

## THE ROLE OF THE LAITY IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH AND IN THE WORLD TODAY

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### ABSTRACT

Fifty-four years after Vatican II, it seems to the researcher that the role of the laity in the Roman Catholic Church is still problematic to some clergy and the laity. Some clergy and the laity still see the laity's role in the Roman Catholic Church as passive and overstretching their bounds when they wish to participate fully in the mission of the Church as priests, prophets and kings. There is an underlying tension between some clergy and the laity as to the proper role of the laity in the Church and in the world, whereas Vatican II clearly defined the role of the laity in the Church and in the world. In this article, the researcher seeks to lay bare the role of the laity in the Roman Catholic Church and in the world as prophetic, priestly and kingly; and to point out that there are some places in the world, such as the family, socio-cultural, politics, economics and so on, where only the laity are more qualified and competent and can more effectively preach the gospel by their words and deeds. Therefore, the article recommends that the clergy and the laity are both called by their baptism and confirmation to take active roles in the Church and collaborate in the mission of Christ for the spreading of the kingdom of God on earth.

**Key Words: Role, Laity, Clergy, Church, World**

### INTRODUCTION

After more than 54 years since Vatican II, the notion of the roles and ministries in the Roman Catholic Church are still imperfectly grasped by some clergy and the laity. Some of the centuries' old traditions of regarding the laity as subservient, passive, paying-obeying and praying members of the Church still persist in the minds of some clergy and the laity. Congar's description of the laity in the Pre-Reformation parish in the Roman Catholic Church is still true today in some parishes as in those days. The laity kneel before the altar and sit below the pulpit, and then put their hands in their purse.<sup>2</sup>

Sarpong lamented the undemocratic, hierarchical and clericalistic method of some bishop's (clergy) in Africa at the Conference of Catholic Bishops of Africa in Accra, Ghana in these words,

*The way some bishops wield episcopal power is often unAfrican and sometimes unChristian, and does great injustice to the common cause. The African is not used to dictatorship... No African potentate can just do what he likes and get away with it. He has often to fall in line with the wishes not only of his council but also of the common man if he wants to have a successful reign – autocratic rule is alien to African societies.*<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, Bishop Mwoleka, addressing the 1975 Plenary Assembly of SECAM, called the African experience of clericalism as incurable disease. He observed that "the root of the trouble is that we have a fixed idea of the Church. At meetings like this everybody seems to agree that the Church, of course, means

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<sup>2</sup> Yves Congar, *Lay People in the Church: A Study for theology of the laity*, transl. by Donald Attwater. (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1965), xi.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Kwasi Sarpong, "What does African Laity ask? In *African Ecclesiastical Review* (AFER), Vol. XIV, No. 4 (Kampala, Uganda: Marianus Press, 1972), 288.

all the faithful. But at the back of our minds and in our imagination, almost instinctively, the Church is always the Church of the clergy. The disease is incurable.”<sup>4</sup>

A Nigerian Roman Catholic Bishop addressing senior seminarians is said to have said, “we are the Church, you are not the Church; the Church speaks, you listen; we talk, you do the listening; we give directives, you obey; you are there, we are here; we send you, you go!”<sup>5</sup>

The chain of events in recent times, the unwritten rivalry or tension between the clergy and the laity in some parishes in the Roman Catholic Church calls for a better recognition and evaluation of the role of the laity in the Church. For instance, when some laity of the Roman Catholic Church in a particular diocese in Ghana were asked what they think hinder their full participation in the life of the Church, they said,

*O the attitude of some priests, thinking they know all; accepting no advise; do not consult anybody. There are lay societies such as, the laity council, parish council, finance committee, liturgical committee, and so on, but some of them are non-functional – just on paper. The priest, master of all, and the laity are never consulted.” However, “some of the clergy are doing their work as they ought to. Some of them are doing well by writing projects for the development of the parish. They are ministering to the people, forming the faith community and building up structures for formation. They ought to continue the good work.”<sup>6</sup>*

On the other hand, some said,

*The laity are not doing their work as they ought to do because: they are not well informed. There is a lack of support and dialogue. The laity are just sitting on the fence. Sometimes there is no transparency on the part of the clergy as regards the use of the Church’s property. The laity seems to be receiving always from the priests and do not give back. Some laity are honest in their vocation while others are careless with their God-given vocations. They do not help the hierarchy to look after the flock of Christ. Yet despite all the impediments the laity are trying their best to propagate the gospel. They join hands with the clergy to bring to the entire community the meaning of some of the Church’s doctrines and traditional practices. They are gradually infiltrating into the various lay structures in the Church. Thus, limiting the heavy schedule of the clergy, even though there are some problems sometimes.”<sup>7</sup>*

Moreover, when asked about the relationship between the laity and the clergy some of the responses were: “quite good, cordial.”<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, others said, “not very cordial; good, but needs to be improved; somehow; there is a good relationship, but the gap is still there.”<sup>9</sup>

Thus, it seems to the researcher from the above descriptions that the role of the laity in the Roman Catholic Church as outlined by Vatican II has not been fully realised in the Church. Some members of the laity are still passive, not participating fully in the life of the Church, either because they are poorly informed of their roles, rights, duties and responsibilities, or as the clergy responded, “they need more education from us, the clergy, so that they will know their proper role and responsibility in the Church.”<sup>10</sup> Thus, John Paul II said, “The laity are to be helped to become increasingly aware of their role in the Church, thereby fulfilling their particular mission as baptized and confirmed persons, according to the teaching of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* and Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*.”<sup>11</sup>

From the above analysis, it is clear that there is a need for the laity to participate in the life of the Church, to fulfil their roles in collaboration with the clergy, especially in those areas where the laity are more qualified, or where only the laity can more effectively carry out the mission of Christ in the Church and in the world. The data used for this article was based on a questionnaire administered to a cross-section of the laity and the clergy in one Roman Catholic Diocese in Ghana in 1996, Internet materials and library research.

<sup>4</sup> C. Mwoleka, “The Two Forms of Evangelization Demanded by Our Time: SCC and Human Promotion,” Acts of the 4<sup>th</sup> Plenary Assembly of SECAM (Rome, 1975), 181-182.

<sup>5</sup> Mwoleka, “The Two Forms of Evangelization Demanded by Our Time: SCC and Human Promotion,” 181-182.

<sup>6</sup> Written Interview, 1996.

<sup>7</sup> Written Interview, 1996.

<sup>8</sup> Field Survey, 1996.

<sup>9</sup> Field Survey, 1996.

<sup>10</sup> Interview, 1996.

<sup>11</sup> John Paul II. *The Church in Africa And Its Evangelising Mission Towards the Year 2000. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation*. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995), 96.

## The Objective

The situation described above and many others have motivated the researcher to explore critically the role of the laity in the Roman Catholic Church, a much neglected, but very important area of study today, and to expose the proper role of the laity in the Church so that both the laity and the clergy will know their roles and take up their proper places in the Church, for an effective participation and collaboration in Christ's priestly, prophetic and kingly mission in the Church and in the world.

## Definition of the term "Church"

For the purpose of this article, I took the definition of "Church" from the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church to mean,

...the sole Church of Christ which in the Creed we profess to be one, holy catholic and apostolic, which our Saviour, after his resurrection, entrusted to Peter's pastoral care (Jn. 21:17, commissioning him and the other apostles to extend and rule it (cf. Matt. 28:18, etc.), and which he raised up for all ages as the 'pillar and mainstay of the truth' (1 Tim. 3:15). This Church, constituted and organized as a society in the present world, subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him. Nevertheless, many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside its visible confines.<sup>12</sup>

In this sense, the term Church is used in this article not only for Roman Catholics but also Protestants, Orthodox, Pentecostals, Charismatics and Neo-Pentecostals, and in deed all the holy people of God, as much as possible, and in so far as they are "joined in many ways to the baptized who are honoured by the name of Christian, but who do not however profess the Catholic faith in its entirety or have not preserved unity or communion under the successor of Peter."<sup>13</sup>

## The Place and Role of the Laity in the Roman Catholic Church Before Vatican II

The clergy and the laity are the two modes of belonging to the Church. They form the people of God. They mutually identify and define each other and are intrinsically united that a theological study of each of them without the other is very difficult, if not impossible.<sup>14</sup>

However, until Vatican II, the Roman Catholic Church used a tradition, derived from the socio-historico-cultural context of the Medieval period to keep the laity passive in the Church's activities, and subservient to the clergy.<sup>15</sup>

In the next section, the researcher traces the origin and historical development of the distinction between the laity and the clergy in the Church since the post-apostolic era to Vatican II.

## The Distinction Between the Laity and the Clergy: A Tradition of the Post-Apostolic Church

The Scriptures, both the Old Testament and the New Testament, never used the term "laity" *laicos*. The term laity in the sense of the non-cleric is a later development in the tradition of the Church and therefore cannot be superimposed on scriptural or divine tradition. According to Osborne, "all authors are well aware, and in full agreement that the word *laicos* (laity) does not appear in either the Old Testament or the New Testament."<sup>16</sup> According to Osborne, the distinction between the laity and the clergy has a historical background, dating as far back as post-apostolic Church, but not in the New Testament. This distinction originated from a pastoral situation, a distinction between the people and the leadership of a worshipping community, given a dogmatic or theological rationalization in a post-200 AD Church.<sup>17</sup> In the view of Osborne, the New Testament is silent on the issue of ordination. Nowhere is it mentioned explicitly that

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<sup>12</sup> Austin Flannery (Gen. Ed.). "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," *Lumen Gentium* (LG). In: *Vatican II*. (Iperu-Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria: Ambassador Book Centre, 1988) # 8.

<sup>13</sup> Flannery (Gen. Ed.). "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," *Lumen Gentium* (LG), # 15.

<sup>14</sup> Kenan, B. Osborne, *Ministry: Lay Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church, its History and Theology* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1993), 20

<sup>15</sup> Osborne, *Ministry: Lay Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church, its History and Theology*, 20.

<sup>16</sup> Osborne, *Ministry: Lay Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church, its History and Theology*, 20.

<sup>17</sup> Osborne, *Ministry: Lay Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church, its History and Theology*, 20.

the twelve or the apostles, or the *episkopoi* were ordained, nor did any of the twelve, or the apostles, or the *episkopoi* ordained anyone.<sup>18</sup> Thus, Osborne said, “nowhere is there a command of Jesus to ordain.”<sup>19</sup>

However, according to Osborne, as the Church began structuring itself, it modelled itself on the ordered society, and a distinction was made between those in an *ordo* (clergy) and the rest of the populace (the laity).<sup>20</sup> Thus, the adoption, usage and interpretation of *ordo* in the Christian Churches had deep roots in the Graeco-Roman world but not in the New Testament writings.<sup>21</sup> Nowadays the term simply means to ordain or promote to any order, whether major or minor.<sup>22</sup>

After the time of Constantine, the term “ordination” or appointment to the “order of office bearers” clearly became more attractive because the clergy were seen as more exalted class in the Church in comparison with the lowlier believers. Thus, the beginning of “clericalization of ministry.”<sup>23</sup> Hence Osborne observed in the words of O’meara saying:

*The Church could not help but be modified in its self-understanding by the powerful and useful thought-forms and political institutions of the Roman world bestowing fixed positions and subordinate arrangement. This Roman social appropriation of order into Church polity was intensified by the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius in the Middle Ages. There a neo-platonic canonization of taxonomy of higher and lower orders took place.*<sup>24</sup>

Thus, the Church assumed the shape of the state in so far as she was situated in the historico-social context. Even though Jesus’ mission and ministry were neither clerical nor lay, the Church has used it to place believers into certain ecclesial offices or ministries. For example, the 1917 Code of Canon Law makes it as if the laity-clergy distinction is of divine origin. It states, “By divine institution there exist in the Church clergy distinct from laity.”<sup>25</sup> However, the 1983 Code of Canon Law states, “By divine institution, among Christ’s faithful there are in the Church sacred ministers, who in law are also called clerics; the others are called lay people.”<sup>26</sup> The Church since Vatican II has realised that the centuries’ old class system and the institutionalised clericalism is not of divine origin but tradition. Thus, the Church has sought to locate sacred ministry within the people of God.

Based on the above, recent Church declarations by Popes, Bishops, Pastors and theologians since Vatican II have called on the laity to take their place in the Church’s mission, not only on the temporal side, but also the ecclesiastical side as well. Thus, Congar observed,

*The laity are no longer mere passengers in a ship navigated by the clergy alone: they are in their own place, part of the ship’s company, jointly responsible with us for the voyage for which the priest, under the authority of the bishop, is obviously the one chiefly responsible and the leader, or the ship’s captain.*<sup>27</sup>

Nevertheless, there are still to be found among some clergy today, some of the mistrust, low opinion or reservation which was associated with the clergy of the pre-Vatican II towards the activities, initiatives, and involvements of the laity in the Church. Thus, in some parishes, some of the laity still feel that they are not taken seriously when they take part in certain Church matters or merely give their opinions on certain issues in the Church. In practice, the laity hardly count, and the tradition of the Church has never granted the laity a place as deliberating members in Ecumenical Councils. In so far as they are concerned, the laity only give advice, witness, consent and publish the conclusions adopted by the hierarchy. It is therefore, not surprising that the Councils up to Vatican II were indecisive as to the participation of the laity. Congar points out that at Vatican I, “no layman was invited thereto in any capacity whatsoever.”<sup>28</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Osborne, *Ministry: Lay Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church, its History and Theology*, 20.

<sup>19</sup> Osborne, *Ministry: Lay Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church, its History and Theology*, 26.

<sup>20</sup> Osborne, *Ministry: Lay Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church, its History and Theology*, 26.

<sup>21</sup> Osborne, *Ministry: Lay Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church, its History and Theology*, 20.

<sup>22</sup> New Catholic Encyclopaedia, vol x (Washington DC: Catholic University of America, 1967), 727.

<sup>23</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *Ministry: Leadership in the Community of Jesus Christ*, Transl. by John Bowden. (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1981), 36.

<sup>24</sup> Osborne, *Ministry: Lay Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church, its History and Theology*, 29.

<sup>25</sup> James A. Coriden, Thomas J. Green and Donald E. Heintschel (Eds.). *The Code of Canon Law: A Text and Commentary*. (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1985), 131.

<sup>26</sup> John Paul II, *The Code of Canon Law*. (London: Collins Liturgical Press, 1983), # 207.1.

<sup>27</sup> Congar, *Lay People in the Church: A Study for theology of the laity*, 250.

<sup>28</sup> Congar, *Lay People in the Church: A Study for theology of the laity*, 250.



However, at Vatican II, he said, “not only certain laymen but also some lay women were invited to attend and were present as auditors.”<sup>29</sup>

Today, the laity are beginning to find their proper role in the Church as active members of the Church, involved in its liturgical worship. Today, the laity are asking of their proper and active role in the life of the Church. Hence a proper understanding or theology of the laity is needed. We would examine who the laity are, their mission and role in the Church and in the world since Vatican II.

### Lay Participation in the Church and in the World

The concern for a theology of the laity in the Church is largely a recent development, in fact, since the twentieth century. Pope Pius X followed by Pope Pius XII began the movement which reached its climax in Vatican II.

According to Robert C. Broderick,

*The word laity is derived from the Greek word meaning ‘people.’ It is the general term used for all the members of the Mystical Body, of the Church universal, of the Catholic and other Christians who are not members of a professed religious order, society, or congregation, or are not ordained deacons, priests, or bishops. Sisters and brothers in religious life are considered members of the laity, except in canon law.*<sup>30</sup>

### Who are the Laity? A Definition

The laity are the simple, not specially qualified, members among God’s people, the whole of those who are consecrated. Clement of Rome defined the laity as that part of the people which is never priestly nor Levitical, it is a matter of the non-priestly, non-Levitical element among the holy people.<sup>31</sup>

Some of my respondents understand the term “laity” as “anyone in the Church who is not a priest,” “one who does not belong to the clergy or to any of the religious congregations of clerics, brothers or sisters,” “those not ordained,” “that is, “apart from the priests and the religious, the rest of the Church members are lay people, “all those not among the hierarchy” and so on.

*The Catechism of the Catholic Church*<sup>32</sup> and *The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church*<sup>33</sup> define the term “laity” as,

*all the faithful except those in Holy Orders and those who belong to a religious state approved by the Church. That is, the faithful who by Baptism are incorporated into Christ and are integrated into the people of God are made sharers in their particular way in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world.*

Moreover, Edward Schillebeeckx defines the term “laity” as, the baptised person who does not belong to the priestly hierarchy, but who either fulfils a secular task in the world (and does this in the light of the general aspiration towards Christian perfection).<sup>34</sup>

Also, Michael Schmaus defines the term “laity”

*as, the faithful who are not members of the priestly state or of the established religious order, i.e. the baptised who participate in the priestly, prophetic and pastoral office in their own way and carry out their own part of the mission of the whole Christian people.*<sup>35</sup>

Both the laity and the clergy are called to the same salvation and holiness by the action of the Holy Spirit, who moves all interiorly to this end, that they may love God with their whole heart, with their whole soul, with their whole mind and all their strength, and love one another as Christ loves his own.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, the laity are members of the people of God, but distinct from the clergy or religious, who dedicate themselves exclusively to the Kingdom of God. By their baptism, the laity share in Christ’s role as priest, prophet and king but carry out this mission precisely by being involved in family and social life and in secular activities and fulfil a secular task in the world. They are Christians whose Christian situation and

<sup>29</sup> Congar, *Lay People in the Church: A Study for theology of the laity*, 250.

<sup>30</sup> Robert C. Broderick, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. (New York, NY: Thomas Nelson Inc., Publisher, 1976), 335.

<sup>31</sup> Congar, *Lay People in the Church: A Study for theology of the laity*, 4.

<sup>32</sup> John Paul II, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), # 897.

<sup>33</sup> Flannery, Vatican II, *Dogmatic Constitution of the Church*, Lumen Gentium (LG), 31.

<sup>34</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *World and Church*, Transl. by Smith N. D. (New York, NY: Sheed and Ward Ltd., 1971), 68.

<sup>35</sup> Michael Schmaus, *Dogma: The Church, its origin and structure*, Patrick Burke (Ed.) and Mary Ledderer (Transl) (London: Sheed and Ward, 1972), 119.

<sup>36</sup> Michael Schmaus, *Dogma: The Church, its origin and structure*, 120.

responsibilities are determined from below, by their insertion into the life of the world, though they must live that situation and those responsibilities as Christians in the strength of the resources of their baptism and confirmation and of the *vita in Christo* of a true believer witnessing to the Lord.<sup>37</sup>

Moreover, the marks of the laity are their engagement in the world, in secular, marriage and professional life. They work for the Kingdom of God, but not at the expense of their earthly engagement. They serve God not by setting themselves above or apart from marriage and the professions but through marriage and the professions and in work. The laity follow a road which is longer and difficult, but it is their own, their vocation.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, in his discourse of 5<sup>th</sup> October 1957, Pius XII said, “It is in essentials the work of lay people themselves, of men who are clearly involved in economic and social life, taking part in government and legislative assemblies.”<sup>39</sup>

Likewise, Congar observed, “the layman is the Christian whose contribution to the work of salvation and the advancement of the Kingdom of God (and so to the double task of the Church) is made in and by his involvement in the structure of the world and in temporal work.”<sup>40</sup>

The Christian laity is the point where the leaven of the Gospel is thrust full into the meal of the world and meets its historical reality. It is by the mediation of the laity’s conscience that the divine law is written into the earthly city. Thus, Pius XII in his allocution of 20<sup>th</sup> February 1946, said,

*The laity are in the front line of the Church’s life; through them, the Church is the vital principle of the human society; they, in consequence, they above all, must be ever more conscious that they not only belong to the Church but they are the Church, that is, the community of the faithful on earth. They are the Church in so far as she tries to be the soul of human society...*<sup>41</sup>

Moreover, in her mission to guide the human society towards God and according to God, “the laity not only form part of the Church, but they are the Church.”<sup>42</sup>

The laity exist, not in order to constitute the Church as a sacral organism, but to enable her to accomplish her mission fully. That is something the Church cannot do without the laity. Therefore, the laity are necessary, not that the Church may be a power of salvation, but that she may carry out the fullness of her mission.<sup>43</sup>

Moreover, Congar said, “the priesthood cannot be everywhere,”<sup>44</sup> for the propagation and defence of the faith. To him, “in those lands it is the laity who carry on the Church (as they did from 1660 to 1864 in Japan).”<sup>45</sup> He added, “for more than two thousand centuries the Church there existed entirely through the laity, who baptised, received consent to marriages, presided at prayer and handed down the catechism.”<sup>46</sup>

The laity have often done the same in missionary countries. However, even though the laity can effectively start the Church, they cannot perfect her. According to Congar, “the Church is perfected as the mystical body only by the sacraments, and above all by the Eucharist, which only the priest can celebrate,”<sup>47</sup> but the Church can exist in a certain way even without the priesthood. Therefore, Congar wrote, “we must not think that there can be no Church without the cassock and the priestly power. The Church exists through the laity, but she cannot be perfected without the action of the priesthood.”<sup>48</sup>

Hence, it is evident that some aspects of the Church’s mission, such as spreading the faith in the world: domestic, cultural, professional, national and international life, can only be done effectively by those who are really engaged in these different spheres, and who know them and are qualified to speak about them. Therefore, there is a whole section of the world which the Church can effectively carry out only through the laity. In these areas, only the laity extend the Church’s influence.

<sup>37</sup> Yves, Congar, *Christians Active in the World*. (New York, NY: Herder and Herder Inc. 1968), 65.

<sup>38</sup> Congar, *Christians Active in the World*, 52.

<sup>39</sup> Congar, *Christians Active in the World*, 71.

<sup>40</sup> Congar, *Christians Active in the World*, 72.

<sup>41</sup> Congar, *Christians Active in the World*, 72.

<sup>42</sup> Congar, *Christians Active in the World*, 73.

<sup>43</sup> Congar, *Christians Active in the World*, 52.

<sup>44</sup> Congar, *Christians Active in the World*, 53.

<sup>45</sup> Congar, *Christians Active in the World*, 53.

<sup>46</sup> Congar, *Christians Active in the World*, 53.

<sup>47</sup> Congar, *Christians Active in the World*, 53.

<sup>48</sup> Congar, *Christians Active in the World*, 53

## The Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World

The mission of the Church is in principle the same for all, laity and clergy, to extend the message (mission) of Jesus Christ and to advance the Kingdom of God. The laity make their contribution towards the attainment of the universal, final, historic and cosmic end which Christ has in view in the building up of His Body, the Church. Thus, the laity share in the mission of the universal Church. By their baptism and confirmation, they are full members of the people of God and share in the priestly, prophetic and kingly functions of Christ. They also have the right and responsibility to share in the life and mission of the Church. Hence, the work of carrying out the mission of the Church does not belong to the clergy alone but also every baptised member of the Church. Therefore, to achieve the mission of the Church in the world, the laity and the clergy must co-operate with each other and with Christ in building up the Church.

Secondly, the laity form the greater percentage of the people of God, but some aspects of the universal mission of the Church are common to both the laity and the clergy alike, while other aspects or spheres of activity are limited to some members of the Church. For example, only those in Holy Orders are engaged in the Church's hierarchical ministry while the laity are engaged in the material and secular affairs, i.e., the family, social and business life, and practice of the various trades, skills and professions.

Moreover, the laity order temporal things according to the plan of God. They are meant to be a leaven in the world and sanctify it from within. They can also make Christ known especially by the witness of their lives.<sup>49</sup>

Furthermore, it is the duty of the laity to manifest Christ in their personal lives, family lives, through their ordinary manual work and house work, by exercising their trade or profession, in their business and social work.

Similarly, through the Christian laity, the life of the gospel can illuminate family life, civilisation and culture, science, economics, politics, work, promotion of fundamental human rights, justice and peace, the conquest of hunger and disease, the distribution of the earth's goods, the world of leisure, and so on.

Moreover, the laity by their training and experience, are competent in these spheres than those who do not possess it, i.e. the clergy; and with the help of the Holy Spirit, the laity are given special gifts to enable them to exercise their special apostolate through their secular activity in the world.

Therefore, it is the task of the laity to regulate life here on earth, and to do this automatically, not as tools of the priestly hierarchy, but as full lay people.<sup>50</sup> Thus, the laity has a very important role to play in social, political and economic life and both the working class and the intellectual leadership have to share in building up an environment that is receptive to grace. Moreover, the laity who are competent in this sphere must be responsible for the structural reforms of society because the hierarchical Church cannot make any positive contributions to this task. Certainly, the Church has a social inspiration, but she is in no way competent to apply this inspiration to concrete situations except through the laity. Therefore, it is for the laity to assess the situation autonomously, to apply whatever concrete measures necessary, and to be personally responsible for their actions.

Schillebeeckx said, "the Church's social teaching and particular solutions in this world are thus radically different and it is the legitimate task of a responsible laity to form the link between the two."<sup>51</sup> Hence, this responsibility of the laity must not be denied because they alone, in most cases, have the obligation to form their own free and autonomous opinion in the social, political and economic sphere in the light of the Christian faith and sound social philosophy.

The witness of the laity includes all spheres, i.e., the family, profession, science, technology, culture, politics and so on. There is no cleavage possible between one's profession and one's full Christian life. However, there is the temptation of some laity becoming so strongly interested in Church services and tasks that they fail to become actively engaged in their responsibilities in the profession, socio-cultural and political world: i.e., separating their faith from their life. Hence, Vatican II has urged the laity to a unity of life by forcefully decrying the grave consequences of separating their faith from their life, and the gospel

<sup>49</sup> Laurence Ryan, *Vatican II: The Constitution on the Church, a theological and pastoral commentary*, McNamara Kevin (Ed.) (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1968), 241.

<sup>50</sup> Raymond F. Bulman, "Workshop: Laity in the World Church" in *The Catholic Theological Society of America* (CTSA), Vol. 39, George Kilcourse (Ed.), (June 13-16, 1984), 108.

<sup>51</sup> Schillebeeckx, *World and Church*, 72.

from culture. The laity are to perform their earthly duties faithfully in response to the spirit of the gospel. Thus, John Paul II said,

*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 faith itself they are more than ever obliged to measure up to those duties, each according to one's vocation... This split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age.*<sup>52</sup>

In a similar way, Vatican II said, "one of the gravest errors of our time is the dichotomy between the faith which many profess and the practice of their daily lives."<sup>53</sup> Similarly, Sarpong said,

*The African makes no difference between his religious practice and, say his administration of justice or hunting exploits. Whether he is travelling or farming, or tending cattle, or dancing, he is deeply involved in a religious experience. Therefore, the notorious dichotomy between religion and politics is artificial to the African and should not be allowed to erode his sense of religion which acts as incentive to good conduct and a deterrent against aberrant behaviour. To the African, religion is like the skin that you carry along with you wherever you are, and not like the cloth that you wear now and discard the next moment.*<sup>54</sup>

Mbiti also made similar comment about African Traditional Religious believers:

*Because traditional religions permeate all the departments of life, there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the religious and non-religious, between the spiritual and the material areas of life. Wherever the African is, there is his religion: he carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party or to attend a funeral ceremony; and if he is educated, he takes religion with him to the examination room at school or in the university; if he is a politician he takes it to the house of parliament.*<sup>55</sup>

Thus, John Paul II said, "a faith that does not affect a person's culture is a faith not fully embraced, not entirely thought out, not faithfully lived."<sup>56</sup>

Moreover, the laity while properly fulfilling their secular duties in the ordinary conditions of life, should not dissociate themselves from union with Christ, but through the very performance of their task according to God's will, they should grow in it.<sup>57</sup>

Thus, the laity are not called to abandon their position in the world, because baptism does not take them away from the world at all. This is what St. Paul in 1 Cor. 7:24 said, "...in whatever state each was called, there let him remain with God." Therefore, the laity are called, so that led by the spirit of the Gospel, they may contribute to the sanctification of the world, as from within, like leaven, by fulfilling their own particular duties.<sup>58</sup>

Furthermore, let me quote John Paul II extensively:

*In order to achieve their task directed to the Christian of the temporal order – in the sense of serving persons and society – the lay faithful are not to relinquish their participation in the public life, that is in many different economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural areas, which are intended to promote organically and institutionally the common good. Moved by Christian charity and in harmony with the teaching of the Church, the lay faithful must always offer their contribution to the Christian renewal of the temporal order, aware that the basis of the moral norms that inspire their conduct should be the recognition of God as the source of life and salvation. In this way their individual and collective apostolic activity, will also be a school of perfection and Christian virtues, that will reveal the mystery of God to others and show that love is the only thing that brings salvation.*<sup>59</sup>

<sup>52</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, "Christifideles Laici" (Dec. 30, 1988), # 59.

<sup>53</sup> Flannery, Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, "Gaudium et Spes," # 43.

<sup>54</sup> Peter Kwasi Sarpong, "What does African Laity ask? In *African Ecclesiastical Review* (AFER), Vol. XIV, No. 4 (Kampala, Uganda: Marianus Press, 1972), 290.

<sup>55</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2.

<sup>56</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, "Christifideles Laici," # 59.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Vatican II, Decree on the Apostolate of the Lay People, "Apostolicam Actuositatem," # 4.

<sup>58</sup> John Paul II, Discourse to the participants in the National Congress of Church Movements of Cultural Responsibility, Jan. 16, 1982, No. 2.

<sup>59</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, "Christifideles Laici" #12.



And in the homily at the Independence Square, Accra (Ghana) on 8<sup>th</sup> May 1980, to mark the Centenary Anniversary celebration of the Catholic Church in Ghana, John Paul II said,

*You who are lay persons in the Church, all who possess faith, the greatest of all resources – you have a unique opportunity and crucial responsibility. Through your lives in the midst of your daily activities in the world, you show the power that faith has to transform the world and to renew the family of man. Even though it is hidden and unnoticed, like the leaven or salt of the earth spoken of in the Gospel, your role as laity is indispensable for the Church in the fulfilment of the mission she has received from Christ. As members of laity, you are called to take an active part in the sacramental and liturgical life of the Church, especially in the Eucharist sacrifice. At the same time, you are called to spread the Gospel actively through the practice of charity and through involvement in catechetical and missionary efforts, according to the gifts which each one of you has received (1 Cor. 12: 4 ff).*<sup>60</sup>

He added,

*Your Christian vocation does not take you away from any of your brothers and sisters. It does not inhibit your involvement in civic affairs nor exempt you from your responsibilities as a citizen. It does not divide you from society nor relieve you of the daily trials of life. Rather your continued engagement in secular activities and professions is truly a part of your vocation.*<sup>61</sup>

Elsewhere John Paul II said to the laity: Catholic Women's Organisation and the Catechists, on his historic visit to Nigeria in 1982.

*As lay people you know that your special apostolate is to bring Christian principles to bear upon the temporal order, that is, to bring the spirit of Christ into such spheres of life as marriage and the family, trade and commerce, and arts and professions, politics and government, culture and national and international relations.*<sup>62</sup>

Moreover, "in society you are called to be a leaven for Christ to witness to Christ in the school, in the government, in the town development union, and in politics."<sup>63</sup>

Hence, Vatican II observed, "For all their works, prayers, and apostolic endeavours, their ordinary married life, the daily labours, their mental and physical relation, if carried out in the spirit, and even the hardships of life, it patiently borne – all these become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Pt. 2: 5)."<sup>64</sup>

Thus, the proper field of the laity is the world. It is in the world that they have to sanctify themselves in their secular activities. Moreover, it is in the world, on the basis of their union with Christ, that they are to be evangelisers, striving to penetrate the whole human order with the saving and vivifying power of Christ. Benedict XVI said, "Through her lay members, the Church is present and active in the world. Lay people have an important role to play in the Church and in society. To enable them properly to take up this role, it is fitting that centres of biblical, spiritual, liturgical and pastoral formation be organised in the dioceses."<sup>65</sup>

Furthermore, by reason of their special vocation, it belongs to the laity to seek the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by directing them according to God's will, to animate the world with the spirit of Christianity; to sanctify the world from within, and to permeate and perfect the temporal order with the spirit of the Gospel.<sup>66</sup>

Similarly, the laity are given the special vocation: to make the Church present and faithful in those places and circumstances where it is only through them that she can become the salt of the earth;<sup>67</sup> and just as they are called by God to make of their apostolate through the vigour of their Christian spirit a leaven in the world.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>60</sup> John Paul II, Homily delivered at Independence Square, Accra, Ghana, on 8/5/80 and published in *L'osservatore Romano*, (2/6/80), 8.

<sup>61</sup> John Paul II, Homily delivered at Independence Square, Accra, Ghana, 8.

<sup>62</sup> John Paul II, An Address to the Laity, Catholic Women Organisation, and Catechists of Nigeria on his historic visit to Nigeria in 1982 (see G. A. Ojo, "Laity participation in the mission of the Church in West Africa" in *West African Journal of Ecclesial Studies* (WAJES), Vol. 1, (1989), 81.

<sup>63</sup> John Paul II, An Address to the Laity, Catholic Women Organisation, and Catechists of Nigeria, 81.

<sup>64</sup> Flannery, Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* (LG), 34.

<sup>65</sup> Benedict XVI. *The Commitment of Africa. Africae Munus*. Apostolic Exhortation. (Takoradi: St. Francis Press Ltd. 2011), 60.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Vatican II, LG 31; 10; and GS 43; AA 2.

<sup>67</sup> Flannery, Vatican II, LG 33.

<sup>68</sup> Flannery, Vatican II, AA 2.

According to Burke, a lay person may announce the word of God in the Church as part of his/her prophetic function, but “where the specific vocation of the lay person calls him to announce the word of God is not in the Church but in the world; in his factory, in his office, in his club, in his family.”<sup>69</sup> Thus, the laity have to do this not only by their example but also by directly communicating doctrine and knowledge of the faith. They also have to ensure that in their prophetic mission, it is truly the word of God that they communicate. Burke said, “it is not in sermonizing that he will do this (the role of the preacher fits the layman poorly) but in the normal exchange of view among colleagues and friends, where the impact of the Christian truth inspiring him will hit home.”<sup>70</sup>

Similarly, the laity are meant to be kings in relation to their work just as Christ was king in the everyday work he performed. The Christian is meant to dominate work, not to be dominated. Therefore, the laity must realise that their work, in which they dedicate themselves, is not just a means of making money or self-affirmation, but that it serves the divine plan.

Moreover, they should rule and direct their work to the fulfilment of their divine plan. Thus, Pope Paul VI said, “the laity’s role is not enhanced when they look for or are given a share in the clerical authority or service.”<sup>71</sup> They can go in that direction, but not many can go; and it is not their proper direction. Their share in the kingly mission of Christ is not essentially there but in the world. Their primary and immediate task is not to establish and develop their ecclesial community – this is the specific role of the pastors – but to put to use every Christian and evangelical possibility latent but already present and active in the affairs of the world.<sup>72</sup>

The laity in collaborating in the Church’s life and mission must also realise that their own field of evangelizing activity is the vast and complicated world of politics, society and economics as well as the world of culture, of the sciences and the arts, of international life, of the mass media and so on.

On the other hand, the laity must foster a feeling for their own dioceses, of which the parish is the kind of cell, and be always ready at their bishops’ invitation to participate in diocesan projects. Moreover, if the needs of cities and rural areas are to be met, the laity should not limit their co-operation to the parochial or diocesan boundaries, but must strive to extend it to inter-parochial, inter-diocesan, national and international fields. This is because the daily increase of population mobility, the growth of mutual bonds and the ease of communication can no longer allow a sector of society to remain closed in upon itself. Hence the laity must be concerned about the needs of the people of God scattered all over the world.

Furthermore, there is a social aspect of the Church; but the clergy are not in the world in the full sense as the laity. Therefore, unless the laity take up that job which is appropriate to their own state of life, that part of Christ suffers. Hence the laity who are versed in politics, and as it should be the case, firm in the faith and Christian teaching should not decline to enter into public life or politics. Rather, by a worthy discharge of their functions, they should work for the common good and at the same time prepare the way for the Gospel. Politics is not by nature dirty, unholy or evil as some Christians think. Therefore, the laity should not separate their union with Christ from their ordinary political life. Instead, through the very performance of their task which are God’s will for them, they should promote the growth of their union with Christ, just as St. Paul said in Colossians 3: 17: “whatever you are doing... do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

Hence, Vatican II observed: “The effort to infuse a Christian spirit into the mentality, customs, laws, and structures of the community in which a person lives, is so much the duty and responsibility of the laity that it can never be properly performed by others.”<sup>73</sup>

Moreover, the kingly mission of the laity involves permeating the whole social order with those Christian principles which humanize and elevates it. Thus, everyone has the mission and responsibility of acknowledging the personal dignity of every human being and of defending the right to life; but some laity are given a particular title to this task – parents, teachers, health workers and the many who hold economic and political power.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Cormac Burke, *Authority and Freedom in the Church*, (Britain: Guernsey Press Co. Ltd., 1988), 124.

<sup>70</sup> Burke, *Authority and Freedom in the Church*, 124-125.

<sup>71</sup> Paul VI, “*Evangelii Nunciandi*” 70 (cf. Burke, *Authority and Freedom in the Church*, 126).

<sup>72</sup> Paul VI, “*Evangelii Nunciandi*” 70.

<sup>73</sup> Flannery, Vatican II, AA 13.

<sup>74</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, “*Christifideles Laici*” proposition # 30.

Hence the laity should be proud of the opportunity to carry out their earthly activity in such a way as to integrate human, domestic, professional, scientific and technical enterprise with religious values for the glory of God.

However, these do not suggest that the clergy have no specific mission in the world. Of course, they have, “the whole Church has,”<sup>75</sup> but very often people do not listen to the clergy because “from the world’s point of view, the clergy and the hierarchy often appear as outsiders.”<sup>76</sup> They want to go to the world, and to preach the gospel, but often the way to the world is blocked to them; physically and morally. Moreover, Burke said, “people’s doors – factory doors, office doors, assembly doors, neighbourhood doors – are often closed to them. People’s ears too are closed to them.”<sup>77</sup>

However, the laity are “insiders.” They do not have to go to the world; they are already there. They are in the world as ordinary citizens, like the rest of their fellow citizens. Thus, in so many ways, they and they alone, can be effective evangelisers.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, Vatican II emphasises that “it is a fact that men cannot hear the Gospel and come to acknowledge Christ except through the layman they associate with.”<sup>79</sup> Hence Chrysostom said to the laity,

*...do not forget that together we form one single body, and that we differ from one another as member differs from member. Therefore, you must not leave concern for the Church to the clergy alone... You can do much more for people than the clergy... You have more opportunities for meeting one another. You know each other’s condition better... You can reprove and encourage one another better than we can...*<sup>80</sup>

Therefore, John Paul II appealed to the laity to exercise their kingly service by leading their fellow men and women to Christ not by coercion, but by free fellowship. Thus, by implication, the laity are to carry out their mission and role of spreading the divine plan of salvation to all men and women of every epoch all over the earth.

It is not the task of the laity to cultivate a properly informed conscience and to impress the divine law on the affairs of the earthly city. They are also in a lay way, to be Christ to the world, while the clergy has to be Christ to the Christian laity.<sup>81</sup>

Moreover, the laity can foster relations with followers of other religions through their example in the situations in which they live and in their activities. Thus, John Paul II observed,

*Throughout the world today the Church lives among people of various religions... All the faithful, especially the lay faithful who live among the people of other religions, whether living in their native region or in lands as migrants, ought to be for all a sign of the Lord and His Church; in a way adapted to the actual living situation of each place. Dialogue among religions has a preeminent part, for it leads to love and mutual respect and takes away, or at least diminishes, prejudices among the followers of various religions and promotes unity and friendship among peoples.*<sup>82</sup>

From the foregoing, we have learnt that since the mission of the Church is the same for all, both clergy and laity, the mission of the laity is not limited only to the temporal or secular sphere. Vatican II gives several “inner Church” ministries to the laity.

### **The Mission of the Laity in Inner Church Ministries**

The laity shares in the whole mission of the Church, therefore, it is also fitting that they share in several inner Church ministries. Vatican II gives a greater participation to the laity in decision making processes of the Church. However, this should not lead into clericalizing the laity; creating a lay elite. According to John Paul II, it is not enough merely to gather the faithful to carry out pastoral activities. The laity are not merely co-workers or helpers of the ordained ministry. Rather, they are called to act within the temporal

<sup>75</sup> Vatican II, AA 7

<sup>76</sup> Cormac Burke, *Authority and Freedom in the Church*, 127.

<sup>77</sup> Burke, *Authority and Freedom in the Church*, 127.

<sup>78</sup> Burke, *Authority and Freedom in the Church*, 128.

<sup>79</sup> Flannery, Vatican II, AA 3.

<sup>80</sup> Congar, *Lay People in the Church*, 358..

<sup>81</sup> Burke, *Authority and Freedom in the Church*, 129.

<sup>82</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, “Christifideles Laici” proposition # 30.

order and in the area of their own competence to build a society imbued with Gospel values.<sup>83</sup> Similarly, the laity's action within the Church communities is so necessary that without it the apostolate of the pastors will frequently be unable to obtain its full effect.<sup>84</sup>

Moreover, Pius XII admitted that the laity and the clergy are not on the same plane, even for those things that they do together. However, different their duties may be, they are complementary. Hence, since the Church's apostolic mission goes beyond purely spiritual duties, it follows that this mission is fully exercised only through the laity doing their own proper part in it. They are irreplaceably the Church for a whole world order of ecclesial activities. Furthermore, the clergy's part and laity's part are integrated in the Church's total mission without detriment to what is common to both. Thus, the laity's mission complements that of the clergy, which would not be fully effective without it.<sup>85</sup> Therefore, pastors must recognise the variety of charismatic gifts which are found among the laity and which enable them to co-operate in building up the Church with Christ.

### The Priestly Role of the Laity in the Church

The laity, as members of the Church by their baptism and confirmation, share in Christ's priesthood. However, even though they do not receive the fullness or more complete participation in the priesthood of Christ, they still share in a real way in the one priesthood of Christ. Essentially, the priest is the one who stands between humanity and God, to reconcile humanity to God. Thus, the priesthood is a sacrificial office. Ryan observed,

*The ordinary daily work of the Christian layman, every aspect of his married life, his acts of charity to others, his prayers, and good example, his recreation and enjoyment, his patient endurance of evil are the actions of one who is incorporated to Christ and who is anointed with the Holy Spirit. All this activity has a priestly dimension. Together with the life and activity of all other Christians it is now offered to God in union with and through Christ as a continuous act of worship and dedication.*<sup>86</sup>

According to Ryan, Christ acts through the ordained ministers, and because the laity are also incorporated to Christ by baptism, they are also associated with the liturgical exercise of Christ's priesthood in the Church. Hence, the laity also exercise their priesthood by participating in the liturgy. The laity exercise their priesthood especially through the eucharist, and by receiving Christ sacramentally they perfect their union with him and with one another.<sup>87</sup>

Moreover, the laity and the clergy share in the common priesthood of all the faithful. In addition, the laity exercise their common priesthood in their married and family lives and in all those forms of secular activity in which the clergy are not engaged and in which only the laity make the salvific action of the Church present.<sup>88</sup>

Furthermore, as regards the education of children, the laity's action is the condition of the efficacy of the priests. Congar writes succinctly:

*We priests have all experienced it; our catechism, our instructions on the use of the sacraments, and even on prayer, have serious results only where they find roots, and those roots are planted not by us but by the family. Where there is no Christian family, our efforts are nearly always stillborn: where there is one, they have a future. In short, it is not we who make Christians, it is the parents. We seldom achieve much by working on the children: we achieve everything almost certainly when we work on the parents.*<sup>89</sup>

Similarly, John Paul II in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici* observed:

*The Christian family as the "domestic Church" also makes up a natural and fundamental school for the formation in the faith: father and mother receive from the sacrament of*

<sup>83</sup> John Paul II, "Mission of the Church is to imbue social order with the Gospel values" in *L'Osservatore Romano*, (English ed.) No. 25 (1396) (Vatican City: June 1995), 6.

<sup>84</sup> Vatican II, AA 10.

<sup>85</sup> Congar, *Lay People in the Church*, 391.

<sup>86</sup> Ryan, *Vatican II: The Constitution on the Church, a theological and pastoral commentary*, 238-239.

<sup>87</sup> Ryan, *Vatican II: The Constitution on the Church, a theological and pastoral commentary*, 251.

<sup>88</sup> Ryan, *Vatican II: The Constitution on the Church, a theological and pastoral commentary*, 251.

<sup>89</sup> Congar, *Christians Active in the World*, 20



*Matrimony the grace and the ministry of the Christian education of their children, before whom they bear witness and to whom they transmit both human and religious values...*<sup>90</sup>

He added,

*The daily life itself of a truly Christian family makes up the first “experience of Church,” intended to find confirmation and development in an active and responsible process of the children’s introduction into the wider ecclesial community and civil society. The more that Christian spouses and parents grow in the awareness that their “domestic Church” participates in the life and mission of the universal Church, so much the more will their sons and daughters be able to be formed in a “sense of the Church and will perceive all the beauty of dedicating their energies to the service of the Kingdom of God.”*<sup>91</sup>

Sarpong advised: “in your reflection, remind yourselves that families evangelise better to themselves than what our own efforts can do.”<sup>92</sup>

Hence, John Paul II said, “formation is not the privilege of a few, but a right and duty of all.”<sup>93</sup> Congar added that “the laity are responsible, on their own levels for the evangelization and witness, and they exercise it no less effectively than the priests.”<sup>94</sup> However, the exercise of such tasks does not make pastors of the laity. John Paul II said, “Bishops and priests are indispensable to the life of the Church and the baptised, but the latter in turn are called to live the common priesthood.”<sup>95</sup> There is an organic co-operation between the clergy and the laity.

### **The Prophetic Role of the Laity in the Church**

In addition to fulfilling a priestly role in the Church, the laity also fulfil a prophetic role in the Church with the clergy. Christ continues his prophetic role through the clergy, as well as the laity. The laity are witnesses to the faith and proclaim the gospel in their everyday family and social lives, and in their daily involvement in secular affairs.

Moreover, married people in their married and family lives bear witness to Christ in a special way and proclaim the gospel in their ordinary secular surroundings.

A prophet is one who proclaims the truth about God. Since Christ is a prophet par excellence, he is the truth.<sup>96</sup> Hence in our own days, the responsibility of proclaiming the truth about God is fulfilled in different ways by the clergy and the laity. By their baptism and confirmation, the laity are anointed with the Holy Spirit, and they carry out their prophetic role within the Church, in the circumstances of their lives in the Church and in the world.

The distinctive feature of the prophetic role of the laity is that it is exercised mainly through secular and material activity; and this dimension in which they share their prophetic witness or role differs from that of the clergy or religious. By their daily work, their every effort to improve the world and develop all its powers, the laity are helping to show forth ever more fully and clearly the power, glory, goodness and love of God.<sup>97</sup>

Similarly, the laity’s involvement in secular affairs has an apostolic dimension. By their involvement in these affairs in accordance with the spirit and teaching of the gospel they engage in a wordless proclamation of the gospel.

Moreover, the laity apply the teaching of the gospel to family life, the problems of promoting peace, conquering hunger and disease, developing freedom, culture and civilization. All these, according to Ryan, belong to the Church’s mission in the world and it is only the one who has the special combination of natural competence and supernatural gifts of the spirit to enable them to carry out this mission.<sup>98</sup>

Furthermore, the laity live and proclaim their Christian faith through their participation in the Mass and the sacraments, and through their private and family prayer. Therefore, they combine the prophetic

<sup>90</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, “Christifideles Laici” proposition # 62.

<sup>91</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, “Christifideles Laici” proposition # 62.

<sup>92</sup> Peter Kwasi Sarpong, “The Evangelizing Mission of the Church in Kumasi Diocese” in *Acts and Declarations of the Second Kumasi Diocesan Synod*, (Kumasi: Kumasi Catholic Press, 4<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1994), 50.

<sup>93</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, “Christifideles Laici” proposition # 63.

<sup>94</sup> Congar, *Christians Active in the World*, 18

<sup>95</sup> John Paul II, “Mission of the Church is to imbue social order with the Gospel values,” 5.

<sup>96</sup> Ryan, *Vatican II: The Constitution on the Church, a theological and pastoral commentary*, 254.

<sup>97</sup> Ryan, *Vatican II: The Constitution on the Church, a theological and pastoral commentary*, 254.

<sup>98</sup> Ryan, *Vatican II: The Constitution on the Church, a theological and pastoral commentary*, 254.

role they exercise in their ordinary daily lives with the witness they bear to Christ through their participation in the liturgy.<sup>99</sup>

In the same way, Christian husbands and wives manifest their faith and love not only to one another but also to their children, by example of their Christian lives, and by the instruction given to their children, they participate in Christ's prophetic role, as given to them by their baptism and marriage. Therefore, the basic way in which the laity exercise their prophetic role in the Church is in their daily secular activities, even though some of them may be called upon to exercise their prophetic role in a more special way by apostolic activities which are more closely linked with the teaching role of the clergy. These include, lay catechists and teachers of religion in schools; or sacred sciences in places where there is scarcity or lack of ordained ministers or where these are prevented by persecution from carrying out their role. In such circumstances, the laity fulfil a prophetic role by leading people in liturgical prayers, preaching, administering baptism and the sacramentals.

### **The Kingly Role of the Laity in the Church**

Christ is the king of the universe, and all creation is subject to him, and he brings all things into subjection to the Father. Christ also shares with his disciples this power of bringing all things into subjection to the Father. Thus, the disciples can conquer sin in their own lives in this work of spreading Christ's kingdom by saving creation from corruption and leading it to the freedom of the children of God.

Moreover, the laity has the principal responsibility of seeing to it that through their skills and work, created goods serve their divinely appointed purpose of benefitting every person, and are more equitably distributed, and promote human progress.

According to Ryan, all Christians, but especially the laity, exercise their kingship by helping to direct all creation to God. They are engaged in material affairs and through their activity the material universe is freed from the effects of sin and directed entirely to God.<sup>100</sup>

Similarly, all Christians, especially the laity, by their own Christian lives are to help one another to live and act in accordance with the spirit of the gospel. They are also to order all earthly things to God according to the teachings of the gospel, in truth, in charity, justice and peace. Thus, the laity takes on a special significance in this technological age, by investigating and discovering the potentialities of the universe, and working out how best these potentialities can be developed.

Moreover, the laity by their ordinary daily manual and intellectual work, scientific experiment and technological discovery exercise their share in Christ's kingship. Thus, by effectively and conscientiously developing the material universe for the benefit of all, they are using material goods and human skills to promote the dignity and freedom of all, and so promote social justice and peace, and conquer hunger, poverty and disease. Furthermore, it is the responsibility of the laity to co-operate in removing injustice, dishonesty, hatred and all forms of social immorality from human society.

### **CONCLUSION**

In the light of the foregoing analysis in the Pre-Vatican II era, the clergy performed tasks which were not part of their essential ministry because there was nobody else to do it. The laity were passive. However, today, the laity are hungry for an active role in the Church. Thus, the clergy must realise that the Church has moved from a period in which the clergy were almost everything, and the only educated men, into one in which the very structure of the Church herself is seriously under attack. Today, the clergy must collaborate with the laity in those areas of the Church's life where the laity's special training and competences entitle them to participate actively in the fulfilment of the mission of Christ. The clergy must collaborate with the laity in the evangelization of the people.

Therefore, Sarpong exhorted the clergy to be the resource persons, energizers, promoters, and not dictators. They are to bring into their ambient all the sections of the people of God in their parishes as their captain who cannot win a game unless he inspires all the other players through words of inspiration, warning, congratulations, self-discipline and effort to play well himself to give of their best.<sup>101</sup> Moreover,

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<sup>99</sup> Ryan, *Vatican II: The Constitution on the Church, a theological and pastoral commentary*, 254.

<sup>100</sup> Ryan, *Vatican II: The Constitution on the Church, a theological and pastoral commentary*, 258.

<sup>101</sup> Sarpong, *Acts and Declarations of the Second Kumasi Diocesan Synod*, 42

future priests and religious should be trained to work in mutual co-operation and collaboration with the laity.

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