

Vatican and pope john paul role of laity religion essay



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“ There is so much need today for mature Christian personalities, conscious of their baptismal identity, of their vocation and mission in the church and in the world...the world thus becomes the place and means for the faithful to fulfill their Christian vocation...” (John Paul II *Christifideles Laici*, 15)

Background

The teaching of the Church concerning the laity is one of the most uncommon pieces of good news in the world. By using the word ‘ laity’, the Church means all the faithful apart from those in Holy Orders, as well as those belonging to a religious state, which has been approved by the Church. The word is borrowed from the Greek term *laos* meaning the people and in this case, it implies the faithful, who through baptism, are introduced to Christ, and integrated to be among the People of God. They are then made to be sharers in a priestly and prophetic way. In addition, they have they have their role in the mission of the people in the world and in the Church. The laity are not the depositories of spiritual power but instead, they are the flock confined to the good care of the shepherds in this case, the priests, (Boudinhon). However, it is important to note that the clergy and the laity belong to the same society and are governed by the same doctrines under the catholic church practices.

The mission of the laity was first stated in the documents of Vatican II. The role of the laity is emphasized in the Constitution of the Church in Modern World as well as the Decree on Missions . In the Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II *Christifideles Laici*, which means Christ’s faithful people, an emphasis is placed on how the laity can have a significant impact on others. Any

human occupation in life can be a path to finding God, and an efficient way of helping others find Christ, (John Paul II).

Mission Statement

The purpose of this study is to distinguish the role of laity in the world and society as clarified by John Paul II. This will be achieved by focusing on Catholic documentation, which describes the role of the laity in today's society. The motivation behind this analysis is the increasing trend of confusion among the laity where they are taking on roles that are limited to the legally ordained priests. Since the Vatican II, the church has had to issue edicts on the same the most poignant one being the concerns raised by Pope John II over the laity's distribution of the Holy Communion, (P. J. II). Though the 2nd vatican council reportedly outlined and clarified the role of the laity, this is yet to become fully actualized in the church more so at the bottom levels in the parish. It is important to note that though the council of fathers and pope john paul II outlined the roles of the laity, it was not without some caution as seen in this section of the *Gaudium et Spes* or the pastoral constitution,

“...this council exhorts Christians, as citizens of two cities, to strive to discharge their earthly duties conscientiously and in response to the Gospel spirit. They are mistaken who, knowing that we have here no abiding city but seek one which is to come, think that they may therefore shirk their earthly responsibilities. For they are forgetting that by the faith itself they are more obliged than ever to measure up to these duties, each according to his proper vocation. Nor, on the contrary, are they any less wide of the mark

who think that religion consists in acts of worship alone and in the discharge
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of certain moral obligations, and who imagine they can plunge themselves into earthly affairs in such a way as to imply that these are altogether divorced from the religious life. This split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age. . .

To avoid falling into the pitfalls outlined by the noble council, this paper seeks to critically reexamine the role of the laity in light of the existing literature on the same. From this analysis, the paper will seek to come up with a conclusion and recommendation as to the way forward in creating a middle ground where the laity and the other catholic hierarchies do not compete but work in tandem in spreading the gospel.

Methodology: Exploratory research approach

In order to effectively address its target audience, which is high school theology teachers, the study will dwell on Catholic documentation, as the basis of its arguments both as a strategy of getting deeper insight but also providing the audience with more sources of reference for their own research or general reading. This means that the study will be based on secondary research, with an effective analysis of Catholic literature. The Catholic documentations that will be utilized to complete the report are Splendor of the Church, Mariology, Catechism of the Catholic Church, The Role of Laity: an Examination of Vatican II Christifideles Laici, and Encyclical Christifideles Laici, among others.

The Role of Laity

Though many Catholics have the interest of being more involved in the church, they lack a clear comprehension of their role in the Church. It is important to note that the lay state implies a vocation resulting from our baptism and not just a state of belonging to the fellowship. Their role is important in attaining the mission of the Church. The laity is called in order to take part in the affairs of the society and the world, and carry out their duties as per the will of God. The unique ability that the laity has is to bring the divine message of Christ in all ways of life. Our role then is twofold, to continually nurture the life of our own members and secondly, to bring the light of Christ to the unbelievers of the world.

One of the most outstanding aspects of the Catholic Church is its structure, and the manner in which it operates. There is a defined organization from the hierarchy to the laity. The structure of the Catholic Church usually depicts the laity in the outer circle of several concentric circles. These circles are also, at times, referred to as the feet and legs of a human form. Some people believe this to imply that the laity is the outer circle, or the lower extremities, those not consecrated as priests or religious. As a result, they are sometimes seen to be part of a less significant component of the Church. But the lay people being less significant could not be further from the truth. Many of the common understandings of laity as constituted in the Catholic Church are mistaken as they are based on wrong definitions and more so, what they are not. Through the minimalist view of what the laity is not, the negative perception becomes integral in any more examination of this important part of the church. For a clear understanding of the laity, it is

obvious that the laity has to be defined for what they are and the church does so by succinctly declaring that the laity are;

Sharers in Christ's office of priest, prophet and king

Holders of an important vocation in the church

The Laity is critical in the overall fulfilling of the church's mission that is spreading the gospel, (Linden).

Through baptism and confirmation, we are selected to share in the priestly, prophetic and kingly offices of Christ. We share in the prophetic priesthood by living holy lives, taking part in the sacraments, and becoming living examples of Christ's word. As laity, we can participate because we can sanctify, teach and govern as members of Christ's Church. Laity is in constant contact with nonbelievers. Even though the pope and bishops have the primary responsibility of governing the church; lay people have roles such as campus ministry, elementary, secondary and college level instructors, parish ministries and Church related organizations that all aid in the authority of the Church. The members of the church bring and engage in diverse talents, gifts, responsibilities and ministries. Laity lives while interacting with others, rejoicing in the dignity and commitment of the Church. The fact that we are joined with and to Christ enables us to share in His priestly, prophetic and kingly ministries.

Mission and Vocation of the Laity

The laity are individuals whose main vocation is to introduce Jesus Christ to the world. According to the Vatican II Decree on the laity, all Christians have

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the obligation of working toward bringing the salvation message for everybody to hear. In the secular arena, the role of the laity is to maintain temporal order (Olson). The Decree states that these roles are achieved by the guidance of gospel and Christian love.

It is important to realize that, as per the Church's teachings, the mission and vocation of the laity comes from Baptism. This is made affirmed through confirmation. This implies that the work and place of the laity in Christ's body is given directly, by the Holy Spirit, and not in an indirect way through an ordained office. The Pope states that God himself dispenses the laity to the apostolate. He adds that they are consecrated to the royal priesthood so that they may be the witnesses of Christ to the entire world. Therefore, the laity is called with the aim of sharing the mission of the Church of Christ by living in the world as well as addressing all its concerns and challenges with the message of salvation, (Faculty of Catholic University of America, ed). As members of the family of God and the Church, the laity are not on their own. They are united in Christ and with the family of God, which is the church. This is because the Church is seen to be a functioning and living body. Though there are many missions that the laity are called to, this paper will highlight only the major ones. They are taken from part 3 of the *Christifidelis laici* and many more can be found throughout the important document.

Promoting the Dignity of the person (CL 37)

Today's world is wrought with many problems for every individual. The laity has the duty to rediscover and make others rediscover their dignity. This is one of the most essential roles for the laity and it helps reunite the Christian family. According to pope john II, the human being is the centre and summit
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of all that exists on this earth and as such, their dignity is the most precious possession of an individual. The laity has the important role of helping the lost ones to regain their most precious possession.

Bringing the Message to the World

One of the crucial roles of the laity is to bring the message of Christ to the whole world. The laity have been entrusted by God with the apostolate by the desirable quality of their Baptism as well Confirmation . They have the right as well as duty, grouped at associations or individually, to work so that the message of salvation is known and also accepted by everybody in the world. This role is more urgent when it is only through the laity that men and women can get the chance to hear the Gospel and learn about Christ. The activity of the laity in ecclesial communities is so essential that, for most of the part, the apostolate of pastors is not able to be efficient without it . John Paul II stated in the *Christifideles laici* that the world is a place for the lay Christians to attain their Christian vocation. Our baptismal identity tells us who we are and equips us to do the work we are called to do. The importance of the laity's activities in ecclesial communities is highlighted by the fact that the apostolate of other hierarchies cannot work effectively without the laity playing their role.

The Laity as Disciples in the World

The baptismal identity of the laity tells the society who they are, and equips them to carry out their duties as per their calling. The identity as a priest, prophet and king is not just for reference but guides us towards accomplishing what we have been called to do. In this context, it is important to note that the work of evangelizing cannot be carried by one person. The <https://assignbuster.com/vatican-and-pope-john-paul-role-of-laity-religion-essay/>

laity is not just a mass of followers but in fact consists of a body of disciples who are in a constant mission of carrying out the work that Jesus Christ set out to do. The role of evangelization is about bringing the good news of Jesus into every human situation and seeking to convert individuals and society. Evangelization can be through personal conversion, witnessing or just sharing the word and the fact that the laity makes up 98.6% of the church places them in the right position to administer the faith, (Michael Sweeney).

Discernment

The laity cannot fulfil their duty if they are not able to learn the signs of the time. It is important for the laity to look out for what the Holy Spirit is exhorting us to do if at all we are to accomplish any roles that we have set for ourselves. In *Christifidelis Laici*, pope john paul II guided us on where we can expect to see these signs of the times in order to do the bidding of the holy spirit. However, the most important aspect remains having faith and believing that we have actually been called as this forms the basis of the Catholic Church. The document tells us as the laity to always engage in active listening of the word of God and to pray fervently in order to get the discernment that we desire. When we know what the Lord wants from us, then we have acquired the knowledge to spread the gospel depending on our social and historic situations that are different. The call for us individually cannot contradict the call of the church as this is a call from the same God. To get this call, we have to be humble, courageous and wise to avoid picking extremist views as the rightful callings from the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

After looking at germane issues arising from the Vatican II and the subsequent clarifications by John Paul II, it becomes clear that the laity has a fundamental role in the modern Catholic Church. The use of secondary literature more so the Catholic documentations that were used to complete the report were Splendor of the Church, Mariology, Catechism of the Catholic Church, The Role of Laity: an Examination of Vatican II Christifideles Laici, and Encyclical Christifideles Laici, among others.

Despite this critical assessment of this literature, it remains the obligation of the audience to carry out more research. To understand one's role as a lay member of the Catholic Church means constant reevaluation as this is a role that is not just passive as previously thought but which carries a lot of personal responsibility. The special role of the laity, stemming from the special lay character that is theirs and nourished by the threefold sacraments of baptism, confirmation and marriage is to make the world a better place. The laity of the church must not feel threatened by what seems like the compartmentalization of the church because there is only one mission and intention whether a member belongs to the clergy or the laity. All members of the Church must always look to find ways to carry out the mission of the Church. Theology teachers need to instill a sense of membership within the students they teach. Informing students that Baptism is a sign of membership into the community may take time to resonate with them. However, by demonstrating how there are prerequisites to playing on a team sport, belonging to a scout group, or being a good family member, this may bring the point home. Engaging students in becoming more

comfortable with speaking about their faith is always a challenge but can be accomplished by a talking directly to students. The use of new approaches such as brainstorming sessions can bring to mind little ways in which we can be a community and church to one another would be effective.

The role of the laity in the church cannot be gainsaid. This study clearly indicates that the Church is in a constant need for the laity to play this role with creativity, authority, and power given by the Holy Spirit through Baptism. The laity is called in order to take part in the affairs of the society and the world, and carry out their duties as per the will of God. The unique ability that the laity has is to bring the divine message of Christ in all ways of life. The baptismal identity of the laity tells the society who they are, and equips them to carry out their duties as per their calling. Such an identity also points toward, as well as equips the laity to attain what they are called to do. It also makes it clear that the laity can only attain their roles when they work in communion with the Church.