

## The Apostleship of Laymen, a Current Missionary Challenge

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**Abstract:**

Laity – men and women – are an essential constituent element of the church, without which church life can not be conceived. If it is true that where the bishop is, there is the church, so true is that the unbelieving bishop is not the church. Therefore, the hierarchs, the clergy and the people (laymen) form the whole church, whose elements cannot be conceived separately, so that the church body can exist and function normally.

**Keywords:** mission, preaching, apostleship, confession, layman

### **I. The participation of laymen in the integral mission of the Church**

The laymen have not only the right but also the duty to participate in the entire mission of the church. One must not confuse the priesthood, which has a special apostolic mission in the Church, with the mission of the Church itself, excluding the laity from the right and the duty to confess the faith at any time and place. The entire “people of God” is called and consecrated to participate in the mission of Christ as “companions” with the Apostles in the building of the Church: “we work together (in synergy) with God; you are the field of God, the building of God. Everyone must be careful how they build; that another foundation cannot bring forth what is set forth, which is Christ” (1 Corinthians 3, 9, 10, 11). Embodied into Christ by Baptism, Chrismation, and Eucharist and constituted as “the people of God”, the laymen participate in their own way in Christ's prophetic, priestly and royal ministry, exerting their share of the mission entrusted to the whole Christian people of the Church, and in the world. The specific call of the laymen is to seek the kingdom of God (Matthew 6: 33) and to deal with the temporal order to order them according to His will. They are those who have a particular duty to illuminate and order all the temporal realities in which they are heavily involved, so that they are continually realized in the spirit of the gospel of Christ. The initiative of secular Christians is particularly necessary in discovering and inventing the

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means to impregnate social, political and economic realities with the demands of Christian learning and life. But for this they must have a clearer conscience not only belonging to the Church, but that they are the Church, and that, under the guidance of Christ, the Head of the Church and the guidance of the bishops and priests, the visible entities of Christ, must fulfill an apostolate in Church and the world.

Being entrusted by God with the apostolate in virtue of the sacraments of Initiation, all believers enjoy the right and obligation to act individually or group in societies so that the message of salvation in Christ be known and received by all men on earth. This obligation becomes even more pressing when only through them people can hear the gospel and know Christ. In parish communities, their action is so necessary that without it, the apostolate of sacramental priesthood cannot have full effect.

## **II. The participation of laymen in the prophetic service of Christ**

The participation of the laymen in the prophetic ministry of Christ is through the preaching of the Gospel, the preservation and the missionary transmission of the apostolic Tradition and the Christian testimony in the midst of the world. Christ fulfills his prophetic mission not only through the Apostles and their descendants, the bishops and priests, but also through the lay faithful who call them to confess the faith by giving them the grace of the word. To teach someone to bring it to faith is the task not only of every ordained preacher but also of every believer. “My brethren, if any of you will be wandering away from the truth, and someone will turn him to know that he who has turned the sinner out of the wandering of his way will save his soul from death, and a multitude of sins will cover him”. 5, 19–20).

The testimony of the word of God is an internal requirement of faith: “Believe, I have spoken; and we believe, and therefore we speak” (2 Corinthians 4: 13). To confess God is to confess our divine lineage. It means to confess that we are created by God and that we live and exist in this divine order. It means recognizing that we are not autonomous, but dependent on God, both in the beginning, in our whole life and in our end. By confessing and transmitting faith we show our dependence on God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ whom we receive as the Savior who perfects and sanctifies our lives through the Holy Spirit and leads us to the Kingdom of God (Plămădeală, 1989: 197).

The laymen receive many opportunities to practice the apostolate of evangelization and sanctification. The very testimony of Christian life and the good works of “working faith through love” (Gal. 5: 6) have the

power to draw people to God (Mt. 5: 16). However, such an apostolate is not only the testimony of life. The true apostle seeks opportunities to declare Christ by word, or to the unbelievers, to bring them to faith, or to the faithful, to instruct, strengthen and exhort them to a true Christian life “for the love of Christ rules us” Cor. 5: 14). In the heart of all the words of the Apostle must resound: “Thou shall save me if I do not rejoice” (1 Corinthians 9: 16).

The evangelization and the missionary transmission of the Christian tradition by the laity is of paramount importance within the family (Bria, 1999: 162).

Ever since its inception, the Christian Church has been modeled on the family as a community of love: “Do not defy the old man, but urge him as a parent: the youngest, as the brethren; old women like mothers; the young ones, as sisters, in all purity. The widows honor them, the truly widowed. And if a widow has children or grandchildren, they first learn to prove their piety to their own family and reward their parents, for it is good and received before God” (1 Tim. 3–4).

The Apostle Paul compares the connection between man and woman with that between Christ and the Church (Eph. 5: 20–33). “This great mystery is; and I say in Christ and in the Church” (Ephesians 5: 32).

The family is founded not only on God's inner necessity of living in the human being, but also on the communion that exists between God and the humanity he loves. Since the Creator placed the communion between man and woman at the foundation of human society (Genesis 1: 27, 2, 18–25), and by His grace He has made the Mystery in Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5 : 32), the Apostles' of families has a special importance for the mission of the Church and for society.

Christian spouses are collaborators of grace and faithful witnesses to one another and to their children and other family members. The family is the evangelical environment in which new generations of Church members are preparing. Christian education and training within the family are crucial for children and young people. Parents are the first messengers of the faith and educators for their children. By word and example, they educate them in Christian and apostolic life. This education is done either directly or indirectly through the experience of common prayers, fasting, by preparing the children for receiving the sacred Sacraments, and especially by personal relationships between parents and children, not only at home but also outside. Spiritual guidance and direct example of parents are of decisive importance in transmitting the faith and Christian tradition.

Christian parents are the most important mediators between the Church and the world. Through them, the children and young people are

helped, and through them they are sent into the world as disciples of Christ as witnesses and prophets of Him. It is a prolongation of the Church in the world and a bringing of the world into the Church. The fulfillment of the apostolic duty towards the children and the young generation also maintains the faith of the parents. Many Christian parents have lost their rightful faith and authentic Christian life because they no longer care about the Christian education of their children.

In the Old Testament, the teaching of the law, in the collective, and its transmission was a family obligation: “These words which I say to you today, have them in your heart and in your soul; that thou shall plant them in thy sons, and speak unto them when thou sit in thy house, when thou go on a path, when thou sleep, and get up” (Deut 6: 6, 7). The Christian family fulfills their mission if through the love and respect of their members to each other, by confessing faith and by praying elevated to God in common, it will appear as the household cell of the Church, and if the whole family will fit into the liturgical cult of the Church and promote Christian virtues in society. “It must be stressed that, to the greatest extent, within the family cell, the life of the Christian becomes reality, and thus the health of all problems is renewed. In the face of contemporary threats to the existence of the family itself, it must be remembered that precisely within its structures, day by day, the spiritual cult and the preaching of the Word of God take place, in which the priesthood of the parents, who offer their children to the divine light and who are the representatives the provisional and mirror of parental care and divine mercy” (Bria et alli, 2003: 37–39).

Always and everywhere, but especially in areas where the gospel of Christ has not yet become a concrete human reality, or where the Church is in great difficulty, Christian families, adhering to the gospel with all their lives, give a great testimony to the world precious about Christ. All Christians are indebted to confess Christ to men (Mt. 10: 32), that is to each other, in public not only privately, that is, not only as a statement of personal faith, made in the face of one’s own conscience, but as a confession of public faith by word and deed. This demand is so categorical that the Savior Jesus Christ is not content to say only affirmatively: “He who confesses to men..” but always returns, as always in biblical language, repeating the idea and the negative one, to strengthen it, saying: “but to him who will deny me before men, I will also deny myself to my Father who is in heavens” (Mt. 10: 33).

Even during the Savior's public activities, there were many laymen who testified and spread the word of the Gospel, which Jesus did not stop; some even sent them to proclaim Him. Thus, when the Apostle John informed Him that someone was casting demons in His name (Mk.

9: 38), “Jesus said, Do not stop it, there is no one to do a miracle in My name, and then to He can hurry to speak to Me of evil. For he who is not against us is for us” (Mk 9: 39-40). After he had healed him, he sent him home, asking him to declare among his own people the faith in Him: “Go to your house, to yours, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has loved you. And he departed, and began to declare in the Decapolis what Jesus did for him; and they all marveled” (Mk. 5: 19–20).

The apostles were specifically sent (Mt. 28: 18–19, Mk. 16: 15–16, FA 1, 8, 2, 41) to fulfill the “ministry of the word” (FA 6: 4), but they were helped in this ministry of deacons (FA 6, 7–9; 7, 11–59; 8, 5, 40) and faithful men and women. For the Savior’s request to confess Him to men does not refer only to the Apostles, but to all Christians, this being the general ground for preaching the word by the laymen as well.

The New Testament and the history of the Church show us that many believers have followed this existence of mission, and every Christian was a living agent in the propagation of the Good News. Everyone in his circle worked among the Gentiles for their conversion. Christians felt compelled to preach in wider circles, hoping to gain as many as possible for Christ. Each Christian community was a center for spreading the gospel. Missionary activity was continually carried out by personal contact, by kinship and friendship, and by attending Christian meetings for teaching. Craftsmen, soldiers, merchants, slaves, men and women all were engaged in this missionary activity.

After the persecution of the Christians in Jerusalem, they spread throughout Palestine and the surrounding. “But those that were scattered went from one place to another by the word” (Acts 8: 4). And “those who had scattered after the trouble that happened in Stephen's time went to Phenicia, and to Cyprus, and to Antioch. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and the great number of those who believed and returned to the Lord” (Acts 11: 19, 21). They founded the Church in Antioch, where Christians were first called Christians (Acts 11, 26). According to the New Testament clues and tradition, the Church of Rome was also founded by simple believers. Here, the spouses Aquila and Priscila, who were secular believers, preached here. Then, together with the Apostle Paul, they also preached other secular disciples like Epafra, Tihic, Aristarchus, etc., as Apostle Paul writes when he writes to the Philippians that “most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord through my chains, dare to speak without fear the word of God without fear” (Philippians 1: 14). Of many unnamed preachers in the Church of Thessalonica, all Apostle Paul tells us that they have been parable of all who believe in Macedonia and Achaia, for from them “the Lord’s word

was spoken not only in Macedonia and Achaia, our faith in God has entered our whole place” (1 Thess. 1, 8).

The sermon of missionaries and evangelists consists of a simple exposition of the teaching of faith and an account of the history of salvation in Christ. A more in-depth explanation of the teaching of faith and its deepening was made by the instructions in the first Christian ages, and then by catechists (second-fourth century) by catechists. They therefore acted within the Church’s internal mission and were most often laymen, well trained in the mysteries of the Christian faith (Călugăr, 2005: 41). Our times do not claim less commitment from the laymen. On the contrary, the present conditions require them to develop a more intense and wider apostolate. The progress of science and technology, the complex relationships among men, not only extended the sphere of apostolate to the endless, but raised new problems, whose solving in the Christian spirit demands a special concern, effort and commitment of the laymen.

The apostolate of the laymen has become all the more necessary, as the autonomy of many sectors of human life, which also involves a certain alienation from the religious and moral life, has greatly increased, thereby endangering the Christian life itself. There are few who, by trusting too much in the progress of natural sciences and techniques, fall into some sort of idolatry of temporal things, becoming more slaves than their masters.

Being the status of secular believers to lead their lives in the midst of the world and worldly affairs, they are called by God, inspired by the Christian spirit to exert their apostleship in the midst of the world, activating for the evangelization and sanctification of men, and striving to penetrate the social order with the spirit of the gospel, so that their work will give a clear witness of Christ and serve the salvation of men. Each, according to his gifts and competence, is called upon to actively participate in the deepening and defense of Christian principles as well as in their correct application to the problems of the contemporary world. The apostolate in the social environment, meaning the preoccupation to penetrate the Christian spirit, the mentality and morals, the laws and structures of the community in which each one lives, is the mission and duty of secular Christians to such an extent that it can never be fulfilled as words to someone else. At home, job, or profession, study, or leisure time, they are best placed to help their brothers and sisters. This apostolate must encompass all people living in the environment and include any good spiritual or material that they can do. By doing so, they contribute to the evangelization and knowledge of Christ by those with whom they come into contact and in the formation

of Christian knowledge, so that they, in turn, penetrate the spirits of the gospel through the various environments and human communities.

The laymen faithful who have the proper gift and training are called upon to give their contribution to catechism, religious-moral education, and the defense of Orthodox Christian faith in parish communities, in schools, and through the means of social communication. The bishop is invested with a “fulness of truth” (St. Irineu, *Adv. haer.* 2. 26. 2) He is introduced by ordination in the succession with the bishops established by the Apostles and today’s missions to “teach the word of the Truth”. Not only priests, but also teachers of theology and religion, educated catechists and laity must be engaged in this didactic and pedagogical mission (Călugăr, 2005: 41).

An important contribution is made by the laymen to dialogue, which is so necessary today, between theology and science, so that science, while preserving its necessary autonomy to be promoted in the Christian spirit, and faith supported with a scientific foundation for that Christians always be ready to answer to anyone who asks for their hope (cf 1 Pt. 3: 15).

### **III. The participation of laymen in the priestly ministry of Christ**

The participation of the laymen in the priestly ministry of Christ is accomplished by actively participating in the public worship of the Church through private prayer and by giving them the service of communion in the mysterious Body of Christ as anticipation of the future Kingdom of God. The Divine Liturgy, the center of Orthodox Christian life and spirituality, is the structure of communion through excellence. Orthodox liturgical spirituality is based on the holy ministry of “Whoever brings and is brought, who receives and divides”. The Eucharistic sacrifice is nothing more than a mystical update of the sacrifice of Christ as an extension of His surrender as a man of God, a surrender that, when in a body capable of death, led to the end, accepting the bloody death, and after the resurrection it maintains it as a total surrender of His humanity to God. The Risen and Ascended Christ is in a state of continuous dedication to God, the Holy Trinity and to men (Stăniloae, III, 1978: 105). That is why the Epistle to the Hebrews presents Him as the everlasting giver, constantly interfering for us (7: 24–27), and the Revelation as “a lamb, sitting stabbed in the throne” of God (5: 6).

Mass is brought by Christ together with His Church, with all, and for all its members. In the Liturgy, the whole community is in a state of celebration and education, being together-sacrificing and sacrificing

together in and with Christ through the liturgical priest who moves this worship action. It can be said that in a very profound sense, the nature of the community of the Church is achieved and maintained through priestly ministry, which is why where the institution of priesthood disappears its ecclesial profile is erased. The Church cannot therefore be defined as a community gathered in the name of Christ simply. Its ecclesial meaning is perfected by its liturgical, Eucharistic character of consecration (Bria, 1982: 484).

Mass is not only the guarantee and expression of unity of faith, prayer and love that exists in the body of the seen Church, but also the joy of being joyful with Christ in His next Kingdom: “For whenever you eat this bread and you drink it drink the Lord’s death, proclaim it until it comes” (1 Cor 9: 26). The church is sacramental to the Kingdom of God, but it begs and anticipates the future kingdom as it organizes itself and presents itself as the Eucharist. The purpose of the Liturgy is identical to the purpose of the Church, that of transforming everything into the Eucharist, for only prepared and ordained as “the Eucharist”, as a sacrifice offered to God, humanity can be introduced through the Holy Spirit into the communion of the risen and exalted One (Bria, 1982: 484).

In the Mass, is preached not only the word of God, and believers share the body and blood of His Son, but also draw an icon of Christian life in its spiritual and social aspect. The mass indicates a way of reorganizing mankind into a new order of grace, which is symbolically represented on the disk. Its purpose is to set in motion this Eucharistic order or the liturgical organization of the world in Christ, in the spirit of which everything, human life and creation must be prepared and offered as a gift to God. The Orthodox Church promotes through its Eucharistic cult a model of liturgical spirituality. This is noticed not only in the common liturgical celebration as an act of paschal joy but also in the coherent organization of the spiritual and social life according to the Eucharistic model, which is the model of consecration and of love until the sacrifice. The Church claims the Gospel project and proposes to the world the Eucharistic Perspective, the perspective of the coming of the Holy Spirit to prepare the world from here for and in the face of the future world (Evdokimov, 1977: 40–44; Khodze, 1976: 6–12; \*\*\*, 1975: 417–421).

Through mass, the orthodoxy has maintained a balance and unity not only between word and mystery, between mission and cult, between history and the Kingdom of God, but also between dogma and ethics, between prayer and ministry. The re-affirmation of the liturgical status of the Church is decisive for our time when looking for a new type of



consistency between theology, spirituality and social ethics. Communion of the Church, according to the Eucharistic model, is also essential for the unity of the human community. This “communion of the saints” is manifested both in prayer and intercession, as well as in social solidarity and common ministry (Bria, 1982: 491).

But not only has the liturgy had this Eucharistic character. All the sacraments are related to the sacrifice and resurrection of Christ. For in all Christ is given for us, and gives Himself to God, but it is also given to us. In Baptism He gives us a new life capable of giving to Him in Him through Chrismation the power of advancing into virtues is given to us, which are forms of self-sacrifice. Repentance is the grace of forgiveness that meets our renunciation of selfish pleasures. The priesthood is the consecration of the ordained God to lead a life dedicated to Him and the Church. Marriage is a gift of true love and gifting, combined with a defeat of selfishness. Each individual man is destined to die and resurrect with Christ, to reconstitute, in a liturgical way, the history of universal salvation in his own person (Stăniloae, 1978: 105).

Falling in this liturgical, Eucharistic order, all Christians, by public worship and by assuming the burdens of life in the spirit of Christ, become like Him: “always bearing in the flesh the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus they appear in our body” (1 Corinthians 4: 10, Col. 1: 24). All activities: apostolic prayers and initiatives, family life, daily work, joys and trials of life, if they are lived in the spirit of Christ, become “spiritual sacrifices, pleasing to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2): in the celebration of the Eucharist, are offered with deep godliness to God together with the offering of the Body and Blood of the Lord. At the Divine Liturgy, Christians also offer themselves to God with Christ: “Receive our God, our prayer; make us worthy to bring prayers, requests and sacrifices without blood to all your people” (From *The First Prayer for the Believers*, Missal). Thus, secular laymen, acting all over with holiness as worshipers, consecrate to God the world itself, following the exhortation of the ecstasy: “Let ourselves and one another, and all our life of Christ God, give it” (from *Liturghier*, ed. 2012).

The laymen believers participate in the priesthood of Christ and through all actions by which they enhance the reconciliation of men with God and the whole: “I urge you to make requests, prayers, intercessions, thanks to all men, that this is a good thing and received before God our Savior” (1 Tim., 2, 1, 3). For God “reconciled us with Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5: 18).

#### **IV. The participation of laymen in the royal service of Christ**

The laymen or faithful believers participate in the royal service of Christ by their victory over temptations and sins, by organizing Christian communion and by Christian deacon in secular society. The gospel of Christ calls men out of the bondage of sin and death and by birth to life in Christ (Romans 6: 3–6, Gal 3: 27) sets them on the path of justice, freedom and communion of eternal life. “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14: 6). “I am the light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of Life” (Hebrews 8: 12). But because this path of the Christian is not yet the ultimate goal, it passes through temptations, disputes, and sufferings, and therefore asks for the spiritual struggle: “And every fighter, from all things, endures. But to take a wretched crown; but we, an unselfish one” (1 Corinthians 9: 25). The target of the road shines only in its course. Salvation is gained in the struggle with the temptations and contestations of this world: the victory of life in the struggle against sin and death.

Through His gift to God, which culminated in the victory of sin and death through the cross and resurrection, Jesus Christ shared with His disciples the gift of liberty and power that by self-denial and holy life they could overcome the temptations and the dominion of sin themselves, “For the One Who is in us is greater than the one who is the world” (1 John 4: 4). The Apostle Paul expresses this power of the Christian, coming from the power of Christ, to overcome temptations and sins through the exhortations of “to walk in the renewing of life”.

“So do you, think that you are dead to sin, but come to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore, let not sin reign in your mortal body, that you may obey your lusts; neither let your members be put to serve sin as weapons of injustice, but present to God that you are alive from the dead, and your members as weapons of righteousness in the service of God. For sin will not take hold of you, since you are not under the law, but under grace” (Romans 6: 11–14). “He who subdues his body and governs his soul without being overwhelmed by passions is his own master: he can be called emperor because he is able to lead his own being; is free and independent, and does not fall prey to a guilty servant”. For “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against wicked spirits” (Eph 6: 12), victory over sin must also manifest itself in the social sphere. It also improves living conditions in the world, its institutions and structures, so as not to generate social sins, but to provide the optimal conditions for the perfection of man (Bel, 2001: 43–77).

### V. Conclusions

It would be preferable for all Christians to have the consciousness of their spiritual, spiritual nobility, and the consciousness of their mission. Through their moral life, they master their passions, which always try to unleash and disorganize the personal life of man and society. They are the ones who offer liturgical sacrifices, participating in the Divine Liturgy. They are teachers because they are meant to carry on what they have learned in the Liturgy or from a multitude of other sources.

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