

Being Catholic Today

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Fourth Lecture - **The Vocation of the Laity**

Saint Francis de Sales (17th century):

Just as every sort of gem, cast in honey, becomes brighter and more sparkling, each according to its color, so each person becomes more acceptable and fitting in his own vocation when he sets his vocation in the context of devotion. Through devotion your family cares become more peaceful, mutual love between husband and wife becomes more sincere, the service we owe to the prince becomes more faithful, and our work, no matter what it is, becomes more pleasant and agreeable. (*Introduction to the Devout Life*)

St. Pius X: *Vehementer Nos* (1906): The laity have no other right than to let themselves be guided and so follow their pastors in docility.

Pius XI: Catholic Action (1927) defined as “the participation of the laity in the apostolate of the Church’s hierarchy.”

Pius XII: *Mystici Corporis* (1943), The Mystical Body of Christ and Our Union in It with Christ

Christ our Lord wills the Church to live his own supernatural life, and by his divine power permeates his whole Body and nourishes and sustains each of the members according to the place which they occupy in the Body, in the same way as the vine nourishes and makes fruitful the branches which are joined to it. (55)

Vatican II: *Lumen Gentium* (1964), Dogmatic Constitution on the Church

1. The Mystery of the Church (1-8)

2. The People of God (9-17)

3. The Hierarchical Structure of the Church, with Special Reference to the Episcopate (18-29)

4 The Laity (30-38)

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. (31)

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**. (31)

The layman is closely involved in temporal affairs of every sort. It is therefore his 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. (31)

The laity are called in a special way to make the Church present and operative in those places and circumstances where only through them can she become the **salt** of the earth. (33)

As worshipers whose every deed is holy, the laity consecrate the world itself to God. (34)

Christ made the laity his witnesses and gave them understanding of the faith and the grace of speech so that the power of the gospel might shine forth in their daily social and family life. (35)

The faithful must learn the deepest meaning and the value of all creation and how to relate it to the praise of God...In this way the world is permeated by the spirit of Christ and more effectively achieves its purpose in justice, charity, and peace. The laity have the principal role in the fulfillment of this purpose...In this manner, through the members of the Church, Christ will progressively illumine the whole of human society with his saving **light**. (36)

Laymen will imbue culture and human activity with moral values. (36)

Because the very plan of salvation requires it, the faithful should learn how to distinguish carefully between those rights and duties which are theirs as members of the Church, and those which they have as members of human society. Let them strive to harmonize the two, remembering that in every temporal affair they must be guided by a Christian conscience. For even in secular affairs there is no human activity which can be withdrawn from God's dominion. (36)

"What the **soul** is to the body, let Christians be to the world." (*Letter to Diognetus*; 37)

5 The Call of the Whole Church to Holiness (39-42)

By this holiness a more human way of life is promoted even in this earthly society. All of Christ's faithful, whatever be the conditions, duties, and circumstances of their lives, will grow in holiness day by day through these very situations, if they accept all of them with faith from the hand of their heavenly Father, and if they cooperate with the divine will by showing every man through their earthly activities the love with which God has loved the world. (41)

6 Religious (43-47)

7 The Eschatological Nature of the Pilgrim Church and Her Union with the Heavenly Church (48-51)

Christ, having been lifted up from the earth, is drawing all men to himself (Jn 12:32). Rising from the dead, he sent his life-giving Spirit upon his disciples and through this Spirit has established his body, the Church, as the universal sacrament of salvation. Sitting at the right hand of the Father, he is continually active in the world, leading men to the Church, and through her joining them more closely to himself and making them partakers of his glorious life by nourishing them with his own body and blood. (48)

8 The Role of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the Mystery of Christ and the Church (52-69)

Gaudium et Spes (1965), Pastoral Constitution on the Church in Modern World.
Preface (1-3)

Introduction: The Situation of Men in the Modern World (4-10)

Part One: The Church and Man's Calling (11)

Chapter 1: The Dignity of the Human **Person** (12-22)

Chapter 2: The **Community** of Mankind (23-32)

Chapter 3: Man's **Activity** Throughout the World (33-39)

Men are not deterred by the Christian message from building up the world, or impelled to neglect the welfare of their fellows. They are, rather, more stringently bound to do these very things. (34)

Christ is now at work in the hearts of men through the energy of his Spirit. He arouses not only a desire for the age to come, but by that very fact he animates, purifies, and strengthens those noble longings too by which the human family strives to make its life more human and to render the whole earth submissive to this goal....He frees all so that by putting aside love of self and bringing all earthly resources into the service of human life they can devote themselves to that future when humanity itself will become an offering accepted by God. (38)

The expectation of a new earth must not weaken but rather stimulate our concern for cultivating this one. (39)

Chapter 4: The Role of the **Church in the Modern World** (40-45)

The Church goes forward together with humanity and experiences the same earthly lot which the world does. She serves as a leaven and as a kind of soul for human society as it is to be renewed in Christ and transformed into God's family....The earthly and the heavenly city penetrate each other.... (40)

Christ gave his Church no proper mission in the political, economic, or social order. The purpose which he set before her is a religious one. But out of this religious mission itself come a function, a light, and an energy which can serve to structure and consolidate the human community according to the divine law. (42)

In the exercise of all their earthly activities, Christians can thereby gather their humane, domestic, professional, social, and technical enterprises into one vital synthesis with religious values, under whose supreme direction all things are harmonized into God's glory.

Secular duties and activities belong properly although not exclusively to laymen. Therefore acting as citizens of the world, whether individually or socially, they will observe the laws proper to each discipline, and labor to equip themselves with a genuine

expertise in their various fields...Laymen should also know that it is generally the function of their well-formed Christian conscience to see that the divine law is **inscribed** in the life of the earthly city. (43)

For God's Word, by whom all things were made, was himself made flesh so that as perfect man he might save all men and sum up all things in himself. The Lord is the goal of human history, the focal point of the longings of history and of civilization, the center of the human race, the joy of every heart, and the answer to all its yearnings. He is whom the Father raised from the dead, lifted on high, and stationed at his right hand, making him judge of the living and the dead. Enlivened and united in his Spirit, we journey toward the consummation of human history, one which fully accords with the counsel of God's love: "To reestablish all things in Christ, both those in the heavens and those on the earth" (Eph 1:10). (45)

Part Two. Some Problems of Special Urgency (46)

Chapter 1: Marriage and the Family (47-52)

Chapter 2: Development of Culture (53-62)

Chapter 3: Socio-Economic Life (63-72)

Chapter 4: The Political Community (73-76)

Chapter 5: Peace and the Community of Nations (77-90)

Conclusion (91-93)

Paul VI: *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975)

Evangelization means bringing the good News into all the strata of humanity and through its influence transforming humanity from within. (18)

John Paul II: *Christifideles laici* (1988)

There cannot be two parallel lives in their existence: on the one hand, the so-called "spiritual" life, with its values and demands; and on the other, the so-called "secular" life, that is, life in a family, at work, in social relationships, in the responsibilities of public life and in culture. The branch, engrafted to the vine, which is Christ, bears its fruit in every sphere of existence and activity. In fact, every area of the lay faithful's lives, as different as they are, enters into the plan of God, who desires that these very areas be the "places in time" where the love of Christ is revealed and realized for both the glory of the Father and service of others. Every activity, every situation, every precise responsibility—as, for example, skill and solidarity in work, love and dedication in the family and the education of children, service to society and public life and the promotion of truth in the area of culture—are the occasions ordained by Providence for a "continuous exercise of faith, hope and charity." (59)