

Lumen Gentium Chapter IV, continued

Remarkably, Vatican marks the first time in the history of the Church that the laity receive specific and formal consideration within the context of an ecumenical council.

The Lay apostolate, in all its many aspects, is exercised both in the Church and in the world (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* #9).

All the laity have the exalted duty of working for the ever greater spread of the divine plan of salvation to all of humanity of every epoch and over all the earth. Therefore may the way be clear for them to share diligently in the salvific work of the Church according to their ability and the needs of the time (*Lumen Gentium* #33).

By reason of the knowledge, competence or pre-eminence which they have the laity are empowered—indeed sometimes obliged—to manifest their opinion on those things which pertain to the good of the Church (*Lumen Gentium* #37).

In the Church are to be found very many apostolic enterprises owing their origin to the free choice of the laity and run at their own discretion. Such enterprises enable the Church...to fulfill her mission more effectively...(Apostolicam Actuositatem #24).

The Council beseeches bishops and priests to recognize, affirm, and work collaboratively with the activities of the laity, while acknowledging equality among ecclesial members (see *Lumen Gentium* #32).

The hierarchy's duty is to favor the lay apostolate...(Apostolicam Actuositatem #24).

Bishops, parish priests and other priests of the secular and regular clergy will remember that the right and duty of exercising the apostolate are common to all the faithful...and that in the building up of the Church the laity too have parts of their own to play (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* #25).

The pastors, indeed, should recognize and promote the dignity and responsibility of the laity in the Church. They should willingly use their prudent advice and confidently assign duties to them in the service of the Church, leaving them freedom and scope for acting. Indeed, they should give them the courage to undertake works on their own initiative (*Lumen Gentium* #37).

In exercising his office of father and pastor the bishop should be with his people as one who serves...In exercising his ministry he should ensure that the faithful are duly involved in Church affairs; he should recognize their right and duty to play their part in building up the Mystical Body of Christ (*Christus Dominus* #16).

Priests should unite their efforts with those of the lay faithful and conduct themselves among them after the example of the Master who came amongst men not to be served but to serve...Priests are to be sincere in their

appreciation and promotion of lay people's dignity and of the special role the laity have to play in the Church's mission...They should be willing to listen to lay people, give brotherly consideration to their wishes, and recognize their experience and competence in the different fields of human activity. In this way they will be able to recognize along with them the signs of the times (*Presbyterorum Ordinis* #9).

In **Called and Gifted**, the American Bishop's pastoral letter on the laity, the bishops expand upon the Council's vision and call the laity to be adults within the Church:

One of the chief characteristics of the laity today is their growing sense of being adult members of the Church. Adulthood implies knowledge, experience and awareness, freedom and responsibility, and mutuality in relationships.

The laity:

- share the call to holiness
- share the call to ministry
- share the call to community

Adulthood, as understood by the bishops, involves:

- giving advice to pastors
- proposing suggestions and desires to clergy
- manifesting their opinion in the life of the Church
- proffering their unique knowledge and competence to the service of the Church

Cardinal Pironio of the Pontifical Council for the Laity maintains that the communion ecclesiology of Vatican II requires that *the laity participate in the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of pastoral projects...they have the right and duty to transmit the results of their discernment to the ecclesial community.*

In *Pneumatic Correctives*, we maintain that such affirmation of the adulthood of the laity, along with the Church's consistent magisterial teachings regarding democratic forms of governance being most consistent with human dignity, advocacy, of subsidiarity and acknowledgement of the *sensus fidelium* (see *Lumen Gentium* #12), warrant greater ecclesial consideration of future mechanisms of shared governance and decision-making within the Church (see *Lumen Gentium* #37). In addition to being consistent with these aforesaid affirmations and teachings, we also maintain that such empowerment of the laity is, likewise, consistent with the kingly and prophetic dignity bestowed upon them by the Lord via baptism (see *Lumen Gentium* #'s 12, 34-35).

The Laity's Sacramental Dignity

From whence does this renewed appreciation for the laity emerge? Primarily from the Council's renewed appreciation for the dignity and charisms bestowed by the Lord upon the laity via the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and marriage:

The faithful, by Baptism, are incorporated into Christ, are placed in the People of God, and in their own way share the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ, and to the best of their ability carry on the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world (*Lumen Gentium* #31).

Via baptism all share in the priestly, prophetic and kingly ministry of Jesus
(*Lumen Gentium* #'s 10-11, 31, and 34 and *Christifideles Laici* #'s 9, 13, 14, 23, and 29)

This tri-fold dignity of Baptism informs both the laity's *ad extra* mission/apostolate of evangelization and social justice in the world as well as their role/share in the *ad intra* priestly function of the Church's mission/ministry of sanctification/sacramental life (see below).

Via confirmation the laity are appointed by the Lord Himself to the apostolate (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* #3)

Married life serves as the domestic church, school of social virtue and the primary/vital cell of society (*Lumen Gentium* #'s 11 and 35, *Gaudium et Spes* #'s 47-52, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* #11, *Christifideles Laici* # 3, and *Familiaris Consortio*)

Empowering the Laity via *Ad Intra* Liturgical Reform

At the Second Vatican Council, the bishops promulgated the **Decree on the Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium***, first because they understood that if they were to have the Council's message regarding the laity have its greatest impact, then they would need to begin with the laity's primary point of contact with the Church, namely the sacramental economy. The Council fathers committed themselves to *ad intra* liturgical reforms that were meant to draw in and involve the laity in the sacramental life of the Church in active and meaningful ways so that by being formed by the story, ritual, and symbols of the Christ Event (which are communicated by the sacraments) and via the grace received, they could better impregnate the world with the Spirit of the Gospel (see *Lumen Gentium* #33 and *Ad Gentes* #36).

The Council's Decree on the Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, explicitly states that the primary goal of all liturgical reform is to be toward ensuring the full, conscious, and active participation of the laity (see *Sacrosanctum Concilium* #'s 11, 14, 19, 21, and 27 and *Christifideles Laici* #'s 23 and 24).

In the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy, the full, conscious and active participation by all the participants is the aim to be considered before all else, for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the Christian Spirit (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* #14).

...The faithful are to take part fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rites and enriched by it (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* #11).

Toward this end, rites are to be simplified and rendered more intelligible to the laity so as to ensure their comprehension and participation (see *Sacrosanctum Concilium* #'s 34, 50, and 79). Such reform necessitates liturgical inculturation (see *Sacrosanctum Concilium* #'s 36-40).

Furthermore, the Council taught:

The laity are to be seen as co-offerers of the Eucharist: **The faithful indeed, by virtue of their royal priesthood, participate in the offering of the Eucharist...The faithful recall the Passion, Resurrection and Glorification of the Lord, give thanks to God, and offer the immaculate victim not only through the hands of the priest, but also together with him (*Lumen Gentium* #10 and *Sacrosanctum Concilium* #48)**

The sacrifices which lay persons make in their apostolic efforts become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus and can be fittingly offered to God in the celebration of the Eucharist (see *Lumen Gentium* #34).

The laity lend to the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist via prayers, songs, and the presence of the gathered assembly (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* #7).

Indigenous language/the vernacular is to be introduced (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* #'s 36, 54, and 63).

Liturgical inculturation is to occur (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* #'s 37-40, 63, 77, 81, 107, 109, 119, and 123).

The homily and general intercessions are to be restored (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* #'s 52-53).

Note the radical departure from medieval clericalism, clerical monopolization, privatization of the sacramental life, the insistence on *ex opera operato*, and the passive tendencies of the laity...

The laity not only participate in the sacraments, but are indispensable to their full effects being realized! The pioneering work of the Liturgical Movement in the decades prior to Vatican II significantly informs these teachings of the Second Vatican Council.

In *Pneumatic Correctives*, we maintain that such affirmation of the laity's indispensable roles in the Church's *ad intra* sacramental life flows forth from the priestly dignity bestowed upon them by the Lord in the sacrament of baptism (see *Lumen Gentium* #34).

Empowering the Laity via Accentuating the *Ad Extra* Apostolate of Justice in the World

Vatican II taught that the Eucharist is to be viewed as linked to the lay apostolate of justice *ad extra* in the world, serving as the soul, animator, and nourishment of the apostolate (*Lumen Gentium* #'s 5 and 33, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* #'s 2 and 10, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* #10, and *Christifideles Laici* #14).

The positive result is an emerging apostolate of the laity which is at the service of the world on behalf of the Church which strives for social justice via renewing the temporal order and impregnating it with the Spirit of the Gospel (see *Lumen Gentium* # 36, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* #'s 3 and 6-9, *Gaudium et Spes* #43, and *Ad Gentes* #15):

Their temporal activity openly bears witness to Christ (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* #'s 2-3): **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 make Christ known to others...(Lumen Gentium #31).**

They manifest Christ's message via word and deed and communicate His message to the world...the very testimony of their life and good works...have the power to draw others to belief and to God (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* #6): **The lay apostolate is exercised when the laity work at the evangelization and sanctification of humanity; it is exercised, too, when they endeavor to have the Gospel Spirit permeate and improve the temporal order, going about it in a way that bears witness to Christ and helps forward the salvation of humanity. The characteristic of the lay state being a life in the midst of the world and of secular affairs, the laity are called by God to make of their apostolate, through the vigor of their Christian Spirit, a leaven in the world (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* #7).**

This activity in the temporal sphere is uniquely and in a special way theirs (*Lumen Gentium* #'s 31 and 33; *Apostolicam Actuositatem* #7, and *Ad Gentes* #21): **The Church is not truly established and does not fully live, nor is a perfect sign of Christ unless there is a genuine laity existing and working alongside the hierarchy. For the Gospel cannot become deeply rooted in the mentality, life and work of people without the active presence of lay people (*Ad Gentes* #21).**

In *Pneumatic Correctives*, we posit that the laity's role in the Church's *ad extra* apostolate of social justice in the midst of the world is a manifestation of the kingly dignity bestowed upon them by the Lord via the sacrament of baptism.

One of Vatican II's 16, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* documents is devoted exclusively to the lay apostolate.

Summary Review

The Decree on the Liturgy was the first document promulgated by the Second Vatican Council.

The sacramental life is the Church's primary point of contact in the lives of the laity.

Hence, the Council fathers were intentionally starting where the Council's teachings could most readily impact the lives of the faithful.

They did so knowing that if the ecclesiological vision of the Council, namely that the Church is to be a sacrament of Christ unto the world (see *Sacrosanctum Concilium* #5, *Lumen Gentium* #1, *Gaudium et Spes* #'s 42, 45, and 21, and *Ad Gentes* #'s 1 and 5); to succeed, then those within the Church who are the Church's point of contact vis-à-vis the world (the laity) would have to be empowered by the grace afforded by the sacraments (see *Lumen Gentium* #33 and *Ad Gentes* #36) if they were, in turn, to go forth into the world and witness Christ.

In short, the Council fathers realized that the laity facilitate the Church's efforts to be a sacrament of Christ to the world, and that the ecclesiological vision of the Council would sink or swim depending upon the lived witness/example of the laity.

Furthermore, the Council fathers realized that if the Council's ecclesiological/sacramental/soteriological mission unto the world was to be successful, then the laity would first have to be edified by the grace of Christ which the sacraments afford (see *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, *Lumen Gentium* #33, and *Ad Gentes* #36).

Hence, *ad intra* sacramental reform necessarily precedes the *ad extra* apostolate of justice in the world. This is because the grace which the sacraments afford animates, nourishes and sustains such an apostolate (see *Lumen Gentium* #33 and *Ad Gentes* #36).

Via practicing social justice, showing forth in deed what they profess in creed, the laity bring to realization the sacramental and missionary nature of the Church (see *Lumen Gentium* #'s 12, 33, 26, and 17, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* #'s 2 and 5, and *Ad Gentes* #'s 11 and 21).

The sacramental/missionary nature of the Church is brought to realization when the laity, themselves, serve as sacraments pointing to and making present Jesus to the world via their lived example of faith, love, and social justice Church (see *Lumen Gentium* #'s 12, 33, 26, and 17, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* #'s 2 and 5, and *Ad Gentes* #'s 11 and 21).

The Laity as Sacraments

Looked at collectively, these points of the Council implicitly describe lay persons as sacraments in so far as they are able to illuminate and manifest Christ to the world via their apostolate of social transformation (see *Lumen Gentium* #38).

God shows to us, in a vivid way, His presence...in the lives of those companions of ours...who are more perfectly transformed into the image of Christ. He speaks to us in them and offers us a sign of His kingdom...(Lumen Gentium #50)

Vatican II and The Significance of the Laity

The laity have an indispensable role to play in bringing to realization Vatican II's vision of what the Church is to be.

In light of the universal soteriological objective operative within the Council's ecclesiology, that the Church is by nature missionary (see *Ad Gentes* #'s 2-4 and 6-7) and to be a sacrament of Christ unto the world (see *Sacrosanctum Concilium* #5, *Lumen Gentium* #1, *Ad Gentes* #'s 1 and 5, and *Gaudium et Spes* #'s 42, 45, and 21), the Council fathers understood that part of the task at hand becomes one of assisting in the proper formation of individuals' consciences.

The laity have a particularly important role to play in this soteriological mission for it is their *proper and peculiar secular character* that enables them to facilitate this goal.

By reason of their special vocation it belongs to the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them towards God's will. They live in the world...There they are called by God...to contribute to the sanctification of the world...especially by the witness of their life...(Lumen Gentium #31)

Hence, the laity are indispensably associated with the Church's salvific mission (see *Lumen Gentium* #'s 12, 33, 26, and 17, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* #'s 2 and 5, and *Ad Gentes* #'s 11 and 21).

The laity are given a special vocation: to make the Church present and fruitful in those places and circumstances where it is only through them that She can become the salt of the earth. Thus, every lay person...is at once the witness and living instrument of the mission of the Church itself (Lumen Gentium #33).

Note that *Lumen Gentium* and *Ad Gentes* call each/all members of the Church to a universal call of holiness and missionary activity (see *Lumen Gentium* #'s 39-42 and *Ad Gentes* #'s 1-12 and 21); i.e., each/all of the baptized share in the Church's responsibility to respond to Jesus' Great Commission to go forth to the whole world to share the Gospel via word and deed. Vatican II associates this role of the laity with the prophetic office of Christ (see *Lumen Gentium* #'s 35 and 12).

Christ fulfills this prophetic office...by the laity. He accordingly establishes them as witnesses and provides them with the appreciation of the faith and the grace of the Word so that the power of the Gospel may shine out in family and social life (Lumen Gentium #35).

The Church is the People of God

Perhaps the Council's renewed affirmation of the laity is most obvious in the very ordering of the chapters of the Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*. As noted above, The Church as Mystery and People of God (see *Lumen Gentium* #'s 1-17); i.e., ecclesiology accentuating corporate/communal commonality precedes subsequent chapters which discuss ecclesial distinctions/differentiations (the Church as hierarchical, lay, and religious).

Via accentuating the notion of the Church as the People of God, the Council fathers opted to utilize biblical imagery as their ecclesiological framework, a framework which emphasizes collective relationships/the corporate nature of the ecclesial community as well as the Church's relationship with Israel as part and parcel of God's ongoing historical-existential unfolding of salvation history.

Hence, the concept of the Church as People of God is a dynamic one, a community marching toward a goal established by God, chosen and consecrated for this very task and witness thereunto.

Again, it becomes clear why the Council would also emphasize that the Church is a sacrament and pilgrim...with a fundamental missionary essence/nature (see *Sacrosanctum Concilium* # 5, *Lumen Gentium* #'s 1, 48-51, and 14, *Gaudium et Spes* #'s 42, 45, and 21, and *Ad Gentes* #2-4 and 6-7).

Vatican II on Marriage and Family Life

The bishops of Vatican II noted that marriage and family life have a particularly important role to play in the laity's priestly and prophetic ministries for they serve as the **Domestic Church**; i.e., the community in which persons are first exposed to the word and example of Christ (see *Lumen Gentium* #'s 11 and 35 and *Gaudium et Spes* #48).

Furthermore, the bishops explicate that marriage has a special importance in the realization of the laity's prophetic and kingly offices, for when a marriage creates a family in which the Christian faith pervades its structure and way of life, then it serves as **a school of social virtue/the lay apostolate** not only to children, but to the world (see *Lumen Gentium* #35, *Gaudium et Spes* #'s 47-52, and *Familiaris Consortio*), thus acting as **the primary and vital cell of society** (see *Apostolicam Actuositatem* # 11).

Christian family...is a reflection of the loving covenant uniting Christ with the Church, and as a participation in that covenant, will manifest to all the Savior's living presence in the world...(Gaudium et Spes #48).

The family has received from God its mission to be the first and vital cell of society. It will fulfill this mission if it shows itself to be the domestic sanctuary of the Church through the mutual affection of its members and the common prayer they offer to God, if the whole family is caught up in the liturgical worship of the Church, and if it provides active hospitality and promotes justice and other good works for the service of all in need (Actuositatem Apostolicam #11).

Family is the primary community in which we both learn and put into practice the Christian way of life that is to characterize the lay apostolate.

As a sacrament (graced), marriage has the innate ability to manifest Christ to the world.

As a covenantal relationship, marriage has the innate ability to reveal to the world the covenantal nature (*hesedic/kenotic/agapic*) of God's relationship with humanity.

Thus, smack in the middle of the Council's seminal Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, the Council fathers situate and consider the importance of marriage and family life.

The bishops recognized that devoid of healthy marriage and family life, the Council's *ad extra* soteriological/sacramental/missiological ecclesiological vision would fail.

Vatican II describes marriage as a community of life and love which is an act of ecclesial worship and expression of faith that serves as a sign of the Church's unity and witnesses to the presence of Christ.

Vatican II emphasizes marriage as a covenantal community of love—the sacrament is constituted by the mutual giving of self to the other (*kenosis*) exchanged by the spouses. This serves as a symbol of God’s love for humanity and Christ’s love for the Church.

This symbolic love is lived in the midst of the world and, hence, can draw others to know and experience the love of God.

This is precisely the primary ecclesiological objective of Vatican II when the Council defined the Church to be a sacrament. Hence, married life is a model and example of what the Church is to be to the world. Here we can see how married life is, indeed, the “domestic church.”

The family, because it arises from marriage, which is an image of the covenant of love of Christ and the Church, and a participation in this covenant, will disclose to all the living presence of the savior in the world, as well as show also the authentic nature of the Church (*Gaudium et Spes* #48).

Married persons, themselves...will bear witness, by their faithful love in the joys and sacrifices of their calling, to that mystery of love which the Lord revealed to the world by His death and resurrection (*Gaudium et Spes* #52).

Emphasizing the importance of family life and Christian education, Vatican II sees marriage as intimately linked to the well-being of society and the Church.

The Apostolate of married persons and of families has a special importance for both the Church and civil society (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* #11).

The well-being of the individual person and of both human and Christian society is closely bound up with the healthy state of conjugal and family life (*Gaudium et Spes* #47).

The Church’s social mission is one of striving to bring to realization the covenantal love between Christ and the Church via social justice.

Families can embody these ideals in their day-to-day life and activities; i.e., they can incarnate the ideals of love, reconciliation, justice, peace, hospitality, etc. In doing so, marriage, once again, serves as a model of what the Church is to be to the world.

Marriage and family life can serve as the building block of an ecclesiology which strives to bring to realization the Church as sacrament, as well as a global order based upon peace and justice—this is the notion that Vatican II emphasizes in its situating of marriage within the context of the Church’s sacramental identity and social mission as evidenced in the dedication of an entire chapter to marriage in *Gaudium et Spes*. In short, marriage is to prefigure the just society that the sacramental identity of the Church is to help bring to realization.

The mission of being **the primary vital cell of society** has been given to the family by God Himself. This mission will be accomplished if the family...offers active hospitality and practices justice and other good works for the benefit of others...Christian families bear a very valuable witness to Christ before the world when all their life they remain attached to the Gospel and hold up the example of Christian marriage (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* #11).

The family is the first school of those social virtues which every society needs...It is through the family that children are gradually introduced into civic partnership with their fellow human beings...(Gravissimus Educationis #3).

Marriage serves to build up the Kingdom of God in history by participating in the life, mission and sacramental identity of the Church:

Husband and wife find their proper vocation in being witnesses to one another and to their children of faith in Christ and love for Him. The Christian family boldly proclaims both the present virtues of the Kingdom of God and the hope of a blessed life to come. Thus by its example and witness it...enlightens those who seek the truth (Lumen Gentium #35).

Likewise, by having children and nurturing them, the spouses communicate the nature of God's love to the world. Family life is intended to be an environment in which we can grow in all the unique dimensions of our individuality.

Vatican II's appreciation for cultural pluralism and its emphasis on the innate dignity of each human being challenges the Church to create a global environment in which the uniqueness of each individual can come to fruition. Hence, the family is absolutely indispensable for the realization of the Church's social mission.

Family teaches the skills needed to transform the world. It teaches us how to create communities for family life, requires an ongoing willingness and effort to be present in a personal way to one another, and it demands a level of intimate sharing, caring and communicating and the acceptance of the difficulties and sacrifices that this involves.

Interdependence which exists between family members contributes to a better understanding of the responsibilities we have toward **solidarity** with others and the practice of **subsidiarity**, the very cornerstones of any efforts to achieve social justice.

Through family we grow in our abilities to respect one another and learn to share in an equitable way. This, in turn, sensitizes to injustices taking place within society. Via the love we receive from our family members we can discover that persons are gifts which communicate God's love to us—persons are sacraments!

This inspires us to love others in return, thus perpetuating God's love for us all. The mutual and reciprocal exchange of love and forgiveness between family members serves as a sacrament of Christ's own *kenotic* love for us. In this way, married life contributes to Vatican II's ecclesial task to be a sacrament of Christ to the world.

The sacrament of marriage and family life can do much to teach the wider ecclesial community how to be a sacrament of Christ unto the world.

Marriage and family life are in microcosm what the Church is to be in macrocosm.

Pope John Paul II beautifully elaborated on such a vision of marriage and family life in his encyclical *Familiaris Consortio*.