

**Articles by Jose Reyes from  
*CVX CLC Progressio, Laity – Christ’s Missionaries,*  
Supplement #59, December 2004.**

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# **The Church of the Laity**

## **Introduction**

Many insist in today's world that the Church of this millennium is 'The Church of the Laity'. This description has been coined by religious starting from the teachings of the Church and it has for them many meanings and implications. In this present article I would like with humility and liberty to interpret that description from my own lay experience, an experience which has matured within the vocational and associative context of the Christian Life Community®. I say with humility and liberty because I do not attempt to represent the laity nor do I wish to impose my particular vision or experience but I want my contribution to flow out from my experience and reflection without having any methodological inhibitions or any paralysing fears. I am convinced that a first meaning of the expression 'The Church of the Laity' is precisely that we, the laity, have found the way and the opportunity to express ourselves in the Church, as Church, as Church which has become motley, one which has gone beyond herself and which has been challenged by life itself. I also take on board that the expression 'the laity' is a very wide one and it includes very different people and people who bring with them very diverse histories of their faith. That which they have in common is the Christian seal of their baptism which draws us into paschal life and into the mission of Jesus Christ through His Church. Also what is common to all, albeit with different degrees of intensity, is the recognition of Jesus Christ as Lord and Master and a sense of belonging or of strong connection to the Church. The union with Jesus is born and grows within us by means of the Church and the union with the Church matures and is nourished from union with Jesus. If at times we feel distanced from or cold in our relationship with the Church it may be because the Church has not led us closely enough towards Jesus and in that case He has not been able to send us back empowered towards the Church. The indissoluble union between Christ and His Church is not a matter of words; it is an undertaking which as Christians we live out in our struggles and contradictions, in our acts of rebellion, in our searches for farther-flung frontiers and in our apostolate. It is also a grace which we live out with joy and plenitude in the liturgy, in prayer and in mystery.

## **1. The Challenge of Including**

The Church of the Laity means, to a certain extent, 'The Church of Including', or, to put it another way, 'The Church of not Excluding'. Jesus Christ wants to call all peoples to Himself, men and women of all ages and social conditions, to be with Him and to work with Him. Ecclesial communion cannot be constructed as something which excludes many people or which allows many people to feel excluded. We have to live out a Church which surprises itself, a Church which is recognised not only by the brilliant and shining fruits of sanctity but, above all, in the day-to-day struggles of the poor, of the young, of women who are alone, of families experiencing difficulties or which are broken etc. We, the laity, who are the Church, we have to be able to recognise and to proclaim Jesus Christ and His Gospel not as set of prohibitions, interruptions, regulations, dictates or marginal statements but as a word of life in a real situation which is being lived through, like a discrete and unconditional means of being there, of accompanying. The image of the good Christian – and of the Church – must be less stereotypical, more dynamic and capable of discovering the good within people even in the midst of the darkest situations. We have to be able to live out a greater pluralism and display a greater tolerance but with a positive note; the more restricted our sphere of operation becomes, the more

we marginalize. I also believe that our education, Church education, should be less segregated, more plural and vulnerable and produce fruits of greater social integration. One of the great virtues of the Gospels is that they include and integrate and we must do so too. We must convince ourselves that each one of us 'becomes' more Church and 'makes' more Church when we move out to meet those who are different, when we welcome and do not judge. The image of 'the rotten apple' holds no weight among human beings and so we should rather cultivate that of 'the damaged icon'. We have to feel a happiness when, as a team, we restore damaged icons, icons which, albeit hidden behind the degradation produced by many trials and tribulations, retain their original beauty; this may be recuperated after much delicate and painstaking work, with brushstrokes which remove the dirt and give back the original form. When we do this, we ourselves will also grow, the Church will grow and Christ's Kingdom will move forward. What a different image this is to the one of 'the rotten apples'! May God find us inviting, including and restoring and not choosing the nice apples while rejecting the 'rotten, ugly ones'! In situations of sin we must not see only the individual sinner but also the social and ecclesial sin just as Ghandi punished himself when his son fell into sin. Our penitential acts must take all that has been noted above into account.

## **2. The Challenge of a Change of Mentality or Paradigm in Formation**

The Church of the Laity to a certain extent signifies a change in direction and of focus as regards access to the truth and therefore in the exercising of the teachings and in the styles and plans for formation. Truth exists, we long for it, we seek it out and we are not satisfied with some relativism or opportunism which distorts the truth as it pleases. And so we need teachings. But this is not about some truth which descends heavily towards people from above, like some excellent preaching, and with the movement 'from above to below' which might be experienced by a person as a kind of pressure. It is the person who moves upwards, from his/her situation, towards the truth, having been attracted by it and not pressurized by it; this movement will be 'from below to above' by means of experience, reflection and in company. What we therefore need are not good preachers or defences but good companions along the way to truth; these companions will offer their unconditional presence, empathy and solidarity.

God's definitive strategy was not that of the tablets of the Law given on the top of a mountain to a man who would then bring them down to the people. No; the definitive strategy was that of the incarnation of God Himself, to come to seek the human experience and to make this grow, to make it climb the Mountain of the Transfiguration but not stay there. And in addition, the strategy was that of the total death of the word and of the total eloquence of the cross and the resurrection.

## **3. The Challenge of a Lay Teaching which invites Dialogue and becomes Incarnate.**

As a corollary of what was noted above, Church of the Laity means the appearance or recognition of lay teaching. I do not wish to establish any kind of opposition between the hierarchy and the laity. I simply affirm that we, the laity do have our own teaching which does not ignore that of the hierarchy but which complements it, humanizes it, brings it closer to life, makes problems for it, enriches it with wise advice which comes from life itself. Maybe there will be some who might wish to say to me that it might also degrade it, water it down or confuse it etc. And yes, that may be so, but in general, among Catholics the first description predominates because our judgements will always be positive and our efforts will be to integrate

and not to seek confrontations. But, as I have commented above, integration does not mean letting a philosophical-theological-spiritual 'brick' fall down on everyday life from above to below to pressurize and to oppress. It means rather attracting both intelligence and affections towards new possibilities and this can only arise from real experience, from dialogue, from the evaluation of difficulties, from listening to criticisms both from without and from within. I would like to share with you an example which I experienced once with my son, such a great critic of the liturgy, the commandments, morality etc. I said to him: 'Son, the Church needs a Pope who keeps us united and who leads us. It needs a teaching which directs us and makes us study and reflect on matters which are not so easy that you can resolve them by yourself. It also needs a dad who can help his son to understand and who can say "Don't worry, you are exempted of this by these reasons"...and the Church is made up of the Pope, the teaching, the dad, the son, not of only one of these alone. And also, the Pope cannot be a dad and the teaching of your dad doesn't want to turn its back on the teaching of the hierarchy of the Church...but your dad would be very opinionated if he tried to talk to you like the Pope'. In this way I have said things which might seem to go against the traditional teachings but which are very necessary and empowering from the ordinary everyday teachings of the faithful. For example, I feel that it is permissible to look at the notion of Sunday duties in a different way for young people; it's sometimes hard for them to go Mass and get anything out of it. And so, as a dad in the Church, and not as a Church 'official', instead of going on and on about 'going to Mass on Sundays' to the point where it becomes a family conflict, I can say instead 'each time you go to Mass it is a Sunday, the Lord's Day and I wish you many Sundays in your life'. I'm telling you this not so that everyone should imitate me but to illustrate a deeper truth which each person knows how to live out.

I am helped in all of this by a conversation I had recently with an engineer who had graduated two years previously. He mentioned to me that the more he got involved with his work, he found all he had learned at University to be more incomplete and abstract. He told me that he frequently returned to matters he had studied during his University course but he now looked at these from the perspective of some real problem and that always 'something was wrong'. Sure, I said to him; now you are the one who is responsible for solving these real problems, drawing on your own knowledge but also using your creativity, your practical sense, judging the resources you have at your disposal, the limitations imposed by the environment and finally you have to take decisions. The same thing happens between the teachings of the hierarchy and that which I call the teachings of the laity. There is no opposition – they complement each other and they need each other. This becomes even stronger if we accept that the Lord's Spirit is also present in the laity when we try to live out the Christian life just as this Spirit is present in the hierarchy when they teach. In addition, one may affirm in general that neither the hierarchy nor the laity is infallible but that together we are less fallible than when we are apart and that fidelity is more important than infallibility.

#### **4. The Challenge of the Laity as Greater Protagonists in the Church**

The Church of the Laity means that the Church is also a sphere of action for the laity. The role of the laity out with the Church is frequently highlighted - the role of the laity in the world, for example - and this is something which is of great importance and something which I will deal with in my next article. But there may be a certain temptation lurking under the guise of goodness as regards emphasizing the role of the lay person in the world. In actual fact, one might exaggerate and say that the world belongs to the laity and the Church to religious; but we have

already offered ample proof of the important role of the laity in the Church, not to mention the important contribution which religious bring to the world.

Thus, the topic of the key leading role of the laity in the Church arises and it is Mystery, Communion and Mission. Apart from our crucially important participation in the mission of the Church to the world - and this is something we must not give up - there is also a serious, unavoidable and inescapable responsibility of the laity within the ecclesial community. It is for this reason that we have the lengthy title of the post-synod exhortation, namely 'The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World'. It is up to us to work for a Church which is more faithful to its Founder and we must bring our teachings, our simple style of life, our gifts of prophecy, our sense of being a royal priesthood right into the very heart of the Church. We must help in the building of a Church which participates, which encourages dialogue at its centre and one which has sufficient spaces so that all the riches of the Spirit which the Lord grants to the laity may be made manifest. It is our business to bring back to the Church the criticisms we receive, together with the difficulties and contradictions we encounter in our contacts with non-believers, with the lapsed, with young people and with those who are marginalized. It is up to us to help make the organization and finances of the Church healthy, transparent, efficient and coherent. It is essential that the clergy should see the laity as adults in the faith, whose participation in the Church should not be limited just to being participants in catechesis or in the liturgy as recipients or as monitors. And we must be fully aware too that upon this adulthood and role of protagonists which we live out at the heart of the Church will depend, for the most part, our credibility in the eyes of the world, at the heart of which we live out our special situation as lay Christians; we cannot witness to the world about things which we avoid or put off in the Church. All of this supposes not only the creation of new spaces and new styles of doing things and a new sense of life in the Church but it also supposes the we, the laity, assume our adulthood and role as protagonists within it and that we devote our energies, efforts, talents and resources etc to the Church. However, all these statements I have made cannot be analysed or lived out either from the standpoint of adolescents who seek self affirmation or from the standpoint of social vindication. All of this should arise from a love of the Church which we see as joined to Christ in a way that can never be dissolved. There is no sense of a destructive haste but one of a process, a sense of growing with Christ. And we know very well that the Church moves slowly and that they do not only depend on us. Closely bound to the very heart of the Church, we, the laity must rise and walk forth to explore its frontiers and to open out new possibilities. We must also bring our dreams for our Church and work within it so that these might come true. We already do this partly in some of our associations and in some parishes but these must be subjected to permanent discernment to be certain that they are genuine expressions of Our Lord's Spirit in the Church and that they have sufficient means of communication with the wider 'fabric' of the Church.

*Jose Reyes*

## **Helpers of Christ, Companions in Work and Adults in the Church.**

We are lay Christians, in the Church of Jesus Christ and trying to share in His mission. We are laity not only because we have a relationship with Jesus Christ but because we have a relation with the Church and because the quality of our presence in the world is marked by this double relationship.

### **The Relationship with Jesus Christ**

As lay people we are, above all else, partners, friends, helpers and companions of Jesus. In the words of St. Paul we can express it as follows: 'You ought to consider yourselves simply as Christ's helpers, who have been instructed to teach the secrets of God's plan' (1 Corinthians 4,1). Or, to borrow another Pauline expression we can say that we are 'companions in work who are in the service of God'. (1 Corinthians 3,9)

We, as lay Christians, are disciples of Christ who long to be with Him, to contemplate Him, to listen to Him, to understand His message and to spread this everywhere. We want to be His helpers, to assist souls, as St. Ignatius would have it, so that many people, ourselves included, may get to know and go deeply into those 'secrets of God's plan'. In this way we are encouraged to teach others - to teach our children, our friends, our colleagues, our brothers and sisters in the faith, our partners, our bosses, our workers, our patients, our clients etc. We do this with gestures, with our style of life, with the careful, quiet word. Together with Jesus, we gradually learn that the secrets of God are not taught in a vacuum but to real people whom we encounter by chance or whom we meet in special places moving out from a complex and dynamic reality. Jesus knows that with time, a rich tradition is accumulated which includes the purest secrets of God but He knows too that with time rubbish can be collected, extra things which are not needed and useless additions. His style and His teachings, therefore, are sober, basic, discrete and free. As lay people, if we want to be His helpers, we must put His style into practice; there is no need of lengthy discourses, we must be with people in their real settings. We must contemplate a Jesus Who did not turn His back on any human reality; He freely took part in celebrations, feasts, outings, journeys, funerals, polemics, fasts, ceremonies and many other activities. He mixed and mingled with all sorts of people including - and this fell outside of the logic of His times - a special preference for the poorest and those in greatest need. For those of us who are teachers the word 'helper' which St. Paul uses has a very special and precise meaning: it means to try to illustrate and make available to the learner the complex truth which the Master teaches. For Ignatius of Loyola 'helping souls' signified helping real people on their way to God. I really like this Pauline definition which I apply to the laity; we are 'simply Christ's helpers' in the knowledge that He is the Master, He is the one who changes hearts - we do not do this.

Taking now the other quotation from St. Paul mentioned at the beginning we can say that as lay Christians we are also apostles: we walk with Jesus through modern 'synagogues, towns and castles' (Spiritual Exercises 91), as 'companions of work in the service of God'. In the words of today we would say that we walk with Jesus in the midst of temporal things (LG 31) and in the midst of the ecclesial community (LG 32). In actual fact Jesus walked through towns and castles

- today we'd say through cities, suburbs and townships, shopping centres, places of work, civic centres etc. - and those who encountered Him were not left indifferent as a result of it. He also entered into synagogues and into the religious structures of His times, He came into contact with the authorities and the religious customs and here too he did not leave anyone indifferent. The great contribution Jesus makes is to transform people, to heal all their different wounds and to change the focus of their attention, to make them move and make them believe. We, today's lay Christians, want to be His companions in His work of healing, of giving a meaning to life, of listening to the poor, of loosening ties which bind and of stirring people at the deepest level of their being and of challenging civic and religious authorities etc. And, in particular, when we contemplate Him on the Cross, dying so that we might live and taking His mission of service to the ultimate limits, we accept with reverence and humility that this identity which He bestows on us may seem to contain elements of madness, of folly - but we are called to share in it (1 Corinthians 1, 18-21).

### **Relationship with the Church**

In this journey we become brothers and sisters and we become Church. Once more, together with St. Paul, we can say that as laity we are 'those who have been consecrated to God in Jesus Christ and called to form part of His People, together with all those who all over the world proclaim the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, our Lord and theirs' (1 Corinthians 1, 2). By our baptism we have been incorporated into the mystery of the life of Christ, which is a Paschal mystery, and of the life of the Church which, likewise, is a Paschal mystery. Through our confirmation we have been empowered by the Spirit to participate more fully and with greater awareness in the missionary communion, which is the Church of Christ and that which continues His mission. Our experience teaches us that it is not always easy or gratifying for us to be in the Church, to love it, to respect it and to serve it. We will also see that many people tend to repeat the words which have tempted so many modern Christians: 'Yes to Christ but no to the Church'. Or, we might follow the logic of the eminent Italian author Ignazio Silone who defines himself as '*a Communist without a Party, a Christian without a Church.*'

Lay Catholics consist of those of us who through our awareness, desire and will, want to belong to the Church alongside its hierarchy, its ordained ministers, its male and female religious men and all of this together with those who have gone before us, with all the saints, male and female, including many who are unknown to us but who mysteriously are with us in the Church. We are also together with those who make us feel uncomfortable, with those who scandalise. This awareness, desire and will are all fruits of the Spirit's actions and we have been led to see and love that union which exists between Christ and His Church, a union which cannot be broken. In this way we increase our line of vision, and together with the wide yet all-embracing image of the people, which is the one which attracts us most of all, we also know that we are body, we are structure, that we have hierarchy, teachings and an impressive diversity of charisms and ministries etc. We also know full well that a spontaneous opinion voiced suddenly by one of us does not have the same authority as Council affirmation. We love the Pope, we are moved by the liturgy and by some traditional devotions. Following the advice of Ignatius and although these things might go against our cultural sensibilities or our personal preferences 'we praise procession, relics, ceremonies etc'. (Spiritual Exercises 354 and ss.)

All of this does not deny that as lay people we are also the ones who 'suffer' the Church most of all. We refuse to remain like children who do not grow up alongside a mother who does not

grow old. With a basic sense of confidence which forms the foundation of our spiritual health we relate to Holy Mother Church like a child who is growing up and becomes an adult and we know that the mother needs her children more and more in order to live and satisfy her needs. In the initial stages, in our spiritual infancy, we listen and we believe, we accept and we do not doubt. But it is not enough for confirmed lay people (and it even annoys us) just to listen to the catechism and to sermons. We call upon the right of our adolescence which makes us rebel and lose our balance, which tends to move away from infantile certainties and go out and dare to explore new horizons and possibilities. We call upon our rights as adolescents to have a tenacious intelligence before our mother, affections which are in disarray, emotions which quickly turn to boredom, feelings which are extremely sensitive and a sense of aesthetic dissatisfaction. In this way the moment of adulthood arrives to which we have a right, a time during which adolescent tensions will be resolved because these have been lived out fully and they have found their limits and we will be able to love this mother although we are aware of certain contradictions, exaggerations, excesses of authority and dogma etc.; we will be able to make our own decisions about our own lives without straying from fundamental things and we will be deeply reconciled with our past history and with what we have lived through and we will be able to exclaim with St. Paul that 'Christ came to set us free' (Galatians 5,1).

And the mother will become young again, she will rejoice and marvel at those adult children who love her, respect her, care for her, serve her, ask for her advice and ask her about her past and her origins and who listen to her words. She will be happy as she sees the unbelievable fruits of her children - sometimes these fruits will be unexpected, unconventional- and she will recognise in them the same seeds, the same roots and, above all, the same potter, the same master.

And as far as the unpleasant side, the sinful side of the mother and the children is concerned, mother and children will pardon each other and this forgiveness will rise up in a spontaneous and a never-ceasing way - there will be acceptance, a healthy and real vision of things which will be tinged with humour, humility and the necessary transparency so that we ourselves and the whole world may believe in them.

*José Reyes*

## **The Mission of the Laity - A Contribution from CVX**

'Because of the common dignity of baptism, the lay Christian has a joint responsibility, together with the clergy and religious, for the Church's mission'. There is a starting point and a foundation which is our baptism and this brings us into the life of Christ and makes us participants in His mission. But, we all know that today we receive baptism in an unconditional way; for the most part, we are baptised in our earliest infancy and this comes to fruition in our later Christian life, in the other sacraments which belong to our more adult life and in particular through our confirmation which is the sacrament of mission and sending out. Thus, the laity, which has become aware of and committed to the mission of the Church and empowered by the Holy Spirit to participate fully in this, need to engage in continuous reflection as to how we may live out our missionary or apostolic vocation and we also need to find help and means which will allow us to collaborate with each other and with the ordained clergy and religious.

The CVX General Principles have been written following this line of thought, in particular No. 8 which contains an excellent summary and exposition of what the Second Vatican Council teaches with regard to the apostolate of the laity. Although this text is written within the context of a special community as are many texts of the Church, nevertheless following this text might help all the laity in a general way and in particular those who follow the Ignatian way. It could also help the hierarchy and religious to a greater understanding of the lay approach to the theme of mission. We shall then follow General Principle No. 8 and we will add certain pedagogical elements and directions, the fruits of discernment processes over the past years, and in this way we will enrich it.

### **1. In the Church we Share in the Mission of Jesus Christ:**

Our mission is the mission of Jesus Christ and He Himself makes us participants in this. This is all about spreading the Good News, announcing freedom, freeing things that bind, making the blind see, proclaiming the Love of God Who fills all things with His Grace. And we must try to do this among the men and women of today's world by our lives - preferably among the poor, the captives, the blind, the oppressed. Christ gives us mission, we receive it from Him, we are first and foremost His witnesses. We are not spreading propaganda or being active about some project of our own. But we cannot 'take upon ourselves' the mission of Jesus in a triumphant and powerful way. No, Jesus enters into our lives to inspire them in a permanent way. Our life will be apostolic if *'it finds its permanent inspiration in the Gospel of Jesus, poor and humble'*.

All this dynamic of knowing and loving Jesus in order to receive from Him His mission and to share in His radical options we live it as a people who are equal, as Church. We do not live this 'in the Church'. We live this 'as Church', becoming one people, becoming Church as we journey together. Communion and mission cannot be separated, just as in our spirituality contemplation and action are inseparable. And so as laity, we live out our mission *'as members of the People of God on our way'*, that is to say in the company of others and within a process which has no end, a process or a way which has its ups and downs, its struggles, its moments of weariness, its successes and its failures, in four 'weeks' which go and then return with all their graces.

One central concern which we have is that our union with Christ and His mission brings us together as a People and does not set us apart from other men and women but, in fact, going

beyond our limitations and statutes, we will be of a mind to *'collaborate in initiatives which work to unite Christians'* and to offer *'our active presence in secular or religious organisations and efforts which already exist'*, united with many leaders and following the Spirit of Our Lord.

## **2. There are no limits or fixed territories**

The field of our mission has no limits, it does not confine us to set circles or areas. In this way we are able to act both in the Church and in the world and we are even aware that the limits are not so fixed and that in today's world we are more and more involved in our identities and relationships. There might be a slight temptation, masquerading as 'goodness', when we emphasise the role of the laity in the world. The Bishops who set up the Synod on the Laity repeated that 'the correct field of evangelising activity of the laity is the vast and complex world of politics, of social reality, of the economy; this also includes the field of culture, the sciences and the arts, international affairs, organs of social communication; there are also other realities which are especially open to evangelisation, for example, with those we love, with the family, in the education of children and adolescents, in professional work and in suffering.' But it would be an error to confine those headings to the world since they are also very relevant to the Church. Just think how in the Church we encounter serious problems about the use of money and power, about international affairs, education etc. It is a fact that the terms Church and World, while they are certainly different, cannot be kept apart because the dividing lines between them are not clear cut and they have 'shared areas'. The family, for example, is the 'domestic Church'...while at one and the same time it is the basic 'cell' of civic society. A Catholic School is a Church community but it is also an economic unit set within the market. A Lay Rector of a Pontifical University is an official of the Church and much more so than a priest who teaches economics in a Private University. Thus, the statements made by the Council to the effect that 'the laity have to search for the Kingdom of God through their own vocation while dealing with and ordering things of this world in God's way' or that 'the secular character belongs only to the laity and is theirs alone' (LG 31) can and should be slightly altered and completed by other statements such as: 'all that has been said about the People of God applies to the laity, to the clergy and to religious' or 'consecrated pastors are very well aware of the contribution made by the laity to the good of the whole Church'.

Nor do other dichotomies, such as serving people or transforming structures, really work either. We must see ourselves as helpers of Christ in all these things, according to our talents and discernment, collaborating with others and in the full knowledge that our action is not the definitive one since it is Our Lord who makes the conversion and Who multiplies our efforts and brings them to fruition. Lay apostolic action brings with it a dynamic of reciprocal 'appeal' between Church and society, between personal relations and social life, between science and discernment. That which truly belongs to the life of the laity is the integration of different elements and environments, a certain bilingualism which we possess when we speak the language of faith and that of science, or the language of the spirit and that of real, concrete and material 'society'.

## **3. There is an individual dimension which cannot be surrendered.**

First and foremost we live out our mission in that which makes up each one of us and in what we do with and for others in their daily run-of-the-mill environments. Christy calls each one of

us in a personal way and our response - although it may be thought through with and empowered by the community - is always a personal one in the same way as, in the final instance, our process of growth and our vocation are. We are all individually servers ('ministers') in the mission of Christ. Generically the word 'ministry' means service and so it may be applied in a wide sense to what Christians do for the good of others both within the Church community or outside it but always moved by our sense of joint responsibility in the mission of the Church. But it is a mistake to speak only of 'doing' because in a definitive way this is about the quality of our presence and not only of our actions. For example, within our families we could live out the fact of being parents like a ministry, that is to say as a service to the mission of Christ and this will not only have to do with how we act as parents but with the entire quality of our presence and our attitude within the family, including at times what we do or even in spite of what we do (or fail to do). In education it is common to speak of 'the ministry of education', which, naturally, has more to do with the quality and the awareness of the educator rather than with his/her specific task which is more instrumental. In a similar way we might say that in the Church we have to develop more the quality of our presence and not only what we do, what we can do or that which we are allowed to do or entrusted to do. Thus, our personal life is essentially an apostolic one even in its most humble and everyday manifestations. This personal dimension of mission is absolutely essential; it is the basic condition from which the Gospel can be spread and through which credibility may be acquired for Christians.

#### **4. There is a call to action together or collaboration**

Apart from this individual dimension of our mission we are called to exercise '*an organised or a group apostolate*'. This is especially valid today because of the complexity of the world in which we live and the problems which we face and because of the sense of impotence which often accompanies individual efforts. But this is not just a matter of achieving a greater efficiency but of acting in the best possible way as 'being Church'. The Church - community - is built up and expresses itself through an apostolate which is made up of groups; in this way it becomes visible, believable and it becomes attractive to others. It is 'constructed' by means of that missionary communion to which Christ calls us, in that sacrament or sign which we wish to be. This is something which might seem obvious to us but which, nevertheless, is difficult because an organised apostolate supposes agreed connections with others, with structures, with long-term projects. It also supposes a sense of perseverance which goes above and beyond our personal situations, a certain amount of contact with institutions and means of participating in apostolic discernment etc. Lay people who participate in associations try through these to develop this dimension of cooperation and organisation in our mission '*in a great variety of forms*'. But we have to admit that not all are called to this type of association. There are two kinds of 'group' apostolate: '*to initiate and to sustain*' which are special corporate actions or to add '*our active presence to organisations and secular or religious efforts which already exist*'. In the first case we will bring our leadership, we will take on as a community the full responsibility for projects or initiatives, setting up '*the adequate structures*' to guarantee their successful progress; we will engage in continuous discernment, provide sustainability and fidelity to the original apostolic criteria and values. In the second case we will bring instead our capacity for work, our time and our apostolic spirit but we will not have the final responsibility. Both cases mentioned above may be described as 'group' apostolates if we deliberately set out to work or collaborate with others and all those involved display a kind of 'lay' obedience which is not the same as canonical obedience to a superior but fidelity and perseverance within an

apostolic life which does not begin or end with oneself but which is lived out within an apostolic body which has great meaning for my life.

##### **5. There are apostolic priorities and directions, a shared mission.**

At this stage we might return for a moment to the question regarding the sphere of our mission as lay people. At the start we said that there are no limits, there are no frontiers and we continue to emphasise this. Now, however, after having demonstrated that the individual dimension has its prolongation in organised group action and just before we investigate more fully the meaning of being an apostolic community we can affirm that indeed certain apostolic priorities and directions can exist at the heart of a Christian community. In the case of CVX, the General Principles introduce certain priorities although some delegates at the Assembly which approved these would have preferred that they had been expressed in a wider and less specific way. Thus, quite correctly the following priority or direction was formulated, that of *'proclaiming the Word of God to all people and to work for the reform of structures in society taking a part in the efforts to free all those who are victims of any kind of discrimination and, in particular, the suppression of all differences between the rich and the poor. We want to contribute from within to the evangelisation of cultures'*. (GP 8) But, in addition, it has to be said that even before referring specifically to the theme of mission, the CLC General Principles at the same time as they insist upon the freedom of the Spirit, upon permanent renewal, upon the individuality of each vocation, they let slip in a few areas of mission which some would have preferred to see left out, not because these were of little importance but so that the whole area of mission could have been left open. I refer to *'progress and peace, justice and charity, liberty and the dignity of all'*. Naturally these are not declarations which seek to exclude or to be laborious but they are apostolic directions for the community and for individuals. Quite correctly and after the experience which has been lived out, the same community would ask after 8 years have passed (Itaici 1998) about 'common mission'. Some objected to the question being posed, that is to say they challenged the possibility that a universal community could ever formulate a common mission. But nevertheless there was a movement of the Spirit in the community which asked for that step to be taken and encouraged us to discern at universal or world level a common calling. We did not know what would come of this but we did know that we might face a crisis and reach the conclusion that a common apostolic direction was not possible. We entered the process of preparation and during the Assembly a direction gradually emerged which was described as 'our common mission'. But how to formulate a common mission for a universal community? The Spirit allowed this to be expressed as 'three areas of mission and the supply of necessary means to accomplish them'. When I make my own summary of this and taking into account pedagogical aims, I prefer to speak of *priorities, options, lines of action and spheres of action*. There is a diagram included at the end of this article which shows how these four components make up shared mission, one for which we are all responsible but one which does not 'tread on' either individuals or cultures. As once the Jesuits described their mission as 'the service of faith and the promotion of justice', this world community of lay people following the Ignatian way may express itself as follows:

We want to bring to our social reality the liberating power of Jesus Christ

We want to find Jesus Christ in all varieties of cultures allowing His Grace to illuminate all that needs to be transformed

We want to live united to Jesus Christ so that He can enter into all aspects of our daily life in this world.

The similarity with what is expressed in the General Principles which we have already noted and the enormous capacity to bring together and activate movement which these three apostolic priorities possess; they, in fact, form our common mission. In another article I offer a fuller vision of the first priority and I develop from it a whole lay style of life which is founded on apostolic choices. And therefore, both the individual dimension and the group dimension of lay Christian mission is challenged, empowered and directed by this common mission which also sets us up as an apostolic community in the Church.

## **6. There is a community function**

And so in this way we reach the topic of the Apostolic Community. The individual dimension of apostolate which is a result of our union with Christ, sets us up as apostles. If, in addition, we take part in a community of faith in which we find motivation and strengthening for our individual apostolate, then we are being part of a 'community of apostles'. If we allow that community to '*spur us on*' and '*to help us*' and we are involved in it '*to live out this apostolic commitment in all its different dimensions and to open ourselves up to the most urgent and universal calls*' and all this with an awareness and a wish to share responsibilities in a shared mission or in a 'common' mission, then we are being an apostolic community. The classical ways of '*examining life in common and personal and community discernment*' will become more and more meaningful and profound until we enter into a process in which the community at its different levels fulfils the functions of discerning - sending - supporting - evaluating. Today we have discovered that these four functions are the ones which confer both an identity and a gravitation of the apostolic community.

When a World Assembly with delegates from more than 60 countries formulates a common mission then it is the community at its world level which is fulfilling the function of discernment. When a small group of Christians in some specific city gives itself time so that each person can relate what s/he is doing and how s/he is doing it and what difficulties are being experienced then we have that same world community, now at local level, fulfilling the function of supporting and evaluating. When in one country an apostolic project or place is chosen, be this a local one or in another area, and various people are asked formally to devote both time and energies to this project or place in a systematic way, then it is the same community, which at a national level is fulfilling the function of sending out. When after an examination of his life in the community, a young man feels confirmed in the options he has chosen and in his style of life and eager to progress and grow then it is the community at its local level which is sending this young man out to live out those options in that particular style. In a diagram recently published in *PROGRESSIO* various ways are suggested through which the community at its various levels can fulfil these 4 functions of discerning - sending - supporting - evaluating, in order to live out its common mission and to integrate itself within the Church with heart and method.

When I spoke about the individual dimension of the apostolate I said that the term 'ministry' meant 'service'. Now when I speak of the function of the community from the perspective of a common mission I recall that the expression 'ministry' also carries with it the idea of a 'commission' which has been received from someone who has conferred it upon us with a certain

formality, stability and ritual. Members of CVX should have no problem in saying that *the ecclesiastical authority which sends us out is the World Christian Life Community*® through its structures and which has been adequately integrated into the Church at its different levels.

## **7. The Challenge and Renewal of Collaboration especially with the Society of Jesus.**

A critical eye cast over what has been said thus far might observe a certain presumption or self-sufficiency. Nothing was further from my intentions and from those of the community which nurtures and inspires me. The same that has been said about the individual dimension and the community dimension of lay mission has to be said in a similar way taking a particular community as individual in relation to the Church as universal community. In the same way as a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and a dimension of individual apostolate are indispensable, it is also indispensable that each community should have a group life together with its own commitments. In the same way as individuals come together through a sense of spiritual affinity in order to express the reality of the Church as the body of Christ in a more effective way and to be more efficient in their mission so too communities which have a spiritual affinity should come together to become 'more Church' and also to become more efficient in their service. As noted above, something which appears obvious is not so easy. Delicate subjects are touched upon in a tangential way, such as those of authority and power in the Church, that of the tension between the missionary community and the 'organic' community, that of the collaboration at the heart of the church between and among the various charisms. As lay people we want to participate in the discernment of mission in the Church, together with others and also to assume the consequences of this discernment in terms of receiving commissions from or being sent out by the apostolic community in its multiple forms. One does not function without the other and we have to move forward with this knowledge.

We have a special interest in particular as regards the relationship with the Society of Jesus. This is a matter of loyalty, coherence, affection, efficiency - all of which are linked to the very best of our shared traditions. It is a matter of Church, of what we bring to the Body of Christ from the specific grace which we share - namely that of the Spiritual Exercises. There are many ways through which this collaboration can occur and develop, and we are learning about these from our experiences. In some places the Society of Jesus is talking of 'a new apostolic subject' in order to refer to what might happen if the theme of collaboration were to be taken seriously. Although this term has not yet been well defined, some lay people - those who have been called together - see this as a new point of reference which, in a certain manner, would link the laity to the Society of Jesus as regards mission and apostolic planning of the Society, fulfilling in this the functions of discerning, sending, supporting and evaluating. We know from what has already been discussed in this article and in others in this same series that the mission of lay Ignatian individuals or of the Ignatian Community CVX cannot be defined through or as a function of the mission of the Society of Jesus. Nevertheless, because of our shared identity and because we believe in collaboration, we are called to participate as community with lucidity and generosity in order to build up and develop this new point of reference in the frame of mission of the Church in which we are all participating. In practice, what has tended to predominate has been a somewhat individual participation of the laity - some CVX members - who have discovered here a way to empower and fill with meaning their work with or voluntary attachment to some apostolic work of the Society of Jesus. Also, as individuals, some lay people who have been chosen by the Society are linked to them in a closer way - even in a legal way - and the point is

reached where they are accepted by the Society in a special way while they are not members of the Society and they are open to receiving 'commissions' from the superiors. Other lay people who carry out their apostolic work out with specifically Ignatian works and without being members of any special community, can receive support, inspiration and even sending out from this new point of reference mentioned above. Many of these lay people are members of the Christian Life community but their membership acquires new nuances which we still have not been able to take in and assume in a satisfactory way but I believe that these things have been prepared for CVX in their Principles and General Norms. They too have to continue bringing their experience as members of CVX to these new possibilities although it has to be recognised that for some people this will mean the end of their belonging to CVX.


When we generalise this movement we could state that in a new and different and promising manner - if this is all carried out in a mature way - emphasis and leadership are again being placed on to the religious communities who are, in the final instance, the ones who will control and develop the greater part of the initiatives and who will take the greatest number of decisions and the laity can be seen in relation to them but not necessarily grouped amongst themselves or grouped in a functional way around apostolic works or sections. This is the new concept of the Network/Web, so connected with our latest times. This is a powerful concept which with differing topologies associates many people in liberty and with a pragmatic vision and does not set up cumbersome structures. People connect to this Network/Web according to their needs and they switch off from it as they wish but the Network/Web is a powerful one because it integrates efforts, it forces new identities to come to maturity and it encourages a new sense of belonging which probably has much to do with the future of the Church. The implications which this new model has for our spiritual, community and apostolic lives can be very wide ranging and we must bring matters for general reflection with openness and even give up old ways if we see the action of the Spirit in that which is new. A new way of being Church is coming into being but we have not yet formulated the theology which will sustain it, in particular the theology of the laity which lies at its very base.


*Jose Reyes.  
October 2004, revised in January 2005.*


**The Mission of CLC - A synthesis starting with Itaicí '98**  
*(For the inspiration of the National and Regional Councils, the local communities and individual members)*


Priorities	Options	Ideas for action	Place for Action
<p>We want to bring to our social reality the liberating power of Jesus Christ.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ To participate in the prophetic posture of the Church, to be prophets of hope and justice, to go against the current.</li> <li>➤ To make a serious analysis, to adopt responsible and effective attitudes relating to poverty and its causes and to the structures of sin.</li> <li>➤ Assuming the perspective of the poor, going to meet them and to participate in their struggles.</li> <li>➤ Examining our own lives from these perspectives: a simple lifestyle, a spirit of solidarity, the refusal of consumerism, working against greed.</li> <li>➤ Learning and contributing to discernment, dialogue and the capacity to listen</li> <li>➤ Encouraging and supporting one another in these options</li> <li>➤ Bearing witness to our vocation as individuals and as a community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Initiating social action, being social entrepreneurs.</li> <li>➤ Participating in national and international forums</li> <li>➤ Participating actively in economic, social and political structures.</li> <li>➤ Having a program of action and of training for the action.</li> <li>➤ Promoting experiences of integration</li> <li>➤ Sharing the wealth of the Spiritual Exercises in all circumstances of life.</li> <li>➤ Working in networks of collaboration.</li> <li>➤ Working in union with the Society of Jesus.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Diverse political and economic structures</li> <li>➤ International life</li> <li>➤ The business world</li> <li>➤ The international debt</li> <li>➤ The integrity of creation</li> <li>➤ The quality of family, work, ecclesial, social relationships, etc.</li> <li>➤ Education</li> <li>➤ Refugees</li> <li>➤ NGOs</li> </ul>


We want to find Jesus Christ in all the various cultures allowing his grace to illuminate all that needs transformation.


-  Hating the sin characteristic of each culture that breaks people and divides communities, developing critical capacities and the value of going against current.


-  Valuing the uniqueness of local cultures, enriching oneself with their unique contributions, with the local symbolism and creativity; seeking the positive integration of various cultures without seeking the uniformity that destroys the uniqueness and characteristics that each one can contribute.


-  Allowing Christ to manifest himself through respect, dialogue and the transformation of the negative, in the multiplication of good, and in concern for the human community which often asks us to go beyond our limited horizons.


-  Opposing tendencies such as individualism, marginalization, consumerism while on the other hand promoting tendencies like dialogue, concern for human rights, the affirmation of life, etc.


-  Contributing to the search for meaning, in active hope, in dialogue, in reconciliation, in the integration of faith and


-  Using effectively the mass media, using them extensively in order to communicate our faith and the values that we defend.

-  Sharing with those who are different in order to learn how to serve, give and receive.


-  Seeking better forms of education in values.


-  Accompanying the various stages of life and their cultural manifestations, especially among the youth.


-  Furnishing abilities for dialogue, commitment and reconciliation

-  Being involved in the search for a new way of being a universal Church, one that welcomes cultural diversity.


-  The Mass Media


-  Instances of social dialogue

-  Manifestations of local cultures


-  Production of symbols, iconography, etc.

-  Youth culture

-  Interreligious or ecumenical dialogue



-  Theological reflection

-  Liturgy

-  Pastoral and catechetical inculturation.

	<p>life.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Practicing all the above-mentioned also in the Church: living the internal and external dialogue, promoting the positive and challenging the negative in the local churches, healing the wounded, seeking authentic human relationships, transforming the structures of sin, etc.</li> </ul>		
<p>We desire to live together with Jesus Christ so that He can enter into all the aspects of our ordinary life in the world.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ ☞ To seek and find to God in all the things, that our CLC vocation comes in contact with, all that we do in our daily life.</li> <li>➤ ☞ To give value to daily life as an opportunity to serve and to grow.</li> <li>➤ ☞ Supporting the human person, creating authentic personal relationships, living a healthy affectivity, welcoming and valuing, including and not excluding.</li> <li>➤ ☞ Promoting a family life in which authentic relationships mature in the couple, between parents and children, and between generations.</li> <li>➤ ☞ Offering the wealth of our faith, striving to make the way of Jesus Christ attractive and challenging for the youth.</li> <li>➤ ☞ Valuing work and the dignity of the worker.</li> <li>➤ ☞ Overcoming the frequent distance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ ☞ Being a community of faith that is lay and Ignatian in mission</li> <li>➤ ☞ Having special care for the poor and the excluded.</li> <li>➤ ☞ Fomenting a Christian and critical understanding of contemporary problems such as globalization, the environment, militarization.</li> <li>➤ ☞ Accompanying the youth</li> <li>➤ ☞ Accompanying couples</li> <li>➤ ☞ Looking after the family in all its manifestations, especially looking after those who suffer division or brokenness.</li> <li>➤ ☞ Bringing discernment into marriage and the family life.</li> <li>➤ ☞ Fighting against unemployment and below normal wage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ ☞ The daily effort</li> <li>➤ ☞ Work and the profession</li> <li>➤ ☞ Human relationships</li> <li>➤ ☞ Development and the affective life</li> <li>➤ ☞ A critical capacity in the face of facts</li> <li>➤ ☞ The couple, the family and the youth</li> <li>➤ ☞ Intergenerational dialogue</li> <li>➤ ☞ A style of life</li> <li>➤ ☞ Christian initiation of the youth.</li> </ul>

between our faith  
commitment and our  
professional activities  
and labors.

earning  
➤   Fighting  
against consumerism, the  
obsession for gains, etc.

**THE APOSTOLIC POLYNOMIAL OF CLC**  
**Discern - Send- Support- Evaluate**



This polynomial of four words has arisen in the recent history of CLC and has great apostolic force. It is not 4 successive steps that should occur in each community meeting. Neither is it a series of four words with a vague content that can stop our spontaneity. It implies four functions that fulfill the community on its different levels making it a true apostolic body.

I offer the following structure: it doesn't exhaust the topic but it has the merit of being synthetic. It will be completed and enriched by various contributions, and I believe that it is already necessary to add two more columns: one on means and another on the personal level.

<b>Function</b>	<b>In the World Community – National -Regional Group</b>	<b>In the local community or group-</b>
<b>Discern</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•1 Study the reality</li> <li>•2 Bring together the experiences</li> <li>•3 Formulate orientations and apostolic priorities</li> <li>•4 Guide the processes</li> <li>•5 Communicate with the Church</li> <li>•6 Identify places, works, milieu, relationships.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•1 Welcome the orientations and apostolic priorities</li> <li>•2 Share individual experiences about them</li> <li>•3 Listen to the Word of God</li> <li>•4 10. Contemplate Jesus in Action</li> <li>•5 Share the spiritual movements</li> <li>•6 Clarify what we have heard and experienced</li> <li>•7 Ask what we will do about it.</li> <li>•8 Take out personal or communities conclusions</li> </ul>
<b>Send</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confirm (or not) initiatives and apostolic formal commitments.</li> <li>• Assure and organize a presence of CLC members in the different places or works identified</li> <li>• Cover the whole range of orientations and apostolic priorities</li> <li>• 4. Establish bonds with the hierarchical Church and with the Society of Jesus regarding missions entrusted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•1 Confirm (or question) personal options in the ordinary environment</li> <li>•2 Connect the experiences of the members with the apostolic priorities (publish and print the apostolic commitment of each member).</li> </ul>

	to some members.	
<b>Support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•1 Give spiritual, intellectual, apostolic and human formation</li> <li>•2 Connect efficiently to members apostolically authorized</li> <li>•3 Create structures of support</li> <li>•4 Contribute leadership, vision.</li> <li>•5 Disclose documents, possibilities for obtaining assistance, etc.</li> <li>•6 Go beyond CLC for apostolic collaboration with others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•1 Welcome and accompany concrete difficulties, personal necessities, depressions, questions.</li> <li>•2 Give members what they individually need: advice, encouragement, specific help, confirmation, etc.</li> <li>•3 Pray for each one and for their mission</li> <li>•4 Study and deepen some specific aspects according to the needs</li> </ul>
<b>Evaluate</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•1 Promote and guide self-evaluation and self-criticism on apostolic efficacy within CLC</li> <li>•2 Gather and systematize successful or failed experiences</li> <li>•3 Study the criticisms coming from the Church, the Society of Jesus and other associations</li> <li>•4 Prepare and point out good examples of evaluation, discernment and projection</li> <li>•5 Set objective parameters for the apostolic commitment of CLC and its members.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•5 Practice giving advice and fraternal correction</li> <li>•6 Make known the background and give input to the leaders or commissions on the regional or national levels</li> <li>•7 Value the apostolic life of each member with a grateful attitude</li> <li>•8 Continuously refocus on our goals in function of the apostolic life of the members and of CLC</li> </ul>

*José Reyes*  
*Vice-President World ExCo*

## **Being Laity: Vocation and Mission** *Intimacy and extroversion*

When referring to the laity we have been accustomed to talk about "vocation" and "mission" in an almost inseparable way. Similarly, we talk about the laity "in the Church" and "in the world," that is, of the "vocation and mission of the laity in the Church and in the world." In doing so we must admit that intimacy and extroversion are not successive steps but circular, or rather go "in spirals." They are two lines of the Christian life that are inseparable and that feed each other mutually. Thus we could talk about "Apostolic Prayer," or the "Prayerful Apostolate." We could speak of "being with Jesus" or of being "sent by him," or of spirituality and ethics, of call and response. In short, being laity is a matter of developing a "coherent style of life, one consistent with the life of received grace."

In the gospel there are many passages that help to understand the inseparability of these two dimensions. I suggest taking Jn 15,1-17: the parable of the vine and the branches. The main verbs are "produce (fruits)" and "remain," or synonyms of these in different conjugations. "I am the vine and you the branches." The branches give fruit if they remain united to the vine. "Without me you can do nothing." We remain in Jesus, and Jesus remains among the people through us. Remain in me... bear fruit... the fruit remains (v16).

There is certainly a tension between prayer and apostolate, between remaining and bearing fruit, between calling and answering. But it is a constructive tension which sometime seems to be in opposition only because of our immaturity or historical errors. It has been said in the past and sometimes we ourselves say this: that either we chose the life of prayer -- separated from the world [contemplative]-- or we chose life in the world, apostolic, active. Jesus didn't concur in that dichotomy. His mission flowed from his prayer, his prayer gave it dynamism and launched him into the world. The world caused feelings and motions that made him turn towards his Father in prayer.

In view of the hidden life of Jesus, from the annunciation until the baptism in the Jordan, there are many great graces that are most touching. The Trinity is touched when looking at the divided world and from its infinite unity decides to tear itself apart, "separating" the second person. Jesus, the second person, whose mission is nothing less than the redemption of the world, is made small and vulnerable: he takes risks, receives threats and passes difficult tests. There is Herod and his sinister plans, the exile in Egypt, the austere intimate life of the family of Nazareth. What happened with Jesus during those years? The contemplation of the hidden life leads me to think that what happened is that Jesus, by means of prayer, is growing, becoming conscious of his mission, and restoring the Trinitarian unity that was willingly divided in the decision of the annunciation. The familiarity of Jesus with the psalms and the Scriptures cannot be explained otherwise. Surely little by little Mary told him of the annunciation of angel, the virginal conception, his birth in Bethlehem, the shepherds, the magi, Simeon, the visit to Elizabeth, etc., everything with simple words. Wisdom grew little by little in the boy, according to his age. From these concrete stories he moved slowly to accept their meanings. These latter gather momentum in the episode of Jesus at twelve years of age: Jesus leaves childhood, searches for formation. He must have sustained long conversations with wise men as well as his parents. He must have done much reading. The stories that his mother related to him, his reading

of the psalms and Scriptures, the atmosphere of the Jewish town, everything was brought together for the grace of God. I believe that in any moment, or in various moments, he had "visions," insights we would say today, as Ignatius did in the Cardoner. Being God, he left God in order to be man... being man, he received the grace of God in order to return to Him bringing humanity with him. In short, grace permitted Jesus to make connections, to be conscious of his mission, because of the intimate union he had with his Father. In his young mind and heart he was disturbed by many discoveries, and with emotion he recognized the Spirit who bound him more and more to the Father. All Christian adolescents have had spiritual emotions, and "insights." Jesus certainly was no different. At this time deep in his heart, there was stirring the truth he would later proclaim: "I and my Father are one." There are other sentences that indicate this growing consciousness of Jesus regarding his mission and his fundamental unity with the Father:

**Jn 6, 57:** "I have life because of the Father"

**Jn 6, 27:** "On whom God the Father has set his seal"

**Jn 5, 19:** "The Son cannot do anything by himself"

**Jn 5, 20:** "The Father loves the Son and everything the Father does He shows him."

**Jn 4, 26:** "I who speak to you am he [the messiah]"

**Jn 4, 36:** "The reaper and the sower"

**Jn 8, 14:** "I know where I came from and where I am going"

For Jesus, growing in grace is establishing intimate relationships with the Father, "reestablishing the Trinitarian unity," that for a time seemed broken in order to be given to mankind.

In spite of the fact that at twelve years old, an age in which religious obligations began, he declares that he must dedicate himself to "the things of the Father," Jesus still waits for about 18 years more. He doesn't fall into the temptation of being a boy prodigy, in spite of impressing everyone. He knows that he has to grow in intimacy with the Father and be formed humanly and socially. His options were maturing in prayer. Reading Ezechiel and Isaiah he opted for less rigorous or legalistic thought, more centered on conversion of heart, giving up the messianic current which was more political. In prayer he discerned spirits: "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees yeast of Herod" (Mk 8,15). Jesus must have read the messianic texts of Isaiah and Ezechiel (contemplate in prayer the Heart of Jesus reading Is 52ff, or Ez 36ff) given that he was moved by them in the beginning. He had to question whether they referred to him and his mission. For example, these texts:

**Is 42, 1:** "Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am well pleased upon whom I have put my Spirit..."

**Is 42, 6:** "I, Yahweh, have called you for the victory of justice; I have grasped you by the hand; I formed you, and set you as a covenant of the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out prisoners from their confinement, and from the dungeon those who live in darkness."

After much reading and many hours of prayer, Jesus arrives at the conclusion that these prophecies refer to him. Youthful Jesus, young adult, mature man, he decides that he is the Messiah. He proclaims it at the beginning of his preaching: "Today this prophecy has been completed." and he says to the woman at the well: "I am He." The baptism in the Jordan is the result of a discernment: Jesus is a humble Messiah who is inserted into history; he inaugurates

a new stage, however he doesn't feel as if he is a founder. The explicit presence of the Father and of the Spirit is the confirmation of the discernment of Jesus, of what has been maturing in him. The words of the Father present Jesus as the servant of Yahweh, the hoped for Messiah.

It is incomplete to contemplate Jesus in mission without considering the contemplation of Jesus in prayer, reading Scripture, singing the psalms, in discernment or of Jesus in formation, in waiting, in pilgrimage, in dialogue with teachers, listening to his parents. In the same way, it is useless to imagine us in mission, giving fruit that remains, without experiencing the manger, exile, silence, the desert, the Jordan... or without soaking ourselves in the current of salvation in which we are inserted, discerning who we are in all of this and what is the moment that we are now living. This is not a contiguity of doing, but a continuity of life, a dynamic of every day. This is what we call contemplation in action.

The same topic of the dynamic relationship between prayer and apostolate could be seen starting with the public life of Jesus, or from his passion and death. For us, the contemplation of the life of Christ are moments of intimacy and of launching out. Looking at Jesus who passes, we comprehend, we are moved, we heal, we multiply human efforts, we go to the heart of the person, we expose the temptations of the enemy, etc. It is both a motivation to move toward the apostolate and an invitation to intimacy. Sometimes it will move our wills more forcefully, sometimes our affections. At times it will have an impact more on the fruit or on the experience of healing; at other times we will be moved more to contemplate the Heart of Christ, the healer.

Contemplative prayer develops the 5 spiritual senses in us. It gives us a particular sensitivity and a creative imagination. Accompanying Jesus in his public life allows us to adapt little by little to the apostolic wisdom of Jesus. From the contemplation of the poor and humble Jesus the simple style of our life arises. From the contemplation of the group of the apostles with Jesus, our desire arises to be companions in the mission. From the meditation of the parables there emanates a different wisdom and a less conceited attitude. From the contemplation of the fallen Samaritan woman a fruitful apostolic imagination arises. What is happening with us is that prayer and life are mutually generated: finding ourselves with a poor person crossing our path sends us to the Heart of Jesus, and meeting Jesus deep within us turns us to the poor on our path. One doesn't know if the tears flow from the pain and commotion that what we see produces in us, or from the emotion of feeling the palpitations of the Heart of Jesus. In regard to action, when we surprise ourselves by undertaking generous services, prayer enables us to recognize that it is God who gives fertility to the sterile.

Finally, prayer is the source of apostolic inspiration. It is the wisdom that comes from above; it is the fertilizer of our life; it is a touching encounter. It is provocation, confirmation, persevering force and transformation. For that reason, there is no apostolate without prayer, because prayer activates grace and keeps us united to the vine.

This dynamic that Jesus experienced of leaving God and returning to him is the one that we want to deepen today as laity in connection with Jesus. Being with him, being sent for him and returning to him. We can't say like Jesus "my Father and I are one," but we will probably say with Saint Paul "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me." In the contemplation of the life of Christ from the baptism in the Jordan until Palm Sunday what happens in us regarding Jesus is what we have seen happening to him regarding the Father and his mission:

we become more conscious of our mission and available for action starting with a growing intimacy, that is vocation or call.

This way of intimacy-extroversion marks our journey as lay adults in the Church and in the world, and our participation in the mission of Jesus.

## **Prophets of Hope and Justice**

### *A Vision of Lay Christians' Mission\**

*\* Based on a presentation given to the Chilean National CLC Assembly, October 1999.*

How can I synthesise our way of being Christians in today's world? Throughout our Christian experience each one of us has developed his/her own personal relationship with Jesus Christ and his/her own special way of following Him. In this way a Christian 'style of life' comes into being, that is to say a way of living, of praying, of behaving, of choosing etc. On the other hand, all of us have an experience of 'Christian community', we feel that we are part of some 'cell' of the mystical body of Christ in which we experience the life of the Church in the liturgy, formation, charity, shared hopes and opportunities to discuss our faith. Finally, some Christians, we also belong to organizations or associations with all that this implies in terms of structures, planning, social and economic requirements. This can be described as the associative and apostolic dimension.

In this presentation I will lay most emphasis on the first aspect, that is to say on that which has to do with our Christian 'style of life'. But my intention is in part to show how from this the other two, that is to say 'the experience of community' and 'the associative and apostolic dimension', rise up in a spontaneous way and how these three aspects both need each other and empower each other.

When we speak of Christianity as a 'style of life' there at once rises up the classic tension of every vocation; the 'yes, but not just yet'. From a very young age we make our Christian choices and in each of these choices we give our all. In that sense we are Christians. But at the same time we feel our personal limitations, our lack of formation, our lack of coherence. And in that way we are not yet what we would like to be. It may well be that when we say we are Christians we are placing more emphasis on the community and associative dimensions: we are baptised, we are part of the Church, we belong to a community - maybe we even belong to some association, we are concerned about our formation, we take part in activities where we serve others etc. Perhaps when we say that we still 'are not', we are laying emphasis more on the style of life, being aware of our imperfections, of our feeling that we are carrying a treasure in vessels made of clay, of our feeling of distance with regard to a genuine Christian vocation, which we intuit but which we have not completely assimilated or made our own.

The fact is that any individual vocation in the Church has to be understood at one and the same time as a means of formation and as a style of life. A way of formation is marked out from beginning to end by the complete vocation which is being aspired to although there might not be a perfect model of this vocation set out which could be imitated. Nevertheless, even taking into account our imperfections and knowing that this way has no end, there must be some people amongst us who live out their Christian vocation not only like part of the rules of some association or like a way which is being followed but as a complete orientation for their lives, a radical choice of life style, a personal response to a call, that is to say, like a stable vocation which is visible both within and outwith the community and which has the seal of a permanent commitment on it. And there should be others also who feel that they are on the way, others who feel they are at the beginning of this way, others who have made some progress along it but all

will have a certain fascination for this way they are following and they will be able to recognize stages of this way, turning points on it and they will be able to find adequate symbols to express these.

In order to clarify the way and to give the adequate means and signs, it is helpful to have brief and appropriate summaries which can in some form or other express well a genuine, mature and stable vocation - that to which people aspire and that which can give information about all the formative stages. In the Church and in its different associations we do have these basic texts and we are always trying to make up new syntheses and often this is done after discernment processes at a community level, at a local level, or at a national or a world level. At this point I will try to formulate some new summaries and I do this without attempting to replace much more authoritative texts.

Going for inspiration to a Workshop which I led at a CVX World Assembly and to a series of discussions which took place there I'd like to offer a 'synthesis' of our Christian life today. Although this comes from an experience of discernment at the heart of CVX I think that many Christians will be able to identify with it, whether they have Ignatian experience or not. Let us recall that in the Church any graces received are not private ones – they are for the entire Church. My synthesis of our vocation and our mission which I'd like to move on to now is the following one: *we want to be prophets of hope and of justice, capable of acting in this world from the perspective of the poor.*

## **1. Prophets**

I am not a teacher of 'Prophets' as was a Jesuit friend of mine in the Bible College in Rome. I use the word rather in an intuitive and an allegorical way, with freedom and a touch of fantasy, in order to bring together a series of experiences and contents which seem to me to be absolutely vital and at the very heart of our vocation.

In the first place a prophet is a person in conversation with God, there is a communication which is familiar but not necessarily intense or impressive. God speaks to his/her heart, s/he is moved, stirred...the prophet listens and defends him/herself, asks and counterattacks, asks for more power or for more signs. God gives him/her only what is necessary, He asks him/her for actions, movements, journeys, to undertake various things. Their dialogue is about reality, about life and it consists of a coming close and a moving away again within the lines of our human history and the line of God's infinite love for us. It is a dialogue which is prayer but a prayer which is born of life and which returns you to life but with new drives, directions and meanings.

A prophet is also a lucid person although s/he may seem somewhat badly adapted or eccentric. Lucidity is a gift but it is also the result of observation, method, the capacity to listen, analyse and assimilate data which come from reality itself and from the dialogue with God, including those data which might seem threatening or dangerous. Not being able to adapt is caused in his/her case by a refusal to adopt easy and obvious solutions, by a dissatisfaction with static and recalcitrant formulae which remain in place only because of the weight with which they oppress or by the habit and lethargy which exist around them. The prophet has an inner restlessness which will not be quietened – a kind of spiritual sense which tells him/her that something is amiss. The prophet knows all the gospel warnings about camels and is aware that there is so

much hypocrisy, like that of the Pharisees, in both the organisation and behaviour of society, in speeches and official events, in the Church and even in the Communities to which s/he belongs. Nevertheless, his/her place is right there, in the centre of reality but with a tendency towards the outer edges, and for this reason tending towards eccentricity also but without losing his/her union with God which will prevent any kind of lack of validity or self destruction. The prophet does not seek out any sort of lack of adaptation nor is s/he a misfit but s/he is able to live with the exact dose of these ingredients in a life which is not always easy to understand because it contains much that runs contrary to the prevailing culture.

Moreover, the prophet knows well his/her own weakness and s/he grows starting from this point and passing through it. His/her prophecy does not have as an aim to hold up its own conceited perfection against the generic and total imperfection of society. The prophet has his/her own experience of transformation, of empowerment which comes from his/her experience of God. S/he has made contact with her/his own weakness and that is what permits her/him set him/herself up as a prophet before others. It is not his/her perfection but his/her experience of transformation which sets him/her free and allows him/her to be detached from him/herself; this strengthens the prophet for mission and allows him/her to live out his/her vocation without any false sense of shame.

One last feature which I'd like to propose is that the prophet expresses him/herself in a convincing way. S/he does not denounce or destroy; rather, s/he is a creator of images, means and undertakings. S/he proposes alternatives and pulls out only to plant anew. S/he does not like abusing words and is shy of doing so. S/he has no liking for grandiloquent gestures but s/he knows that the spirit is neither silent nor lifeless. S/he exults in images of deep wells, living waters, fires which will not be extinguished, swollen nets and vessels of clay. In this way s/he puts up no opposition to that which springs from within neither does s/he experience any problem in being able to express this in visible ways.

## **2. Of Hope**

Prophets of hope, of direction. This means being able to show clearly, project and reflect a positive attitude to the world and to others and this should not be confused with a trivial sort of optimism. By hope we mean that which we have not been able to nor will we be able to achieve by ourselves but it is present and is understood in our daily efforts to change the world and it is also something we know through revelation.

If we are firmly rooted in Christ we have no reason to lack hope. We may be pessimistic with regard to the results which we will obtain through our own efforts or with regard to the quality of our ways of acting but we cannot doubt the action of God in the world through us.

This is a basic Christian attitude – that of believing in the multiplication of the loaves, in the miraculous fish and in the healing of the paralytic. In this way we can live our lives as fishermen, as children or as paralytics, without losing hope, but rather persevering, adding our own grain of sand with constancy and graciousness, offering it to be multiplied and spread.

It is hope which spurs us on to action. We do not love the action in itself but the action as transformed by God. Thus we are surprised by our catch and by what we are able to distribute and so we are encouraged to cast our nets each day.

Faced with the serious problems we have to witness or live through our response is one of active hope. We ask ourselves how we can help and even when we find ourselves face to face with extreme situations we have no doubt that there will be something we can do and that God wants us to do something so that He might show Himself.

In my opinion, this active hope is one of the most important sources of our apostolic energies. But, I repeat, hope springs from the contemplation of and the union with Christ. If our hope falters then so does our action and this generally happens because we have lost our sense of direction, because we have strayed from the Galilean ways, from the sands of Tabga, from the manger in Bethlehem, from the journeys to Jerusalem and from the synagogues, towns and villages which Our Lord frequented.

### **3. Of Justice**

The World Assembly tells us that ‘we must work against greed and the improper use of power in political and economic structures’. There are those structures which are sinful and they reinforce each other, they spread, they gain power and thus they engender even more sin, more injustice, they spread beyond national frontiers, dulling our consciences and making us used to the scandal of differences between and among our brothers and sisters, to the scandal of excessive earnings and of the thirst for power. Nevertheless on the way to a genuine conversion of heart there will be the consideration of these structures of sin in prayer and from this there will spring, like a grace which has been given, sorrow and tears. During this contemplation of sins, both on a personal and a structural level, and the waving of The Two Flags in the world and in our hearts, we will hear within ourselves The Call of the King, the Call to work with Him and the desire to accept this Call.

‘We are called’ – continues the World Assembly – ‘to bear witness about a world community which gives to its members the power to be prophets of hope and justice, who are capable of taking up bold positions in order to bring more justice to this world’. And here again we will be going against the prevailing culture; we will have to struggle against and put up a strong resistance to consumerism and individualism, to unmask the spiritual and cultural erosion which they produce, to renounce unnecessary earnings, to maintain simplicity in our family life and in our relations with others. From a permanent conversion of our own lives we will prepare ourselves also to ‘establish new and virtuous collaboration networks’ which will oppose the ‘networks and chains’ by which the enemy seeks to ensnare and trap. We will become social entrepreneurs and use the same astuteness, intelligence and decisiveness which managers use in the world of business. As a community we will become not only a community of prophets but also a prophetic community.

To be prophets of justice will signify also for us to sharpen our discernment thus to understand and to identify the diverse forms, open and subtle, that the sin has to infiltrate itself in our social relations, in our structures and in our companies, and to weaken us and to confuse ourselves in

our struggles. It is a kind of politeness that generates liberty, creativity, arbitrariness to be associated and to undertake, perseverance to continue and to continue.

The rebelliousness of prophet of justice is not bitterness, rancour or a sense of hopelessness – these qualities normally spring from the bad spirit. But this is a pure and healthy rebelliousness which is the Paschal mystery in one's life, it is sorrow and pain which contain the glimmer of the resurrection, the seeds of future actions and of a greater intimacy with God.

#### **4. Able to be Active in the World**

Our contemplation and our formation have to lead us on to action. We have already spoken of this coming and going between action and contemplation, between the reality of the everyday and the life of the spirit. The World Assembly in Itaici also reminded us of the relationship between formation and mission, noting that 'practically all the social needs we wish to cope with require formation but action cannot wait until we have completed this formation... We need to learn right from the very beginning to be contemplatives in action, to promote opportunities of being right at the very deepest level of situations where there is oppression and deprivation, and to promote the model of experience, reflection and action in our formation programmes'.

The tendency towards action is the factor which gives credibility to attitudes. We have to make ourselves able to be active in the middle of our reality and this means developing skills and forms of behaviour which make us men and women who are situated at the heart of our social, historical and cultural contexts.

In today's society it is not a matter of being lay Christians in spite of or behind the back of modern times but of being Christians fully within our modern times. This means that our ability to witness and to be active will be directly related to our ability to receive, to engage in dialogue, to listen to other different people and to learn from them. With this attitude 'we commit ourselves to promote the full presence of Christ in all cultures' and we try to attract others towards Him rather than oppress with our convictions or try to impose our truths since we trust that hearts are changed by God and not by us.

In order to work with Christ today in the midst of our reality and our times we need to equip ourselves to be able both to be innovators and promoters of new ways of doing things. We need to excel in the use of the means and very clear about the ends we are pursuing. We have to be judged worthy not so much by the posts we hold or by the activities we carry out but rather by our dedication and by the quality of our work. We must not succumb to offers of corruption or to the temptation of easy success. We will make every effort to reach a Christian and a critical understanding of phenomena such as globalisation, the environmental crisis or political problems and we will try to develop a special skill for social analysis.

And finally, I would like to suggest that from the point of view of our work to transform society, our family life is very relevant. The family is not only for us a source of energies which arises from love between and among persons or a place to relax after our daily struggle to extend God's Kingdom. I believe that it is above all the key place where we learn and develop in a permanent way the models which we would like for society as a whole. It is the place where we learn to identify sin, personal grace and the grace to be found in structures. From a good family

experience the following can be learned, come to fruition and be firmly rooted within us: an ability to express our affections in our lives, a proper harmony between male and female, a special sensitivity for and an inclination towards those who suffer, a well-balanced ability to share our resources – our talents and our goods, a respect for people's intimacy and freedom, a sincere and transparent way of communicating, the ability to recognise and give little importance to that which is superfluous and the living out of our faith – including all its crises – as a daily adventure. However, we do appreciate that for many people their experience of family is something traumatic or destructive. We are not to judge or to compare and we should not oppress people with our own experience. We can but help, be there, love, accept, serve and search for that little thread of life which always allows growth to continue...

## **5. From the Perspective of the Poor**

The teachings of Jesus, of the Church and of successive World Assemblies make it clear to us that this is not an extra option but that it is at the very heart of our experience. We need look no further than the World assembly of Itaici where we are told that 'we are called in our community life to encourage each other to look at the world and to work in it from the perspective of the poor and to increase our ability to encounter them, to know where they are in our societies and to find out how we might take part in their struggles'.

We want to destroy poverty, leave behind marginalisation and in order to do this we must love the poor and those who are marginalized, encounter them and take their side. We have to become acquainted with their problems, to value all that is positive in their culture which might often seem to us to be coarse, basic and even threatening.

When we analyse the problems of health, education, accommodation, the family or leisure our perspective should be that of the poor not in order to perpetuate poverty nor to idealise its characteristics but simply because we will have more possibilities to build justice and we will come closer to the poor and humiliated Christ Whom we wish to follow on His Paschal Way and we will obtain greater spiritual benefit and have a greater desire to work.

## **6. Conclusion**

The Christianity lived out in its lay variety is a style of life which expresses itself as a mature and stable vocation - which I have tried to outline above – and a formation process which reaches both personal and community level.

The relevance and the quality of a way of formation may be tested by what it produces in those who follow its paths. If it brings us close to the ideal we have dreamed of, if it permits us to live day by day in closer harmony with our vocation then we are on a true way of formation. On the other hand, if the way becomes exhausting and boring, if we often have the feeling that it does not present us with new stages or landmarks as we go along, it is probable that we are only repeating a model which originally might have been valid but one which today can no longer move our hearts. Or it may be that the way proposed is a good tried and tested one but that we are the ones at fault and if this is the case, then we must ask ourselves honestly the question of St. Ignatius as to whether we are carrying out well the Exercises which are being proposed to us.

And finally, I believe that our desire to journey along a way of formation will stop us from being like the first type of man in the Exercises – namely, the one who makes no efforts until at death's door.