

The Catholic Layman, a Daily Witness in the World for the Church

(This is the fourth of the eight chapters of the Vatican Council's Constitution on the Church, as released by N.C.W.C. News Service.)

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 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 the 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 encourage their ministries and charisms so that all according to their proper roles may cooperate in this common undertaking with one mind. For we must all "practice the truth in love, and so grow up in all things in Him who is head, Christ, from whom the whole body, being closely joined and knit together through every joint of the system according to the functioning in due measure of each single part, derives its increase to the building up of itself in love" (Eph 4:15-16).

Laymen by Baptism

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 as such 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 for their own part the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world.

What specifically characterizes the laity is their secular nature. It is true that those in holy orders can at times be engaged in secular activities, and even have a secular profession. But they are by reason of their particular vocation especially and professionally ordained to the sacred ministry. Similarly, by their state in life, religious give splendid and glowing 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.

They live in the world that is in each order in all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life from which the very wealth of their existence is woven. They are called 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 the way that they may make Christ known in their lives, especially by the witness of a life independent in faith, hope and charity.

Therefore, since they are tightly bound up in all types of temporal affairs it is their special task to order and to bring light upon these affairs in such a way that they may come into being and then continue to increase according to Christ to the praise of the Creator and the Redeemer.

All Men Equal

32. Real and ideal unity Holy Church is a body and governed with a wonderful diversity. For just as in one body we have many members, so all the members have not the same functions, so we the many are one body in Christ but several members of another (Rom 12:4-5). Therefore the chosen People of God is one, "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph 4:5), sharing a common dignity as members from their regeneration in Christ, having the same filial grace and the same vocation to participate in the 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 male nor female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28, cf. Col 3:11).

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 (cf. 2 Pt 1:1). 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. Pastors of the Church, following the example of the Lord, should minister to one another and to the other faithful. These in turn should enthusiastically lend their joint assistance to their pastors and teachers. 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" (1 Cor 12:11).

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 (cf. Mt 20:28). 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 writes: "I am for you terrified 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" (1).

Lay Apostles

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 extend all their energy for the growth of the Church and its continuous sanctification. Since this very energy is a gift of the Creator and a blessing of the Redeemer, the lay apostolate, however, is a participation in the salvific mission of the Church itself.

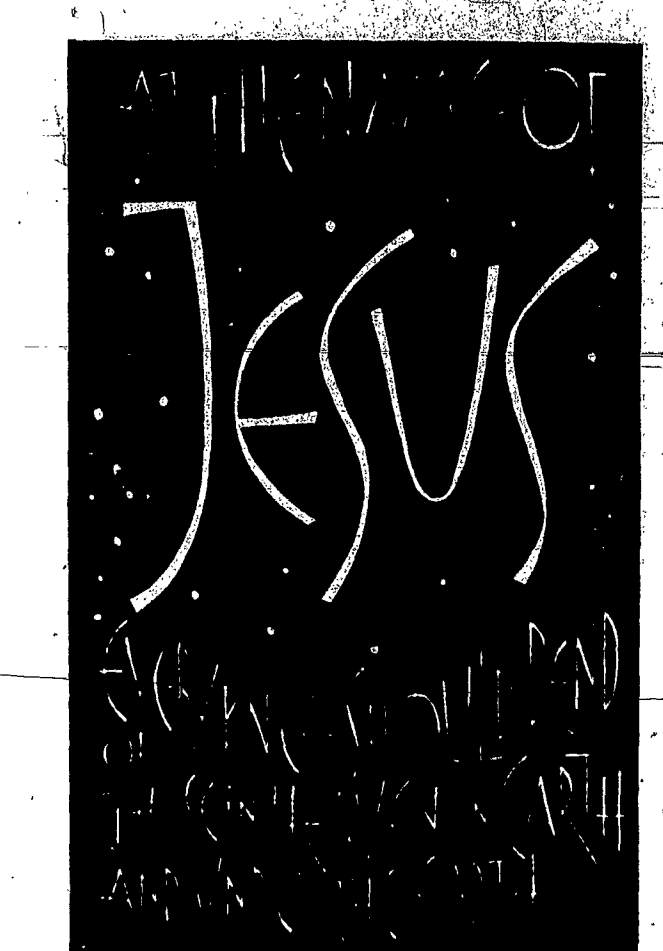
Through their baptism and confirmation all are commissioned to that apostolate by the Lord Himself. Moreover, by the sacraments, especially holy Eucharist, that charity toward God and man which is the soul of the apostolate is communicated and nourished. Now the laity are called in a special way to make the Church present and operative in those places and circumstances where only through them can it become the salt of the earth (2). Thus every layman in virtue of the very gifts he is endowed with 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 (Eph 4:7).

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 (3). This was the way certain men and women assisted Paul the Apostle in the Gospel, laboring much in the Lord (cf. Phil 4:3, Rom 16:3ff). 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 in every land. Consequently, 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.

Lay Liturgists

34. The supreme and eternal Priest, Christ Jesus since He wills to continue this witness



From Holy Name Mass, Jan. 3

and service also through the laity, sacrifices them in the 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 men. For this reason the laity, dedicated to Christ and anointed by the Holy Spirit, are marvelously called and wonderfully prepared so that even more abundant fruits of the Spirit may be produced in them. For all their works, prayers and apostolic endeavors, 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" (1 Pet 2:5).

Together with the offering of the laity, 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, continually fulfills His prophetic office until the complete manifestation of the Kingdom. 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 in whom He gave understanding of the faith (consent) and an attractive newness in speech (cf. Mt 2:17-18, Apoc 10:10) 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 (cf. Eph 5:16, Col 4:5), and with patience await the glory that is to come (cf. Rom 8:25). Let them not, then, lose 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 produce a new heaven and a new earth (cf. Apoc 21:1), so too the laity go forth as powerful proclaimers of a faith in things to be hoped for (cf. Heb 11:1), 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 is 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 fulfill 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 the dynamic growth of the Kingdom of Christ in the world. Therefore, let the laity devoutly strive to acquire a more profound grasp of revealed truth, and let them insistently beg of God the gift of wisdom.

Service to Others

36. Christ, becoming obedient even unto death and because of this exalted by the Father (cf. Phil 2:8-9), entered into the glory of His Kingdom. To Him all things are made subject until He subjects Himself and all created things to the Father (cf. 1 Cor 15:27-28). 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 (cf. Rom 6:12).

Further, He has shared this power so that serving Christ in their fellow men they might by humility and patience lead their brethren to that King for whom they seek to reign. 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 (4). In this kingdom creation itself will be delivered from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the sons of God (cf. Rom 8:21).

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" (1 Cor 3:23). 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. They must assist each other to live holier lives even in their daily occupations. In this way the world may be permeated by the spirit of Christ and it may more effectively fulfill its purpose in justice, charity and peace. The laity have the principal role in the overall fulfillment 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 labor, technical skill and civic culture for the benefit of all men 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 men, 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 impediment to such that they hinder 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 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.

Because of the very economy of salvation 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 righty 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 (5).

Rights of Laity

37. The laity have the right, as do all Christians to receive in abundance from their pastors the spiritual goods of the Church, especially the assistance of the word of God and of the sacraments (6). They should openly resist 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 (7).

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 and decisions of their pastors, 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 (cf. Heb 13:17).

Let pastors recognize and promote the dignity as well as the responsibility of the laity in the Church. Let them 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 pastors encourage by 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 pastors respectfully acknowledge that just freedom which belongs to everyone in this earthly city.

London Prelate Says

Fear on Decline In Soviet Russia

London — (RNS) — There is an "absence of fear" on people's faces in Russia today and evidence that the economical movement is working for better relations between the Russians and Roman Catholics, according to Archbishop John C. Heenan, Primate of England and Wales.

Archbishop Heenan made this report on his return to London after a three-months absence which took him first to Rome for the Vatican Council, then to Bombay for the Eucharistic Congress, and then to Moscow.

He recalled at a press conference that he visited Moscow as a priest in 1936, when he was a curate in Baker, East London. On that visit he wore layman's clothing, but on his recent one he was dressed as a bishop.

The Catholic primate said he found a big change in Russian conditions. "Now," he said, "there is an absence of fear. I no longer see it on people's faces. When I was there before, Stalin's purges were at their height. There is less fear now, but the essential attitude of the Soviets towards the Church is still the same and there are very few Catholics in Russia."

"But the Orthodox Church is much stronger," he continued. "People flocked to church during the war and many have continued to go. I was at an Orthodox church on Sunday (Dec. 13) and listened to the most beautiful singing I have ever heard. I noticed that many members of the choir looked very young — about 19 or 20 — but most of the congregation were older people. Churchgoers were mostly old, so perhaps we may still hope that others will still come back to the faith."

In reference to a meeting he had with Patriarch Alexei, head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Archbishop Heenan said the atmosphere was "tremendously cordial." "I felt this great bond between us," he said. "It is quite obvious that the ecumenical movement is working for better relations between the Russians and ourselves."

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A great many wonderful things are to be hoped for from this familiar dialogue between the laity and their pastors. In the laity a strengthened sense of personal responsibility; a renewed enthusiasm; a more ready application of their talents to the projects of their pastors. 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 fulfill its mission for the life of the world.

38. Each individual layman 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 the fruits of the Spirit (cf. Gal 5:22). They must diffuse in the world that spirit which raises up the poor, the weak, the peace makers—those whom the Lord in the Gospel proclaimed blessed (cf. Mt 5:3-8). In a word, "as the soul is in the body, so let this spirit be in the Christian world" (9).

NEXT WEEK—Vocation to Holiness.

He emphasized that his visit to Moscow was a purely private one. He went there not as a representative of the Church but simply as one active in the ecumenical movement. It was an opportunity to meet leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church—who visited Britain earlier this year as guests of the Anglican Primate of England, Archbishop Arthur Michael Ramsey, and it was the shortest way home from Bombay.

Archbishop Heenan said he did not take any tourist trips in Russia, nor did he meet senior government officials. While in Moscow he celebrated Mass for Roman Catholics at a service in the Argentine Embassy.

Czech Reds Ask Atheist Rights

United Nations — (RNS) — Communist Czechoslovakia filed formal objections to a proposed draft declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Religious Intolerance by a study commission of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights.

Chief reason given was failure to equate atheism and religion in the declaration. The Czech Communiqué to the Human Rights Commission noted "the rapid development of science and technology in our epoch... there are now living in the world millions of people who do not adhere to any religion and support the ideas of atheism."

Since the draft declaration currently being circulated for consideration among U.N. member states fails to mention protection of the rights and equal status of atheists it met with Czech opposition. It is hoped that final agreement on a declaration will lead to its adoption by the General Assembly.

Expansion of the declaration to admit atheists on equal footing with believers was recommended.

Negro Issue Colors World's Opinion of U.S.

By GARY MacEDON

I wrote last week about the reactions of a group of Latin American opinion leaders to our election campaign and voting procedures. This was just one element in a program which offered them the opportunity to discuss United States policies and practices with a number of historians, social scientists, newsmen, politicians and public officials.

They were understandably interested in our programs of foreign aid and our defense and Cold War policies. But both formal and informal discussions convinced me that they regarded equal rights as the touchstone of United States sincerity. They were remarkably well informed about the developments of the past few years. Indeed, it seems to me that our enemies may have done us a favor by stressing in their propaganda how far our practice in race relations fell behind our principles. The bleak picture they painted serves to highlight the rate of progress.

"How can a local administration succeed for years in frustrating the national will

is clearly expressed by Congress and the federal executive?" This is the question that seems to be asked most insistently by foreign observers.

Many Latin American countries have nominally federal political systems. But in practice they are highly centralists. When the "strong man" voices his position, the response all the way down is automatic. It is natural for people raised in such traditions to suspect connivance when the local level ignores the command given by the central executive.

That is, of course, the same question we hear with increasing shrillness from individuals and groups within the country dissatisfied with the rate of progress. I have, nevertheless, found that our visitors become quickly convinced of the positive values of our present system, once they get to understand the motives which dissuade the federal authorities from using force except as a last resort.

A newsmen from Venezuela summed up his observations for me. "We hear a lot about race discrimination in the United

States, and we cannot reconcile your practices and attitudes with the rest of our image of your country as the leader of world democracy. What I have seen, however, is a society in action. The Negro is a victim of discrimination in many ways, especially in access to housing and in job opportunity. But the improvement is more rapid than I was led to expect."

Asked to what extent his own views reflected those of the general Venezuelan public, my friend said that he thought that both Venezuelans and Latin Americans in general were rather well informed about the facts, far better than is the United States public about social problems in their countries.

"United States news and picture magazines circulate widely not only in English but in Spanish editions. Our local newspapers and magazines, moreover, rely heavily on your news agencies and syndicates for their material. And as the United States is very frank in its reporting of its peculiarities, we get every detail about each riot, flouting of the law and race murder."

"On top of this, however, we have an element that is less known in the United States. Journalism of opinion is very important in our countries, and many of the views writers are Communist sympathizers. They use the facts to construct an image of a country built on racist principles. And this technique may backfire, because what we have seen in a country working hard to bring its practice into conformity with its principles."

Our friends in Latin America, accordingly, believe that any slackening of the tempo of our human rights program would do us incalculable harm in their country. "What is most gratifying," one of them said to me, "is to be able to contrast the situation in South Africa and that in the United States. Both have grave racial problems and a deep tradition of discrimination. But while South Africa is dedicated to a continuance of injustice, the United States moves to be true to itself. To slow down now would be to abandon your friends and give comfort to your enemies."

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