread, your life, your work, that Christ wished to fill with his love and give it as love to the world.

Blessed are you, God of the universe

You who give us this bread,

Fruit of the earth and work of our hands;

We present it to you:

It will become the bread of life (Mass: presentation of the bread)

Blessed are you, God of the universe,

You who give us this wine,

Fruit of the vine and work of human hands,

We present it to you:

It will become the wine of the eternal Kingdom (Mass: presentation of the wine)

Yes, Christ is present in the Eucharist, but he is present in a community of faith and of love. He becomes present by the gathering of its members (*wherever two or three are gathered in my name, I am in their midst!*) He gave his faithful the power to render Him present, to render Him visible in their midst. However, this is done by the strength of their love, of their faith and of their unity.

So, tell me, why are you giving thanks? Are you giving thanks for your baptism (many Christians have a vague resentment for having been baptized without their consent – they celebrate the day they were born – the day they became dust to return to dust – but they ignore the date, the place, of the beginning of their eternal life), are you proud of your Christian vocation? Do you find in it strength and encouragement for your apostolate?

Do you give thanks for your family, do you give thanks for your work, for your milieu, for our time? I don't say that your family is great, nor that your work is fascinating, but you have a mission, you have been sent there precisely because, without you, others would not have been saved. You are responsible for them. If you loved them better, they would become better. If you were more transparent to God, you would recognize Him in them. It is up to you to sanctify them, to bring them to the altar so that the Lord may achieve what he gave you to initiate.

Mass is the sign and source of our union with God and, indivisibly, of our union with our brothers.

But it is a source only if it is also a sign!

Generally, we are content to speak and live as if it were a source. So, let us celebrate as many Masses as possible... one, three, five, twenty per day, and the world will be sanctified! False clericalism that imagines the priest operating the sanctification of the world in a vacuum, all alone!

Each Mass, each sacrament, is a human and divine act all in one, and when we dehumanize the sacrament, we cease to deify man.

In the primitive Church, we celebrated Mass in homes, on a table, with the family bread. We have changed all this. We can confuse people by grouping them in churches, but the real church where they celebrate the Eucharist at all times and in all places, is in their homes. "It is when you depart from churches that you enter the Church!", your home. We fool them by giving them something that resembles everything but their bread, and instead of celebrating Mass on their table, we make it an altar and, quite symbolically, a tomb!

The Eucharist is celebrated by a priest united to his people, sustained and charged by him to give thanks to God for his call, for his vocation to salvation and his mission to call others, and by solemnly commemorating the gifts of God they have already received, the faithful prepare and open themselves to receive some more.

CHAPTER FIVE

TO BE A COMMITTED LAYPERSON IS TO BE ABLE TO QUESTION, LISTEN AND REFLECT

After the Council, in our sector, there was a period of euphoria. The fruits of this euphoria: for one, the enthusiasm and dedication of many among the laity, but on the other hand, a triumphalist rhetoric concerning the laity, its rights and prerogatives; a certain spirit of claims, of fruitless contestation and finally of frustration and bitterness⁹.

This season seems to have passed and the picture we have is that of an anonymous multitude of laypersons, working silently at all levels in the Church and throughout the world.

While being realistic, we must not however fall into a naïve optimism, for there are several questions marks. I would even say that there are risks, problems, fumbling, and even deviations. Let us talk about, if you will, tensions. However, I wouldn't want to err by defeatism, and this is why, next to each tension, I will show the hopeful signs thanks to which all these tensions become precious elements in the construction of the Church of today. These signs of hope are perspectives and realizations.

We will not expose here – much less comment on – all the numerous, complex and qualified tensions that appear.

Let us be content to glean here and there and briefly comment the principal ones among a list far from being complete.

Clericalism or “laity-ism”?

The first one, most widespread, is the tension that hasn't yet been resolved – will it ever be someday? – between clericalism and anti-clericalism (or “laity-ism” as Paul VI called it in: To the Bishops of the North Region of France. *Osservatore Romano*, 28-29 March 1977). Clericalism, in the Pope's allocution, is the pretention of Pastors to “control the monopoly of the apostolate”, in other words, the degeneration of the legitimate authority of pastors or ministers in the Church into an authoritarianism that suffocates the legitimate autonomy and the freedom of initiative among the laity.

⁹ Neves, *Vocation of the laity*, Église Canadienne, 1978, pp. 334-ss.

Laity-ism is the extreme reaction that leads the most conscious and committed laypersons to “cut themselves off from the priesthood under the pretext of autonomy” – these words are again from Paul VI – and perhaps, even more, to contest, reduce and empty the charism and mission of the pastors to the point of conceiving, contrary to the plan of Jesus, a Church governed by the laity if not entirely made up of laypersons. Under various forms, according to milieux and circumstances, and not always very clear, these phenomena are still present and cause tensions that are more or less strong and dangerous.

However, after examining this, there is no doubt that innumerable laypersons are much more conscious that “far from being performers of the hierarchy”, they must acquire “their identity and majority by also respecting the identity and specific mission of their Pastors”. Being aware that the Church willed by Christ is made up of ministers and laypersons, not separated and antagonistic but profoundly united, and that “it is important to maintain and renew the organic bond between priests and the laity” in order that, by “an intelligent and persevering, creative articulation, the Church, far from being a power play, may be a communion”: it is always Paul VI who speaks (ibid.).

The Council set up organisms to realize this communion: they are the pastoral councils at the parish and diocesan level. The *motu proprio* “*Apostolatus peragendi*” gives the Council for Laity, in close liaison with the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, the attention to these councils. They are entirely new and have to live this experience before producing their expected results. However, the Plenary Assembly of “the Pontifical Council for the laity” has sharply recommended following what is taking place in this area in order to develop as much as possible this important organism for ecclesial communion. The converging and harmonious lay-pastor work wanted by the Council will be the end result of a humble and persevering apprenticeship. The pastoral councils could become excellent instruments for this.

The Assembly has neither forgotten this form of collaboration of the laity with the Pastors who are its ministers. Pope Paul VI spoke of these ministries and their importance in the work of evangelization accomplished by the Church. Certain local churches see a few of these ministries emerging in their midst in answer to precise pastoral needs. The Assembly expressed the wish that the Pontifical Council for the Laity become aware, as much as possible, of the experiences achieved, of the results obtained, of the shortcomings observed, of the possible risks in order to be able, in the future, to promote these ministries in a direction that is in keeping with the vocation of the laity. These ministries must not “clericalize” the laity but respect their entire identity in the Church and in society.

Always in this line of communion between the laity and pastors, just a word about the concern that was strongly manifested during the Assembly by the lay members concerning the promotion of sacerdotal and religious vocations. These laypersons did not hide the fact that the more they receive responsibilities in the Church, the more they need the pastoral action of the priest and the testimony of the religious. Also, one of the 25 final recommendations concerning the activity that the laity can eventually exercise, should be either to favor the awakening of priestly vocations, or to encourage their priests and religious in their vocation.

I think therefore that, in spite of the always active virus of clericalism or of “laity-ism”, the present time allows us to see in the Church an effort of overtaking these polarizations and a real communion in the mission, saving the distinction of roles between the laity and clergy.

Commitment or spirituality?

Second tension: the one that exists between commitment and the Christian faith. All the theology of the laity, during the last 40 years, and crystallized in the ecclesiology of Vatican II, insists on the meaning and value of the commitment – social, political, cultural, scientific, etc. – of the Christian. Faith is not, for the believer, a reason not to commit oneself, but all the more reason to commit oneself as a Christian. And yet, there is a profound tension that is manifested in many different forms.

We won't have the time to examine them here, but I would like to signal at least the three following aspects:

- The laity, alone or associated in different ecclesial organizations, are drawn more and more by the attraction to ideologies. Therefore the problem, often very delicate, is seen in the confrontation of ideology and faith. The risk is not imaginary; it is quite real and powerful to subordinate faith and its teachings to dogmas of ideology. So, it is no longer faith that judges and criticizes opinions, and options, and again actions coming from ideologies, but it is the ideology that passes judgment on a faith that has become hostage or prisoner. The Christian originality – and identity – of the commitment suddenly vanishes and the latter is confounded with any other commitment. It is the whole risk contained in the phrase often stated: “It is not because of my faith that I commit myself, but because of my solidarity or of my analysis of society, etc. Finally, I confront my commitment with my faith.”
- From this, there is a repercussion at the level of the apostolate: when ideology is more important than the inspiration of faith, the commitment is quite ready to

detach itself from faith as well, and become some sort of absolute and be adopted, whether it is according to faith or opposed to it. This is quite the road followed by many christian movements, born under the sign of the evangelization and become little by little heralds of a messianism that is purely terrestrial and temporal.

- Another manifestation of this second tension: being torn between commitment and spirituality. A more global outlook on the laity of the whole world at the present time, shows them quite divided between a laity radically committed and a laity that is charismatic and spiritual. One fears that the tension may result in a separation. Now, the Church is at the same time and truly in solidarity with mankind (therefore at his service) and charismatic (therefore turned towards her Lord in adoration, prayer and contemplation). Her beauty, but also her riches and her strength is the unity within her of Christians who are committed and charismatic. Moreover, we must say that each Christian, while carrying within himself the predominance of one or the other aspect, must be at the same time, committed and spiritual. This is surely the most profound tension at the present time. It is the constant concern of the Council for the laity to promote, by every means it has, the equilibrium within this tension, in every way possible. This equilibrium is far from being acquired and it seems, however, that the most frightful polarizations are coming to an end: laity that is most committed always gives its true place to faith and is discovering the meaning and urgency of a spirituality, even of contemplation; the concern for an authentic evangelization, not to be confused with the political message, seems to be taking over; movements of spirituality are more aware of the requirements of commitment.

Apostolate and Incarnation

This is the third tension. Many Christians whose formation, in the family, in their parish or within different movements, who had been transformed into apostles suddenly entered a crisis, asking themselves what good were their apostolic actions.

What were the reasons for this crisis? First of all, the false conviction that the Good News is already implicitly or virtually present and alive in each person and that it is superfluous if not dishonest to do more. Such apostolic momentum was paralyzed by this “dogma” abusively attributed to the Council. But there is another reason: the intuition that mankind is bathing in a determined culture, that has its roots, its expression, its mode of influence, and on the other hand, the sensation that the apostolate is not aimed at this culture, but consists in stating general truths, intemporal and therefore without any take on real persons. Let us take note right away that a recent pontifical document has taken into account the double knot of this tension: the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* has denounced the absurdity and even the cruelty of keeping quiet the proclamation of Jesus

Christ and of His Gospel in the name of an “implicit Christianity” or of a false conception of the “*semina Verbi*” present at the core of humanity or of the “*preparatio evangelica*” contained in certain human values; it also declared with strength and clarity that to evangelize is not to repeat formulas but to insert profoundly the ferment of the Word of God in Jesus Christ intimately within the culture and cultures found within mankind as within a matrix.

I believe I can affirm that this doctrine of *Evangelii Nuntiandi* is profoundly inspiring for the program of the Council for the Laity, just as it is, coming from the Plenary Assembly. The recommendations concern a permanent attention to the continental and/or regional realities, the setting up of activities for the promotion of a university Pastoral, of a Pastoral for men of science, of questions addressed to the Church by country dwellers, a continuation of studies and activities concerning the active presence of women in the Church and Society: you have here the power lines in the action of the Pontifical Council for the Laity inserting the ferment of the Gospel in culture and cultures.

Unity or diversity?

The fourth tension could be summed up in the word pluralism: it is the tension unity-diversity. Here we are faced with a tension that strongly attacks a very great number of laypersons, and has a hundred different faces. I very briefly present a few.

- There is the tension that could seem superficial and ridiculous, but can arrive in extreme situations we all encounter, between “progressives” – “conservatives” (I put them in quotations to signify how much they must be put in perspective). This tension has always existed in the Church: in the 1st Letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul gives very wise and very evangelical orientations on this subject in the precise question concerning the meat offered to the idols. It becomes sharper during notable events like a Council. It strongly affects the Church nowadays. It is resolved only by a profound inspiration of charity.
- It is also the tension between the Catholic identity that must be maintained and the dialogue to be had with non-Catholics, non-Christians, non-believers. The temptation is great, among innumerable laypersons, to resolve the tension either by an easy irenicism that sidesteps the differences and does not hesitate to sacrifice the essential elements of the Catholic faith, or a stiffening attitude that blocks all dialogue. It is not by chance that ecumenism appears as one of the most thorny issues for the laity, for it is on a ground where it does not feel safe but rather ill at ease.

- Finally, there is the tension between theological research and the unbreakable attachment to guaranteed truths of our faith. We can notice among a great number of laypersons a profound consternation when faced with certain theological theories, propagated as acquired doctrine, and especially when facing doubt, uncertainty and relativism concerning matters where they need certainty the most.

I think that the Council for the Laity has an important role here as long as it remains faithful to its original vocation, clearly expressed in the *motu proprio*. I am speaking about its vocation to be a “place of encounter, of listening and of dialogue” for the vast world of the laity. Experience seems to show how important and decisive this role can be to construct unity in diversity and how much the Council for the Laity can accomplish, silently and with discretion, with perseverance, always maintaining a bond with all its representatives. It has received from the Plenary Assembly much encouragement for this.

Structures or liberty?

The fifth tension: the one that exists between spontaneity and organization in the apostolate. Our time – especially with the young generation – is strongly allergic to all that is institution and structure. This is paradoxical and understandable if we think that never as today has the universe been subject to the rigours of a technology, always more refined. Never has man been more dependant on computers in an “Alphaville” civilization. As for the apostolate, this tension is found in what Father Serge labelled in an article “Gli interrogativi dell’associazionismo cattolico” (*La Civiltà Cattolica*, no. 300, vol. II, Juin 1975, pp. 536-551) and others call the crisis, or agony, of apostolate associations.

It is true that many of these associations have dangerously weakened or become extinct in the after-Council due to two contrary reasons: one is a lack of renewal, the other, a renewal without criteria or discernment.

However, an objective look does not go in the catastrophic sense of those who talk of agony. First of all because many of these associations, thanks to a wise and prudent “aggiornamento”, were able to rejuvenate and rekindle their efficiency in a changed world and a renewed Church, and continue to render good services, either in the spiritual growth of its members, or in the caritative mission of the Church, or again in the insertion of many laypersons in to temporal realities. And then, because, if some associations have disappeared, others have appeared, born from new situations and adapted to the new requirements of the Church mission in the world of our time.

A special attention should be given to very different kinds of communities that are born, in close communion with the doctrine and life of the Church and under the very close

orientation of the Bishops, from the Basic Ecclesial Communities that are mentioned in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (n. 58), and with prayer or neo-catechumenal groups and fraternities of young people, as well as real communities of life inspired by the “charismatic renewal” (they exist in the United States and in France), or again by the Christian Family Movement and others.

It is in these groups and communities that we will perhaps find a balance between the tendency to spontaneity, to liberty and creativity on one hand, and the need for a minimum of structure and organization on the other hand. Will they be the pre-announcing models of Catholic associationism of tomorrow? It is too early to say. These groups show us anyhow that we must not sound the death knell on the associations of all kinds with which laity is providing itself in order to live a Christian life more intense and more profound or from an apostolic action more enduring and more efficient. And in all this, Catholic Action, which, *mutatis mutandis*, remains actual in the Church of today, as is vigorously stated in *Apostolicam Actuositatem*.

The Council feels strongly questioned by the presence and future of the associations. Her attention goes first to those with an international outreach, especially Catholic International Organizations whose function as a form of presence of the Church in international life cannot be ignored. It is not by chance that an important part of the time and activities of the Council is given to these associations. The Plenary Assembly fully understood this and has confirmed the Council along this line.

Action or formation?

A last tension: the one that exists between the call to action and the need of formation. If we may admit – but can we really? – that at a certain moment, the formation was less necessary for the laity, it is today of an urgent nature. For, the more the laity is called to an active participation in the life and mission of the Church, the more they need to be formed, under the pain of answering poorly to their vocation and frustrating the expectations of the Church. This formation will be generally on the human level, but also doctrinal, spiritual, social, apostolic, etc. We will no doubt have to recuperate the values that Cardinal Cardijn – and the whole Catholic Action after him – called the formation in action through action, in order to avoid an absurd dichotomy and abstract formation absent from reality. But we will also have to ward off all pragmatism and keep in mind that a good part of formation is not necessarily oriented towards immediate action, but to build the man and the Christian in each layperson.

This need of formation was felt very strongly during all the Assembly. Questions concerning the new tendencies in the formation (examined in the past by the “Consilium

de Laicis” in an ecumenical symposium), but also the content of this formation, its framework and instruments, its agents, were raised and looked at by all.

One last consideration: the richness of the Plenary Association resides in the action program beginning with a project elaborated by the Secretariat, a tangible result of its work. This program includes points already mentioned: a pastoral approach for men of science, for example; an attention (concerted with the Commission for Justice and Peace) to questions concerning faith and commitment. It also includes points like the apostolate of the sick and for the sick and handicapped; questions concerning senior citizens; questions concerning the promotion of women, etc. This program must be a necessary point of reference for the coming years, even if the forthcoming Assemblies will certainly enrich it, develop it, and underline certain points.

CHAPTER SIX

TO BE A COMMITTED LAYPERSON IS TO BELIEVE IN THE POWER OF PRAYER

Prayer is the most powerful form of energy for everyone, priests and laity...

I am the vine, you are the branches.

Whoever remains in me and I in him

Will bear much fruit,

Because without me you can do nothing (Jn 15,5).

In the same way, the Spirit too comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groanings. And the one who searches hearts knows what is the intention of the Spirit, because it intercedes for the holy ones according to God's will (Rm 8, 26-27).

A moment of real adoration has more value and spiritual effectiveness than the most intensive activity, even if it has to do with apostolic activity. (Puebla, n° 529)

Vital necessity of prayer

A few reflections:

“Man has as much need of prayer as the body needs oxygen... Today, more than ever, prayer is urgently necessary in the lives of men and nations.” (Doctor Alexis Carrel)

“I am not a man of letters or of science, but I humbly pretend to be a man of prayer. It is prayer that saved my life.” (Gandhi)

“To pray is to act. Action not only on a few individuals but on the universality of mankind. To pray is to act on God and through Him on the whole universe.” (Cardinal Saliege)

“The aim of prayer is less to obtain what we ask for than to become better.” (J. Green)

“Why pray? It doesn't change a thing, do you say? The order of events is changed for all eternity!”

It will change something. Prayer changes your state of mind and your heart. It will change your outlook on the order of things, which is the equivalent of modifying

this order. You ask through prayer to receive something. Ask rather to become somebody, to become Jesus Christ.

To make the prayer of Jesus our own

The first Christian community reveals to us: Christian existence has its source in Jesus Christ always present among us and acting by the power of his Spirit.

To make our the prayer of Christ

Christian prayer is first of all and essentially the prayer of Christ that becomes our own. It exists before us and, in some ways, without us. It is the prayer that Christ never ceases addressing to his Father by the Spirit.

We do not have to invent prayer, but to receive Christ's prayer *for he lives forever to make intercession for them.* (Hb 7, 25). To receive it, that is, to make it our own. To pray is to participate in the prayer of Christ, the only One to whom the Father listens.

Every Christian prayer is therefore "a prayer in the name of Christ". This expression does not mean: "in the place of Christ..." nor "by the mandate of Christ...", but "in Christ and with Christ." This is the meaning of the words of Jesus in Saint John's Gospel: *Truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father, he will give it to you in my name. Until now, you have not asked for anything in my name, ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.*

To commemorate Christ in prayer

To pray, for a Christian, is therefore to commemorate the Prayer of Christ, or even better, "to commemorate Christ in prayer. Such a prayer cannot be addressed to a divinity without a name, to an impersonal and foreign God. It is always addressed to the Father who revealed himself in Jesus Christ.

Jesus, one day, pronounced the name "Abba" – that is "Father dear". "Abba", "Imma", are the first words that a baby babbles. "Abba" was childish. No one would have dared to say "Abba" to God. Jesus does so always, in all the prayers he has given us.

Jesus spoke to God as a little child to his father, with the same intimate simplicity, the same trusting abandonment... To him who had received from the Father, in fullness, the knowledge of God belonged by right the Messianic privilege of naming him thus, familiarly, as a child. "Abba", this name addressed to God, Jesus has given us the power to pronounce it with him and in him. Christian prayer is the fruit of the Spirit within us.

The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God...The Spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groanings (Rm 8, 14-17; 26-27).

To welcome within us the Holy Spirit

Christian prayer is the prayer of Christ, but it is also our prayer; it is the word addressed to God by each one of us in Jesus Christ thanks to the Holy Spirit. To make the prayer of Christ our own is to welcome the Holy Spirit and to take on the same attitude as Christ's.

Each one of us has his own proper and original way of praying, depending on our temperament, our education, our milieu, our culture. Each one has his own way of praying, even when he uses ready-made formulas. This is why it is so difficult to speak about praying. It is the reason why it is equally so difficult to be "a master in praying".

Christ alone is the Master in praying

There is only one Master in praying: Christ Jesus working within us through his Spirit.

The master in praying is only the pedagogue who disappears in the presence of the Holy Spirit. This master is perhaps a "spiritual" who has had a long life with the Lord in silence. It can also be members of the prayer group to whom you belong. It seems today that we do not refer as much to one person but to those who are praying with us and helping us to say truthfully: "Abba, father dear".

The pedagogues, the spiritual masters, cannot be those who can define prayer, but who, with courage, and at times painfully, learn and re-learn how to pray in this world in complete transformation as we know it today.

God awaits man's acceptance

Man is responsible for the word he addresses to God. That is, he can pronounce this word or refuse to do so. To accept or refuse to say the prayer is an activity that is implanted in man's freedom. But this acceptance or refusal is situated within a calling from God.

You would not seek me if you had not already found me...

If man speaks before God, it is because God has given him the power to pronounce the word and invites him to say it.

Since Christ has come, man no longer expects God; it is somehow God who expects man. It is God who awaits man's acceptance of Him.

On a more practical level, this means that prayer supposes a preliminary listening to the word of God. If, very often, we have nothing to say when we have decided to pray, it is because we don't know how to listen to the word that God is showing us in the Bible, in the Church, in the world, in events.

This means once more that prayer supposes an attention given to the person who is pronouncing this word, at this moment, for us. When we are having a conversation with a friend, we are more attentive to the friend himself than to the words he is saying. More precisely, we are present to a friend who is revealing himself in what he is telling us. It is the same thing in our relationship with God in prayer.

A prayerful life

If you begin to unite your life to your prayer, they will never be separated. And life will be a fuel that will constantly nourish a fire that will become more and more rich, more and more hot, and will transform you little by little into the burning bush mentioned in Holy Scriptures. "To have a prayerful life, to pray about life, to pray about events": These are as many expressions that show a will to do away with a prayer that would be an escape from the reality of our world and would lead us to a "disengagement".

To unify one's life

Christian prayer cannot and must not be placed far from events that we live each day nor be a foreign object that would be dumped on our human history. It is the prayer of a man, a woman who loves, works, suffers, rejoices, gets involved in activities, different enterprises... The Psalter, an inspired prayer, is quite revealing on this subject. We discover here the prayer of an entire population that sings about its thanksgiving for the interventions of God in history, that recognizes its sin in order to be forgiven. Little ones, the sick, the poor cry out their misfortunes and their oppression; they call on God for help. People in exile, prisoners express their hope for freedom that they expect from God alone. All those who are cured, saved, delivered, sing their thanksgiving. In these events, they all proclaim the grandeur of God, who is their God, whom they worship and praise.

They do not accept life as it is in order to "canonize" it. On the contrary, they call on God for help in order to have the courage to change it.

To pray with the psalms

The Jews who composed the psalms and prayed them, lived the events of their history and their personal situations in faith, that is, they accepted another meaning to these events and situations, another meaning than the one that was given by the sole light of intelligence. Events and situations found their place in the project of God, the creator and redeemer. They were signs and the promise that God was going to bring.

No escape

By his prayer, the Christian does not seek to escape from his human condition. He does not live as if misery, misfortune, sin did not exist. He accepts life as it is, with all its joys and sorrows. But he accepts it, not through resignation nor to conform himself to the spirit of the world. On the contrary! He distances himself from what he experiences each day, in order to discover the calling that God sends him and to better see what commitments he must make. Making Christ's prayer his own, he is called to live the mystery of death and resurrection in the events that make up his existence. His prayer does not change the course of his history nor the course of the history of the world. It changes his outlook and his heart. It is then with a new outlook and a changed heart, thanks to the Holy Spirit, that he experiences the events of his life.

To pray is to discover the will of God: it is a eucharist

At the heart of the Church, there is the Eucharist, sacrament of Christ's sacrifice. At the heart of Christian prayer, there is the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection. The Christian prayer movement is sacrificial. It is this movement that we find in the last prayers of Christ: *Father, not my will but yours be done, and: Father, into your hands, I commend my spirit* (Lk 22, 42 and 23, 4).

A thought

“Nothing prevents a woman holding her distaff or in weaving her canvas, from raising her thoughts towards Heaven and invoking God fervently. Nothing prevents a man who arrives or travels alone from praying attentively. Or another, sitting in his shop, sowing a fabric is free to offer up his soul to our Master. The slave at the market, during his occupations, in the kitchen, if he is unable to go to church, is free to offer up an attentive and ardent prayer. The place does not shame God.” (Saint John Chrysostom)

Therefore, life is a celebration

We, the street people we are, can be certain that we are able to love God as much as He would like to be loved by us.

Because we find in love a sufficient occupation, we did not take the time to classify the acts into prayers and actions.

We find that prayer is an action and that action is a prayer; it seems to us that a truly loving action is full of light.

Our steps lead us along a street, but our heart is beating throughout the world.

Each docile act allows us to receive God fully and to give God fully in a great spirit of freedom.

Therefore, life is a celebration¹⁰.

Each small action is an immense event where paradise is ours, where we can share paradise with others. Who cares what we have to do...a broom or the use of a pen... all this is but the surface of a splendid reality, the encounter of the soul with God renewed each minute, an increase in grace each minute, everything always more beautiful for God's sake.

To live is to pray

My neighbor would no longer speak to me
And who suddenly
Speaks to me.
This silent child who, this evening,
Begins sharing with me.
This friend whom I believed was lost
And who suddenly returns.
This smile,
This kiss, this caress,
This gaze.
This handshake.
This morsel of bread.
Work, rest.
Leisure, vacation.
The anonymous crowd in a bus
In the subway.
Television,
The children's homework.
This strike.
This political meeting.
This war, over there,
At the other end of the world.
The astronauts, above
In space.
This persecuted writer.
This clubbed demonstrator.

¹⁰ Delleret, M., *Alors ta vie sera une tête* (We, the street people).

This humiliated stranger
In whom I find a brother.
This flower.
This landscape.
This music
This anniversary.
This equilibrium.
This harmony.
This good news
This catastrophe.
This illness.
My joys and my sorrows.
All this is my life,
My breeding-ground,
My roots.
This makes of my prayer
A request,
An offering,
A thanksgiving,
An intercession,
An act of repentance,
A suffering,
A moment of peace,
A moment of joy,
A cry,
A communion,
A desire,
A celebration.
NOTHING THAT IS HUMAN
IS FOREIGN TO MY PRAYER.
EVERY EVENT, THOUGH HUMBLE,
CAN BECOME A SOURCE, A ROAD,
AN INVITATION TO PRAY.

CHAPTER SEVEN

TO BE A COMMITTED LAYPERSON IS TO RECOVER MARY IN SACRED SCRIPTURE

Introduction:

Jesus answered: *My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and act on it* (Lk 8, 21).

Vatican II. *Lumen Gentium*

“A true devotion (to Mary) does not consist in a sterile and short-lived movement of the senses, nor in a vain credulity; the true devotion comes from true faith that leads us to recognize the eminent dignity of the Mother of God and urges us to love this Mother with a filial love and to imitate her virtues” (LG 67).

Paul VI. *Marialis Cultus*

“The devotion to the Virgin has deep roots in Revelation and a solid dogmatic foundation” (MC 56)

“The necessity of a biblical imprint in all forms of devotion is understood today as a general postulate of Christian piety... The intimate action of the Spirit urges Christians of our time to use the Bible as a fundamental book for prayer and to draw from it a true inspiration and incomparable models of life. The devotion to the Blessed Virgin...must use it particularly in order to acquire new vigor and a sure advantage...” (MC 30).

Paul VI. At the Council.

“During her life on earth, Mary realized the perfect model of the disciple of Christ... she lived according to the evangelical beatitudes proclaimed by Christ... In her, the whole Church attains the most authentic form of the perfect imitation of Christ.”

“Mary, humble servant of the Lord, is entirely turned to God and to Christ... The devotion to Mary, far from being an end in itself, is on the contrary a means essentially destined to orientate souls towards Christ and thus unite them with the Father, in the love of the Holy Spirit” (21 November 1964).

An argument fortunately outdated

It seems that, in the past and still today in certain countries, the usual way of distinguishing Christian persuasions was very simple: “The Protestants have the Bible

and the Catholics, the Virgin Mary!” This polarization is not without a significant meaning, but it would be quite unfortunate if it implied that the Catholic Marian devotion had no contact with the Bible!

It is true that the polemic between Catholics and Protestants did not make things easy: the Protestants rejecting the Marian devotion as not belonging to Scripture, and Catholics developing, in the name of a tradition a bit narrow minded, a “Mariology” more and more abstract, using the Bible with “accommodations” that are disconcerting to us today.

In the context of a renewal profoundly influenced by the “biblical movement”, a Mariology expressed in another language would risk finding itself more and more isolated and intransmissible to generations formed by “the Gospel and life”. We can see here the causes among many preachers and catechists why it is difficult for them “to speak about Mary”.

But in the last thirty years, things have changed little by little. Under the guidance of biblical scholars and theologians, Catholics have learned to find in the Gospel the roots of their devotion to Mary, the mother of Jesus. Enlightened by the whole Bible, passages like the Annunciation, the Magnificat or the Presentation in the Temple, like Cana or Mary on Mount Calvary, reveal an extraordinary doctrinal and spiritual density.

Thus, a deficiency in Marian devotion has been progressively resolved. It now appears to us quite natural to see the Council present the mystery of Mary by beginning with an inventory of biblical texts that concern her (LG 55-59). This discovery of the Bible is one of the first conditions of the Marian renewal.

Mary in the Rosary, a prayer for adults

For a long time, the ROSARY has been teaching the faithful to greet Mary with the very words of the Gospel and to meditate with her the evangelical memories concerning the birth, death and resurrection of Christ. The Rosary is, by its nature, a school of Marian biblical piety.

The meditation of the fifteen mysteries of the Rosary can already be a first discovery of Mary’s place in the Incarnation, the Cross and the glory of the Lord Jesus.

A real revision of life helps us discover God’s outlook on all things, and commit ourselves to take on the responsibility imparted to us for the realization of God’s plan.

The “I believe in God” is one of these prayers for adults, for it summarizes the unfolding of God’s plan for the world. When we say it, it reminds us that all has been created by

God and that all has been called to return to God by the salvation of Christ continued in the Church until everlasting life. We can shine the light of these divine words on each one of our situations, on each event in our lives. What better way to terminate a revision of life than to say “I believe in God”, shining the light of God on all the things that we imperfectly “recognize” through faith. God cannot, at that moment, in the secret of each one’s conscience, refuse to give us this light.

The Rosary, a prayer for adults

God’s plan is also developed in the Rosary. The Rosary, indeed, allows us to meditate on all the important mysteries of Christ’s life, from the beginning of salvation with the Annunciation, and passing through the Redemption of the Cross, till the victory of Christ, of Mary and of the Church in the glorious mysteries.

But why the fastidious repetition of the “Hail Mary”?

When we go to the cinema, the images on the screen are accompanied by a background of music that helps us enjoy the film, to better react to the different sequences of the film. The “Hail Mary” is like a musical background that places us in the presence of Mary, reminds us that she is everywhere and always present during the unfolding of God’s plan. She is the Mother of Christ and the Mother of us all who have become brothers and sisters of Christ through Baptism. She is our mother in the most complex situations in which we are involved. And as a mother, she is actively near us to help us effectively realize our mission as sons of God in the complexity of our adult life.

The mysteries of the life of Christ and of the Blessed Virgin continue in the Mystical Body of Christ from which we are members. Christmas continues, the Passion continues, Easter and Pentecost continue in today’s world with the Church, and Mary continues her mission of mother, discreet and omnipresent.

The Rosary allows us to project the mysteries of Christ on the difficulties of our adult lives and engages us, in the heat of these difficulties, to be active participants in the service of God so that we may live as much as we can according to his plan of salvation.

How could we be without hope when we know that Mary is our Mother in Jesus Christ and is actively helping us in the most complex situations to do what God expects from each one of us?

It would certainly be useful to be in a concrete way apprentices of this prayer. Let us not reject it too soon as an apprentice would abandon his tool the first day, under the pretext that he isn’t able to use it properly.

Here are indications on the different ways of using this form of prayer.

1- The ordinary way:

To meditate in succession each of the fifteen mysteries of the Rosary (for example, one mystery per day with a decade of the rosary).

JOYOUS MYSTERIES: Lk 1, 26-28: Annunciation; Lk 1, 39-45: Visitation; Lk 11, 1-20: Nativity; Lk 11-22-38: Presentation in the Temple; Lk 11, 41-52: Jesus in the Temple.

SORROWFUL MYSTERIES: Agony in the Garden: obedience Mt 26, 36-46; The Scourging: endurance Jn 19, 1; The Crown of thorns: humility Mk 15, 16-20; Carrying the Cross: patience Lk 22, 26-32; Jesus dies on the Cross: perfect love Jn 19, 23-30.

GLORIOUS MYSTERIES: The Resurrection: Mt 28, 1-15; The Ascension: Acts 1, 4-11; Pentecost: Acts 11, 1-11; The Assumption: meditate the Magnificat: Lk 1, 46-55; The Coronation of Mary in heaven: meditate on the “beatitudes of the Blessed Virgin”; Lk 11, 27-28.

2- The Rosary in brief:

Meditate each day on the fifteen mysteries of the Rosary by saying for each one the Our Father and one or several “Hail Mary”s. This method has the advantage of presenting us each day with the ensemble of the plan of salvation. It is a convenient way to pray this way when travelling.

3- Meditation of a mystery with the help of a text from the Gospel:

Read the text corresponding to the mystery and after each sentence or paragraph, say a “Hail Mary” in order to ask the Blessed Virgin to help us understand and live the same way She did, the event we are reading.

4- Meditation of the Gospel:

We can extend this method to any text from the Gospel even outside of the fifteen mysteries of the Rosary.

For example, when we are tired or simply to renew our reading and meditation of the Gospel – or to help us during Communion.

Mary in the liturgy

Still more profoundly, the LITURGY of the feasts of the Blessed Virgin has always given us a vast collection of texts from the Old and New Testament, allowing us to celebrate Mary with the annual cycle of the mystery of Christ. The liturgy renewed since Vatican II is of a great richness because of the biblical texts that are retained, as well as the

antiphons, prayers and prefaces that accompany them. It is an ideal context to meditate on the mystery of Mary, in full communion with the faith and prayer of the Church. At the source of this Marian devotion is the faith of the Church of the apostles found in the New Testament¹¹.

The rediscovery of Mary in the New Testament

It seems more and more that the first answer to questions concerning the Marian devotion, is to study attentively what the New Testament tells us about Mary, by allowing ourselves to be led by the context of the whole Bible, but also by the authentic Tradition of the Church, particularly the teachings of the Councils, and close to us, Vatican II. We are speaking, indeed, to believers who do not want to “prove” the Marian devotion, but to re-energize it in their contact with the faith of the Church of the Apostles.

To better place ourselves in communion with our first brothers, it would be interesting to scan the texts that speak about Mary, in the order in which they appear in the apostolic sermons, at least according to the inspired documents that were transmitted to us. There is surely a providential pedagogy here that can be enlightening for us again today.

We cannot go into details here (see the lively lecture of Father George in “Cahiers Marials,” n° 73, 15 Juin 1970: The discovery of Mary in the New Testament), but a brief look can be helpful.

In the Acts of the Apostles, in the sermons of Peter or Paul, there is no mention of Mary. The apostles were first of all witnesses to the Resurrection, by depending on what *the Lord Jesus had experienced in their midst, beginning with the baptism of John* (Acts 1, 21-22). But let us not forget that Luke mentions explicitly the presence among the apostolic community on the eve of Pentecost of *a few women and Mary the mother of Jesus* (Acts 1, 14). And Mary was in the eyes of the disciples the mother of the Messiah-King whom the beloved disciple honored as his own mother.

If, in his letters, Paul only says that *Jesus is born of a woman* (Gal 4, 4) to affirm that “Jesus belongs to our humanity in the destiny and common poverty of all men” (Fr. George), we know that his disciple, Luke, is much more interested in Mary.

In the synoptic gospels narrating the words and miracles of Jesus, we see the person of Mary placed little by little in the spotlight, from her presence in the group of “brothers” of Jesus who want to seize him (Mk 3, 20-21) to the declaration of Jesus, that Luke places at the end of a discussion: *A woman called out: “Blessed is the womb that carried*

¹¹ Laurenceau, J. o.p., Parlez-nous de Marie (Tell us about Mary) pp. 15-ss.

you and the breasts at which you nursed.” He replied, “Rather blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it” (Lk 11, 27-28).

For Luke who mentioned twice that *Mary retained all these events and meditated them in her heart* (Lk 2, 19-51), the answer of Jesus underlines that the real grandeur of Mary is to listen to the Word of God and to keep it.

The “Gospels of childhood” (Mt 1 and 2; Lk 1 and 2) are very important moments in the discovery of Mary by the apostolic community: the virginal conception of Jesus, the common statement in Matthew and Luke are expressed very differently. This sends us back to a Palestinian tradition transmitted no doubt by the group called “the brothers of Jesus” before the troubles and the dispersion of 66. The specialists tell us that for a Palestinian, for whom heredity is exclusively male, the virginal conception of Jesus caused a difficulty for the Davidic descendance. It is only later that we will refer to Isaiah 7, 14, that speaks only of virginity in the Greek text. Therefore, before Matthew and Luke, there is in Palestine around year 60 a statement concerning the virginal conception of Jesus by the Holy Spirit... This means that Mary had in the origin of Jesus Christ a unique and singular role that places her in a personal relationship with the Holy Spirit... The virginal conception is the sign, par excellence, given to Mary... to reveal that her son is “the Son of God” unheard of until then (Fr. George).

And so we are involved in a fascinating discovery of the mystery of Mary, inseparable from the mystery of Jesus, our Savior, Son of God, found in the narrations of the Annunciation and the Visitation, of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, where he will be found when he was twelve. These texts, permeated with the books of Moses, the prophets and the psalms, allow us to see progressively in Mary the “Daughter of Sion” in whom the glory of God becomes present, as in a new Tabernacle, under the shadow of the Cloud. Mary is seen as the Servant of the Lord, Blessed believer, associated in the redemptive sufferings of the Holy Servant, sacrificed as a lamb, announced by Isaiah. An immense horizon opens up to our contemplation of Mary’s role in the plan of salvation.

Finally, with the Gospel of John, we reach a summit in the presentation of the mystery of Christ: *...and the Word was God... and the Word became flesh, and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory...* (Jn 1, 1-14), but also a summit and expression of faith in Mary, the Woman who gives birth, the new Eve, Mother of all the living, spiritual Mother of the disciple whom Jesus loves, a figure of God’s People, at the foot of the Cross and in Glory.

The roads of Marian renewal

The rediscovery of Mary in the New Testament allows us to perceive a few of the great doctrinal perspectives expressing the place and the role of Mary in “the plan of salvation”:

- The maternity of Mary and the mystery of the Incarnation: Mary is truly “the Mother of God”;
- The faith of Mary and an encounter with God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit;
- Mary, “Daughter of Zion”, living figure of the People of God, therefore, of the Church;
- Mary, mother of the disciples, mother of all those who are called to be reborn in Christ.

A biblical meditation of the mystery of Mary is prolonged quite naturally into a doctrinal reflection, as the teaching of Vatican II shows us concerning “the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the mystery of Christ and of the Church” (LG 8)

Pope Paul VI, a qualified witness of the common faith of the Church, insists on the Trinitarian and ecclesial aspect of a true Marian devotion: Mary can be understood only as inseparable from the incarnate Word, totally dependant on the Holy Spirit, and inseparable also from the Church as her mother and model (MC 25-28). He also insists on “the necessity of a biblical imprint in any form of devotion” and particularly in the devotion given to the Blessed Virgin, if we want it to acquire new strength and be really profitable” (MC 30).

We now have a precious lead in order to “speak about Mary”.

Thus “invigorated” by the Bible and theology, Marian devotion must permeate our whole life.

First of all, liturgical life, the Church assembled to celebrate Christ, the Son of God, made flesh, crucified and risen for our salvation. Mary is precisely the very model of the Church who listens to the Word of God in faith; who prays in thanksgiving, with demands and intercession; who offers the sacrifice of Christ through her association; and who gives birth to the members of Christ, the children of God, by preaching the Gospel and with the sacraments of faith (MC 16-20).

But Mary is also mother and educator of the spiritual life for each Christian called to make of his own life a worship of God, a total commitment of his life. This is done by following the example and with the help of Mary (MC 21). More and more, this Marian inspiration, rooted in the Gospel, touches different aspects of our lives:

- The daily-familial, professional, social duty lived in communion with the Lord Jesus, following the example of Mary of Nazareth, bringing us to have a new outlook on today's women;
- A concern for the poor and the oppressed, of our faith in God, Savior of the Exodus, where the marvels are sung in the Magnificat;
- The apostolate that associates us in the mission of the Church in order to work for the regeneration of mankind in Christ, will be lived in union with the maternal love of Mary for all the brothers of Jesus (LG 65).

*

May Mary, by her maternal prayer and her evangelical example, help us grow during our pilgrimage of faith towards the Father, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit!

CONCLUSION

A few prayers:

Mary, Mother of our Savior

You who have been chosen by God to receive Christ in our name, and who received him with such a transport of intimate joy, show us how to receive him fervently!

You who, in the midst of great material poverty, surrounded Jesus with the unique warmth of your maternal affection, teach us, in spite of our poor soul, how to show him much love!

You who showed your child first to the contemplation of the shepherds, show us how never to get tired looking at him, of admiring him with renewed joy!

You who carried among us the divine presence in human flesh, show us how to open up to this presence, to allow ourselves to be filled and invaded by it!

You who joyfully consecrated your whole existence to serving the Redeemer, show us the way of consecrating our lives, of serving him endlessly!

You who raised the Messiah in order to give him to all humanity, show us how to receive him and be possessed by him in order to give him to others!

Word made flesh

Not content in becoming flesh and living among us, you have wanted to dwell permanently with us.

Formerly, by coming on earth, you became flesh like one of us; presently, through communion, it is our flesh that you want in order to unite it to you.

May the mystery of your Incarnation be realized in us! Invade our bodies and our souls with your divine life!

You who led a life on earth so perfectly human, give us, by your divine presence, the perfection of our human existence.

You who hid your divinity in the obscurity of an earthly life, deign once more hide your divinity in the obscurity of our lives.

You who transformed life into divine life, and have given all human actions a divine dignity, deign transform all our actions by inspiring them and guiding them so that they may be divine actions within us.

By incarnating your presence in the intimate part of our being, establish in us the love that realizes your Incarnation so that we may love as you have loved us!

Prayer of Saint Francis

LORD, MAKE ME AN INSTRUMENT OF YOUR PEACE!

Where there is hatred.....may I sow love
Where there is offense.....may I sow forgiveness
Where there is discord.....may I sow unity
Where there is error.....may I sow truth
Where there is doubt.....may I sow faith
Where there is despair.....may I sow hope
Where there is darkness.....may I sow light
Where there is sadness.....may I sow joy.

O Master, may I not seek so much

To be consoledas to console
To be understood.....as to understand
To be loved.....as to love

For:

It is by giving.....that we receive
It is by forgetting ourselves.....that we find
It is by forgiving.....that we are forgiven
It is by dying.....that we are raised to Eternal Life.

Lord, meek and humble of heart

Make me poor of heart, one who is profoundly aware of his misery and who places his trust entirely in God;

Pure of heart, entirely detached from the riches of this world and free from earthly ambitions;

Humble of heart, truly happy to be ignored, left in the dark, and even pushed aside, despised;

Meek, one who spreads the sweetness and charm of your love;
Open, welcoming and understanding other's pain;

Considerate, a messenger of your goodness and of your peace;

Simple and cheerful, remaining joyful even when I experience my misery, trusting in your omnipotent love;

A silent heart that stops tongue wagging and forgives and forgets all wrong doings;

A generous heart that never refuses to help and lend a hand;

A heart of sacrifice, offering discreetly its hardships for the growth of your kingdom.

The last "yes"

The **yes** of our death, we offer it to you already
With lucidity, for we do not know
If, at the last moment, we will still have time,
The possibility.

You ask this **yes** so that in this encounter
Where you want to open up to us, Father, all your treasures,
We may reach you with a filial heart
Ready to receive all.

This **yes**, you wish to unite it to that of Jesus,
To the **yes** that overcame the agony and pain and that made of the Cross an loving sacrifice for the salvation of the world.

In this **yes**, we wish to express our faith,
The total confidence in your endless goodness,
The desire to be yours, a timid desire
That we wish were stronger.

By this **yes** that emerges full of hope,
And that surrenders ourselves to you in our simplicity,

You will introduce us to the richness
Of your eternity.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Father Eusebe-Henri Menard was born in East Broughton,(Quebec) in January 6, 1916 and pass away in Montréal, (Quebec), March 26, 1987.

At baptism, he received the name of Henri. It is only later, after seven years of study that he knocks on the door of the Franciscans and receives the name of Eusebe-Henri.

After his theological studies, he was ordained in the Fall of 1941. After his ordination, he undertook studies in sociology and pastoral Theology at the University of Montreal. He completed them in 1943.

He then preached retreats at the retreat house of the Franciscans in Châteauguay (Quebec). During his years of preaching, he encountered young people and adults from colleges, military barracks, and universities. He found in them a wonderful seedbed of vocations to the priesthood. No one seemed interested in them; no one seemed to believe that God could sow seeds in soil hardened by years of neglect.

It was in this retreat house in Châteauguay that Father Eusebe met Mr. Hector Durand, a well-known business man and entrepreneur. Mr. Durand offered him his talents and financial resources in order to expand or set up a new enterprise.

In 1946, counting on the close collaboration of a few associates, they founded in Montreal, a seminary for young people and adults. This seminary was first called “École apostolique St-Pascal” to become later on “Séminaire des Saints-Apôtres”. Four years later, the original idea had grown: Why not found a group of leaders sharing this same preoccupation in order to work on awakening vocations to the priesthood?

A profound, confidential and joint action would give way to the founding of several seminaries, houses for retreats, educational centres, health care centres, charitable and social enterprises; in other words, it gave way to a productive apostolate of humanization and evangelization that continues today to branch out into the following ramifications:

- The Society of the Holy Apostles, priests and brothers.
- The Society of the Sisters of the Holy Apostles.
- The Society of the Missionaries of the Holy Apostles.
- The Corporation of lay collaborators in different countries of apostolates promoted by these Societies.
- The fraternity (feminine) of the Missionaries of the Holy Apostles.

- The Father Eusebe Menard Foundation in Montreal, helping in the pastoral work of the Missionaries of the Holy Apostles in Latin America.

Mr. Hector Durand continued in giving his collaboration during 25 years until his death.

The development of the work of the Holy Apostles began in Canada up until 1962; then, the work went beyond its boundaries with the providential trip of the Founder that made the United States and Latin America part of the mission. This work until today has given more than 800 priests throughout the world (in 35 different dioceses and 33 religious communities).

During this time, a branching out of the work went as far as Africa, and another one caused Father Eusebe to open up houses in the United States, Peru, Colombia, Brazil and Rome. Today, the Missionaries of the Holy Apostles are working in these countries, continuing the work of Father Eusebe Menard, their founder and superior general.

Father Eusebe Henry Menard died in March 26, 1987 in Montreal Canada, after many years of faithful and fruitful ministry, and God from this Charism given to the Church, after the death of his founder the Family of Holy Apostles has houses in the following countries: Canada, United States of America, Cameroon, Republic Democratic of Congo, Colombia, Brazil, Indonesia, Vietnam and Peru... We thank you God in this one hundred of our founder that the seed planted continues to give fruits¹².

WHO ARE THE MISSIONARIES OF THE HOLY APOSTLES?

They are a group of priests and committed laypersons (a Pontifical Society of Apostolic Life) that find their intimate union and strength in the Mystical Body of Christ, following the example of the Apostles and of the first Christians as described in the Acts of the Apostles.

The Missionaries of the Holy Apostles wish to render the best service possible to the People of God, that is, to discover, form and accompany spiritual leaders, priests or laity – particularly adults – for countries that are most in need, such as Peru and other countries of Latin America; and in the world.

As a complementary work, the Missionaries of the Holy Apostles found and operate retreat houses and take on pastoral work in poor parishes by serving the underprivileged.

¹² This we update the references till March 2016.

The Society of the Missionaries of the Holy Apostles was approved by the Holy See in Rome (Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and the Propagation of the faith), on the 27th of September 1971. It is the first Religious Society of men founded in Peru.

The branches founded one in Canada “The Société des Saints Apotres (1947) and the other in Peru “The Society of the Missionaries of the Holy Apostles” (1962), after the decess of their founder worked for the unification and become one new Society under the name of the “Society of the Missionaries of the Holy Apostles” (M.S.A.) in 1995, in Montreal-Canada, and received the Pontifical Approval in June 29, 2000.

In our family we have two societies of women, and some Laity Associations as the Foundation Pere Menard-Canada, the Friends of Jesus-Peru, The friends of the Seminary-Colombia, the Laity Menardians-United States of America, etc.