

## Pan-African Congress of Catholic Laity

### BEING WITNESSES OF JESUS CHRIST IN AFRICA TODAY *“Salt of the earth ... light of the world” (Mt 5: 13,14)*

#### The Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Light of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *“Christifideles laici”*

Yaoundé (Cameroon), 6<sup>th</sup> September 2012

Your Eminences, Your Excellencies,  
 Dear brothers in the episcopacy and priesthood,  
 Dear delegates from the bishops’ conferences of Africa,  
 Dear representatives from the ecclesial movements and new communities,  
 Dear brothers and sisters in Christ!

#### *Part I. The Context: the Expectations of the African Church with regards to the Synod of Bishops on the Laity (1987)*

With the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (ChL), which was presented by Blessed John Paul II on the penultimate day of 1988, we possess a valid and ongoing reference for the apostolate of the laity throughout the world.<sup>1</sup> Although it is now nearly twenty four years old, ChL is a *reliable guide* and remains the *Magna Charta* of the Pontifical Council for the Laity<sup>2</sup>, as well as being a very useful *Vademecum* for every Catholic lay person.<sup>3</sup>

ChL offers us a *summary* of the teachings of the *Second Vatican Council*, the subsequent Magisterium on the laity and the praxis of the Church in this regard. What is more, it also discussed themes that were directly linked to new developments in the post-conciliar period: questions regarding non-ordained “ministers”, the ecclesial movements and new communities, and the participation of women in society and in the life of the Church.

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<sup>1</sup> John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici* on the vocation and mission of the lay faithful in the Church and in the world, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 1988 (= ChL); cf. D. Tettamanzi (ed.), *Laici verso il terzo millennio*. Esortazione apostolica «Christifideles laici», Testo e commento, Editrice Città Nuova, Roma 1989; M. Toso, *Laici per una nuova evangelizzazione*. Studi sull’esortazione apostolica «Christifideles laici» di Giovanni Paolo II, Editor Elle Di Ci, Leumann (Torino) 1990.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the booklet, *Il Pontificio Consiglio per i Laici*, 2<sup>a</sup> ed., Città del Vaticano 2012, 18-20.

<sup>3</sup> J. Schotte, *I frutti di un impegno personale e comunitario*, in: O. R., 30-31 January 1989, insert tabloid, 3.

An enthusiastic article in the Vatican Newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* speaks of it as “A bill of rights for the missionary character of the people of God in the third millennium”.<sup>4</sup> In other words, we can say that ChL allows the Church of today to hear again this bold and decisive invitation of Christ himself: “*You too, go into the vineyard*” (Mt 20:3-4).<sup>5</sup>

The Exhortation (ChL 2) is intended “to stir and promote a deeper awareness among all the faithful of the gift and responsibility they share ... in the communion and mission of the Church.” In 2008, Pope Benedict XVI adds that ChL offers guidelines for the “discernment, examination and orientation of lay efforts within the Church faced with the social changes of these years.”<sup>6</sup>

In this Exhortation can be found a genuine and systematic “echo” of the work of the 7<sup>th</sup> [Ordinary General Assembly of the] Synod of Bishops, which took place in October, in 1987 [twenty years after the Second Vatican Council] on the theme of the “Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World”.<sup>7</sup>

This synod had a strong *African imprint*, in as much as thirty-eight African bishops were *present* at the synod, elected from thirty-three bishops’ conferences. There were also two cardinals from the Roman Curia, two cardinals and two bishops of papal nomination, two experts and ten auditors from the African continent. Altogether, we can count 56 African representatives among the 229 total participants, that is to say, *a quarter* of the synodal assembly!<sup>8</sup>

Additionally, Cardinal Hyacinthe Thiandoum, the then Archbishop of Dakar (Senegal), occupied an important role in the synod as its *Relator-General*. Pope John Paul II praised him at the end of the synod for his “admirable work” and stressed how “in this way the African Church has made an important contribution of great value to the fruit of the synod”.<sup>9</sup>

If we look at the *debates* that took place during the synod, we find a strong African participation. Of the 170 oral or written remarks from the bishops, we find

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Acta Diurna*, in: O. R., no. 30, 5 Feb. 1989, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. ChL 2;3.;28; 64.

<sup>6</sup> Benedict XVI, *Address to Participants in the 23rd Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Laity*, 15 November 2008, Italian Original, in: *Insegnamenti IV/2* (2008), 670-673, 671.

<sup>7</sup> G. Caprile S.I., *Il Sinodo dei Vescovi*, Settima Assemblea Generale ordinaria (1-30 ott. 1987), Editor “La Civiltà Cattolica”, Roma 1989; V. Leonzio (ed.), *La missione del laico*. Documenti ufficiali delle settima Assemblea generale ordinario del Sinodo dei Vescovi sul tema: «Vocazione e missione dei laici nella Chiesa e nel mondo a venti anni dal Concilio Vaticano II». Sintesi originali degli interventi con il testo integrale delle «Proposte» dei Padri sinodali, Editor Logos, Roma 1987; W. Kasper, *Berufung und Sendung des Laien in Kirche und Welt*, in: *StdZ* 112 (1987), 579-593; E. Klinger/R. Zerfuß (ed.), *Die Kirche der Laien*. Eine Weichenstellung des Konzils, Editor Echter, Würzburg 1987.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Caprile, *Sinodo* 715-729;71.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Speech* at the last session of the VII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, 29 October 1987, Italian Version, in: *Insegnamenti X/3*, 949-955, 952.

37 coming from delegates from the African bishops' conferences, to which we can also add the remarks of the African synod auditors.<sup>10</sup> It is significant that the third voice to be heard in the synod hall on the first day of discussion was that of an African woman, synod auditor Callixta Belomo Essana, from Cameroon.<sup>11</sup>

The African synod fathers shared the same consensus about the general purpose of the Synod, which was that of moving from the splendid conciliar “*theory*” concerning the laity to an authentic ecclesial “*praxis*”<sup>12</sup>. We can find almost a dozen points that were introduced into the synod debate by African members:

1. The move to increase the responsibility of the laity
2. The missionary dimension of Baptism
3. The need for authenticity in Christian life
4. The importance of catechists and the “mokambi”
5. The mission of women and the role of the youth
6. The need of catechetical, spiritual, and social formation
7. The need for the inculturation of the Christian message
8. The distinction and collaboration between clergy and laity
9. The task of the lay faithful in public life
10. The “Small Christian communities”, associations and movements
11. The importance of structures for dialogue and exchange

An attentive reading reveals that ChL fully satisfies the hopes and expectations that the representatives of the African Church had expressed for an eventual “users guide” for the lay apostolate.<sup>13</sup>

Following all this, the scope of my conference can be summarized in the following five points:

1. *To present* the essential message of ChL for the Church in Africa today;
2. *To provoke* an “examination of conscience” about the degree of our familiarity with ChL, and its application;
3. *To encourage* the various initiatives undertaken in the last decades in the sphere of laity apostolate;
4. *To motivate* all Catholic leadership in Africa, laity as well as ordained ministers, to promote the reinvigoration of lay Catholics, above all in their specific fields of expertise;

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Caprile, *Sinodo* 396.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Caprile, *Sinodo* 108 s.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. ChL 2; cf. the remarks of Bishop Raphael S. Ndingi Mwana ‘a Nzeki, Diocese of Nakuru (Kenya), in: Caprile, *Sinodo* 153-157,153; Bishop Phocas Nikwigize, Diocese of Ruhengeri (Rwanda), in: Caprile, *Sinodo* 272 s; Bishop. Evaristus Thato Bitsoane, Diocese of Qacha’s Nek (Lesotho), in: Caprile, *Sinodo* 284s; Bishop Gervase Mozes Chisendera, Diocese of Dedza (Malawi), in: Caprile, *Sinodo* 342 s.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. the interventions of Bishop Henry Ernest Karlen C.M.M., Diocese of Bulawayo (Zimbabwe) and Bishop Michael J. Cleary, Diocese of Banjul (Gambia), in: Caprile, *Sinodo* 134 s e 204 s.

5. *To direct* the attention and effort of the laity towards some specific areas that have emerged from the reception of ChL in the Post-Synodal apostolic exhortations *Ecclesia in Africa*<sup>14</sup> and *Africae munus*<sup>15</sup>.

It seems to me that an openness to these suggestions could help the Church in Africa to promote the *New Evangelization*, as ardently desired by Pope Paul VI, John Paul II and Benedict XVI.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, this would be a very effective contribution to the *Year of the Faith* that Pope Benedict XVI has convoked from October 11, 2012 to November 24, 2013.<sup>17</sup>

## ***Part II. The Response: the Permanent Lessons of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation “Christifideles Laici” (1988)***

### **1. The Church as Communion**

At the press conference presenting ChL, the then President of the Council for the Laity, Cardinal Eduardo Pironio concluded his speech by inquiring about the “novelty” of the Post-Synodal Exhortation: “Those who are looking for new things in the document or concrete solutions will perhaps be disappointed ... But the real and deeper novelty is this: the document frames the issue of the laity within an authentic ecclesiology of communion. The faithful are not considered ‘on their own’, as isolated or separate, but in the overall context of a Church which is essentially ‘communion in Christ’ (LG 1) and, at the same time, the ‘universal sacrament of salvation’ (LG 48).”<sup>18</sup>

This “koinonia-communion” of Christians finds its “model, source and end in the very communion of the Son with the Father in the gift of the Holy Spirit: united to the Son in the loving bond of the Spirit, Christians are united to the

<sup>14</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* on the Church in Africa and its evangelizing mission towards the year 2000, 14 September 1995, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 1995 (= EA).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Africae munus* on the Church in Africa in service to reconciliation, justice and peace “You are the salt of the earth ... You are the light of the world” (*Mt* 5:13-14), 19 November 2011, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2011 (= AM).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Apostolic Letter in the form of Motu Proprio* «Ubicumque et semper» establishing the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization, 21 September 2010, Italian Version, in: *Insegnamenti* VI/2 (2010), 283-287.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Apostolic Letter* “Motu Proprio data” «*Porta Fidei*» for the Indiction of the Year of Faith, 11 October 2011, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2011; cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Note* with pastoral recommendations for the Year of Faith, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2012.

<sup>18</sup> Card. E. F. Pironio, *Lettura biblica, teologica e pastorale* (presentazione dell’Esortazione Apostolica), in: O. R., 30-31 January 1989, insert tabloid, 1-3, 3; cf. P. Coda, *Il laicato in un’ecclesologia di comunione*, in: Tettamanzi, *Laici verso il terzo millennio* 172-186; E. Glaubitz, *Der christliche Laie*. Vergleichende Untersuchung vom Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil zur Bischofssynode 1987, Series: Forschungen zur Kirchenrechtswissenschaft, vol. 20, Editor Echter, Würzburg 1995, 256 (no. 124).

Father”.<sup>19</sup> This communion is received through listening to the word of God and in the sacraments, as ChL affirms: “Baptism is the door and the foundation of communion in the Church. The Eucharist is the source and summit of the whole Christian life (cf. *LG*, 11). The Body of Christ in the Holy Eucharist sacramentalizes this communion, that is, it is a sign and actually brings about the intimate bonds of communion among all the faithful in the Body of Christ which is the Church (1 Cor. 10: 16).”<sup>20</sup>

The Second Vatican Council makes use of various images (the sheepfold, the flock, the vine, the building, the holy city) in order to explain the mystery of the *Church as Communion* as that which indicates the communion of *Christians with Christ* and communion *with each other*. In reference to the Apostle Paul, the Council also uses the image of the body of Christ and uses again that of the *People of God*.<sup>21</sup>

ChL describes the communion of the faithful with Christ by means of the image of the vine: “I am the true vine and my Father is the vinedresser ... *Abide in me and I in you*’ (Jn 15: 1, 4). These simple words reveal the mystery of communion that serves as the unifying bond between the Lord and his disciples, between Christ and the baptized: a living and life-giving communion ... ‘*I am the vine, you are the branches*’ (Jn 15: 1-11). From the communion that Christians experience in Christ there immediately flows the communion which they experience with one another.”<sup>22</sup>

It should be noted here that this continual reference to the analogy of the *vine*, of the *vineyard* and its *laborers* (cf. *Mt*, 20: 1-2; *Jn* 15: 1-11) is a great choice that is well adapted for presenting the identity and dignity of the vocation and mission of the lay faithful.<sup>23</sup> The image of the vine in all of its positivity, with its *vitality, organicity, and fecundity*, presents being and living as a Christian in a way that is attractive, profound and persuasive.<sup>24</sup>

Following the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* (no. 1), ChL affirms: “*The reality of the Church as Communion* is, then, the integrating aspect, indeed *the central content of the "mystery"*, or rather, the divine plan for the salvation of humanity”.<sup>25</sup> The *Church as Communion* is an *organic community*, distinguished by the presence of both *diversity* and *complementarity* of vocations

<sup>19</sup> ChL 18; cf. K. Hemmerle, *Trinità e Chiesa*. Sulla teologia della Trinità nella «Christifideles laici», in: Tettamanzi, *Laici verso il terzo millennio* 187-200.

<sup>20</sup> ChL 19 cites the *Relatio finalis* (II, C, 1) of the II<sup>a</sup> General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (1985), *Ecclesia sub Verbo Dei mysteria Christi celebrans pro saluto mundi*.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. ChL 19.

<sup>22</sup> ChL 18.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. the remarks to the evangelical parable *Mt* 20, 12 in the synodal debate of Bishop J.-B. Kyedrebeolgo, Auxiliary-Bishop of Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. G. Rossé, *La vigna-Israele nella tradizione biblica*, in: Tettamanzi, *Laici verso il terzo millennio* 156-160.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*; Cf. AM 133.

and states of life, of ministries, and of charisms and responsibilities.<sup>26</sup> ChL points out that it is the *Holy Spirit* who is the principle and source of unity for this “organic diversity”.<sup>27</sup>

ChL sums it up in this way: “*Church communion then is a gift, a great gift of the Holy Spirit, to be gratefully accepted by the lay faithful, and at the same time to be lived with a deep sense of responsibility. This is concretely realized through their participation in the life and mission of the Church, to whose service the lay faithful put their varied and complementary ministries and charisms.*”<sup>28</sup>

It seems that within this context, our attention should be given to the remarks of the then Auxiliary Bishop of Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), Jean-Baptiste Kyedrebeogo, who links the experience of the “*Church as Family*” in Africa to the ecclesiology of communion: “Within the perspective of the Church as Communion as brought out in the Council, our pastoral approach is traced back to the experience of African family life, and has its roots in the mystery of Trinitarian Life of the Family of God. As Jesus reveals to us, God is one, but not alone. Happy and appreciative of the call of our members to participate in the divine family, in communion with the great family of the universal Church, our bishops express to the synod this hope ... : the Synod deepens again the mystery of Trinitarian life, as the source of being and becoming a Christian. Our people feel enthusiastic about this wonderful news of being Christians. With a sense of being a family that is particular to Africa, we understand that all things work together for the good of the family itself and that what we give to one is therefore not taken away from another”.<sup>29</sup> Without a doubt, ChL fully satisfies the expectations of these bishops from Burkina Faso.<sup>30</sup>

## 2. The Vocation of the Lay Faithful

### a. The Identity and Dignity

Number 8 of ChL gives us the “leitmotiv” for our reflection on the *identity* and *dignity* of the lay faithful: “*Only from inside the Church's mystery of communion is the "identity" of the lay faithful made known, and their fundamental dignity revealed. Only within the context of this dignity can their vocation and mission in the Church and in the world be defined.*”<sup>31</sup> The Exhortation considers the

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. ChL 21.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. ChL 20.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Caprile, *Sinodo* 334 s; cf. F. Becchina, *Die Kirche als «Familie Gottes»*. Die Stellung dieses theologischen Konzeptes im Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil und in den Bischofssynoden von 1974 bis 1994 im Hinblick auf eine «Familia-Dei-Ekklesiologie», Series: Analecta Gregoriana no. 272, Rome 1997.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. ChL 26.

<sup>31</sup> ChL 8; Cf. D. Tettamanzi, *La Chiesa Misterium, Communio, Missio come struttura portante della «Christifideles laici»*, in: Pontificium Consilium pro Laicis, ed., *Christifideles Laici: Spunti per uno studio*, in: Laici oggi 32-33, Città del Vaticano 1989-90; H.-J. Görtz, *Das kirchliche Handeln des Laien*, “Christifideles Laici” im

“profile” of the lay faithful within this threefold and unified aspect of the Church as: “*mystery*,” “*communion*” and “*mission*”.<sup>32</sup>

During the second day of the synod discussion, the Bishop of the Diocese of Bulawayo (Zimbabwe), Henry Ernest Karlen, C.M.M., offered an important insight: “There exists today a crisis of Christian identity”.<sup>33</sup> So the question arises with greater insistence: “*Who are the lay faithful?*” “On what things do we base their *identity* and *dignity*, their *vocation* and *mission*?”

ChL (no. 9) gives us an answer while citing no. 31 of the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*: “The term ‘lay faithful’ is here understood to mean all the faithful except those in Holy Orders and those who belong to a religious state sanctioned by the Church. Through Baptism the lay faithful are made one body with Christ and are established among the People of God. They are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ. They carry out their own part in the mission of the whole Christian people with respect to the Church and the world.”

This positive portrayal contains many different aspects: the lay Christian is described as an *active member* of the people of God, as one who is a *participant in*, and *co-responsible for* the Church’s mission. Precisely because of their secular character, they are occupied with the things of the world, which is the aspect that manifests their *particular vocation*.<sup>34</sup> Their principle task - by means of their personal testimony - is that of making Christ seen in the world, permeating it with his Spirit and ordering it according to his will.

In light of this, our first step is that of understanding well the *identity* and *dignity* of the lay faithful by means of an adequate appreciation of the sacraments of *Christian initiation*, particularly, the sacrament of *Baptism* that is described in ChL as the fundamental “newness” of Christian life.<sup>35</sup> This sacrament of initiation produces a triple effect: “*Baptism regenerates us in the life of the Son of God; unites us to Christ and to his Body, the Church; and anoints us in the Holy Spirit, making us spiritual temples.*”<sup>36</sup>

Kontext der “Communio-Ekklesiologie” von “Lumen Gentium”, in: ThPh 66 (1991), 177-191; A. Scola, *La teologia del laicato alla luce dell’ecclesiologia di comunione: l’identità del fedele laico*, in: Pontificium Consilium pro Laicis, ed., *Christifideles laici. Bilancio e prospettive*, Collana: Laici oggi no. 16, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2010, 23-46.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. D. Tettamanzi, *Uno sguardo d’insieme*, in: Id., *Laici verso il terzo millennio*, 139-155, 149.

<sup>33</sup> Caprile, *Sinodo* 134; cf. also the remarks of card. Paulos Tzadua, Metropolitan-Archbishop of Addis Abeba (Ethiopia) e of Bishop Michael J. Cleary, Diocese of Banjul (Gambia), in: Caprile, *Sinodo*, 168 e 204 s.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. ChL 15; cf. also E. Braunbeck, *Der Weltcharakter des Laien. Eine theologisch-rechtliche Untersuchung im Licht des II. Vatikanischen Konzils*, Series: Eichstätter Studien. N.F. XXXIV, Editor Pustet, Regensburg 1993.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. ChL 9; 17; 58.

<sup>36</sup> ChL 10 s; cf. EA 73.

At number ten the Exhortation underlines with a surprising affirmation that the “entire existence of the lay faithful has as its purpose to lead a person to a knowledge of the radical newness of the Christian life that comes from Baptism, the sacrament of faith, so that this knowledge can help that person live the responsibilities which arise from that vocation received from God.”<sup>37</sup>

By means of their *Baptism, Confirmation* and the *Eucharist*, the laity participate, as members of the Church in Christ’s *triple mission - priestly* (spiritual worship and call to holiness), *prophetic* (testimony and proclamation) and *kingly* (transformation of the world according to the spirit of the Gospel).<sup>38</sup>

Therefore, any renewal of the lay faithful’s self-awareness and commitment must start from the source of Christian existence. Many of the baptized have forgotten or never understood this fundamental “newness” and this “specific difference” in their lives. We call to mind the admonition of Pope Leo the Great, also mentioned in ChL: “*Agnosce, o Christiane, dignitatem tuam!*”- “*Acknowledge, O Christian, your dignity!*”<sup>39</sup>

To better understand what it means to be a Christian, we must realize more and more that *to be baptized* is not the same as joining a “club” or an international organization, nor is it comparable to “membership” in other religions. We know that these forms of membership are based on some “common interest” or on the fact of being born in a given territory or to parents who belong to a given religion. Consequently, the presentation, or even better, the rediscovery of the sacraments of Christian initiation is then a *most pressing need*, whether for the “long standing” or “newly established” particular Churches.<sup>40</sup>

## **b. The Call to Holiness**

The primary and fundamental vocation that the Father assigns to the laity in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit is the call to holiness, that is, the call to a perfection of charity. “Holiness is the greatest testimony of the dignity conferred on a disciple of Christ.”<sup>41</sup>

The universal call to holiness is an undeniable requirement arising from the mystery of the Church. *All* the members of the Church have received from God and share in the very *same* vocation to holiness, inseparable from their baptismal

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. ChL 73.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. ChL 14.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. ChL 17.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. ChL 64.

<sup>41</sup> ChL 16.



dignity: it is a call to participate in the fullness of Christian life and to strive for the perfection of charity according to their own state in life.<sup>42</sup>

ChL affirms that the vocation to holiness entails a *life* according to the Spirit, realized in the totality of temporal reality. Referring back to the proposals of the synod fathers, it highlights a fundamental aspect: “The unity of life of the lay faithful is of the greatest importance ...”<sup>43</sup> This means that the sanctification of the laity is realized in everyday life, in its occasions for union with God and for fulfilling his will. In this way, it is there where a service to other human beings is offered; it is there where this communion with God in Christ is established.<sup>44</sup>

According to ChL (no. 17), the holiness lived by the lay faithful is derived from their participation in the Church's holiness and represents their first and fundamental contribution to the building of the Church as a "Communion of Saints". Holiness is a fundamental presupposition and an irreplaceable condition for everyone in fulfilling the mission of salvation within the Church.

ChL (no. 34) links the laity's responsibility *to testify* to the Christian faith and their participation in the *prophetic mission* of Christ.<sup>45</sup> The positive result of this commitment, however, presupposes that the lay faithful reach a *vital unity* between their faith and their daily duties of life, as the Magisterium of the Church has often reiterated.<sup>46</sup> Several synod fathers stressed the urgency for this coherence between faith and life in the African context.<sup>47</sup>

We can all see - both in the Northern and Southern hemispheres - that in our societies dominated by consumerism and the sway of the mass media, and saturated to the utmost with words and images, *personal integrity* has acquired a *decisive role* in the transmission of faith. The demands of this unity of life could even, in extreme situations, require the final and supreme witness: *martyrdom*, as seen in the example of the Ugandan martyrs in the nineteenth century.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. ChL 17: “The dignity as a Christian, the source of equality for all members of the Church, guarantees and fosters the spirit of communion and fellowship, and, at the same time, becomes the hidden dynamic force in the lay faithful's apostolate and mission. It is a dignity, however, which brings demands, the dignity of labourers called by the Lord to work in his vineyard...”

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. (proposition 5).

<sup>45</sup> Cf. ChL 34; cf. also AA 13.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. GS 43; cf. ChL 17; 34; 35; 59; cf. EA 21; AM 166.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. the remarks of Bishop Raphael S. Ndingi Mwana ‘a Nzeki, Diocese of Nakuru (Kenya), in: Caprile, *Sinodo* 158; Card. Paulos Tzadua, Metropolitan-Archbishop of Addis Abeba (Ethiopia), in: Caprile, *Sinodo* 167; Gabriel Gonsum Ganaka, Bishop of Jos (Nigeria), in: Caprile, *Sinodo* 295: “The problem of overcoming the division between faith and life is as old as the world (...). This inconsistency is a major obstacle to evangelization, because modern man is convinced more readily by testimony than by words (EN 41) ... The documents of Vatican II often returned to this testimony of the clergy, religious, laity”; Gabriel Zubeir Wako, Bishop of Khartoum (Sudan), in: Caprile, *Sinodo* 332 s; Robert Sastre, Bishop of Lokossa (Benin), in: Caprile, *Sinodo* 335 s.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. ChL 34, 39: “The proclamation of the Gospel and the Christian testimony given in a life of suffering and martyrdom make up the summit of the apostolic life among Christ's disciples, just as the love for the Lord Jesus

### 3. The Mission of the Lay Faithful

#### a. Proclaiming and Living the Gospel

Taking up again the image of the vine and the branches, the exhortation highlights the need for Christians to bear fruit and considers *communion with Jesus*, which generates communion with others, as the essential prerequisite.<sup>49</sup>

This *Church as Communion* is by its very nature a *missionary community*, led by the Holy Spirit: “Communion and mission are profoundly connected with each other, they interpenetrate and mutually require each other to the point that *communion represents both the source and the fruit of mission: communion gives rise to mission and mission is accomplished in communion.*”<sup>50</sup>

The Holy Spirit convokes and unites the Church and sends us to “evangelize to the ends of the earth” (*cf.* Acts 1: 8). The Synod Fathers of 1994 have recalled with admiration and gratitude how this universal missionary mandate has been obeyed by many generations of missionaries in Africa.<sup>51</sup>

The Church is aware that “the communion received by her as a gift is destined for all people. Thus the Church feels she owes to each individual and to humanity as a whole the gift received from the Holy Spirit that pours the charity of Jesus Christ into the hearts of believers, as a mystical force for internal cohesion and external growth. The mission of the Church flows from her own nature as Christ has willed it: that of being a ‘sign and instrument ... of unity of all the human race’ (LG 1). Such a mission has the purpose of making everyone know and live the ‘new’ communion that the Son of God made man introduced into the history of the world.”<sup>52</sup>

In this context the *co-responsibility* of the lay faithful in communion with the other members for the mission of the Church emerges.<sup>53</sup> The missionary character of the Church signifies for the lay faithful, who have been equipped through the sacraments of Christian initiation and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the fundamental and foremost task of *proclaiming the Gospel*.

Through the proclamation of the Gospel, the lay faithful participate in the primary task of the Church, which is that of building up a *community of faith* that “confesses the faith in full adherence to the Word of God which is celebrated in

even to the giving of one's life constitutes a source of extraordinary fruitfulness for the building up of the Church.”; *cf.* AM 113.

<sup>49</sup> *Cf.* ChL 32.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Cf.* EA 35; *cf.* also no. 10 of the *Message* of the Synod Fathers of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa, 6 May 1994, Italian Version, in: O. R., 8 May 1994, 4-6, 4.

<sup>52</sup> ChL 32; *cf.* ChL 35.

<sup>53</sup> *Cf.* ChL 15.

the Sacraments, and lived in charity, the principle of Christian moral existence.”<sup>54</sup> In a particular way, ChL entrusts to the lay faithful those persons who are “distant” from the faith of the Church<sup>55</sup> and, indicates the systematic study of the catechism as the “path” to follow.<sup>56</sup>

The “world” is the place and the means for the lay faithful to fulfill their Christian vocation. The synod fathers affirmed that this “secular character” is to be understood in the light of the Divine plan of salvation and the mystery of the Church.<sup>57</sup> Referring to the Constitution *Lumen Gentium* (LG no. 31), ChL (no. 15) reminds the laity that the Council considers their secular condition as not simply an external and environmental framework, but “*a reality destined to find in Jesus Christ the fullness of its meaning ... The ‘world’ thus becomes the place and the means for the lay faithful to fulfill their Christian vocation.*”

In other words, the “world” is the proper place and means in which to fulfill the lay vocation. “Like leaven from within”, the lay faithful “are called by God to contribute to the sanctification of the world through the exercise of their proper function ... under the guidance of the spirit of the Gospel, and in this way to make Christ known to others, especially by the witness of their life, resplendent in faith, hope and charity (LG 31)”.<sup>58</sup>

In accordance with the proposals made by the synod fathers, ChL affirms that for the lay faithful, being 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. The term ‘secular’ must be understood in light of the act of God the creator and redeemer, who has called the laity to participate in this sphere by means of their ordinary lives.<sup>59</sup> To this last point we can connect the strong appeal made to the laity contained in the subtitle of our congress, to be “*Salt of the earth*” and “*Light of the world*”.<sup>60</sup>

## **b. The Various Forms of Participation of the Laity**

ChL deals with a widespread *misconception* in the post-councilar period, that is, the tendency towards a “clericalization” of the laity, regarded as the “self-deputation” of *intra-ecclesial* functions and duties to the detriment of their “secular” commitment.<sup>61</sup> On the one hand, ChL praises the *new style of collabora-*

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<sup>54</sup> ChL 33

<sup>55</sup> Cf. ChL 27.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. ChL 33.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. ChL 15 (Propositio 4): “The ecclesial condition of the lay faithful is fundamentally defined by their *newness of life* and distinguished by their *secular character*.”

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. ChL 3, 15; EA 74, 108; AM 3; 5; 6; 13; 15; 77; 95; 97; 99; 113; 130; 132; 159; 162; 176.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. ChL 2; 23.

tion among priests, religious and lay faithful and their active participation in Church life.<sup>62</sup> On the other hand, with respect to the various ecclesiastical offices and functions entrusted to the laity, it highlights the need to distinguish within the one mission of the church, the ministry of the clergy from the “secular” nature of the laity, while keeping in mind the common baptismal roots of these tasks.<sup>63</sup>

From the very beginning of the evangelization of Africa, the Church has counted upon a large presence of Catholic laity committed in the life of the local church. ChL expressly recognizes the possibility of entrusting to the lay faithful certain tasks associated with the ministry of pastors, but that do not require the character of Holy Orders. Even taking on a full-time commitment within the Church does not alter the state of life of the lay person and this must be reflected in the terminology used to describe this.<sup>64</sup>

It seems to me that in this context we should remember the figure of the so-called “Mokambi”. Born in the Archdiocese of Kinshasa (D.R. Congo) and now present in many African countries, they play an important role in parishes and small ecclesial communities, after an adequate theological formation has been given. Here we see lay catechists - married, working men -, who through this contribution help their faith communities to become authentic places for the flourishing for the Gospel and for works of evangelical charity, thus building up the Church as family of God.<sup>65</sup>

These reflections lead us to the question regarding the *forms* of participation of the laity within the Church. It is important to note that every Christian has a unique and irreplaceable obligation to participate in the apostolic work of the Church, while being, at the same time, free to choose their *form* of participation.<sup>66</sup>

Among the possible areas of lay commitment the first place goes to one’s own *parish*, as this is the most immediate and visible expression of *ecclesial communion* in a fixed place. The parish is not principally a structure, a territory, or a building, but rather, it is the “*Family of God*”, a fellowship afire with a spirit of

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<sup>62</sup> Cf. ChL 2.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. ChL 23.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Congregation for the Clergy, Pontifical Council for the Laity, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Congregation for Bishops, Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts, *Instruction on certain questions regarding the collaboration of the non-ordained Faithful in the sacred Ministry of Priests*, 15 August 1997, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 1997, no. 17-18.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. ChL 23; Cf. *Instruction on certain questions*, Practical Provisions, Art.1: Need for an Appropriate Terminology.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Caprile, *Sinodo* 201, 283, 452.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. ChL 28.

unity, a family home, a fraternal and welcoming community of believers.<sup>67</sup> The model of the “*Church as the Family of God*” is above all made tangible in the parish. This idea was already present in the work of the 1987 Synod and became one of the key ideas guiding the first Synod for Africa in 1994.<sup>68</sup>

Most certainly, “the parish is based upon a theological reality, because it is a *Eucharistic community*”.<sup>69</sup> Because of this, the first and foremost task of the laity consists in the *active participation* in this *Eucharistic community*! ChL strongly recommends the contribution of every *person*, for example, in liturgical service or catechesis or in charitable and social activities.<sup>70</sup> Cooperation among the various *representative structures* is also explicitly encouraged.<sup>71</sup>

Let us now consider the *associative forms* of lay participation seen as a “qualified” type of action and collaboration. Because of the growth and development of the lay movements and new ecclesial communities, ChL (no. 29) speaks, and rightly so, of a “*new era of lay group endeavours*” and observes how these new ecclesial realities, while being very diverse from one another in various aspects - such as in their external structures, their procedures and training methods - all manifest “a profound convergence when viewed from the perspective of their common purpose, that is, the responsible participation of all of them in the Church's mission of carrying forth the Gospel of Christ, the source of hope for humanity and the renewal of society”.

ChL points out that just as the *associative form* corresponds to man's social nature, so too the Christian commitment acquires a “social entity” that allows a more extensive and effective impact on culture. In addition, faced with an ever more secularized society, a community is also better able to provide support in favor of fostering a truly Christian life and missionary commitment.

This becomes all the more true in situations of Christian minority, where international groups manifest the universality of the Catholic faith and provide a link with the See of Peter and the universal Church.

But prior to these considerations there is a fundamental *ecclesiological* reason that justifies lay associations: the lay association “*signifies the communion and unity of the Church in Christ*” (cf. AA 18). ChL insists on the laity's freedom to associate and proposes some *fundamental criteria of ecclesiality* for these lay associations.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Cf. ChL 26.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. EA 63.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Proposition 10.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. ChL 27.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. ChL 25 s.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. ChL 29 s.

***Part III. The Reception: Three Expectations of “Christifideles laici” taken up in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortations “Ecclesia in Africa” (1995) and “Africae munus” (2011)***

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ!

I would now like to briefly point out *three urgent tasks* for the African Church which emerged in the years after the initial reception of ChL and can also be found in the two post-synodal exhortations, that is, *Ecclesia in Africa* (1995) and *Africae munus* (2011). It can certainly be affirmed that the two Exhortations, like many other documents of the Magisterium of the last twenty four years, presuppose the teaching of ChL and apply in various ecclesial contexts its principles and its guidelines.

**1. A Reawakening of Missionary Activity**

Twenty four years ago, ChL insisted on the urgent need to reawaken the lay faithful in taking up a *new evangelization* (no. 34) and to fulfill the call to mission *ad gentes* (no. 35). Already it was clear that that in many countries of the first world people were living “as if God did not exist”, that is to say, with religious indifference and even an explicit atheism.

Cardinal Thiandoum, who had been the *Relator-General* at the Synod on the laity, performed this task also in the first African Synod of 1994. Already this coincidence binds together the two synods, but it is even more relevant that the Synod, and therefore the exhortation «Ecclesia in Africa» - signed by Pope John Paul II on September 14, 1995 right here in Yaoundé - focused on the urgency of the mission *ad gentes*<sup>73</sup> and also the *new evangelization* in which the faithful have an irreplaceable role.<sup>74</sup> What is more, the entire history of the African Church bears witness to the essential contribution of the lay faithful in Christianizing the continent.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Cf. EA 1; 5; 7; 11; 19; 47; 72; 74; 128; 141; cf. also J. Schotte, Un Documento per l’Africa di oggi e di domani, in: O. R., 16 sett. 1995, 1.12: “With regard to the issues discussed and the salient features of the document, you must first emphasize the importance of the main theme that unifies all of the text: the evangelization and the missionary zeal.”

<sup>74</sup> Cf. EA 53. 88. 90. 99.

<sup>75</sup> See among others, the remarks of Archbishop Rafael Maria Nze Abuy, Archdiocese of Malabo (Guinea Equatoriale), in: Caprile, *Sinodo* 155-158, 158; Cf. ChL 35, 90: “Lay people should be helped to become increasingly aware of the role that they should occupy in the Church, thereby fulfilling their particular mission as baptized and confirmed, in accordance with the teaching of the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Christifideles laici* (....) and the Encyclical *Redemptoris missio* (....).”

With regards to the spreading of the faith in Africa, ChL (no. 34) points out that just as the *traditional ecclesial communities* have been of great help in the past, so also today these exercise a determining role.<sup>76</sup>

Like ChL, *Ecclesia in Africa* also insists - and to an even greater degree - on the need for living Christianity in an authentic way, and for overcoming this separation between the Gospel and daily life. Pope John Paul II makes his own the synod fathers' observation that the *pertinence* of the Christian message goes hand and hand with the *credibility* of he who announces this message and this has become an essential condition for the effectiveness of their words.<sup>77</sup> Along the same lines are these words of Benedict XVI: "The word of God and the testimony of life go together (AG 15)" and, referring to Pope Paul VI's Apostolic Letter *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, he adds: "But testimony on its own is not enough for 'even the finest witness will prove ineffective in the long run if it is not explained and justified ... made explicit by a clear and unequivocal proclamation of the Lord Jesus' (EN 22)."<sup>78</sup>

In line with *Ecclesia in Africa*, Pope Benedict XVI also points out the contribution that the laity have to play in the mission *ad gentes*<sup>79</sup> and in the *new evangelization*, both of which are now extremely urgent tasks.<sup>80</sup> The Holy Father states that there is a "need for a profound evangelization of the African soul!"<sup>81</sup>

## 2. The Need for Spiritual, Intellectual and Social Formation

As already mentioned, to fully realize his identity as a Christian, and in particular to fulfill this missionary mandate, the mature lay faithful must know his faith well.<sup>82</sup> This principle applies doubly where the local church is in a minority situation or within a multi-religious country. Many African participants of the synod on the laity had insisted on the need for an adequate training of the laity and the

<sup>76</sup> Cf. 125: "It is Africans who have to evangelize Africans (...)"

<sup>77</sup> Cf. EA 21;77; 54 s; 166; 56: "To bear witness to the Gospel in word and deed: this is the task which the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops received and which it now passes on to the Church of the Continent."

<sup>78</sup> AM 32.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. AM 167; 162: "Led by the Holy Spirit, the Church in Africa must proclaim the mystery of salvation - by living it - to those who have not yet learned of it. The Holy Spirit whom Christians received in Baptism is the fire of love impelling us to the work of evangelization"; cf. AM 165.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. EA 88; cf. AM 160; 162; 171: "The new evangelization is an urgent task for Christians in Africa because they too need to reawaken their enthusiasm for being members of the Church. Guided by the Spirit of the risen Lord, they are called to live the Good News as individuals, in their families and in society, and to proclaim it with fresh zeal to persons near and far, using the new methods that divine Providence has placed at our disposal for its spread...."

<sup>81</sup> Cf. AM 91.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. ChL 58: "God calls me and sends me forth as a labourer in his vineyard. He calls me and sends me forth to work for the coming of his Kingdom in history. This personal vocation and mission defines the dignity and the responsibility of each member of the lay faithful and makes up the focal point of the whole work of formation, whose purpose is the joyous and grateful recognition of this dignity and the faithful and generous living-out of this responsibility"; cf. AM 103.

need of institutions for such purposes.<sup>83</sup> Referring again to the image of the vine and branches, ChL has even dedicated a specific chapter to this theme, called: “*The call to growth and a continual process of maturation, of always bearing much fruit*”.<sup>84</sup>

The exhortation lists among the basic means of formation: *listening to the Word of God* and that of the *Church*; *prayer* and *spiritual direction*; recognition of *personal talents* and of the *sign of the times*. ChL insists on an *integral formation* of the laity, because this is what will bring *wholeness of life*, coherence between *faith* and *life*, and between being a *Christian* and a *citizen*. It lists the *spiritual*, *intellectual* and *social* spheres among the key fields of a unified and integral formation.<sup>85</sup>

One point made in ChL has a particular relevance for the African continent. I refer to the attention it gives to what the synod fathers have called *local culture*.<sup>86</sup> On this point, ChL (no. 63) affirms: “The formation of Christians will take the greatest account of local human culture, which contributes to formation itself, and will help to discern the value, whether implanted in tradition or proposed in modern affairs”.<sup>87</sup> *Ecclesia in Africa* as well as *Africae Munus* amply deal with the need of inculturation and offer the principle criteria for this.<sup>88</sup>

Given the irreplaceable role of the lay faithful, *Ecclesia in Africa* gives well-deserved attention to their formation in light of the work of evangelization.<sup>89</sup> In light of political and social developments, *Ecclesia in Africa* stresses an ade-

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<sup>83</sup> Cf. the interventions of Bishop Gabriel Balet, Diocese of Moundou (Ciad), in: Caprile, *Sinodo* 118 s; Archbishop Robert Sarah, Archdiocese of Conakry (Guinea), in: Caprile, *Sinodo* 173; Bishop Polycarp Pengo, Diocese of di Tunduru-Masasi (Tanzania), in: Caprile, *Sinodo* 177 s; Archbishop Paul Verdzekov, Archdiocese of Bamenda (Camerun), in: Caprile, *Sinodo* 198 s; Bishop Ignace Matondo Kwa Nzambi, Diocese of di Basankusu (Zaire), in: Caprile, *Sinodo* 201 s; Archbishop André-Fernand Anguilé, Archdiocese of Libreville (Gabon), in: Caprile, *Sinodo* 207 s; Bishop Josaphat L. Lebulu, Diocese of Same (Tanzania), in: Caprile, *Sinodo* 265 s; Bishop Youssef Ibrahim Sarraf, Diocese of Le Caire of the Caldein (Egypt), in: Caprile, *Sinodo* 250; Bishop Joseph Perrot, Diocese of San (Mali), in: Caprile, *Sinodo* 254 s; Archbishop Gabriel Zubeir Wako, Archdiocese of Khartoum (Sudan), in: Caprile, *Sinodo* 332 s; Bishop. Robert Sastre, Diocese of Lokossa (Benin), in: Caprile *Sinodo* 336, 368.

<sup>84</sup> ChL 57-63, 57: “People are approached in liberty by God who calls everyone to grow, develop and bear fruit. A person cannot put off a response nor cast off personal responsibility in the matter. ... In this dialogue between God who offers his gifts, and the person who is called to exercise responsibility, there comes the possibility, indeed the necessity, of a total and ongoing formation of the lay faithful ...”

<sup>85</sup> Cf. ChL 60.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. the interventions of Archbishop Rafael Maria Nze Abuy, Archdiocese of di Malabo (Guinea Equatoriale), in: Caprile, *Sinodo* 155 s.; Archbishop Elias Mutale, Archdiocese of Kasama (Zambia), in: Caprile, *Sinodo* 236 s; Bishop Anthony E. Ilonu, Diocese of Okigwe (Nigeria), in: Caprile, *Sinodo* 304; Bishop Jean-Baptiste Kyedrebeogo, Auxiliary-Bishop of Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso e Niger), in: Caprile, *Sinodo* 334 s; Bishop Robert Sastre, Diocese of Lokossa (Benin), in: Caprile *Sinodo* 368; Bishop G.M. Chisendera, Diocese of Dedza (Malawi), in: Caprile, *Sinodo* 469 s; Auditor Mrs. C. Bellomo Essana (Camerun), in: Caprile, *Sinodo* 523 s.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. ChL 44.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. EA; AM 36 s.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. EA 53; 75; 76.



quate preparation by means of the study of the *Social Teaching of the Church* in order to respond to the urgent *political, economic and social* tasks.<sup>90</sup>

In *Africae Munus*, Pope Benedict XVI cites the need for a *biblical, spiritual, liturgical* and *pastoral* formation. Because of the particular scope of this document, he also highlights the need for knowing well the *Church's social teachings*.<sup>91</sup> In continuity with ChL, the Holy Father recalls that the vocation to holiness is to be lived out in the ordinary life of this world<sup>92</sup> and he mentions the usefulness of associations and other educative centers for the formation of conscience and for fostering efforts in favor of justice and peace.<sup>93</sup> Last, but not least, he underlines the contribution made by the “*Small Christian communities*” in keeping the flame of Baptism alive and he joins his own voice to the appeal already made in *Ecclesia in Africa* for a greater commitment of Catholic laity within the university world.<sup>94</sup>

I would like to mention some of the *privileged instruments* we have for lay formation: the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*<sup>95</sup>, the *Compendium of the Catechism*<sup>96</sup> and the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*<sup>97</sup>. Furthermore, as a support for forming the next generation, the 2011 World Youth Day in Madrid has also bequeathed us the “*Youcat*”, available in twenty languages and with 1.7 million copies sold (as of May 2012).<sup>98</sup>

### 3. Commitment in Public Life (the Work of Reconciliation)

As already mentioned by the 1987 synod fathers, there is an urgent need for a more incisive presence of lay Catholics in the *public sphere*.<sup>99</sup> One such voice in

<sup>90</sup> Cf. EA 54; 75; 90; 103; 107.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. AM 22; 32; 53 s; 59; 62; 75; 90; 103; 111; 137; 128. “It is my heartfelt desire that lay people with responsibility in the political, economic and social fields be equipped with a solid knowledge of the Church’s social doctrine, which can provide them with principles for acting in conformity with the Gospel. Lay men and women, in fact, are “Ambassadors of Christ” (2 Cor 5:20) in the public sphere, in the heart of the world! Their Christian witness will be credible only if they are competent and honest professional people.”

<sup>92</sup> Cf. AM 129.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. AM 131.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. AM 103.

<sup>95</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Editor Pauline Books & Media, Boston MA 1994; cf. AM 95.

<sup>96</sup> *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Ed., Washington, D.C. 2005.

<sup>97</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, ed., *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, USCCB Communications, Ed., Washington, D.C. 2005; cf. AM 95.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. *Youcat*. Youth Catechism for knowing and living the faith of the Church. Forward by Pope Benedict XVI, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 2011.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Card. Paulos Tzadua, Metropolitan-Archbishop of Addis Abeba (Ethiopia), in: Caprile, *Sinodo* 167; Bishop Chrétien Matawo Bakpessi, Diocese of Sokodé (Togo), in: Caprile, *Sinodo* 211 s; Bishop Jean-Samuel Raobelina, Diocese of Tsiroanomandidy (Madagascar), in: Caprile, *Sinodo* 239-241; Bishop John Olorunfemi Onaiyekan, Diocese of Ilorin (Nigeria), in: Caprile, *Sinodo* 296; BishopThéodore Adrien Sarr, Diocese of Kaolack (Sénégal-Mauretania), in: Caprile, *Sinodo*, 328; Bishop Raphael S. Ndingi Mwana ‘a Nzeki, Diocese of di Nakuru (Kenya), in: Caprile, *Sinodo* 367.

favor of this was the African Cardinal Bernardin Gantin (Benin), who was then Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops: “Politics represents one of the most important fields of action within the historical and theological reality of secular life.”<sup>100</sup>

Thus, ChL (no. 42) explicitly encourages the laity to be engaged in this sphere: “In order to achieve their task directed to the Christian animation of the temporal order, in the sense of serving persons and society, the lay faithful are never to relinquish their participation in ‘public life’”. Additionally, “... the lay faithful must bear witness to those human and gospel values that are intimately connected with political activity itself, such as liberty and justice, solidarity, faithful and unselfish dedication for the good of all, a simple life-style, and a preferential love for the poor and the least.”

It is in this sense that ChL (no. 36) underlines that the lay faithful, through their “example” of an authentic Christian life, exercise a great service to *all people* and to *all of society*.<sup>101</sup> As for specific fields of action it lists the following (cf. ChL no. 37-44): the promotion of the *dignity of the person*, the defense of the inviolable *right to life*, the recognition of *religious freedom* and the *family* as the primary place for *social action*; *charity* as the motor and support for *solidarity*; the obligation of the participation of all in *political life*; the *centrality of the person* in *economic* and *social life*; the evangelization of *culture*.<sup>102</sup>

Along these same lines of thought, *Ecclesia in Africa* (no. 14) also recommends political action, underlining that, in doing so, the laity not only contribute to the *common good* but also open up a *path to the Gospel*.<sup>103</sup>

Closely connected to these efforts in favor of the common good, is this last aspect of my talk, which touches upon the contribution of Catholic laity towards the work of *reconciliation* in Africa. This theme was already present in *Ecclesia in Africa* (no.79) but it occupies a special place in *Africae Munus*<sup>104</sup>, as Benedict XVI writes: “The lay faithful ... are ‘ambassadors of Christ’ (2 Cor 5: 20) in the public square, in the heart of the world (ChL 15, 17) and he adds: “Evangelization today takes the name of reconciliation”.<sup>105</sup> Recent episodes of persecution

<sup>100</sup> Caprile, *Sinodo* 466 s., 466; cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note* on some questions regarding the participation of Catholics in political life, 24 November 2002, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2002.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. S. Matusiak, *Kirche und Politik*, Die politische Dimension des Laienapostolats im Licht der Ekklesiologie des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils, Series: Ethik in Forschung und Praxis 3, Editor Dr. Kovač, Hamburg 2005, 57-61; L. Ciccone C.M., *La responsabilità di servire la società*, in: Tettamanzi, *Laici verso il terzo millennio* 256-266, 260 s.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. AM 69-74.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. EA.75; 54;75; 105.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. AM 1; 3; 10; 12; 14; 15; 16; 17; 18; 19; 20; 21; 23; 32; 34; 43; 49; 53; 59; 81; 83; 89; 94; 99; 101, 111; 117; 132; 133; 145; 146; 149; 150; 155; 157; 163; 169; 171; 172; 174; 175; 176.

<sup>105</sup> AM 174; cf. AM 155.

and barbaric killings in various African countries remind us of the urgency of this task. The stress on the work of reconciliation implies a ‘*pars pro toto*’, because this is an indispensable prerequisite for living together in justice and peace.<sup>106</sup>

Following upon *Ecclesia in Africa*, Pope Benedict XVI gives special attention to the theme of reconciliation in Africa. In fact, it is one of the principle points of his reflection and corresponds to the idea of the “Church as family”.<sup>107</sup> The Pope writes: “In this community where Jesus Christ, ‘the first-born among many brethren’ (Rom 8:29), reconciled all people with God the Father (cf. Eph 2:14-18) and bestowed the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn 20:22), the Church for her part becomes the bearer of the Good News that every human person is a child of God. She is called to transmit this message to all humanity by proclaiming the salvation won for us by Christ, by celebrating our communion with God and by living in fraternal solidarity.”<sup>108</sup>

The Holy Father adopts the suggestion of the synod fathers in 2009: that of dedicating a day, a week, or even a year of reconciliation at a continental level, in order to “beg of God special forgiveness for all the evils and injuries mutually inflicted in Africa, and for the reconciliation of persons and groups who have been hurt in the Church and in the whole of society (Proposition 8)”.<sup>109</sup>

ChL (no. 35) already noted that the unity of life of a Christian who lives in a multi-religious or minority situation can generate something new. In situations of conflict, Christians who live their faith in an authentic way can contribute to the building of bridges and relationships with their surrounding world, in this way bettering the reciprocal relations with their neighbors and actively supporting a peaceful co-existence.

In addition to personal testimony, *dialogue* among the Catholic lay faithful and with the followers of other religions - as already encouraged by the synod fathers in 1987 - also plays an important role in the work of reconciliation.<sup>110</sup> Pope Benedict XVI invites us to dialogue with a “spiritual approach” that fosters a

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<sup>106</sup> Cf. AM 99.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. AM 2: “It was appropriate, ten years into this third millennium, to rekindle our faith and hope, so as to help build a reconciled Africa by pursuing the paths of truth and justice, love and peace (cf. Ps 85:11). In union with the Synod Fathers, I recall that “unless the Lord build the house, in vain do its builders labour” (Ps 127:1)!”; cf. also AM 17-21; 169: “Thus, there is a need to welcome the grace of the Holy Spirit who bids us: “be reconciled to God” (2 Cor 5:20). All Christians are admonished to be reconciled to God. In this way you will become agents of reconciliation within the ecclesial and social communities in which you live and work. The new evangelization presumes that Christians are reconciled with God and with one another. It demands that we be reconciled with our neighbors, and that we overcome every kind of barrier, including those arising from language, culture and race.”

<sup>108</sup> Cf. AM 8.

<sup>109</sup> AM 157.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. the remarks of Card. Francis Arinze (Nigeria), in: Caprile, *Sinodo* 464; ChL 35; cf. also EA 49; 65; AM 11s, 88; 94.

collaboration based on trust among the members of other religions<sup>111</sup>, but especially with Christians of other churches and communities who are our privileged partners for this. The lay associations play a particular role in this ecumenical dialogue.<sup>112</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI bases all of these efforts upon the Christian hope that “the Holy Spirit is at work everywhere, in Africa as much as anywhere else, and that the power of life, born of love, always prevails over the power of death (cf. Song of Songs 8: 6-7).”<sup>113</sup>

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ!

The subtitle of our Congress refers to two images of the Gospel of Mark (cf. Mk 5: 13 and 14) encouraging us all to be the "salt of the earth" and "light of the world". These two biblical words are presented by Pope Benedict XVI as the *leitmotiv* for the life of the African Church in these years.<sup>114</sup> In order to respond to the Lord's mandate and to follow the indications given by Benedict XVI, the exhortation ChL continues to offer us a great service: it is a theologically well-founded document, full of enthusiasm and insights for a fruitful realization of the vocation and mission of the laity in the Church and the world.

Now it is up to us to keep this exhortation present in our group deliberations and to translate it into reality in the life of our Churches and in our families, in the spheres of work and leisure, in our dioceses and parishes, and in our ecclesial movements and new communities.

I would now like to conclude with an exclamation of Pope Benedict XVI at the very end of his apostolic exhortation: “*Get up, Church in Africa.... Set out on the path of a new evangelization...!*”<sup>115</sup> With ChL and the subsequent documents in our minds and hearts, let us arise then and make our own contribution towards the work of redemption for our brothers and sisters in Africa!

Thank you for your attention.

✠ *Josef Clemens,*  
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*Vatican City*

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<sup>111</sup> Cf. AM 88; 92; 94; 137.

<sup>112</sup> Cf. AM 89; EA 49.

<sup>113</sup> AM 12; cf. AM 30.

<sup>114</sup> Cf. AM 6; Cf. AM 3; 5; 13; 15; 77; 95; 97; 99; 113; 130; 132; 159; 162; 176.; cf. EA 108.

<sup>115</sup> AM 173.