



ORDO FRANCISCANUS SAECULARIS
- Initial Formation for Candidates -

Module 3: "ELEMENTS OF ECCLESIOLOGY AND THE
THEOLOGY OF THE LAITY"

sheet 5

2. The Identity of the Lay Person
(III) The Lay Person & Pastors in Mission

Having confirmed and furthered the participation of the laity in the mission of the Church, the Council Fathers of Vatican II go on to look more deeply at autonomy and relationship to the hierarchy of the Church.

This relationship is expressed in terms of :

equality in dignity &
diversity of function

In other words, a matter of rights & obligations

Lay people have the right, as do all the faithful, to receive in abundance the spiritual goods of the Church, especially the assistance of the Word of God and the Sacraments. The lay people make known to their pastors their needs and desire with that liberty and confidence which belongs to the children of God and brothers in Christ. [LG, 37]

The thinking of the Council, as later expressed in the Canons of the new Code of Canon Law [CIC, 1983] is markedly different from that of its predecessor in 1917. In the latter, the laity were entitled to the Sacraments and prohibited from wearing clerical attire! [The tone: 'subjection'] The new Code has a whole book [2] devoted to The People of God—and the Obligations and Rights of all the Christian Faithful are defined in Canons 204-223; The Obligations and Rights of the Lay Christian Faithful in Canons 224-131. A far cry from the meagre understanding afforded in 1917; but a valiant reflection of the thinking of the Council, especially in Lumen Gentium. [The tone is 'participation']

Working together with him, then, we entreat you not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says, 'At the acceptable time I have listened to you, and helped you on the day of salvation.' Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. We put no obstacle in any one's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labours, watchings, hunger, by purity, forbearance, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honour and dishonour, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as punished, yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

[II Cor 6.1-10]

From the 'right to receive' one passes to the 'right-duty to give' - "according to the knowledge, competence, and authority which they enjoy".

This work of mission is reciprocal—LG, 37



"Like all Christians, the laity should promptly accept in Christian obedience what is decided by the pastors who, as teachers and rulers of the Church, represent Christ."



"The pastors, indeed, should recognise and promote the dignity and responsibility of the laity in the Church. They should willingly use their prudent advice and confidently assign duties to them in the service of the Church, leaving them freedom and scope for acting. Indeed, they should give them the courage to undertake works of their own initiative. They should with paternal love consider attentively in Christ initial moves, suggestions and desires proposed by the laity."

{ I Thes 5.19 'Do not quench the Spirit'; I John 4.1 'Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God...'}

"Many benefits for the Church are to be expected from this familial relationship between the laity and their pastors."

Hierarchy and laity are thus associated in the mission of the Church which is not merely to bring the message of Christ and his grace, but also to penetrate and to perfect the temporal order with the spirit of the gospel. In certain areas of life, without the laity, the gospel of salvation cannot reach people. Nonetheless, one should not forget that this mission is realised in the whole Church in diverse and complementary ways.