

THE PRESENT MOMENT OF THE LAITY IN THE CHURCH

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The present moment of the laity in the Church should be seen in the light of the Church's journey starting from the experience of the Second Vatican Council. We find here the beginning of a reflection that still continues not only to enrich thought and reflection, but above all to shed ever new light on the identity and action of the laity and the entire believing community. I will limit myself to three nuclei.

A. The first document after the Second Vatican Council that deals with the vocation of the laity in a very thorough and profound manner is the *Apostolic Exhortation CHRISTIFIDELES LAICI* (30 December 1988). The parable of the vineyard and the vinedressers is a very evocative image that guides this document. Here are the five points of this document.

1. **Christ is the vine and we are the branches.** The dignity of the lay faithful in the Church comes from the fact that all of us, through baptism, are part of the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ. We are daughters and sons in the Son. We are living and holy temples of the Spirit, participating in the priestly, prophetic and kingship of Jesus Christ.
2. **This identity is nourished by the one vine,** Christ, and does so by actively participating in the life of the Church-Communion.
3. **It is an active and life-giving participation:** we are all constituted, chosen, **to go and bear fruit** in the logic of **co-responsibility** in the Church-Mission.
4. Workers in the vineyard are called to be **good stewards of God's manifold grace** in the variety of their vocations and charisms.
5. For this journey to bear fruit there is a need for formation **processes and experiences.**

B. A second document in this ecclesial journey: the *Apostolic Exhortation EVANGELII GAUDIUM* by Pope Francis. Three brief points.

1. Commenting on the theme of the laity, citing *CHRISTIFIDELES LAICI*, Pope Francis first of all also clarifies their **identity**, using the image of "**closeness within a common journey**" and "**missionary communion**": two phrases, one programme.

The Church's **closeness to Jesus is part of a common journey**; "**communion and mission** are profoundly interconnected", (*Christifideles laici* n.32) [\[20\]](#) In fidelity to the example of the Master, it is vitally important for the Church today to go forth and preach the Gospel to all: to all places, on all occasions, without hesitation, reluctance or fear. The joy of the Gospel is for all people: no one can be excluded. (*Evangelii gaudium* n.23)

2. The second reference concerns the **challenges**, with a long way to go. And the Pope identifies **three areas** that need to be strengthened: the **awareness of one's vocation** made more manifest, a **lack of formation** and, finally, the **instilling of Christian values** into the social, political and economic world:

There has been a growing awareness of the identity and mission of the laity in the Church. We can count on many lay persons, although still not nearly enough, who have a deeply-rooted sense of community and great fidelity to the tasks of charity, catechesis and the celebration of the faith. At the same time, **a clear awareness of this responsibility of the laity**, grounded in their baptism and confirmation, **does not appear in the same way in all places.** In some cases, it is because **lay persons have not been given the formation needed to take on important responsibilities.** In others, it is because **in their particular Churches room has not been made for them to speak and to act**, due to an excessive clericalism which keeps them away from decision-making. Even if many are now involved in the lay ministries, **this involvement is not reflected in a greater penetration of Christian values in the social, political and economic sectors.** It often remains tied to tasks within the Church, without a real commitment to applying the Gospel to the transformation of society. **The formation of the laity and the evangelization of professional and intellectual life represent a significant pastoral challenge.** (*Evangelii gaudium* n.102)

3. The third point is **the response to the poor.** It is a privilege that the laity assume but it does not end up being an area reserved for the laity but is a call to be taken up by the entire believing community.

While it is quite true that **the essential vocation and mission of the lay faithful is to strive that earthly realities** and all human activity may be transformed by the Gospel, **none of us can think we are exempt** from concern for the poor and for social justice. (*Evangelii gaudium* n.201)

Let us summarize the core that Pope Francis leaves us with in *EVANGELII GAUDIUM*: the **growing awareness of one's own identity - communion and mission** - needs to be strengthened in the **assumption of responsibility.** The **response to the poor** is a testing ground.

- C. Finally, we hope to have time to delve into the third source: **the current Synodal Path of the Church**, which shows us some roadmaps for a journey of complementarity between consecrated and lay people, which at the Salesian Family level challenges us in a concrete way. In this current ecclesial context, discovering the convergences of our journey with and within the ecclesial journey is a call and a grace to which we cannot renounce.