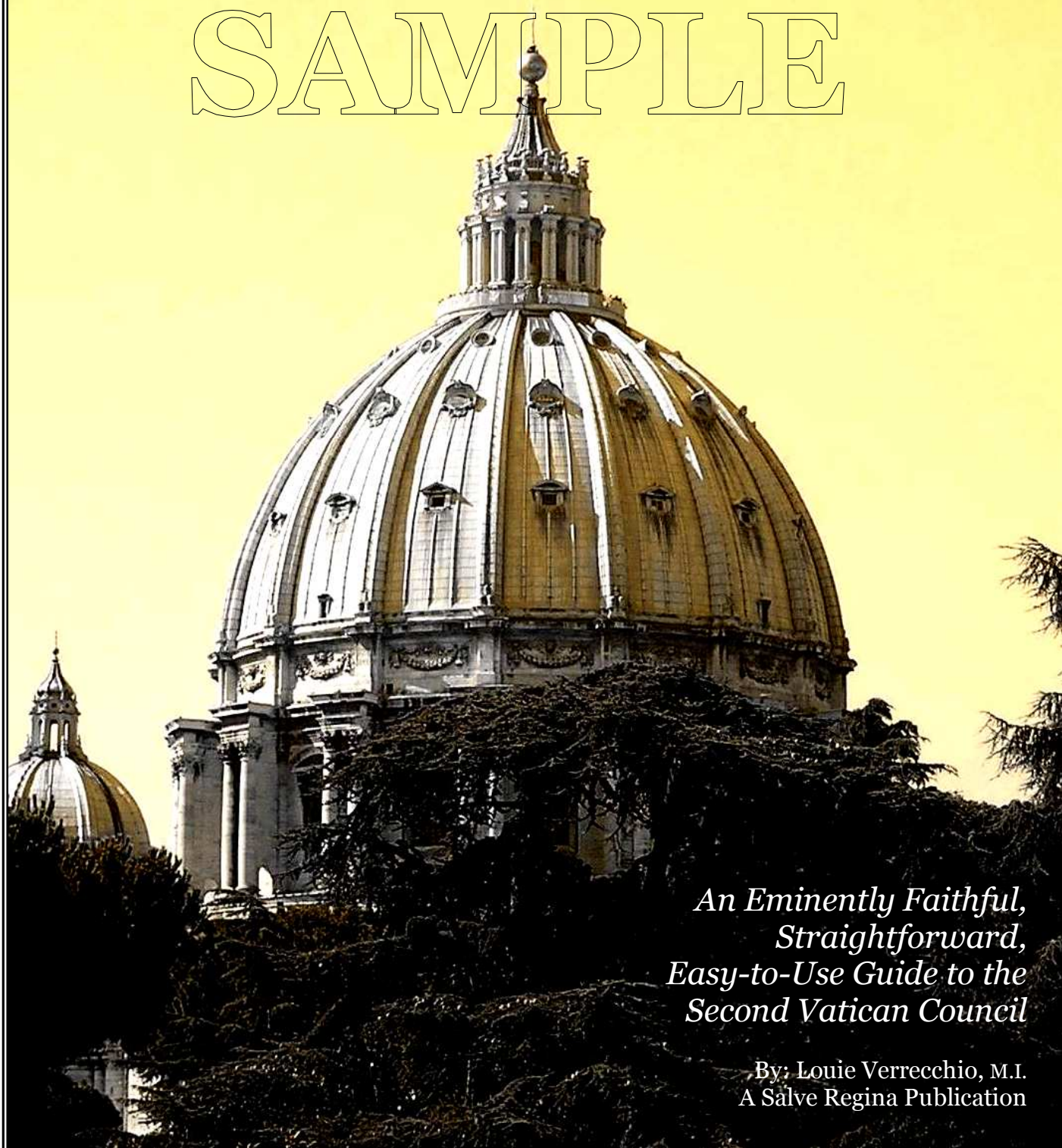


- PART TWO -
Harvesting the Fruit of Vatican II

Apostolicam Actuositatem ♦ Ad Gentes

SAMPLE



*An Eminently Faithful,
Straightforward,
Easy-to-Use Guide to the
Second Vatican Council*

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A Salve Regina Publication

Lesson 1 [SAMPLE LESSON taken from PART TWO]

Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity – *Apostolicam Actuositatem* - Chapters I-III

Introduction

Part One of *Harvesting the Fruit of Vatican II* began with an examination of the Opening Address in which Blessed Pope John XXIII outlined the Council's goals and motives: to safeguard the sacred deposit of faith while exploring more effective ways to communicate God's truth to the modern world. From there we delved into *Dei Verbum*, the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, in which the Council Fathers expounded upon the ways in which God communicates with man thereby extending an invitation to enter into an intimate relationship with Himself; one that He desires should end in our salvation, both as individuals and as members of the one Body of His Son, Jesus Christ.

In Part Two, we will begin to explore the nature of this relationship between God and man a little more closely, in particular as it applies to the lay members of the Church. In *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, the Council will address such questions as: *What is the Church's mission? How is man's relationship with God expressed in his relationship with the Church? How can the laity participate most effectively in the mission of the Church?*

Empowering the Laity

Much is said in the Church today of the notion that Vatican II "empowered the laity." So much so, in fact, that depending upon who is speaking you might even hear it implied that in "lifting up the laity" the Council may have somehow intended to "lower the hierarchy." It's actually not uncommon in some circles to hear it said that the laity's relationship with the hierarchy today reflects - thanks to the spirit of Vatican II - a shift from the old institutional, "vertical model" of the Church to a more modern, "horizontal model." A closer look at the Council's teachings, however, tells a slightly different story.

First, consider if you will a couple of interesting facts:

The words "horizontal" and "vertical" do not appear anywhere in the conciliar documents; they are simply popular expressions that shed little light on the Council's intent apart from substantial clarification, ideally by direct reference to the conciliar text itself. Secondly, and even more telling, the word "empower" is used only twice in the Council documents and in both instances it speaks directly to the role of the bishops; not the laity!

Indeed much could be said of the Council's teaching concerning the relationship between the hierarchy and the laity, but for our purposes suffice it to say that properly speaking the Council Fathers did not affect any shift of "power" in this relationship at all. Rather, throughout the Council documents, the Fathers simply developed more deeply our understanding of Catholic ecclesiology – a fancy term for the theology of the Church - on two key fronts; the Church as communion, and the Church as the People of God.

Keep in mind; neither one of these images is anything new. St. Paul wrote nearly 2,000 years ago of the Church as being composed of many parts that are joined together in communion as one Body in Christ. (1 Cor. 12) He also wrote, in his letter to the Hebrews, of the Church as that which was prefigured in the Old Testament “People of God.” So what exactly did the Council Fathers have to say on the matter?

As you will soon discover in the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, the Council Fathers don’t so much *empower* the laity as they *obligate* them to participate in the mission of the Church in ways that are proper to their vocation. All too often we make the mistake of taking a far too narrow view of what lay participation means by focusing almost exclusively on activities in the parish proper; most especially as it applies to activities undertaken in the sacred liturgy, (a notion we will explore much more deeply in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy).

On closer examination, one will find that more than anything else the Council Fathers urge the laity to strive for a life of holiness; to uphold their “special obligation to renew the temporal order,” (AA 7) and to serve the poor by promoting the common good. No, this call to service isn’t quite as flashy as teaching RCIA, donning a robe to perform a function at Mass or taking up a position in the administration of a parish, but this is exactly what the Council Father’s stressed over and over again.

As for those parish-based activities that seem to get so much more attention; “such as the teaching of Christian doctrine, certain liturgical activities, and the care of souls,” the Council Fathers make it clear that laypersons engage in these duties only inasmuch as the “hierarchy entrusts” them to us (AA 24).

Herein lies the key point; while it may be reasonable, with explanation, to say that the Council “empowered the laity,” it is grossly incorrect to imply that the unique role of the hierarchy as it had been understood throughout the centuries before the Council was somehow deemphasized in the process.

According to the Council Fathers, though the activity of the laity takes place in a certain partnership of cooperation with the hierarchy, this activity is also very much dependent upon the sacred hierarchy:

“Whether they offer themselves spontaneously or are invited to action and direct cooperation with the apostolate of the hierarchy, the laity function under the higher direction of the hierarchy itself.” (AA 20)

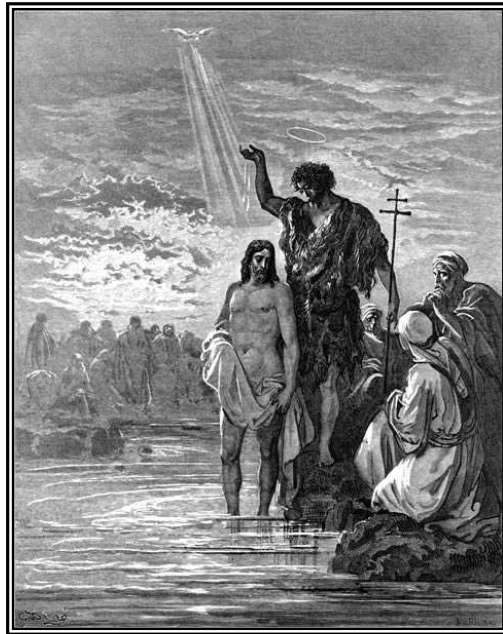
NOTE: Our study of *Apostolicam Actuositatem* will be covered in three lessons. For Lesson 1, please read Articles 1-14 which follow. As always, begin with prayer. *Hail Mary*....

*** The official English language version of each Council document addressed in *Harvesting the Fruit of Vatican II* is reprinted therein by permission of the Holy See. The documents are broken down into segments for each individual lesson making it easy for participants to navigate its text. For the sake of brevity, the Council documents are not reproduced in the SAMPLE LESSONS.**

Study Questions

Following many of the questions, a number will appear in brackets that corresponds to the relevant paragraph in the Council document. This is intended to serve only as a guide as relevant insights may be found in the commentary and elsewhere.

1. For what purpose did the Council address the laity in *Apostolicam Actuositatem*? [1]
2. Was it the Council's intention to exhaustively define the proper role of the laity in the pages of this Decree? Why is your answer to this question of great importance? [1]
3. Read Matthew 28:16-20 and CCC 775-776. For what purpose was the Church founded? [2]
4. Read CCC 1267-1270. What is the meaning of "the apostolate"? To whom is the apostolate proper? [2]



5. Read CCC 1272-1274. In what ways are the baptized consecrated to the royal priesthood?

6. Read CCC 1546-1550. What are the differences between the common priesthood of all believers and the ministerial priesthood?

7. Referring once again to CCC 1546-1550 from Question 6, what does “in persona Christi” mean?

8. Read CCC 1302-1304. What is the purpose of Confirmation?

9. Read CCC 1557, 1582, 1594. What parallels exist between Baptism and Confirmation; the sacraments of the common priesthood of all believers, and Holy Orders; the sacrament of ministerial priesthood?

10. Article 2 of the Decree states, “Indeed, the organic union in this body [the Church] and the structure of the members are so compact that the member who fails to make his proper contribution to the development of the Church must be said to be useful neither to the Church nor to himself.” Read Luke 11:17-23. Can such a member be said, as well, to be opposing the mission of the Church? Why is this important to you as an individual, as a spouse, as a parent, or as a child? Is there any good news to be found in the way you answered these questions?



Reflections

NOTE: Always prepare to reflect upon how you might go about putting the Council's teachings to work in your life of faith through prayer.

1. "For the exercise of this apostolate, the Holy Spirit gives the faithful special gifts, allotting them to everyone according as He wills..." (AA 3) Read 1 Corinthians 12:7-11. What special gifts has the Spirit allotted to you and how you might apply them in the mission of the Church?

2. The Council urges us to use our gifts in the apostolate "in communion with our brothers in Christ." While there are many ways in which to do so, the Fathers specifically mention the existence of the great variety of Catholic associations, each of which, in union with the hierarchy, bear witness to Christ in a special way. (e.g. Militia of the Immaculata, Knights of Columbus, etc.) Are you a member of such a group? If so, what is the special way that your association bears witness to Christ? Are there aspects to your association's witness that you have yet to explore? If you are not associated with such a group, take some time to explore the various associations that exist to see if any one in particular appeals to you. If you were to found an association, what would it look like? Describe it.

3. "Since Christ, sent by the Father, is the source and origin of the whole apostolate of the Church, the success of the lay apostolate depends upon the laity's living union with Christ..." What spiritual aids nourish your union with Christ the most? What other ways might you seek such nourishment?

Consulting the Catechism

900 Since, like all the faithful, lay Christians are entrusted by God with the apostolate by virtue of their Baptism and Confirmation, they have the right and duty, individually or grouped in associations, to work so that the divine message of salvation may be known and accepted by all men throughout the earth. This duty is the more pressing when it is only through them that men can hear the Gospel and know Christ. Their activity in ecclesial communities is so necessary that, for the most part, the apostolate of the pastors cannot be fully effective without it.

Action Plan

Review your answers to the Reflection Questions and consider a goal for each one that will help you to make the transition from Reflection to Action. Commit to carrying out one action for each of your three reflections; this week, in the months ahead, and long term.

TIP: Begin with small steps; they will often lead to more profound opportunities.

An action I can carry out this week:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

An action I can carry out this month or next:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Long term goals:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Mass Intention

Jesus comes to us in the Sacred Liturgy to nourish us with the gift of Himself in both Word and Sacrament, not just as an end unto itself, but that we may “go forth in peace to love and serve the Lord and one another.” Write a brief intention based on your reflections and goals that you will carry to Mass in the week ahead. You may be surprised just how directly your intention is addressed in the hymns, the readings, the homily, the intercessions, etc... Make note of it.

TIP: Make the effort to read the Scripture readings for Mass ahead of time and proactively seek connections to your reflections, goals and ultimately your intention for the week.

Suggested Responses

1. In the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, the Council Fathers sought to inspire the people of God to increase their apostolic activity. They wished to make the absolute need for lay participation in the work of the Church known by describing the nature of lay service, while giving instruction aimed at making the efforts of the laity more effective. Additionally, the Council pointed out the real danger that minus guidance and instruction from the Church, the lay apostolate runs the risk of departing from the truths of the Christian faith. In so acknowledging, the Council offered pastoral directives aimed at helping the laity develop a sense of mission that thrives in unity with the mission of the Universal Church.

2. The Council makes it clear from the outset that this particular decree is not intended to define the proper role of the laity in carrying out the Church's mission. Footnote (2) of the introduction references the numerous other conciliar documents that serve to address this role within the context of the various ministries within the Church. Among these documents are *Lumen Gentium*; *Inter Mirifica*; *Unitatis Redintegratio*; and others. This is a very important "disclaimer," if you will. If one were to approach the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity as though it were intended to serve as a complete guide in such matters, one could very easily get the impression that the parameters of proper lay activity in the Church were purposely left un-addressed, and therefore remain largely "open-ended." Such, however, is not the case, as we will see in future lessons.

3. The Bride of Christ is both a sign and the instrument of man's union with God. The Church was founded in order to spread the good news of Jesus Christ throughout the entire earth, so that every man, woman, and child might attain salvation through, with, and in Him. This is the same great commission that Jesus gave to the Apostles and through them to every member of His Body.

4. All of the activities of the Church that are directed toward this mission (described in #3) are called "the apostolate," a word derived from the word "apostle," which means "one who is sent." Through Baptism, believers are incorporated into the one Body of Christ, and are thereby commissioned as once the Apostles were commissioned, to spread the Good News. The apostolate, therefore, is proper to each and every person who has died with Christ, and has risen with Christ, in the waters of Baptism.

5. The baptized are configured to Christ, fashioned with an indelible mark upon the soul, and consecrated for Christian worship. In Baptism, the faithful are able to answer the call to serve God within the sacred liturgy through active participation. Further, he or she is called upon to witness to the truth of the Gospel in the world, in charity, as a means of drawing men to Christ. Each of these activities are priestly functions that are proper to all of the baptized.

6. The common priesthood of the people is ordered toward the unfolding of the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity in one's life, while the ministerial priesthood is ordered toward the unfolding of these virtues in all of the souls within their care. The ordained ministers of the Church, therefore, are configured to Christ in order to serve the laity; to act with the authority of Christ as Teacher and Healer; to offer sacrifice on behalf of all the faithful in the Person of Christ, the eternal High Priest, and to function as the living image of Christ Himself.

7. In the priest, it is Christ Himself who becomes present and visible to the people of God, particularly when he offers the Sacrifice of the Mass. Jesus alone is the eternal High Priest who offers Himself to His Father in the sacred liturgy, therefore, the ordained minister is not acting simply with the *permission* of Christ, but is acting *in the person* of Christ. By virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, the ordained is configured to Christ *ontologically*, meaning that “priest” is not what he does, it is *who he is* by virtue of this configuration. The sacrament of Reconciliation also offers a profound expression of *in persona Christi*; for it is Jesus Himself who grants absolution through the priest who acts in His Person.

8. Confirmation is a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the baptized. This strengthening in the Spirit completes Baptism by uniting the confirmed more deeply with Christ and His Church; by increasing the gifts of the Holy Spirit within; thereby bringing the common priesthood to perfection. This maturing in the faith prepares one to go forth to proclaim the good news to the world as an apostle (one who is sent) of Christ.

9. Just as Baptism is completed in Confirmation, Holy Orders is an outpouring of the Holy Spirit that is conferred in degrees. A man who is ordained to the presbyterate (priesthood) can be likened to a person who is baptized, but has yet to have the common priesthood to which he is consecrated perfected in Confirmation. Upon ordination to the episcopate, (the office of bishop) Holy Orders and priesthood is brought to perfection by a more complete configuration to Christ the High Priest. Only the bishops have received the fullness of Holy Orders. Another similarity lies in the fact that the mark of Ordination is like the mark of Baptism and Confirmation; both are indelible and cannot be removed from the soul in any way, nor can they be repeated.

10. Jesus is very clear in His teaching, there is no middle ground - one is either with Him or against Him. The member of Christ’s Body who does not make his proper contribution to the Church, whatever that may be, is not truly neutral, rather, he is actively opposing the Lord and His Church through his inaction. Every parent, spouse, and child - in other words, everyone who loves another - should take this notion to heart. For the Church’s mission is to deliver the means of salvation to those we love; to our spouse; to our child; to our mother and to our father... Therefore, he who opposes the Church by inaction, opposes and wounds not only himself, but also the people he loves the most. Complacency wages silent war against the Church, and opposes Her mission to draw all men to Christ. As the Council states, the Body of Christ is One; joined in “organic union,” making the wound of one, the wound of all. The good news in this recognition is that the efforts of one may also be for the benefit of all. Those who are the sole believer in their family can strive to lift up their inactive loved ones through their own active contribution to the apostolate.



Summary

In this lesson we learned:

1. That the laity are called to participate in the work of the Church by virtue of our Baptismal call.
2. The laity, in order to serve fruitfully in the apostolate, stand in need of the direction provided by the sacred hierarchy.
3. The Baptized share in the threefold office of Christ who is Priest, Prophet and King. Yet we must be clear in understanding that the priesthood of the people is different in essence, not just in function, from the ministerial priesthood.
4. There is no middle ground; one is either with Christ or against Him. Therefore, he or she who shirks the responsibility to participate in the apostolate is actively opposing Gods saving plan.

