



He Lay Faithful and Their Secular Character Chiristifideles laici, 15

The newness of the Christian life is the foundation and title for equality among all the baptized in Christ, for all the members of the People of God: "As members, they share a common dignity from their rebirth in Christ, they have the same filial grace and the same vocation to perfection. They possess in common one salvation, one hope and one undivided charity". *Because of the one dignity flowing from Baptism, each member of the lay faithful, together with ordained ministers and men and women religious, shares a responsibility for the Church's mission.*

But among the lay faithful this one baptismal dignity takes on a manner of life which sets a person apart, without, however, bringing about a separation from the ministerial priesthood or from men and

women religious. The Second Vatican Council has described this manner of life as the "secular character": **"The secular character is properly and particularly that of the lay faithful"**.

To understand properly the lay faithful's position in the Church in a complete, adequate and specific manner it is necessary to come to a deeper theological understanding of their secular character in light of God's plan of salvation and in the context of the mystery of the Church. Pope Paul VI said the Church "has an authentic secular dimension, inherent to her inner nature and mission, which is deeply rooted in the mystery of the Word Incarnate, and which is realized in different forms through her members". *The Church, in fact, lives in the world, even if she is not of the world (cf. Jn 17:16). She is sent to continue the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, which "by its very nature concerns the salvation of humanity, and also involves the renewal of the whole temporal order"*.

Certainly *all the members* of the Church are sharers in this secular dimension but *in different ways*. In particular the sharing of the *lay faithful* has its own manner of realization and function, which, according to the Council, is "properly and particularly" theirs. **Such a manner is designated with the expression "secular character"**.

In fact the Council, in describing the lay faithful's situation in the secular world, points to it above all, as **the place in which they receive their call from God: "There they are called by God"**. This "place" is treated and presented in dynamic terms: the lay faithful "live in the world, that is, in every one of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very fabric of their existence is woven". They are persons who live an ordinary life in the world: they study, they work, they form relationships as friends, professionals, members of society, cultures, etc. However, **the Council considers their condition not simply an external and environmental framework, but as a reality destined to find in Jesus Christ the fullness of its meaning**. Indeed it leads to the affirmation that "the Word made flesh willed to share in human fellowship ... He sanctified those human ties, especially family ones, from which social relationships arise, willingly submitting himself to the laws of his country. He chose to lead the life of an ordinary craftsman of his own time and place.

The "world" thus becomes the place and the means for the lay faithful to fulfil their Christian vocation, because the world itself is destined to glorify God the Father in Christ. The Council is able then to indicate the proper and special sense of the divine vocation which is directed to the lay faithful. They are not called to abandon the position that they have in the world. **Baptism does not take them from the world at all**, as the apostle Paul points out: "So, brethren, in whatever state each was called, there let him remain with God" (1 Cor 7:24). **On the contrary, he entrusts a vocation to them that properly concerns their situation in the world**. The lay faithful, in fact, "are called by God so that they, led by the spirit of the Gospel, might contribute to the sanctification of the world, as from within like leaven, by fulfilling their own particular duties. Thus, especially in this way of life, resplendent in faith, hope and charity they manifest Christ to others". Thus for the lay faithful, to be present and active in the world is not only an anthropological and sociological reality, but in a specific way, a theological and ecclesiological reality as well. In fact, in their situation in the world God manifests his plan and communicates to them their particular vocation of "seeking the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God"... **The lay faithful's position in the Church, then, comes to be fundamentally defined by their newness in Christian life and distinguished by their secular character**.

The images taken from the gospel of salt, light and leaven, although indiscriminately applicable to all Jesus' disciples, are specifically applied to the lay faithful. They are particularly meaningful images because they speak not only of the deep involvement..., but also and above all, they tell of the radical newness and unique character of an involvement and participation which has as its purpose the spreading of the Gospel that brings salvation.

Christ, we need you Saint Paul VI

Pentecost inaugurates the time of the Church, a time in which she bears witness to the presence of the Trinitarian Mystery by breaking the bread and shedding the blood, imitating the boundless Love of Christ, built on the rock of the apostles being heralds of the Kingdom of God. A beautiful spiritual theme of the month of June that we can nourish with this prayer of Paul VI, the Pope of the Secular Institutes.

O Christ, our only Mediator,
We need you
to come into communion with God the Father,
to become with you,
that you are his only Son and our Lord,
his adopted children,
to be regenerated in the Holy Spirit.

We need you, O only real Master of truths
hidden and indispensable to life,
to know our being
and our destiny, and the way to achieve it.

We need you, O our Redeemer,
to discover moral misery and to heal it;
to have the concept of good and evil
and the hope of holiness;
to deplore our sins and for forgiveness.

We need you,
O first-born Brother of mankind,
to find the real reason
of brotherhood between men,
the fundamentals of justice,
the treasures of charity, the supreme good of peace.

We need you,
O great Patient of our pains,
to know the meaning of suffering
and to give it a value of atonement and redemption.

We need you O Victor of Death,
to rid us of despair and denial
and to make sure he doesn't cheat forever.

We need you,
O Christ, O Lord, O God with us,
to learn true love and to walk in joy
and in the power of your charity
our hard road, until the final meeting...
with you loved, with you expected,
with you, blessed forever. Amen.

The book "The Salesian Family in the World"

At the end of the 28th General Chapter, the Rector Major presented to the Chapter members, the book THE SALESIAN FAMILY IN THE WORLD, a long-desired work that offers an updated vision of the reality of our Family in the world. Three are the great nuclei of the book: The Charter of Charismatic Identity, a true guide to immerse ourselves in the gift of the charism and to revive the spirit of communion and the commitment of the mission; the Light of Salesian Holiness, a living heritage of a tradition that pushes us along paths of evangelical radicality; and the presentation of the 32 Groups that are officially part of the Salesian Family in the World. A volume that speaks for itself and that helps us to live in deep communion.

The animation of the Salesian Family in the world

The decision of the 27th GC SDB (2014) to establish a Central Secretariat, directly dependent on the Rector Major with the task of accompanying and animating the whole world Salesian Family. Fr. Eusebio Muñoz has been the head of the Secretariat until now. The Rector Major has appointed Fr. Joan Lluís Playà as his successor. We thank Don Eusebio for his tireless dedication and Don Joan Lluís for his availability that will make him compatible with Assistance of VDB and CDB.

The manifestations of an abundant and creative solidarity in these months of the Pandemic.

The information that has appeared in the ANS and on the various sites of the SDB, FMA, and, in general, of all the local groups of the Salesian Family, is an extraordinary sign of the creative solidarity that has been implemented throughout the Salesian world in the face of the human and spiritual needs of those affected by the coronavirus epidemic and other natural disasters. The Charter of the Charismatic Identity of the Salesian Family (Article 9) encourages us to interpret the phenomenon of globalization in terms of solidarity, which must be compressed as "the firm and persevering determination to commit ourselves to the common good, because we are all responsible for all". A beautiful response to the call to be "good Christians and honest citizens" of the Strenna.

A novena to bind oneself to the meaning of self-offering of Salesian spirituality.

The novena of Mary Help of Christians led by the Rector Major (Cf. Youtube) helped us to contemplate the self-offering proper to our spirituality evoking the personalities, among others, of Don Bosco, Mother Mazzarello, Fr Beltrami, Sr Troncati, Sg. Zatti, Fr Variara... Their testimony to be present in the world of physical pain (sick, hares, infected...), even putting their lives at risk, continues today in the actions of the elderly and young members, women and men, of our Family.