

**FOURTH PLENARY ASSEMBLY: WORKSHOP DISCUSSION GUIDE****THE LAITY IN MISSION****THE VOCATION AND MISSION OF THE LAITY IN THE ASIAN CONTEXT  
TWENTY YEARS AFTER VATICAN II**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

It is already a cliché and an understatement to say that the Second Vatican Council has revolutionized the life of the tradition-bound Catholic Church as perhaps seldom in its history, though, generally speaking, it has been a quiet revolution. On the one hand, the Church has looked backwards to the Scriptures, the New Testament Church and the fathers to gain an authentic understanding of its sources, vocation and mission. On the other hand, Vatican II has taught us to look forward and bring the Church into the twenty-first century, meet the needs of mankind, speak its language and serve its spiritual needs.

One area where radical thinking and changes are taking place is the laity. We look backward to understand its original meaning and we look forward to make the whole Church more evangelistic and more fully involved in the mission of Christ.

Our retrospective glance and our forward-looking glance at the laity are essential to keep the right balance in the Church. Secondly, we must keep in mind that our understanding of the "figure" and role of the laity in the Church is conditioned by our present thinking and ecclesiology.

Our task now is to examine the new ecclesiological image of the laity and its mission in the contemporary world according to Vatican II and how the new understanding of the laity's vocation and mission has matured in the Church. We shall also consider the ecclesial structures, ecclesial roles and involvement of the laity consequent upon the new self-awareness of the Church. We shall then point out what still needs to be done at the level of theological reflection and action.

## II. IMPORTANCE OF THE THEME AND THE CRUCIAL ISSUES INVOLVED

One of the most significant discoveries of Vatican II is that the Church is essentially the *ecclesia*, gathering, assembly of the "people of God." It was not without a bitter struggle that the order of the chapters of *Lumen Gentium* was finally agreed upon by the Council fathers. It is worth giving the order here:

1) the mystery of the Church; 2) the people of God; 3) the hierarchical structure of the Church, with special reference to the episcopate; 4) the laity, etc.

There was a long struggle to put the "hierarchical structure of the Church" as the second chapter. What was at stake is not just the order of chapters but the old ecclesiology and mentality over against the new ecclesiology and mentality. As it is, Vatican II finally and overwhelmingly settled for the new ecclesiology, which is in fact the basic ecclesiology of the Old and the New Testaments. The Church is essentially the people of God. This fact has a direct bearing upon our understanding of the vocation and the mission of the laity.

How crucial the issue of the laity is may be seen from the extensive treatment of it in several documents of Vatican II, such as: the Church, the Church in the Modern World, Missions, Laity, Bishops, Communications, Education, etc.

One would also be surprised at the extensive coverage the theme of laity is given in many of the synodal documents and papal pronouncements, such as: Justice and Peace, 1971; *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 1974; Catechesis, 1977; Christian Family, 1980; Reconciliation, 1983; Redeemer of Man, 1979; Human Labor, 1983; the New Code of Canon Law.

The theme of laity is important since crucial issues like the future of the Church in the next millennium are at stake. The future of the Church in Asian will depend, at least partially, on how the Church projects itself to the people of Asia, whether as a rigidly, excessively hierarchical institution or as an authentic "people of God" called together to act as a leaven in the Asian masses. This is confirmed by the preparatory synodal document on the laity which says: "The Second Vatican Council, with its renewed vision of the Church and her salvific mission in the world, has opened up new and magnificent horizons for the laity and their involvement in the Christian community and in society."<sup>1</sup>

### III: LAITY: ITS ORIGINAL MEANING

#### a) The Old Testament Meaning

It may be very useful to see the history of the term laity to have a proper understanding of its theological meaning.

The term laity has its origin in the Hebrew word *Qahal Yahweh*, the people of God. It signified the people whom God had gathered together as his own, as a covenanted people, as his kingdom, holy to him, set apart

for him, to know, to love and obey him: "For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession."<sup>2</sup>

God wanted to make them into a unique "kingdom," a community of people that acknowledged God's dominion in their lives. In this lay their greatness, holiness, nobility and consecration: "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."<sup>3</sup>

The Old Testament *Qahal Yahweh* did not distinguish greatly between the cultic priesthood and the ordinary people within Israel. It was essentially and primarily meant to express the theological reality of the people of God, of a people who accepted God's sovereignty in their lives collectively.

#### **b. The New Testament Meaning**

It is this meaning of laity as God's people that is taken up by the New Testament writers when speaking of the new people of God gathered together by Jesus. Thus Peter writing to the Christians of Asia defines for all times what the Church is: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into wonderful light."<sup>4</sup> Peter simply calls them *laos*, the Greek word for *Qahal* which means the people of God. Hence, the real implication of the term laity is: The Church is the *laos* of God, the laity of God. In this sense the whole Church is laity for it is the people of God, the *laos* of God.

When Peter spoke of the Church as *laos* of God, functional and sacramental differences were already there among the people of God. But he did not inject these meanings into the term *laos* of God, as in our current usage, to mean those who are not ordained ministers of the Church, those who have no hierarchical status.

#### **c) The Theological Meaning**

The Old Testament and the New Testament terms point to a specific theological meaning. It expresses a covenantal relationship with Yahweh. In the New Testament too it expresses a new covenantal meaning, a fellowship with God and one another in Jesus Christ. In fact Jesus' shedding of his blood on the cross was a covenantal act, gathering the new people of God together: "This is how the New Testament writers understood the Church: "Be shepherds of the Church of God, which he bought with his own blood."<sup>6</sup>

Hence the people of God is a “fellowship,” a *koinonia*, a sharing, an agape, a participation.<sup>7</sup> The same idea is expressed in various ways by the New Testament writers when they called the Church: brethren, brotherhood, the called, the holy, saints, fellowship, etc.<sup>8</sup>

The Church is called the “Way” in the Acts, the “followers of the Way,”<sup>9</sup> those “who belonged to the Way.”<sup>10</sup> It is a community of those who are marching towards God, with Jesus Christ as their leader.

Essentially and primarily the Church is a communion in the Holy Spirit. All other distinctions are only functional, that is to say, services to build up the body of Christ: “If therefore everyone in the Church does not proceed by the same path, nevertheless all are called to sanctity and have received an equal privilege of faith through the justice of God (cf. 2 Pet 1:1). And if by the will of Christ some are made teachers, dispensers of mysteries, and shepherds on behalf of others, yet all share a true equality with regard to the dignity and to the activity common to all the faithful for the building up of the Body of Christ.”<sup>11</sup>

The contrast is not between layman and priest (clergy) but one who belongs to God and one who belongs to the world, *saeculum*. The distinction is between *ecclesia* and *saeculum*. The distinction is not between cultic and non-cultic persons in Israel, but between Israel as God’s people and gentile nations, between *kuriakon*, namely, those who belong to the Lord, and those who do not.

#### d) The Juridical and Canonical Meaning

The word *laikos* as adjective is not found in the Septuagint. This is itself significant. The Greek word *laikos* was used to refer to people distinct from state officials, people with no special knowledge, skills and public offices. It meant the masses, the ordinary, the incompetent and the term laity acquired a derogatory meaning.

In the early Church the word *laikos* was used for the first time in the letter of Clement of Rome, around the year 95 A.D., to refer to ordinary people, *plebs* in Latin, from where is derived the English term people. Still, the believers were called *plebs sancta*,” a holy people.

From the fourth century onwards the distinction between different functional groups in the Church became more and more accentuated. Thus there were the *kleros*, namely, the sacred ministers endowed with sacramental power and “sacred authority,” and entrusted with the care of the people of God, the monks and the religious in general and the *plebs sancta*, the people of God, those not in clerical orders.

With the barbarian invasions in Europe a new element was introduced into the life of the Church, after the age of persecutions. As the existing civil and political structures crumbled under the weight of barbarian invasions, the clergy shouldered more and more the burden of secular offices and civil administration. Thus the clergy emerged with a distinct status in life as celibates, distinct marks of their class in dress, tonsure, and distinct powers of civil administration. The monks too emerged as spiritual men separated from the world and self-sufficient in their monastic complexes.

Gradually the *laos* of God became predominantly the object of pastoral care and not also the agents of missionary proclamation and pastoral care. In liturgy too they were reduced to be non-participants, and mostly became "hearers" and "seers" of liturgy and not concelebrants as before. All decision making, even in areas not belonging strictly to sacramental unction and sacred authority, was concentrated in the hands of the clergy.

Despite the winds of change brought about by Renaissance, Humanism, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, the explosion of knowledge, scientific and technological temper of mind, secularity, etc., the Church remained defensive as regards the role of the laity in the Church, up to Vatican II.

From the fourth to the twentieth century we can notice a clear shift in emphasis from a biblical and theological understanding of laity, as a people of election, vocation, mission, dignity, participation, equality and coresponsibility, to a social, imperial, feudal, canonical, juridical understanding of laity as a social category of the dependent, servile, educationally and culturally ignorant and powerless. The *laos* of God became laity under the clergy, second-class citizens who need only obey, ask no questions, make no decisions.

It is during this period that the terms clergy and laity emerged as antonyms. Somehow a dualistic concept of membership in the Church was introduced into theology and ecclesiastical structures. Thus Gratian's code of canon law, which influenced the Church up to now, speaks of "*duo sunt genera Christianorum*."<sup>12</sup> There are two kinds of Christians and they are the clerics and the laity. Passages, like, "Do not plough with an ox and a donkey yoked together,"<sup>13</sup> were applied to clergy and the laity to mean that the laity have no role to play in Church matters.

This was not so in the early Church. Many laymen like Tertullian, Cyprian, Origen, Basil, Gregory Nazianzen, Jerome, Augustine and others were lay theologians at the start of their ecclesiastical careers. It was only later that the medieval assignment of sacred sciences to clerics

and the profane to the laity set in. Again, clerical monopolization of the bible, liturgy, preaching, church finances, court procedures, benefices, patrimonies, clerical immunity from civil trial, higher education, theological studies, etc., are phenomena that date only from the time of Justinian and Gratian. No doubt some of it came about due to lay interference, but it led to clerical abuses with disastrous consequences for the body of the Church. As a result the Church was torn apart by the Reformation.

#### IV. VATICAN II AND THE LAITY

One of the greatest achievements of Vatican II is its re-emphasis on the Church as the people of God. This, as we said earlier, is underlined by the fact that chapter two of *Lumen Gentium* is on the Church as the people of God.

The Church is one in its vocation and mission. Therefore, the very question, what is the vocation and mission of the Church?, is a misplaced question. It should rather be: What is the specific manner of living out the vocation and mission of the Church by the laity?

The Church is the communion of all believers incorporated into the body of Christ by baptism and nourished by the other sacraments. They cannot have a different vocation and mission than those of the Church itself, and the mission of the head of the Church.

Whatever be the distinctions, differences and diversities in the body of the Church, they are due to the fact that it is a body with diverse functions: "By divine institution Holy Church is structured and governed with a wonderful diversity. 'For just as in one body we have many members, yet all the members have not the same function, so we, the many, are one body in Christ, but severally members one of another'"<sup>14</sup> (Rm 12:4-5).

##### a) The Vocation of the Laity

Ultimately, there is only one vocation and one mission for the Church. The oneness of vocation is founded on the fact that by baptism every believer is incorporated into the body of Christ. Hence, he shares in the life and mission of the head, Christ. This is the ultimate foundation of the identity of all believers, irrespective of the common priesthood of the people of God and the ministerial sacramental priesthood and sacred jurisdiction (distinct from secular, temporal jurisdiction). Hence, there is only one ecclesial vocation.

The Council affirms the oneness of the vocation of the laity and the clergy in unmistakable terms: "Therefore, the chosen people of God is one: 'one Lord, one faith, one baptism' (Eph 4:5). As members, they

share a common dignity from their rebirth in Christ. They have the same filial grace and the same vocation to perfection. They possess in common one salvation, one hope, and one undivided charity."<sup>35</sup>

The distinction among the members of the Church is not in participation in the one vocation and mission of the Church but in the manner of participation: "If therefore everyone in the Church does not proceed by the same path, nevertheless all are called to sanctity and have received an equal privilege of faith through the justice of God (cf. 2Pet 1:1). And if by the will of Christ some are made teachers, dispensers of mysteries, and shepherds on behalf of others, yet all share a true equality with regard to the dignity and to the activity common to all the faithful for the building up of the body of Christ."<sup>16</sup>

### **b) Mission of the Laity**

The mission of the laity is the mission of the whole people of God. It is the mission of Christ, the mission of the Church, to redeem and restore all things in Christ. Such mission is already implied in the vocation of the people of God, the vocation of the Church. The clergy and the laity do not have a mission different from each other's. The manner of exercising is different, though complementary.

The mission proceeds from the call and is rooted in baptism, the anointing with the Holy Spirit and the Eucharist. Through these sacraments the laity as well as the clergy participate in the one and same mission of the Church. Thus *Lumen Gentium* again states: "The lay apostolate, however, is a participation in the saving mission of the Church itself. Through their baptism and confirmation, all are commissioned to that apostolate by the Lord himself."<sup>17</sup>

The term lay apostolate is also often misleading. In the first place, it gives the impression that the clergy have an apostolate different from and superior to that of the laity. Secondly, it gives the popular impression that it is the work of some associations, confraternities, sodalities, etc. Instead, according to Vatican II, as quoted above, lay apostolate is participation in the saving mission of Christ.

What is distinct is the manner of participation. It may be by reason of the common priesthood of the people of God or also by a special sacramental ordinance and the area of exercising the mission. What is important to note is that through the providence of God, both the clergy and the laity exercise their mission in complementarity. The clergy, in fact, cannot exist without the laity, nor can the laity exist without the clergy. This is but the will of Christ: "For the distinction which the Lord made between sacred ministers and the rest of the people of God entails a unify-



ing purpose, since pastors and the other faithful are bound to each other by a mutual need."<sup>18</sup>

## V. RESISTANCE TO VATICAN II

While there have been abuses in the name of Vatican II, no one will deny that there has been also a resistance of silence, of inaction, or apathy to Vatican II ecclesiology and hence to the theology of the vocation and mission of the laity as God's people in the world of today. Some have not grasped the full extent of the revolutionary ideas accepted and approved by Vatican II.

Resistance to Vatican II on the vocation and mission of the laity is a glaring fact of post-conciliar Church. Such resistance is understandable since both members of the hierarchy and the laity have been brought up in the old ecclesiology and it is difficult for some to change one's theology. Renewal is a difficult process of readjustment. It is like resetting wrongly set fractured bones in a living organism.

## VI. THE ASIAN CONTEXT

Yet the Church must look to the future of the world and the mission of Jesus Christ. The Church is on a mission to the world. It is a mission from God to man, in which it is both the pastored and the pastor. The Church is the "flock" of God. It is gathered together, nourished and led forward to the fulness of life in God. But the Church is also on a mission from God to the world and as such is a pastor, shepherd to the world in the name of Christ and as service to the world.

The Church must look to the past and to the future. This is particularly true of the Church in Asia where it has not made any significant impact. Christianity was born in the Asian cultural soil. Only later did it become "Westernized" and "romanized" in modes of worship and juridical structures. The Church in Asia now needs to rediscover its original identity and create ecclesial structures that are adopted to the genius of the Asian peoples.

The Church as God's people must once again become conscious of its being God's people called together for a mission. And for the Asian Church it is on a mission to the people of Asia. More than half the world's population is in Asia and they need to hear of Jesus Christ in order to become a fully-renewed humanity. The Church needs to mobilize its entire membership to fulfill this mission to Asia.

Secondly, Asian religions are unstructured and led by charismatic persons rather than by hierarchic persons. Hence, a rigid, legalistic,

clerical religion will not appeal to the Asian people.<sup>19</sup> Presenting the Church as God's people and as a "way" of life will certainly appeal better to the Asian people.

Buddhism is an eightfold path to salvation. Hinduism has a threefold *marga* (path) to liberation. Taoism implies a "way." According to Luke, the first name for Christianity was "the Way," and as such it is very close to the great Asian religions. Essentially it is not a structure but a "way" of life.

It may be interesting to make a remark here on the Way concept as applied to the early Christians in India. Paul Kariamadam in a significant study on the Lucan concept of the "way" says: "This ancient land of the ways to reach the *Sathguru* (Christ) who is our way, truth and life."<sup>20</sup>

Most Asians are allergic to the idea of organized proselytization. Hence, the role that the clergy can play in bringing Christ to the Asian people is minimal. But a more articulate and committed laity by their witness and missionary involvement can better bring Christ to them.

Asia is not only the home of the world's classical religions. It is also the home of many animistic religions and beliefs. Animistic societies and religions are also non-hierarchical in many ways, though not all. They are not clergy-dominated religions. The priest is a spiritual animator.

There is a new mood of inquiry sweeping through the whole of Asia, an awakening from a colonial attitude of servitude to new-found freedom and critical spirit. They will no longer tolerate imposition from above, even religious impositions. The new spirit of democracy and critical approach to religious problems will not accept mere human structures of domination.

Asians are acquainted with joint-family life. Hence, Church as communion and participation will be far more intelligible and acceptable to them than as a structured hierarchical community.

## VII. THE NEW THEOLOGY OF THE LAITY AND ITS EFFECTS

The new Vatican II theology of the laity is bound to have far-reaching effects upon the life of the Church and its evangelizing thrust.

When traditional Christianity fails to appeal to people as the process of secularization gathers momentum in Asia, only a theologically enlightened, evangelically committed and involved laity can be the support of the Church. Only with the aid of such a laity can it really become an evangelizing Church.

In this connection, it is difficult to understand the statement of Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*: 'The primary and immediate task of the laity is not to establish and develop the ecclesial community — this is the specific role of the pastors — but to put to use every Christian and evangelical possibility latent but already present and active in the affairs of the world.'<sup>21</sup> If it means that the ministry of the sacraments is needed for establishing and developing an ecclesial community, it is intelligible. But if it means that it is not the task of the laity to spread the Gospel, then it is difficult to see the validity of the statement. As a matter of fact, in the New Testament times and now, especially across the tribal population belts of Asia, many communities of Christians were established and developed by the laity: catechists, teachers, and even young boys and girls.

### VIII. PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

The contemporary needs of the Church in Asia call for a twofold action by Church leaders: accept and put into effect the new insights of Vatican II's new theology of the laity by creating adequate structures, legislation to support them, and involving the laity in the life of the Church. The Church in Asia should evolve its own theology of the laity on the basis of the universal ecclesiology, adapted to Asian cultural and psychological needs. Pope John Paul II in an address to the Secretariate of the Synod said: "Twenty years after the conclusion of the conciliar assembly, it has not all faded. On the contrary, the necessity for a resumption of the Church's reflection on the vocation and the mission of the laity in the context of the plan of salvation which God in Jesus Christ fulfills in history is made greater and more urgent. Among other considerations, two in particular dominate in stressing the relevance and urgency of a further examination of the conciliar doctrine on the laity."<sup>22</sup>

Let us now examine the various areas of possible application of the new theology of the laity. We shall not mention here those which are already enumerated in the conciliar texts like the formation of the laity, developing a spirituality adapted to their contemporary life-situation of family, work, society, entertainment, media and its needs, higher theological preparation of some lay persons, laity councils, membership in Roman and diocesan curias, etc.

#### a) General Principle

As a general principle we may say that the Church should go back to the mode of functioning in the Church of the New Testament and the patristic period prior to the introduction of Roman law into Church structures and modes of functioning. This need not imply that the Roman law, which gradually became church law, canon law, is entirely to be rejected as useless. But an excessive rigorism in the application of it in the life of

the Church can vitiate our ecclesiology and the style of functioning in the Church. The Church should function more as “way” in the Asian context and less as a structure.

## **b) Conclusions from the General Principle**

### **i. Models for Church's Functioning**

The New Testament churches operated in different ways in different places. Their style of ecclesial functioning can be models for the functioning of local churches today. This is particularly true of the Asian local churches.

Just as the Church makes herself at home in every culture, the Church can and must make herself at home in differing systems of jurisprudence and law. Except for the requirements of the universality of the Church, local churches should be left to adopt the modes of functioning of the people of their regions.

### **ii. Community Style of Functioning**

The early Church operated more as a community and less as a hierarchy. This is a most important and basic principle. Once this principle is accepted, there will evolve structures and modes of community participation in the functioning of the Church.

Such participation will evolve structures for community decision making, consultation in decision making, opportunities given to communities to make known their opinions in the election, nomination or appointment of Church leaders, whether they be at the sacramental level or at the administrative level.

This is the style of functioning that we see in use in the early Church. And we know the praxis of the New Testament and the early Church is normative, though differently, for all successive generations of Christians.

### **iii. Participation in the Decision Making Process in the Church**

Much has been said and will be said in the forthcoming synod on the laity. Some of it will be a repetition of pious platitudes to mollify the growing demand by the laity for a genuine participation, within the framework of the hierarchical nature and structure of the Church. The official Church is aware of it: “Noteworthy also is the far more extensive and stronger request, on the part of some of the laity, for access to various ‘ecclesial ministries’.”<sup>23</sup> Unless the laity are given their rightful place at the consultative, deliberative and administrative levels of the Church's

life and mission, the synod will mean only one more document. Such participation is nothing new. We read in the Acts of the Apostles how the early Church operated. In the Council of Jerusalem the Apostles took the final decision regarding the admission of the Gentiles into the Church after

listening to the whole community. In fact, it was the community that decided: "Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, two men who were leaders among the brothers."<sup>24</sup>

The same community pattern of functioning was followed at Antioch: "The men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter. The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message."<sup>25</sup>

A similar pattern was followed by the early Church in the election of presbyters, overseers and popes. Some of the Oriental Churches retain this custom even today.

#### **iv. Participation in the Administration of the Temporal Goods of the Church**

Everyone who takes the New Testament seriously will grant that the administration of the word and the sacraments was entrusted by Christ to the official witnesses of his death and resurrection, namely, to the apostles, the nucleus of the future hierarchy of the Church. The Church, however, is also a temporal reality, a social phenomenon, and hence is involved in temporal administration.

There is absolutely no New Testament basis, however, that all temporal administration should be concentrated in the hands of the clergy to the exclusion of the laity. Besides, the temporal goods of the Church are, in justice, goods produced by the laity. The first Christians sold their property and gave the proceeds of the sales to the Apostles: "From time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the Apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need."<sup>26</sup> But even after donation, the goods and the money offered belonged to the community. The community, the *laos* of God, the laity always remains the true owner of the temporal goods of the Church as we read in the Acts: "The whole group of believers was united, heart and soul; no one claimed for his own use anything that he had, as everything they owned was held in common."<sup>27</sup>

The people of God, therefore, have a natural right to be consulted, and to decide within certain limits about the administration of the temporal goods of the Church. Yet in many local Churches the laity have no voice in the administration of the goods of the Church.

This is particularly true of most of the Asian Churches, where the laity have little knowledge of or participation in the administration of the temporal goods of the Church.

Often money is given to churchmen by local or foreign benefactors. Most of the time, people are prompted to make offerings not *intuitu personae*, but *intuitu ecclesiae*, *intuitu missionis*, *intuitu pauperum*, or *intuitu personae ecclesiae*. In other words, offerings are made to Church leaders because they represent the Church in mission lands, the Third World, the poor, because they are persons of the Church and not on any strictly personal basis. Seldom are offerings given solely for personal and unaccountable disposal. Hence, 99% of offerings belongs to the Church community that churchmen represent. They have no moral right to let these flow into personal accounts, with no accountability to the community. At the present moment this is a glaring abuse of money given in trust to churchmen in Asia.

This is one of the most serious dangers and abuses of identifying the Church with the hierarchy of the Church.

#### **v. The Laity and Clerical Accountability**

In any well-ordered society, the principle of accountability is accepted, if not always practised. The Church-society cannot be an exception. Obviously, in the content of the salvific message and saving dispensations the hierarchy is accountable to Christ and not to the community. The Church is not a parliamentary democracy. But, on the other hand, it is not a personal or a group property either.

Since the temporal goods of the Church belong to the community, their administration at all levels is accountable to the community, to the people of God, to the laity. Mutual dependence and mutual controls need not be foreign to such a society as a divine-human community.

The non-acceptance and non-implementation of this principle has done incalculable harm to the life of the Church in the past.

The principle of accountability should be extended to budgeting, choice of priorities, feasibility of projects, opportuneness, their evangelical witness, value, etc., and must be open to the community's opinion and consultation and with some amount of consensus. Only such an approach will avoid misuse and abuse of Church funds, ill-conceived and inopportune projects prompted by the whims, fancies, ignorance, etc., of the clergy. The sources and the channels of securing the funds do not justify their withdrawal from the community's, that is, the laity's, right to be accounted to.

Again, in young Churches the laity's ignorance and incompetence in participation in the administration of the goods of the Church are no valid justification to by-pass them and treat them as non-existent.

The clergy's failure to understand, accept and implement the twofold principle of participation in the decision-making process and machinery of the Church and accountability of the clergy to the laity has led to many abuses, such as luxurious churches in rural Asian villages and tropical jungles, among people who live in huts, and sumptuous episcopal palaces that would put to shame the residences of state or provincial governors across the countries of Asia, built with the money of foreign and local laity, in which the laity themselves have no say.

The principle of mutual accountability is derived from the fact of oneness of vocation and mission in the Church, the fundamental equality and dignity of the people of God and the complementarity of the roles of the clergy and the laity. In spiritual matters and the exercise of "sacred authority" the laity is accountable to the clergy and in its temporal matters the clergy must be accountable to the laity because it is their field of Christian involvement. "The laity by their very vocation seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God ... for the sanctification of the world from within, in the manner of leaven ... to illumine and organize these affairs ..."<sup>28</sup>

## **vi. Laity and Evangelization**

We have seen that within the Catholic Church there has been a tendency to identify "sacred ministry" and "sacred power" with "temporal ministries" and "temporal power." Such confusion has been and still is the cause of many evils in the Church. One of the consequence of such confusion is the creation of a more or less marginated, indifferent, apathetic laity. Nowhere else is this visible than in the field of evangelization. The Catholic laity has in general little evangelistic spirit.

Even where lay enthusiasm is spontaneously present, as among Asian tribal communities, the Catholic tribal laity tend to be evangelistically indifferent, once the clergy-dominated type of Christianity is established. A Church that pays lip service to laity's role in decision-making process, without substantive participation in the Church's life, and without mutual accountability in areas where it is only natural and right to have them, has to pay a heavy price in its evangelization thrust and dynamism.

The opposite is also true as regards evangelization. Catholics often wonder where the Protestant laity derive their missionary enthusiasm from. We forget that where there is no adequate participation or sharing of responsibilities and mutual accountability, missionary enthusiasm dies out even where it is naturally present.

The Church needs the laity for the great work of evangelization. Without its active and responsible participation, the hierarchical structures of the Church may grow, but not the Church itself. This is the case with India, Japan and a number of Asian countries. In India, from 1886 when the hierarchy was established, the number of dioceses has increased from 17 to 109 without a corresponding increase in the Church.<sup>29</sup>

#### **viii. Laity, Pastoral Care and Service**

There is a large number of lay associations in the Catholic Church both at local, regional and international levels. There is much good being done by way of pastoral care of and services to both Christians and non-Christians by them. Greater recognition, more involvement in planning, consultation, etc., can make them more effective.

As mentioned above, there is a growing demand for recognition of lay ministries and participation in ecclesial ministries. The forthcoming synod will have to reflect and deliberate before God to discern his will in these matters since some of them are problems for which there is no precedence and about which Scripture and Tradition may be silent or at least not so clear.

### **IX. CONCLUSION**

#### **a) Clericalization and Laicization of the Church**

The Church is essentially a community called together by God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. It is the *laos* of God in a unique sense of the word. It is neither clerical nor lay in the sociological sense of the word, meaning two separate classes. The distinction points only to different but complementary charisms, services and functions. There has always been the danger both of clericalization or laicization of the Church. We should not forget that clericalism has done as much harm, perhaps, as anticlericalism to the cause of the mission of the Church in the world.

#### **b) Evangelization and the Laity**

The first and second stages of evangelization efforts by pioneering missionaries from abroad and from parts of Asian countries to peoples of differing cultural traditions than their own is drawing to a close. It is urgent to launch the third stage of evangelization in Asia through a more committed and involved laity.

The laity must be considered not only as the object of the pastoral care of the clergy but also as participants of the one mission of the Church to the world. It is the Church that has received a mission from God. It was



the disciples that Jesus called together first, and from among them he appointed the twelve as his apostles. He appointed also seventy others whom he sent out to preach and heal. He entrusted them with special roles in the new people of God, as we see in the New Testament writings.

The laity, therefore, is coresponsible for the mission of the Church along with and under the spiritual guidance of the hierarchy. The essential unity of vocation and mission of the laity and the clergy is prior to all functional and ministerial distinctions and differences.

Only through the laity can the vast masses of the Asian peoples be contacted and the saving message and the sacraments of Christ be offered to them. They must be made to feel that they are part of the mission of the Church to the people of Asia through the exercise of coresponsibility and participation at various levels of the life of the Church.

### **c) The Order of Diaconate**

The order of lay deacons in the early Church was established for two purposes: for the administration of the temporal goods of the Church and for preaching the word in missionary proclamation and catechesis. But a clergy-dominated Church eliminated it gradually and reduced it to its shadow as a purely sacramental rite, from its original ecclesial and theological function in the Church.

Lay deacons could carry out considerable evangelistic and pastoral work in Asia, if only they were allowed to. Twenty years after Vatican II, there is no sign that Asian Church leaders are thinking in this line. The same may be said of lay deaconesses.

### **d) New Structures**

The Council speaks of recognizing and promoting the dignity as well as the responsibility of the lay person in the Church: "Let them willingly make use of his prudent advice. Let them confidently assign duties to him in the service of the Church, allowing him freedom and room for action. Further, let them encourage the layman so that he may undertake tasks on his own initiative."<sup>30</sup>

Responsibility, freedom, initiative and action are possible only where adequate structures to support them are established. Though the Council has spoken out clearly on the participation of the laity in the missionary and pastoral mission of the Church, adequate structures have not yet been created. Such structures as pastoral councils, laity councils and other councils need to be established and function effectively.

### **e) Training of the Laity**

The Church can be truly missionary and pastoral only where the whole Church is involved in this twofold service to itself and the world. But any meaningful involvement of the laity is possible only where it is adequately trained in theological sciences and in pastoral methods and skills. The level and extent of training will depend on individual capacity and the needs of the local Church. Vatican II tells us: "Let them train the laity to become conscious of the responsibility which as members of Christ they bear for all men. Let them instruct them deeply in the mystery of Christ, introduce them to practical methods."<sup>31</sup>

Resources, opportunities, encouragement and structures for the training of Church personnel, especially at the higher levels, tend to be in favor of the clergy and the religious in the Catholic Church. In Protestant Churches one meets a large number of theologically and pastorally well-informed and articulate lay persons. But in the Catholic Church any gathering is dominated by the clergy and the religious, and the laity, even if present, are silent for lack of theological and pastoral competence.

The reason for this state of affairs is that most of the funds available and structures existing in the Church favor the higher education of the clergy and the religious. Vatican II counsels all to better efforts in this area: "Furthermore, centers of documentation and study not only in theology but also in anthropology, psychology, sociology, and methodology should be established for all fields of the apostolate, for the better development of the natural capacities of laymen and laywomen, whether they be young persons or adults."<sup>32</sup>

### **f) Genuine Participation and Consultation**

Vatican II says that pastors must recognize and promote the dignity of the laity. This has a particular application in the young Churches of Asia. In the early Church there was no cultural gap between evangelizers like Paul and the people to whom they were sent. There existed a cultural and educational equality between pastors and the flock.

In the Asian context there is a cultural and educational gap between the pastors and the laity who are new in the faith. The tendency is to treat them as cultural and educational dependents and inferiors. There arises, then, a mentality of "dispensers" and the "dispensees." There is need, then, to project the right image of the Church as people of God and acknowledge their rightful role in the life of the young Churches. The relationship of dependence and subservience is still, unconsciously perhaps, promoted or accentuated by an outdated ecclesiology and the medieval trappings of dress, symbols of power, and titles that pastors still

cling on to as we enter the 21st century. The tendency then will be to treat the laity in the missions as minors and not as adults. We have much to learn from the Protestant mode of church functioning.

### **g) The Genius of the Asian Churches**

In a world where participation, coresponsibility, mutual accountability and dignity of individuals apart from functional differences are more and more accepted in theory and made effective in appropriate structures in family, industry, government, etc., the Church in Asia cannot afford to project the image of a patriarchal society. The mentality and cultures of Asian peoples also call for a more horizontal Church without rejecting the divinely-willed vertical dimensions.

In fact, the Council wisely calls on the local churches to evolve new structures and styles of functioning: "As a result, avenues will be opened for a more profound adaptation in the whole area of Christian life. Thanks to such a procedure, every appearance of syncretism and of false particularism can be excluded, and Christian life can be accommodated to the genius and the dispositions of each culture."<sup>33</sup>

### **h) Participation of Women in the Life of the Church**

The Church must act as a leaven in the world. It must renew the temporal order. There is one particular area in which the Church can act as a leaven in the Asian world, where in many instances women are not accorded equal dignity as men, where women are discriminated against in family, society, industry, etc.

When we look at the role of women in the Gospels and in the Pauline letters, we begin to wonder at what stage the Church became a male-dominated Church. It was not so in the beginning. We find that there were a number of women disciples following Jesus: "After this, Jesus travelled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means."<sup>34</sup>

Again, it is enough to look at Paul's list of helpers and friends in Romans, chapter 16. Phoebe, Priscilla and Aquila, Mary, Tryphena and Tryphosa, Persio, Julia and many others were all his intimate collaborators in evangelization.

In the Gospels we see that women were, perhaps, the first witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The New Testament is normative also for women's participation in the mission of the Church.

By allowing full participation in the life of the Church at various levels, the Church will set in motion a process of renewal of the Asian society. This is also the mind of Vatican II which says: "Since in our times women have an ever more active share in the whole life of society, it is very important that they participate more widely also in the various fields of the Church's apostolate."<sup>35</sup>

### **i) One Single Vocation and Mission**

As there is one Lord Jesus Christ, one faith and one baptism, and one body of Christ, there is only one vocation and mission for the Church as God's people and each individual believer. The Church is in its original and authentic sense of the word, the laity of God, the people of God.

The Church is a gathering of God's people from all nations of the world: "Among all the nations of earth there is but one people of God, which takes its citizens from every race, making them citizens of a kingdom which is of a heavenly and not an earthly nature."<sup>36</sup>

The Church is made up not only of different peoples, as Vatican II puts it, it is also made up of various ranks in its inner structure. But the diversity of ranks arises either by reason of duties towards the whole body in the exercise of sacred ministries, or by the state of life the members lead.<sup>37</sup> But the whole people of God, by virtue of the gifts bestowed upon them, "is at the same time a witness and a living instrument of the mission of the Church herself, according to the measure of Christ's bestowal" (Eph 4:7) for the building up of the body of Christ.<sup>38</sup>

The Church in Asia must become truly the *laos* of God, the people of God in Asia, as were the laity in the early Greco-Roman world of the first four centuries of Christianity with its inner vitality. Then may the prophetic words of John Henry Newman be realized also in Asia: "Rather, in that earliest age, it was simply the living spirit of the myriads of the faithful, none of them known to fame, who received from the disciples of our Lord, and husbanded so well, and circulated so widely, and transmitted so faithfully, generation after generation, the once delivered apostolic faith; who held it with such sharpness of outline and explicitness of detail, as enabled even the unlearned instinctively to discriminate between truth and error, spontaneously to reject the very shadow of heresy, and to be proof against the fascination of the most brilliant intellects, when they would lead them out of the narrow way. Here, then, is a luminous instance of what I mean by an energetic action from within."<sup>39</sup>

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Asian Churches have many catechists but few lay leaders.  
What are the causes of this situation?  
How can the Churches remedy this situation?
2. Lay participation in the decision-making process in the Church is minimal.  
What are the causes of such a situation in your area?  
What concrete structures are needed in your region to change this situation?
3. The principle of mutual accountability is essential for lay participation in the mission of the Church.  
Is this a theologically sound principle?  
What dangers, if any, do you detect in it?  
What structures can you propose to make this principle operative in the Asian Churches?
4. The Asian Churches need lay ministries.  
What lay ministries, that would better involve the laity in the life of the Church, can you propose for your region?  
May lay people be given *missio canonica* to preach, teach and baptize?
5. The laity have a right to participate in the temporal administration of the Church.  
What structures are needed to facilitate such participation?
6. The laity today is hardly capable of entering into dialogue with the Asian Religions at the higher level.  
What do you think are the causes of such a situation?  
At the popular level do you notice any negative attitudes to dialogue?  
Do Christians make an effort to understand the religious values behind non-Christian observances, festivals, etc.?  
Does our catechesis prepare people for a positive encounter with the Asian Religions?
7. Vatican II and subsequent documents of the Church have much to say on dialogue and ecumenism.  
Do Christians know the contemporary teaching of the Church on dialogue and ecumenism?  
Does the Sunday catechesis deal with these problems and bring about a changed and renewed attitude towards non-Christians?

Do pastors and lay people in your area unconsciously act on age-old prejudices?  
What contacts do they have at the level of genuine religious dialogue and ecumenism?

**Footnotes**

- 1) *Lineamenta*, Preparatory Synodal Document on the Laity, n.6.
- 2) Dt 7:6.
- 3) Ex 19:5-6.
- 4) 1 Pt 2:9.
- 5) Mk 14:24; Mt 26:28, and Lk 22:20.
- 6) Acts 20:28.
- 7) 1 Jn 1:1-5.
- 8) Acts 2:42, 1 Cor 3:16, 2 Cor 6:10, Eph 2:19, Heb 10:21, etc.
- 9) Acts 22:4.
- 10) Acts 9:2.
- 11) *Lumen Gentium* 32.
- 12) *Corp. Jur. Can.* C.12.
- 13) Dt 22.10.
- 14) *Lumen Gentium* 32.
- 15) *Ibid.* 32.
- 16) *Ibid.* 32.
- 17) *Lumen Gentium*.
- 18) *Ibid.* 32.
- 19) See S. Karotemprel, "Christian, Mission and Cultural Formation in the Midst of Cultural Conflicts," *Indian Missiological Review*, vol. 7 (1985), p. 271.
- 20) Paul Kariamadam, "India and Luke's Theology of the Way," *Bible Bhashyam*, March (1985), p.60.
- 21) *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 70.
- 22) John Paul II to the Synod Secretariat on May 19, 1984, AAS, 76 (1984), p. 785.
- 23) *Lineamenta*, 8.

- 24) Acts 15:22.
- 25) Acts 15:30-31.
- 26) Acts 4:34-35.
- 27) Acts 4:32.
- 28) *Lumen Gentium* 31; Laity 6,7.
- 29) AIF, 1982, p.5, as quoted by Karl Mueller, "Meaning and Priority of First Evangelization in Today's Missiological Discussion," *Verbum*, 26 (1985), p.11.
- 30) *Lumen Gentium* 37.
- 31) Missions 21.
- 32) Laity 32; cf. Missions 21.
- 33) Missions 22.
- 34) Lk 8:1-3.
- 35) Laity 9.
- 36) *Lumen Gentium* 13.
- 37) *Ibid.* 13.
- 38) *Ibid.* 33.
- 39) John Henry Newman, *Historical Sketches*, Westminster: Christian Classics, 1970, pp.209-210.

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