

## THIRD PLENARY ASSEMBLY: WORKSHOP DISCUSSION GUIDE

**LAITY IN THE CHURCH OF ASIA**

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## Introduction

### Symptoms of a Passive Laity

In spite of the closed doors of the Church being thrown open to the world and the Church eloquently declaring itself in Vatican II as the people's Church (*LG*, Ch. 2,4,5), committed to the people's cause (*GS*, Ch. 1-4), a great majority of our Asian Church still continues to be clerical and has strong symptoms of an immature clerical—laity relationship and of a passive laity, which weaken its composition, obscure its sign-value and paralyze its effectiveness. The large mass of our laity is still a passive lot with a reverential/servile fear of the clergy; inactive — either because they are unwilling to accept roles or are denied any active roles; hesitant because of the devaluation of their state by themselves or by the clergy; and unwilling to change the situations for fear of possible, responsible or punitive consequences. The so-called lay apostolate is still, at its best, a passive participation in the intra-ecclesial and hierarchically-directed action; the diocesan and parochial structures are clergy-directed with a semblance of lay consultation for a hierarchical decision; even the lay leadership in politics, economics, education are not actively encouraged by the Church leadership as genuine lay apostolate.

### Attempts: Superficial and Ad Hoc

Very often attempts are made to treat the symptoms by ad hoc and superficial measures which give temporary relief but leave the root and reason for these symptoms untouched. The roots of the evil indicated by the above symptoms run into many areas of Church life. And the remedial measures have to be radical, integral and persevering. Hence, our proposals take the form of ecclesiological statements that can motivate and encourage concrete ideals for action at the local level.

Thesis I: The global process of the Church of Asia becoming a relevant and effective community of faith in Asia is intrinsically dependent on the laity rediscovering their place and function in the Church of Asia.

#### a) From Distinction to Discrimination

The concept of the laity within the Church is essentially one of relationship, place and function in the Church. Although the clergy—laity distinction is a divinely-willed arrangement for a unifying purpose (*LG*, 32, d), the historical development of this relationship of distinction has unfortunately degenerated into a baneful discrimination

within the Church, tarnishing its sign-value and paralyzing its functions. Hence, a unity in diversity that was divinely-intended on the pattern of the Church as a body, to work in rich and diverse ways for the welfare of the whole has by historical circumstances and secular temptations suffered a type of dislocation or a breakdown, causing passivity and crippling the functions of the Church to the world.

### **b) Resetting an Ecclesial Dislocation**

A dislocation, we know, in the limbs of the body needs both a painful resetting as well as a persevering physiotherapy exercise of the limbs. Similarly, this ecclesial dislocation, caused by the clergy and the laity pushing each other to extreme positions — the clergy getting more and more behind the altar of power and cult and the laity moving more and more outside the main body of the church — needs not only an ecclesial and ecclesiastical resetting with respect to the spirit and laws guiding the positions and functions of both, but also the exercise of these functions in the newly-set positions. A dislocated body cannot function well without resetting. And once reset, an effort must be made to exercise functions with the reset limbs. This can heal, strengthen the resetting and be a sign to the well-ordering of the body.

### **c) Interdependent Processes**

Hence our wish for the local Churches of Asia to become relevant and effective communities of faith in Asia implies two things: that within these communities changes must be attempted to make them well-composed and rightly-ordered communities of faith; that the communities do their due salvific function in relation to the Asian context and thereby strengthen their internal composition and right ordering. But these two changes — within and without — are mutually dependent or interrelated. A rightly composed and structured ecclesial community will serve as a relevant saving community of faith in Asia; an effective and salvific community serving Asia will necessarily rectify and strengthen its internal composition and order.

### **d) Laity Indispensable for Achieving Ecclesial Goal in Asia**

Further, the laity—clergy relationship cannot be dismissed as purely an intra-ecclesial distinction without any extra-ecclesial significance and effect. Such a view could have been allowed in the pre-Vatican Church. As long as the Church was conceived as a self-centred, closed-up, centripetal Church of safety — only for the saved and the saints — it did not matter much where they stood in relation to each other or what they

did. What really mattered was the assurance of safety and of salvation through mere membership in the Church. Thus a passive mass of laity (low-class membership!), led by a domineering minority of clergy, was sailing in a lifesaving boat (Church) away from a sinking ship (world). But now the new vision of the world and of the Church in it makes new demands on the clergy and the laity. The Church emerges as the outward-looking (centrifugal) open Church commissioned as a sign and an instrument (sacrament) of salvation for the whole world. Its *raison d'être* is to be *in* the world and to be *for* the world. And this new challenge and task cannot be met merely by a minor portion of the Church — viz., the clergy alone — however powerful they may be. The laity are indispensable to it (AG, 15h).

The future of Asian Church, says Cardinal Sin of Manila, depends on its capacity to inculturate itself in Asia, to dialogue with Asian religions, and to liberate Asia from its poverty and oppression. And this capacity cannot be sought only in the few clerics but has to be found in the mass of the laity. Hence, the future of the Church in Asia will depend on the capacity of the laity to relate themselves adequately to the larger popular spheres of religion, culture and social liberation. Without an awakening of the laity, the Church in Asia cannot become relevant and cannot be a community of faith in Asia. Hence Vatican II:

The Church has not been truly established,  
and is not yet fully alive,  
nor is it a perfect sign of Christ among men,  
unless there exists a laity worthy of the name  
working along with the hierarchy (AG, 21a).

Thesis II: The rediscovery of the laity in the Church of Asia cannot be achieved by means of effecting appendage changes to the existing or operative clergy—laity relationship, but only as a consequence of a more radical discovery of our own Asian Churches, inspired by Revelation, guided by the Magisterium (of Vatican II), and in sincere response to the demands of Asianness.

#### **a) Vatican II Changes as Response to European Demands**

During the last five centuries of Asian Christianity, the older Churches have witnessed at least four stages of development in the matter of clergy—laity relationship, mainly in response to their many agitations for changes. The stages could be roughly described thus:

i) The existence of a wide gap between the powerful hierarchical Church and the powerless laity (esp. from the 16th to 19th century).

ii) The laity become important helpers to the hierarchy (around the turn of this century).

iii) The laity become participants in the apostolate of the hierarchy. Catholic action in the world on behalf of the hierarchy (after World War II).

iv) The laity, as the people of God, participating directly in the mission of the Church (Vatican II).

The changes, especially the latter two, came in as a response to agitations and demands made by many lay groups and organizations, e.g., the JOC of Canon Cardijn, the Azione Cattolica in Italy, France, Germany, and England and the Lay Apostolate Congresses of the 1950's under Pius XII in Rome. Hence the changes were appreciated as needed, put into practice with enthusiasm, and the ground prepared for further changes.

### **b) Changes Imposed on Asian Churches**

But in the case of Asian Churches, the clergy—laity relationship was very much akin to that of the colonials in respect to the superstitious heathen, which at best meant copying the patterns available at that time in the Western European Churches. No organized agitation was possible, nor demand was made; consequently no stages of development was experienced, and no ground was ever prepared for further changes.

Hence the changes for renewal suggested by Vatican II, especially with respect to the clergy—laity relationship, were imposed on us without our asking or agitating for them and without our feeling the need for the changes. Hence there were very little receptive interest and enthusiasm with regard to the suggested changes.

### **c) New Heads with the Old Spirit**

Although the leadership of the younger Churches of Asia has changed hands from a European missionary clergy to an indigeneous secular clergy and consequently the foreign outlook on the Churches is very much reduced, yet the clergy—laity relationship betrays an ecclesial immaturity and a new "spiritual" colonialism. The tendency of the new leadership to wait for detailed instructions from Rome or to do patch-

work and appendage changes (by way of appointing some episcopal and national commissions) to satisfy Roman demands still continues. Very often we witness structural changes, without the demands of the context, without the spirit of Vatican II, but merely to execute Roman directives. Giving a sprinkling of lay membership to our clergy-dominated commissions and structures or condescending to give a bit more of their apostolate (the hierarchy's) to the few laity around them often quiets our conscience and justifies our positions vis-à-vis the Roman demands. Invitations are made to the laity by way of exhortations that they should take more responsibility in ecclesial life, take an active interest in the traditional activities of the Church, bring in lay initiatives and charisms into the parochial life, etc. But here again the clergy often fall into the old temptation of the learned cleric-ruler, drawing up constitutions, with great canonical precisions, for execution by the laity! Thus the clergy appears to be overanxious to impose law and order on the other group that has hardly woken up or not yet even stood up for action!

#### **d) Rediscovering the Laity through Rediscovering the Clergy**

The rediscovery of the laity in the Church, the clergy seems to think, is entirely a matter to be realized by the laity — but under the direction of the clergy. The clergy, in blissful ignorance, presume that they themselves are in the right place and in right relation to all the others in the Church. (Nothing clerical calls for changes or renewal. But if sanity is to prevail over this comfortable ignorance, the truth appears to be quite different.) The rediscovery of the laity must be understood by the clergy only as a logical consequence of a wider discovery of all — clergy, religious and people — and this too in the Asian Church geared truly to an Asian salvific mission. Hence the words of Father Congar four decades ago regarding the European situation take on a new meaning and urgency for our Asian situation: “There is no sound and sufficient theology of the laity, but only a total ecclesiology” (*Lay People in the Church*, p. xiv) We can say likewise there is no rediscovery of the laity in the Asian church except through a rediscovery of the total Asian Church.

#### **e) Principles of Rediscovery**

Our criteria in this reshuffling of positions and functions and consequent rediscovery are clearly three: response to the demands of our Asian salvific mission, faithfulness to Revelation and faithfulness to the universal Magisterium, esp. of Vatican II.

When the local Churches of Asia gradually give up or shed the Counter-Reformation elements that came to them during the first phase of their evangelization and undertake a second phase of evangelization (or evangelical reformation) guided by these three criteria, then the internal clergy—laity relationships, their places and functions will undergo a natural and logical reshuffling. Until now the place and function of the laity in the Church have been primarily matters for the clerical theologians and canonists to decide. It was dictated neither by the sources of Revelation (the pattern of early Christian communities, etc.), nor by the pressing demands of the salvific mission in Asia, but by a remote power group that dictated details to an obedient faithful.

#### **f) In Response to Asian Realities**

But now it has become increasingly clear to all of us in Asia that our Churches must be a true incarnation of the saving values of Christ in the midst of Asian realities. These realities have been identified in recent years as our religious and cultural riches and our poverty-situation. And we are convinced that there is no future for the Church in Asia unless it responds to these realities by dialogue, inculturation and social liberation.

#### **g) Faithfulness to Revelation and Magisterium**

Equally has it become clear to us that this renewal—rediscovery of an Asian Church must be in faithfulness to the sources of revelation and to the Magisterium. We owe thanks to recent biblical insights that flowed into Vatican II about the nature and mission of a Church which is to initiate a new kingdom and serve as a sacrament of salvation for the whole of humanity.

Such a radical ecclesial transformation, or metamorphosis, is comparatively easy, as long as we remain young and flexible to change, as long as we are inspired by the spirit of early Christian communities, as long as we are encouraged by the open ecclesiology of Vatican II, and above all, as long as we respond to the demands of Asian priorities.

Hence our efforts to Asianize and evangelize the Asian Churches in the spirit of Vatican II will liberate us from petty internal differences and urge us to mobilize ourselves as a single collaborative people. The urgency of our mission to Asia must help all within the ecclesial community to get into their proper places.



Thesis III: The emergence of the laity to their rightful place and function in the Asian church demands from the present Churches a declericalization of ministries, a dewesternization of the clergy and a levelling down of pyramidal structures. Thus the emergence of the laity will be helped by the emergence of base churches.

#### **a) Removing Obstructive Realities**

The emergence of the laity to their rightful place and function cannot be left only as a consequential effect of the discovery or realization of authentic Asian churches in the future. That would amount to leaving much to an idealistic future and to easy justification of our present inactivity or of our "ad hoc" changes for the present. Our attempts towards authentic Asian Churches, and for a rightful place and function for the laity therein, must be accompanied by the removal or even destruction of certain obstructive realities of the present Churches. Three such realities are clericalism, westernism and pyramidalism of the Asia Churches.

These obstructive ecclesial realities — overlapping and related — are the unavoidable historical accumulations to a Church that has journeyed through the dust and heat of the Middle Ages and of the Counter-Reformation period. They have been so canonized and so revered in history that it is a difficult task to part with them.

Had the missionaries from Antioch — Paul and Barnabas — set foot on our Asia instead of Cilicia and Cyprus, there would have been no necessity today to remove such obstructive ecclesial realities. Willy-nilly, we are the recipients of a Christianity that was born in the Jewish context, cradled in the Greek philosophy, brought up in the Greece-Roman liturgy, dogma and lifestyle for fifteen centuries and then with a Counter-Reformation defensive-packing transplanted into Asia!

The ecclesial forms and structures — dogmas, liturgy, lifestyle—far from expressing relevantly the message of Christ for Asia, appear to have covered or even disfigured that message. Hence it has become necessary to weed out all forms of disfigurements that are not in harmony with or expressive of the Christian message for Asia. We cannot wait any longer in hope that these obstructive realities will gradually disappear merely as a result of emergent nationalism and consequent nationalization of Christianity. We need to make concrete efforts in removing them ourselves. Hence our efforts are called for in the following ways:

- i) Declericalization of all ecclesial ministries
- ii) Dewesternization of the leadership
- iii) Levelling down of pastoral structures.

## **b) Declericalization**

The gap between the clergy and the laity widened mostly because the minority-clergy gradually monopolized all charisms, services and ministries. This happened during medieval times and the Counter-Reformation period, when the priesthood emerged as the one ideal ministry (deaconate — either extinct or only a liturgical stepping-stone to the priesthood; episcopate—mostly as administration or representation of the Pope) which swallowed up all other ministries. This left the laity a passive and powerless majority, devoid of all charisms and functions in the Church. Vatican II has drawn attention to the ministerial character of the whole people of God and to the variety of ministries, charisms and services present among these people (*LG*, 8a, *LG*, 12c, *AA*, 3c). Post-Vatican theology, based on sound biblical scholarship, goes on to emphasize that the one salvific ministry in the Church has had several divisions in the early Church and later crystalized into the triple form of bishop—priest—deacon. This form could be reshaped and redivided even today according to the local Asian needs (Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol. XII, Part II, p. 63). Thus the pluralistic NT ministries have not only narrowed down to one priestly ministry, but the strong sacerdotal character of that ministry has also characterized all services done in the Church. Even the little that was undertaken by the laity/religious was seen as assistance to the priest and was given a clerical coloring. Consequently, a clericalization of all services.

The laity, remaining laity (married, living in the world, secular profession, etc.), had no way of assuming any ecclesial responsibility in a public manner. If the laity did anything publicly in the Church, they did so only by way of delegation or extension but never in their own right. Hence it is necessary to infuse the idea of service, or *diakonia*, into all ministries and reduce the clerical character in them, viz., clerical security, distance from the world, celibate status, elitist education in Western philosophy and scholastic theology, glasshouse formation in seminaries, etc. Such action will open more relevant and effective ministries to the clergy as well as to the laity. Besides reducing the ministerial shortage, this will also reduce the gap between the “haves and the have-nots” of ecclesial responsibility.

### c) Dewesternization

The European missionaries of our younger Churches have been to a great extent succeeded by indigenous priests and religious. The leadership of dioceses and institutions has changed hands. But the lifestyle of the present clergy, and the institutions that form the future clergy, are still Western-oriented. Hence the Church appears still foreign, not because Asian Christians have a Western way of life, but because the clergy and their institutions of life and action are permeated with Western philosophy, culture, lifestyle and, above all, supported by foreign funds. (This may be one reason why the Asian priest or religious who is not comfortable in his own country finds himself at home in the Christian West). If it is the clergy, more than the laity, who have got Westernised in their life and distanced themselves from the people, there is need and urgency to shed all Western culture and lifestyle among our priests and religious, and thereby return to our own culture and lifestyle, in order to be understood, accepted and at home with all our people.

### d) Levelling Down

The Counter-Reformation Church, in its attempt to defend the visible nature and structure of the Church, has fallen into the error of a hardening of its hierarchical structure into a pyramid of power. Hence Pope Pius X could write: "The right and authority, necessary to promote and direct all the members towards the final goal of society, rests only in the hierarchy. As for the multitude, they have no right other than that of leaving themselves to be conducted and of following their pastors obediently with docility" (Pius X, 11.2 1906, *Vehementer Nos*, AAS, 39, (p. 8-9.) But we have gone far away from such a monopoly by the hierarchy. Vatican II clearly states: "Pastors also know that they themselves were not meant by Christ to shoulder alone the entire saving mission of the Church" (LG, 30b).

Vatican II has made an attempt to reduce this pyramidalism of power, by means of its new ecclesiology of the Spirit and of the People (LG, Ch. 1 and 2), and by the principle of collegiality for its structure (LG, 22). Collegiality will not be a *modus agendi* only for the college of bishops. It has been accepted as a style of leadership and relationship (collegial union, LG, 23), and as a principle to be practised at different levels of ecclesial ministries (LG, 28). Hence the move is on from the high pyramidal structure built through the centuries to a horizontal and concentric-circular pattern of participation and leadership (cf. Congar, *Ministere Ecclesial*). In this structure the hierarchy will not exercise its leadership in an exclusive manner and by standing on and over the people

but in a participative manner, by being at the center of the people, animating them and piloting a whole college of clerical and lay leaders. The present diocesan and parochial structures, and the personalities in these structures, will do well to give up many of the pyramidal elements such as distance from the laity, exerting authority as a force on or over them, imposing ideas and decisions on them, demanding blind obedience from laity, etc.

#### **e) Emergence of Churches from Below**

The parish, though serving as a valuable structure for a hierarchical Church that systematically dispenses sacramental services and builds up an institution, is fast becoming a questionable form for a Church that is to be a people's community of faith, with an eloquent sign-value, and truly relevant to the salvific mission in an Asian context. The different categories of Asian realities calling for evangelization, like the worker, the youth, neighborhood groups, the oppressed and the suffering, demand a new style of ecclesial presence in their midst. Hence we find the birth of a new style of community from below (basic ecclesial communities). These churches from below bring with them vast resources of lay charisms and services, unknown to the hierarchical Church of the past. Hence the need to welcome them and help them. Only in such a levelling down of ecclesial structures can such churches of the people emerge from below, and still be recognized as churches. Basic ecclesial communities — where the future of our Churches lies to a great extent — must not be organized or established but encouraged to emerge as a Church of the people, by the people, and for the people. The role of the clergy, therefore, in these emergent churches is not one of direction and impatient action, nor of tolerance and unwilling assistance from above, but one of solidarity, encouragement and animation from within.

In such a solidarity of the clergy with the people, unhealthy elements of clergy—laity discrimination will disappear and new healthy relationship will be born.

Thesis IV: There is urgent need in our Churches for a program of catechesis and mass conscientization regarding the theology, apostolate and spirituality of the laity, as well as a corresponding program of pastoral action.

Along with and in the context of the above global changes, there is need for a program of concerted effort by our Churches, by way of catechesis and pastoral action — to awaken, to conscientize and to motivate all of us to action in favor of the laity.

## **A. Catechesis**

### **a) Aim of Catechesis**

The program of catechesis, through preaching, instruction and seminars, will be aimed at making ourselves, both clergy and laity, become aware of the teachings of the Magisterium, made known through Vatican II, regarding the laity in the Church. Such awareness will be the beginning of a conversion to realize our own positions in the Church.

### **b) Theological Consensus of Content**

Although Vatican II gave no solemn dogmatic definition regarding the place and function of the laity, yet the whole attitude that prevailed at the Council with regard to the presence and participation of the laity, the place given to the laity in the various documents and the total ecclesiology of *Lumen Gentium*, followed-up by the documents on the apostolate of the laity and of the missionary activity — all these converge to a post-Vatican theological consensus about the place and function of the laity. Catechesis and preaching must make this consensus their objectives.

Hence any attempt to shelve the theological and magisterial consensus reached in Vatican II about the laity, or to do some minimal isolated patch-up job, without changing the pre-Vatican immature relations the priests and religious had with the laity, would be tantamount to a betrayal of the post-Vatican Church and of the Spirit who moves it.

### **c) Method of Catechesis**

In so far as this catechesis for a total conscientization about the laity necessarily involves teaching about clergy and religious, the method used in the catechesis demands a new method. It will not be limited to the usual style of announcing, preaching, teaching, instructing an ignorant laity by an enlightened clergy. It will be more an attempt to arrive at a common acceptance and awareness of the will of the Lord, with regard to our place and function as clergy and laity in the Church. This acceptance has to be accompanied by a common witness in our day-to-day life to the truth that we become aware.

### **d) Content of Catechesis**

The main points around which we need this catechesis for our awareness:

## (1) A Common Heritage

We are a people with a common heritage: the dignity and the freedom of the Sons of God (*LG*, 9 d); common goal and salvation — the Kingdom of God (*LG*, 9e); and a common vocation to holiness — the perfection of charity (*LG*, 40) — but enjoying a wonderful diversity of gifts and functions for a unifying purpose (*LG*, 32, a,b,c,d).

The one common ecclesial heritage, goal and vocation arise from the one radical discipleship of Jesus Christ. Whether one is pope, bishop, priest, monk or layman, his saving relationship to God is in his discipleship. This one discipleship can grow in intensity (spirituality), and be expressed in diverse forms, corresponding to the wonderful diversity of gifts and functions (apostolate and ministry). But diversity of functions does not demand a radically or essentially new discipleship. And to pretend a diversity of discipleship by reason of a diverse function in the Church amounts to clerical hypocrisy.

## (2) Full Membership

The laity are full-fledged members of the new people of God, enjoying a God-given ecclesial status (heritage and dignity and freedom and vocation) rights and duties (*LG*, 37).

In the past their status has been devalued, (if not denied over against an exaggerated status for ecclesiastics); their rights have been overlooked by clerical conveniences, and the duties proper to them have been taken over and expropriated by the clergy.

Hence Vatican II stresses the common but saving Christian status, based on our common discipleship in Jesus Christ. And this status as a full-fledged member of the people of God gives the layman, the up-to-now unknown positive basis and dimension for a new personality in the Church (S.J. Emmanuel, *Recognizing the Faceless Minister*, 78).

He is to be defined no more as a non-entity (non-cleric), nor solely in relation to a minority, but in himself, with his own human, Christian, ecclesial and sacramental basis. His rights are God-given too. Every human being that comes into the world, by reason of his humanity enjoys basic human rights, such as the right to have all the means for life, viz., freedom, human respect, food, clothing and shelter, etc. These cannot be left to the whims and fancies of individuals, nor even to the generosity of philanthropists. They are guaranteed, guarded and defended by due legal structures. So also for every Christian. The

ecclesial right given to every Christian, by virtue of Baptism and Confirmation (freedom of the sons of God, to speak out his mind, the right to receive abundantly the Word of God, sacraments, pastoral assistance from the pastoral leaders) must be respected, safeguarded and defended.

The right of the laity to be at home in the Church and to speak with freedom and to act with initiative (*LG*, 37a,c) as mature responsible members — these must be respected, guarded and defended as sacred. Very often we who are conscious of our own human rights and speak eloquently on behalf of the human rights of others who are oppressed blatantly forget or overlook the rights of our own people, who have a claim on our own concern and service. Such an overlooking only betrays a false concept in our own ministry, as if it exists for our own personal growth and satisfaction. We have forgotten that God has given charisms, offices and sacred power for the benefit of those whom we have to serve.

### **(3) Threefold Mission**

The triple messianic functions of Christ characterize the whole laity as the people of God. The bishop and priest are rightly entrusted with their prophetic, priestly and royal roles. And their roles have been spelt out accordingly. But in the case of the laity who by virtue of Baptism received these triple functions, these have remained only titles of honor and banners of defence. Adequate meaning and form as to how these become operative in normal Christian life must be studied.

Vatican II indicates certain ways in which the laity can exercise their prophetic role of witnessing to the truth in their life-situations. Strengthened by the common *sensus fidelium* (faith instinct) and the various charisms (*LG*, 12a,b), the laity must live their faith so that the power of the Gospel may shine forth in their daily social and family life (*LG*, 35a). In our Asian context, riddled with situations of poverty, oppression and injustice, the prophetic voice of the layman needs to be heard loud. Time was when every little political or social crisis in a society had to await a too-cautious clergy to pronounce a belated statement—and that too hardly relevant or equal to the urgency of the situation. The laity acting as Christians on the strength of their own prophetic vocation and guided by a Christian conscience must speak out fearlessly both their praise and protest. Thus the prophetic presence of the Church or the critical function of the Church in the service of truth and justice, love and mercy — all values of the Kingdom — is not a monopoly of the hierarchy but a function of the whole Church as a prophetic people.

The Catholic Counter-Reformation defence of the ministerial priesthood gave no time to concretize Catholic belief regarding the priesthood of the faithful. The latter remained chiefly a protest banner of the reformers. Very little flesh and blood were given to this old biblical concept of a priestly people. Vatican II has indicated ways of giving meaning and form to the exercise of this priesthood. The Christian priesthood — whether it be one of mediatorship between God and humanity or one of offering gifts in praise of God (*LG*, 34) — is one exercisable by a Christian in his secular context. Through his mediatory and sacrificial presence the layman has a vast potential to sanctify the secular and secularize the sacred.

Similarly, in the work of preparing for the Kingdom, the laity by virtue of their royal character have the principal role (*LG*, 36c). Not only invited to conquer the reign of sin in themselves, the laity are exhorted to breathe a Christian spirit into the human and the secular so as to hasten the coming of the Kingdom. Hence leadership roles by laity in areas of politics, economics, education, sociology are in no way alien to the Christian layman. They are his by vocation. If the Church is to be truly a renewing force in the world, the laity must take active and leadership roles in all areas of human activity — especially in those that cry out for truth and justice.

“You who are lay persons ... have a unique opportunity and crucial responsibility, ... to show the power that faith has to transform the world and renew the family of man” (John Paul II, *Oss. Rom.*, 7/1/82).

#### **(4) A Charismatic People**

Charisms are no more a monopoly of the ordained cleric and the professed religious. Nor are they funnelled through any sacraments. They are gifts for the building up of the body — given to anyone according to the will of the Spirit and to the needs of the people. Hence the charisms which make the laity fit and ready to undertake various tasks for the upbuilding of the Church have to be acknowledged with gratitude and put to proper use. Those who enjoy the gift of ordained leadership, without any fear of challenge to their gifts, must search out, welcome and encourage special gifts (*LG*, 12c; *AA*, 3c).

#### **(5) Specific Secularity**

The specific element or dimension qualifying a layman as layman is secularity (*LG*, 31b). But this secularity has to be understood, not in a



sense as opposed to the sacred, nor outside the Church, but as the whole complex of life-realities. Karl Rahner calls it the vast native situation of the layman. It is not an alien domain outside the Church where the laity move in for a hierarchy-delegated mission but is the whole reality pervading the true Christian life. (Accordingly the priest does not have an anti-secular or out-of-the-world field of life and work but a task of sacralizing the secular space of his existence around him). Hence attempts to pull out good active laymen from the secular context into a narrow clerical group betrays depreciation of the specific secularity of the laity.

## **(6) Lay Spirituality**

As a direct consequence of his place and gifts in the Church and of his context of secularity, the specific spirituality of the layman needs to be renewed. In an earlier clergy-centered Church, the spirituality of the laity was understood and gauged in relation to the spirituality of the cleric and the religious. It was understood as the spirituality of the man with one foot in the world and the other in the Church. But now the emphasis of Vatican II is on the following:

a) the universal call to holiness addressed with equal intensity and sincerity to all in the Church — clergy, religious and laity — regardless of their situation (*LG*, 40a).

b) the essence of holiness is not other than the perfection of charity (*LG*, 39b) aspired through discipleship of Christ.

c) the holiness qualified by the context of life, married state, labor, economic and social situation (*LG*, 41 g,h,i).

Hence there is need to found a lay spirituality on the one and only basis of the discipleship to Christ. If the laity are to attain holiness by the perfection of charity in their secular context, there is need to re-evaluate secular realities and the involvement of the laity in those realities in a more positive manner than before.

Although Vatican II puts the Church in the heart of secularity and expounded its mission in and for the world, it has not adequately spelt out the lay or secular dimension of their spirituality, one that will motivate such mission. Hence it is a challenge and a task for us to discover a lay spirituality on the basis of a Jesus-discipleship in the secular context.

## (7) Lay Apostolate

Lay apostolate has had a history of quick changes within this century with regard to its meaning and form. As stated above, the laity have moved from being mere helpers to the hierarchy and participants of the apostolate of the hierarchy to becoming direct and God-commissioned participants in the very mission of the Church (*LG*, 33). On the basis of such a lay apostolate, as a mature participation in the mission of the Church, there is need to rethink our traditional forms of lay apostolate through various clergy-directed or clergy-delegated organizations.

The laity by virtue of their own Baptism and Confirmation have the sacramental basis and the power to initiate, plan and operate missionary action for the furtherance of God's Kingdom. (As such, the role of the clergy and the form of their assistance and animation need study and modification.) Up to now, the context of the apostolate has been much cultic and church-centered and less world-centered. There is need to initiate Christian involvement in secular affairs as new forms of lay apostolate.

## (8) Lay Ministries

Ministries, as public ecclesial services for the nurturing and growth of the Church (*LG*, 18a), cannot be limited merely to the ordained few but must be open to all in the Church — both ordained and lay. From a healthy and rich pluralism in ministries evident in the early Churches, we have narrowed ministry down to a clericalized ministry of the ordained few. Vatican II, realizing the impoverishment and consequent ministerial shortage, has opened the way for non-ordained or lay ministries.

Since the essence of ministry is not ordination but public service (*diakonia*) in the Church, we would attempt to define lay ministry in the following manner: It is the apostolate in which a layman, while remaining a layman, and in virtue of his sacramental (Baptism and Confirmation) powers and jurisdictional status, exercises his triple messianic functions in a public manner for the good of an ecclesial community (Emmanuel, *op. cit.*, 129). The impact of new lay ministries on the traditional ordained ministries needs to be studied. Elsewhere suggestion is made to widen the present sacrament of Holy Orders to a sacrament of service (based on the biblical *diakonia* and the washing of the feet), and allow diverse forms of recognition: (ordination, institution, *missio canonica*, etc. (S.J. Emmanuel, "Ordained Ministries in the Church," *Clergy Review*, Feb. 1980).

## **B. Pastoral Action**

The foregoing reflections with regard to the intra-ecclesial clergy—laity relation with respect to the Asian world and with regard to the form and content of catechesis to be done in our Churches need necessarily to be concluded with some guidelines for pastoral action at different levels of Church life — be it a diocese or parish or interest group.

Some of these could be listed as indications or examples for further discussion:

a) The clergy getting closer to the people in their pattern of thought and life.

b) Creating structures or occasions for shared responsibility and decisions.

c) Redistributing some “supposedly-priestly” functions back to the laity.

d) Giving the initiative and leadership with regard to youth, workers, political and socioeconomic movements to laity.

e) Theologizing at the level of the people (people’s theology).

f) Rethinking the administration of the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation.

g) Promoting groups in defence of human and Christian rights.

### **Conclusion**

The Church has no future in Asia, unless it rediscovers the mighty lay potential within it. The rediscovery of the laity calls for correction of past errors, conversion to new insights and a determined action towards definite goals. The Spirit moving in us Asians will not fail us.

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