

YOUR

Vocation

**IN
THE**

LAITY

BY
PAUL

HILSDALE S.J.



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IRELAND AND THE LAY APOSTOLATE*

We should not be blind to certain dangers that threaten our Catholic way of life. There are some who, infected by a spirit of secularism and false Liberalism, seek to withdraw from the jurisdiction of the Church questions in which a moral issue is clearly at stake. Our people, moreover, no longer enjoy the same isolation as in former times. Through the Cinema, the Radio and the imported Press, and even some sections of the national Press, they are subjected to the constant impact of anti-Christian ideas, and are made familiar with standards of conduct wholly at variance with Catholic ideals. The spirit of materialism and of indifference or hostility to all religion is not the monopoly of Atheistic Communism, but is widespread in circles which in practice ignore God and His claims to our allegiance. Frequently in these days Irish Catholicism is made the target of attacks by writers who claim to be progressive and representative of the modern mind. We are charged with being narrow, intolerant, medieval in our outlook, because we continue to respect the Ten Commandments, and retain our sense of sin and of personal responsibility to our Creator, which has been lost by many of the post-Christians of our time. We are accused of puritanism and of an unnatural attitude to sex, because we condemn promiscuity and uphold the sanctity of married life. Our system of censorship has been virulently assailed, though impartial observers would, I believe, admit that it has done much to check the flood of indecent literature which can have such a baneful influence on young and immature minds.

* Extract from *Lenten Pastoral, 1957, of His Eminence John Cardinal D'Alton, Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland. For complete text see C.T.S. Booklet "The Lay Apostolate" (SE.89).*

YOUR VOCATION IN THE LAITY

By Paul Hilsdale, S.J.

Dear Bob and Judy,

I have written this as a long personal letter to you, an imagined Judy, and you, a very real Bob. One of you is now (I hope) about to read it. Yes, it's "just the thing" for Dick and Jane, too; but please don't put it in your pocket for one of them. Read it yourself first!

Apologies to Judy, though. I hope you don't mind being called a *layman* all through this letter. But not even the large dictionary gives a word *laywoman*. So please blame Webster, not me, if this annoys you!

THE ROLE OF THE LAITY

First, a *don't*. Let's get it out of the way. The rest of this letter will be positive.

Don't ever say to yourself: "I'm *only* a layman." If you do, the chances are you're not being humble; you're trying to shirk responsibility and get out of work—telling yourself that priests are carefully trained in things religious, and since you're "just a layman" you'd better leave the hard religious work in the parish to the experts.

No one is *only* a layman. You're *especially* a layman. This was driven home by the first Pope in the first papal

encyclical: "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people God means to have for Himself; it is yours to proclaim the exploits of the God who has called you out of darkness into His marvellous light."

IRREPLACEABLE YOU

I don't want this letter to be an exhortation or sermon. I'm not even going to tell you about specific Church organisations such as the Sodality, Legion of Mary, Holy Name Society, Young Christian Workers, etc. There are plenty of books and pamphlets you can read about them. I want this to be just a statement of fact: what your position is, as a layman, in the Church and in the world.

Radio and T.V. propaganda and 20th century advertising sink deeper into our minds than we realise. Somehow we've got to neutralise the poison. We've got to develop a clear awareness of why we're on earth. What's the purpose of life.

God has a special plan *just for you*. He has a job *only you can do*. And if you don't, it just won't be done. In Christ's mind, and in His heart you mean much more than the whole material world. You're more important than all the planets, stars, and galaxies of this universe.

But we keep forgetting this. We live in an assembly-line, machine civilisation. We stay home from factory one day, and another is hired to take our place. The job goes on just as well without us. We've come to feel that we're as replaceable as the machines.

For that matter, in the factory you are decidedly replaceable. But in the kingdom of Christ you are most certainly not replaceable. That's the first basic idea I want to get across.

We live in an inter-planetary civilisation. We think of ourselves as atom-sized people, lost in the billions of light years of astronomy and space travel. Galileo was on the right track when he tried to prove that the earth is not the pivot of the universe (though his proof really didn't hold water). But his modern disciples get way off the track when

they try to prove from this that mankind is just a passing flicker, of no importance in the evolution of the universe. That's both science fiction and religious nonsense.

The fact is, of course, that long after our Milky Way and its neighbouring galaxies have dissolved into space, you and I and our friends will be just beginning to find our way around the suburbs of heaven.

"THE SALVATION OF MANY DEPENDS ON YOU"

This you've got to really think about. It's not only your own eternal life that's at stake, but *the life of many others* as well. There's a sobering thought, hard to believe; but it's the clear teaching of Pope Pius XII in his encyclical on the Mystical Body: "Deep mystery this, subject of inexhaustible meditation: that the *salvation of many depends on the prayers* and voluntary suffering which the members of the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ offer for this intention."

Start with this as a first principle. Going on from here you can begin to discover your role as a layman in the world.

Admittedly God *could* deal with each of us by individual revelations (something perhaps like the Protestants' notion of private interpretation of Scripture, where we would each get guidance directly from God whenever we opened the Bible). But as a matter of *fact* God planned differently. He entrusted His way of salvation to 12 energetic Palestinian workmen and to their successors, the bishops of the Catholic Church. He made the success of His plan depend on the dedicated lives of the early Christian laity, whose Greek and Roman neighbours exclaimed, "See how these Christians love one another," then asked for baptism.

The salvation, then, of future generations depends on our success and mine in doing the job God has assigned us. Your failure or mine would be a world failure. It's hard to understand why He left His plan in such clumsy hands. But He did. Really, I suppose, it's His supreme compliment to our intelligence and free will. He could have made us puppets, instead, He has incorporated us as His

Mystical
Body

partners. In one of her visions St. Catherine of Siena heard this from Our Lord:

"I could have bestowed on men all that they need for body and for soul; but I wished them to be in need of each other, that they may be my ministers, distributing the graces and presents that I give them . . .

"You see, then it is that they may exercise the virtue of charity that I have made them my ministers, and that I have placed them in different states with unequal opportunities. This shows you that there are in My house many mansions, yet in them there is nothing I desire but love."

WHAT'S A LAYMAN?

First, I've got to clear up the precise meaning of this word, laity, that we've been discussing.

The word originally meant a "specially chosen people." In ancient Greece, Homer sang of the *laos* of Agamemnon, the king's chosen followers. And that's the basic meaning in the Church also—you are the *chosen followers* of Christ the King, *called apart from the world* to save the world. That was the meaning Our Lord had in mind at the Last Supper: "I am not asking that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them clear of what is evil . . . I have sent them into the world on my errand . . . it is not only for them that I pray; I pray for those who are to find faith in Me through their world."

In this sense, then, you are special followers of Christ, commissioned to do a job no one else can do.

In the course of the centuries the word has taken on a more specific meaning. So that now it refers to those among His special followers who haven't been ordained priests and haven't joined a religious congregation.

The Church is made up of laymen and religious, priests, and bishops, all united under the Pope, the visible head of the Church. Christ, as I've already said, chose not to inspire each of us directly but to work through these lines of communication. The structure of Pope, bishop, priest, layman

is "hierarchical" not democratic, i.e., a holy rule from the top down (with Christ directing at the top), not a merely human rule by majority vote from the bottom up.

FROM FOOD TO BODY

The description of the hierarchical Church that has most meaning for me is the Church as Christ's Mystical Body. Now I'm going to describe the obvious. But it's so important, I've really got to spend time on it. For when you see clearly how a natural body lives, it's much easier to see how the Mystical Body lives and where you fit into that life.

You were born with a brain, a central nervous system, internal and external organs. Fortunately they all worked together, and you grew up. Eventually the big day came when you could feed yourself. Baby fingers reached out, grasped a tempting piece of cake, stuffed it into your mouth, and you gurgled it down with milk. Then began the process of digestion and assimilation. Lifeless protein and starch were broken down, then built up into tremendous complex molecules. Eventually they were transformed into living cells of your body, cells kept alive by your soul, sharing the soul's life.

Thus you grew to physical maturity. What was once passive, external food and drink has now become active, living cells. These cells now obey the directives of nerve and brain; they now help your body develop even further. For example: as cells of finger, hand or arm they in their turn now bring more food to your mouth. They help assimilate more of the lifeless outside world and transform it into fully living tissue.

FROM DEATH TO LIFE

There's the basic picture of the Mystical Body. I've deliberately emphasised *one* of the many things a body's new cells may be expected to do—to help assimilate more food—because I want to set up a picture of your apostolic obligations.

The Mystical Body is made up of parts that are specially co-ordinated, like the parts of your natural body. There is the visible head (the Pope), there are visible nerve connections that convey the directives of the head to hands and feet, etc. (the bishops through their priests to the laity). It is primarily through the outside organs—tongue, hands, fingers, etc. (the laity)—that the head contacts the outside world.

Before your Baptism you were not a member of the Mystical Body; you did not live by Christ's supernatural life. Then some living member of His Body came along, took you to Church, and poured into you the grace of Baptism—incorporating you (digesting you) into the living Body of Christ. Strengthened by Confirmation and nourished by the Eucharist you have now become a strong member of the Church.

You must be ready to obey the head. A hand is not much of a hand if it refuses to move when the head commands: "take up that pen and write . . ." A tongue is not much of a tongue if it refuses to give voice to the ideas the mind wants to express. So as a layman you must not only be spoken *to* by the Pope and bishops, you must also be spoken *through*. Through you, and possibly through you alone, can Christ's voice reach *your* children, *your* neighbours, *your* buddies in the factory or in the shop.

"The doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ is a difficult doctrine," said Cardinal Gracias, Archbishop of Bombay, "but the difficulty is of a special kind . . . the difficulty is to grasp that the Church really means it, and that we are what this doctrine says we are."

As a layman then, you are an essential, irreplaceable contact between Christ's Church and the outside world.

NEEDED: INTELLIGENCE AND INITIATIVE

This comparison between your growth as a baby and your growth as a member of the Mystical Body is accurate as far as it goes. Only it doesn't go far enough. Hands, feet and tongue do what they're told, blindly. But the members of the Mystical Body are endowed with intelli-

gence and freedom. You're not supposed to be robots under the push-button remote control of the hierarchy. You're expected to use your intelligence to the full, to plan and think, to suggest, to move with foresight and initiative.

Not to use your mind, not to plan and suggest, can be a sin of omission.

I'm afraid this is much forgotten. Those who should be writing editorials for the diocesan newspapers too often prefer to read the clergy's editorials instead. And those who should be organising Catholic action in their parish just sit down, hoping the priest will get around to it. Sometimes they have an excuse: they tried once and got their fingers burnt, so now they're going to be "obedient children of the Church," trying to camouflage ill-feeling under the pious mask of literal obedience?

Keep this in mind when you meet with opposition, for wounded self-love leads to the worst kind of defeatism. The Church realises you're a mature, intelligent "collaborator in the apostolate of the hierarchy" though some of her priests may not.

You've heard people complaining that the clergy want to do everything; they don't want the help of the laity. Usually, as I said, the objectors are only trying to get out of work. But even when they have a just complaint the solution is to begin tactfully to *do* something. It was the laity's inactivity that brought on much of the problem. In his book, *For Men of Action*, Yves de Montscheuil pinpointed the difficulty:

"If the faithful do not have the courage to assume their responsibilities and if they develop the habit of trying to cover themselves unnecessarily with a decision of authority, there is the danger of giving the clergy the unfortunate habit of intervening too much in the choice of temporal institutions. After that, one would be out of order in complaining of a clericalism which he has provoked and has made practically necessary by his own pusillanimity."

In general, the greater health of the Mystical Body demands that decisions be made by those who are best able to make them. There's no sense in the pastor trying to

install an air-conditioning system if some of his parishioners are refrigeration experts. Their work, besides saving money, frees the priest for lectures, confessions and spiritual direction. That example is obvious; but the same holds for labour-management decisions and family problems. You can't wait for prophetic decisions from the hierarchy; they're waiting for you. You've got to study the social teachings of the Church, learn the general principles, then try to adapt them to your particular union or your particular business. The same goes in your family life. The Church tells you what attitudes and what kind of a Christian character your children should have; she wants you to suggest the best means of achieving this in view of modern television, films, advertising and education.

That's why the encyclicals are sometimes annoyingly vague and general. But the Pope respects your competence as a layman (and he respects the brains of writers and educators in each country who will try to apply the encyclical to local needs). Therefore, he prefers not to command "Do this, do that. Go here, go there." Rather he says, "Study this economic problem, this social system. Here's the Catholic faith. Now work out a just solution in terms of that faith. We must work *together* to restore all things in Christ."

NEEDED: DIAPER SPECIALISTS

Some people seem to think that the reason the laity has to start moving is that there aren't enough priests and sisters to do the job. Well, there aren't; but that's got nothing to do with the case, except to suggest that you start praying now that God calls some of your children.

From the long build-up I've given the idea of the Mystical Body, you can see, without my spelling it out, that Christ needs you, a layman, not because He is short of priests but because he needs specialists in your field—He needs specialists in atomic energy and in floor sweeping, particularly specialists in diaper changing. Some of my priest friends qualify in the first two; you've got no competition in the last!

The way you take care of these material jobs is important, for on these you will be judged at the end of the world.

"When the Son of Man comes in His glory . . . He will say to those who are on his right hand: 'Take possession of the kingdom which has been prepared for you since the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me food, thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you brought Me home, naked and you clothed Me, sick and you cared for Me, a prisoner and you came to Me . . . Believe me, when you did it to one of the least of My brethren here, you did it to Me'" (Matt. 25: 31-41).

And this doesn't mean just distributing baskets to the poor at Christmas-time, or giving a sandwich to a beggar at the door. God demands that you use your *brains* in his service. To "feed the hungry, and clothe the naked" with a world population of two and a half billion, you've got to do a better job of sowing wheat. You have to help dam rivers, construct homes, and develop atomic energy; you have to work for peace in labour-management relations, for a great improvement in your district school, for honesty in local and national politics.

You're not free to shirk this responsibility. I know you can't tackle single-handed the immense job of reforming the world. But that's the devil's worst temptation. After you've batted away his whispered "I'm *only* a layman" then he winds up with this curved ball, "Well, I really do have an important job; but it's so big I'd have to be a saint to do it. Anyhow I can't do it, so I can't be a saint . . . I guess I'll just muddle through."

In the last half of this letter I'm going to try to show that there are plenty of opportunities of being fully a Catholic right in your daily life. You won't have to do anything new at all—merely do it better. (If you love someone, *really* love; if you say grace at meals, *really* make it a prayer, etc.). Later on God may shove you into more demanding situations, but that won't be your problem for some time. So don't let the devil worry you. First things first.

Let me hammer down once and for all the fact that Christ really demands your collaboration, and that doing nothing is a sin of omission. Then we'll go on to *what* in general you can do. Cardinal Gracias gave a celebrated address to the 1951 World Congress of Catholic Action. In it he stated:

"There are many Catholics who are sincerely, but mistakenly convinced that they have not only no obligation to engage in apostolic work but also that it is no business of theirs. It cannot be stressed sufficiently, therefore, that participation in the apostolate by the laity is *not a matter of choice but of obligation*. One may choose the form of the apostolate according to one's aptitude or circumstances, but choose one must."

PARTLY A MATTER OF WORDS

Cardinal Gracias speaks of the *apostolate* of the laity; I've spoken of your *vocation*, also of the *mission* of the laity, and of *Catholic Action*. To avoid confusion let me say that I'm using them all with about the same meaning. The word *mission*, for example (from the Latin verb "to send"), was used by officers in the last war when they sent special missions against the enemy. The *mission* of the laity, then, means something you're sent to do by Christ your Commander. And the word *apostolate* is merely the Greek original for the Latin, *missio*, the "Apostles" being those specially sent by Christ to carry on His work. Next, *vocation*. I don't see any reason for limiting the word to the priestly or religious life; it means "a call" and, as I've been trying to show, *Christ is really calling* on you to get in there and pitch. Lastly, there's always a problem when people speak of Catholic Action (C.A. in capitals) for in Europe it's come to mean one specific organisation. Here I'll always be speaking about Catholic action (small "a") referring to the basic idea of actively putting your talents to the service of Christ, whether silently praying for others or openly giving them a hand.

YOUR THREE BATTLEFIELDS

If the Church were a bowling society your contribution would, I suppose, be anything that promoted bowling, whether as pin boy or advertising artist. Well, the Church is a society whose one purpose is to extend through space and time the work of Christ. "As the Father sent Me," He said, "I also send you." His work was to teach, to rule and to sanctify. So, that's the work of the Church and your collaboration with her will be in one of those three fields.

TO CO-OPERATE

This calls for an aside. When Donald Attwater was asked to write an article on the role of the laity in the Church, he began by saying: "If you want me to put it explosively, the answer is 'None'." That's an important answer, especially when it comes from a leading English layman. He went on to explain that the whole body acts, not the parts separately. (It is I, not my fingers that shake your hand. It is I, not my tongue that says "hello.") Therefore, it's more important to speak of the role of the Church than the role of the laity. I've seen articles about the "emancipation of the laity." The phrase is dangerous. We want the emancipation of the Church; we want it to be free from any internal sickness that would shackle its activity. Any growth in a body that is not controlled from the head is a foreign growth, a cancer. We must keep the Body of Christ free from the anarchy of spiritual cancer, free from internal jealousies, discord and lack of trust.

This, I'm convinced, is something you're going to have to work on right from the beginning. No matter how brilliant your idea, if you can't work it out in collaboration with your pastor then drop it. Or, if it's really important, refer it to the bishop, and *never* act against his decision. Keep in mind what I've said about the Church as the Body of Christ, directed by Him from the top down; and then remind yourself that any growth, no matter how healthy and vigorous, that is not under the general control of the head is a cancerous growth—a marvellous cancer, maybe,

but still a cancer. That will help to keep your actions in line.

TO TEACH

As a layman you share the Church's, Christ's, mission of teaching, ruling and sanctifying.

As a teacher you are almost exclusively responsible for your children's faith. What you tell them about Christ and the Church "goes." They will take your word, and this is as God intends. Further, it's a well-known fact that a child's first idea of God is an idea of its father, enlarged and projected into heaven. That's a frightening thought, for it means that you've got to try to be really like God, firm and just, yet affectionate and loving. Otherwise, your child will grow up with horrible notions of God—He will imagine that God is a tyrant who bears grudges, or a weak thing that can be pushed around, or a selfish person who just doesn't care much about anyone other than Himself.

I think if more parents realised how much Christ had them in mind when he said, "Going, therefore, teach you all nations . . ." they would be running to the nearest Catholic bookstores to brush up on their lessons and to buy a supply of new, brilliantly-coloured children's books. And owners of Catholic bookstores would again begin to eat three meals a day!

In your family circle, then, you're the teaching voice of the Church. That doesn't mean, of course, that you can make up nice stories about what you think the Church is. You've always got to check with the official teachers, the bishops. It's the bishop's responsibility to provide good religious teaching and preaching in his diocese. He can't do all the preaching himself, so he authorises certain priests to preach. Not everyone can preach, only those to whom the bishop has delegated jurisdiction.

It's theoretically possible, I suppose, for a bishop to authorise a layman to preach and refuse permission to all the local clergy. But you needn't worry, because he's for-

bidden by the present Code of Canon Law to appoint a layman to preach in church.

You won't have to preach, but you may be asked to teach catechism. For, in the same Code of Canon Law, the bishop and the local pastor are encouraged to enlist your aid in teaching Christian Doctrine. (In mission lands lay catechists now outnumber priests ten to one.) In most of our cities the priest has sisters he calls on to help teach catechism. But if you think there are enough sisters, just see what happens when you volunteer to help them!

This catechetical instruction, if you can make time for it, is a direct, almost official kind of Church teaching. Obviously it's tremendously important and has to be under the close supervision of the hierarchy.

Most of your work, however, will be more indirect and unofficial—though not less essential. You receive Catholic truth from Christ, "telephoned" down through the hierarchy. This you pass on in private conversation to non-Catholics and to less-instructed Catholics. It's up to you, for example, to understand and justify the Catholic position on labour unions and on the responsibilities of labour and of business. It is up to you to explain the Church's teaching on divorce, birth-control, and other hotly-contested modern issues.

People who would suspect me of self-interest and saying something "because he has to" will be convinced by one or two casual sentences from you. For they know you don't get paid to preach; you've got nothing to gain by sticking to the "party-line." You must actually understand what you're saying, or at least believe it!

Finally, your actions speak much louder than your words. Christ taught by 30 years of chisel, hammer and saw; by a life devoid of riches, lavishing His love on the unloved; by offering His life silently on the cross. It is largely from His example that His few recorded spoken words draw their extraordinary power.

So when you reveal Christ's joy in your family life you are "preaching" Catholicism to everyone on the block.

A Catholic employer, showing Christ's concern for his more inefficient employees, is teaching in modern context what Christ taught by His concern for the poor on the streets and in the workshops of Palestine. A Catholic machinist I know almost lost his job recently when he tore a nude picture from above his lathe and replaced it with a beautiful calendar scene. His action was the most effective of sermons on the dignity of womanhood and in the end his courage won the respect of his fellow-workers.

To share in the teaching power of the Church, you don't have to do something spectacular or learned. You merely have to go about your daily life with evident honesty and integrity. The best and least suspect type of preaching is always sanctity of life. St. Peter cites the case of stubborn men who were to be won for the Gospel "not by word, but by the example of their wives," and he specifies: "by their modesty and reverence."

TO RULE

To Pilate's question "Art thou a King then?" Christ replied, "For this was I born, for this came I into the world . . ."

Pope and bishops, successors to the Apostles, possess the only juridical power in the Church. Some of it they delegate to priests. History is full of tragic situations where the laity tried to gain control of the Church, sometimes, unfortunately, with considerable success. In Fliche-Martin's great *Church History* there is a whole volume entitled *The Church at the Mercy of the Laity*. It names the 10th century, "the century of iron," when the German emperor played with the papacy as money barons used to play with the stock market. In early Church history Constantine tried to rule the universal Church. In recent times lay administrators tried to dictate to individual parishes. Probably you remember vaguely from history class how the "Trustee System" got out of hand in Colonial America. When priest and layman disagreed about what should be preached, the lay administrators who controlled

the parish funds simply locked the priest out and closed the church. They seemed to have had the idea that priests, like many Protestant ministers, received their power "from the consent of the governed" rather than directly from Christ through the Sacrament of Ordination.

I'm afraid the abuses of this Trustee System have set the laity back many years in America. Only slowly, and with many misgivings, are laymen being permitted again to administer Church funds, to direct Catholic charities, and to organize Catholic schools. The more these affairs can be turned over to lay specialists the more time and energy priests will have to prepare sermons, hear confessions, visit the sick, and form lay apostles. Anything you can do to help in this line in your country?

INDIRECT CONTRIBUTION

But if you can't help in the direct administration of the Church, your daily indirect contribution can be invaluable.

When I was trying to teach in high school I remember praying on the first day of class: "Let there be at least two or three well-behaved children who will set a pattern for the rest." *Just a few* can make a class a howling success, or just a howling class. The authority of the teacher depends so much on how it is received by the leaders.

So the effective power of a pastor in his parish depends tremendously on how willingly you co-operate with him. If you give visible witness to the joy of Christian life, enthusiastically accepting the Church's Commandments, never undermining the authority of the pastor, then Christ will really be able to rule in that parish.

Ed. Marciniak, vice-president of the AFL-CIO Newspaper Guild, said that the average man "underestimates the importance of social institutions in his life, and overestimates his own ability to influence his environment . . . Don't sell short the thing that happens when a group of workers sit down to study the words of Christ." Your efforts to universalise the rule of Christ the

King must bring into existence *social institutions* that enable people to obey Him. You must encourage housing projects with homes for large families; working hours that enable people to worship God on Sunday; recreations that do not encourage sin; in short, living and working conditions that foster personal responsibility and a sense of human dignity.

Again, however, these are things you may be able to do only in the future. At present you can make a really great contribution just by your example of joyous ready obedience to God's laws, "Living in such a way" according to the phrase of Cardinal Suhard "that your life would be inexplicable if God did not exist."

TO SANCTIFY

The world becomes holy by (1) the sacraments, (2) prayer and good works.

There's one sacrament that priests in the Western Church are forbidden to administer. Only laymen can give it. In the marriage ceremony, bridegroom and fiancée administer the Sacrament of Matrimony to each other. The priest is present merely as the Church's official witness.

There's another sacrament you may administer when necessary, Baptism. (And don't forget how, because one of these days you'll come upon a wreck when it's too late for a priest to be called and you suspect that the dying person has never been baptised.)

The other five sacraments can be given only by a priest or bishop. But even they will not sanctify the world without your collaboration, for they confer no grace unless you receive them with correct disposition. That's another most important fact that I wish more Catholics would remember: the amount of grace you receive from a sacrament depends on how well disposed you are to accept it. The more generous and open your heart, the more grace you will bring

down into your soul—and through you into this parched world.

The second way to sanctify the world is by your prayers and good works. It's not just a polite formula when a priest asks for your prayers. He *knows* that without them he can talk and talk and talk without even denting a person's heart; but he's seen near miracles take place when his words are backed up by the prayers of others. Please don't forget this!

Your most effective prayer, of course, is the Sacrifice of the Mass. I don't want to branch out here into what is the Mass; you've got excellent books and pamphlets on the subject. Let me just remind you that at Mass you and the priest *join to offer Christ's own prayer* to the Father in heaven. True, a missionary can offer Mass in an isolated grass hut all alone; but still it is not only *his* prayer that is being offered to the Father, but the prayer of all Christians in the world who are joined in the Mystical Body to Christ, the one sacrificer. That is why in the Morning Offering you pray: "I offer thee my prayers, works, joys and sufferings . . . *in union with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass throughout the world.*"

If you're really serious about collaborating with Christ in sanctifying the world, you'll do everything you can to make possible daily Mass. (Sometimes, I realise, a family makes this simply impossible. If so, God will accept your desire in place of the act: your dressing the children and cooking breakfast will then most certainly be offered *in union with the Holy Sacrifice.*)

So much in too brief form, for your role as a layman in the direct sanctification of the world. Here again, as in your power of teaching and ruling, you have an essential indirect contribution to make drawing others to God by example.

When people see you rising early in the morning for Mass and making a visit during the day, they are drawn by your example. You are beginning a kind of chain reaction that is part of the sanctification of the whole world.

FOR THE FUTURE

What I said about developing social institutions that favoured the rule of Christ applies also to institutions that favour His sanctifying power—that enable people to be more receptive of His grace. Who will write liturgical songs that fill the heart of modern man? Who will arrange them and who will sing them? Who will design and build churches whose glass and steel reveal the meaning of Christianity to the modern world as well as did the stone and mortar of medieval Gothic five hundred years ago? Laymen must teach in our schools the primacy of the spiritual, in our public schools especially. Laymen will have to write wholesome, constructive books for to-morrow. Laymen will have to design, edit and publish healthy magazines.

These are all things for the future. If you can't do them yourself, perhaps your children can. They are all part of the layman's responsibility. If you have the talent and show yourself willing, God will not be miserly with His grace.

SUMMARY

This letter has already grown pages longer than I intended. But I had to go over with you a detailed analysis of the Mystical Body, since that alone explains why the Church's mission has to be also your mission. As Pope Pius XII said, you the laity "under the guidance of the common Head, the Pope, and of the bishops . . . are the Church." Then I wanted to show you that your life, even now before joining special Catholic action groups, is valuable in the sight of Christ. For your whole day can be a powerful influence, directly and indirectly teaching, ruling and sanctifying the world. (Though also, you should certainly look for an alert and *active* Catholic action group that will accept you.)

I want to summarise all this, with special emphasis on what should be your attitude to this vocation as a layman—as a special follower, that is, of Christ.

Our world is groping in the dark, cowering before the screech of sirens, despairing of the future. It is now that you, as a member of the Catholic laity, should stand out as a beacon of light marking the road to safety, and assuring the timid that "Not a hair of your head shall perish" without the will of your Father in heaven.

"I am the vine; you are the branches." Such was Our Lord's description of His Church. This vine, planted in the 1st century, is now growing more vigorously than ever in the soil of the 20th century. Alive with the life of Christ you must never think that sanctity means running away to the desert. Rather, you must go willingly to office or factory, to supermarket and launderette, working "to restore all things in Christ." As expressed by Msgr. Hillenbrand in one of his favourite figures: "Christ *thrust* Himself into the ancient world at the Incarnation, so now He *thrusts* you, the members of His Mystical Body, into the modern world."

As Christ made Himself totally present in the world, so must you make yourself (and Christ in you) totally present in your neighbourhood, in your work-group, in political life, and if you should happen to get the chance, in national and international organisations.

This a dangerous assignment, dangerous for your own soul. Since you're working wholeheartedly in and with "the world"; you will have to be doubly careful not to work *only* for this world. A spirituality of total presence in the world can so easily degenerate into a craving for success here below. That's Secularism, the philosophy of modern advertising and the slick paper journals.

NOT WITHOUT TEARS

There's a litmus test you can use to see how much of this spirit you've unconsciously absorbed. What is your attitude to suffering, contradiction and failure?

The lay apostle will never walk far along the block

before he meets someone who asks him to help carry a cross. Your attitude to that cross must be totally different from that of the passing crowd. By the courage and readiness with which you lift it to your shoulders, you will proclaim to the world your allegiance to Christ who has led the way and taught us the value of suffering.

I'm afraid that my emphasis in this letter on the active virtues may cause you to undervalue patience in adversity and long-suffering love. It is the sick and the crippled, the aged and the dying who are winning for us the strength to go out and work actively for Christ. Suffering of itself has no value; but the prayer of loving acceptance when God sends you sorrow or pain will always be your most powerful contribution to Catholic action. It is an invisible force. No one will praise you for the good it does; and no one will thank you—but God!

BUT WITH HOPE AND JOY

Christ's journeys in Palestine led deliberately from Bethlehem to Calvary. But the road did not end there; it led from the tomb to the Cenacle, and up the steep slope of the Mount of the Ascension. The Crucifixion would have been meaningless without the Resurrection.

So, in the Mystical Body, there is bound to be suffering, but it must never be a suffering divorced from hope and joy. In your heart there must always be peace and a conviction of his presence and love. And you will find that this peace and deep-set joy is the most powerful witness you can give to Christ in the modern world.

Such was the witness given by the greatest of the laity, Mary, His mother. Her life was a pattern woven of the divine and the ordinary, much as yours must be. In the Christmas cave her whole job was to watch her Child—to see if He was cold and needed another coverlet; to find if He was hungry; to see if He needed to be moved in his cradle. She expected no miracles. When she placed a

blanket over the manger, she did not expect Him to reach down and pull it around His shoulders (as God had wrapped the sky around her shoulders), but she gently slipped her hand under the Child's head and pulled the coverings warmly around Him.

And later, in Nazareth, she spoke with the Son of God in His workshop, down in the village square, and at home much as we speak with the sons of God on their way to work, in their shops and offices, and at home in the evening. Mary served in ordinary ways, by providing food, warmth, shelter and friendship. Our gift will become more perfect as it approaches her manner of giving; always realising that in some mysterious way God is working through us, using our rough hands and rougher speech in a patient appeal to His other sons, the brothers of His First-born.

Your life as a layman will be fruitful and pleasing to God in so far as you share Mary's convictions and Mary's love—co-operating with Christ in the growth of His Mystical Body as she co-operated with the growth of His physical body.

You see, it's all very simple. Your vocation as a layman is to be yourself—to the full.

Now you can close this letter, as you may have been tempted to do before reading it and pass it on to Dick or Jane as I suggested right on the first page.

Good bye and God bless you.



PRAYER OF POPE PIUS XII

Lord Jesus, who hast called us to the honour of making our humble contribution to the work of the apostolate of the hierarchy, Thou Who hast prayed the heavenly Father, not to take us out of the world, but to keep us from evil, grant us in abundance Thy light and Thy grace that we may overcome in ourselves the spirit of darkness and of sin, so that conscious of our duty, persevering in good, inflamed with zeal for Thy cause—by force of example, prayer, of action and of supernatural living, we may become each day more worthy of our holy mission, and more qualified to establish and promote among our fellow-men Thy kingdom of justice, peace and love.

POPE PIUS XII.

Prayer composed by the Holy Father on the occasion of the First World Congress for the Lay Apostolate, and first recited by Him with the delegates at the solemn Audience of October 14th, 1951.

“NOW THIS IS ETERNAL LIFE : That they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou has sent” (St. John, 17 : 3).

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