

Re : Workshop # 12: A life pledged towards justice, carried out by our work

Excerpts for

Rule, Article 15 : CIOFS manual, The PROFESSION in the SFO, Sécularity

In the light of *Gaudium et Spes*, the world is —the whole human family along with the sum of those realities in the midst of which it lives; that world which is the theatre of man's history, and the heir of his energies, his tragedies and his triumphs; that world which the Christian sees as created and sustained by its Maker's love, fallen indeed into the bondage of sin, yet emancipated now by Christ, Who was crucified and rose again to break the strangle hold of personified evil, so that the world might be fashioned anew according to God's design and reach its fulfilment || . (GS 2).

The being and action of the laity and of Secular Franciscans take place in this context of —the world || . Living in the world, they are geared towards the perfection of charity and commit themselves to the sanctification of the world, working within the world.

Secular Franciscans, together with all the lay faithful, are called to live their lives in the ordinary situations of the world, and within the specifically —worldly || sphere they share in the Church's mission of evangelisation.

Starting from these premises, which are founded on the mystery of the Incarnation and on the intrinsically —worldly || character of the entire people of God, we can understand the specific mission of the laity and of Secular Franciscans.

What specifically characterizes the laity is their secular nature...But the laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the world, that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven. They are called there by God that by exercising their proper function and led by the spirit of the Gospel they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven. In this way they may make Christ known to others, especially by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope and charity. Therefore, since they are tightly bound up in all types of temporal affairs in such a way that they may come into being and then continually increase to Christ to the praise of the Creator and the Redeemer". (LG 31).

What specifically characterizes the laity is their secular nature....to seek the kingdom of God by dealing with temporal things and directing them in accordance with God's plan || : this is the specific mission of the laity. Consecrated in the world and for the world, the Franciscan lay faithful have the task of *consecrating the world* by immersing themselves fully in it.

To belong to Christ does not mean to deny the world. The price the Christian pays for his discipleship is not the negation or despising of the world, but rather a particular responsibility for the world, an availability to give oneself, entrust oneself to the world || (J. B. Metz). This presupposes an attitude of joyful optimism and sincere appreciation of worldly realities, which draw their origin from the Incarnation of the Word. The Incarnation is God's —yes || to the world: irrevocable, indestructible, with no going back.

The Christian's love for the world therefore arises from a desire to enter more deeply into God's love for the world, and thus to share personally in the realisation of the love which the Father has revealed by sending His Son into the world. Consequently the world becomes the —place || where discipleship is lived and where one becomes holy, not in spite of, but precisely because of and by means of, being in the world (*in saeculo et ex saeculo*). However, the Incarnation, while testifying to God's love for the world, is the mystery which reveals how the world itself must be ordered according to God and changed from within..

The Incarnation happened through a hidden *kenosis*, when the Son of God emptied Himself and was humbled to the point of death on a cross. Anyone who wants to be a disciple of Christ must deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow Him, must be crucified to the world. The world, in fact, can only be changed by the asceticism of discipleship, because it is the new man, redeemed by Christ and constantly purified by penance, who builds the new society; it is the new man who ushers in a new way of being at the service of humanity, not against it.

Professing a form of evangelical life, living their consecration to God in the world and for the world, and —transmitting into world affairs the genuine spirit of the gospel || (*Ritual*, III. 46), Secular Franciscans bear witness that the sanctification of the world necessarily occurs through the sanctification of people, because this world cannot be transformed without the spirit of the beatitudes (cfr. *LG* 31).

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Excerpts from ELEMENTS OF ECCLÉSIOLOGY AND THEOLOG7 OF THE LAITY

In the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Paul VI, speaking of the laity, wrote: —Their own field of evangelizing activity is the vast and complicated world of politics, society and economics, but also the world of culture, of the sciences and the arts, of international life, of the mass media. It also includes other realities which are open to evangelization, such as human love, the family, the education of children and adolescents, professional work, suffering. The more Gospel-inspired lay people there are engaged in these realities, clearly involved in them, competent to promote them and conscious that they must exercise to the full their Christian powers which are often buried and suffocated, the more these realities will be at the service of the Kingdom of God and therefore of salvation in Jesus Christ. ||

The Laity must take on the renewal of the temporal order as their own special obligation. Led by the light of the gospel and the mind of the Church, and motivated by Christian love, let them act directly and definitively in the temporal sphere. As citizens they must cooperate with other citizens, using their own particular skills and acting on their own responsibility. Everywhere and in all things they must seek the justice characteristic of God's kingdom || (AA7).

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Excerpts from the PROFESSION in the SFO

Consequently the concern of the Rule, the Constitutions and the Ritual is to highlight the need to *live as authentic members of the Church*, in line with the stronger and closer bond established with the Church by Profession. This is above all a *bond of communion*; and this is the fundamental element in the Church, which has to be affirmed in actual everyday life. The duty to give *witness*, to which Secular Franciscans are destined first by baptism and then by profession, flows precisely from the innermost essence of the Church, which is a communion of faith and love.

This insistence on witness in the Rule and Constitutions should alert the brothers and sisters of the Secular Franciscan Order more and more to the fact that their existence in the Church is justified only by the authenticity of their lives. The brothers and sisters of penance are asked to offer, constantly and in all the circumstances of their lives, the supreme proof of their fidelity to God, to give an account to the world of the hope that is in them, to witness in an unmistakable way their faithfulness to the covenant established with the Church and the fraternity from the moment of their profession.

Therefore, all the admonitions contained in the Rule, the Constitutions and the Ritual about the importance of personal witness must be welcomed and put into practice with full awareness that this is the fundamental duty of the Lord's disciples.

ESSENTIAL BIBLIOGRAPHY The Christian lay person is called by the Church to be capable of expecting and welcoming the new and unheard of in the Spirit which is always given. Revelation is already fulfilled in Christ. But not all the power of the Word has yet been felt, heard, understood and realized.

Sources:

Conciliar Documents: Lumen Gentium, Gaudium et Spes, Apostolicam Actuositatem, Ad Gentes.

Encyclical: Ecclesiam Suam. (Paul VI)

Apostolic Exhortation: Evangelii nuntiandi (Paul VI)

The messages of the Church to the world. (8 december 1965)

Apostolic Exhortation : Christifideles laici (John Paul II)