

**Lumen Gentium**  
**The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church**  
**(21 Nov 1964)**

**Question 2: How is the Church structured?**

**Answer 1: She has a two-fold structure based in the Sacraments**

*“What I am for you terrifies me; what I am with you consoles me.  
For you, I am a bishop; but with you, I am a Christian.  
The former is a duty; the latter is a grace.  
The former is a danger; the latter is salvation”  
(St Augustine)*

**CHAPTER III ON THE HIERARCHICAL STRUCTURE OF THE CHURCH  
AND IN PARTICULAR ON THE EPISCOPATE**

**#s 18-29**

- In Christ, by the grace of Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist, all are members of the Church (Chapter 4)  
By the grace of Ordination, some are called out to exercise ‘sacred powers’ (Chapter 3)
- The fulness of Orders resides in the Bishop; in varying degrees, Priests and Deacons share in this grace
- In Christianity, all authority is vicarious – even Christ’s which he exercises in the name of the Father  
In the Church, the authority of the members of the hierarchy is also vicarious, exercised in the name of Christ
- The Church’s two-fold structure is the formal will of Christ as seen in both the *Gospel* and *Acts*
- The gifts he gives to some are in the service of communion and are always for the good of the whole
- Christ wills his whole Church to be ‘indefectible’ i.e. unflinching, infallible in both truth and holiness
- In this ministry, the Roman Pontiff and Bishops have different but complimentary roles
- Their charge is to be exercised collegially, as both a sign of the Mystery of Communion and at its service
- In this way, the earthly ‘People of God’ (Chapter 2) become the ‘Mystical Body of Christ’ (Chapter 1) as the Temple of the Holy Spirit, and all learn to live to the glory of the Father
- The one Universal Church exists in the many different diocesan or local churches throughout the world

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**18.** For the **nurturing and constant growth of the People of God, Christ the Lord instituted** in His Church **a variety of ministries**, which work **for the good of the whole body**. For those ministers, who are **endowed with sacred power**, **serve their brethren, so that all who are of the People of God**, and therefore enjoy a true Christian dignity **may arrive at salvation**. [NB What follows is a **solemn declaration**<sup>6</sup>]

- **This Sacred Council**, following closely in the footsteps of **the First Vatican Council**, with that Council **teaches and declares**<sup>6</sup> that
  - **Jesus Christ**, the eternal Shepherd, **established His holy Church**,
  - having **sent forth the apostles** as He Himself had been sent by the Father;
  - and He **willed that their successors, namely the bishops**, should be shepherds in His Church even to the consummation of the world.
  - And in order that the **episcopate** itself might be **one and undivided**, He placed **Blessed Peter over the other apostles**, and **instituted** in him a permanent and visible source and foundation of unity of faith and communion.

And all this teaching about **the institution, the perpetuity, the meaning and reason for the sacred primacy of the Roman Pontiff and of his infallible magisterium**, this Sacred Council again proposes to be firmly believed by all the faithful.

Continuing in that same undertaking, this Council is **resolved to declare and proclaim**, before all, **the doctrine concerning bishops, the successors of the apostles, who** together with the successor of Peter, the Vicar of Christ, the visible Head of the whole Church, **govern the house of the living God**.

<sup>6</sup> A solemn and therefore infallible statement See also #s 20, 21

19. The Lord Jesus, after **praying to the Father**,

- **calling to Himself** those whom **He desired** (Mk 3:13-19; Lk 6:12-16)
- **appointed twelve to be with Him**, whom **He would send to preach the Kingdom of God**; and **these apostles He formed** after the manner of **a college or a stable group**, over which **He placed Peter** chosen from among them.
- **He sent them** first to the **children of Israel** and then to **all nations**,
- so that, **as sharers in His power**, they might **make all peoples His disciples**, and **sanctify and govern** them, and **thus spread His Church**, and by **ministering to it under the guidance of the Lord**, direct it all days even **to the consummation of the world**.

And in **this mission**, they were **fully confirmed on the day of Pentecost** in accordance with the Lord's promise: "You shall **receive power** when the **Holy Spirit comes upon you....**".

And the **apostles... gather together the universal Church**, which the Lord **established on the apostles and built upon blessed Peter**, their chief, **Christ Jesus Himself being the supreme cornerstone**.

20. That divine mission... **will last until the end of the world**, for the **Gospel** they are to teach **is for all time the source of all life for the Church**. For this reason, **the apostles... took care to appoint successors**.

... As St. Irenaeus testifies, through those who were **appointed bishops by the apostles**, and through their **successors down in our own time**, the **apostolic tradition is manifested and preserved**.

**Bishops**, therefore, with their helpers, the priests and deacons, **have taken up the service of the community**, presiding in place of God over the flock, as teachers for doctrine, priests for sacred worship, and ministers for governing.

And just as the **office granted individually to Peter... is permanent** and is to be transmitted to his successors, so also the **apostles' office is permanent, and is to be exercised without interruption by the sacred order of bishops**. [There follows a second **very solemn declaration**]

**Therefore, the Sacred Council teaches that bishops by divine institution have succeeded to the place of the apostles, as shepherds of the Church, and he who hears them, hears Christ, and he who rejects them, rejects Christ and Him who sent Christ.**

21. In the **bishops... our Lord Jesus Christ, the Supreme High Priest, is present...**

through their service **He is preaching** the word of God to all nations, and **(He is) constantly administering** the sacraments of faith to those who believe, .... **He incorporates new members** in His Body by a heavenly regeneration, and... .... **He directs and guides the People** of the New Testament in their pilgrimage.

These pastors... **passed on this spiritual gift to their helpers by the imposition of hands**, and it has been transmitted down to us in episcopal consecration. [There follows a third **very solemn declaration**]

**The Sacred Council teaches that by episcopal consecration the fullness of the sacrament of Orders is conferred, that fullness of power, namely .... the high priesthood, the supreme power of the sacred ministry.**

Episcopal consecration confers:

together with the **office of sanctifying**, the **office of teaching and of governing**, which... **can be exercised only in hierarchical communion with the head and the members of the college**.

For from the tradition... **bishops in an eminent and visible way sustain the roles of Christ Himself as Teacher, Shepherd and High Priest**, and that they **act in His person....**

22. Just as in the Gospel, the Lord so disposing, St. Peter and the other apostles constitute one apostolic college, so in a similar way the Roman Pontiff, the successor of Peter, and the bishops, the successors of the apostles, are joined together. Indeed, **the very ancient practice whereby bishops duly established in all parts of the world were in communion with one another and with the Bishop of Rome in a bond of unity, charity and peace**, and also the **councils** assembled together, in which more profound issues were settled in common... both of these factors are already an indication of **the collegiate character and aspect of the episcopal order**; and the **ecumenical councils** held in the course of centuries are also manifest proof of (this).

Also... several bishops take part in the elevation of the newly elected to the ministry of the high priesthood. Hence, **one is constituted a member of the episcopal body in virtue of sacramental consecration and hierarchical communion with the head and members of the body.**

- ...As **Vicar of Christ and pastor of the whole Church, the Roman Pontiff has full, supreme and universal power over the Church.** And he is always free to exercise this power.
- **The order of bishops**, which succeeds to the college of apostles and gives this apostolic body continued existence, is also **the subject of supreme and full power over the universal Church** ... together with its head the Roman Pontiff and never without this head.
- ...The **power of binding and loosing**, which was given to Peter, was **granted also to the college of apostles**, joined with their head. **This college:**
  - insofar as it is **composed of many**, **expresses the variety and universality of the People of God**,
  - Insofar as it is **assembled under one head**, **it expresses the unity of the flock of Christ.**
- In (this college), **the bishops**... exercise their own authority for the good of their own faithful, and indeed of the whole Church... (It) is **exercised in a solemn way in an ecumenical council** confirmed or accepted as such by the successor of Peter; it is prerogative of the Roman Pontiff to convoke councils, to preside over them and to confirm them.
- This **same collegiate power** can be exercised together with the pope **by the bishops living in all parts of the world**, provided that the head of the college calls them to collegiate action, or... approves of or freely accepts the united action of the scattered bishops....

23. This **collegial union** is apparent also the mutual relations of the individual bishops with particular churches and with the universal Church.

- The Roman Pontiff, as **the successor of Peter**, is the **perpetual and visible principle and foundation of unity** of both the bishops and of the faithful.
- The individual bishops, however, are the **visible principle and foundation of unity** in their particular churches... **in and from which comes into being the one and only Catholic Church.**

For this reason, the **individual bishops represent each his own church**, but **all of them together** with the Pope **represent the entire Church** in the bond of peace, love and unity.

- The individual bishops, who are placed in charge of particular churches, exercise their pastoral government over the portion of the People of God committed to their care and not over other churches nor over the universal Church.
- But each of them, as a member of the episcopal college and legitimate successor of the apostles, is obliged by Christ's institution and command to be solicitous for the whole Church, and this solicitude, though it is not exercised by an act of jurisdiction, contributes greatly to the advantage of the universal Church.
- It is the duty of all bishops
  - to promote and to safeguard the unity of faith & the discipline common to the whole Church,
  - to instruct the faithful to love for the whole mystical body of Christ, especially for its poor and sorrowing members and for those who are suffering persecution for justice's sake, and
  - to promote every activity that is of interest to the whole Church, especially that the faith may take increase and the light of full truth appear to all men.

**...By governing well their own church as a portion of the universal Church, (bishops) effectively contribute to the welfare of the whole Mystical Body, which is also the body of the churches.**

... It follows that the individual bishops, insofar as their discharge of their duty permits, are obliged to enter into a community of work among themselves and with the successor of Peter.

... (T)hey must supply to the missions both workers for the harvest and also spiritual and material aid.

... (I)n a universal fellowship of charity, (they) should gladly extend their fraternal aid to other churches....

By divine Providence... various churches, established in various places by the apostles and their successors, have in the course of time coalesced into several groups, organically united, which, preserving the unity of faith and the unique divine constitution of the universal Church, enjoy their own discipline, their own liturgical usage, and their own theological and spiritual heritage. This variety of local churches with one common aspiration is splendid evidence of the catholicity of the undivided Church....

24. Bishops, as successors of the apostles, receive from the Lord... the mission to teach all nations and to preach the Gospel to every creature, so that all may attain to salvation by faith, baptism and the fulfilment of the commandments.

To fulfil this mission, **Christ the Lord promised the Holy Spirit to the Apostles**, and on Pentecost day sent the Spirit from heaven, by whose power they would be witnesses to Him before the nations and peoples and kings even to the ends of the earth. And **that duty**, which the Lord committed to the shepherds of His people, is a **true service**, which in sacred literature is significantly called *diakonia* or **ministry**....

25. Among the principal duties of bishops, **preaching the Gospel occupies an eminent place**. Bishops, teaching in communion with the Roman Pontiff, are to be respected by all as witnesses to divine and Catholic truth. In matters of faith and morals, the bishops speak in the name of Christ and the faithful are to accept their teaching and adhere to it with a religious assent.

This religious submission of mind and will must be shown to the **authentic magisterium of the Roman Pontiff**, even when not speaking ex cathedra; that is, it must be shown in such a way that his supreme magisterium is acknowledged with reverence, the judgments made by him are sincerely adhered to, according to his manifest mind and will. His mind and will in the matter may be known from the character of the documents, from his frequent repetition of the same doctrine, or from his manner of speaking.

- **Although the individual bishops do not enjoy the prerogative of infallibility, they nevertheless proclaim Christ's doctrine infallibly whenever, even though dispersed through the world, but still maintaining the bond of communion among themselves and with the successor of Peter, and authentically teaching matters of faith and morals, they are in agreement on one position as definitively to be held.**

This is even more clearly verified when, gathered together **in an ecumenical council**, they are teachers and judges of faith and morals for the universal Church, whose definitions must be adhered to with the submission of faith.

- **This infallibility with which the Divine Redeemer willed His Church to be endowed in defining doctrine of faith and morals, extends as far as **the deposit of Revelation** extends, which must be religiously guarded and faithfully expounded.**
- **This is the infallibility which the Roman Pontiff, the head of the college of bishops, enjoys in virtue of his office, when, as the supreme shepherd and teacher of all the faithful, who confirms his brethren in their faith, by a definitive act he proclaims a doctrine of faith or morals.**

And therefore, his definitions, of themselves, and not from the consent of the Church, are justly styled irreformable, since they are pronounced with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, promised to him in blessed Peter, and therefore they need no approval of others, nor do they allow an appeal to any other judgment.

**For then the Roman Pontiff is not pronouncing judgment as a private person, but as the supreme teacher of the universal Church, in whom **the charism of infallibility of the Church itself** is individually present, he is expounding or defending a doctrine of Catholic faith.**

- **The infallibility promised to the Church resides also in the body of Bishops, when that body exercises the supreme magisterium with the successor of Peter....**

But when **either the Roman Pontiff or the Body of Bishops together with him defines a judgment, they pronounce it in accordance with Revelation itself, which all are obliged to abide by and be in conformity with,**

that is, **the Revelation which as written or orally handed down is transmitted in its entirety through the legitimate succession of bishops and especially in care of the Roman Pontiff**, and which under the guiding light of the Spirit of truth is religiously preserved and faithfully expounded in the Church. The Roman Pontiff and the bishops, in view of their office and the importance of the matter, by fitting means diligently **strive to inquire properly into that revelation** and to **give apt expression** to its contents; but a **new public revelation they do not accept as pertaining to the divine deposit of faith.**

26. **A bishop marked with the fullness of the sacrament of Orders**, is “the steward of the grace of the supreme priesthood,” especially in the **Eucharist**, which he offers or causes to be offered, and by which the Church continually lives and grows. This Church of Christ is truly present in all legitimate local congregations of the faithful which, united with their pastors, are themselves called churches in the New Testament.

For in their locality these are **the new People called by God, in the Holy Spirit** and in much fullness.

In them the **faithful are gathered together by the preaching of the Gospel of Christ**, and the **mystery of the Lord’s Supper** is celebrated, that by the food and blood of the Lord’s body the whole brotherhood may be joined together.

In any community of the altar, under **the sacred ministry of the bishop**... though frequently small and poor... **Christ is present**, and in virtue of His presence there is brought together **one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church**....

Every legitimate celebration of the Eucharist is regulated by the bishop, to whom is committed the office of offering the worship of Christian religion.

Bishops thus, by praying and labouring for the people, make outpourings in many ways and in great abundance from **the fullness of Christ’s holiness.**

By the **ministry of the word** they communicate God’s power to those who believe unto salvation and through the sacraments... they **sanctify the faithful.**

They direct the conferring of Baptism, by which a sharing in the kingly priesthood of Christ is granted. They are the original ministers of Confirmation, dispensers of **sacred Orders** and the moderators of penitential discipline

And... by the example of their way of life they must be an influence for good to those over whom they preside exchanging evil for good, so that together with the flock committed to their care they may arrive at eternal life.

27. **Bishops, as vicars and ambassadors of Christ, govern the particular churches** entrusted to them by their counsel, exhortations, example, and even by their authority and sacred power....

This power, which they personally exercise in Christ’s name, is **proper, ordinary and immediate.**

... bishops have the sacred right and the duty before the Lord to make laws for their subjects, to pass judgment on them and to moderate everything pertaining to worship and the apostolate.

The **pastoral office** or the habitual and daily care of their sheep is **entrusted to them completely; nor are they to be regarded as vicars of the Roman Pontiffs**, they exercise an authority proper to them....

Their power... is not destroyed by the supreme and universal power, but is affirmed, strengthened and vindicated by it, since the Holy Spirit unfailingly preserves the form of government established by Christ the Lord in His Church.

A bishop, since he is **sent by the Father to govern his family**, must keep before his eyes the example of the Good Shepherd. **Let him not refuse to listen to his subjects**, whom he cherishes as his true sons and exhorts to cooperate readily with him. As having one day to render an account for their souls.

Let him be ready to preach the Gospel to all, and to urge his faithful to apostolic and missionary activity.

The faithful must cling to their bishop, as the Church does to Christ, and Jesus Christ to the Father, so that all may be of one mind through unity, and **abound to the glory of God.**

28. **Christ**, whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world, has **through His apostles, made their successors, the bishops, partakers of His consecration and His mission.** They have legitimately handed on to different individuals in the Church **various degrees of participation in this ministry.** Thus, the divinely established ecclesiastical ministry is exercised on different levels by those who from antiquity have been called **bishops, priests and deacons.**

**Priests**... do not possess the highest degree of the priesthood, nevertheless are united with the bishops in sacerdotal dignity. **By the power of the sacrament of Orders**, in the image of Christ the eternal high Priest, they are consecrated to preach the Gospel and shepherd be faithful and to celebrate divine worship. Partakers of the function of Christ the sole Mediator, on their level of ministry, they announce the divine word to all.

For the sick and the sinners among the faithful, they exercise the ministry of alleviation and reconciliation and they present the needs and the prayers of the faithful to God the Father.

Exercising within the limits of their authority the function of Christ as Shepherd and Head, they gather together God’s family as a brotherhood all of one mind, and lead them in the Spirit, through Christ, to God the Father....

Finally, they labour in word and doctrine, believing what they have read and meditated upon in the law of God, teaching what they have believed, and putting in practice in their own lives what they have taught.

**Priests**, prudent co-operators with the episcopal order, its aid and instrument, called to serve the people of God, constitute one priesthood with their bishop although bound by a diversity of duties. ...

- Let **priests sincerely look upon the bishop as their father and reverently obey him.** And let the **bishop regard his priests as his co-workers and as sons and friends**, just as Christ called His disciples now not servants but friends....
- By their common sacred ordination and mission, **all priests are bound together in intimate brotherhood...**
- Let them remember that by their daily life and interests they are showing the face of a truly sacerdotal and pastoral ministry ... to Catholics and non-Catholics,
- and that to all they bear witness to the truth and life, and as good shepherds go after **those also, who though baptized in the Catholic Church have fallen away** from the use of the sacraments, or even from the faith.

The human race is joining more and more into a civic, economic and social unity, it is that much the more necessary that priests, under the leadership of the bishops and the Supreme Pontiff, wipe out every kind of separateness, **so that the whole human race may be brought into the unity of the family of God.**

29. At a lower level of the hierarchy are **deacons, upon whom hands are imposed “not unto the priesthood, but unto a ministry of service.”**

For strengthened by **sacramental grace, in communion with the bishop and his group of priests they serve in the diaconate of the liturgy, of the word, and of charity to the people of God.**

It is the duty of the deacon:

- to administer **baptism** solemnly,
- to be custodian and dispenser of the **Eucharist**,
- to assist at and bless **marriages** in the name of the Church,
- to bring **Viaticum** to the dying, to read the **Sacred Scripture** to the faithful,
- to **instruct and exhort** the people,
- to **preside over the worship and prayer** of the faithful,
- to **administer sacramentals**,
- to officiate at **funeral and burial services.**

Dedicated to duties of charity and of administration, let deacons be mindful of the admonition of Blessed Polycarp: *“Be merciful, diligent, walking according to the truth of the Lord, who became the servant of all.”* ....

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**Question 2: How is the Church?**

**Answer 2: The Laity**

*“There are many places where the Spirit blows,  
but there is one Spirit that blows in all places.  
There are some people whom God takes and sets apart.  
There are others he leaves among the crowd, people he does not “withdraw from the world.”  
These are the people who have an ordinary job, an ordinary household, or an ordinary celibacy.  
People with ordinary sicknesses, and ordinary times of grieving.  
People with an ordinary house, and ordinary clothes.  
These are the people of ordinary life. The people we might meet on any street.  
They love the door that opens onto the street,  
just as their brothers who are hidden from the world love the door that shuts behind them forever.  
We, the ordinary people of the streets, believe with all our might that this street, this world,  
where God has placed us, is our place of holiness”*

**Madeleine Delbr el**

**CHAPTER IV THE LAITY**

**#30-47**

- Chapter II on *The People of God* described the whole Church, without mentioning the Laity particularly
- Here in Chapter IV, the lay state is defined positively for the first time in Church documents
- What is proper to the laity’s grace and mission is brought out
- Theirs is the mission to allow Christ in the Spirit to bring the world back to the Father
- In and through the laity, Christ exercises his 3-fold mission of Priest, Prophet, King in and for the world
- Lay ministries and charisms are to be acknowledged

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30. Having set forth the functions of the hierarchy, the Sacred Council gladly turns its attention to the state of those faithful called the laity. Everything that has been said above (CF. Chapter II) **concerning the People of God is intended for the laity, religious and clergy alike.**

**But there are certain things which pertain in a special way to the laity, both men and women, by reason of their condition and mission.** Due to the special circumstances of our time the foundations of this doctrine must be more thoroughly examined.

- For their pastors know how much the laity contribute to the welfare of the entire Church.
- They also know that they were not ordained by Christ to take upon themselves alone the entire salvific mission of the Church toward the world.
- On the contrary, they understand that it is their noble duty to shepherd the faithful and to recognize their ministries and charisms, so that all according to their proper roles may cooperate in this common undertaking with one mind....

31. **The term laity is here understood to mean all the faithful – except those in holy orders and those in the state of religious life specially approved by the Church.**

- **These faithful** are **by baptism made one body with Christ** and **constituted among the People of God;**
- they are in their own way made sharers in the **priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ;** and they carry out... the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world.
- **What specifically characterizes the laity is their secular nature.**
  - Those in holy orders can... be engaged in secular activities, even a secular profession. But by reason of their particular vocation are professedly ordained to the sacred ministry.
  - By their state in life, religious give splendid and striking testimony that the world cannot be transformed and offered to God without the spirit of the beatitudes.
  - **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.**

The laity live in the world, that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations;

... in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven...; 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...**

**they make Christ known to others**, especially by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope and charity.

It is their **special task to order and to throw light upon (temporal) affairs** so that they come into being and continually increase **according to Christ** to the praise of the Creator and the Redeemer.

32. **By divine institution Holy Church is ordered 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".

Therefore, **the chosen People of God is one: "one Lord, one faith, one baptism"; sharing a common dignity as members from their regeneration in Christ, having the same filial grace and the same vocation to perfection; possessing in common one salvation, one hope and one undivided charity.**

**There is, therefore, in Christ and in the Church no inequality on the basis of race or nationality, social condition or sex, because "there is neither Jew nor Greek: there is neither bond nor free: there is neither male nor female. For you are all 'one' in Christ Jesus".**

If therefore in the Church everyone 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.**

And if by the will of Christ some are made teachers, pastors and dispensers of mysteries 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.

For **the distinction which the Lord made** between sacred ministers and the rest of the People of God bears within it a certain union, since pastors and the other faithful are bound to each other by a mutual need... Thus, **in their diversity all bear witness to the wonderful unity in the Body of Christ.** This very diversity of graces, ministries and works gathers the children of God into one, because "all these things are the work of one and the same Spirit".

Therefore, **from divine choice** the laity have Christ for their brother who though He is the Lord of all, came not to be served but to serve. They also have for their brothers those in the sacred ministry who by teaching, by sanctifying and by ruling with the authority of Christ feed the family of God so that the new commandment of charity may be fulfilled by all. **St. Augustine** puts this very beautifully when he says:

**"What I am for you terrifies me; what I am with you consoles me.**

**For you I am a bishop; but with you I am a Christian.**

**The former is a duty; the latter a grace.**

**The former is a danger; the latter, salvation"**

33. The laity are **gathered together in the People of God and make up the Body of Christ under one head.**

Whoever they are they are called upon, as living members, to expend all their energy for the growth of the Church and its continuous sanctification...

The lay apostolate, however, is a participation in the salvific mission of the Church itself.

Through **baptism and confirmation all are commissioned to that apostolate by the Lord...**

Now **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 it become the salt of the earth.

Thus, **every layman, in virtue of the very gifts bestowed upon him,**

**is at the same time a witness and a living instrument of the mission of the Church itself "according to the measure of Christ's bestowal".**

Besides this apostolate which certainly pertains to all Christians, the laity can also be called in various ways to a more direct form of cooperation in the apostolate of the Hierarchy. This was the way certain men and women assisted Paul the Apostle in the Gospel, labouring much in the Lord. Further, they have the capacity to assume from the Hierarchy certain ecclesiastical functions, which are to be performed for a spiritual purpose.

**Upon all the laity, therefore, rests the noble duty of working to extend the divine plan of salvation to all people of each epoch and in every land...** May every opportunity be given them so that, according to their

abilities and the needs of the times, they may zealously participate in the saving work of the Church.

34. **The supreme and eternal PRIEST, Christ Jesus, since he wills to continue his witness and service also through the laity, (he) vivifies them in this Spirit and increasingly urges them on to every good and perfect work.**

For besides intimately linking them to His life and His mission, **He also gives them a sharing in His PRIESTLY function of offering spiritual worship for the glory of God and the salvation of all.** For this reason, the laity, dedicated to Christ and anointed by the Holy Spirit, are marvellously called and wonderfully prepared so that ever more abundant fruits of the Spirit may be produced in them.

For all their **works, prayers and apostolic endeavours, their ordinary married and family life, their daily occupations, their physical and mental relaxation,** if carried out **in the Spirit,** and even the **hardships of life,** if patiently borne—all these become *“spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ”*. **Together with the offering of the Lord’s body,** they are most fittingly offered in the celebration of the **Eucharist.** **Thus, as those everywhere who adore in holy activity, the laity consecrate the world itself to God.**

35. **Christ, the great PROPHET, who proclaimed the Kingdom of His Father both by the testimony of His life and the power of His words, (he) continually fulfils His prophetic office until the complete manifestation of glory. He does this not only through the hierarchy who teach in His name and with His authority, but also through the laity:**

whom He made His witnesses and to whom He gave understanding of the faith (*sensu fidei*) and an attractiveness in speech so that the power of the Gospel might shine forth in their daily social and family life.

They conduct themselves as children of the promise, and thus strong in faith and in hope they make the most of the present, and with patience await the glory that is to come.

Let them not, then, hide this hope in the depths of their hearts, but even in the program of their secular life let them express it by a continual conversion and by wrestling *“against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness”* (Eph 6:12).

Just as the sacraments of the New Law, by which the life and the apostolate of the faithful are nourished, prefigure a new heaven and a new earth, so too the laity go forth as powerful proclaimers of a faith in things to be hoped for, when they courageously join to their profession of faith a life springing from faith. **This evangelization, that is, this announcing of Christ by a living testimony as well as by the spoken word, takes on a specific quality and a special force in that it is carried out in the ordinary surroundings of the world.**

In connection with the **prophetic function, that state of life which is sanctified by a special sacrament obviously of great importance, namely, married and family life.** For where Christianity pervades the entire mode of family life, and gradually transforms it, one will find there both the practice and an excellent school of the lay apostolate. In such a home, husbands and wives find their proper vocation in being witnesses of the faith and love of Christ to one another and to their children. The Christian family loudly proclaims both the present virtues of the Kingdom of God and the hope of a blessed life to come. Thus, by its example and its witness it accuses the world of sin and enlightens those who seek the truth.

**Consequently, even when preoccupied with temporal cares, the laity can and must perform a work of great value for the evangelization of the world.**

For even if some of them have to fulfil their religious duties on their own, when there are no sacred ministers or in times of persecution;

and even if many of them devote all their energies to apostolic work;

**still it remains for each one of them to cooperate in the external spread and increase of Christ’s Kingdom.**

- 36 To Him all things are made subject (that is, to Christ) until He subjects Himself and all created things to the Father that God may be all in all. Now Christ **has communicated this ROYAL POWER** to His disciples that they might be **constituted in ROYAL FREEDOM** and that by true penance and a holy life they might conquer the reign of sin in themselves. But the Lord wishes **to spread His kingdom also by means of the laity,** namely, a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace.

**In this kingdom creation itself will be delivered from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the sons of God.** Clearly then a great promise and a great trust is committed to the disciples:

***“All things are yours, and you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s”.***

- **The faithful, therefore, must learn the deepest meaning and the value of all creation, as well as its role in the harmonious praise of God.**
- **The laity have the principal role in the overall fulfilment of this duty.**
- Therefore, by their **competence in secular training and by their activity, elevated from within by the grace of Christ**, let them vigorously contribute their effort, **so that created goods may be perfected by human labour, technical skill and civic culture for the benefit of all according to the design of the Creator and the light of His Word**. May the goods of this world be more equitably distributed among all, and may they in their own way be conducive to universal progress in human and Christian freedom. In this manner, through the members of the Church, will Christ progressively illumine the whole of human society with His saving light.

Moreover, **let the laity also by their combined efforts remedy the customs and conditions of the world**, if they are an inducement to sin, so that they all may be conformed to the norms of justice and may favour the practice of virtue rather than hinder it. By so doing they will imbue culture and human activity with genuine moral values; they will better prepare the field of the world for the seed of the Word of God; and at the same time, they will open wider the doors of the Church by which the message of peace may enter the world.

... **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 reconcile the two**, remembering that **in every temporal affair they must be guided by a Christian conscience**, since even in secular business there is no human activity which can be withdrawn from God’s dominion. In our own time, however, it is most urgent that this distinction and also this harmony should shine forth more clearly than ever in the lives of the faithful, so that the mission of the Church may correspond more fully to the special conditions of the world today. For it must be admitted that the temporal sphere is governed by its own principles, since it is rightly concerned with the interests of this world. But that ominous doctrine which attempts to build a society with no regard whatever for religion, and which attacks and destroys the religious liberty of its citizens, is rightly to be rejected.

37. **The laity have the right, as do all Christians, to receive in abundance from their spiritual shepherds the spiritual goods of the Church, especially the assistance of the word of God and of the sacraments**. They should openly reveal to them their needs and desires with that freedom and confidence which is fitting for children of God and brothers in Christ. They are, by reason of the knowledge, competence or outstanding ability which they may enjoy, **permitted and sometimes even obliged to express their opinion on those things which concern the good of the Church**. When occasions arise, let this be done through the organs erected by the Church for this purpose. Let it always be done in truth, in courage and in prudence, with reverence and charity toward those who by reason of their sacred office represent the person of Christ.

**The laity should, as all Christians, promptly accept in Christian obedience decisions of their spiritual shepherds**, since they are representatives of Christ as well as teachers and rulers in the Church. Let them follow the example of Christ, who by His obedience even unto death, opened to all men the blessed way of the liberty of the children of God. Nor should they omit to pray for those placed over them, for they keep watch as having to render an account of their souls, so that they may do this with joy and not with grief.

**Let the spiritual shepherds recognize and promote the dignity as well as the responsibility of the laity in the Church.**

- Let (the bishops) willingly employ their prudent advice.
- Let them confidently assign duties to them in the service of the Church, allowing them freedom and room for action.
- Further, let them encourage lay people so that they may undertake tasks on their own initiative.
- Attentively in Christ, let them consider with fatherly love the projects, suggestions and desires proposed by the laity.
- However, let the shepherds respectfully acknowledge that just freedom which belongs to everyone in this earthly city.

A great many wonderful things are to be hoped for from this familiar dialogue between the laity and their spiritual leaders:

- in the laity a strengthened sense of personal responsibility; a renewed enthusiasm; a more ready application of their talents to the projects of their spiritual leaders.
- The latter, on the other hand, aided by the experience of the laity, can more clearly and more incisively come to decisions regarding both spiritual and temporal matters.

**In this way, the whole Church,  
strengthened by each one of its members,  
may more effectively fulfil his mission  
for the life of the world.**

**38. Each individual layperson must stand before the world as a witness to the resurrection and life of the Lord Jesus and a symbol of the living God.**

- All the laity as a community and each one according to his ability must nourish the world with spiritual fruits.
- They must diffuse in the world that spirit which animates the poor, the meek, the peace makers whom the Lord in the Gospel proclaimed as blessed.

**In a word, “Christians must be to the world what the soul is to the body”.**

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