

Re : Workshop # 4: Active Members of the Church

Excerpts from the CIOFS Manual : section The Vocation, the Charism and Mission

In the Church, all baptized must respond to God's expectation, in relation to their personal vocation: they accomplish their project of life (God's given vocation), on the basis of their spiritual energies, according to the gift they have received (Eph 4:7).

Pope John Paul II pronounced some very clear and wonderful expressions on this point in his message to the youth in 1998 (7-8):

«The gift of the Spirit makes God's ancient commandment to his people timely and possible: "You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy" (Lev 19:2) To become holy seems a difficult goal, reserved for people who are quite exceptional, or suited to those who wish to remain apart from the life and culture of their own time. Instead, to become holy is a gift and a task, rooted in Baptism and Confirmation and entrusted to everyone in the Church in every age. It is a gift and a duty of lay people as well as religious and sacred ministers, in the private realm as in public affairs, in the life of individuals as in that of families and communities.

However, within this common vocation that calls everyone to be conformed not to this world but to God's will (cf. Rom 12:2), there are different states of life and numerous vocations and missions.

The gift of the Spirit is the basis of everyone's vocation. It is at the root of the consecrated ministries of the Bishop, priest and deacon, who are at the service of ecclesial life. It is also he who forms and moulds the soul of those who are called to a life of special consecration, configuring them to Christ, chaste, poor and obedient. In the Spirit himself, who through the sacrament of Marriage surrounds and consecrates the union of the spouses, the mission of parents, called to make the family the first and fundamental expression of the Church, finds its strength and support.»

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It is therefore indispensable for each one to seek and to recognize day after day the long path on which the Lord is leading him to his personal encounter with him. Dear friends, question yourselves seriously about your vocation and be ready to answer the Lord who is calling you to take the place he has prepared for you from eternity.*

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Excerpts from the CIOFS Formation Manual: section ELEMENTS OF ECCLESIOLOGY AND OF THEOLOGY OF LAITY

Lay people and the mission of the church

The secular dimension, while pertaining to the whole Church as to each of the faithful (cleric, religious, lay) called to build up the Body of Christ in the world, is realized, however, in a special way by lay people. The message of salvation is indeed addressed to the whole world and it is precisely there, **in the world** and **through** the things of the world, that the lay faithful respond to the call of God and are witnesses of **His presence**, incarnating in their lives the task of revealing God.

—By their very vocation, the laity 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 and social life which the very web of their existence is woven || (LG 31).

a. —**Being lay** || as a specific theological —place

There is an important message in the Council: the world is not a place, a space, nor a means of sanctification, but the means of living the dignity of the Children of God in the midst of the most hidden miseries of the humanity that Christ has taken to himself. Lay people in their ordinary activities (work, friendships, pleasure in knowing and learning, free-time of rest and sport, politics and economic affairs, etc.) witness to the extraordinary in life and realize the perfection of charity. In this sense we read in *Christifideles laici* that —the secular character of the lay faithful is to be defined not only in the sociological sense but especially in a theological sense || (CFL 15), that is a sign and revelation of the creative and redemptive activity of God.

This is what the Council affirmed when it said that the laity are called by God so that by exercising their proper function and being led by the spirit of the gospel they can work for the sanctification of the world from within, in the manner of leaven. In this way they can make Christ known to others, especially by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope and charity. The lay person is closely involved in temporal affairs of every sort. It is there for his/her special task to illumine and organize these affairs in such a way that they may always start out, develop and persist according to Christ's mind, to the praise of the Creator and the Redeemer (LG31)

The universal call to holiness is made concrete in the diversity and variety of the members of the Church which recognizes in the lay state one of its fundamental characteristics.

b) Competence of lay people

Lay people are —competent || in the questions of ordinary life (marriage, family, human culture, political life, economics, etc.). It is through them that the Church is in a special way present there.

In these sectors, the laity act as leaders and the Church must rely on those who live in the world, are versed in different institutions and specialties, and grasp their innermost significance in the eyes of both believers and unbelievers.

With the help of the Holy Spirit it is the task of the entire People of God, especially pastors and theologians, to hear, distinguish and interpret the many voices of our age (GS44)

For the Church, listening to the world is not limited to a reference to method and language but through them she means to welcome the newness, the hopes, the needs and the presence of God which is at work in all things.

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. ||

Lay spirituality

The particularity of lay people is made clear in an original and fruitful way not only at the level of the apostolate but at that of spirituality, one no longer borrowed from religious.

Lay Christians are called to be on the watch for the breath of the Spirit which makes the Word of God living and effective.

Their life in the Spirit || (or spirituality) has specific connotations.

- It is characterized above all by service and apostolic co-responsibility which takes human history seriously, living it as the daily place of sanctification. The today of God is in our concrete lives, our day-to-day is the —hour || of God, the today of salvation. Secular involvement, however, does not consist in living the faith by consecrating the world, but in living in the world according to the Spirit-mission proper to the People of God.
- It is Christ-like in the sense that it flows from sharing in the priesthood, prophecy and kingship of Christ in the Church.
- It is Charismatic: it is founded in the inner freedom of the Spirit which continually offers new life.
- It is Evangelic: in the spirit of the Beatitudes, lay people are not prisoners of the logic and wisdom of the world, but they make of their life and —path || the arena for the virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance.
- It is Wisdom: by its dual belonging to the ecclesial community and the human community, as such it brings together the demands of divine revelation and human reason.