Notes and Comments

VATICAN II ON THE LAITY: "LIMEN" OR "LUMEN"?

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TWO WAYS OF LOOKING AT VATICAN II

There are two ways of interpreting the documents of the Second Vatican Council: either as limen (limit) or lumen (light). Our understanding of the various statements depend on which manner of reading the documents we opt for.

1. VATICAN II AS LIMEN

We can choose to read the documents of Vatican II as limen, that is, as end-products that now need only be applied. In this way, Vatican II has said it all (at least for the time being). From this perspective, further theological reflection that goes beyond the declarations of the Council are not too welcome. Even the application of the new insights embodied in the conciliar documents are kept within the limits mentioned in the documents themselves.

One sees this manner of looking at the Council in one direction or trend indicated by Archbishop Legaspi in his paper. There he points out that within this framework questions about relationships of laity to the clergy and working out the various ministries

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suitable for the ordained (ministries properly belonging to the clergy) and non-ordained (possible lay ministries) are tackled. Notice that theological reflection here means the working out of the application of such limit. The usual clergy-laity categories are retained and within which applications are to be worked out. I consider this trend in the theological literature concerning the laity as reading the Council as *limen*.

2. VATICAN II AS LUMEN

Another way of interpreting the Council is to regard it as a springboard for further reflection. If seen in this manner, then the future is the moment for a consistent drawing out of the implications of its theological gains, not excluding areas which have not been envisioned by the Council itself. Following this way of looking at Vatican II, it will be possible to go beyond the Council itself based on the actual directions which it had earlier taken.

In the paper of Archbishop Legaspi it is indicated that an other trend in the literature concerning the laity is one that starts from more fundamental realities rather than the customary categories. Hence, this “direction” begins, for instance, with the Church as the People of God (one community) and the Church as ministerial in its entirety (one mission). This manner of interpreting Vatican II, I believe, sees the Council primarily as *lumen*, as light or springboard; here the Council shows the way to proceed rather than stating the limit.

a. A Return to Foundational Theological Realities

In analyzing the above trend we notice the tendency of such theological reflection to move towards foundational realities. Instead of remaining with the laity-clergy categories, it chooses instead to begin with the more basic assertion that there is one community, one People of God. Rather than continue speaking of the ministries of the clergy and of the laity, it prefers to start with the basic ministeriality of the entire community; the one People of God has one, and only one, mission.
b. Primacy of the Kingdom

Following this development in a consistent way, we have to speak about the reality of the Kingdom for both Church and ministry stem from and are aimed at this Kingdom. "Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness . . ." (Mt 6:33). The Church is a community gathered together for the sake of the Kingdom. Consequently, ministry is service of the Kingdom. It is the reality of the Kingdom which gives justification for the Church and its mission.

c. Reasons for Regarding Vatican II as Lumen

So it does make a difference on how one fundamentally sees the Council. And, I believe, that Vatican II through its own orientation has set the stage for a Vatican III. As springboard for further theological developments, Christian communities will need to convene for a Vatican III to clarify and assess the new developments and, perhaps, give them new and further impetus. The reason is that our understanding of the Church is never absolute at any given time and that experiences of people are never at a standstill. "To interpret the Council documents within the living Tradition of the Church," says theologian Walter Kasper, "also means interpreting these in the light of the changing 'signs of the times' and achieving a deeper knowledge of the gospel and the Council on the basis of the changed questions of the hour. Not without reason was it once said in the Council that the Council texts are lumen rather than limen (light rather than limit)."

There are a number of reasons why we should read Vatican II as lumen rather than limen. First of all, the recovery of the biblical insight "One People of God" takes primacy over the other theological categories (e.g., laity-clergy) which have developed in history. It takes precedence in importance because scripture is considered as the primary norm in our understanding of our Faith Tradition: norma normans non normata (i.e., a norming norm which is not normed).

Secondly, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et Spes, states that contemporary issues are to be reflected upon in the light of experience and the Gospel (cf. GS 46). This reason highlights the fact that experience is es-
sential in understanding our faith, and that theological reflection can never be at a standstill for the mutual interaction between human experience and the Gospel never really stops.

Thirdly, the definition of the laity which we find in *Lumen Gentium* 31 was never intended to define once and for all who the laity are in the Church. This definition is *neither a definitive statement nor a theological definition*. On the basis of the printed relatio of the Council we know that this is just a *typological definition*; it is just a description of the type of laity which has so far developed. The whole approach of the document indicates that no essential, theological definition is being offered, but simply a description *ad hoc*. Hence, the typological definition, far from settling any issue regarding what a lay person is, only gives us, as it were, the *status quaestionis*, the balance-sheet on the development of the understanding of the laity in the Church.

**CONSEQUENCES OF SEEING VATICAN II AS "LUMEN"**

There are definite theological consequences in seeing Vatican II as light and springboard for further development. If we begin with the fundamental oneness of the christian community, then we need to develop a "total ecclesiology" (Y. Congar). This is an ecclesiology of all christians and for all christians. Every baptized member is a contributor to this understanding of the Church because this is intended for each and every one in the community. The christian experiences of lay men and women count in the formulation of a theology of the Church.

A total ecclesiology starts with the basic assertion that we — all of us baptized in Christ — are Church. The letter to the Galatians reminds us that there is "neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (3:28). The very forceful emphasis given on this oneness is realized when we note that all the cultural (Jew-Greek), social (slave-free) and even biological (male-female) differences no longer matter when we talk fundamentally about our being christian. We really ought to begin on the fundamental reality which unites all christians: their being christian through baptism-confirmation. Nothing can remove or diminish this fundamental unity and commonality.
1. WE ARE CHURCH

Consequently, the false dualism between clergy and laity ought to be abandoned. In fact, it is worth our while to reconsider whether our understanding of the Church would be better if we were to abandon the use of the terms "laity" and "clergy." After all these terms originated from two characteristics of the entire Christian community: "laity" from the Greek term "laos" (= people) or "laikos" (= to belong to the people) and "clergy" from the Greek term "kleros" (= portion, heritage, lot). Together they assert that the entire community is the people (= "laos," "laikos") which is God's portion or lot (= "kleros").

In this sense, the description of the Church as the People of God actually embodies these two characteristics. Moreover, we can also say from this perspective that the entire community is laity; the entire community is clergy. We may be better off with a new terminology such as "ministry" and "ministries" to capitalize the community's fundamental oneness and commonness and show how this is carried out through various "ministries."

2. WE ARE CHURCH IN AND FOR THE WORLD

Having asserted our fundamental unity, a second corollary assertion needs to be made: that all of us together have one fundamental mission with respect to the Church and to the world. We all share in the same mission and no one is more responsible for it than another. Because of this there is no function, no important responsibility in the Church that is not first of all the concern of the whole Christian community as such — even if in fulfilling it there will be diversity of complementary roles.

Clearly, a Christian who does not serve is an anomaly in the Church. Everyone has the responsibility to carry out the mission of the entire Church in his or her own way. Moreover, this double-faceted mission of the Church — ad intra, the building up of the community and ad extra, the task of social transformation in the light of the Kingdom — cannot be split into two with each, then, being designated to a particular group in the Church (e.g., the spiritual and the religious for the clergy, and the temporal for the laity). There is only one mission and everyone shares in it.
Thus, it would be preferable if we moved away from the categories of the priestly (clerical) ministry and lay ministries to avoid the connotation which relegates the religious and the spiritual to the clergy and the temporal to the laity. Perhaps, a shift to the concept "christian ministries" (which includes the ministry of leadership as one of them) can help foster the idea that there are different yet complementary ways of carrying out the one and the same mission of the Church for which all are responsible.

Moreover, we have to keep in mind that there is really no specific "lay" ministry because what is often regarded as the specific task of the laity (cf., for example, LG 31 where it is stated that "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") is in fact the christian vocation in the world. Even religious life, for instance, cannot but be considered as a way of being a christian in the world.

About 95% of the entire Church is lay and that is practically the whole Church. This suggests that the lay manner of living the Christian life and carrying out the mission of the Church is what the Church is to be concerned with. An implication that can be derived from this is that the identity of the lay christian is truly the identity of the christian as such. This means that there is really no need to clarify the identity and role of the laity in the Church for the world. The lay identity is the christian identity.

This virtually shifts the burden of clarifying identity and role from the laity to the clergy. In the words of Jacques Dupuis, S.J.,

The real ecclesiological problem, then, consists less in defining the laity’s place and role in the Church than in determining the function in it of the hierarchical priesthood, based on the sacrament of order received in the apostolic succession, and in showing how it is related to the basic priestly reality of the People of God. Does not in the last analysis the priest’s function in the Church community raise a more difficult question than does simply being a member of God’s People? And has not our own time been marked by an identity crisis of priests rather than of lay people?¹

3. THE SEARCH FOR A SPIRITUALITY

Spirituality is the way of being and becoming Christian. Lay people for a long time have been exhorted to follow the spirituality of the monks rather than encouraged to find their own way of following Jesus in their ordinary circumstances. Obviously, experience is an important factor in this search for a spirituality. Any spirituality which would have a real impact in the lives of those trying to realize it ought to be incarnational, that is, based on actual experiences. The experiences, then, of lay men and women matter and must be taken into account in this spirituality.

A foundational and necessary element in spirituality is *metanoia*, which when understood literally means a radical change of mind (*nous*). A paradigm shift must happen among the laity who wish to live as full, participating members of the Church. Letting go of the accustomed view of the Church as "hierarchology" (Y. Congar) in order to adopt the ecclesiology of Vatican II (the People of God) needs a real change of mind. This call for *metanoia*, however, is not an abstract theory without any basis in the faith experiences of lay people.

One can point, for example, to lay people's "intuitive sense" of being Christians in the world, although there is the need to develop among them a stronger sense of being Christians for the world. If one looks at the phenomenon of the Basic Ecclesial Communities, one can find there the incarnation of this awareness of being Christians in the world and for the world. For this reason, the further development of these Basic Ecclesial Communities will be a positive factor in the formulation of a spirituality.

Analysis of this search for a spirituality brings us again to the fundamental realization that lay spirituality is, in fact, plain and simple Christian spirituality of every baptized Christian. "Lay" spirituality as contrasted to a "priestly" or "religious" spirituality does not really exist. In the words of Leonard Doohan,

There is no such thing as a spirituality of the laity. There is only the one unique Christian spirituality; but, just as this was lived out in a variety of ways over history, so it is lived out in a variety of ways today by laity, priests and religious . . .

CONCLUSION

Following the manner of looking at Vatican II as *lumen* rather than *limen*, we saw how this meant the development of a "total ecclesiology," a theology of the Church of all christians and for all christians. A total ecclesiology starts from the foundational reality that we — all of us baptized in Christ — are the Church and that together we have but one mission which has two aspects. One people, one mission. Together we all live as christians in and for the world in the light of the Kingdom (one fundamental spirituality). Because Vatican II stands for further development of such ecclesiological understanding (*lumen*), it is clear that our communal task for the future is to spell out more clearly and concretely the primacy of our being and becoming christian as Church. Ultimately, and primarily, the question is indeed: How do we become Church today in our concrete situation?