

Reflections on John Paul II's Theology of the Laity: 20th Anniversary of *Christifideles Laici* (1989)

Peter N.V. Hai

Abstract: This essay argues that baptismal dignity is the theological motif that John Paul II employs in his Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* to explicate the status and role of lay people. For the Pope, the identity, vocation, mission, and spirituality of the laity spring from the dignity conferred by the sacrament of baptism. From this *noblesse oblige* or *honor/onus* logic the Pope expounds the theme of baptismal dignity by stressing its Trinitarian and ecclesiological dimensions. In his view, the identity of the laity is based on three pillars of baptism, secularity, and participation in Christ's triple ministry; communion ecclesiology is the context for understanding the role of the laity; and, like *Lumen Gentium*, the universal call to holiness lies at the heart of *Christifideles Laici*.

Introduction

The Seventh General Assembly of the Ordinary Synod of Bishops,¹ commonly known as the Synod on the Laity,² was held in Rome from 1st October to 30th October 1987. On 30th January 1989, the Apostolic

¹ The institution of the Synod of Bishops was created by Pope Paul VI in 1965 aiming to address issues that are *pastoral* in character, *urgent*, and of importance for the *universal* Church. The word "Synod" means "a journey together." This Ordinary Synod differs from the Extraordinary Synods held in 1969 and 1985 in that they have more participants, have a fuller agenda and take place over a longer period.

² Addressing the Italian Episcopal Conference in May 1985 John Paul II recalled the importance that Vatican II had placed on the laity's contribution to the mission of the Church in the world and gave two reasons for choosing the vocation and the mission of the laity as the topic of the 1987 Ordinary Synod of Bishops, the first being "the increased awareness of the role that the laity play in the work of salvation," and the second relating to the need to respond to the suggestion of many bishops throughout the world. See John Paul II, "[Address to the Italian Episcopal Conference:] Propose Suitable Pastoral Lines in the Light of Loreto Discourse," *L'Osservatore Romano* (30 September 1985) 9.

Exhortation was released at the Vatican.³ Pope John Paul II declared that it is a fruit of the Synod process and “a faithful and coherent expression of it,”⁴ having explicitly quoted about forty-five out of the fifty-four Synod’s final propositions. As the most important papal statement on the laity since the Second Vatican Council, this document has occasioned considerable publicity, aroused immense interest, inspired so much passion, and generated numerous treatises and comments from both experts and practitioners. Therefore, in this essay we intend to provide only a brief summary of the Exhortation to highlight its ecclesiological and Trinitarian approach, and then concentrate on exploring its main themes under a series of observations and offering critical reflections on its teachings with reference to Vatican II, the final report of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod, pre-synodal documents of the 1987 Synod such as the *Instrumentum Laboris* or working paper, the propositions, and notable interventions by participants, and as far as practicable, to other writings of the Pope.⁵ This approach will allow us to distil the main features of the document that characterise his theology of the laity and provide an adequate gauge of the theological issues discussed at the Synod.⁶ It also enables us to identify the unity of his thinking on the subject, which drew its inspiration from conciliar teachings. In the process, we hope to highlight its

³ John Paul II, “*Christifideles Laici: Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World*,” *Origins* 18:35 (9 February 1989) 561, 563-595. Henceforth, in footnotes, the full title will be simplified to *Christifideles Laici* followed by relevant numbers. The Apostolic Exhortation carries the date of 30 December 1988, feast of the Holy Family.

⁴ *Christifideles Laici*, no. 2.

⁵ While *Christifideles Laici* is the primary source of the Pope’s theology of the laity, his view on the role of the laity can also be gathered from the catechetical lectures he gave in general audiences between 27 October 1993 and 21 September 1994. See *The Church: Mystery, Sacrament, Community. A Catechesis on the Creed* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1998) 409-527.

⁶ The post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, in some sense, is written by both the Pope and the bishops of the Synod as it is based on the propositions voted by the Synod delegates. Avery Dulles observes that while many of the Pope’s official writings are personal in tone, it is difficult to be sure whether works published under his name were actually written by him. The Pope has no doubt relied on his assistants to compile many of the footnotes, and they most likely wrote parts of the actual text. See Avery Dulles, *The Splendor of Faith: The Theological Vision of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Crossroad, 1999) 2. Robert Mickens also notes that “popes tend to say and write a lot of things—but most of it comes from the hands of others.... It’s a long-standing game among Vatican watchers to try to discern which of these come directly from the Pope’s hand and which from his ghostwriters” (“Letter from Rome, *The Tablet* [27 January 2007] 33).

contributions and unresolved issues that require further analysis and clarification. One of these issues has to do with the very nature of the Church. For instance, while Vatican II operated with a number of images and biblical metaphors such as People of God, Body of Christ, Temple of the Holy Spirit, flock, mother, spouse, and vineyard, John Paul II chose the biblical paradigms of the vine and the vineyard as his starting point. In analysing the theological themes relating to lay people such as their dignity, identity, vocation, mission, ministry, secularity, spirituality, formation, and ecclesiological framework, we note that there is a strong linkage between the teachings of Vatican II and *Christifideles Laici*.

Overview of the Contents, Structure, and Context of *Christifideles Laici*

Christifideles Laici, a “small Summa for the Catholic laity,”⁷ has five chapters besides an introduction (sections 1-7), and a short conclusion (section 64) comprising an appeal and a prayer. It focuses on three themes: vocation, communion, and mission of lay people, and two biblical images: Jesus as the true vine (John 15:5, 16) and the vineyard parable (Matthew 20). These themes and images are intensely ecclesiological as they are based on the central image of the true vine and developed in the first three chapters of the document under the ecclesiological headings of Church as mystery, Church as communion, and Church as mission. In choosing these headings, the Pope articulated an understanding that the vocation and mission of lay people is integral to, and inseparable from, that of the entire people of God, and in so doing he was likely mindful of the principle enunciated by Yves Congar, who stresses that “there can be only one sound and sufficient theology of the laity,” and that is a “total ecclesiology.”⁸ The Pontiff had earlier underscored this point in his introductory letter to the Working Paper where he affirmed that the “synod on the laity also seeks to confirm the church’s vocation, to strengthen her and to give her fresh impulses and motivations, so that she may be able to respond to pastoral needs with complete

⁷ Pironio, Cardinal Eduardo, “The Laity as Agents of Evangelization,” *Origins* 18:42 (30 March 1989) 700.

⁸ Yves M.J. Congar, *Lay People in the Church, revised ed.* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1985) xvi.

fidelity to the Spirit who guides her.”⁹ The themes and images are also predominantly Trinitarian as they reflect on the presence and action of God in history and in the lives of each Christian. This presence and action is of God as Trinity: the Father calls to communion in Jesus Christ, his Son, and to mission through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 1, comprising 10 paragraphs (8-17), defines the lay faithful’s position in the Church by reflecting on “The Dignity of the Lay Faithful in the Church as Mystery” under the title “I am the Vine and You are the Branches.” After discussing the mystery of the vine and giving a basic, positive description of the lay faithful, it stresses that baptism is the Trinitarian source of the lay Christian’s dignity, identity, and new life; the lay faithful are sharers in the priestly, prophetic and kingly mission of Jesus Christ, characterised by their secular character or presence in the world; all faithful are called to holiness, and this holiness is lived out in the world. Chapter 2, which bears the title “All Branches of a Single Vine,” explores the meaning of communion, emphasises the participation of the faithful in the Church as communion, and deals with three topics: ministries and charisms, universal and local Church, and associations and movements. Under the title of “I Have Appointed You to Go Forth and Bear Fruit” the third chapter reflects on the role of the lay faithful in the Church as mission, highlighting the need for co-responsibility, new evangelisation, and the myriad of ways in which lay people can serve the individual human person and the society. Chapter 4 discusses the variety of lay vocations based on the image of the vineyard and focuses on issues relating to women. The final chapter returns to the Johannine image of the vine and deals with the formation of the lay faithful. With this summary of the contents and structure of the Apostolic Exhortation we will be embarking on a critical analysis of its theological themes after a brief discussion of the context.

There were 232 participants or “Synod Fathers” in the 1987 Synod including “153 representatives of the Episcopal Conferences, 14 representatives of the Assemblies of the patriarchs and bishops of the Oriental Churches, 23 cardinals or bishops of the Roman Curia, 10 representatives of the Union of Superiors General,” and “30 other

⁹ John Paul II, “The Pope’s Letter to Bishops on the Synod Working Paper,” *Origins* 17:1 (21 May 1987) 20.

bishops or priests directly nominated by the Pope,”¹⁰ who could nominate 15% of the Synod Fathers.¹¹ Of the delegates from the Episcopal Conferences, 47 were from Africa, 36 from Asia, 65 from the Americas, 75 from Europe, and 7 from Oceania.¹² Of all the Synod Fathers, 114 participated for the first time at a Synod and 63 were members of religious orders.

It is worthwhile to recall the background of the key figures who guided the Synod. The Relator was Cardinal Hyacinthe Thiandoum who succeeded Marcel Lefèbvre in 1962 as the first autonomous Archbishop of Dakar, Senegal.¹³ The appointed Special Secretary, the key theologian of the Synod, was Pierre Eyt, co-adjutor Bishop of Bordeaux and member of the International Theological Commission, who had served as secretary to the Tübingen theologian Walter Kasper at the 1985 Extraordinary Synod, where the latter was Special Secretary under the leadership of Cardinal Godfried Danneels, Archbishop of Malines-Brussels. There was some expectation that Thiandoum and Eyt would perform as successfully as the Danneels-Kasper team. The pair was supported by 20 expert assistants who were chosen by the Pope on the advice of the Synod Secretariat and Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Gerard O’Connell felt that the list of these expert assistants “left the distinct impression of being of a more conservative hue than one might have hoped for,”¹⁴ and he recalled that “the absence of an Asian expert was a sore point with some of the Asian delegates at the Synod.”¹⁵ One of the three Synod

¹⁰ Noted by Peter Coughlan, Under-Secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, in *The Hour of the Laity: Their Expanding Role: Exploring “Christifideles Laici”: The Pope’s Key Document on the Laity* (Newtown, NSW: E.J. Dwyer, 1989) 10; see also Gerard O’Connell, “The Synod on the Laity: Dichotomies or Distinctions?” *The Month* (March 1988) 572.

¹¹ This 15 per cent of the total category “enables the Pope to restore any imbalance that may arise between different tendencies or countries but also provides him with the opportunity of strengthening his position.” See Jan Kerkhofs, “The Members of the Synod,” *Concilium* 188 (1986) 47-8.

¹² Gerard O’Connell, “The Synod on the Laity: Dichotomies or Distinctions?” *The Month* (March 1988) 572-3.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 574.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 575.

presidents designated by the Pope was Cardinal R. Vidal of Cebu, appointed to replace Cardinal Jean-Marie Trịnh Văn Căn of Hanoi, who was not allowed to leave Vietnam.¹⁶ The other two presidents were European, one of whom was Cardinal E. Pirono, President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity from April 1984, and the other the Major Archbishop of Lwow of the Ukrainians. A distinctive feature of the 1987 Synod was the presence and participation of 60 lay auditors from 44 countries and all five continents, of whom 28 were women including five religious women, a figure that Gerard O’Connell described as a historic maximum.¹⁷ The Pope himself appointed the lay auditors on the recommendations of the Synod Secretariat who based their decisions on five selection criteria relating different conditions of lay life, different continents and countries, different sectors of Christian movements, different professional and cultural milieux, and different states of life (religious, secular institutes, etc).¹⁸ As auditors, lay participants did not have the right to vote but otherwise participated as fully as other Synod Fathers. Their active presence was demonstrated by the fact that all of them participated in the discussions in the *Circuli Minores* or small language groups with six of them appointed as experts or assistants to the Special Secretary, and two actually sitting at the table of the Presidency. These *circuli* focused on four themes suggested by the Relator, namely the secular character of the vocation and mission of the laity, lay associations and their relations with the pastors, ministries of lay people in the Church today, and the vocation and mission of women in the Church and in the world.¹⁹ In all, 17 lay people (10 women and 7 men) addressed the Synod Assembly with each given twenty minutes while interventions of

¹⁶ [Editor], “Asian Voices in the Synod,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 25:1 (1988) 11. Gerard O’Connell notes that “in fact the Vietnamese Cardinal is ill” (“The Synod on the Laity: Dichotomies or Distinctions,” *The Month* [March 1988] 575).

¹⁷ [Editor], “Asian Voices in the Synod,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 25:1 (1988) 11; Gerard O’Connell, “The Synod on the Laity: Dichotomies or Distinctions,” *The Month* (March 1988) 573; Kerkhofs observes lay auditors took part in the Second Vatican Council from 12 September 1963 onwards (“The Members of the Synod,” *Concilium* 188 [1986] 51).

¹⁸ Gerard O’Connell, “The Synod on the Laity: Dichotomies or Distinctions,” *The Month* (March 1988) 573.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 577; B.L. Marthaler, “Synod of Bishops (Seventh General Assembly, 1987),” *New Catholic Encyclopedia: Jubilee Volume: The Wojtyla Years* (Detroit: Gale Group in Association with the Catholic University of America, 2001) 158.

the Synod Fathers were limited to eight minutes.²⁰ Five of these speakers were special invitees and not part of the 60 lay person delegation.²¹ John Paul II singled out the importance of the presence of lay people in his homily at the closing mass of the Synod. For him, “in a certain sense, the experience of this Synod is unprecedented,” and he hopes that “it will become a ‘model’, a reference point for the future.”²² Indeed, in this Synod, the lay presence was far more in evidence in numbers and in their manner of participation than in previous ones such as the 1980 Synod on the family and the 1983 Synod on penance and reconciliation. Joseph Thomas notes that three issues generated a lively debate on the Synod’s floor, namely, the place and role of women in the Church and in society, the growth of new movements in addition to approved lay associations, and lay ministries.²³

The treatment of the vocation and mission of lay people in the first three chapters of the Apostolic Exhortation under the themes of the Church as mystery, communion, and mission follows closely the structure of John Paul II’s homily at the concluding mass of the 1987 Synod.²⁴ It is also aligned with the particular themes of the final report of the Extraordinary Synod of 1985,²⁵ whose importance is acknowledged by the Pope as “the preparation of the Synod on the Laity in 1987.”²⁶ This Extraordinary

²⁰ Peter Coughlan, Under-Secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, *The Hour of the Laity: Their Expanding Role: Exploring “Christifideles Laici”: The Pope’s Key Document on the Laity* (Newtown, NSW: E.J. Dwyer, 1989) 10.

²¹ Pope Paul VI opened the Synod to non-members and this practice of inviting non-members to be present at meetings of the Synod was confirmed by Pope John Paul II. See Jan Kerkhofs, “The Members of the Synod,” *Concilium* 188 (1986) 49; Gerard O’Connell, “The Synod on the Laity: Dichotomies or Distinctions,” *The Month* (March 1988) 573.

²² John Paul II, “Homily at Concluding Synod Mass,” *Origins* 17:22 (12 November 1987) 390.

²³ Joseph Thomas, “L’Exhortation ‘Les laïcs fidèles du Christ’: Plaidoyer pour l’engagement temporel,” *Etudes* (May 1989) 689.

²⁴ John Paul II, “Homily at Concluding Synod Mass,” *Origins* 17:22 (12 November 1987) 390-2.

²⁵ Synod of Bishops, “The Final Report of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops,” *Origins* 15:27 (19 December 1985) 446-50.

²⁶ John Paul II, “Homily at Concluding Synod Mass,” *Origins* 17:22 (12 November 1987) 390. From a procedural viewpoint, the Extraordinary Synod is different from the 1987 Synod

Synod aims to mediate, deepen, and foster “the application of the teaching of Vatican II 20 years after its conclusion,”²⁷ and endeavours to better understand the Church in “her vocation and mission and in her nature as both mystery and communion.”²⁸ It affirms that “the ecclesiology of communion is the central and fundamental idea of the council’s documents.”²⁹ For Hermann Pottmeyer, *mysterium*, the first of the two motifs of this Synod refers to the theological aspect, and *communio*, the second, to the institutional aspect of the Church.³⁰ Avery Dulles also observes that the Extraordinary Synod’s final report attempts to “synthesise the Church’s apostolates of evangelisation, ecumenism, and social transformation in the light of an *ecclesiology of mystery and communion*.”³¹ Joseph Komonchak goes further to note that Church as mystery was presented as “an antidote to the reductive anthropology ... and as a way of responding to the signs of a return to the sacred,”³² and many Synod participants viewed the notion of the Church as communion as “holding the key to many of the contemporary problems of the Church.”³³ At this Extraordinary Synod, twenty-seven Fathers spoke on the mission of the laity under the theme of communion.³⁴ The structural similarity between the two post-synodal documents underlines the intimate link between these two Synods, rooting both of them in the fertile soil of the Second Vatican Council. Indeed, Vatican II was a constant reference point at every stage of the Synod on the Laity process, and at least 97 of the 224 footnotes of the Apostolic

in two aspects: no working document was prepared and the release of the Final Report marks the first time that a synod’s full report to the Pope has been made public.

²⁷ John Paul II, “Closing Address to the Synod,” *Origins* 15:27 (19 December 1985) 452.

²⁸ John Paul II, “Homily at Concluding Synod Mass,” *Origins* 17:22 (12 November 1987) 390.

²⁹ Synod of Bishops, “The Final Report of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops,” *Origins* 15:27 (19 December 1985) 448.

³⁰ Hermann Pottmeyer, “The Church as Mysterium and as Institution,” *Concilium* 1988 (1986) 99.

³¹ Avery Dulles, “Catholic Ecclesiology since Vatican II,” *Concilium* 188 (December 1986) 4.

³² Joseph Komonchak, “The Theological Debate,” *Concilium* 188 (December 1986) 55.

³³ Gerard O’Connell, “Statements of the Synod Fathers,” *The Month* 19:4 (1986) 124.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 126.

Exhortation refer to the documents of the Council.³⁵ The Pope himself, in his introductory letter to the *Instrumentum Laboris*, stressed that the Second Vatican Council's reminder contained in the theme chosen for the 1987 Synod "The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and the World 20 Years After the Second Vatican Council"³⁶ was "not there by mere chance."³⁷ Like the final report of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod which sees itself challenged to present the Church primarily as mystery, *Christifideles Laici* explores the baptismal dignity and identity of the lay faithful in the context of the Church as mystery right in its first chapter. Adopting this approach these two post-synodal documents simply follow the lead of *Lumen Gentium* which takes mystery as its starting point in exploring the nature of the Church.³⁸

Critical Analysis of the Theology of the Laity in *Christifideles Laici*

A careful analysis of *Christifideles Laici* shows that the document employs the concept of baptismal dignity as the framework to define the status of lay people, who are called to participate fully in the Church's life as communion and in its mission in the world. Our first observation is that the entire Apostolic Exhortation revolves around this theological theme.

Baptismal Dignity as Leitmotif

Indeed, in John Paul II's theology of the laity, the dignity, identity, equality, vocation, communion, mission, spirituality, and secularity of the laity, spring from baptism. He repeatedly emphasises this point in several dense and explicit statements, often couched in forceful terms, some of which deserve to be quoted in full. For him, "it is

³⁵ Peter Coughlan, Under-Secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, *The Hour of the Laity: Their Expanding Role: Exploring "Christifideles Laici": The Pope's Key Document on the Laity* (Newtown, NSW: E.J. Dwyer, 1989) 7.

³⁶ The General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, "The 'Instrumentum Laboris' or Working Paper for the 1987 World Synod of Bishops," no. 1, *Origins* 17:1 (21 May 1987) 1.

³⁷ John Paul II, "Letter to the World's Bishops on the Synod Working Paper," *Origins* 17:1 (21 May 1987) 20.

³⁸ See Chapter I: The Mystery of the Church of *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 1-8.

no exaggeration to say that the entire existence of the lay faithful has as its purpose to lead a person to a knowledge of the radical newness of the Christian life that comes from baptism, the sacrament of faith, so that this knowledge can help that person live the responsibilities which arise from that vocation received from God.”³⁹ He reinforces this idea again stating that “to grow in the knowledge of the richness of baptism and faith as well as to live it more fully” is the demanding task that awaits “all lay faithful and all Christians at every moment.”⁴⁰ From this “one dignity flowing from baptism,” the Pope affirms, “each member of the lay faithful, together with ordained ministers and men and women religious, shares a responsibility for the church’s mission.”⁴¹ In his view, this dignity as a Christian is “the source of equality for all members of the church, guarantees and fosters the spirit of communion and fellowship, and at the same time becomes the hidden dynamic force in the lay faithful’s apostolate and mission.”⁴² Echoing the thought of Vatican II and the Synod Fathers, he maintains that among the lay faithful “this one baptismal dignity” takes on a proper and particular manner of life, which is described as the secular character.⁴³ This secularity, or presence in the world, must be understood in the theological and ecclesiological sense, that is, “in light of God’s plan of salvation and in the context of the mystery of the church,” and not merely as “an anthropological and sociological reality.”⁴⁴ The world, he writes, is “the place and means for the lay faithful to fulfil their Christian vocation.”⁴⁵ Baptismal dignity, he emphasises again, is a dignity that “brings demands, the dignity of labourers called by the Lord to work in his vineyard.”⁴⁶

³⁹ *Christifideles Laici*, no. 10.

⁴⁰ *Christifideles Laici*, no. 58.

⁴¹ *Christifideles Laici*, no. 15.

⁴² *Christifideles Laici*, no. 17.

⁴³ *Christifideles Laici*, no. 15.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 15.

⁴⁶ *Christifideles Laici*, no. 17.

From this *noblesse oblige*, or *honor/onus*, logic the Pope expounds the motif of baptismal dignity by emphasising its Trinitarian and ecclesiological dimension, which, in our view, is the predominant approach of the post-synodal Exhortation. First, he encourages all Christians including the lay faithful to be conscious of the fact that “through baptism they have received an extraordinary dignity,” the dignity of being “called to be children loved by the Father, members incorporated in Christ and his church, living and holy temples of the Spirit.”⁴⁷ He is convinced that this baptismal dignity, or newness of life, is “the basis of their participation in the priestly, prophetic and kingly mission of Christ and of their vocation to holiness in love,” and in lay people, it is fulfilled through their presence in the world.⁴⁸ As members of the Church and sharers in the triple office of Christ, lay people participate in the mission of the Church, which is “concentrated and manifested in evangelization.”⁴⁹ This supreme duty of evangelisation has two dimensions, *ad extra* as proclaiming the Gospel to the world, and *ad intra*, as playing an active part in the life and activity of the Church.⁵⁰ In his thinking, to grasp the “full sense of the dignity of the lay faithful” one has to consider that “the vocation to holiness, that is, the perfection of charity” is “the prime and fundamental vocation that the Father assigns to each of them in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.”⁵¹ The Pope hastens to add that “holiness is the greatest testimony of the dignity conferred on a disciple of Christ.”⁵² Second, he highlights the communitarian and ecclesial dimension of the baptismal dignity by insisting that “only from inside the church’s mystery of communion is the ‘identity’ of the lay faithful made known and their fundamental dignity revealed. Only within the context of this dignity can their vocation and mission in the church and in the world be defined.”⁵³ Here his thought on the subject seems to be based on the

⁴⁷ *Christifideles Laici*, no. 64.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Christifideles Laici*, no. 33.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Christifideles Laici*, no. 16.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Christifideles Laici*, no. 8.

Thomistic principle of *agere sequitur esse*, or action follows being, that is, identity and dignity.

The statements on the baptismal dignity of the lay faithful and its implications for Christian life show that John Paul II's thought strongly reflects the views of Vatican II and the Synod participants. Indeed, according to the teachings of *Lumen Gentium* and the conciliar Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People *Apostolicam Actuositatem* on the foundations of the lay apostolate, every lay person is "the witness and the living instrument of the mission of the Church,"⁵⁴ their right and duty to be apostles flows from their union with Christ the head, and being inserted "in the Mystical Body of Christ by baptism and strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit in confirmation," they are assigned to the apostolate by the Lord himself.⁵⁵ They live this apostolate "in faith, hope and charity" which is poured out by the Holy Spirit into the hearts of all members of the Church.⁵⁶ This charity, Christ's greatest commandment, "urges all Christians to work for the glory of God through the coming of his kingdom and for the communication of eternal life to all men."⁵⁷ With these passages Vatican II changed the way lay people are understood to share in the ministry and mission of the Church. Prior to the Council, Catholic Action was the dominant form of lay involvement. It was defined by Pope Pius XI, its initiator, as the participation, and by Pope Pius XII as the collaboration, in the apostolate of the hierarchy. With Vatican II, sacramental initiation becomes the theological and ecclesiological basis of the vocation and mission of the laity, and John Paul II simply continues and deepens this fundamental shift. In a similar vein, in the message to the entire Church issued at the conclusion of the Synod, the Synod Fathers declare that "all lay faithful have a dignity which they hold in common with clerics and religious, since there is only one people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."⁵⁸ For

⁵⁴ *Lumen Gentium*, no. 33.

⁵⁵ *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no.3; *Lumen Gentium*, 33.

⁵⁶ *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 3.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Synod of Bishops, "Message to the People of God from the 1987 Synod of Bishops," *Origins* 17:22 (12 November 1987) 387.

them, “this dignity comes from baptism, through which a person is incorporated into Christ and the community of the church and called to a life of holiness.”⁵⁹ They continue to affirm that “whoever receives baptism, confirmation and the eucharist commits himself or herself to follow Christ and to witness to him with his or her whole life.”⁶⁰ Like John Paul II, the Synod Fathers highlight both the Trinitarian and ecclesial dimension of the baptismal dignity which demands a holy life of witness from all the baptised Christians. Earlier, in the propositions drawn up at the end of their deliberations, the Synod Fathers reached similar conclusions. In their words, “all Christians, men and women, incorporated in Christ through baptism, enjoy the same Christian dignity and together form the people of God.”⁶¹ Through baptism, they are made disciples of Christ, “called to holiness, sharing in the eucharist and being marked by the gifts of the Holy Spirit,” and, in their own way, make “the life and mission of Christ present in this world to the honor of God and the salvation of human beings.”⁶²

Ecclesiology of Communion as Context for Lay Mission

Like the concept of baptismal dignity, which is the basis and springboard for John Paul II’s reflection on the identity and role of the laity, the notion of mystery of communion, another pivotal point of *Christifideles Laici*, is decidedly Trinitarian and ecclesial. Our second observation therefore is that, for John Paul II, communion ecclesiology is the necessary context for understanding and explaining the vocation and mission of the laity.⁶³ The Pope emphasised this point in his annual address to the

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Synod of Bishops, “The Propositions of the 1987 World Synod of Bishops,” *Origins* 17:29 (31 December 1987) 500.

⁶² Synod of Bishops, “The Propositions of the 1987 World Synod of Bishops,” *Origins* 17:29 (31 December 1987) 500.

⁶³ Avery Dulles notes that John Paul II’s writings on the Church were “occasional rather than systematic” (*The Splendor of Faith: The Theological Vision of Pope John Paul II* [New York: Crossroad, 1999] 52). The Pope’s ecclesiological insights can be gleaned from two main sources: his book *Sources of Renewal: The Implementation of Vatican II* (San Francisco:

Roman Curia, barely two months after the conclusion of the Synod on the Laity, stating that the Synod's positive results are due not only to its reaffirmation of the teachings of Vatican II, but "more so because of the emphasis on the ecclesiology of communion as a necessary context for situating the role of the laity in the church for the salvation of the world."⁶⁴ The fundamental meaning of this complex, biblical word *communion*,⁶⁵ the Pope explains, refers to "the union with God brought about by Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit."⁶⁶ Such communion, he adds, is "present in the Word of God and in the sacraments," and "baptism is the door and foundation of communion in the church."⁶⁷ He immediately adds that "the body of Christ in the holy eucharist sacramentalizes this communion," and "the eucharist is the source and summit of the whole Christian life."⁶⁸ Recalling the words of Pope Paul VI spoken at a general

Harper & Row, 1980), and his talks given in general audiences between 10 July 1991 and 30 August 1995. See *The Church: Mystery, Sacrament, Community. Catechesis on the Creed* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1998).

⁶⁴ John Paul II, "Annual Address to the Roman Curia," *Origins* 17 (28 January 1988) 575.

⁶⁵ Patrick Granfield notes that the word *communio* or *koinonia* occurs 19 times in the New Testament and 13 of these are in the Pauline writings (*Origins* 28:44 [22 April 1999] 757). Michael McDermott observes that, in the strict sense, no doctrine of *κοινωνία* is to be found in the Old Testament, and its full theological import is revealed in the Pauline letters "as that most intimate union of man with God and his fellow-men accomplished through Christ that constitutes final salvation" ("The Biblical doctrine of KOINONIA," *Biblischer Zeitschrift* 19 [1975] 65). For him, community, participation, contribution, collection, and communion are some possible ways of translating *κοινωνία*, and in Paul's writings, "there is a fullness of significance in almost every occurrence of this word," and "it is often impossible to limit it to a single clear-cut meaning" (*ibid.*, 232). Schuyler Brown contends that while *koinonia* is attributed to Christians in the New Testament, it is "used abstractly ('participation' or 'fellowship'), not concretely ('community'), and consequently a direct identification between *koinonia* and *ekklesia* is impossible." See "Koinonia as the Basis of New Testament Ecclesiology," *One in Christ* 12 (1976) 159. Brown also warns that today we tend to use the word communion in the concrete sense of a body of Christians having one common faith and discipline, e.g., the Anglican communion, and we must be careful not to read this meaning of communion back into *koinonia*. *Ibid.*, see also Walter Kasper, "Church as Communio," *New Blackfriars* 74:871 (May 1993) 236. For Hans Urs von Balthasar, "*Com-munio*", a combination of two Latin words: *munire*, to surround with a rampart and *moenia*, city walls, means "community in the concrete, expressive sense of being brought together into a common fortification" and "into a common achievement, task, administration, which at the same time can mean mutual satisfaction, gift, grace" ("*Communio*," *Communio* 10:2 [Summer 1983] 198; excerpted from "*Communio* - a Programme," *International Catholic Review*, 1:1 [1972] 3-12).

⁶⁶ *Christifideles Laici*, no. 19.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

audience on the day after the close of Vatican II, he speaks of the Church as *sanctorum communio*, the communion of saints, which refers to “a double, life-giving participation: the incorporation of Christians into the life of Christ and the communication of that life of charity to the entire body of the faithful in this world and the next, union with Christ and in Christ, and unity among Christians in the church.”⁶⁹ Thus, ecclesial communion has two inseparable dimensions, vertical and horizontal, “the communion of each Christian with Christ and the communion of all Christians with one another.”⁷⁰ This communion, the Pope affirms, is “the very mystery of the church.”⁷¹

Here John Paul II faithfully retrieves the teachings of both Vatican II and the 1985 Synod of Bishops. Indeed, right in its first paragraph *Lumen Gentium* claims that the Church as mystery, lived as the people of God, is the sign and instrument of a communion to which the whole human family is called.⁷² Likewise, in their final

⁶⁹ *Christifideles Laici*, no. 19; this text was taken from Paul VI’s address in Italian: “Chiesa vuol dire comunione dei sancti. E comunione dei sancti vuol dire una duplice partecipazione vitale: la incorporazione dei cristiani nella vita di Cristo, e la circolazione della medesima carità in tutta la compagine dei fedeli, in questo mondo e nell’altro. Unione a Cristo ed in Cristo; e unione fra i cristiani, nella Chiesa.” (“La Chiesa è una comunione,” [General Audience, 8 June 1966], *Insegnamenti* IV [Vatican City: Vatican Polyglot Press, 1966] 794). Based on Joseph Hainz’s identification of two meanings in Saint Paul’s concept of *koinonia*: “Community through participation” or, “community with someone through common participation in something,” H.-J. Klauck argues that “the expression *tōn hagiōn koinōnia* [communion of saints] might contain both ideas of “community with others, and participation in the elements of the Lord’s Supper,” and there is a causal relationship between them: “participation in the sacrament establishes community” (“Eucharist and Church Community in Paul,” *Theology Digest* 35:1 [Spring 1988] 19). Avery Dulles shares this view suggesting that the term *communio sanctorum* in the Apostles’ Creed seems to have meant “‘participation in holy things’, rather than ‘communion of saints’,” and notes that today it suggests “Holy Communion, the reception of the Body and Blood of Christ” (“The Church as Communion,” in *New Perspectives on Historical Theology: Essays in Memory of John Meyendorff*, edited by Bradley Nassif, [Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1996] 126).

⁷⁰ *Christifideles Laici*, no. 19. Elsewhere the Pope describes ecclesial communion as “a ‘participated theonomy’ which draws us into the communion of Trinitarian love in such a way that our full humanity is fulfilled at the same time that it is transcended.” J. Augustine Di Noia, “Ecclesiology of Communion and Catholic Higher Education,” *Origins* 29:17 (7 October 1999) 269.

⁷¹ *Christifideles Laici*, nos. 18, 64.

⁷² *Lumen Gentium*, no. 1. The Preliminary Explanatory Note to the third chapter of *Lumen Gentium* says that the idea of communion is “not to be understood as some vague sort of *good*

report, the 1985 Synod Fathers state that communion is “a matter of communion with God through Jesus Christ in the sacraments,” “baptism is the door and the foundation of communion in the church,” and “the communion of the eucharistic body of Christ signifies and produces, that is, builds up, the intimate communion of all the faithful in the body of Christ which is the church.”⁷³ Dennis M. Doyle notes that the term communion, considered by some to be “the single most important idea leading to Vatican II,” did not come into wide use after Vatican II, but communion ecclesiology as a theological approach has started much earlier, and, despite being “a diverse and many-layered idea whose historical roots are complex,” tends to be associated with Johann Adam Möhler’s *Die Einheit in der Kirche* (1985).⁷⁴ Sharing this view, Walter

*will, but as something organic which calls for a juridical structure as well as being enkindled by charity” (“Lumen Gentium. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,” in *Vatican Council II: Volume 1: The Conciliar and Postconciliar Documents*, new rev. ed., edited by Austin Flannery [Northport, New York: Costello Publishing] 425). For Walter Kasper, *Lumen Gentium* provides a Trinitarian description of the mystery of the Church as the mystery of *communio*: “communio means participation in the divine life to which we are called by the eternal father”; *communio*, “the aim of the entire history of salvation is uniquely personified in history through Jesus Christ;” and “what happens once and for all in Jesus Christ is continued and spread throughout the world through the Holy Spirit, who lives within the Church and the hearts of the faithful (“Church as Communio,” *New Blackfriars* 74:871 [May 1993] 234-5). Hermann Pottmeyer notes that Vatican II applies the concept of communion to all areas of Church’s life: “it is a *communio fidelium* in the people of God, *communio hierarchica* in the college of bishops, *communio ecclesiarum* in the whole Church; it is unity in diversity, and *communio non plena* with the separated churches” (“The Church as Mysterium and as Institution,” *Concilium* 188 [1986]104).*

⁷³ Synod of Bishops, “The Final Report of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops,” *Origins* 15:27 (19 December 1985) 448.

⁷⁴ Dennis M. Doyle, “Communion Ecclesiology and the Silencing of Boff,” *America* (12 September 1992) 140; Dennis Doyle, “Möhler, Schleiermacher, the Roots of Communion Ecclesiology,” *Theological Studies* 57 (1996) 467-8; see also Johann Adam Möhler, *Unity in the Church, or the Principle of Catholicism Presented in the Spirit of the Church Fathers in the First Three Centuries*, edited and translated with an introduction, addenda, and appendixes by Peter C. Erb (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1996). According to Domenico Spada, “Möhler’s central idea is that the Church is essentially the work of the Holy Spirit, who is its soul, its interior force, urging the faithful to confession of the Truth and to a life of communion in love” (“The Laity and their Mission in the Development of Modern Theology,” *The Laity Today* 26 [1999] 20). To correct this pneumatological bias in interpreting the Church, in his later work *Symbolik* [Symbolism], first appeared in 1832, Möhler emphasises the Christological dimension of the Church, which is seen as a continued incarnation. Michael J. Himes notes that Möhler’s Christological focus is the incarnation, not the life, death and resurrection of Jesus (“Divinizing the Church: Strauss and Barth on Möhler’s Ecclesiology,” *The Legacy of the Tübingen School: The Relevance of Nineteenth-Century Theology for the Twenty-First Century*, edited by D.J. Dietrich and M.J. Himes, [New York: Crossroad, 1997] 105).

Kasper agrees that the basic meaning of *koinonia/communio* was first rediscovered by the Catholic Tübingen theologians, especially Möhler, but for him, the real breakthrough came with *Corpus Mysticum*, a 1943 book by Henri de Lubac, and those insights “were made ecumenically fertile by Yves Congar.”⁷⁵ In the same vein, George Tavard observes that the idea of the Church as communion, systematically explored by Jérôme Hamer in his work, *The Church is a Communion*, published in 1962, on the eve of Vatican II, has emerged as the dominant theme of post-Vatican II ecclesiology.⁷⁶ Hamer defines the Church as “the mystical body of Christ, that is to say a communion which is at once inward and external, the life of union with Christ and established (caused) by the economy of Christ’s mediation.”⁷⁷ His conclusion is that the specific and permanent form of the unity of the Church is communion, and that is the book’s answer to the single question it sets out to explore: “What is the principle of the Church’s unity?”⁷⁸ Continuing this line of thought, but with more ecumenical sensitivity, French Canadian ecclesiologist J.-M. R. Tillard develops an ecclesiology based on the concept of communion using biblical and patristic sources. His thesis is that the Church is “the *Church of Churches*,” and “understood in its full context, it is the *communion of communions*, appearing as a *communion* of local Churches, spread throughout the world, each one itself being a *communion* of the baptized, gathered together into communities by the Holy Spirit, on the basis of their baptism, for the Eucharistic celebration.”⁷⁹ For him, the Church exists as communion,

⁷⁵ Walter Kasper, *That They May All Be One: The Call to Unity* (London: Burns & Oates, 2004) 57-8; For Congar, “the underlying meaning of *koinonia*, communion, is very close to *metoché*, participation” (“The Conciliar Structure or Regime of the Church,” *Concilium* 167 [1983] 3).

⁷⁶ George H. Tavard, “Tradition as *Koinonia* in Historical Perspective,” *One in Christ* 24:2 (1988) 97. Walter Kasper thinks that *communio* has emerged, in a totally unplanned way, “as the key term and the common denominator for the different visions of Christian unity) (“Ecumenism: the Way Ahead,” *The Tablet* [24 May 2003] 34). Patrick Granfield notes that “Vatican II used the term ‘*communio*’ over one hundred times with a variety of meanings” with most significant usages in *Lumen Gentium*, *Dei Verbum*, *Gaudium et Spes*, and *Unitatis Reintegratio* (“The Collegiality Debate,” in *Church and Theology: Essays in Memory of Carl J. Peter*, edited by Peter C. Phan [Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995] 93).

⁷⁷ Jerome Hamer, *The Church is a Communion*, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1964) 92.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 209, 9.

⁷⁹ J.-M. R. Tillard, *Church of Churches: The Ecclesiology of Communion* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1992) 29. For Cardinal Johannes Willebrands, “the future of

and this communion is not a secondary characteristic of Church's identity, but is essential to it.⁸⁰ In another seminal work, Tillard takes the *ephapax* of Pentecost as the departure point to relate the communion of the local Church to the universal Church, suggesting that the first Church of Jerusalem is the mother Church of all others.⁸¹ Patrick Granfield notes that "*koinonia* brings together two essential qualities of the Church - its locality and universality - as coherent aspects of one and the same reality."⁸² Discussing the use of models in ecclesiology John Fuellenbach considers Vatican II's communion ecclesiology as a "*paradigm shift*" in the understanding of the Church compared to "the dominant ecclesiology that prevailed in the century before the council."⁸³ Walter Kasper goes much further in asserting that "for the Church, there is only one way into the future: the way pointed by the council, the full implementation of the council and its communion ecclesiology. This is the way which

ecumenism is an ecclesiology of communion in all its dimensions" (quoted by Eric W. Gritsch, "Justification by Faith and Ecclesial Communion: Pointers from the Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue," in *Church and Theology: Essays in Memory of Carl J. Peter*, edited by Peter C. Phan [Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995] 161); see also Johannes Willebrands, "Vatican II's Ecclesiology of Communion," *Origins* 17:2 (28 May 1987) 32.

⁸⁰ J.-M. R. Tillard, *Church of Churches: The Ecclesiology of Communion* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1992) 29, 53. Tillard notes that in *Church of Churches* he describes "the structure of God's Church," and in "the second volume" of his ecclesiology of communion, he reflects more deeply on "the living reality of grace for which this structure exists" (*Flesh of the Church, Flesh of Christ: At the Source of the Ecclesiology of Communion*, translated by Madeleine Beaumont [Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2001] ix-x).

⁸¹ J.-M. R. Tillard, *L'Eglise Locale* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1995). For Hervé Legrand, the Church was born universal at Pentecost. See "Inverser Babel, mission de l'Eglise," *Spiritus* 43 (1970) 334; cited by Joseph Komonchak, "The Church Universal as the Communion of Local Churches," *Concilium* 146 [June 1982] 32). Raymond E. Brown concurs with this view stating that "any thesis that would give priority to the local regional church runs up against the indication in Acts that at one time the local community of Jerusalem was the whole Church" ("New Testament Background for the Concept of the Local Church," *CTSA Proceedings* 36 [1981] 1-4). The relationship between the universal Church and the local Church would later become the topic of an interesting debate between two theologian cardinals; see Walter Kasper, "On the Church: A Friendly Reply to Cardinal Ratzinger," *America* (23-30 April 2001) 8-14; and Joseph Ratzinger, "The Local Church and the Universal Church," *America* (19 November 2001) 7-11.

⁸² Patrick Granfield, "Realization of Communion," *The Jurist* (49 (1989) 450.

⁸³ John Fuellenbach, *Church: Community for the Kingdom* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002) 147.

God's Spirit has shown us."⁸⁴ As an active participant at Vatican II, which was largely a Council about the Church, John Paul II has followed *Lumen Gentium's* vision of the Church as a "communion of life, love and truth," the instrument for the salvation of all,⁸⁵ or as a "community of faith, hope and charity," a visible organisation through which Christ communicates truth and grace to humankind.⁸⁶ Indeed, according to Avery Dulles, while John Paul II's ecclesiology can be characterised in terms of five ecclesiological models: "the church as mystical communion, institution, sacrament, herald and servant," his preferred category for ecclesiology is that of communion.⁸⁷ However, the Pope's preferred use of the phrase "mystery of communion"⁸⁸ and his treatment of the concepts of mystery and communion show that for him they are simply two aspects of the same reality even though in *Christifideles Laici* they are discussed in different chapters, Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 respectively, and often referred to as two distinct ecclesiological motifs by prominent theologians such as Dulles, Komonchak, and Pottmeyer.⁸⁹ The reality of the Church as communion, he writes, is "the integrating aspect, indeed the central content of the 'mystery', or rather, the divine plan for the salvation of humanity."⁹⁰ From this perspective the Pope affirms that the Church as mystery of communion is the living context for grasping

⁸⁴ Walter Kasper, *Theology and Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1989) 150.

⁸⁵ *Lumen Gentium*, no. 9.

⁸⁶ *Lumen Gentium*, no. 8. Francis A. Sullivan considers this passage "the most profoundly theological article in the whole constitution on the church" as it describes both the divine and human element of the Church (*The Church We Believe in: One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic* [New York, N.J.: Paulist, 1988] 15).

⁸⁷ Avery Dulles, "The Ecclesiology of John Paul II," *Origins* 28:44 (22 April 1999) 759. In an address to the U.S. Bishops in 1987, the Pope affirms that "at the heart of the church's self-understanding is the notion of *communio*" (Address to the U.S. Bishops," *Origins* 17:16 [1 October 1987] 257).

⁸⁸ *Christifideles Laici*, nos. 18, 55, 64.

⁸⁹ Avery Dulles, "Catholic Ecclesiology since Vatican II," *Concilium* 188 (December 1986) 4; Joseph Komonchak, "The Theological Debate," *Concilium* 188 (December 1986) 55, and "The Church: God's Gift and Our Task," *Origins* 16:42 (2 April 1987) 735; Hermann Pottmeyer, "The Church as Mysterium and as Institution," *Concilium* 188 (1986) 99.

⁹⁰ *Christifideles Laici*, no. 19.

the identity, mission, and responsibility of the lay faithful.⁹¹ Elaborating on this point, Cardinal Eduardo Pironio, head of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, states that “the principle of *Christifideles Laici* is the presentation of the lay faithful’s vocation and mission within an ecclesiology of communion, which was at the heart of the council and reposed by the 1985 extraordinary synod.”⁹²

Indeed, in the post-synodal Exhortation, John Paul II explains that lay Christians’ share in the threefold mission of Christ is derived from the Church communion, and their participation has to be “lived and realized in communion and for the increase of communion itself.”⁹³ This communion, in his view, is “the first great sign in the world of the presence of Christ,” and it “promotes and stimulates the proper apostolic and missionary action of the church.”⁹⁴ The lay faithful, together with the clergy and religious, are all labourers in the vineyard, and they are at the same time “the goal and subjects of church communion as well as of participation in the mission of salvation.”⁹⁵ In the Church communion, their life has a profound meaning, that of “living out the commonly shared Christian dignity and the universal call to holiness in the perfection of love.”⁹⁶ Here, the Pope, recalling Saint Paul’s image of the mystical body of Christ, describes ecclesial communion as an “organic” communion, analogous to that of a living and functioning body.⁹⁷ It is characterised by “a diversity

⁹¹ *Christifideles Laici*, no. 18. Addressing the Congress of Catholic Laity in 2000 the Pope affirms that “the Church is a mystery of communion, which originates in the life of the Blessed Trinity. She is the Mystical Body of Christ. She is the People of God who, made one by the same faith, hope and charity, journey through history to their definitive homeland in heaven.” See “Message of His Holiness John Paul II,” in *The Congress of Catholic Laity: Rome 2000*, edited by the Pontificium Consilium pro Laicis (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2002) 5. Therefore, he stresses that “it is important to reawaken in the entire People of God a true sensus Ecclesiae, along with a deep awareness of being Church, that is, a mystery of communion.” Ibid.

⁹² Eduardo Pironio, “The Laity as Agents of Evangelization,” *Origins* 18:42 (30 March 1989) 699.

⁹³ *Christifideles Laici*, no. 14.

⁹⁴ *Christifideles Laici*, nos. 64, 31.

⁹⁵ *Christifideles Laici*, no. 55.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ *Christifideles Laici*, no. 20.

and complementarity of vocations and states of life, of ministries, of charisms and responsibilities,” which exist “in communion and on behalf of communion.”⁹⁸ Reflecting on the co-responsibility of the lay faithful in the Church as mission the Pope highlights the intimate link between communion and mission: “Communion and mission are profoundly connected to each other, they interpenetrate and mutually imply each other, to the point that communion represents both the source and the fruit of mission: Communion gives rise to mission and mission is accomplished in communion.”⁹⁹ As vocation, communion, and mission are the main concepts of the Apostolic Exhortation, it is worthwhile to recall a helpful distinction made by Vatican II Degree *Apostolicam Actuositatem* and the *Instrumentum Laboris*. According to this Decree, the apostolate of the laity is derived from their very vocation as a Christian.¹⁰⁰ The Working Paper expands this idea further: “Vocation is broader than mission because it is composed of both a call to *communio* and a call to mission. *Communio* is the fundamental aspect destined to endure forever. Mission, on the other hand, is a consequence of this call and is limited to an earthly existence.”¹⁰¹

John Paul II’s explication of the identity, vocation, and mission of the laity from the perspective of the Church as communion raises a question, which, we believe, has not explicitly been raised before, and that is: would the role and ministry of the laity be different from what was presented in *Christifideles Laici* had the Pope proceeded from the conciliar framework of the Church as the people of God? To adequately address this question one has to consider it in the context of the post-conciliar debate about the very nature of the Church. Indeed, after Vatican II, especially as a result of the accent on the topic of “The People of God” in Chapter 2 of *Lumen Gentium*, there was a commonly held view that the dominant image of the Church is that of the people of God. José Comblin stresses this point arguing that “Vatican II explicitly tried to place the people of God before the theme of the Body of Christ as more all-

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ *Christifideles Laici*, no. 32.

¹⁰⁰ *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 1.

¹⁰¹ General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, “The ‘Instrumentum Laboris’ or Working Paper for the 1987 World Synod of Bishops,” no. 14, *Origins* 17:1 (21 May 1987) 7.

embracing and more fundamental.”¹⁰² Hermann Pottmeyer notes that “the basic idea followed in *Lumen Gentium* is the church as the people of God on pilgrimage; the basic idea in *Gaudium et Spes* is the church as the universal sacrament of salvation.”¹⁰³ However, the final report of the 1985 Synod of Bishops changed this paradigm by declaring that “the ecclesiology of communion is the central and fundamental idea of the council’s documents.”¹⁰⁴ Since the release of this report several prominent theologians have pointed out this ecclesiological shift from the expression of the Church as the people of God to the Church as communion. Referring to the 1985 Synod, Jean-Marie Tillard speaks of the “displacement of the accent on the Church as People of God,”¹⁰⁵ and Aloísio Lorscheider mentions a fear in some quarters that the image of the people of God might degenerate into a merely democratic view of the Church.¹⁰⁶ Joseph Komonchak notes that the 1985 Synod of Bishops “almost completely neglects the idea of People of God in favor of the idea of communion,”¹⁰⁷ and that the sole reference to the term in the final report is its alleged misuse, a fact that he considers to be “an astounding development for a document which warns against partial and selective readings of the Council’s texts.”¹⁰⁸ For Avery Dulles, “this gravitation to the concept of communion is surprising since the Church is never called a communion in Scripture, nor is it so called in the documents of any ecumenical council of the Catholic Church,” and this includes Vatican II.¹⁰⁹ In

¹⁰² José Comblin, *People of God*, edited and translated by Phillip Berryman (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004) 53.

¹⁰³ Hermann J. Pottmeyer, *Papacy in Communion: Perspectives from Vatican II*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Book, 1998) 111.

¹⁰⁴ Synod of Bishops, “The Final Report of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops,” *Origins* 15:27 (19 December 1985) 448.

¹⁰⁵ Jean-Marie Tillard, “Final Report of the Last Synod,” *Concilium* 188 (1986) 67.

¹⁰⁶ Aloísio Lorscheider, “The Extraordinary Synod in Light of Vatican II Twenty Years Later,” *Concilium* 188 (1986) 81.

¹⁰⁷ Joseph Komonchak, “Concepts of Communion. Past and Present,” *Cristianesimo nella storia* 16 (1995) 335.

¹⁰⁸ Joseph Komonchak, “The Theological Debate,” *Concilium* 188 (1986) 55-6.

¹⁰⁹ Avery Dulles, “The Church as Communion,” in *New Perspectives on Historical Theology: Essays in Memory of John Meyendorff*, edited by Bradley Nassif (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1996) 127.

his view, the 1985 Synod seems to have made “a deliberative effort to oust ‘People of God’ from its position of primacy,” and its preferred use of the concept of communion is due to the belief that it is not “amenable to sociological reduction, and seems “conducive to internal unity and peace .”¹¹⁰ Hermann Pottmeyer notes that “the charges made against the phrase *people of God* were also made against *communio ecclesiology*,” and “a number of theologians expressed reserve concerning *communio ecclesiology* and demanded a return to *people of God* as the ecclesiological catchword.”¹¹¹ Reviewing this debate, Komonchak observes that some interpreters have misunderstood the connection between Chapter 1 of *Lumen Gentium* on the mystery of the Church and Chapter 2 on the people of God, and have consequently commented on them as if one had to choose between body of Christ and people of God, or between people of God and communion.¹¹² For him, the first chapter considers the Church “from creation in the plan of God until its fulfilment in heaven,” and the second chapter discusses “the same mystery in the time between the ascension and the Parousia,” or the mystery of the Church as “lived out in history,” a “‘communion of life, charity, and truth,’ that is ‘the messianic people’ which God uses as the instrument of salvation, ‘the visible sacrament of saving unity’.”¹¹³ Walter Kasper contends that a detailed analysis reveals that images and concepts used to describe the nature of the Church in Vatican II documents, such as “Church as People of God, as Body of Christ, as Temple of the Holy Spirit and as Sacrament, i.e., sign and instrument of unity,” are “ultimately based on, and interpreted through, the

¹¹⁰ Avery Dulles, “The Church as Communion,” in *New Perspectives on Historical Theology: Essays in Memory of John Meyendorff*, edited by Bradley Nassif (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1996) 128.

¹¹¹ Hermann Pottmeyer, “The Actualization of Vatican II,” *Theology Digest* 49:2 (Summer 2002) 148-9.

¹¹² Joseph Komonchak, “Ecclesiology of Vatican II,” *Origins* 28:44 (22 April 1999) 764.

¹¹³ Joseph Komonchak, “Ecclesiology of Vatican II,” *Origins* 28:44 (22 April 1999) 764; see also “Concepts of Communion. Past and Present,” *Cristianesimo nella storia* 16 (1995) 335. In explaining the structure of *Lumen Gentium*, Joseph A. Komonchak further stresses that “a single mystery was being unfolded, first in its transcendent and then in its historical dimensions, and the commission had broken the material up into two chapters simply because a single chapter would be too long” (“The Significance of Vatican II for Ecclesiology,” in *The Gift of the Church: A Textbook on Ecclesiology in Honour of Patrick Granfield*, edited by Peter C. Phan [Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2000] 77).

understanding of the Church as *communio*.¹¹⁴ The unity of the Church, he writes, is “a *communio*-unity,” and as “*communio*-unity she is the concrete, sacramental sign and representation of the trinitarian mystery, an icon of the Trinity.”¹¹⁵ The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith also insists that the concept of communion, “a key for the renewal of Catholic ecclesiology,” must be “integrated with the concepts of people of God and body of Christ,” and “the relationship between the church as communion and the church as sacrament” has to be given due importance.¹¹⁶ In light of the intrinsic connection between communion and people of God, impressively argued by Joseph Komonchak, Hermann Pottmeyer, and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and the need for John Paul II to refer to the teachings of Vatican II,¹¹⁷ we believe that if the Pope had developed his theology of the laity from the image of the Church as people of God, he would have arrived at similar conclusions.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Walter Kasper, *That They May All Be One: The Call to Unity* (London: Burns & Oates, 2004) 58.

¹¹⁵ Walter Kasper, “The Church as Sacrament of Unity,” *Communio* 10 (1987) 8-9.

¹¹⁶ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion,” *Origins* 22:7 (25 June 1992) 108.

¹¹⁷ For example, in his Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, John Paul II considers Chapter Five of *Lumen Gentium* as the normative text of the magisterial teaching on the Church (“Apostolic Letter ‘*Novo Millennio Ineunte*’ for the Closing of the Jubilee of the Year 2000,” no. 30, *Origins* 30:31 [18 January 2001] 499). Earlier, in another Apostolic Letter, he insists that “the best preparation for the new millennium ... can only be expressed in a renewed commitment to apply, as faithfully as possible, the teachings of Vatican II to the life of every individual and of the whole Church” (“*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*,” no. 20, *Origins* 24:24 [24 November 1994] 407). Joseph Thomas considers that “au plan théologique, le synode ne pouvait que reprendre les renseignements du concile Vatican II” (“L’Exhortation ‘Les laïcs fidèles du Christ’: Plaidoyer pour l’engagement temporel,” *Etudes* [May 1989] 689).

¹¹⁸ It is instructive to recall that in the Bull of Promulgation of the 1983 Codex, John Paul II declares that “foremost among the elements which express the true and authentic image of the Church are: the teaching whereby the Church is presented as the people of God...; the further teaching which portrays the Church as a communion...; likewise, the teaching by which all members of the People of God share, each in their own measure, in the threefold priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ.” See “Apostolic Constitution,” in *The Code of Canon Law: New Revised English Translation*, prepared by the Canon Law Society of Great Britain and Ireland in association with the Canon Law Society of Australia and New Zealand and the Canadian Can Law Society (London: HarperCollins, 1997) xv.

In the final appeal made at the conclusion of the Apostolic Exhortation, the Pope links two concepts of baptismal dignity and mystery of communion together. First, he asks all Christians to be aware of “a commonly shared Christian dignity.”¹¹⁹ Second, he encourages them to be always mindful of “what it means to be members of the church of Jesus Christ, participants in her mystery of communion and in her dynamism in mission and the apostolate.”¹²⁰ For him, this “ecclesial consciousness” is “a sense of belonging to the mystery of church communion,” and it solicits a free and generous response from all Christians.¹²¹ As “the gift of Christ and his Spirit,” communion is destined for all people.¹²²

In our view, one of the guiding principles of John Paul II’s reflection on baptismal dignity and mystery of communion, and his use of these themes as the basis for understanding and explaining the vocation and mission of lay people, is his conviction that ecclesial communion is both a gift and a task. He explicitly refers to this idea by affirming that the Church communion is “a great gift, to be gratefully accepted by the lay faithful, and at the same time to be lived with a deep sense of responsibility.”¹²³ His emphasis on the twin notions of baptismal dignity and mystery of communion in the post-synodal documentation represents a deepening of, and a progression from, the teachings of Vatican II. These concepts are intimately connected, providing both the defining basis of, and the operating context for, the life, vocation, and mission of lay Christians. They also lead us to contend that at the very centre of his theology of the laity is the belief that lay people’s identity, vocation, and mission are simply different dimensions or aspects of the same reality. One should not speak of several theologies of the laity in the Pope’s vast and varied corpus. Rather, in this Exhortation and his other writings, there is only one essential theological treatment of the dignity, identity, and role of the lay faithful. In the Church, which is at the same time

¹¹⁹ *Christifideles Laici*, no. 64.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Christifideles Laici*, nos. 31-32.

¹²³ *Christifideles Laici*, no. 20.

communion, missionary, and holy by nature,¹²⁴ lay people are called to discover and live their own vocation and mission. Our third observation is that, like *Lumen Gentium*, the universal call to holiness lies at the heart of *Christifideles Laici*. As the fullest expression of communion, it is bound intrinsically to the identity, mission, spirituality, and secularity of lay people.

Holiness as Fundamental Vocation of Lay People

The post-synodal Exhortation discusses the call to holiness in sections 16 and 17. However, to fully appreciate the richness of its teachings, the entire document has to be taken into account. As a whole, *Christifideles Laici* has a strong spiritual and pastoral orientation. It provides a programme of spirituality for lay people aiming to link doctrine and life. This emphasis on unity of life has baptismal identity as the basis, and missionary communion as its content. Section 16 examines the theological foundation of the call to holiness, and section 17 insists that lay people have to live this vocation in the world, that is, there should be no dichotomy or conflict between their Christian life and their presence in the world. Philippe Delhay identifies four major themes in these two sections: holiness as a fundamental and undeniable demand flowing from the mystery of the Church; charity, love of God and love of neighbours, as the essence of Christian holiness; holiness as an essential element of the baptismal, sacramental life, and as a constitutive element of the dignity and mission of Christians, and finally, holiness as the obligation for all Christians, based on the idea of following and imitating Christ.¹²⁵

In section 16, John Paul II defines the call to holiness, stresses its importance in Christian life, and explains its Trinitarian, Christological, and Pneumatological foundation as well as its universal character. The vocation to holiness, understood as “the perfection of charity” is “the prime and fundamental vocation” of the lay faithful

¹²⁴ *Christifideles Laici*, no. 32.

¹²⁵ Philippe Delhay, “Les Grandes Leçons du Synode de 1987: Guide de lecture de l’Exhortation Apostolique Post-Synodale *Christifideles Laici*,” *Esprit et Vie* [Part 1] 22 (1 June 1989) 329.

that “the Father assigns to each of them in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.”¹²⁶ It is a universal and common call, rooted in baptism, and addressed to all members of the Church.¹²⁷ Finally, it is a requirement “to follow and imitate Jesus Christ,” and a vocation to lead a holy life according to the Spirit.¹²⁸ Here the Pope implicitly links the concept of holiness with the baptismal dignity by affirming that holiness is “the greatest dignity conferred on a disciple of Christ.”¹²⁹

In section 17, following the propositions of the Synod Fathers, the Pope reflects on the theme of holiness but with an emphasis on the unity of life and the need to live out this holiness in the midst of the world.¹³⁰ This unity of life of lay Christians is of “the greatest importance,” and implies a life lived according to the Spirit, which “expresses itself in a particular way in their involvement in temporal affairs and in their participation in earthly activities.”¹³¹ The vocation to holiness is “an essential and inseparable element of the new life of baptism, and therefore an element which determines their dignity.”¹³² Lay people have to recognise and live this vocation as “an undeniable and demanding obligation.”¹³³ Their holiness is derived from their participation in the Church’s holiness, and represents “their first and fundamental contribution to the building of the church herself, who is the ‘communion of saints’.”¹³⁴ It is “intimately connected to mission and to the responsibility entrusted to the lay faithful in the church and in the world.”¹³⁵ Therefore, it must be considered as

¹²⁶ *Christifideles Laici*, no. 16.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ Synod of Bishops, “The Propositions of the 1987 World Synod of Bishops,” *Origins* 17:29 (31 December 1987) 501.

¹³¹ *Christifideles Laici*, no. 17.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

“a fundamental presupposition and an irreplaceable condition for everyone in fulfilling the mission of salvation within the church.”¹³⁶ The church’s holiness, the Pope concludes, is “the hidden source and the infallible measure of the works of the apostolate and of the missionary effort.”¹³⁷ The idea of this section is that Christian holiness must be integrated in the very activities of daily life, and that there should be no conflict or dualism between a life of holiness and the full participation in the world.¹³⁸

In the last part of his Exhortation where he discusses the variety of vocations and the formation of the lay faithful, the Pope returns to this theme, but from a different perspective, calling for a “total integrated formation for living an integrated life.”¹³⁹ For him, the fundamental objective of the formation of lay people is “an ever-clearer discovery of one’s vocation and the ever-greater willingness to live it so as to fulfil one’s mission.”¹⁴⁰ This vocation is to live out the commonly shared Christian dignity and the universal call to holiness in the perfection of love.¹⁴¹ It requires that lay people remain attached to the vine, which is Jesus Christ, to continually grow in spiritual maturation.¹⁴² In a Christian spirituality, which bears its fruit, there is a unity of life, and every activity, every situation, and every responsibility of the lay faithful become “occasions ordained by providence for a ‘continuous exercise of faith, hope and charity’.”¹⁴³

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ To underscore the possibility of holiness in lay life, the Pope beatified two laymen, Lorenzo Ruiz (18 October 1987) and Giuseppe Moscati (25 October 1987), while the Synod on the Laity was in session. See “Annual Address to the Roman Curia,” *Origins* 17 (28 January 1988) 575.

¹³⁹ *Christifideles Laici*, nos. 59-60.

¹⁴⁰ *Christifideles Laici*, no. 57.

¹⁴¹ *Christifideles Laici*, no. 58.

¹⁴² *Christifideles Laici*, no. 57.

¹⁴³ *Christifideles Laici*, no. 59.

John Paul II also frequently reflects on the topic of holiness in other addresses and writings. In 1979, a year into his pontificate, he declared that every lay Christian is “an extraordinary work of God’s grace and is called to the heights of holiness.”¹⁴⁴ Lay people, according to the Pope, share in the holiness of the Church, and this “ontological” sharing is translated into an individual ethical commitment to sanctification.¹⁴⁵ In a homily at the World Youth Day in Paris in 1997, he expatiates on the linkage between baptism and holiness, describing baptism as “the most beautiful of God’s gifts,” and “the sign that God has joined us on our journey, that he makes our existence more beautiful and that he transforms our history into a history of holiness.”¹⁴⁶ In the inspiring Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, his message for the Church at the beginning of the third millennium, he explains that holiness is “the dimension which expresses best the mystery of the church.”¹⁴⁷ For him, the rediscovery of the Church as mystery and as people of God goes hand in hand with the rediscovery of holiness.¹⁴⁸ Therefore, all pastoral initiatives, he insists, “must be set in relation to holiness.”¹⁴⁹ He deepens his earlier Trinitarian explanation of the concept of holiness by affirming that, through baptism, Christians enter into “the holiness of God himself, being incorporated into Christ and made a dwelling place of his Spirit.”¹⁵⁰ He returns to the gift/task dynamics and states that holiness is not only a

¹⁴⁴ John Paul II, “Homily in Limerick: The Task of the Modern Generation,” 1 October 1979, *Origins* 9 (1979) 324-6.

¹⁴⁵ John Paul II, *Agenda for the Third Millennium*, translated by Alan Neame (London: Fount, 1996) 46.

¹⁴⁶ John Paul II, “Do You Know What Baptism Does to You?” *Origins* 27:12 (4 September 1997) 187-8.

¹⁴⁷ John Paul II, “Apostolic Letter ‘*Novo Millennio Ineunte*’ for the Closing of the Jubilee of the Year 2000,” no. 7, *Origins* 30:31 (18 January 2001) 492.

¹⁴⁸ John Paul II, “Apostolic Letter ‘*Novo Millennio Ineunte*’ for the Closing of the Jubilee of the Year 2000,” no. 30, *Origins* 30:31 (18 January 2001) 499.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ John Paul II, “Holiness and the Credibility of the Church’s Proclamation: ‘*Ad Limina*’ Address to Bishops from California, Nevada and Hawai,” *Origins* 34:3 (3 June 2004) 41; see also John Paul II, “Apostolic Letter ‘*Novo Millennio Ineunte*’ for the Closing of the Jubilee of the Year 2000,” no. 31, *Origins* 30:31 (18 January 2001) 499-500.

gift to all believers, but also a task, intrinsic and essential to Christian discipleship.¹⁵¹ For every member of the Church, this task is personal sanctification, and this “radicalism of holiness in accordance with the Spirit of the evangelical counsels” is incumbent on all Christians and intimately linked to the credibility of the Church’s proclamation of the Gospel.¹⁵² Here again we find a strong linkage between *Christifideles Laici* and the teachings of Vatican II, in particular *Lumen Gentium*, which offers the clearest statements of a paradigm shift in the understanding of holiness. Holiness, that is, perfection of charity, is now mandatory and accessible for all members of the Church, of any status of life and occupation, and not just the elite, who leave the secular world in pursuit of the sacred. The universal call to holiness occupies a central place in both *Christifideles Laici* and *Lumen Gentium*.

In chapter five of the Constitution on the Church, holiness is articulated as a living reality, an essential element of ecclesial life, and the fullest expression of the Church’s mystery and communion. All Christians, “in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love.”¹⁵³ All are “invited and obliged to holiness and the perfection of their own state of life.”¹⁵⁴ *Lumen Gentium* gives greater recognition to the holiness of the Church in marriage and in celibacy, through choices made at home and in the workplace, and also in the whole range of relationships. Holiness and charity are a gift, and this Trinitarian gift must be cultivated by acting “under God’s Spirit,” “obeying the Father’s voice,” and following “Christ, poor, humble and cross-bearing.”¹⁵⁵ It is to be sought after in the meditation of the word of God, the cooperation with the divine, the sacramental life of the Church, especially the Eucharist, the prayer, self-denial, service, and the practice of

¹⁵¹ John Paul II, “Holiness and the Credibility of the Church’s Proclamation: ‘*Ad Limina*’ Address to Bishops from California, Nevada and Hawai,” *Origins* 34:3 (3 June 2004) 41.

¹⁵² John Paul II, “Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation ‘*Pastores Gregis*’,” no. 18, *Origins* 33:22 (6 November 2003) 364; “Holiness and the Credibility of the Church’s Proclamation: ‘*Ad Limina*’ Address to Bishops from California, Nevada and Hawai,” *Origins* 34:3 (3 June 2004) 41.

¹⁵³ *Lumen Gentium*, no. 39.

¹⁵⁴ *Lumen Gentium*, no. 42.

¹⁵⁵ *Lumen Gentium*, no. 41.

all virtues.¹⁵⁶ Above all else Christian holiness entails living in faith, hope and charity, a witness of life radically exemplified to an extraordinary degree in the lives of saints and martyrs.¹⁵⁷ Our third observation can now be reformulated as follows: holiness is a participation in the Trinitarian life, and has to do with who we are, how we live, and what we do in the Church and in the world. This reformulation touches on one of the thorniest issues concerning lay people: the definition or description of Christian laity.¹⁵⁸ Our fourth and last observation is that John Paul II has at times provided a description of the lay faithful which is more positive than that proposed by Vatican II, and has indeed opened the avenue for an identification between the lay faithful and the Christian while maintaining the functional differentiation between laity and clergy by stressing the concept of secular character.

A Positive Description of the Laity

Section nine of the *Christifideles Laici* summarises the Pontiff's view on the identity of the lay faithful.¹⁵⁹ First, it notes that the Synod Fathers have identified a need for a better clarification of the positive description of the Christian laity through a deeper exploration of Vatican II teachings and other magisterial documents, and a particular attention to the life and practice of the Church.¹⁶⁰ Second, it recalls section 31 of *Lumen Gentium*'s description of the lay faithful: negatively as "all the faithful except those in holy orders or those belong to religious state sanctioned by the church," and

¹⁵⁶ *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 41-2.

¹⁵⁷ *Lumen Gentium*, no. 41.

¹⁵⁸ Yves Congar considers that a positive definition of the laity is very difficult, even impossible. See "The Laity," in *Vatican II: An Interfaith Appraisal*, ed. John H. Miller, (Notre Dame, Ind.: 1966) 241. A. Glorieux, Secretary of the Commission for the Apostolate of the Laity at the time of the Second Vatican Council, recalls that the Commission had used the word "faithful" to mean any baptised person, and "layperson" to refer to one who is not a religious or a cleric; see footnote 93 in Jan Grootaers, "The Drama Continues Between the Acts: The 'Second Preparation' and its Opponents," in *History of Vatican I, vol. 2: The Formation of the Council's Identity: First Period and Intercession October 1962-September 1963*, edited by Giuseppe Alberigo, English version edited by Joseph Komonchak (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1997) 407.

¹⁵⁹ *Christifideles Laici*, no. 9.

¹⁶⁰ See Proposition 3 of "The Propositions of the 1987 World Synod of Bishops," *Origins* 17:29 (31 December 1987) 500.

positively as the lay faithful, who are through baptism made one body with Christ, established among the people of God, and become sharers in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ, and also in the mission of the whole Church. This section also highlights the unique character of the laity's vocation as seeking the kingdom of God "by engaging in temporal affairs and ordering them according the plan of God." Finally, it quotes approvingly Pope Pius XII's groundbreaking assertion that lay people do not only belong to, but are, the Church.¹⁶¹

After reiterating the teachings of the Synod Fathers, Vatican II, and Pius XII, John Paul II articulates his own description of the laity, which is based on the three pillars of baptism, participation in the triple mission of Christ, and secularity.¹⁶² For him, "faith and baptism is the source of being a Christian in the mystery of the church."¹⁶³ He develops this idea further in his Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* affirming that every Christian identity has its source in the Blessed Trinity.¹⁶⁴ Through baptism, lay people are made "sharers in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ."¹⁶⁵ Their participation in the triple mission of Christ has a secular feature, which is unique to their vocation and lies at the core of his description of the lay faithful. This secularity must be understood not only in its anthropological and social meanings, but also in a theological sense, that is, "in light of God's plan of salvation and in the context of the mystery of the church."¹⁶⁶ The Church lives in the world and has a secular dimension, and lay people share in this dimension but in different ways.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶¹ Pius XII, "Acta PII PP. XII: Allocutiones I," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 38 (1946) 149.

¹⁶² *Christifideles Laici*, no. 9.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ John Paul II, *I will Give You Shepherds: Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 12 (Boston, Mass.: St Paul Books and Media, 1992) 26.

¹⁶⁵ *Christifideles Laici*, nos. 9, 23.

¹⁶⁶ *Christifideles Laici*, no. 15. It is interesting to recall that, during the 1950's, the motto of the French Workers Priests movement was "Présence au monde est présence à Dieu" [To be present in the world is to be present to God]. This movement was banned by Rome but a decade later its theme became the starting point for *Gaudium et Spes*, Vatican II's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.

¹⁶⁷ *Christifideles Laici*, no. 15.

The world then becomes “the place and the means for the lay faithful to fulfil their Christian vocation, because the world itself is destined to glorify God the Father in Christ.”¹⁶⁸ This secular quality, or presence and activity in the world, thus provides the most distinctive character for the identity and ministries of lay people.

These lay ministries, which are based on the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and matrimony, must be distinguished from those founded on the sacrament of orders.¹⁶⁹ The Pope goes on to caution against four possible abuses: “a too-indiscriminate use of the word *ministry*,” “the confusion and equating of the common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood,” “the tendency toward a ‘clericalization’ of lay people,” and the risk of creating an “ecclesial structure of parallel service to that founded on the sacrament of orders.”¹⁷⁰ He stresses that ministries, services, and charisms performed by lay people “exist in communion and on behalf of communion.”¹⁷¹ Therefore, the discernment of charisms by pastors of the Church is always necessary.¹⁷² In the same fashion, he sets forth several “criteria of ecclesiality” for discerning and recognising the lay associations, which lay people are free to form. Lay groups must give primacy to the vocation of Christians to holiness, profess the Catholic faith, maintain “a strong and authentic communion in filial relationship” with the Pope and the local bishop, conform with, and participate in, the Church’s apostolic goals, and commit themselves to a presence in society, “at the service of the total dignity of the person,” in light of the social doctrine of the Church.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ *Christifideles Laici*, nos. 22-23.

¹⁷⁰ *Christifideles Laici*, no.23.

¹⁷¹ *Christifideles Laici*, no. 20.

¹⁷² *Christifideles Laici*, no. 24. In a General Audience talk given on 24 June 1992, the Pope proposes four criteria for discerning charisms: first, they must agree with the Church’s faith in Jesus Christ; second, they must be accompanied by the fruits of the Holy Spirit, including love, joy, and peace; third, they must be conformed with the Church’s authority and compliant with its directives; finally, they must make a contribution to the building up of the community and the life of communion with God. See *The Church: Mystery, Sacrament, Community. Catechesis on the Creed* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1998) 196-7.

¹⁷³ *Christifideles Laici*, no. 30.

With this description of the laity, which is anchored in the three pillars of baptism, secularity, and participation in the triple ministry of Jesus, the Pope has not added anything new to, but merely provided a clarification of, the teaching of Vatican II. However, earlier, in 1980, he provided a definition of the lay faithful, which is more dynamic and positive than the description proposed in *Lumen Gentium*. The laity, he said, are “by definition disciples and followers of Christ, men [*sic*] of the church who are present and active in the world’s heart, so as to administer temporal realities and order them toward God’ reign.”¹⁷⁴ At the conclusion of section nine of *Christifideles Laici*, he affirms that “only through accepting the richness in mystery that God gives to the Christian in baptism is it possible to come to a basic description of the lay faithful.”¹⁷⁵ Here we find John Paul II trying to overcome the age-old contest between the two views, ontological and functional, of the laity. By focusing on baptism, which is common to all the faithful, laity and clergy alike, the Pope seems to opt for an ontological identification of “laity” and “Christians”. However, by stressing on secular quality as the distinctive character of the lay faithful, he is intent on maintaining the functional differentiation between lay people and the ordained.¹⁷⁶

In summary, John Paul II’s endeavour to harmonise the ontological and functional views of the laity, his insistence on the baptismal dignity of Christians, his accent on the Church as a mystery of communion, employed as the framework for understanding the vocation and mission of the lay faithful, and his emphasis on their call to holiness, are entirely consistent with his insistence on the sacramental dignity of Christians. This dignity includes “the imitation and following of Christ,

¹⁷⁴ John Paul II, “Communion, Participation, Evangelization,” *Origins* 10:9 (31 July 1980) 135.

¹⁷⁵ *Christifideles Laici*, no. 9.

¹⁷⁶ John Paul II repeats this message declaring that “secularity is the true and distinctive mark of the layperson and of lay spirituality (*Ecclesia in America*,” no. 44, *Origins* 28:33 [4 February 1999] 579). Elsewhere, he lays down one of the three conditions required for the proper exercise of the Church’s evangelising mission: “a clear-cut distinction between the function of the laity, committed by specific vocation and charism to temporal tasks, and the function of pastors who dedicate themselves to forming the laity to live out those temporal tasks.” See “Letter to Brazilian Episcopal Conference (Vatican City, April 9, 1986),” in *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History*, edited with Introductions, Commentary and Translations by Alfred T. Hennelly (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990) 500.

communion with one another and the missionary mandate.”¹⁷⁷ This position in turn emanates from his recurrent focus on human dignity, a leitmotif of his entire pontificate. In *Sources of Renewal*, a book written in 1972 as a guide for implementing Vatican II teachings in his archdiocese of Kraków, he insists that the dignity of all the faithful is “at once and the same time human dignity, which belongs to each man as an individual, and Christian dignity in the order of grace.”¹⁷⁸ The dignity of the human person, created to the image and likeness of God, and redeemed by the death and resurrection of the Son of God, is a biblical idea that unifies his theology, especially his social teachings. The human being, he declares, “must always be an end and not the means, a subject and not an object.”¹⁷⁹ In the Pope’s numerous writings and speeches, including his first encyclical *Redemptor Hominis* (1979) and his longest encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, he reiterates the Gospel’s emphasis on the dignity of every human life, and stresses that the Church has the duty to proclaim its message of justice, and denounce any individual, program and system that neglects or exploits human rights which are integral to human dignity.¹⁸⁰ In his view, preaching social doctrine is just the same as preaching the Gospel. In the last paragraph of *Christifideles Laici*, just before the final prayer, he affirms that lay people are called “to proclaim and to live the Gospel in service to the person and to society while respecting the totality of the values and needs of both.”¹⁸¹

Conclusion

¹⁷⁷ John Paul II, “*Ecclesia in America*,” no. 44, *Origins* 28:33 (4 February 1999) 579.

¹⁷⁸ Karol Wojtyła, *Sources of Renewal: The Implementation of the Second Vatican Council*, translated by P.S. Falla (London: Collins, 1980) 143.

¹⁷⁹ John Paul II, “Towards a Common Ethical Code for Humankind: Address to the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences 2001,” *Concilium* 4 (2001) 13.

¹⁸⁰ Avery Dulles notes that *Redemptor Hominis*, a predominantly Christological Encyclical, “sounds a number of themes that will be pursued in other documents and shows how these are connected with the central idea of human dignity founded upon the gifts of creation and redemption. It presents human dignity and liberation as the central focus of the Church’s proclamation” (*The Splendor of Faith: The Theological Vision of Pope John Paul II* [New York: Crossroad, 1999] 10). David Hollenbach argues that human rights are based on human dignity which is the source of all moral principles, not a moral principle itself (*Claims in Conflict: Retrieving and Renewing the Catholic Human Rights Tradition* [New York: Paulist Press, 1979] 90).

¹⁸¹ *Christifideles Laici*, no. 64.

This essay has offered a modest review of John Paul II's theology of the laity as proposed in *Christifideles Laici* (1989) by making four observations. The first observation highlights baptismal dignity or newness of life as the motif that the Pope employs to explicate the role and responsibility of lay people as witnesses to the Gospel. Following this *noblesse oblige* logic John Paul II expounds the Trinitarian and ecclesiological dimensions of the Church, understood as a mystery of communion, to situate his teaching on the identity, vocation, and mission of lay people. This mystery of communion means first of all Christians' union of love with God brought about by Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. This union in turn has as its vital aspect the missionary communion which all lay faithful are called to exercise and live out in the world. Like *Lumen Gentium*, John Paul II insists on the intimate link between baptism, Christian dignity, and holiness of life by declaring that holiness—a notion that occupies a central position in the Apostolic Exhortation—is the greatest testimony of the dignity conferred on a disciple of Christ. Our last observation is that in *Christifideles Laici* lay people are defined by their baptism, secular character, and participation in the triple ministry of Jesus. However, the Pope continues to maintain a functional distinction between the laity and the clergy by an accent on the secularity of the former. By stressing these four elements, John Paul II has deepened and amplified the meaning of the traditional concept of *vita apostolica*. Indeed, the Pope has brought into relief the *vita* aspect by highlighting the baptismal dignity of the laity and their call to holiness. By emphasising their role in the Church as a mystery of communion and their secular character or presence in the world, he has also clarified the *apostolica* dimension of their mission. Twenty years on, *Christifideles Laici* still provides a fresh reminder to all the lay faithful that the great dictum of the Church Fathers *attende tibi ipso* (know thyself) ultimately means to appreciate the *honor* of being a baptised Christian, and to assume the *onus* of living in conformance with its dignity, which necessarily entails the supreme duty to proclaim the Gospel in and to the world.

Author: Peter N.V. Hai has recently completed a doctoral thesis, at the Australian Catholic University, on the theology of the laity in the documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences with special reference to the teachings of Pope John Paul II and the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference.

Email: peternvhai@yahoo.com
