

## ROLE AND RELEVANCE OF THE LAITY

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1. Most Holy Father, Distinguished Synod Fathers, brothers and sisters
2. My intervention: **Role and Relevance of the Laity in the Work of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace in Africa** is based on *Instrumentum Laboris*, Numbers: 95, 115, 137 – 145.
3. My intervention presupposes two questions:
  - What is the *task* of the laity in the work of reconciliation, justice and peace?
  - What is the *impact* of the laity in the work of reconciliation, justice and peace?
4. The two questions flow from each other and move into each other. The former seeks to understand the *mission* of the laity whilst the later seeks to value the *significance* of the laity in the Church's work of reconciliation, justice and peace.
5. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, Nr. 31, states that “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 according to God's will. They live in the world, that is, they are engaged in each and every work and business of the earth and in the ordinary circumstances of social and family life which, as it were, constitute their very existence. They are called by God that, being led by the Spirit to the Gospel, they may contribute to the sanctification of the world, as from within like leaven, by fulfilling their own particular duties.”
6. The Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* affirms this position in many places. In the same vein, the servant of God, John Paul II, in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, Nr. 30, reaffirms this. And Pope Benedict XVI, in his Encyclicals, *Deus Caritas Est* and in *Caritas in Veritate*, reechoes the same. It means, therefore, there is undoubtedly an urgent need to mobilize effectively the laity in the work of reconciliation, justice and peace. As Pope Paul VI noted, contemporary society is not likely to pay attention to what is taught by hierarchy, unless that teaching is accompanied by a compelling personal witness.<sup>1</sup> Further *Redemptoris Missio*, Nr. 41, puts it more plainly and precise: “People today put more trust in witnesses than preachers, in experiences than in teaching, in life and action than in theories. The witness of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission”.
7. When *Instrumentum Laboris* reiterates the call of the laity in the work of reconciliation, justice and peace (Numbers 137 through 145), it is because the laity are the ones who are on the frontiers of our families, the Church and our Small Christian Communities. They are the ones who have ties with people who may have no living contact with Catholic Tradition. They are the ones who have ready entry to many

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Pope Paul VI, *Evangelium Nuntiandi*, Nr. 18.

relationships and situations where the clergy and religious would be unwelcome.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, their participation and collaboration cannot be overemphasized.

8. An effective participation and collaboration of the laity in working for reconciliation, justice and peace depends not only on a well informed laity but also on a well catechized laity. Therefore this will require a lifelong commitment and investment by the Church in the continuous formation of the laity so that they may become credible both in private and public life and be able to truly be “salt of the earth and light of the world” (Mt 5: 13, 14).
9. From the above, I wish to recommend the following.

**Recommendations:**

- Firstly, I recommend to this august Assembly that a clear and strong call be re-echoed for an effective involvement of the laity in the working for evangelization vis-à-vis reconciliation, justice and peace through their varied contacts, associations and movements.
- Secondly, I recommend that every Diocese be required to have in place an effective and responsible Council of Laity to be the leader of involvement of the laity, so that the laity feel fully recognized and accepted along with clergy and religious in the task of evangelization.
- Thirdly, I recommend that each Diocese make a strong investment in the training of the laity, especially with a “new catechesis” in the Social Teachings of the Church. \

Thank you!

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Tony Hanna, *New Ecclesial Movements*, St. Pauls Publications, Strathfield, 2006, p. 267.