

THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE LAITY

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FOREWORD

This publication is intended for those already in touch with the Pontifical Council for the Laity, and for all those interested in its work or who, for one reason or another, have to make contact with it. Its purpose is to give a general understanding of the Council's identity, its institutional aims, its tasks and functions, its structure and component bodies.

The information given here on the Council's origin and development is in no way an overall, or much less, an exhaustive picture of programmes and activities to date. Detailed information can be requested from the secretariat, which will readily comply with all requests.

A dicastery of the Holy See can only be defined in the light of the papal magisterium, and especially of the documents and guidelines in which the Popes have referred, directly to it, or to the Roman Curia in general.

That material is used here. Reference is also made to other texts that are specially relevant.

I

PRESENTATION

1. Dicastery of the roman curia at the service of the lay faithful

The Pontifical Council for the Laity is a dicastery of the Roman Curia that assists the Holy Father in the exercise of his supreme office for the good and the service of the universal Church and the particular Churches, as regards the promotion and coordination of the lay apostolate and, in general, the Christian life of lay people.(1) Its ministerial character becomes clear if it is seen from the standpoint indicated by the Second Vatican Council. "In exercising his supreme, full and immediate authority over the universal Church the Roman Pontiff employs the various departments of the Roman Curia, which act in his name and by his authority for the good of the Churches and in the service of the sacred pastors".(2)

The Council, therefore, is one of the instruments assisting the universal Pastor of the Church in the field of competence he assigns to each one. They render this assistance directly, in obedience and readiness to serve, so that the mission entrusted by Christ to Peter and his successors may be carried out in the most effective manner possible.

Its specificity already expressed in the singular position it occupies among the bodies that together make up the Roman Curia. If indeed, it has a title in common with the other Councils, it is also distinguished from them. Whereas the other Councils are concerned with particular realities, such as family life, culture, justice and peace, ecumenism, etc., the object of this Council is a state of life or category of Christians, the lay "Christifideles". In this respect, and, to some extent, by its approach and purpose, it is akin to certain Congregations, such as those for the Clergy and

Religious.(3)

2. Origins

The renewed awareness of the mystery of the Church and of her mission in the world, arising from Vatican II, could not fail to inspire a profound reform of the Curia. Paul VI put this into effect with the Apostolic Constitution *Regimini Ecclesiae Universae* of 15 August 1967. Alongside the centuries-old Congregations, the tribunals and other Curial offices, new dicasteries and secretariats were created to implement the teachings and directives of Vatican II.

The Pontifical Council for the Laity originated from a proposal formulated in n. 26 of the conciliar decree *Apostolicam actuositatem* on the apostolate of the laity. Its birth was made official by Paul VI on 6 January 1967 with the “motu proprio” *Catholicam Christi Ecclesiam*. At the end of the first experimental period of five years, the Pope declared: “No one can fail to see that the Laity Council is destined to have a privileged place within the Church”.(4) The Council, in fact, is “ever more an irreplaceable and effective instrument for the promotion of the laity in the Church”.(5) Ten years after its creation, on 10 December 1976, with another “motu proprio” *Apostolatus peragendi*, Paul VI reformed it and included it among the permanent dicasteries of the Roman Curia. It had grown “in experience and maturity”,(6) giving “clear signs of faithful service and of the importance of its tasks for the life of the Church and the ministry of the Pope”.(7) John Paul II – who had been for years, as Archbishop of Krakow, a Consultor of the Council – gave it his constant encouragement and confirmed it in the exercise of its particular and demanding responsibilities. Today its basic competence and structure are defined in the context of the Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus* on the Roman Curia, of 28 June 1988.

3. Nature and purpose

“Fruit of the Council”,(8) the Pontifical Council for the Laity can only be rightly understood as sign of a renewed understanding of the Church as mystery of missionary communion, of growing awareness of the dignity and responsible participation of the lay faithful.

Paul VI liked to see in the new body two inescapable poles of reference: the laity and the Hierarchy. “Your Council”, he said, “must remain in an attitude of listening and dialogue, attentively discerning in the environments in which they (the laity) are living the needs and possibilities of salvation”.(9) He encouraged the Council “to gather from all horizons the echoes coming from life in all its aspects and from the ways in which lay Christians, in the various countries and continents, are organizing to meet these appeals”.(10) “You”, he said to the Members and Consultors, “are the direct witness, in your different countries, of these movements of thought and action, of their different manifestations, of the underlying sentiments by which they are inspired. You can appreciate the positive elements they comprise and bring Us precious elements of judgment... We also expect of you that your sense of the Church, your attachment to him who is her visible Head today, will inspire you at the same time to become his interpreters among your brothers and sisters, and bring them the echo of his worries as a pastor; of his instructions, too, as indications it is incumbent on him to give for their apostolate”.(11) And, on another occasion: “The Council must be mindful and bear witness to the fact that zeal and devotion are not enough. There must also be reflection, meditation and constant confrontation with the Gospel and the Church's magisterium”.(12) This shows the responsibility of the dicastery to promote “the interrelationship of the apostolate of the laity with that of the Hierarchy: two forces which it is impossible, in the constitution of the Church, to imagine divergent”.(13) The Council must help to bring about “a

current” within the “living organism” of the Church, through which “the head and the members will be closely united in the same love for Christ the Saviour; where the children's concerns will be known to the Father and shared by him, while the Father's words will be heard by all his children, understood and put into practice”.(14)

This twofold, indivisible and fruitful approach has been taken over by John Paul II as basic to the service rendered by the Council. “On the one hand, through listening and dialogue, you must be particularly attentive to the aspirations, the needs and the challenges present in the lives of lay people as persons, in their families, in their movements and their Christian communities, as well as in their various social and cultural commitments... On the other hand, you must evaluate the varied experiences of the laity in the light of Revelation and of the Church's magisterium”,(15) and “in profound communion with the pastors who, in turn, are united with the Chair of Peter”.(16) This service to the laity of the whole world – called to build the Church, that is constantly renewed by sacramental, hierarchical and charismatic gifts cannot therefore abstract from careful consideration of what the Spirit of God is stirring in the lives of persons and communities.

If we are to foster the participation of the lay faithful in the life and mission of the Church, we have to realize that “laity” refers to persons who are very diverse one from another, who live in extremely different situations and contexts, whose Christian formation is at very different levels and whose commitments are highly diversified.

We have also to realize that the laity can only be rightly understood in the light of an ecclesiology of communion and mission and with reference to the concrete situations existing in the world. It is not by chance that the decree *Apostolicam actuositatem* is strictly related to the conciliar constitutions *Lumen gentium* on the Church and *Gaudium et spes* on the Church in the modern world.(17)

The wide scope of the service rendered by the Pontifical Council has been clearly indicated by Paul VI and John Paul II.(18) “The field is immense and the challenge considerable: evangelizing persons and cultures, contributing from within, as a leaven, to the sanctification of the world, penetrating the temporal order with the spirit of the Gospel, in order to build a world more worthy of human beings, of the children of God”.(19) “An immense task”, John Paul II repeated some years later; “a task inherited from the great event of the Second Vatican Council: bringing an ever increasing number of Christians to be committed to living the priesthood of their baptism, conciously and censistently, as stones for Christ's building, citizens and active agents in his pilgrim people”.(20)

4. Structure

4.1. Secretariat

The Pontifical Council for the Laity, like the other dicasteries of the Roman Curia, has at its head a President, assisted by a Secretary and an Undersecretary, as well as by a Presidential Committee composed of cardinals and bishops.

Within the secretariat, there are sections whose tasks concern, respectively:

– international movements and associations of the lay faithful,

- the vocation and mission of women in Church and society;
- youth ministry.

About fifteen lay people are employed full-time for secretarial work and translation, for administration and publications, and for the library, archives and filing, etc.

Those in charge of the Council, with their closest collaborators (heads of sections and “aiutanti di studio”) meet once a week in the “congresso” to deal with current affairs and the implementation of the Council's programme.

4.2. *Members and consultors*

Whereas the members of the Congregations are mainly cardinals and bishops – with the addition, in certain cases, of “some clerics and other Christian faithful”(21) – the majority of the members and consultors of the Pontifical Council are lay people, appointed – together with certain bishops – by the Holy Father for a period of five years. The bishops are generally chosen because of their particular function, especially as secretaries of other departments of the Curia.

“This Council (composed of men and women) is an expression of the different continents, the different cultures and age-groups of God's people. It has certainly not been possible to include all the situations and the social conditions of humanity... But, such as it is, the Council must endeavour to represent the laity as a whole”.(22) The Pope can therefore affirm that, in addressing the members and consultors, he is “in a way addressing all the laity”.(23) There is no question of a formal representation of Christian communities, associations of the faithful and other bodies, but only of the diversity of situations and experiences which the members and consultors – although appointed in a personal capacity – can express and interpret within the Council, which becomes in this way a presence of the laity in the Roman Curia, an expression of their concerns and hopes at the heart of the universal Church.

The members are called together periodically for plenary assemblies. On the basis of the experiences, the needs and expectations of lay people throughout the world, they discuss the general orientation and the programmes of the Council. The consultors are called to express an opinion on matters of their competence in theological, canonical, pastoral and similar fields.

4.3. *Methods of work*

The ordinary activity of the Pontifical Council for the Laity involves a close network of contacts through correspondence, visits, study sessions. These go together with the planning, the organization and implementation of more important projects, such as large gatherings (world consultations of the laity, world youth days), laity congresses in different continents or regions, international meetings on subjects of special interest and current relevance (women in Church and society, Christian witness in the world of work, pastoral action in the university, etc.), world meetings with representatives of international associations and ecclesial movements.

The plenary assemblies are the most important meetings of the Council and the occasion for the fullest participation of the members from all parts of the world. Their purpose is:

- to study questions of particular interest in the light of the papal magisterium;

- through dialogue and common reflection, to create awareness of the problems arising in the lives of Christian lay people;
- to formulate suggestions for the programmes to be adopted; to study documents being drafted by the Council;
- to involve members in making known the Council's activities and programmes in the local Churches and in the international lay movements and associations.

The work of the Pontifical Council is documented by a series of periodical publications: the *Information Service*, which presents a panorama of the Council's activities; the *Documentation Service* and the review *Laity Today*, which are devoted, respectively, to the proceedings of the more important meetings and to the monographic synthesis of studies and experiences in particular fields; the review *I care. Youth Church Hope*, which is concerned with youth ministry and the world youth days.

4.4. Interlocutors

In the course of its activity, and for the achievement of its aims, the Pontifical Council for the Laity derives considerable help from dialogue and collaboration with the following interlocutors:

- the other dicasteries of the Roman Curia;
- diocesan bishops;
- bishops' conferences, especially through their laity commissions;
- national laity councils;
- international associations and ecclesial movements of the laity;

Many other contacts arise from activity in the following contexts:

- pastoral action for youth, the university and the world of work;
- women's concerns;
- lay participation in pastoral councils and non-ordained ministries;
- centres of formation.

It can rightly be said, therefore, that the Pontifical Council of the Laity – called “to focus attention more and more, within the Curia and outside it, on the role of the laity in the one service of the Church”(24) – is a dicastery “whose doors are open” for the most diverse persons and experiences.

5. A “*magna charta*”

The VII Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on “The vocation and mission of the laity” (October 1987) afforded the Pontifical Council for the Laity a panorama of the manifold realities of the laity

at world level twenty years after the close of the Second Vatican Council. The Pontifical Council was called to collaborate actively in the preparation of this event,(25) in which a significant number of lay people took part from all over the world in various capacities.

The guidelines of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici* (1988) are today the main reference as regards the vocation of lay people, their communion and participation in the life and mission of the Church. This document has had wide repercussions. Its value lies in having dealt together with three important objectives. In the first place, it provides an organic summary of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council on the laity, in the light of the subsequent magisterium and practice of the Church. In the second place, in its approach to new movements and questions arising after and as a result of the Council, it proceeds to a delicate and necessary discernment as regards experiences, trends and forms of lay participation that characterized the first post-conciliar period. Thirdly, it gives new indications 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”.(26)

In this way the Apostolic Exhortation has been a kind of “magna charta”, inspiring and guiding the programmes subsequently adopted by the Pontifical Council for the Laity. Since the dignity, coresponsibility and participation of the laity are fully understood only from the standpoint of the mystery of missionary communion that is the Church, the activities since undertaken by the Pontifical Council have been directed mainly towards promoting a participation based on renewed acceptance of the Mystery, on encountering and following Christ, and on the joy, refound, of missionary communication of the gift received.

The answer to the clerical question: “What are we to do with the laity?” has always focused on their “being” rather than on their attributions; they are a new creation – new men and women –, incorporated into Christ through the grace of baptism, called to grow in holiness as “Christifideles”, sharers, in their own way, in the threefold office: priestly (worship), prophetic (witness and proclamation) and kingly (mastery of oneself and of the world at the service of the kingdom of God).

6. Fields of activity

6.1. Contacts with Bishops' Conferences and local Churches

The Pontifical Council for the Laity cooperates both with Bishops' Conferences and with Bishops of particular Churches. It is on them, in fact, and on their ministry that depend to a large extent the authentic growth of the laity and their conscious participation in the mission of the Church.

Over the years, meetings with individual Ordinaries have become more and more frequent, and study sessions with groups of Bishops on their visits “ad limina” have become increasingly important. The subjects most frequently discussed on these occasions concern: the formation of the laity, the relationship of ecclesial movements to their pastors and their integration into the life of the local Churches, the non-ordained ministries entrusted to lay people, the commitments of lay Christians in the world, women's concerns and youth ministry. Dialogue with the Bishops and reflection arising from it, not only gives the Council an opportunity of “listening” to local situations and experiences, but is also irreplaceable for discerning the urgent matters to which programmes should be directed.

In relations with Bishops' Conferences, dialogue and collaboration develop at the level of their respective commissions for the laity and for youth ministry. These contacts are intensified for the organization of regional, or continental laity meetings (Africa, Asia, Latin America, Europe, Oceania, Middle East) and in promoting initiatives for the lay apostolate: their scope is widened in cooperation with the bodies set up at the service of episcopal collegiality: the “Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar” (Secam), the “Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences” (Fabc), the “Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano” (Celam), the “Consilium Conferentiarum Episcopaliū Europae” (Ccee), etc.

6.2. Ecclesial associations and movements

A good part of the activity of the Pontifical Council for the Laity is indicated in art. 134 of the Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*: “Within the parameters of its own competence, the Council performs all activities respecting lay associations of the Christian faithful: it erects associations of an international character and provides approval or *recognitio* for their statutes... As for secular third orders, the Council deals only with those matters concerning their apostolic activity” The scope of this task can be gauged from the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*. Noting “the richness and the versatility of resources that the Holy Spirit nourishes in the ecclesial community and... the capacity of initiative and the generosity of our lay people”, the Exhortation speaks of “a new era of group endeavours” of the lay faithful, in which, “alongside the traditional forming of associations, and at times coming from their very roots, movements and new sodalities have sprouted...”.(27)

In response to the teachings and urgings of the Holy Father the Pontifical Council – while respecting the freedom of association of the faithful – encourages the various lay groups and appreciates their charisms and methods of formation, recognizing the riches their presence can bring to the communion and the mission of the Church.

The Council maintains close contact with the Catholic International Organizations (and the Conference of Cio), with associations of Catholic Action (and the International Forum of Catholic Action), with ecclesial associations, communities and movements. With reference to this multiplicity of commitments, the Holy Father has not failed to stress the utility of getting to know one another better, of “welcoming with gratitude the gifts and fruits brought by other experiences of association, overcoming in this way prejudices and opposition, so as to live in communion with greater transparency, enriching one another and taking more actively each one's proper share in the one mission of the Church”.(28) This is the line taken by the dicastery and we can say – without fear of being proved wrong – that it has contributed not a little to creating positive attitudes of mutual recognition, cooperation and communion between very diverse forms of association, also within various local Churches. In this respect, an important factor has been the part that associations, movements and groups of Catholic young people have played in preparing and carrying out the World Youth Days and Meetings.

The Pontifical Council is also attentive to new groups and local communities some or all of whose members live according to the evangelical counsels, without becoming or wanting to become institutes of consecrated life; it also follows the development of fraternities and lay associations that share the charism and ecclesial service of religious communities.

As group experiences have multiplied, the Pontifical Council – which has the delicate responsibility of discernment in their regard – has had to make a careful study of the current canonical norms for the “*potestas iurisdictionis*” and its exercise. In this context, the requests it has

received for recognition or canonical erection have led it, on the one hand, to define a process for the presentation and study of statutes, the drafting of decrees granting juridical personality and the like; and on the other hand, to intensify consultation with canonists (also through “ad hoc” meetings): for instance, on the criteria for distinguishing between “public” and “private” associations; on membership in Catholic groups of Christians from other confessions and communities; on the canonical status of associations whose members follow the evangelical counsels in a radical way; on the participation of priests and religious in lay associations and movements.

6.3. *The youth*

The “Youth” Section of the Pontifical Council for the Laity was set up by John Paul II in 1986. It is meant to be a visible expression of the importance attributed to the world of youth by the Pope and the whole Church, for the present and for the future; to be also a sign of pastoral care and of confidence in their regard. The Holy Father made this very clear in an address to the Roman Curia on 20 December 1985: “All young people must feel that the Church is paying attention to them. So the whole Church, in union with the Successor of Peter, must feel more and more committed, at world level, in favour of the youth, sharing their cares and anxieties, their aspirations and hopes, in order to match their expectations by communicating the certainty that is Christ, the Truth that is Christ, the love that is Christ”.(29)

The essential reference for the activity of the Section is the *Apostolic Letter to the Youth of the World* written by the Holy Father in 1985 on the occasion of the International Youth Year.

Within the Holy See, the Section is the voice of youth, an instrument for making the other dicasteries aware of the problems of youth ministry, a centre for information on the reality, worldwide, of pastoral care for youth and of their apostolate.

For the universal Church, the Section makes known the Holy Father's initiatives; offers its services to Bishops' Conferences in the field of youth ministry; keeps contact with international movements and associations for youth, promoting cooperation between the various communities; organizes meetings on youth ministry at international and continental level.

In relation to the international organizations concerned with young people (e.g. the commissions of Unesco and the Council of Europe), the “Youth” Section is generally called to represent the Holy See.

Highlights of the Section's activity are preparation for celebrating the World Youth Day, instituted by John Paul II in 1985 (held annually in the local Churches) and organization of the World Meetings of the young people with the Pope (which take place every two years, each time in a different country), including especially the International Youth Forum.

The Section publishes the Pope's official teachings for youth in a volume, “The Pope Speaks to Youth”. It gathers documentation on pastoral care: on associations and movements for youth; on the activity of the more important international organizations that work with young people; on the more significant publications dealing with relevant matters in the fields of pastoral action, education, sociology and psychology.

On behalf of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, the Section promotes and coordinates the activities of the “San Lorenzo” International Youth Centre that, by the wish of John Paul II, was set up in Rome to welcome young pilgrims and share with them the Message of the Gospel.

The activities of the “Youth” Section are financed by the “Youth Church Hope” Foundation, which was erected with public juridical personality on 29 June 1991 by the President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity. Its purpose is “to contribute to the implementation of the teaching of the magisterium of the Catholic Church regarding the priority of youth ministry, as particularly expressed in the World Youth Days”; and “to promote the evangelization of young people and support youth ministry throughout the world” (*Statutes*, art. 1, 2.1).

6.4. *The vocation and mission of women*

In its commitment to implement the teachings of the Second Vatican Council concerning the laity, the Pontifical Council has never failed to stress the equal dignity of man and woman.(30) When a Study Commission on Women in Church and Society was set up by Paul VI in 1973 (responding to a recommendation from the Synod of Bishops of 1971), the then “Consilium de Laicis” provided facilities for its work, which was concluded in 1976. The systematic study and research of the “Laity Council” itself in this field began in 1975, proclaimed by the United Nations “International Women's Year”. The Council contributed actively to the participation of the Holy See in the Year, and in the World Conference held in the course of the Year in Mexico City.(31) The Pontifical Council for the Laity continued the collaboration for the World Conferences on Women held in Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995). Its contribution has incorporated analyses carried out with the collaboration of international movements and associations that promote women's active presence in the life of society and of the Church.

John Paul II's attention to respect for women's dignity and his stress on the identity of the human person – created man and woman – encouraged the Pontifical Council to make these principles the focus of recent initiatives such as the International Meeting on “Women” held in Rome in December 1996, with the participation of 120 people, in majority Catholic women. The Meeting had two main features: one was a “reading” of the Beijing Conference in the light of John Paul II's reflections in the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, the Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* and the *Letter to Women*; the other, a study of the anthropological and theological bases of woman's dignity and mission. The latter was broadened for a fresh understanding of feminine identity, of respect for life and care for humankind, of reciprocal man-woman complementarity and of feminine spirituality.

For its work in this field, the Council – always open for collaboration with other departments of the Roman Curia, with associations, movements and non-governmental organizations (Ngo) – is assisted by an “ad hoc” consultative group, composed mainly of women.

6.5. *Lay commitment in the world*

The necessity of a consistent and effective presence of lay Christians in sectors of vital importance for society, implies priority for the adequate formation and pastoral accompaniment for lay people who have posts of responsibility in the “secular city”. This clearly supposes a deep knowledge of the Church's Social Teaching. The Pontifical Council for the Laity therefore takes a particular interest in programmes and initiatives directed towards the study, dissemination and concrete

implementation of this teaching in political life, in work and industry, in trade unions, in the university world, etc.

Already in the past, this preoccupation found expression in initiatives related to pastoral care for workers and university people. More recently, a particularly significant activity was the World Meeting (Loreto 1995), organized in collaboration with the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, thirty years after the promulgation of the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes* on the Church in the Modern World. The participants included Christians with highly responsible positions (at national and international level) in political life and civil institutions, in industry and trade unions, and in academic, scientific and artistic fields. They contributed valuable reflection on matters treated in the Second Part of the Pastoral Constitution (marriage and family, education and culture, work and economics, political life and human rights, peace and collaboration between peoples), as well as on concrete possibilities for making a Christian voice heard in these fields.

The formation of lay Christians as witnesses to Christ in every environment, their knowledge of the Church's Social Teaching, their commitment for peace and the creation of humane and just living conditions, the importance of their being supported by the Christian community and by their Pastors, all of these are subjects that are constantly present in the programmes of the Pontifical Council and its dialogues with bishops from all parts of the world. These are also questions that call for collaboration within the Roman Curia, for instance, with the Pontifical Councils for the Family, for Culture, for Justice and Peace, and the Council "Cor Unum".

6.6. *The participation of the laity in the life of ecclesial communities*

Another field of activity is that of lay participation in the life of local Christian communities. This calls for a deep sense of belonging to the Church and for recognition – within the people of God – of the diversity and complementarity of vocations, ministries and charisms, states of life and concrete tasks. Participation is sustained, above all, by liturgical and sacramental life, as source of vocation and mission, and finds expression in the various fields of community life, charitable activity, catechetics, education and missionary outreach.

In view of the importance of the Parish – where lay people come together to share the Bread of Word and Eucharist for their growth in holiness and communion – the Council is attentive to initiatives, at this level, directed towards the deepening of Christian formation, towards renewed apostolic effort and the fostering of community life. Among these initiatives there are, for instance, small communities or ecclesial base communities, where many lay people give expression to their Christian commitment; also the traditional forms of popular piety (pilgrimages, etc.) which, for a great many more, express their attachment to the faith. Other important moments which focus the attention of the Council are Catholic Synods and National Meetings.

Of special importance for the work of the Council are structured forms of this ecclesial participation and coresponsibility, such as the National Laity Councils which exist in many countries and provide opportunities for coming together and for collaboration; also lay participation in Pastoral Councils, at parish and diocesan level. Finally, in collaboration with other dicasteries, the Pontifical Council for the Laity is concerned with the growing and varied experience of non-ordained ministries entrusted to lay people.

A GLANCE AT HISTORY

1. A great current in history

On the occasion of the first plenary assembly of the newly constituted “Consilium de Laicis”, Paul VI, receiving in audience the members and consultors, reminded them: “The lay apostolate is no new thing: you are the heirs of a generous effort, which now permits new developments. We lack the time to retrace the manifold history of the lay apostolate, and anyway it is present in your minds and hearts. Let us be content with thanking the Lord with you, and give a thought of gratitude to all those who sowed in the past what we are happily harvesting today”.(32) John Paul II also expressed gratitude when commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the promulgation of the conciliar decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem* on the lay apostolate: “How can we not include in what we remember with gratitude the many personalities, associations, Christians who, at different moments in history, have been active agents in the long process of 'promotion of the laity' which gained special strength already in last century and then proved to be one of the most fruitful and lively currents in the renewal of the Church during the present century”?(33)

There was reason to write that “this historical trend of promotion of the laity – one of the most important developments of the XX century – was one result of the gradual maturing, within the Church, of a deeper self-awareness, not only of the mystery of the Church, but also of her mission in our time. The historical origins of this preparation, both proximate and remote, for the Second Vatican Council, go back to the second half of last century. They have been the object of much study and research. New demands and forms of lay participation emerged in Europe with the progressive disintegration of traditional rural Christian communities, the break between “throne” and “altar”, the hostility and persecution of the Church due to the new secularism of political and intellectual élites; in face also of the profound social and cultural repercussions caused by the industrial revolution ... At the end of the century, biblical and patristic studies ecclesiological renewal, new charisms, new communities for the mission 'ad gentes', and the rebirth of Catholic associations, opened up new paths and reinforced the trends promoting an active role for the laity.(34)

2. Facts and dates

It will be useful to recall certain facts that can be considered, more or less, as leading up to the creation of the “Consilium de Laicis”:

– In the context of the rebirth of lay associations, the importance of the widespread development of “Catholic Action”, starting especially from the pontificate of Pius XI. This meant the consolidation of “a juridical entity different from that contemplated in the Code of Canon Law of 1917, and one over whose nature there was no lack of discussion ...causing the Roman Pontiff to intervene on many occasions, and raising questions as to the relation of this reality – whose structure was not only diocesan, but also national and international – to the structures of the Curia”.(35) In 1938 Pius XI set up the Office “Actio Catholica”, with a Cardinal as President. In a note of 1955, it was still defined as an organism of the Holy See at the service of the Episcopate; a point of reference for organizations working at international level, and a stimulus for the creation of Catholic Action in the various countries and for exchange of experiences, etc.(36)

– The birth of a series of organizations which came to be called Catholic International Organizations (Cio). From 1927 several of these collaborated with one another through a “Conference of Presidents”,(37) especially in relation to their contacts with the League of Nations. After the termination of the League of Nations and the events of the Second World War (1939-1945), the “Conference” came together again in 1946, and, in the '50's, was officially recognized by the Holy See as “Conference of Cio”.

– The growth of institutions and movements for the promotion of “Christian holiness in the world”.(38) Some of these took the new form of Secular Institutes and came within the competence of what was to be the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes; others within that of what was still the Congregation of the Council.

– Finally, there were the World Congresses for the Lay Apostolate (1951, 1957, 1967). On 23 January 1952, in order “to give lasting fruit” to the First World Congress, Pius XII instituted the Permanent Committee for International Congresses of the Lay Apostolate (Copecial), which gradually took over from the former Office of “Actio Catholica”. Later Paul VI was to see the Permanent Committee as having a triple task: “stimulate lay people to apostolic activity” – “choose, in agreement with the Hierarchy, the guiding ideas” – “coordinate the efforts made”.(39) Copecial, in fact, facilitated collaboration between movements for the lay apostolate throughout the world by organizing, not only world congresses, but also national, international and regional meetings; diffusing the results of these meetings; studying questions relative to the lay apostolate; gathering and diffusing relevant documentation; promoting a series of “experts' meetings” on the “status quaestionis” of theology of the laity.(40)

In the restructuration of the Roman Curia resulting from the reform effected by Pius X with the Apostolic Constitution *Sapienti Consilio* of 29 June 1908, and confirmed by the Code of Canon Law of 1917, the Sacred Congregation of the Council was competent for “the discipline of the secular clergy and of the Christian people”, including the laity. It seems that there does not exist “a specific study indicating to what extent and degree the S. Congregation of the Council did in practice concern itself with matters relative to the laity. The general impression is that, in fact, its attention was directed rather to other matters, even if some subjects – as, for instance, the associations of the faithful were really given considerable attention”.(41) The increasing participation of the laity in the life of the Church, the new and varied forms of association that went beyond the categories of the Code, the new bodies created in Rome to accompany, channel and promote this “historical current”, were all signs of “a new era in the age-old process of integrating the laity into the qualified organs and activities of the Church”.(42)

3. The second vatican council

“The Council ratified and extended the contribution that, for more than a century, the movements of the Catholic laity have been offering to the Church, pilgrim and militant”, Paul VI affirmed at the “Angelus” of Sunday, 21 March 1971.(43) And John Paul II, in one of the first meetings of his Pontificate with the active forces of the organized laity, also stressed this point. “You know very well how the Second Vatican Council received this great historical current of our day, the promotion of the laity; going more deeply into its theological foundations, completing and thoroughly enlightening it with the ecclesiology of *Lumen gentium*, inviting and stimulating the active participation of the laity in the life and mission of the Church”.(44)

In the “vast, complex and rich scenario of preparatory work, study and consultation, of spoken and written interventions, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit”,(45) many persons, including a great

number of lay people collaborated in various ways in the preparation and final drafting of the decree *Apostolicam actuositatem*. We cannot fail to recall, for instance, the participation of a significant and very active group of lay “auditors” appointed by the Pope to take part in the Council.

On the initiative of the S. Congregation of the Council, important work was done in the Antepreparatory Commission “De laicatu catholico”. Already at this stage (1959) the question was raised of the need for a “Roman organism” for the promotion of the lay apostolate.(46) The draft prepared in 1962 by the Preparatory Commission for the Lay Apostolate – set up, together with the other preparatory commissions by the “motu proprio” *Superno Dei nutu* of 4 June 1960 – speaks in “general” terms of a possible Roman “secretariat”.(47) The question was raised again in the Conciliar Commission, set up in October 1962. From February 1963, the new draft on the lay apostolate was submitted for consultation – through the bishops – to leaders of associations for the apostolate and to the Catholic International Organizations. The Directing Board of Copecial was also consulted. The draft presented in 1964 stated: “It seems very opportune that a 'special office' ('sui iuris') of the laity should be set up within the Holy See (“apud Sanctam Sedem”. For those drafting the text, “apud” was intended to mean “of” the Holy See, not an office of the lay organizations close to the Holy See; the expression “sui iuris” meant, an independent office with a Cardinal President.(48) The same year (1964), the Holy Father approved the setting up of a “small Group” to study the question of the “organism”. The Group, presided over by a Cardinal, was composed of bishops, “periti” and lay auditors. It drew up a plan for a “Lay Apostolate Secretariat”, that would absorb Copecial and the Office “Actio Catholica”. The Bishops' Conferences (and through them the national organisms for the laity) were consulted worldwide, as well as the cio, as to the aims and composition of the proposed “Secretariat”, its relations with the Bishops, with the bodies of the Roman Curia, the Catholic International Organizations, etc. A synthesis of the findings of the consultation was studied in another meeting of the “small Group” (25-26 June 1965). The final report sent to the Secretariat of State stressed the quasi-unanimity in favour of the creation of the “Secretariat”.

The final text of the decree *Apostolicam actuositatem* reflects this whole process in its number 26:

“A special secretariat should be established at the Holy See for the service and promotion of the lay apostolate. It should serve as a well-equipped centre, supplying information about the various apostolic programmes of the laity, promoting research into modern problems arising in this field and assisting the Hierarchy and the laity in their apostolic works with its advice. The various movements and projects of the lay apostolate should be represented in this secretariat; and clergy and religious should co-operate also with the laity”.(49)

As can be seen, the conciliar decree suggests “an organism of a consultative nature, if not mainly for information and study: an organism ...rather similar to copecial, and therefore, for coordination, consultation and promotion, but without any strictly juridical competence”.(50)

4. The creation of the “consilium de laicis”

4.1. Preliminary steps

On 18 November 1965, Paul VI, together with the conciliar assembly, promulgated the decree on the lay apostolate, previously approved in plenary session by all the Fathers present, with two exceptions: with 2,340 votes in favour; against: 2.

The next step was the constitution of a Post-conciliar Commission. On 3 January 1966, with the “*motu proprio*” *Finis Concilio*, the Pope set up five post-conciliar commissions, composed of the members of the corresponding conciliar commissions, with consultors chosen from among the “periti” of the Council. For the lay apostolate Commission, these latter included lay “auditors”, men and women, from the Council. The Commission worked until June 1966. There were three sub-commissions:

- for the preparation of a papal document;
- for the question of the “Roman secretariat”;
- for the consequences of the decree as regards the Code of Canon Law.(51)

“The last stage was the creation by the Holy Father, on 7 July 1966, of the 'Provisional Committee (Coetus)' mentioned in the 'motu proprio' *Catholicam Christi Ecclesiam*, for the implementation ('ad exsequendos') of the recommendations made in n.26 of *Apostolicam actuositatem* and n. 90 of *Gaudium et spes* concerning the creation of new bodies within the Roman Curia (or a single body, as some suggested)".(52) The “Coetus” was composed of a Cardinal President, a Bishop Vice-President, a Monsignor as Secretary and four lay people.

4.2. The “*motu proprio*” *Catholicam Christi Ecclesiam*

Paul VI announced the creation of the “*Consilium de Laicis*” on the Feast of the Epiphany, 6 January 1967, with the “*motu proprio*” *Catholicam Christi Ecclesiam*. A Bishop who was later Vice-President of the “*Consilium*” wrote that the document “repeats terms used by the Council. Among other things, it speaks of the newly-created Council as a 'place of meeting and dialogue in the Church’”. What kind of dialogue? “The very essential dialogue that lay people must initiate and pursue among themselves, and also with those to whom the Spirit of Christ has entrusted the task of Pastor”.(53) A dialogue that is at the centre of Paul VI's encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*. “Place of meeting and dialogue”: an expression that has the force and the weight of an assignment... and that will become the original vocation of the Council for the Laity.

Paul VI's “*motu proprio*” is focused on the lay apostolate, towards which all the activity of the Council is directed. Another study points out that “this reference to apostolic activity is strengthened still more by a decision that was taken during the preparation of the 'motu proprio' and finally confirmed by Paul VI himself: the decision to bring together the two proposals made during the Council in different documents: the creation of a secretariat for the laity and that of a council, secretariat or committee for the promotion of justice in the world. In view of the fact that one aspect of the lay apostolate consists in sanctifying the world from within by bringing the Christian spirit into its customs and institutions, it was thought to unite, in some way, the 'Consilium de Laicis' and what was to be called the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace. In fact, the two bodies were not only created by one same document and one juridical act; they were also structurally linked”. According to the 'motu proprio', they were to have the same President, a Cardinal, and the same Vice-President, a Bishop.(54) In this way, they could be called 'twin bodies’”.

On 15 August 1967, with the Apostolic Constitution *Regimini Ecclesiae Universae*, the “*Consilium de Laicis*” was included among the organisms of the Curia.(55)

4.3. The functions of the “*Consilium de Laicis*”

Catholicam Christi Ecclesiam defines the functions of the “*Consilium*” in the following terms:

- Promote the lay apostolate at the international level and provide for its coordination and increasing integration in the general apostolate of the Church; maintain contact with the apostolate at the national level; act as a place of meeting and dialogue in the Church between the Hierarchy and the laity, and between the different forms of lay activity, in the spirit of the last pages of the Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*; promote international congresses for the lay apostolate...
- Assist with its advice the Hierarchy and the laity in their apostolic work (*Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 26).
- Promote studies for the further doctrinal clarification of questions concerning the laity, in particular as regards problems of the apostolate, with special reference to the sharing of the laity in overall pastoral activity. Studies may be published on these matters.
- In addition to giving and receiving information on problems of the lay apostolate, establish a documentation centre, to provide material for guidance in the formation of the laity and render an important service to the Church”.(56)

These functions indicate an organism for promotion, coordination and animation, as well as for gathering documentation and for study. Under n. 1, however, it is also added that the Council is competent to “foster the faithful observance of the ecclesiastical laws concerning the laity”. This opens the way to jurisdictional functions; “it will continue to influence the further history of the Council”.(57)

4.4. The experimental period

The experimental period – originally fixed at five years, but prolonged for another three – allowed the Council to find its own identity to establish a network of relationships and trace out lines of action.

The President (a Cardinal) and the Vice-President (a Bishop) had, as collaborators, the Secretary (a Monsignor), two lay Under-Secretaries – a man and a woman – and other staff-members.

Sectors were set up within the secretariat for the Family, for Youth, and for Catholic International Organizations (cio); and also Services (Theological, Juridical, Publications). In the first five-year period, plenary assemblies were held twice a year; later, once a year. The cio and their Conference maintained close contact.

On 3 December 1971, the “*Consilium*” published the document, “Guidelines for the Definition of Catholic International Organizations”, which was the fruit of intense dialogue with the Secretariat of State and of consultations with the Organizations concerned. This period was marked also by pastoral and ecumenical activities, studies and documentation, services for the laity in the various regions, etc.(58)

5. From “*consilium de laicis*” to pontifical council for the laity

Ten years after the creation of the “*Consilium de Laicis*”, with the “*motu proprio*” *Apostolatus peragendi* of 10 December 1976, Paul VI gave the dicastery a new structure with a new name, “Pontifical Council for the Laity”. The decision was the result of a positive evaluation of the experimental period:

“We acknowledge that this *Consilium* has diligently fulfilled the tasks entrusted to it, by fostering, methodically organizing and coordinating the apostolate of the laity on the national level and throughout the Church, by assisting the Hierarchy and the laity with advice, by engaging in studies in this area, and by undertaking other initiatives”.(59)

5.1. *The new name*

The Vice-President of the dicastery notes an “essential continuity” between the “*Consilium de Laicis*” and the Pontifical Council for the Laity, but also “signs of discontinuity and newness”(60) The first, and most evident was the change of name, which was clearly intended to express the “higher form” given to the Council. At least in some languages, the term “de Laicis” (concerning the Laity) had caused confusion, being wrongly translated as “des laics”, “de los laicos”, etc., so that the less informed could see in the “*Consilium*” almost a body laying claim to represent the laity of the whole world with the Holy See, a “parliament of the laity”. On the other hand, the term “pro laicis” (for the laity) could also create a confusion which must be avoided. Some, for instance, might see in it a hidden intention of domination, guardianship or paternalism. The real meaning here of the preposition “pro” is very different: it indicates a desire and readiness to serve. The Council exists and has meaning only in relation to the laity. The title “pro laicis” was also intended to bring the Council closer to the Congregations: “pro Episcopis”, “pro Clero”, “pro Religiosis...”.(61)

5.2. *General attributions*

The new profile of the Pontifical Council for the laity is underlined by the tasks indicated in *Apostolatus peragendi*. The title of the document already reflects the pastoral and missionary vision which was at the origin of the Council, whose competence now embraces not only “the apostolate of the laity in the Church”, but also “the discipline of the laity as such”.(62) However, an “Internal Commentary”, analysing the term “discipline” in the context of the document concludes that, here also, “much more than a purely juridical connotation (giving rules and norms, setting limits, imposing sanctions), there is a pastoral dimension (offering guideline for Christian living, helping to fulfil a vocation, etc.)”(63) In other words, the Pontifical Council for the Laity “has to be concerned about one or another lay person, not only because he or she is carrying out an activity, but as a baptized person, member of the Church, who needs to be educated in faith, spiritually nourished and urged to be active. This vision immensely extends what was the scope and action of the “*Consilium*”.(64)

5.3. *Particular tasks*

- “encouraging the laity to participate in the Church's life and mission, both as members of associations for the apostolate and as individual Christians;(65)
- “evaluating, guiding and fostering initiatives regarding the apostolate of lay people in the various spheres of society” and fostering on its own initiative active participation by the laity in such fields

as catechetics, liturgy, the sacraments and education, in collaboration with the various Departments of the Roman Curia dealing with these matters”;(66)

– “in agreement with the Congregation for the Clergy, dealing with questions concerning Pastoral Councils, whether on the parish or diocesan level, in order to encourage lay people to take part in joint pastoral action”;(67)

– following attentively the group life of the lay faithful. In the second half of the '70's there were signs of a particularly vigorous renewal of group life. In the audiences for the Pontifical Council, John Paul II often stressed “the surprising growth of charisms and of missionary vitality in the ecclesial movements”.(68) Moreover, *Apostolatus peragendi* extends the competence of the Council in this field, quoting a wide range of associations: “international and national organizations of the lay apostolate”, “Catholic societies for the promotion of the apostolate and the spiritual life and activity of the laity”, “pious associations”, “lay Third Orders”, with regard to questions concerning their apostolic activity; “associations of both clerics and lay people”, with due regard for the competence of other dicasteries.(69) Within the competence of the Pontifical Council, *Apostolatus peragendi* includes all questions regarding these associations according to the “Norma” given by the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signature for “the competence of dicasteries of the Roman Curia with regard to associations of the faithful”, and communicated to the “Consilium de Laicis” on 27 January 1969.(70) In a letter of 2 June 1969, the Secretariat of State further explained: “The Consilium de Laicis' is the dicastery of the Roman Curia to which these associations must refer for approval and modification of their Statutes (when this calls for an intervention of the Holy See), for watchfulness with regard to their various apostolic activities, for examination of appeals and the solution of controversies involving their members...”;(71)

– “seeing that the Church's laws regarding the laity are strictly observed, and examining by administrative means disputes involving lay people” (as was already within the competence of the Consilium de Laicis!).(72)

5.4. The structural renewal

The new configuration of the Pontifical Council for the Laity appears in its restructuring, whose essential features remain the same today. The Cardinal President – assisted by a Presidential Committee of 3 Cardinals resident in Rome – has also the collaboration of an Undersecretary and of staff members. The Members of the Council were 12 to 15 in number (all lay people) in the experimental period. The number was increased to 2325 (for the most part lay people, but also bishops and priests). The Consultors are priests, men and women religious and lay people with special competence and experience in fields related to the activity of the Council; but also, by reason of their function, the Secretaries of various dicasteries (the Congregations for Bishops, for the Oriental Churches, for the Clergy, for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, for the Evangelization of Peoples, and the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace).

5.5. The Committee for the Family

A final provision of *Apostolatus peragendi* refers to a fundamental aspect of the human and Christian vocation of the laity: their presence in a family and their action in favour of the family. Paul VI, on 11 January 1973, had created the Committee for the Family as a fruit of work developed within the “Consilium de Laicis”. *Apostolatus peragendi* ruled that the Committee should be “attached to the Pontifical Council for the Laity”, while keeping its own form and

identity”. The Cardinal President of the Pontifical Council would preside over the Committee, assisted by the Secretary of the Council, in “a communion of apostolic concern and pastoral activity”.(73)

John Paul II, on 9 May 1981, with the “motu proprio” *Familia a Deo instituta*, created the Pontifical Council for the Family, which would take the place of the former Committee and operate as an autonomous dicastery. There are still links between the two Pontifical Councils, as, for instance, through the presence of the two Secretaries in each of the Presidential Committees.

6. The pontifical council for the laity today

The Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus* on the Roman Curia (1988) confirmed, with few changes, the norms established for the Pontifical Council for the Laity by the “motu proprio” *Apostolatus peragendi*. In the preparation of the Constitution the particular nature and profile of the dicastery were taken into account. Some attentive observers, analysing the text of the “motu proprio”, had argued that “pro laicis” in the title, the creation of a “coetus” (however limited) of Cardinals to assist the President, the “potestas iurisdictionis” of the dicastery, as well as the vast scope of its attributions, were all evident indications of a status that was more equivalent to that of the Congregations.(74) However, in the final drafting of *Pastor Bonus*, it was found preferable to maintain the profile of a dicastery “sui generis”. While sharing some features essential to the Congregations of the Roman Curia, the Pontifical Council, not being bound by the requirements of the “Sacrae Congregationes Cardinalium”, would still be able to have a majority of lay people among its Members.

In line with the tradition and style of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, the option was to stress its pastoral character, expressed in animation, promotion and coordination in relation to the life and apostolate of the laity. So the tasks of the Council are still those indicated in *Apostolatus peragendi*, with particular emphasis on:

– animation and support of the lay faithful for their special task of “filling the realm of temporal things with the spirit of the Gospel”.(75) Both the VII Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the “vocation and mission of the laity” and the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici* had, in fact, underlined the risks involved in separating faith from life, in an ecclesiastical style of withdrawal, a “clericalization” of the laity, who were called instead to “serve the person and society” on the basis of their involvement with “temporal realities”,(76) and with the strength coming from the Gospel of Jesus Christ;

– the importance of following and directing international meetings and other initiatives pertaining to the lay apostolate,(77) even though, as in the past, these may only correspond in a wide sense to the activities normally undertaken by the Pontifical Council for the Laity;(78)

– the Council's competence to treat all matters regarding “lay associations of the Christian faithful”. The Constitution follows *Apostolatus peragendi* as regards this general competence – which is confirmed, moreover, by the practice of the dicastery. It reaffirms that the Council “erects associations of an international character and provides approval or *recognitio* for their statutes, saving the competence of the Secretariat of State. As for secular Third Orders, the Council deals only with those matters concerning their apostolic activity”.(79) The text requires that the new norms laid down in the current Code of Canon Law regarding associations of the faithful should be taken well into account.(80)

The structure of the Pontifical Council for the Laity is in no way modified. But the configuration confirmed by the Constitution *Pastor Bonus* and the Code of Canon Law has been enriched in its concrete aspects by the VII Assembly of the Synod of Bishops and the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici* – a providential gift in view of the service the Pontifical Council is called to render. A service that, today, is directed towards recognizing, discerning and encouraging all the signs and fruits of truth and goodness that the Spirit of God calls forth in the hearts of persons and in the life of peoples in this “great and dramatic moment of history”,(81) so that the glory of Christ may shine forth at the dawn of the third millennium.

III

INSTITUTIONAL DOCUMENTS

1. The motu proprio catholicam christi ecclesiam

The Catholic Church, in her continuous effort of internal renewal and “aggiornamento” of her structures, in conformity with the times in which she lives, realizes “how much she should continually mature in the light of experience, in her relations with the world” (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 43), for whose salvation she is founded by Christ.

According to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, every Christian, in – the measure of his own strengths inasmuch as belonging to the People of God, must fulfil this mission of salvation (*Lumen gentium*, nn. 17 and 31). The Council, after examining in several documents the particular position of the layman within the People of God, – such considerations being one of its special features – finally dedicated to the activity of the layman in the Church a special Decree, which provided for the institution of an organism “for the service and promotion of the lay apostolate” (*Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 26).

At the same time, the Council, wanting to establish a dialogue with the modern world, gave due attention to some of the major aspirations of the contemporary world, such as the problems of development, promotion of justice among nations and the cause of peace, proposing the institution of an organism in the Church, whose purpose should be to make the Catholic World more aware of these problems (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 90).

After the Council, a post-conciliar Commission, with Our mandate, studied the best way to implement the conciliar decisions concerning n. 26 of *Apostolicam actuositatem*, while a special group, similarly mandated by Us, undertook study of the organism proposed in n. 90 of *Gaudium et spes*.

The conclusions of these groups provided the basis for the work of the Provisional Committee, erected by Us on 7th July 1966, in order to implement the decisions and proposals of the conciliar documents.

The fact that the two questions were studied together, made it possible to see both the specific and common aspects. Thus it became clear that there should be two different organisms, united however at the summit by the same leadership: the “Consilium de Laicis” and the Pontifical

Commission of Studies for Promoting Justice and Peace.

I. Aims of the “*Consilium de Laicis*” (Council on the Laity)

Its aim shall be the work for the service and promotion of the lay apostolate.

In particular it shall:

1. Promote the lay apostolate at the international level and provide for its coordination and increasing integration in the general apostolate of the Church; maintain contact with the apostolate at the national level; act as a place of meeting and dialogue in the Church between the Hierarchy and the laity, and between the different forms of lay activity, in the spirit of the last pages of the Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*; promote international Congresses for the lay apostolate; foster the faithful observance of the ecclesiastical laws concerning the laity.
2. Assist with its advice the Hierarchy and the laity in their apostolic work (*Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 26).
3. Promote studies for the further doctrinal clarification of questions concerning the laity, in particular as regards problems of the apostolate with special reference to the sharing of the laity in overall pastoral activity. Studies may be published on these matters.
4. In addition to receiving and giving information on problems of the lay apostolate, establish a documentation centre, to provide material for guidance in the formation of the laity and render an important service to the Church.

II. Aims of the Pontifical Commission of Studies for Promoting Justice and Peace

Its aim shall be to arouse the People of God to full awareness of its mission at the present time, in order on the one hand, to promote the progress of poor nations and encourage international social justice, and on the other, to help underdeveloped nations to work for their own development.

In particular the Pontifical Commission shall:

1. Gather and synthesize documentation on the major scientific and technical studies in the field of development in all its aspects: educational and cultural, economic and social, etc., and also concerning peace, in so far as it raises problems which go beyond those of development.
2. Contribute to the study of problems relative to development and peace, particularly under their doctrinal, pastoral and apostolic aspect.
3. Communicate the results of this study to all organisms of the Church interested in those problems.
4. Establish contact between all the organisms of the Church working for similar purposes, in order to facilitate a coordination of efforts, give support to more important endeavours and avoid overlapping.

III. *Structure of the two organisms*

1. The “Consilium de Laicis” and the Pontifical Commission of Studies for Promoting Justice and Peace shall have the same President, a Cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church.
2. Similarly they shall have in common the Vice-President, who shall be a Bishop.
3. The “Consilium de Laicis” and the Pontifical Commission of Studies for Promoting Justice and Peace shall have each its own Secretary.
4. The Secretary of the “Consilium de Laicis” shall be assisted by two Assistant-Secretaries.
5. Both organisms shall be further composed of Members and Consultors selected on appropriate criteria. The appointments shall be made by the Holy See.
6. The term of office of the President, Vice-President, Secretaries and Assistant-Secretaries shall last five years. At the end of the five year period the Holy See shall however be able to renew the appointment of any officer.
7. The “Consilium de Laicis” and the Pontifical Commission of Studies for Promoting Justice and Peace are erected “ad experimentum” for five years. Practical experience may suggest suitable changes in their aims and final structure.
8. The two organisms shall have their headquarters in Rome.
9. We hereby declare ended, as from today, the “vacatio legis” concerning the conciliar Decree *Apostolicam actuositatem*. The Bishops and Episcopal Conferences shall provide for the implementation of the Decree in their dioceses and nations.

We have confidently established the two organisms in the firm hope that the lay members of the People of God, to whom We are giving a token of Our esteem and benevolence by this official organisation, may feel themselves more closely associated with the action of this Apostolic See and, in future, dedicate to Holy Church with ever greater generosity their efforts, their energies and their activity.

Everything established by Us in this letter issued on Our own initiative We command to be firm and valid, everything to the contrary notwithstanding.

Given in Rome, at St. Peter's, 6th January 1967, the fourth year of Our pontificate.

PAUL PP. VI

* * *

2. *The motu proprio apostolatus peragendi*

Different forms of the apostolate or “varieties of service” (cf. *1 Cor 12:5*) that help to build up the Mystical Body of Christ, which is the Church, belong by full right also to the laity. The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council has taught this in our times, setting forth the traditional teaching on this matter in a new light. For the laity “live in the world, that is, in all and in each of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary conditions of life in the family and in

society, from which the web of their existence is woven. They are called there by God so that by exercising their proper role and being led by the spirit of the Gospel they can work for the sanctification of the world from within, in the manner of leaven. In this way they can make Christ known to others, especially by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope and charity” (Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 31).

The present time clearly calls for a more earnest and more widespread apostolate on the part of the laity; indeed, “an indication of this manifold and pressing need is the evident work of the Holy Spirit in making the laity today ever more conscious of their own responsibility and inspiring them everywhere to serve Christ and the Church” (Decree *Apostolicam actuositatem*, 1).

In response to these circumstances and to the exhortation of the Council (cf. *ibid.*, 26) the “Consilium de Laicis” was set up in the Roman Curia by the Motu Proprio *Catholicam Christi Ecclesiam* of 6 January 1967. It must be remembered however that this “Consilium” was set up experimentally and temporarily so that practice and experience might suggest suitable changes (cf. *AAS* 59, 1967, p. 28).

We acknowledge that this “Consilium” has diligently fulfilled the tasks confided to it, by fostering, methodically organizing and coordinating the apostolate of the laity on the national level and throughout the Church, by assisting the Hierarchy and the laity with advice, by engaging in studies in this area, and by undertaking other initiatives.

The reasons for which this Council was set up have greatly increased, and the questions to be faced and resolved in this field of the Catholic apostolate have become much more serious and widespread. The experience obtained in these years has also supplied useful knowledge. We have therefore decided to give this institution of the Roman Curia, which can be counted among the outstanding fruits of the Second Vatican Council, a new, definite and higher form.

Hence, after mature consideration of the whole question and having sought the opinion of experts we decree and determine the following:

I. The “Consilium de Laicis” will henceforth be called the “Pontifical Council for the Laity”.

II. This Council is headed and directed by a Cardinal President, who is assisted by a Presidential Committee composed of three Cardinals resident in Rome and the Secretary of the Council.

The Presidential Committee meets every two months and as often as the Cardinal President decides, in order to deal with more important questions.

The Cardinal President is assisted by a Secretary and an Under-secretary. It is the task of all the above-mentioned, according to the norm of law, to perform everything that requires the power of order and jurisdiction.

III. The members of this Pontifical Council are mostly lay people, selected from different parts of the world, and involved in different forms of the apostolate of the laity, with a suitable proportion between men and women. Among the members are also some bishops and priests.

Unless particular circumstances suggest otherwise, the members are convoked once a year to a meeting with the Presidential Committee, under the chairmanship of the Cardinal President, assisted by the Secretary.

IV. The Council is assisted by Consultors distinguished for uprightness, knowledge and prudence. They shall be chosen so as to ensure a majority of lay people and a suitable proportion between men and women. The Secretaries of the Sacred Congregations for Bishops, for the Eastern Churches, for the Clergy, for Religious and Secular Institutes, and for the Evangelization of Peoples and the Secretary of the Pontifical Commission Justice and Peace are added *ex officio*. It is recommended that one or more of the Consultors should be chosen from women bound to the consecrated life.

V. The Consultors form a group which is called the “Consulta”. Its purpose is to study in depth all questions to be decided by the Members of the Council and to perform faithfully the tasks entrusted to it by the Superiors.

The Consultors can be convoked all together or in smaller groups for some specific task, or for individual consultation.

VI. The competence of the Pontifical Council for the Laity covers the apostolate of the laity in the Church and the discipline of the laity as such. In particular, the Pontifical Council has the tasks of:

1. encouraging the laity to participate in the Church's life and mission, both – and this is the principal way – as members of associations for the apostolate and as individual Christians;
2. evaluating, guiding, and, if necessary, fostering initiatives regarding the apostolate of lay people in the various spheres of society, with due regard for the competence of other bodies of the Roman Curia in this matter;
3. dealing with all questions concerning:
 - international and national organizations of the lay apostolate, with due regard for the competence of the Secretariat of State or Papal Secretariat;
 - Catholic societies for the promotion of the apostolate and the spiritual life and activity of the laity, without interference in the rights of the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples regarding societies fostering missionary cooperation exclusively;
 - pious associations (i.e. archconfraternities, confraternities, pious unions, sodalities of all kinds), in consultation with the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes whenever it is a case of an association erected by a Religious Family or a Secular Institute;
 - lay Third Orders, with regard only to questions concerning the activity of their apostolate, and thus without interference in the competence of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes for other questions;
 - associations of both clerics and lay people, with due regard for the competence of the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy in the matter of the observance of the general laws of the Church (cf. the norms of the Apostolic Signatura);
4. fostering on its own initiative active participation by the laity in such fields as catechetics, liturgy, the sacraments, and education, in collaboration with the various Departments of the Roman Curia dealing with these matters;
5. seeing that the Church's laws regarding the laity are strictly observed, and examining by administrative means disputes involving lay people;
6. in agreement with the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, dealing with questions concerning Pastoral Councils, whether on the parish or diocesan level, in order to encourage lay people to take part in joint pastoral action.

VII. The Committee for the Family is attached to the Pontifical Council for the Laity, while keeping its own form and identity.

The Cardinal President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity presides over this Committee and in this matter he is assisted in a special way by the Secretary of the same Council.

The Cardinal shall give to one of the Officials of the Council for the Laity the charge of maintaining the ordinary contacts with the Committee for the Family.

We order that all that we have decreed by this Motu Proprio shall be regarded as established and ratified, any disposition to the contrary notwithstanding.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on the tenth day of December in the year 1976, the fourteenth of our Pontificate.

PAUL PP. VI

* * *

3. The apostolic constitution pastor bonus(82)

The Pontifical Council for the Laity

Art. 131

The Pontifical Council for the Laity is competent in those matters pertaining to the Apostolic See in promoting and coordinating the apostolate of the laity and, generally, in those matters respecting the Christian life of laypeople as such.

Art. 132

The president is assisted by an advisory board of cardinals and bishops. Figuring especially among the members of the Council are certain Christian faithful engaged in various fields of activity.

Art. 133

§ 1. The Council is to urge and support laypeople to participate in the life and mission of the Church in their own way, as individuals or in associations, especially so that they may carry out their special responsibility of filling the realm of temporal things with the spirit of the Gospel.

§ 2. It fosters joint action among laypeople in catechetical instruction, in liturgical and sacramental life as well as in works of mercy, charity, and social development.

§ 3. The Council attends to and organizes international conferences and other projects concerning the apostolate of the laity.

Art. 134

Within the parameters of its own competence, the Council performs all activities respecting lay associations of the Christian faithful; it erects associations of an international character and provides approval or recognition for their statutes, saving the competence of the Secretariat of State. As for secular third orders, the Council deals only with those matters concerning their apostolic activities.

(English translation from Code of Canon Law Annotated, Wilson & Lafleur, Montréal 1993, p. 1241).

(1) Cf. John Paul II, Apost. Const. *Pastor Bonus*, art. 1 and 131.

(2) Vatican II, decree *Christus Dominus*, n. 9.

(3) Cf. J.L. Illanes, *Consejo Pontificio para los Laicos in "Ius Canonicum"*, University of Navarra, XXX, n. 60, 1990, 493.

(4) Paul VI, in *Insegnamenti IX* (1971), 1051.

(5) *Ibid.* X (1972), 1031.

(6) John Paul II, in *Insegnamenti VII*, 2 (1984), 1248.

(7) *Ibid.*

(8) Paul VI, in *Insegnamenti V* (1967), 160.

(9) *Ibid.*, VIII (1970), 208.

(10) *Ibid.*, IX (1971), 1051.

(11) *Ibid.*, VII (1969), 145.

(12) *Ibid.*, VIII (1970), 208ff.

(13) *Ibid.*

(14) *Ibid.*, VII (1969), 145.

(15) John Paul II, in *Insegnamenti III*, 2 (1980), 705.

(16) *Ibid.*, IX, 1 (1986), 1784.

(17) Cf. Paul VI, in *Insegnamenti X* (1972), 1031-35; XIII (1975), 1098-99; John Paul II, in *Insegnamenti VII*, 2 (1984), 1247-51; VIII, 2 (1985), 1300f.

(18) Cf. Paul VI, in *Insegnamenti VIII* (1970), 208; XIII (1975) 1098-99; XV (1977), 1013; John Paul II, in *Insegnamenti IV*, 2 (1981), 355-59.

(19) Paul VI, in *Insegnamenti XV* (1977), 1013.

(20) In *Insegnamenti IV*, 2 (1981) 356.

(21) John Paul II, Apost. Const. *Pastor Bonus*, art. 7.

- (22) Paul VI, in *Insegnamenti X* (1972), 1032.
- (23) *Ibid.*, XII (1974), 895.
- (24) Paul VI, In *Insegnamenti X* (1972), 1035.
- (25) J.L. Illanes, *op. cit.*, 504: “The Cardinal President of the Council for the Laity was one of the “Presidents” of the Synod; two Officials of the Council were appointed as “periti”; and among the “auditors” there were many lay people related to the Council for the Laity or to institutions with which the Council is in close contact”.
- (26) John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, n. 2.
- (27) *Ibid.*, n. 29.
- (28) John Paul II, in *Insegnamenti XV*, I (1992), 1434 ff.
- (29) *Ibid.*, VIII, 2 (1985), 1559.
- (30) Cf. Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 49.
- (31) Cf. *The Church and International Women's Year 1975*, published by the Pontifical Council for the Laity, Vatican City.
- (32) Paul VI, in *Insegnamenti V* (1967), 160.
- (33) John Paul II, in *Insegnamenti VIII*, 2 (1985), 1301.
- (34) G. Carriquiry, *Consacrazione, santità, missione*, Pontificia Unione Missionaria, Roma 1993, 4.
- (35) Cf. J.L. Illanes, *op. cit.*, 495.
- (36) Cf. R. Goldie, *The Pontifical Council for the Laity: A. Backward Glance*, Manuscript, Rome 1996.
- (37) Cf. A. Mattiazzo, *La Conferenza dei Presidenti delle Organizzazioni Internazionali Cattoliche – Una pagina inedita di storia*, in “*Studia Patavina*”, *Rivista di Scienze Religiose*, 24 (1977) 2, 335-367.
- (38) Pius XI, Apostolic Constitution *Provida Mater Ecclesiae*, 1947.
- (39) R. Goldie, *op. cit.*; cf. *Consilium de Laicis, A short history of the Laity Council and its action during the experimental period*, Manuscript, Rome 1974, 6.
- (40) R. Goldie, *op. cit.*; cf. Copecial documentation and publications, especially the proceedings of the three World Congresses of the Lay Apostolate, Archives of the Pontifical Council for the Laity.
- (41) J.L. Illanes, *op. cit.*, 494.
- (42) Paul VI, in *Insegnamenti V* (1967), 160.
- (43) *Ibid.*, IX (1971), 210.
- (44) *Insegnamenti II* (1979), 254.
- (45) *Ibid.*, VIII, 2 (1985); cf. A. Glorieux, *Histoire du Décret*, in *L'Apostolat des laïcs. Décret Apostolicam actuositatem*, Mame, Paris 1966; *Consilium de Laicis, A short history*, Rome 1974, 2-5; R. Goldie, *op. cit.*

- (46) Very diverse opinions are expressed in the “antepreparatory” report on the lay apostolate, published in *Acta et documenta Concilio Oecumenico Vaticano II apparando*, series I, vol. III, 157-214.
- (47) Cf. Documentation on the work of the Commission and the various drafts of the decree, in the archives of the Pontifical Council for the Laity.
- (48) Cf. R. Goldie, *op. cit.*
- (49) Cf. A. Glorieux, *op. cit.*
- (50) J.L. Illanes, *op. cit.*, 499.
- (51) Cf. R. Goldie, *op. cit.*
- (52) *Ibid.*
- (53) L. Moreira Neves, *Un luogo di incontro e di dialogo*, “L'Osservatore Romano”, 10.01.1975, 1.
- (54) J.L. Illanes, *op. cit.*, 499-500.
- (55) AAS 59 (1967), 920.
- (56) AAS 59 (1967), 25-28.
- (57) J.L. Illanes, *op. cit.*, 500.
- (58) For the activity of the “Consilium” during the experimental period, cf. R. Goldie, *op. cit.*; Consilium de Laicis, *A short history...*, Manuscript, Rome 1974; “Laity Today” (English, French, Spanish), from June 1968, Library of the Pontifical Council for the Laity.
- (59) AAS 68 (1976), 696-700.
- (60) L. Moreira Neves, *Un anniversario che ci impegna*, “L'Osservatore Romano”, 20.01.1977, 1.
- (61) *Ibid.*; cf. G. Carriquiry, *Il Pontificio Consiglio per i Laici*, in “Tabor”, Roma 1981, 5-7; O. Rossi, *Paolo VI e il Pontificio Consiglio per i Laici*, in “Lateranum”, Roma 1978, n. 2, 373-383.
- (62) Paul VI, *Apostolatus peragendi*, in AAS 58 (1976), 696-700.
- (63) Pontifical Council for the Laity, *Commentario interno al motu proprio “Apostolatus peragendi”*, Roma 1977, 3.
- (64) L. Moreira Neves, *Un anniversario che ci impegna*.
- (65) *Ibid.*
- (66) *Ibid.*
- (67) Paul VI, *motu proprio Apostolatus peragendi*, in AAS 68 (1976), 696-700.
- (68) *Insegnamenti X*, 2 (1987), 1751.
- (69) Cf. S. Carmignani Caridi, *Sviluppo, competenze e strutture del Pontificium Consilium pro Laicis*, in *Scritti in memoria di Pietro Gismondi*, Milano 1987, 255-281.
- (70) Pontifical Council for the Laity, *Commentario interno*, Roma 1977, 4-5.

(71) Archives of the Pontifical Council for the Laity.

(72) *Apostolatus peragendi*, AAS 68 (1976), 696-700.

(73) L. Moreira Neves, *Un anniversario che ci impegna*.

(74) *Ibid.*

(75) John Paul II, Apost. Const. *Pastor Bonus*, art. 133, 1.

(76) John Paul II, *Christifideles laici*, nn. 36 ff and 15 ff.

(77) *Pastor Bonus*, art. 133, 3.

(78) The experience of the World Congresses for the Lay Apostolate was followed up in new ways by the “Consilium de Laicis” and the Pontifical Council for the Laity. Cf. proceedings of the World Consultations of the Laity (October 1975 and May 1987) and the Meeting of representatives of international associations of the laity (May 1992). Archives of the Pontifical Council for the Laity.

(79) *Pastor Bonus*, art. 134.

(80) Cf. The Code of Canon Law, *Associations of Christ's Faithful*, Book II, Part I, Title V.

(81) *Christifideles laici*, n. 3.

(82) We quote only the articles concerning the Pontifical Council for the Laity in this Constitution, issued by John Paul II on the June 1988.