

The New Code of Canon Law The Laity and the Revised Code

By Father Kevin McKenna

The heart and lifeblood of the revised Code of Canon Law promulgated by Pope John Paul II is the legislation of an "attitude" that was the heritage of Vatican II: the Church as a communion, the People of God (*Lumen Gentium*, #3). Much of the code and its individual canons can be seen as the careful and deliberate working out of this theology, a perspective that sees all members of the Church exercising their baptismal responsibilities in building up the Body of Christ while respecting a diversity of gifts and functions.

Who are the "Christian faithful" as identified by the Code of Canon Law?

Three specific canons in the code (204, 205 and 206) summarize this term by reference to those baptized and in full communion with the Church by their common profession of faith and unity in sacraments and discipline. All the Christian faithful, by fact of their incorporation into Christ, share in the mission to bear witness to Him in the world.

How does the Code describe lay people and their role within the Church?

The Second Vatican Council defined laity as all the Christian faithful, except those in holy orders and in religious life. The code does not specify the laity by definition or description, but stresses lay people's participation in the Church's mission by virtue of their sharing in the common priesthood of the faithful. The revised code attempts to codify the developments of the post-conciliar era in which the role of the laity has been recognized and expanded to include a wide variety of positions in the ministerial, administrative and consultative life of the Church. Lay people may be appointed to the diocesan posts of chancellor (diocesan notary) and associate judges in the tribunal (church court). They may also serve in the tribunal position of defender of the marriage bond, or act as promoter of justice and advocate (lawyer) in matrimonial courts.

Since the Second Vatican Council, the role of the laity has been most observable in the ministerial life of the Church. The code incorporates into its legislation most of these changes. The formal ministries of lector and acolyte are detailed. The code retains the theological principle that the ordinary ministers of the sacraments

are bishops, priests and deacons, with the exception of matrimony in which the bride and groom are the ministers of the sacrament. Although an ordained minister is normally the Church's official witness for the sacrament of matrimony, with the approval of the Conference of Bishops and the Holy See, a lay person may act as the official witness when ordained ministers are lacking. Another contribution to the code is the opportunity given to lay people to receive the faculty to preach in specific and clearly defined instances.

Are any rights guaranteed the People of God in the revised code?

The code of 1983 can be viewed as one of the Church's first attempts to provide the equivalent of a "Bill of Rights" for all its members. There are at least 16 rights enumerated for all the Christian faithful, including: the right to make one's own spiritual needs known to the pastors of the Church; to make known one's opinion on matters that pertain to the overall good of the Church; the freedom to worship God in one's own rite; the right to follow one's own form of spirituality (provided that it is consonant with the doctrine of the Church); the right of participating in an apostolate; and the freedom to choose one's state in life. Members of the Church may also vindicate their rights in the competent ecclesiastical forum.

The new law of the Church also mentions obligations. In exercising their rights, the members of the Church must take into account the common good of the Church and its ministers; provide for the support of the Church and its ministers; and cooperate with the pastors of the Church in contributing to the proclamation of the gospel.

The observance of these rights, the increasingly active consultative role of the laity in the life of the Church as well as ongoing pastoral leadership positions will promote the code's fidelity to the vision of the Vatican Council — a Church in which all the baptized members contribute their gifts toward building up the Kingdom of God.

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NEXT WEEK: The Code of 1983, Book Two: "The People of God"

Singles club reunion set

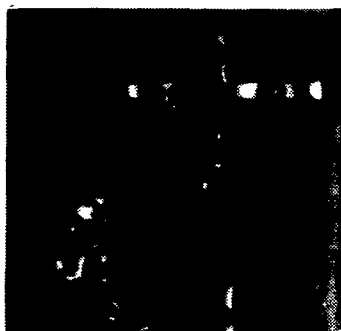
The St. Thomas More Club, an organization for singles, is having their 30 year reunion on September 20, 1986. The club was founded at Sacred Heart Cathedral as the St. John Fisher Club, and in 1956 became the St.

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Father Albert Shamon

A Word for Sunday



Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 17:20-26; (R1) Acts 7:55-60; (R2) Revelations 22:12-14, 16-17, 20.

In the first reading, St. Stephen prays for his enemies; in the third, Jesus prays for His friends.

Jesus' prayer after the Last Supper (John 17) was not one given to the disciples to recite, like the Lord's Prayer. Nor was it a prayer spoken in distress as in the agony in Gethsemane. Rather, this prayer was the conclusion and the climax of our Lord's farewell address to His apostles after the Last Supper. In ever-widening circles, it embraces first Himself, then His disciples and finally "all who will believe in me through their word" (R3).

And for what did Jesus pray for all of us who believe in Him? He prayed "that all may be one." He prayed for unity. He never meant unity to be uniformity, for the model of unity which He gave us was that of the Father and the Son. In the Unity of the Trinity, there is the distinction of persons. So ecclesial unity must have room for diversity. Unity without diversity is monotony. Diversity without unity is cacophony. But unity with diversity is beauty, like the unity between Father and Son and Holy Spirit.

Unity, or oneness, is one of the four marks of the Church of Christ. The Catholic Church is marked off from all other churches by the adjective "Roman." A "Roman Catholic" is one who belongs to the Church that has one head: the Bishop of Rome, the Vicar, the visible head of Christ on earth.

Leonardo Boff attacks the monarchic and pyramidal structure of the Catholic Church. Other liberation theologians would turn the pyramid upside down and make the base the church — the base Christian communities, which such theologians label as the "popular Church," as against the hierarchical Church.

That was why the Holy Father, in his sermon at the Mass he celebrated in Managua, Nicaragua, March 4, 1983 (which, incidentally, was sacrilegiously sabotaged by the Marxist Sandinistas) focused precisely on the theme of unity

in the Church. With a voice of extraordinary power, because the Sandinistas had turned off the altar microphones, the Holy Father projected these words, like bullets, "It is absurd and dangerous to imagine that there can be alongside, let alone in opposition to the Church around the Bishops, another Church conceived uniquely as charismatic and not institutional, new and not traditional, and as it has been recently hailed a 'popular Church.'"

The truth remains that Christ founded His Church with Peter and prayed for Peter — and Peter alone — that his faith fail not and that, being strengthened, he in turn would strengthen his brothers (Luke 22:32). To Peter and the apostles, He gave all authority and promised to be with them all days, so that the hierarchical church "through its Spirit-guided Magisterium, the eye of the Mystical Body of Church, might preserve unity in the whole body." "The task of providing an authentic interpretation of God's word in Scripture or Tradition has been entrusted only to the Church's living magisterium, whose authority is wielded in the name of Jesus Christ" (Const. on Div. Rev., #10). Thus doctrinal unity, or unity of faith, would be maintained in His Church.

Doctrinal unity expresses itself in unity of worship: the Holy Eucharist. St. Augustine said, "The Church makes the Eucharist and the Eucharist makes the Church." It is the Church which brings Christ to the altar at Mass. And Christ gives Himself and His Spirit at Mass so that the Sacrament of Love and the God of Love might gradually transform the assembly into a community of love — the sign of God's presence among men.

Finally, the purpose of doctrinal and liturgical unity, unity of mind and heart, is "that the world may believe that you sent me." For both love and truth are diffusive: where there is truth, there is teaching; where there is love, there is service.

Stephen died for the truth and prayed in love for his persecutors. His witness brought Saul to Christ, and gave the Church Paul.

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