LUMEN GENTIUM
CHAPTER 4

THE LAITY: BAPTISMAL DIGNITY, CHRISTIAN WITNESS, AND THE KINGSHIP OF CHRIST

Our previous reading considered the sacred hierarchy through which Christ teaches, sanctifies, and governs His people. We now consider the vocation of the lay faithful and their responsibilities within the Church and the world.

Today we read Chapter IV, “The Laity,” Sections 30-38.

We will continue reading alongside Sacred Scripture, Sacred Tradition, and the Church’s perennial teaching. Particular attention is needed when we encounter the language of participation, equality, spiritual sacrifice, conscience, and the relationship between pastors and the faithful.

Baptism brings real dignity and real obligations. It does not confer Holy Orders. Christian conscience must answer to truth. It cannot make evil good. Cooperation in the Church’s mission requires fidelity to the faith entrusted to her.

The Church Fathers help us examine these questions. Their writings show that the holiness and responsibility of ordinary Christians belong to the ancient inheritance of the Church.

Our question is concrete: Are the faithful being formed to bring their lives and the world under Christ’s rule, or are they being encouraged to accommodate the faith to the world?

I. READ

Read Chapter IV, Sections 30-38, “The Laity.”

YOU WILL FIND THE COMPLETE OFFICIAL READING AT THE END OF THIS DOCUMENT.

The section headings below identify the subjects of the Council’s text; the explanations that follow are our commentary.

Section 30 – Cooperation in the Church's mission

Acts 18:24-26 provides a useful starting point. Priscilla and Aquila help Apollos understand the way of God more accurately. Their assistance serves the apostolic faith.

We should ask whether our own work helps others receive that faith faithfully.

Enthusiasm alone cannot establish that an initiative serves the Church. Its teaching, methods, and purposes must also be examined.

Section 31 – The lay vocation in the world

Family life, employment, education, and civic duties require serious spiritual formation.

A Catholic employer must deal justly with workers. Parents must teach their children to pray. A public official must consider the moral character of the laws he supports.

These obligations exist throughout the week. They cannot be fulfilled merely by holding a position at the parish.

Section 32 – Common dignity and distinct offices

St. Paul teaches both unity in Christ and a diversity of members and gifts (Galatians 3:28; I Corinthians 12:12-30). We must preserve both.

A person's holiness cannot be measured by ecclesiastical rank. Neither can a person's holiness, expertise, or popularity supply the sacrament of Orders.

Equal baptismal dignity does not mean that every member possesses the same authority or sacramental ministry.

Section 33 – The lay apostolate

We should distinguish the ordinary duty to bear Christian witness from a commission to perform a particular ecclesiastical task.

Parents need no parish appointment to teach the faith to their children. A person entrusted with a specific Church function must respect the authority and limits of that commission.

In either case, the faith being communicated is something received. An apostolate cannot legitimately become a vehicle for replacing Catholic doctrine with personal opinions.

Section 34 – Spiritual sacrifice

Romans 12:1 and I Peter 2:5 provide the scriptural foundation for offering our lives to God.

Prayer, honest work, patience in suffering, and faithful family duties can become spiritual offerings through grace.

This requires conversion. Dishonesty does not become holy because someone associates it with a religious intention. The conduct itself must be brought into obedience to God.

Section 35 – Witness in word and life

Acts 18 and Ephesians 6:4 direct our attention to instruction as well as example.

Children need to hear the faith explained. Our neighbors need truthful answers. Those who ask about Christ should encounter more than our reluctance to speak.

Good example gives credibility to our words. It does not make words unnecessary.

Section 36 – Christian responsibility in temporal affairs

Romans 6:12-13 begins with the struggle against sin in ourselves. Matthew 25:31-46 directs us toward concrete service to others.

Our responsibilities include the treatment of employees, the protection of vulnerable people, the honesty of our professional conduct, and the moral character of our public decisions.

Technical competence cannot excuse moral wrongdoing. Neither can political success.

Section 37 – Pastors and the faithful

Hebrews 13:17 joins pastoral authority to accountability for souls. Acts 5:29 establishes the priority of obedience to God.

Respectful questions, competent advice, and truthful reports of wrongdoing can help a pastor fulfill his office.

Neither flattery nor contempt helps the Church. Pastors need courage to hear the truth; the faithful need care to speak it accurately and charitably.

Section 38 – Christian presence in the world

Matthew 5:13-16 gives us the images of salt and light.

Christian witness requires a visible difference in the way we live: honesty where dishonesty is profitable, fidelity where betrayal is accepted, and care where the vulnerable are treated as burdens.

We should ask whether our presence helps others recognize Christ.

II. SCRIPTURE

Scripture gives us both the dignity of the Christian vocation and the demands that accompany it.

I Peter 2:5, 9 describes the faithful as a holy priesthood and a kingly priesthood. These words belong to apostolic teaching. Catholics should neither neglect them nor interpret them as abolishing the ordained priesthood.

St. Peter speaks of spiritual sacrifices offered through Jesus Christ. St. Paul makes the practical demand clear in Romans 12:1-2: Christians must offer themselves to God and resist conformity to the world.

Our bodies, decisions, habits, and use of time matter.

A business transaction cannot remain dishonest and become a pleasing offering merely because we attach a prayer to it. Conversion must enter the act itself.

This gives us a necessary test: Does our understanding of ordinary Christian life lead us toward repentance and virtue?

I Corinthians 12:12-30 describes a body whose members differ in their gifts and functions. St. Paul's questions about apostles, prophets, and teachers exclude the assumption that everyone possesses the same office.

The passage also excludes contempt for members whose work seems less conspicuous.

The mother teaching a child to pray, the laborer refusing fraud, and the sick person persevering in faith belong within the Church's living service to Christ. Their fidelity matters even when it brings no title or public attention.

Our Lord commands His disciples to let their light shine so that others may glorify the Father (Matthew 5:16). St. Peter tells Christians to be prepared to explain their hope with reverence and a good conscience (I Peter 3:15-16).

Neither passage supports a faith permanently concealed out of fear or disapproval.

The content of our witness is also given. Galatians 1:8-9 warns against a message that departs from the Gospel already received.

Charity governs our manner of speaking. Fidelity governs what we say.

Deuteronomy 6:6-7 places instruction in God's commands within the daily life of the household. Ephesians 6:4 charges fathers with bringing up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Religious education at church can assist parents. It cannot remove their responsibility for the atmosphere, example, and instruction of the home.

Do children hear prayer? Do they see repentance? Do they learn that Sunday worship and the commandments govern family decisions?

Finally, in Matthew 28:18-20, the risen Lord declares His authority and commands the teaching of all that He entrusted to His Apostles.

Colossians 3:17 extends Christian allegiance into words and deeds.

A Catholic identity confined to private devotion, while professional or political life follows contrary moral principles, fails this scriptural test.

III. REMEMBER – WHAT CAME BEFORE?

The Church's earlier witnesses help us distinguish genuine lay responsibility from interpretations that confuse the Church's sacramental order or weaken the demands of Christian life.

St. Augustine – The common priesthood

In *The City of God*, Book XX, Chapter 10, Augustine explains that Christians are called priests because they are members of the one Priest, Jesus Christ. He also distinguishes this usage from the particular designation of bishops and presbyters as priests in the Church.

His explanation preserves both the common participation and the particular ministry.

Speaking of the priesthood of the baptized is therefore no modern invention. Using that language to erase the distinction of sacred ministry misrepresents the ancient witness.

St. Leo the Great – Baptismal dignity and apostolic authority

In *Sermon 3,* Section 1, Leo describes God's adopted people as priestly and royal. The same sermon discusses the episcopal office and Peter's enduring place in the care of Christ's flock.

The dignity of the faithful and apostolic authority belong together in his account.

Recognizing the importance of the laity does not require dismantling the hierarchy.

St. Justin Martyr – Participation joined to faith and moral life

In his *First Apology,* Chapters 65-67, Justin describes common prayer, the thanksgiving offered by the president of the assembly, the people's assent, the service of deacons, and assistance to those in need.

Chapter 66 connects Eucharistic reception with belief in the Christian teaching, Baptism, and a life corresponding to Christ's commands.

This ancient account joins participation to order, doctrine, and moral responsibility.

It gives no support to treating the Eucharist as detached from what Christians believe and how they live.

St. John Chrysostom – The seriousness of married life

In *Homily 20 on Ephesians,* Chrysostom expounds the duties of husbands and wives. He urges husbands toward a costly love modeled upon Christ's love for the Church.

He rejects the use of terror and threat against a wife. Later in the homily, he encourages shared prayer and discussion at home of what was heard in church.

Christian marriage therefore requires more than religious language. The treatment of a spouse, or the ordering of the household, and its life of prayer concern fidelity to Christ.

A parish program cannot compensate for habitual cruelty or religious indifference at home.

The Epistle to Diognetus – Christian life amid ordinary society

This early Christian work has uncertain authorship.

Chapters 5-6 describe Christians sharing the ordinary circumstances of their neighbors while maintaining a distinctive moral life. Its account includes fidelity in marriage and the refusal to destroy or expose their offspring.

Christian presence in society includes a refusal to imitate its sins.

Living among others does not require surrendering Christian allegiance.

Leo XIII – The faithful must help defend the faith

In *Sapientiae Christianae,* Sections 14-16, Leo XIII teaches that defending and communicating the faith cannot always be left to those who govern the Church.

The faithful also have responsibilities. Their task is to communicate what they have received without assuming the pastoral office.

This teaching corrects a passive understanding of lay life.

Parents, teachers, writers, and ordinary Catholics may need to answer objections, instruct others, or resist attacks upon Christian truth. They must learn what they undertake to defend.

Pius XI – Christ's kingship includes public life

In *Quas Primas,* especially Sections 17-18, Pius XI teaches that Christ's authority extends to civil affairs and embraces individuals, families, and states.

Public life remains answerable to God. Civil authority does not create the distinction between good and evil.

Questions about particular constitutional arrangements and relations between Church and state require further treatment. Here we must retain the underlying principle: no public office releases a person from obedience to the moral law.

Pius XII – The faithful's offering and the priest's ministry

In *Mediator Dei*, especially Sections 84-93, Pius XII explains the faithful's real participation in the offering of the Mass.

He also preserves the distinction between that participation and the priest's sacramental action. The consecration is performed by the priest acting as Christ's representative. The faithful unite themselves to the offering through his ministry and in union with him.

An explanation of participation must preserve both truths.

IV. BENEDICT XVI

Benedict XVI's general audience of February 7, 2007, considers Priscilla and Aquila.

Their marriage, hospitality, instruction of Apollos, and cooperation with St. Paul show the fruitfulness of faithful Christian households. Their home served the life and mission of the early Church.

Their example gives our discussion a practical center.

A home can serve the Gospel through the way its members live, teach, welcome others, and assist the Church's mission.

We should therefore examine what actually happens within our homes. What is taught? What is tolerated? What receives our attention? What do our children learn from the decisions they see us make?

In *Sacramentum Caritatis,* Section 83, Benedict addresses consistency between Eucharistic worship and public conduct.

He identifies obligations concerning human life from conception to natural death, marriage and family, parental freedom in education, and the common good. He also recalls the bishops' duty to reaffirm these values.

The implication is substantial.

Sacramental practice and public moral responsibility cannot be treated as unrelated compartments.

Pastors must teach clearly. The faithful must bring what they receive into the decisions for which they are responsible.

V. PILLARS COMMENTARY

The plumb line is the truth received from Christ and handed down in His Church.

Our assessment must distinguish the Council's actual teaching, an interpretation placed upon it, and a practice that contradicts it.

A failure in Catholic life remains serious even when it does not constitute a reversal of doctrine.

Where departures have been acknowledged

There is a documented basis for identifying failures in the understanding and practice of the lay vocation.

In *Christifideles Laici,* Section 2, John Paul II identifies two temptations: excessive concentration upon internal Church tasks at the expense of responsibilities in the world, and separation of faith from life.

Section 23 reports confusion between common and ministerial priesthood, disregard of ecclesiastical norms, and tendencies toward clericalizing the laity.

These are acknowledged problems within the Church's life.

The following commentary applies the scriptural, patristic, and papal principles considered above to those failures and related distortions.

Confusing baptismal priesthood with Holy Orders

Where instruction suggests that the priest's consecrating power comes from the congregation, it departs from Catholic teaching.

Where participation is explained as though everyone performs the same sacramental action in the same capacity, the faithful are being misled.

Augustine's distinction and Pius XII's explanation establish the boundary.

The needed correction requires clear teaching about the Mass and Holy Orders. The faithful should understand their own offering more deeply while recognizing the ministry that Baptism alone does not confer.

Reducing lay vocation to parish activity

Lay service within a parish can do much good.

The distortion arises when visible ecclesiastical activity becomes the principal measure of whether ordinary Catholics are fulfilling their vocation.

A parent caring for children, a nurse protecting vulnerable patients, and a tradesman refusing dishonest work already carry substantial Christian responsibilities.

Their fidelity cannot be dismissed because they hold no prominent parish role.

We get off the plumb line when we encourage activity within Church buildings while neglecting formation for the obligations Catholics carry into their homes and occupations.

Treating consultation as authority to alter revealed truth

The faithful should contribute knowledge and experience.

A pastor may need to hear about a neglected family, inadequate catechesis, an unjust employment practice, or serious misconduct within a Church institution. Hearing such concerns can lead to necessary correction. But consultation cannot authorize another gospel.

If participation becomes a claim that a majority may overturn received doctrine, its purpose has been corrupted.

St. Paul's warning in Galatians 1 remains applicable. Popularity cannot establish whether a teaching is true.

A responsible consultation should help the Church teach and act faithfully.

Separating conscience from truth

An appeal to conscience becomes misleading when it means that personal conviction can make any chosen action right.

A person must take conscience seriously and seek its proper formation. Sincerity alone cannot establish the moral goodness of an act. Neither professional independence nor political responsibility removes a decision from moral scrutiny.

Catholics may disagree about many legislative strategies and practical judgments. Such disagreements must be distinguished from attempts to justify conduct that is intrinsically wrong.

The necessary question is whether our judgment is being formed by truth or whether we are asking religious language to protect a decision from examination.

Removing Christ from public responsibility

Christian service includes justice, competent work, care for the poor, and protection of those at risk. These obligations must be taken seriously.

Yet social usefulness cannot become the whole content of the faith. The Church must also proclaim redemption, repentance, grace, the sacraments, judgment, and eternal life.

Where Christian activity retains the language of service while abandoning the call to conversion, its supernatural purpose has been obscured.

Where Catholics treat their religion as irrelevant to the moral character of their public actions, they abandon an obligation belonging to discipleship.

Public achievement cannot substitute for obedience to God.

Praising the Christian family while neglecting its formation

Spouses need instruction in fidelity, chastity, forgiveness, justice, and sacrificial love. Parents need help teaching their children the faith. Families enduring hardship need practical and spiritual assistance. The measure cannot be the number of meetings held about family life.

We should ask whether families are being helped to pray, repent, worship, and persevere.

Where pastoral work avoids the truths necessary for these duties because those truths are unpopular, families are left less prepared for their vocation.

Mercy requires patience with people in difficulty. It also requires truth about the good toward which they are being helped.

Using obedience to silence truthful concerns

The obligation of obedience does not make concealment virtuous. A credible report of harm deserves attention. A well-founded doctrinal question deserves an honest response.

At the same time, the duty to speak does not authorize reckless accusation. We must distinguish evidence from rumor and an actual contradiction from a disagreement about practical means.

Pastors must listen and act justly. The faithful must speak truthfully and with charity.

Silence about wrongdoing can injure the Church. Accusations made without adequate evidence can also injure her members.

What this examination establishes

The ancient sources establish the dignity, responsibility, and spiritual offering of ordinary Christians. They also preserve the apostolic ministry, received truth, and the demands of conversion.

The documented failures concern confusion of roles, neglect of the lay mission in the world, and separation of faith from conduct.

Further departures occur wherever participation is used to claim authority over revelation or conscience is invoked to excuse disregard of the moral law.

These failures require correction wherever they occur.

Our task is to hold Catholic teaching and Catholic practice to the same received standard: affirm what faithfully expresses the tradition, clarify what is misunderstood, and correct what contradicts it.

VI. REFLECT

As we finish today's reading, ask yourself:

Am I bringing my family, work, and public responsibilities under Christ's rule – and am I careful to distinguish a proven departure from Catholic teaching from an accusation that still requires evidence?

VII. DEEPER THOUGHTS TO CONCLUDE THIS DAY

Much of a lay Catholic's fidelity takes place where few people see it. A promise is kept. An injustice is refused. A child is taught to pray. A spouse receives patient care. A person who has fallen into sin returns to confession and begins again.

These acts require grace. Their value cannot be measured by public recognition.

The Fathers direct our attention toward the seriousness of ordinary Christian life. Their witness calls us to worship, moral discipline, charity, and perseverance within the circumstances entrusted to us.

Our examination of the Church must also reach our own lives.

It is possible to speak forcefully about fidelity while excusing dishonesty, resentment, neglect, or cruelty in ourselves. The same truth that exposes a public error calls each of us to conversion.

Today, pray for parents and children, for teachers and employers, for those who work in public service, for the sick, and for Catholics whose fidelity carries a personal cost.

Pray for pastors to teach clearly and govern justly.

Ask for the knowledge to recognize error, the courage to resist it, and the charity to seek the salvation of those involved.

CHRIST CALLS HIS FAITHFUL TO RECEIVE HIS TRUTH, OFFER THEIR LIVES TO GOD, AND BEAR WITNESS TO HIM IN THE WORLD.

CHAPTER IV

THE LAITY

30. Having set forth the functions of the hierarchy, the Sacred Council gladly turns its attention. to the state of those faithful called the laity. Everything that has been said above concerning the People of God is intended for the laity, religious and clergy alike. But there are certain things which pertain in a special way to the laity, both men and women, by reason of their condition and mission. Due to the special circumstances of our time the foundations of this doctrine must be more thoroughly examined. For their pastors know how much the laity contribute to the welfare of the entire Church. They also know that they were not ordained by Christ to take

upon themselves alone the entire salvific mission of the Church toward the world. On the contrary they understand that it is their noble duty to shepherd the faithful and to recognize their ministries and charisms, so that all according to their proper roles may cooperate in this common undertaking with one mind. For we must all "practice the truth in love, and so grow up in all things in Him who is head, Christ. For from Him the whole body, being closely joined and knit together through every joint of the system, according to the functioning in due measure of each single part, derives its increase to the building up of itself in love".(190)

31. The term laity is here understood to mean all the faithful except those in holy orders and those in the state of religious life specially approved by the Church. These faithful are by baptism made one body with Christ and are constituted among the People of God; they are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetical, and kingly functions of Christ; and they carry out for their own part the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world.

What specifically characterizes the laity is their secular nature. It is true that those in holy orders can at times be engaged in secular activities, and even have a secular profession. But they are by reason of their particular vocation especially and professedly ordained to the sacred ministry. Similarly, by their state in life, religious give splendid and striking testimony that the world cannot be transformed and offered to God without the spirit of the beatitudes. But the laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the world, that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven. They are called there by God that by exercising their proper function and led by the spirit of the Gospel they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven. In this way they may make Christ known to others, especially by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope and charity. Therefore, since they are tightly bound up in all types of temporal affairs it is their special task to order and to throw light upon these affairs in such a way that they may come into being and then continually increase according to Christ to the praise of the Creator and the Redeemer.

32. By divine institution Holy Church is ordered and governed with a wonderful diversity. "For just as in one body we have many members, yet all the members have not the same function, so we, the many, are one body in Christ, but severally members one of another".(191) Therefore, the chosen People of God is one: "one Lord, one faith, one baptism"(192); sharing a common dignity as members from their regeneration in Christ, having the same filial grace and the same vocation to perfection; possessing in common one salvation, one hope and one undivided charity. There is, therefore, in Christ and in the Church no inequality on the basis of race or nationality, social condition or sex, because "there is neither Jew nor Greek: there is neither bond nor free: there is neither male nor female. For you are all 'one' in Christ Jesus".(193)

If therefore in the Church everyone does not proceed by the same path, nevertheless all are called to sanctity and have received an equal privilege of faith through the justice of God.(194) And if by the will of Christ some are made teachers, pastors and dispensers of mysteries on behalf of others, yet all share a true equality with regard to the dignity and to the activity common to all the faithful for the building up of the Body of Christ. For the distinction which the Lord made between sacred ministers and the rest of the People of God bears within it a certain

union, since pastors and the other faithful are bound to each other by a mutual need. Pastors of the Church, following the example of the Lord, should minister to one another and to the other faithful. These in their turn should enthusiastically lend their joint assistance to their pastors and teachers. Thus in their diversity all bear witness to the wonderful unity in the Body of Christ. This very diversity of graces, ministries and works gathers the children of God into one, because "all these things are the work of one and the same Spirit".(195)

Therefore, from divine choice the laity have Christ for their brothers who though He is the Lord of all, came not to be served but to serve.(196) They also have for their brothers those in the sacred ministry who by teaching, by sanctifying and by ruling with the authority of Christ feed the family of God so that the new commandment of charity may be fulfilled by all. St. Augustine puts this very beautifully when he says: "What I am for you terrifies me; what I am with you consoles me. For you I am a bishop; but with you I am a Christian. The former is a duty; the latter a grace. The former is a danger; the latter, salvation" (1*).

33. The laity are gathered together in the People of God and make up the Body of Christ under one head. Whoever they are they are called upon, as living members, to expend all their energy for the growth of the Church and its continuous sanctification, since this very energy is a gift of the Creator and a blessing of the Redeemer.

The lay apostolate, however, is a participation in the salvific mission of the Church itself. Through their baptism and confirmation all are commissioned to that apostolate by the Lord Himself. Moreover, by the sacraments, especially holy Eucharist, that charity toward God and man which is the soul of the apostolate is communicated and nourished. Now the laity are called in a special way to make the Church present and operative in those places and circumstances where only through them can it become the salt of the earth (2*). Thus every layman, in virtue of the very gifts bestowed upon him, is at the same time a witness and a living instrument of the mission of the Church itself "according to the measure of Christ's bestowal".(197)

Besides this apostolate which certainly pertains to all Christians, the laity can also be called in various ways to a more direct form of cooperation in the apostolate of the Hierarchy (3*). This was the way certain men and women assisted Paul the Apostle in the Gospel, laboring much in the Lord.(198) Further, they have the capacity to assume from the Hierarchy certain ecclesiastical functions, which are to be performed for a spiritual purpose.

Upon all the laity, therefore, rests the noble duty of working to extend the divine plan of salvation to all men of each epoch and in every land. Consequently, may every opportunity be given them so that, according to their abilities and the needs of the times, they may zealously participate in the saving work of the Church.

34. The supreme and eternal Priest, Christ Jesus, since he wills to continue his witness and service also through the laity, vivifies them in this Spirit and increasingly urges them on to every good and perfect work.

For besides intimately linking them to His life and His mission, He also gives them a sharing in His priestly function of offering spiritual worship for the glory of God and the salvation of men. For this reason the laity, dedicated to Christ and anointed by the Holy Spirit, are marvelously

called and wonderfully prepared so that ever more abundant fruits of the Spirit may be produced in them. For all their works, prayers and apostolic endeavors, their ordinary married and family life, their daily occupations, their physical and mental relaxation, if carried out in the Spirit, and even the hardships of life, if patiently borne—all these become "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ".(199) Together with the offering of the Lord's body, they are most fittingly offered in the celebration of the Eucharist. Thus, as those everywhere who adore in holy activity, the laity consecrate the world itself to God.

35. Christ, the great Prophet, who proclaimed the Kingdom of His Father both by the testimony of His life and the power of His words, continually fulfills His prophetic office until the complete manifestation of glory. He does this not only through the hierarchy who teach in His name and with His authority, but also through the laity whom He made His witnesses and to whom He gave understanding of the faith (*sensu fidei*) and an attractiveness in speech(200) so that the power of the Gospel might shine forth in their daily social and family life. They conduct themselves as children of the promise, and thus strong in faith and in hope they make the most of the present,(201) and with patience await the glory that is to come.(202) Let them not, then, hide this hope in the depths of their hearts, but even in the program of their secular life let them express it by a continual conversion and by wrestling "against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness.(203)

Just as the sacraments of the New Law, by which the life and the apostolate of the faithful are nourished, prefigure a new heaven and a new earth,(204) so too the laity go forth as powerful proclaimers of a faith in things to be hoped for,(205) when they courageously join to their profession of faith a life springing from faith. This evangelization, that is, this announcing of Christ by a living testimony as well as by the spoken word, takes on a specific quality and a special force in that it is carried out in the ordinary surroundings of the world.

In connection with the prophetic function is that state of life which is sanctified by a special sacrament obviously of great importance, namely, married and family life. For where Christianity pervades the entire mode of family life, and gradually transforms it, one will find there both the practice and an excellent school of the lay apostolate. In such a home husbands and wives find their proper vocation in being witnesses of the faith and love of Christ to one another and to their children. The Christian family loudly proclaims both the present virtues of the Kingdom of God and the hope of a blessed life to come. Thus by its example and its witness it accuses the world of sin and enlightens those who seek the truth.

Consequently, even when preoccupied with temporal cares, the laity can and must perform a work of great value for the evangelization of the world. For even if some of them have to fulfill their religious duties on their own, when there are no sacred ministers or in times of persecution; and even if many of them devote all their energies to apostolic work; still it remains for each one of them to cooperate in the external spread and the dynamic growth of the Kingdom of Christ in the world. Therefore, let the laity devotedly strive to acquire a more profound grasp of revealed truth, and let them insistently beg of God the gift of wisdom.

36. Christ, becoming obedient even unto death and because of this exalted by the Father,(206) entered into the glory of His kingdom. To Him all things are made subject until He subjects Himself and all created things to the Father that God may be all in all.(207) Now Christ has communicated this royal power to His disciples that they might be constituted in royal freedom

and that by true penance and a holy life they might conquer the reign of sin in themselves.(208) Further, He has shared this power so that serving Christ in their fellow men they might by humility and patience lead their brethren to that King for whom to serve is to reign. But the Lord wishes to spread His kingdom also by means of the laity, namely, a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace (4*). In this kingdom creation itself will be delivered from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the sons of God.(209) Clearly then a great promise and a great trust is committed to the disciples: "All things are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's".(210)

The faithful, therefore, must learn the deepest meaning and the value of all creation, as well as its role in the harmonious praise of God. They must assist each other to live holier lives even in their daily occupations. In this way the world may be permeated by the spirit of Christ and it may more effectively fulfill its purpose in justice, charity and peace. The laity have the principal role in the overall fulfillment of this duty. Therefore, by their competence in secular training and by their activity, elevated from within by the grace of Christ, let them vigorously contribute their effort, so that created goods may be perfected by human labor, technical skill and civic culture for the benefit of all men according to the design of the Creator and the light of His Word. May the goods of this world be more equitably distributed among all men, and may they in their own way be conducive to universal progress in human and Christian freedom. In this manner, through the members of the Church, will Christ progressively illumine the whole of human society with His saving light.

Moreover, let the laity also by their combined efforts remedy the customs and conditions of the world, if they are an inducement to sin, so that they all may be conformed to the norms of justice and may favor the practice of virtue rather than hinder it. By so doing they will imbue culture and human activity with genuine moral values; they will better prepare the field of the world for the seed of the Word of God; and at the same time they will open wider the doors of the Church by which the message of peace may enter the world.

Because of the very economy of salvation the faithful should learn how to distinguish carefully between those rights and duties which are theirs as members of the Church, and those which they have as members of human society. Let them strive to reconcile the two, remembering that in every temporal affair they must be guided by a Christian conscience, since even in secular business there is no human activity which can be withdrawn from God's dominion. In our own time, however, it is most urgent that this distinction and also this harmony should shine forth more clearly than ever in the lives of the faithful, so that the mission of the Church may correspond more fully to the special conditions of the world today. For it must be admitted that the temporal sphere is governed by its own principles, since it is rightly concerned with the interests of this world. But that ominous doctrine which attempts to build a society with no regard whatever for religion, and which attacks and destroys the religious liberty of its citizens, is rightly to be rejected (5*).

37. The laity have the right, as do all Christians, to receive in abundance from their spiritual shepherds the spiritual goods of the Church, especially the assistance of the word of God and of the sacraments (6*). They should openly reveal to them their needs and desires with that freedom and confidence which is fitting for children of God and brothers in Christ. They are, by reason of the knowledge, competence or outstanding ability which they may enjoy, permitted and sometimes even obliged to express their opinion on those things which concern the good of

the Church (7*). When occasions arise, let this be done through the organs erected by the Church for this purpose. Let it always be done in truth, in courage and in prudence, with reverence and charity toward those who by reason of their sacred office represent the person of Christ.

The laity should, as all Christians, promptly accept in Christian obedience decisions of their spiritual shepherds, since they are representatives of Christ as well as teachers and rulers in the Church. Let them follow the example of Christ, who by His obedience even unto death, opened to all men the blessed way of the liberty of the children of God. Nor should they omit to pray for those placed over them, for they keep watch as having to render an account of their souls, so that they may do this with joy and not with grief.(211)

Let the spiritual shepherds recognize and promote the dignity as well as the responsibility of the laity in the Church. Let them willingly employ their prudent advice. Let them confidently assign duties to them in the service of the Church, allowing them freedom and room for action. Further, let them encourage lay people so that they may undertake tasks on their own initiative. Attentively in Christ, let them consider with fatherly love the projects, suggestions and desires proposed by the laity.(8*) However, let the shepherds respectfully acknowledge that just freedom which belongs to everyone in this earthly city

A great many wonderful things are to be hoped for from this familiar dialogue between the laity and their spiritual leaders: in the laity a strengthened sense of personal responsibility; a renewed enthusiasm; a more ready application of their talents to the projects of their spiritual leaders. The latter, on the other hand, aided by the experience of the laity, can more clearly and more incisively come to decisions regarding both spiritual and temporal matters. In this way, the whole Church, strengthened by each one of its members, may more effectively fulfill is mission for the life of the world.

38. Each individual layman must stand before the world as a witness to the resurrection and life of the Lord Jesus and a symbol of the living God. All the laity as a community and each one according to his ability must nourish the world with spiritual fruits.(212) They must diffuse in the world that spirit which animates the poor, the meek, the peace makers—whom the Lord in the Gospel proclaimed as blessed.(213) In a word, "Christians must be to the world what the soul is to the body."(9*)