

Apostolicity of the Church and Apostolate of the Lay Faithful

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“The Christian vocation is, of its nature, a vocation to the apostolate as well” (AA 2,1). This important pronouncement by the Second Vatican Council is slowly but surely permeating every corner of the Church today. The right and duty of each Christian to participate actively in the task of evangelization does not derive from any human authority in the Church, but from the simple and sublime event of baptism. Through the baptismal character, each of the faithful acquires the common priesthood with its triple function: prophetic, priestly, and royal.

Nevertheless, the baptized do not carry out their evangelizing mission in an anarchic way, as though each were acting on his or her own authority, without any relationship to the activity of others. The Gospel they are called to transmit has been received as a free gift; it has a redemptive content of which the faithful will never be the proprietor. The spread of the Gospel, as a work entrusted also to the lay faithful, has to be carried out in fidelity to the Gospel itself, which provides the criteria and orientation for their mission, within which space exists for the legitimate and fruitful spontaneity of the apostolate of the laity.

The responsibility of the lay faithful in evangelization is based on two concomitant causes: their condition as Christians and their condition as Church. For the faithful the Church is not merely an institution that provides pastoral services and guidance, but a reality constitutive of their spiritual and missionary existence. The fact that they (the laity) are Church is the source of their missionary impulse and specifies their way of acting. The apostolate of the laity, in short, is always an ecclesial apostolate, both in its personal form and in its associative form or in cooperation with the hierarchy.

All of this has a solid foundation in the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, which we will consider below. We will also need to look at its consequences, showing how the apostolicity of the whole Church, which we proclaim in the Nicene Creed, leads directly to the apostolic mission that the laity carries out. This also has to be considered in the area of the specific apostolate of the laity, in the context of the relationship between the Church and the world. Finally, we will conclude the study by highlighting certain consequences regarding the relationship between secularity and ecclesial communion.

The “ecclesial” nature of the mission of the faithful

“The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father” (AG 2,1). The Conciliar decree *Ad Gentes* places the Church’s missionary activity, right from its opening paragraphs, in a Trinitarian perspective. The Church on earth is seen as the prolongation in human history of the visible mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit. God’s self-communication to creatures is brought to completion by the missions of the Son and of the Spirit, which in turn originate in the Trinitarian processions.¹ During our pilgrimage on earth, therefore, being Church means being a missionary, such that anyone who participates in this ecclesiality also participates in its missionary aspect.

This Trinitarian perspective of the ecclesial mission, set forth in nos. 2-4 of the decree *Ad Gentes*, is in reality a necessary consequence of the Trinitarian perspective of the entire ecclesial communion, as described in nos. 2-4 of the constitution *Lumen Gentium*. This Conciliar document cites some words of St. Cyprian: “Thus, the Church has been seen as ‘a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit’” (LG 4, 2). Ecclesial communion is thus a participation in the intra-Trinitarian communion; and the ecclesial mission is seen as the dynamic dimension, on earth, of the divine communion.²

This same theological context allows us to clarify the ecclesial dimension of salvation, which the decree *Ad Gentes* places at the beginning of the text: “it pleased God to call men to share in his life not merely singly, without any bond between them, but he formed them into a people, in which his children who had been scattered were gathered together (cf. *Jn* 11:52)” (AG 2, 2). According to the divine plan, therefore, mankind is saved *in Ecclesia*, without this reality eliminating, naturally, the personal dimension of salvation. Salvation is, at the same time, both personal and ecclesial. This is also stressed in the decree *Unitatis Redintegratio*, although formulated in a different way: “What has revealed the love of God among us is that the Father has sent into the world his only-begotten Son, so that, being made man, he might by his redemption give new life to the entire human race and unify it” (UR 2, 1). For mankind, to be regenerated and to be congregated are two dimensions of the one reality of the redemption; the saving grace is at the same time both regenerating and unifying.

The focus adopted by the Council, therefore, presents a mutual involvement between the Christian’s ecclesial and missionary conditions. They cannot exist in

1. Cf. Marie-Joseph Le Guillou, *Décret sur L’activité de l’Église Ad Gentes*. “Introduction.” in *Documents Conciliaires*, Éditions du Centurion, Paris, 1966, 77-78.

2. Cf. Gérard Philips, *La Iglesia y su misterio en el Concilio Vaticano II: historia, texto y comentario de la constitución Lumen Gentium*, Vol. I, Herder, Barcelona 1968, 116-118.

isolation without falling into contradiction. Every missionary action is always an ecclesial (and Christian) activity; every form of evangelization, as a content of the mission, is carried out *in Ecclesia* and *ab Ecclesia*, in the Church and from the Church.

As is only natural, what is true for all Christians is also true for the lay faithful and for their apostolate in its various forms. Lay personal apostolate is always ecclesial, although often it is not an “ecclesiastical” apostolate, in the sense of taking part in public apostolic activities of the Church. As an “ecclesial” apostolate, we can consider how the attributes of the Church have a certain influence on the apostolate of the laity. Of course, among the four attributes, the Church’s apostolicity is especially in harmony with the subject of our study, and therefore we will dedicate special attention to it.

“Apostolic” nature of the mission of the faithful

First of all, we will consider the apostolicity of the Church in general. Then we will analyze the simultaneous origin of the condition of the faithful and of the hierarchical ministry in the college of the Twelve, and its consequences for our topic. Finally we will look at the relationship between apostolicity and catholicity, from the perspective of the apostolate of the faithful.

The apostolicity of the Church

In the Nicene Creed we find the words: “*Credo . . . unum, sanctam, catholicam et apostolicam Ecclesiam.*” “I believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.” The four adjectives that precede the noun “Church,” which theology calls “properties,” have an interesting history, too extensive to be examined here.³ However, it is worthwhile keeping in mind that, among these four properties, apostolicity is the final one that was introduced into the profession of faith.⁴ Of course the Church was already apostolic in its origin, but the conceptual formulation of apostolicity needed the prior conceptualization of the other three properties. Apostolicity appears in the creeds of the fourth century often united to catholicity,⁵ until it finds its definitive place in the Nicene or Constantinopolitan Creed together with the other three properties.⁶

Regardless of the historical process of the formulation of these properties, what concerns us here is to see the mutual connection among them. Fifteen cen-

3. This topic is discussed by Gustave Thils, *Les Notes de l'Église dans l'Apologétique catholique depuis la Réforme*, Duculot, Gembloux 1937.

4. Cf. L. M. DeWailly, “*Mission de l'Église et apostolicité,*” in *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 32 (1948), 5.

5. Cf. Philip Goyret, “*Dalla Pasqua alla Parusia. La successione apostolica nel tempus Ecclesiae,*” *Studi di Teologia*, 15, Edusc, Roma 2007, 27-28.

6. For a more detailed look at this whole question one might consult J.N.D. Kelly, *I simboli di fede della Chiesa antica. Nascita, evoluzione, uso del credo*, Dehoniane, Naples 1987.

turies later, in a magisterial declaration during Pius IX's pontificate, we read: "the true Church of Jesus Christ was constituted by divine authority and can be recognized by the four notes that we state that we believe in the creed. Each of these notes is so connected to the others that it cannot be separated from them."⁷ The Second Vatican Council also pointed to a reciprocal connection between the four properties, precisely in the missionary area: "Thus it is plain that missionary activity wells up from the Church's inner nature and spreads abroad her saving faith. It perfects her Catholic unity by this expansion. It is sustained by her apostolicity. It exercises the collegial spirit of her hierarchy. It bears witness to her sanctity while spreading and promoting it" (AG 6, 6).

But what is the meaning of the "apostolicity" of the Church? Following the theological tradition regarding the *apostolicitas originis, fidei, successionis* [apostolicity of origin, faith, and succession], the recent magisterium teaches: "The Church is apostolic because she is founded on the apostles, in three ways: 1) she was and remains built on 'the foundation of the Apostles,' (*Eph* 2:20; *Acts* 21:14), the witnesses chosen and sent on mission by Christ himself . . . 2) with the help of the Spirit dwelling in her, the Church keeps and hands on the teaching . . . the "good deposit," the salutary words she has heard from the apostles . . . 3) she continues to be taught, sanctified, and guided by the apostles until Christ's return, through their successors in pastoral office: the college of bishops, 'assisted by priests, in union with the successor of Peter, the Church's supreme pastor' (AG, 5)" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 857).

"Apostolicity of origin" stems from the missionary mandate found in *Mt* 28:18-20 and from that of Pentecost, when the Apostles, moved by the Spirit, began to preach the Gospel. In the divine plan, once the visible missions of the Son and the Spirit had concluded, these missions are united in their invisible actualization through the work of the Twelve. The apostles thus became the "foundation" of the Church (the secondary foundation), with Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord (*Eph* 2:20-21). What we want to emphasize here is that the whole Church has the Apostles as its origin: in them one finds "concentrated," as it were, the entire ecclesial reality. The new believers "are added" to the early community (cf. *Acts* 2:41, 47; 5:14; 11:24; 17:4). The Church grew as a body grows, so that joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love (*Eph* 4:16). The growth of the body takes place through God's gift, but it is important to realize that "the body itself also takes part in this."⁸

Although before Pentecost there were also other disciples besides the Twelve, they reached the symbolic number of one hundred and twenty (cf. *Acts* 1:15), in

7. Letter of the Holy Office to the Bishops of England, September 16, 1864, in DH 2888.

8. Heinrich Schlier, "La Lettera agli Efesini. Testo Greco, traduzione e commento," in *Commentario teologico del Nuovo Testamento*, 10.2, Paideia, Brescia 1973, 2, 328.

clear reference to a “multiplication” of the Twelve. These disciples were also “sent,” but the formal mission command was received only by the group of Twelve. The People of Israel, who issued in their totality from the twelve sons of Jacob, maintain their continuity in the twelve Apostles, who constitute “the seeds of the new Israel” (AG 5,1). Thus St. James could begin his epistle by addressing it to the twelve tribes in the dispersion (*Jas* 1:1).⁹

The “apostolicity of origin” also brings into view other important facets. The Twelve are “apostles,” that is, sent out in service of the kingdom of God, with full powers.¹⁰ The Twelve carry out their mission conscious of being “sent out,” and therefore carrying out a task that is not their own, but that they have received. God’s communication about himself, the transmission of the Gospel, is fulfilled, after Christ’s ascension, through the apostolic mission. God communicates himself to mankind through certain men. Access to the Kingdom of God is attained through those he has sent out. In this sense, apostolicity involves the human and social dimension of the Church, in addition to its spiritual nature.¹¹

In the light of the Church’s “apostolicity of origin,” the “apostolicity of doctrine” is seen as its natural consequence. Everything that we believe in the Church comes from the apostolic preaching. The faith professed in the Creed is the apostolic faith. It is interesting to see how St. Thomas Aquinas, when he considers the four notes of the Church, prefers to speak of *firmitas*, “solidity,” rather than apostolicity,¹² since the Church’s stability consists in teaching the same doctrine as the Apostles. For St. Thomas, the apostolicity of the Church is that of its faith, and here the Angelic Doctor is consistent with the expression *congregatio fidelium*, “assembly of the faithful,” which he likes to use to refer to the Church.¹³

If one looks back in history, this aspect of apostolicity, as the International Theological Commission states, “means not only that she (the Church) continues to profess the apostolic faith, but that she is committed to living it in accord with the norm of the early Church.”¹⁴ While if we consider the mission of the Apostles looking towards the future, we see clearly that their mission consisted in preaching the Gospel. The Apostles themselves “build up the Church” by spreading the faith, “gathering into the faith” the new believers. Participation in the apostolic mission, now as then, entails substantially the same thing.

On the one hand, the apostolic mission is prolonged in time as a mission of the whole Church, as we will show in detail below. On the other hand, the min-

9. Cf. Yves Congar, “Apostolicité,” in *Catholicisme* 1, col. 729.

10. Cf. R. H. Rengstorf, “Apostello” in *Grande lessico de Nuovo Testamento* 1, 1085.

11. Cf. L.-M. DeWailly, op. cit., 17-18.

12. Cf. “Explanation of the Apostle’s Creed,” art. 9, in *The Catechetical Instructions of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Sinag-Tala Publishers, Manila, p. 56.

13. Cf. Yves Congar, “L’apostolicité de l’Église selon saint Thomas,” in *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 44 (1960) 216.

14. International Theological Commission, *La apostolicidad de la Iglesia y la sucesión apostólica*, no. 1, 1, 1973, in *Documentos (1969-1996)*, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos (B.A.C.), Madrid 1998, 65.

istry of the Apostles, as pastors by divine institution, finds its continuity exclusively in their successors, the bishops, with the help of the priests and deacons. This aspect of the Church's apostolicity, called *apostolicitas successionis* [apostolicity of succession], has been solemnly reaffirmed in the last Ecumenical Council: "so also the Apostles' office of nurturing the Church is permanent, and is to be exercised without interruption by the sacred order of bishops. Therefore, the Sacred Council teaches that bishops by divine institution have succeeded to the place of the Apostles, as shepherds of the Church, and he who hears them, hears Christ, and he who rejects them, rejects Christ and him who sent Christ (cf. *Lk* 10:16)" (LG 20, 2). *Lumen Gentium* explains, in the same point, the reason for the succession: "That divine mission, entrusted by Christ to the apostles, will last until the end of the world (cf. *Mt* 28:20), since the Gospel they are to teach is for all time the source of all life for the Church. For that very reason the Apostles were careful to appoint successors in this hierarchically constituted society" (LG 20,1).

"The Gospel they were to propagate," although spread by the whole Church, as we have just seen, needs at the same time a specific ministry, the episcopate, so that the Gospel be "for all time the source of all life for the Church." The Church, which transmits and spreads the Gospel, does not provide itself with the Gospel, but receives it continually from above, in the Word and in the sacraments. In the words of the International Theological Commission (ITC), one can say that: "the apostolic succession is, then, that aspect of the nature and life of the Church which shows the real dependence of the community on Christ through those he has sent out." As a ministerial reality, the apostolic succession is "the sacrament of the active presence of Christ and the Spirit in the midst of the People of God."¹⁵ The ordained ministry, in which the apostolic ministry is perpetuated, reminds us that salvation, which the whole Church transmits, does not come from her, but from God.

Thus we can say: 1) the whole Church is apostolic, but only the bishops are the apostles' successors;¹⁶ 2) the apostolic mission is constantly extended in time by the entire Church, but the pastoral task of the Apostles subsists exclusively in the episcopal ministry (and, in a subordinate way, also in the priestly and diaconal ministry); 3) the apostolic succession is at the service of the Church's apostolicity; as the ITC goes on to say, "this apostolicity common to the whole Church is linked to the ministerial apostolic succession, which is an ecclesial structure inalienable to the service of all Christians."¹⁷

The apostolic mission, therefore, is carried out jointly by the faithful and their pastors, not in a "parallel" way but in an organic and mutually related one. In this

15. *Ibid.*, no. 5, in *Documentos (1969-1996)*, cit., 73.

16. The succession refers to the pastoral function of the Apostles, as *Lumen Gentium* states (20, 2). This task does not include those elements of the Apostles' ministry that stems from their condition as eye-witnesses of the paschal mystery. On this subject, see *Dalla Pasqua alla Parusia*, op. cit., 352-370.

17. International Theological Commission, *La apostolicidad de la Iglesia y la sucesión apostólica*, no. 1, 3, in *Documentos (1969-1996)*, op. cit., 67.

sense, the passage from Ephesians just cited (4:15-16) provides more clarity: the effort by all the members of the Church to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, is carried out not in an anarchical way, but harmoniously, within a body joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly.

In this context we can understand better what was said earlier about ecclesiality being “concentrated” in the “apostolicity of origin.” The twelve Apostles were at the same time both faithful and pastors, and they gave origin both to the union of the faithful and to the ministry of succession. What in its origin was a single reality in the persons of the Apostles, will have to be conserved in unity in the relationship between faithful and pastors. The Church’s apostolicity thus imbues from within the relationship between community and ministry, not only as a demand of the organization of a community, nor simply as a moral imperative, but as a unifying aspect constitutive of the Church.

What has been said up to now points to a way of conceiving apostolicity more dynamically and in a qualitatively richer way than that of a simple identity between the faith of today and the apostolic preaching. Today’s Church is the same Church as that of the Apostles, but we have to add that the Church’s mission is the same apostolic mission, and that therefore it has to be carried out more *apostolico*, in an apostolic way. Therefore we need to rediscover the permanent and dynamic character of apostolicity: the Church, engendered by the Apostles, has to be continually “re-engendered apostolically” in every time and place.

Participation by the faithful in the apostolic mission

We recalled above that the whole Church shares in the apostolic mission. But we need to recognize that for many of today’s faithful the missionary mandate continues to be directed exclusively to the Apostles and their successors in the ministry: that is, to the bishops with the help of the priests and deacons. To awaken these slumbering consciences, St. Josemaría wrote, as far back as 1939, a well known text directed to Christians in general: “Proclaim the Good News. ... I shall be with you... It is Jesus who has said this... and he has said it to you.”¹⁸ Christ’s words in *Mt* 28:19-20, addressed to the eleven Apostles, are here seen as a mandate addressed to all Christians.

The magisterium has addressed this issue directly in the last Council, in *Ad Gentes* 5,1. The evolution of early drafts of this text sheds significant light on this question. Referring to the missionary mandate in *Mt* 28:19-20, the early text read: “*Quod munus post eos haereditavit ordo episcoporum, una cum Successore Petri Ecclesiae visibili Capite. In exsequendo vero hoc mandato Ecclesia tota cooperatur, unusquisque secundum locum, officium et gratiam in corpore.*” [After them the order of

18. St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 904.

bishops inherited this task, united with Peter's Successor and Head of the visible Church. The whole Church cooperates, however, in carrying out this mandate, each according to one's place, office and gifts within the body.]¹⁹

This text, which did not appear in the preparatory schema, was introduced to connect the concept of mission with apostolicity. In one of the votes presented when drawing up this text, it was pointed out that “evangelization and the establishment of the Church have their origin and design in God's plan, communicated not to the people, but to the Apostles and their successors. The ‘*mitto vos*’ [I send you] is pronounced for the disciples that Christ had chosen and, precisely by this election and mission, they are called ‘apostles,’ that is, those who are sent.”²⁰ One thus finds a focus that, on the one hand, sees the mission as proceeding from apostolicity, according to the text of *Mt* 28:19-20, but views the mission as a task proper to the hierarchy (the Apostles' successors), and the simple faithful (“*Ecclesia tota*”) are left only with a role of “cooperation.” In short, the mission conferred on the Apostles passes to the bishops; naturally, the other faithful are involved in the mission, but not as a task received directly from the Apostles. Thus their role is viewed as only one of cooperation with the mission of the hierarchy.

This point of view was not accepted by the Conciliar body, especially after the approval of *Lumen Gentium*, which, immediately after citing *Mt* 28:19-20, states: “The Church has received this solemn mandate of Christ to proclaim the saving truth from the Apostles and must carry it out to the very ends of the earth” (LG 17). The subject who receives the missionary mandate (conferred on the Apostles) is now not only the hierarchy, but the entire Church. Joseph Lécuyer, a “*peritus*” or expert at the Council, argued when voting on this text: “there is in this passage (the early draft cited above) a theological error: the mission of the whole Church is not only a cooperation in the fulfillment of a mandate conferred on the hierarchy. The whole Church has been directly sent.”²¹ Joseph Ratzinger, also a Conciliar *peritus*, said in this regard: “*subiectum activitatis missionalis tota Ecclesia est*,” the whole Church is the subject of the missionary activity, while he reserved to the hierarchy the role of “moderating” this activity.²²

These voices were accepted by the Council, and in the new text, the *textus emendatus*, an equilibrium was established, thanks to a new introduction with the

19. *Acta Synodalia* IV/III, 666.

20. The opinion is that of Paul VI. The text can be read in the “Congar Dossier” relating to the Decree *Ad Gentes* (IV, V) preserved in the archive of Le Sauchoir, Paris, and published in Enrique Borda, *La apostolicidad de la misión de la Iglesia. Estudio histórico-teológico del capítulo doctrinal del decreto Ad Gentes*, Pont. Ateneo della Santa Croce, Rome 1990, Appendix VI, p. 283.

21. *Remarques sur le schema* “De activitate missionali Ecclesiae,” published in the appendix by J. B. Anderson, *A Vatican II pneumatology of the Paschal mystery: the historical-doctrinal genesis of Ad Gentes* I, 2-5, Gregorian Pontifical University, Rome 1988, 316-317.

22. “*Quia Ecclesia Dei in activitate sua ab hierarchia moderatur, moderamen missionum eodem modo res hierarchiae est*”: *Considerationes quoad fundamentum theologicum missionis Ecclesiae*, in *Congar Dossier relating to the decree Ad gentes*, IV (O), reproduced in Enrique Borda, op. cit., Appendix III, no. 5, p. 251. These considerations were read in the previous session, but they refer to the same topic. Cf. also *Acta Synodalia* IV/III, 740-741; IV/IV, 153, 523.

following words: “From the very beginning, the Lord Jesus ‘called to himself those whom he wished; and he caused twelve of them to be with him, and to be sent out preaching’ (*Mk* 3:13; cf. *Mt* 10:1-42)” (AG 5,1). “Thus the Apostles,” the text continues, “were the first budding-forth of the New Israel, and at the same time the beginning of the sacred hierarchy” (AG 5, 1). Here we have the key and definitive text, as far removed from a “hierarchical exclusivism” as it is from a dangerous “horizontalism.” As the *relatio* affirms: “*iam in ipso initio duos aspectus adesse, in quantum apostoli, quibus mandatum activitatis missionalis impositum est, tam germen totius novi populi Dei appellandi sunt (sicut ex. gr. numerus “12” ut numerus tribuum Israel exprimit) quam exordium sacrae hierarchiae sunt*” [already at the beginning two aspects are present, since the apostles, who received the missionary command, are called the seed of the whole new people of God (as for example the number “12” expresses the number of the tribes of Israel) as well as the beginning of the sacred hierarchy].²³

It would not be acceptable, therefore, to interpret the following part of the text (slightly modified in the definitive version) as contradicting what we have just cited. AG 5,1, after mentioning the Paschal mystery and the missionary mandate, adds: “Whence the duty that lies on the Church of spreading the faith and the salvation of Christ, not only in virtue of the express command which was inherited from the Apostles by the order of bishops, assisted by the priests, together with the successor of Peter and supreme shepherd of the Church, but also in virtue of that life which flows from Christ into his members: From him the whole body, being closely joined and knit together through every joint of the system, according to the functioning in due measure of each single part, derives its increase to the building up of itself in love (*Eph* 4:16).”

If one starts with a superficial analysis that pays attention only to the editorial form, one might perhaps conclude that the missionary mandate explicitly affects only the order of bishops, while the body of the Church’s members carries out the apostolic mission solely thanks to the life that Christ communicates to his members. This is, in fact, what was proposed in the Council discussion, in the final part of the Council.²⁴ After these explanations hopefully it is clear²⁵ that the missionary activity of the whole People of God has its foundation both in the missionary mandate, as well as in the life that Christ infuses into his members. Recently the magisterium once again emphasized “the urgency of Christ’s invitation to

23. *Acta Synodalia* IV/IV, 271. A few lines later the same idea is emphasized again: “*Sic iam ex ipso initio indicatur nunc et officium totius Ecclesiae et mandatum speciale, quod hierarchiae ecclesiasticae competit.*”

24. The text was not modified because, citing the words of the doctrinal commission, “a) *solummodo differentia missionis hierarchiae et membrorum non hierarchicorum insinuat; b) ex citatione Eph. 4, 17 et ex sequentibus communis affectio virtute vitae patet.*” *Acta Synodalia* IV/VII, 20-21.

25. The Council’s teaching here has not yet been well assimilated, in spite of the fact that more than forty years have passed since the publication of the Conciliar documents. As one reads in the presentation of the book, *Los Laicos en la eclesiología del Concilio Vaticano II. Santificar el mundo desde dentro* (ed. by Ramiro Pellitero, Rialp, Madrid, 2006), “the putting into practice of the Second Vatican Council is still today the great challenge and the great task confronting the Church and Christians” (p. 7).

evangelization and why it is that the mission entrusted by the Lord to the Apostles involves all the baptized. The words of Jesus ‘go therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you’ (*Mt* 28:19-20), are directed to everyone in the Church, each according to his own vocation.”²⁶

The missionary ministry is not conferred on the hierarchy and on the other faithful, therefore, in the same manner, because there is a difference in the mode of being an active subject in the apostolic mission. It is clear, however, that there is a direct connection between both realities (the hierarchy and the faithful) and the apostolic mission of the Twelve.

Apostolate, apostolicity and catholicity

We can state, therefore, that in accord with the Conciliar doctrine, the apostolic mission is entrusted to the whole Church. This enables us not only to discover once more the apostolic character of the entire assembly of the faithful, but to see the mission as a manifestation of apostolicity, at the same time as apostolicity is what configures the mission. As St. Josemaría emphasized on various occasions: “We must all feel responsible for the mission of the Church, which is the mission of Christ. He who does not have zeal for the salvation of souls; he who does not strive with all his strength to make the name and doctrine of Christ known and loved, will not understand the apostolicity of the Church.”²⁷

According to these principles, we can say that the apostolicity of the Church means that the initial and originating mission, granted to the Apostles, subsists in a permanent way in the Church. The Church continuously receives this mission and continuously carries it out. This connection between apostolate and apostolicity is found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church itself, specifically in the conclusion to the chapter on apostolicity (no. 863). After reaffirming the connection between apostolicity of doctrine and apostolicity of succession, it adds: “The whole Church is apostolic . . . in that she is ‘sent out’ into the whole world. All members of the Church share in this mission, though in various ways.”

In this regard, we can once again consider the link between the apostolicity of the Church and the other properties or notes. The one that is especially relevant here is catholicity. One could even say that, at first glance, apostolicity and catholicity coincide at least in part, because both notions imply the spread of the Gospel throughout the whole world. The Church “is catholic because she has been sent out by Christ on a mission to the whole of the human race” (CCC, 831). It is worth emphasizing, in this definition, the notion of being sent and of mission, both deeply rooted in apostolicity.

26. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note on Some Aspects of Evangelization*, December 12, 2007, no. 10.

27. St. Josemaría, *In Love with the Church*, no. 15.

Together with this “quantitative” aspect of catholicity, there is another that we could call “qualitative.” For “in her (the Church) subsists the fullness of Christ’s body united with its head (cf. *Eph* 1:22-23); this implies that she receives from him ‘the fullness of the means of salvation’ (*Ad Gentes*, 6) which he has willed: correct and complete confession of faith, full sacramental life, and ordained ministry in apostolic succession” (CCC, 830). Thus “the universality of the Church does not depend on its geographical distribution, even though this is a visible sign and a motive of credibility. The Church was catholic already at Pentecost. It was born catholic from the wounded heart of Jesus, as a fire which the Holy Spirit enkindled.”²⁸

If we compare these two aspects (catholicity and apostolicity), one could say that the Church’s mission consists in converting its indefectible qualitative catholicity into a real quantitative catholicity. But for the qualitative catholicity to become quantitative as well, the proclamation of the Gospel must be carried out in accord with a third meaning of catholicity, which we might call “intensive,” closely connected with the event that most deeply marks the catholicity of the Church: the day of Pentecost. At Pentecost the Gospel was proclaimed in a way that all were able to understand. The miracle of the plurality of tongues marks a new direction, in contrast with the division of tongues at the tower of Babel. This miracle, not destined to be repeated in the Church’s history, enjoys a permanent ecclesiological importance. It is precisely in this third sense (intensive catholicity) that it is taken up by *Lumen Gentium* as an introduction to the study of mission (no. 13). What the Council affirms is not just a linguistic question, but, more deeply, the capacity of the Gospel to imbue and take up all the legitimate cultural diversity present in mankind. “The People of God is composed of all the peoples of the world, because it receives from all of them its citizens, who are subjects of a kingdom which is not earthly, but heavenly.” The Church fosters and takes up “all the faculties, riches, and customs which reveal the special features of each people, in what there is of good in them...but in receiving them it purifies them, strengthens them and elevates them.”

Apostolicity therefore is catholic, and catholicity is apostolic, also because the assumption in Christ of all human realities is “measured by” apostolicity. The catholic mission, in other words, is always an apostolic mission. Both properties share similar features, make reciprocal demands, and cannot be separated. If the Church, hypothetically, were to abandon the catholic aim of its mission, it would also betray its apostolic identity. And, similarly, if it did not remain faithful to the apostolic tradition it received, it would also lose its catholicity. The apostolic witness, in short, demands a catholic missionary attitude, and vice versa.

These ecclesial characteristics (the properties or notes of the Church) and their intertwining, have relevance also from the existential point of view, in the daily life

28. *Ibid.*, no. 9.

of the faithful. As the recent magisterium points out: “Evangelization is not only accomplished through public preaching of the Gospel nor solely through works of public relevance, but also by means of personal witness which is always very effective in spreading the Gospel.”²⁹ Each of the faithful, therefore, is called to bear witness to the Paschal mystery in his or her life; their life is “apostolic” in the measure in which the “apostolic faith” takes body in it. Each of the faithful, in addition, as a member of the *congregatio fidelium* [assembly of the faithful] that is the Church, is called “to proclaim the saving truth . . . to the very ends of the earth” (cf. LG 17). As is natural, the “catholicity of the proclamation” is carried out by each one according to his or her possibilities, but the warning of St. Paul is valid for everyone: Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! (*1 Cor 9:16*), as *Lumen Gentium* stresses right afterwards.

In order to fulfill this apostolic mission, courage and daring are required in proclaiming the truth. Paul VI said that “even the finest witness will prove ineffective in the long run if it is not explained, justified . . . and made explicit by a clear and unequivocal proclamation of the Lord Jesus.”³⁰ And it is equally clear that the proclamation of the saving truth, if not accompanied by witness to this truth in one’s own life, is destined to sterility.

The apostolic mission and sanctification of the world

What is the content of the apostolic mission? Generically, we can identify it with the spread of the Gospel. But if we consider it more closely, and taking into account the missionary mandate in *Mt 28:19-20*, this content can be described as a triple function: prophetic, priestly and royal. Although preserving a substantial identity, this content is received, transmitted, and exercised in different ways according to the condition of those carrying out the mission: laity, ordained ministers, consecrated religious. In the third part of our study, we will consider the specific role of the lay faithful in carrying out this mission, always within the context of the apostolicity of the Church.

First of all, we will look at some apostolic writings that speak of the Church’s mission to the world, since the situation of the lay faithful in the world is precisely what characterizes them as such. Then we will consider the importance of human work for the Church’s apostolicity and catholicity.

The relationship of Church and world

The apostolic mission that the Church exercises till the end of time consists not only in the salvation of souls, but embraces the whole of material creation.

29. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note on Some Aspects of Evangelization*, op. cit., no. 11.

30. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, December 8, 1975, no. 22.

The lay faithful “by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God” (LG 31, 2). Therefore we will turn our attention now to the relationship between the Church and the world, since this is the context in which the laity carry out their mission.

In the New Testament, the redemption of the cosmos is described with dramatic features in Romans 8:20-21: creation will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. In the heavenly Jerusalem of the Apocalypse, whose walls had twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb (*Rev* 21:14), we will find, besides an immense multitude (*Rev* 19:1), also a new heaven and a new earth (*Rev* 21:1). In a passage that more directly concerns the ecclesial dimension of the redemption, we can cite the introduction to the Christological hymn in Colossians 1:13-20. All created realities in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible are seen as being guided towards a clear destiny: all things were created through him and for him (the Son), who is also the head of the body, the Church.

This same panorama is contemplated from the point of view of the final consummation in Ephesians 1:9-10. The mystery of his will (the will of the Father) is a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. The term “unite” here—or to translate it more literally, “recapitulate” (*anakefalaiosis*)—has a clear reference to the Church, given that the Christ of whom it speaks has been established as the head over all things for the Church which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all (*Eph* 1:22-23).³¹ The same explanation is found in Ephesians 4:15, where we are exhorted to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.³² Furthermore, the purpose of the gifts conferred by the glorified Christ is that of building up the body of Christ (*Eph* 4:12), that is, the Church, so that “in it, with it and by means of it the totality of the universe will grow towards Christ.”³³

The relationship between the Church and the world is not presented as a relationship between two independent or antagonistic realities, or between two parts of a whole, but rather as the same reality, but contemplated either in its initial moment, or in the consummation to which it is destined.³⁴ As the Christians of the first centuries said, “the world was created for the sake of the Church.”³⁵ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* cites this and adds: “God created the world for the sake of communion with his divine life, a communion brought about by the ‘con-

31. Cf. Heinrich Schlier, “La Lettera agli Efesini. Testo Greco, traduzione e commenta,” *Commentario teologico de Nuovo Testamento*, 10.2, Paideia, Brescia 1973 2, 90-91.

32. *Ibid.*, 324.

33. *Ibid.*, 325.

34. Cf. Jose Luis Illanes, “La condicion laical en la Iglesia,” in Pellitero (ed.), *Los laicos en la ecclesio-logica del Concilio Vaticano II*, op. cit., 136.

35. Hermas, *The Shepherd*, II, 4, 1, in *Fuentes Patristicas*, Vol. 6, Ciudad Nueva, Madrid 1995. Bilingual edition prepared by Juan José Ayan Calvo, p. 79.

vocation' of men in Christ, and this 'convocation' is the Church" (CCC, 760). As a Greek Father daringly said: "if one considers its goal, the Church existed before all things."³⁶

The world, work and holiness

Catholics are called to bring all things to God, incorporating in the Body of Christ not only other men and women but also every human value. "Christ's redemptive work," in the words of Vatican II, "while essentially concerned with the salvation of men, includes also the renewal of the whole temporal order. Hence the mission of the Church is not only to bring the message and grace of Christ to men but also to penetrate and perfect the temporal order with the spirit of the Gospel" (AA 5,1). Revelation does not tell us how the final transformation of creation will be accomplished; we do know, however, that: "throughout the course of the centuries, men have labored to better the circumstances of their lives through a monumental amount of individual and collective effort. To believers, this point is settled: considered in itself, this human activity accords with God's will" (*Gaudium et Spes* 34,1). This "effort" is, in the first place, human work, which is thus situated in the context of the "recapitulation" of the world in Christ. *Gaudium et Spes* continues: "For man, created to God's image, received a mandate to subject to himself the earth and all it contains, and to govern the world with justice and holiness; a mandate to relate himself and the totality of things to him who was to be acknowledged as the Lord and Creator of all. Thus, by the subjection of all things to man, the name of God would be wonderful in all the earth" (Ibid.).

This immense task received from the Creator, the sanctification of the world, is thus an integral part of the Church's apostolic mission. And therefore it is directly connected to the catholicity and the apostolicity of the Church. This task is carried out above all by the lay faithful. The laity have been entrusted with the task of "seek[ing] the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God . . . it is their special task to order and to throw light upon these affairs in such a way that they may come into being and then continually increase according to Christ" (LG 31,2).³⁷ In the words of St. Josemaría Escrivá: "The layman's specific role in the mission of the Church is precisely that of sanctifying secular reality, the temporal order, the world, from within, in an immediate and direct way."³⁸ "The immediate task of directly ordering temporal realities in the light of the doctrinal principles enunciated by the Magisterium corresponds specifically to the laity, who work immersed in all the circumstances and

36. St. Epiphanius, *Panarion seu adversus LXXX haereses*, 1,1,5, in PG 41, 181C.

37. As Msgr. Gérard Philips, also a Conciliar *peritus* and author of the initial schema of the second version of the Const. I, wrote: "the expression 'throw light upon' was intentionally chosen. If the laity do not respect temporal values or underestimate them, they will not 'throw light' on them; they will destroy them" (cf. *La Iglesia y su misterio...*, Vol II, Herder, Barcelona 1969, op. cit., 31).

38. St. Josemaría, *Conversations*, no. 9.

structures of secular life.”³⁹ The laity also have the mission of spreading the Gospel among their fellow men and women, whom they find in the most varied situations and circumstances that human work can create. They thus help implement both the Church’s catholicity and her apostolicity.

The sanctification of the world is closely tied to the fourth property of the Church: her holiness. The Church is holy not only because of her Founder and the presence of the Holy Spirit, not only in her institutions and faithful, but also in her activity and ends. The Church is holy and sanctifying (cf. CCC 824), and seeks to lead mankind and all creation to the holiness that will be fully attained only at the final consummation. *Lumen Gentium* includes in the “eschatological” holiness that the Church will attain at the end of time the participation by all creation in the process of sanctification: this eschatological holiness will take place “when there will come ‘the time of the restoration of all things’ (*Acts* 3:21). At that time the human race as well as the entire world, which is intimately related to man and attains to its end through him, will be perfectly reestablished in Christ” (cf. *Eph* 1:10; *Col* 1:20; *2 Pet* 3:10-13)” (LG 48,1).

This provides the theological framework needed to adequately understand the text from *Apostolicam Actuositatem* 2, 2 about the role of the laity. There we read: “the laity likewise share in the priestly, prophetic, and royal office of Christ and therefore have their own share in the mission of the whole people of God in the Church and in the world.” A superficial reading of this text could lead one to separate or isolate the various tasks that the laity fulfill “in the Church” from those they carry out “in the world,” thus erasing the specific character of the laity’s mission. But such a separation would be seriously mistaken. Precisely because the Church’s apostolic mission involves the sanctification of the world, the specific task of the laity in the Church is the one they carry out in the world.⁴⁰

Communion in the apostolic mission and secularity

The apostolate of the lay faithful, if viewed from within the apostolicity of the Church, shows the intrinsic link between secularity and ecclesial communion, thus pointing to a specific aspect of the Church’s unity. We know that ecclesial unity reaches its summit in the Eucharist. In the Eucharist, thanks to the sacred office exercised by the Church’s ministers, secular activity is transformed into an acceptable offering . . . sanctified by the Holy Spirit (*Rom* 15:16). The liturgy of the presentation of the gifts is very explicit in this regard: the bread, “fruit of the earth and made by human hands,” is changed for us into “the bread of life.” The wine, “fruit of the vine and work of human hands,” is turned into “our spiritual drink.” The “recapitulation” of all creation in Christ is thus anticipated in the Eucharist, and

39. *Ibid.*, no. 11.

40. Cf. Fernando Ocariz, “*La partecipazione dei laici alla missione della Chiesa*,” in *Annales Theologici* 1/1-2 (1987) 10.

human work plays an important role here. The world, in short, through the activity of the lay faithful, becomes the “matter” which is offered to God as a spiritual sacrifice, precisely because temporal realities are ordained towards the perfection of their proper nature.⁴¹

This, in turn, enables us to situate secularity within ecclesial communion. It is precisely the emphasis placed on secularity that leads to a strengthening of communion. Exclusion from communion often stems from self-sufficiency, from a posture that is equivalent to saying: “I don’t need you.” According to the Pauline doctrine, the limitations of the members are in direct relation to their specific functions: because the eye is only an eye, and not a hand, it cannot say to the hand: “I don’t need you.” Thus we reach the paradoxical situation that specificity doesn’t damage, but rather strengthens communion.⁴²

If one applies this principle to the properly lay dimension, we can say that the ecclesial mission in secular activities and communion with the pastors mutually imply one another, while any divergence would not be in harmony—neither on one side or the other, nor on both sides—with the apostolicity of the Church. This is a principle that is also true for all ecclesial realities, both in the terrain of the laity and in the context of consecrated life. All are called to participate in the apostolic mission, each according to their proper and specific condition, but without ever harming communion: at times working together in common apostolic projects; more frequently, each one engaged in their own specific area, but, in every case, with an open spirit, mutual recognition, and reciprocal appreciation.

Credo unam, sanctam, catholicam et apostolicam Ecclesiam. “I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.” To conclude these reflections, let us reaffirm decisively the intrinsic and reciprocal interconnection of the properties of the Church. “That they may all be one, even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they may also be in us, so that the world may believe” (*Jn 17:21*), Jesus asked the Father, thus uniting forever the catholicity of the apostolic mission with the unity of the Church in her indefectible holiness.

41. Cf. *Ibid.*, 16.

42. Cf. Raul Lanzetti, “*L’indole secolare proprio dei fedeli laici secondo l’esortazione apostolica post-sinodale ‘Christifideles Laici,’*” in *Annales Theologici* 3/1 (1989), 41.