

his monasteries to bring stability and peace and to preserve learning at a time when the Roman Empire was falling apart. God raised St. Teresa and St. Ignatius to preserve and advance the Catholic Faith at a time when the Church was being torn apart from within by the Protestant Revolt. Today, because of the growth of secularization in the world much of the work which must be done to make the world conform to Christ belongs to the sphere of the laity. God has been raising up institutes of perfection of lay people because many people will not find Jesus Christ unless they find Him in us. We look like them, we work with them, we are their neighbors. They have no idea we are undercover apostles for Jesus Christ. We can enter through an opening that is not there for priests and religious. This is why lay institutes exist.

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Pamphlet 135

# What is a Lay Vocation?

## The Lay Vocation to Holiness

The church defines the laity as, "... all the faithful except those in Holy Orders and those who belong to a religious state sanctioned by the Church, who by Baptism are incorporated into Christ..." and whose unique vocation is to, "seek the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and ordering them to the plan of God" (LG, 31).

Pope John Paul tells us that, "The vocation to holiness must be recognized and lived by the lay faithful, first of all as an undeniable and demanding obligation and as a shining example of the infinite love of the Father that has regenerated them in His own life of holiness." (CL, 17).

The Canon Law of the Church states: "Since the laity like all the Christian faithful are deputed by God to the apostolate through their Baptism and Confirmation, they are therefore bound by general obligation and enjoy the general right to work as individuals or in associations so that the divine message becomes known and accepted by all persons throughout the world (Can. 215)."

## The Vocation of Transforming Society

The lay vocation is expressed in the sanctification of the daily life of each

layman and that of his or her family, profession and society. This counters the common mistaken notion that the layperson's apostolate is above all a sacristy-related activity such as Eucharistic minister, lector, etc., and usually confined to that. In his encyclical about the role of the lay faithful in the Church, *Christifideles Laici*, the Holy Father has commented that often the laity have "the temptation of being so interested in Church services and tasks that some fail to become actively engaged in their responsibilities in the professional, social, cultural, and political world" (LC, 2). There is a terrible confusion of the roles of the priest and laity today that has priests wanting to be laymen and laity wanting to be at least some kind of mini-priest. Meanwhile, the real priestly and lay apostolates are crippled, or at least limping, in many places.

The Church is earnestly calling upon the laity to exercise their special mission in society because what the world really needs today depends in great part upon the laity: good mothers and good fathers, faithful to one another, open to life and dedicated to the education and Christian upbringing of their children; good doctors and good nurses committed to the protection and care of human life at all stages; good and honest lawyers who promote civil legislation in accordance with divine law; good teachers who take to heart their serious responsibility for the

nurturing of the mind and soul of their students in accord with Catholic principles; good, responsible workers in every sector of society who bring their Catholic values and lifestyle into the workplace. Lay sanctity resides in this apostolic orientation. Other works are secondary.

The laity's role is one that requires leadership and courage to exert a positive Catholic influence on society. Otherwise, how is it, for example, that people who are willing to sell their souls to evil things for the sake of power and money can get elected to office and often times on the Catholic vote? Or how is it that so many Catholics practice birth control? And there are many more that simply disregard many of the Church's teachings in faith and morals according to their convenience.

### **The Need to Work Together**

*Why is there so much evil in the world? Basically, because the forces of evil were unified while the Catholics were passive and lacked unity. We need to plan and work together to bring Christ back into the world.*

It is the mind of the Church that Catholics get together so we can be more efficient in our sanctification and in the apostolate. An isolated Catholic is inefficient. Attaining holiness of life and conquering the world for Christ are not things that we will be able to do by ourselves. Unity is a necessary element.

The Vatican Council teaches us that, "In the present circumstances it is supremely necessary that wherever the laity are at work the apostolate under its collective and organized form should be strengthened. In actual fact only a well-knit combination of aims of the modern apostolate and give its fruits good protection." (Vatican II, AA, 18).

The Canon Law of the Church encourages laity to come together in groups. "The Christian faithful are at liberty freely to found and to govern associations for charitable and religious purposes or for the promotion of the Christian vocation in the world; they are free to hold meetings to pursue these purposes in common" (Canon 215).

And Our Holy Father tells us the theological reason why we should group together. Beyond this, the profound reason that justifies and demands the lay faithful's forming of lay groups comes from a theology based on ecclesiology, as the Second Vatican Council clearly acknowledged in referring to the group apostolate as a "sign of communion and of unity of the Church of Christ" (Pope John Paul II, CL, 29)

### **Lay Institutes**

If we look at the history of consecrated life we find that God raised them up according to the special needs of their times. God raised St. Benedict to found