

THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL
FOR THE LAITY

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FOREWORD

This publication is a new updated edition of our presentation of the Pontifical Council for the Laity. It is addressed to all those who have contact with this dicastery and those who are interested in the work we do. Its purpose is to provide information that will facilitate a general understanding of the identity, institutional aims, responsibilities and functions, and the structure and component parts of this Pontifical Council.

The information given here concerning the origin and development of the Council is in no way a comprehensive review, and it does not attempt to give an exhaustive picture of programmes and activities to date. Detailed information can be requested from the secretariat, and they will readily comply with all requests.

A dicastery of the Holy See can only be defined in the light of the papal magisterium, especially the documents and guidelines in which the popes have referred directly to that dicastery or to the Roman Curia in general. That is the material that we have drawn from here, and we complete it with references to other texts that are relevant to the specific subject.

I

PRESENTATION

1. A DICASTERY OF THE ROMAN CURIA AT THE SERVICE OF THE LAY FAITHFUL

The Pontifical Council for the Laity is a dicastery of the Roman Curia. It assists the Holy Father in the exercise of his pastoral office for the good and the service of the universal Church and the particular Churches in all that pertains to the advancement and coordination of the lay apostolate and to the Christian life of lay people in general.¹ Its ministerial character is clearly seen within the perspective of the Second Vatican Council. “In exercising his supreme, full and immediate authority over the universal Church, the Roman Pontiff employs the various departments of the Roman Curia, which act in his name and by his authority for the good of the Churches and in the service of the sacred pastors”.²

¹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, art. 1 and 131, *AAS* 80 (1988), 859 e 894.

² SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Decree *Christus Dominus*, no. 9, *AAS* 58 (1966), 676.

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

Although it holds a title similar to other councils of the Roman Curia, it is also distinguished from them. Whereas the other councils are concerned with particular areas, like for example, family life, culture, justice and peace and interfaith dialogue, the object of this council is a specific state of life or category of Christians, the *christifideles laici*.

2. ORIGINS

Vatican II brought about new awareness concerning the mystery of the Church and the mission of the Church in the world, and this could not fail to inspire substantial reform in the Curia. Paul VI put this into effect with the apostolic constitution *Regimini Ecclesiae Universae*³ of 15 August 1967. Alongside the centuries-old congregations, the tribunals and other curial offices, new dicasteries and secretariats were created to better respond to the needs of the times and to implement the teachings and directives of Vatican II.

³ In: *AAS* 59 (1967), 885-928.

The Pontifical Council for the Laity originated from a proposal formulated in number 26 of the conciliar decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem* on the apostolate of the laity.⁴ It was officially constituted for an experimental period of five years under the name *Consilium de Laicis* by Paul VI on 6 January 1967 with the ‘motu proprio’ *Catholicam Christi Ecclesiam*.⁵ At the end of that period, Pope Paul VI declared: “Whatever changes may be called for by this first phase [...] no one can fail to see that the Laity Council is destined to have a privileged place within the Church”.⁶ The Laity Council indeed proved to be “ever more an irreplaceable and effective instrument for the advancement of the laity in the Church”.⁷ Ten years after its creation, on 10 December 1976, with another ‘motu proprio’ *Apostolatus Peragendi*,⁸ Paul VI reformed it and included it among the permanent dicasteries of the Roman Curia with the name Pontifical Council for the Laity. The experience gained over the years, the maturity acquired in carrying out its mandate, the clear signs of faithful service and of the importance of its work for the life of the Church and the ministry of the Pope, earned for the dicastery the constant encouragement of John Paul II. He had been a consultor

⁴ In: *AAS* 58 (1966), 858.

⁵ In: *AAS* 59 (1967), 25-28.

⁶ PAUL VI, in: *Insegnamenti* IX (1971), 1051.

⁷ *Ibid.*, X (1972), 1031.

⁸ PAUL VI, Motu Proprio *Apostolatus Peragendi*, in: *AAS* 68 (1976), 696-700.

of the Laity Council when he was Archbishop of Krakow. He confirmed the Laity Council in the exercise of the demanding responsibilities that pertain to it by restating its structure and basic competence in the above-mentioned apostolic constitution on the Roman Curia, *Pastor Bonus*, 28 June 1988. Encouragement to continue with renewed zeal in fulfilling this mission was given by Benedict XVI when he addressed the members and consultors of the dicastery for the first time: “During the years of my service in the Roman Curia, I had the opportunity to appreciate the increasing importance of the Pontifical Council for the Laity in the Church; an importance that I have become even more aware of since the Lord called me to succeed the Servant of God John Paul II in guiding the entire Christian people, because I have been granted a more direct view of the work you carry out”.⁹

3. NATURE AND PURPOSE

The Pontifical Council for the Laity, defined by Paul VI in *Apostolatus Peragendi* as “one of the best fruits of the Second Vatican Council”,¹⁰ is an eloquent sign of a renewed understanding of the Church as mystery of missionary communion in which there is growing awareness of the

⁹ BENEDICT XVI, Address to the participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, 22 September 2006.

¹⁰ PAUL VI, Motu Proprio *Apostolatus Peragendi*, in: *AAS* 68 (1976), 697.

dignity and co-responsible participation of the lay faithful. Indeed, the laity can only be understood in the light of an ecclesiology of communion and mission and in relation to the concrete conditions of life in the world. It is therefore not by chance that there is a close link between the decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem* and the conciliar constitutions *Lumen Gentium* on the Church and *Gaudium et Spes* on the Church in the modern world.

Paul VI liked to point out that this new body has two indisputable poles of reference: the laity and the hierarchy. “Your Council”, he said, “must remain in an attitude of listening and dialogue, attentively discerning the needs and possibilities of salvation in the environments in which they (the laity) are living”.¹¹ He encouraged the Council “to gather from all horizons the echoes coming from life in all its aspects and from the ways in which lay Christians, in the various countries and continents, are organizing to meet these appeals”.¹² “You are direct witnesses”, he said to the senior staff, members and consultors, “of these movements of thought and action, of their different manifestations, of the underlying sentiments by which they are inspired. You can appreciate the positive elements they comprise and bring [the Holy Father] precious elements of judgment [...]. We also expect of you that your

¹¹ IDEM, in: *Insegnamenti VIII* (1970), 208.

¹² *Ibid.*, IX (1971), 1051.

sense of the Church, your attachment to the visible Head today, will inspire you at the same time to become his interpreters among your brothers and sisters, and to let them know about his concerns as a pastor; of his instructions and the indications it is incumbent on him to give for their apostolate”.¹³ On another occasion, he said: “The Council must be mindful and bear witness to the fact that zeal and devotion are not enough. There must also be reflection, meditation and constant effort to measure up to the Gospel and the Church’s magisterium”.¹⁴ This confirms the responsibility of the dicastery to promote “the interrelationship of the apostolate of the laity with that of the hierarchy: two forces which it is impossible, in the constitution of the Church, to imagine divergent”.¹⁵ The Council must help to bring about “a current” within the “living organism” of the Church, through which “the head and the members will be closely united in the same love for Christ [...]; where the children’s concerns will be known to the father and shared by him, while the father’s words will be heard by all his children, understood and put into practice”.¹⁶

This twofold, indivisible and fruitful approach was continued by John Paul II as basic to the service rendered by the Laity Council. “On

¹³ *Ibid.*, VII (1969), 145.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, VIII (1970), 208ff.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 209.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, VII (1969), 145.

the one hand, through listening and dialogue, you must be particularly attentive to the aspirations, the needs and the challenges present in the lives of lay people as persons, in their families, in their movements and their Christian communities, as well as in their various social and cultural commitments [...]. On the other hand, you must evaluate the varied experiences of the laity in the light of Revelation and Christian tradition, and ensure that they take place in a spirit of fidelity to the Word of God and the teachings of the Church”¹⁷ and “in profound communion with the pastors who, in turn, are united with the Chair of Peter”.¹⁸ This service to the laity of the whole world – all of whom are called to build up the Church which is being constantly renewed by sacramental, hierarchical and charismatic gifts – cannot therefore be separated from careful consideration of what the Spirit of God is stirring in the lives of individuals and communities.

The task of fostering and encouraging the participation of the lay faithful in the life and mission of the Church must take into account the fact that the laity are people who are very diverse one from another. They live in very different situations and conditions. Their Christian instruction has reached very different levels, and the kinds of commitment they offer are hi-

¹⁷ JOHN PAUL II, Address to the Pontifical Council for the Laity and the Committee for the Family, 22 September 1980.

¹⁸ IDEM, Address to the participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, 7 June 1986.

ghly diversified. The foremost mission of the Pontifical Council for the Laity is to “strengthen the baptised in their knowledge of their identity and Christian vocation through a wealth of initiatives”.¹⁹

The wide scope of the service rendered by the Pontifical Council has been clearly indicated by Paul VI, John Paul II and Benedict XVI. “The field is immense and the challenge considerable: it is to evangelize people and cultures by contributing from within, as leavening, to the sanctification of the world, and by penetrating the temporal order with the spirit of the Gospel in order to build up a world more worthy of human beings, of the children of God”.²⁰ “An immense task”, John Paul II repeated some years later; “a task inherited from the great event of the Second Vatican Council: bringing an ever increasing number of Christians to be committed to living the priesthood of their baptism, consciously and consistently, as stones for Christ’s building, citizens and active agents of his pilgrim people”.²¹

Benedict XVI tells us that “to speak of Catholic laity is to refer to the countless baptized persons working in multiple and various circumstances so that they can grow as disciples and

¹⁹ IDEM, Address to the participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, 25 November 2004.

²⁰ PAUL VI, in: *Insegnamenti XV* (1977), 1013.

²¹ JOHN PAUL II, Address to the participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, 5 October 1981.

witnesses of the Lord and rediscover and experience the beauty to be found in the truth and joy of being Christians. The current cultural and social conditions render still more urgent this apostolic action in order to generously share the treasure of grace and holiness, of charity, doctrine, culture and works, from which the stream of Catholic tradition flows”.²²

4. STRUCTURE

4.1. *Secretariat*

The Pontifical Council for the Laity has at its head a president, assisted by a presidential committee of cardinals. The president is assisted by a secretary and under-secretary.

Within the secretariat, there are four sections that deal with separate areas. These are, respectively:

- associations of the lay faithful, ecclesial movements and new communities;
- women in Church and society;
- youth ministry;
- sport ministry.

About fifteen lay people are employed full-time for secretarial work and translation, for the library, archives and protocol, in administration and the dicastery publications and website.

²² BENEDICT XVI, Address to the participants in the 23rd Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, 15 November 2008.

Senior staff and their closest collaborators (heads of sections and “*aiutanti di studio*”) meet once a week in the “*congresso*” to deal with current affairs and the implementation of the Council’s programme.²³

4.2. *Members and consultors*

Whereas the members of the congregations are mainly cardinals and bishops, the Pontifical Council for the Laity has a majority of members and consultors who are lay people,²⁴ appointed by the Holy Father for a period of five years.

“This Council (composed of men and women) is an expression of the different continents, the different cultures and age-groups of God’s people. It has certainly not been possible to include all the situations and the social conditions of humanity [...]. But, such as it is, the Council must endeavour to represent the laity as a whole”.²⁵ Paul VI could therefore say that when he was addressing the dicastery – its members and consultors – he was “in a way addressing all the laity in the Church”.²⁶ It is not meant to be a formal representation of Christian communities, associations of the faithful and other bodies, but only of the diversity of situations

²³ Cf. *Regolamento generale della Curia romana*, art. 118ff., *AAS* 91 (1999), 677.

²⁴ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, art. 132, *AAS* 80 (1988), 894.

²⁵ PAUL VI, in: *Insegnamenti X* (1972), 1032.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, XII (1974), 895.

and experiences which the members and consultants – although appointed in a personal capacity – can represent and interpret in the dicastery.

The Pontifical Council for the Laity thus becomes a presence of the laity in the Roman Curia, an expression of their concerns and hopes at the heart of the universal Church.

The members are called together periodically for plenary assemblies. On the basis of the experiences, needs and expectations of lay people throughout the world, they discuss the general orientation and the programmes of the Council.²⁷ The consultants are called to express an opinion on matters within their competence in theological, canonical, pastoral and similar fields.²⁸

4.3. *Methods of work*

The ordinary activity of the Pontifical Council for the Laity involves a close network of contacts through correspondence, visits, meetings and study sessions. These go together with the planning, organization and implementation of more important projects such as large gatherings (world consultations of the laity, world youth day, world meetings with representatives from associations of the faithful, ecclesial mo-

²⁷ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, art. 11, *AAS* 80 (1988), 862; see also: *Regolamento generale della Curia romana*, art. 112ff., *AAS* 91 (1999), 675ff.

²⁸ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, art. 12, *AAS* 80 (1988), 862.

vements and new communities), laity congresses in different continents or regions, international meetings on subjects of special interest and current relevance (women in Church and society, Christian witness in the world of work, politics, culture, etc.).

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

- to study questions of particular interest in the light of the papal magisterium;
- to create awareness of the problems arising in the lives of Christian lay people;
- to formulate suggestions for the programmes to be adopted;
- to study documents being drafted by the dicastery;
- to involve the members in making the Council's activities and programmes known in the local Churches and in the associations of the faithful, ecclesial movements and new communities.

The work of the Pontifical Council is documented by a series of periodical publications: the *News bulletin* which presents a panorama of the Council's activities; the *Laity Today* collection which publishes the proceedings of our plenary assemblies and major meetings, and monographic syntheses of studies and experiences in particular fields; the *Youth* collection which mo-

stly publishes the proceedings of international youth forums and youth ministry congresses; The *World Youth Day Magazine* published by the John Paul II Youth Foundation which deals with World Youth Day.

Information about the Council and its activities can also be found on the website of the Holy See (*www.vatican.va*) in the section reserved to the dicastery, and on the website of the Pontifical Council for the Laity (*www.laici.va*).

4.4. *Interlocutors*

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

- the other dicasteries of the Roman Curia;
- diocesan bishops;
- bishops' conferences, especially through their laity commissions;
- national laity councils;
- associations of the faithful, ecclesial movements and new communities;
- international agencies and organisations that deal with issues of interest to the dicastery.

It can rightly be said, therefore, that the Pontifical Council for the Laity – called “to focus attention more and more, within the Curia and outside it, on the role of the laity in the one

service of the Church”²⁹ – is a dicastery “whose doors are open” for the most diverse people and experiences. Benedict XVI said that “Every milieu, circumstance and activity in which we engage that can become resplendent with the unity of faith and life is entrusted to the responsibility of lay faithful, moved by the desire to communicate the gift of encounter with Christ and the certainty of the human person’s dignity”.³⁰

5. A “MAGNA CARTA”

The 7th ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on “The vocation and mission of the laity” (October 1987) afforded the Pontifical Council for the Laity a panorama of the manifold realities of the laity at world level twenty years after the close of the Second Vatican Council. The Pontifical Council was called to collaborate actively in the preparation of this event,³¹ in which a significant number of lay people took part from all over the world in various capacities.

The guidelines of the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (1988) are today

²⁹ PAUL VI, in: *Insegnamenti X* (1972), 1035.

³⁰ BENEDICT XVI, Address to participants in the 23rd Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, 15 November 2008.

³¹ J.L. ILLANES, *Consejo Pontificio para los Laicos*, in: *Ius Canonicum*, 30 (1990), no. 60, 504: “The Cardinal President of the Council for the Laity was one of the “presidents” of the Synod; two officials of the Council were appointed as “experts”; and among the “auditors” there were many lay people related to the Council for the Laity or to institutions with which the Council is in close contact”.

the main reference as regards the vocation of lay people, their communion and participation in the life and mission of the Church, and their service to humankind and society. This document has been widely received with much interest. Its value lies in having dealt together with three important objectives. In the first place, it provides an organic summary of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council on the laity, in the light of the subsequent magisterium and practice of the Church. Secondly, it offers criteria for delicate and necessary discernment of experiences, trends and forms of lay participation that characterized the first post-conciliar period. It is receptive of the innovations that have emerged (non-ordained ministry, ecclesial movements, the participation of women in the life of society and the Church). Thirdly, it gives new indications intended “to stir and promote a deeper awareness among all the faithful of the gift and responsibility they share [...] in the communion and mission of the Church”.³²

This apostolic exhortation has been a real “magna carta” that has inspired and guided the programmes subsequently adopted by the Pontifical Council for the Laity. That is the reason why the dicastery celebrated the twentieth anniversary of its publication in 2008. It was the subject of study at the twenty-third Plenary

³² JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 2, *AAS* 81 (1989), 397.

Assembly.³³ On that occasion, during an audience with the members and consultors of the dicastery, Benedict XVI said that *Christifideles Laici* takes up the teachings of Vatican II and offers guidelines for “belonging to the ecclesial communion, participation in the building of the Christian community and the Church’s mission, witness in all social contexts and commitment to service of the person for the individual’s integral development and for the common good of society”.³⁴ The very title of the exhortation – *Christifideles Laici* – reminds us of the identity, dignity and responsibility of the laity. All the activities undertaken by the dicastery have always aimed to foster the participation of the laity based on renewed adhesion to the Mystery, on coming to know Christ and following him, and on finding new joy in proclaiming the Good News. That is why the response of the dicastery to the question of the vocation of the laity has always preferred to speak of “being” rather than “doing”. It is a new creation of men and women incorporated in Christ through the grace of baptism, participating in his threefold office that is priestly (spiritual worship and call to holiness), prophetic (witness and proclamation) and kingly (transforming the world according to the spirit of the Gospel).

³³ Cf. *Christifideles laici. Bilancio e prospettive*, a cura del Pontificium Consilium pro Laicis, Città del Vaticano 2010.

³⁴ BENEDICT XVI, Address to participants in the 23rd Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, 15 November 2008.

6. FIELDS OF ACTIVITY

6.1. *Contacts with bishops' conferences and local Churches*

The Pontifical Council for the Laity has working relations with bishops' conferences and with bishops in their respective dioceses. The true growth of the *christifideles laici* depends to a large extent on the ministry of the bishops, and so too does their active participation in the mission of the Church.

Over the years, meetings with individual diocesan ordinaries have become more and more frequent, and meetings with groups of bishops on their *ad limina* visits have become increasingly important. The subjects most frequently discussed on these occasions are the following: the Christian education of the laity; the relations that ecclesial movements and new communities have with their pastors, and their integration into the life of the local Churches; the non-ordained ministries entrusted to lay people; their engagement in the world (especially in public life and politics); the active presence of women in the Church and society; youth ministry. Conversations with the bishops help the dicastery to learn about local situations and experiences, and this is essential in order to discern the direction in which future programmes should be directed.

The dicastery occasionally organises seminars for bishops on specific topics. One example is the seminar on the subject of the presence of ecclesial movements and new communities in

the life of the local Churches and their relations with the pastors.³⁵ John Paul II asked bishops to “show fatherly magnanimity and far-sighted charity (cf. 1 *Cor* 13:4) towards these realities”,³⁶ and Benedict XVI repeated this call when he said: “I ask you to go out and meet the movements with much love” because “love is the distinctive sign of the Good Shepherd: it makes the exercise of the ministry that has been entrusted to us authoritative and effective”.³⁷

Dialogue and collaboration with bishops’ conferences are intensified whenever regional or continental congresses of the laity are held. These have included the Congress of Lay Catholics in the Middle East which was held in Beirut in 1997; the Congress of the Catholic Laity in Eastern Europe held in Kiev in 2003; the Congress of Asian Catholic Laity held in Seoul in 2010.³⁸ These congresses help the Pontifical Council for the Laity to further its relations of collaboration with organisations that are at the service of episcopal collegiality, including the Latin American Episcopal Conference (CELAM), the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC), the

³⁵ Cf. *The Ecclesial Movements in the Pastoral Concern of the Bishops*, edited by *Pontificium Consilium pro Laicis*, Vatican City 2000; see also: *Pastors and the Ecclesial Movements*, edited by *Pontificium Consilium pro Laicis*, Vatican City 2009.

³⁶ JOHN PAUL II, Message to the participants in the seminar on ecclesial movements and new communities, 18 June 1999.

³⁷ BENEDICT XVI, Address to bishops and representatives of ecclesial movements and new communities, 17 May 2008.

³⁸ Cf. *Proclaiming Jesus Christ in Asia Today*, edited by *Pontificium Consilium pro Laicis*, Vatican City 2011.

Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), and the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE).

6.2. *Associations of the faithful, ecclesial movements and new communities*

6.2.1. *The new era of group endeavours of the lay faithful*

A large part of the activity of the Pontifical Council for the Laity is described at the beginning of art. 134 of the apostolic constitution *Pastor Bonus*: “Within the parameters of its own competence, the Council performs all activities regarding lay associations of the Christian faithful”.³⁹ The scope of this task can be gauged from the apostolic exhortation *Christifideles Laici*. It notes “the richness and the versatility of resources that the Holy Spirit nourishes in the ecclesial community [...] and the capacity of initiative and the generosity of our lay people”. It speaks of a “new era of group endeavours” of the lay faithful, in which, “alongside the traditional forming of associations, and at times coming from their very roots, movements and new sodalities have sprouted”.⁴⁰

We all remember a special occasion organised by the Pontifical Council for the Laity in 1998 when these groups came together to give com-

³⁹ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, art. 134, *AAS* 80 (1988), 895.

⁴⁰ IDEM, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 29, *AAS* 81 (1989), 444.

mon witness. It was the first World Congress of Ecclesial Movements (27-29 May) followed by John Paul II's meeting with ecclesial movements and new communities on the vigil of Pentecost (30 May).⁴¹ The Holy Father addressed the members of movements who were gathered in Saint Peter's Square. He spoke of how this totally unexpected and explosive innovation had arisen and spread in the Church, sometimes giving rise to reservations and tension: "It was a testing period for their fidelity, an important occasion for verifying the authenticity of their charisms. Today a new stage is unfolding before you: that of ecclesial maturity. This does not mean that all problems have been solved. Rather, it is a challenge. A road to take. The Church expects from you the 'mature' fruits of communion and commitment".⁴² During the Congress that had taken place before the gathering, the prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, gave a memorable lecture entitled "The Ecclesial Movements: A theological reflection on their place in the Church".⁴³ He outlined the historical and theological background of movements of the laity that had taken place in the Church over the centuries, and how these had opened new ways of collabo-

⁴¹ Cf. *Movements in the Church*, edited by *Pontificium Consilium pro Laicis*, Vatican City 1999.

⁴² JOHN PAUL II, Address at a gathering of ecclesial movements and new communities, 30 May 1998.

⁴³ Cf. *Movements in the Church*, op. cit., 23-51.

ration and closer unity between the pastors of the local Churches and new movements.

In order to follow up on the commitments made on that occasion, the Pontifical Council for the Laity began a series of activities in collaboration with dioceses, bishops' conferences, other offices of the Roman Curia and many movements, associations and new communities. These came together on several occasions for study and analysis of some pressing and important issues. This included the seminars for bishops from around the world that we have already mentioned (cf. § 6.1.); meetings of representatives of movements and new communities held regularly at the offices of the Pontifical Council for the Laity to study current issues and to renew their commitment to communion and apostolate; their involvement in congresses of the Catholic laity, and in the preparation of World Youth Day.

These activities were given new encouragement by Benedict XVI. Soon after he began his pontificate, he wanted to personally meet with movements and new communities. A second international gathering took place at the Pentecost vigil in Saint Peter's Square on 3 June 2006. It was also preceded by a congress organised by the Pontifical Council for the Laity on "The beauty of being a Christian and the joy of communicating it".⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Cf. *The Beauty of being a Christian: Movements in the Church*, edited by *Pontificium Consilium pro Laicis*, Vatican City 2007.

The Holy Father commended the work of the dicastery with these new ecclesial groups, and expressed appreciation for “the work carried out during recent decades to welcome, accompany, discern, recognize and encourage these ecclesial realities, for encouraging them to grow in awareness of their Catholic identity, for helping them to be inserted more fully in the great tradition and living fabric of the Church, and for accompanying them in their missionary work”.⁴⁵

The Pontifical Council for the Laity has full respect for the associative freedom of the laity. It encourages the growth and diffusion of lay groups, both new and longer established (*Catholic Action* has always had a special place among these groups). It appreciates their charisms and pedagogies and recognises the great contribution they make through their presence in the communion and mission of the Church. Pope John Paul II, in referring to the great diversity of forms of association, spoke of the “very useful way of getting to know each other better and of recognising the gifts and fruits brought by other associative experiences, [thereby overcoming] prejudice and opposition [...] in order to live in more transparent communion, to enrich each other and to help all to more actively do their part in the one mission of the Church”.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ BENEDICT XVI, Address to participants in the 23rd Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, 15 November 2008.

⁴⁶ JOHN PAUL II, Address to participants in the 14th Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, 14 May 1992.

This approach by the dicastery has helped to create an atmosphere of reciprocal recognition, collaboration and communion among very different groups as well as within the sphere of their local Churches.

The dicastery is also attentive to lay groups or associations in which the members live out their baptism according to the evangelical counsels without becoming or wanting to become institutes of consecrated life.⁴⁷ There has also been an increase in fraternities and lay associations that share the charism of certain religious communities and that have contacts with the dicastery.

As associations of the faithful have been flourishing and increasing in number, the Pontifical Council for the Laity undertook the task, asked of it in *Christifideles Laici*, of preparing a list of associations that have been officially approved by the Holy See.⁴⁸ The resulting directory gives a broad and systematic description of each of these contemporary groups of Catholic laity. The directory of international associations of the faithful was published in 2004.⁴⁹ Associations included in the book are all presented with the same format which includes information on their history, identity, structure, areas of presence, work and contact details. The

⁴⁷ Cf. *Witnessing to Rich Gifts*, Documentation Service no. 24, Pontifical Council for the Laity, Vatican City 1992.

⁴⁸ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 31, *AAS* 81 (1989), 449.

⁴⁹ Cf. *International Associations of the Faithful. Directory*, edited by *Pontificium Consilium pro Laicis*, Vatican City 2004.

Directory is now available on the website www.laici.va and is updated regularly.

6.2.2. *The exercise of power of jurisdiction*

As group experiences have multiplied, the Pontifical Council for the Laity – which has the delicate responsibility of discernment in their regard – has had to undertake careful study of the current canonical norms for the *potestas iurisdictionis* and its exercise, according to art. 134 of the apostolic constitution *Pastor Bonus*. In this context, the requests it has received for recognition or canonical erection have led it, on the one hand, to define a process for the presentation and study of statutes and the drafting of decrees and, on the other hand, to intensify consultation with canonists on specific issues. These include the criteria for distinguishing between “public” and “private” associations; membership in Catholic groups of Christians from other confessions and communities; the canonical configuration of associations whose members follow the evangelical counsels; the participation of priests and religious in lay associations and movements, etc.

The approval of statutes is regulated by a meticulous procedure that ensures that associations meet specific requirements. First of all, they must be international. An essential requirement is the effective presence of members of the association in the local Churches of several

countries in the world. Other factors taken into consideration are the number of members and the nature and importance of the work carried out by the association. These are open criteria that are applied with the flexibility necessary according to the case of each association. Regular contact between the Pontifical Council for the Laity and the leaders of associations of the faithful is an indispensable way of ensuring that the dicastery is sufficiently acquainted with each association.

Recognition of an association of the faithful by the Holy See presupposes that it has already been recognised by a particular Church. Recognition at diocesan level is normally obtained in the particular Church where the association first began. Bishops of the other dioceses in which the association is present should send the Pontifical Council for the Laity letters of recommendation in support of the request for pontifical approval. The dicastery can thus verify the international character of the association as well as be informed by the pastors of the Church concerning the spiritual and apostolic fruits of its members. This requirement holds significant ecclesiological importance as it is a concrete manifestation of mutual collaboration between the universal and local Church.

The procedure begins with a formal request sent by the moderator of the association to the president of the Pontifical Council for the Laity. Draft statutes drawn up by the association

should be included as well as all the documentation that will present the association, its history, aims, activities, approximate number of members, presence in particular Churches and contacts with diocesan bishops. A request of this kind is very significant from the canonical point of view because it is exercising the freedom of association of the faithful that is recognised by Church law.⁵⁰

The dicastery first examines the documentation received in order to ensure that all the prerequisites are present before commencing the process. When this has been completed, the dicastery submits the statutes for assessment. This is done by several canon lawyers who are consultants of the Pontifical Council for the Laity. In addition, the text of the statutes is sent to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to be examined in order to receive the required “prior judgement”. The dicastery will draw up its observations solely on the basis of this data and will communicate this to the interested parties. During this technical-juridical phase, the association of the faithful adds to the statutes the provisions established by the dicastery in order to prepare the definitive text to be presented for approval. The final review of the statutes is followed by the concluding phase of the procedure. The dicastery draws up an administrative

⁵⁰ Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 215; see also: JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 29, *AAS* 81 (1989), 443-446.

decree with which it recognises or constitutes the international association of the faithful and approves its statutes *ad experimentum* for an initial period of five years. At the end of this period, a new decree is normally issued giving definitive approval to the statutes of the association.

It can be seen that the Pontifical Council for the Laity, through these administrative processes, is exercising ecclesiastical power of governance, thus participating in one of the functions that characterise the congregations of the Roman Curia. Moreover, the dicastery exercises power of jurisdiction when it gives an administrative ruling on the hierarchical recourse that individuals, groups or associations of the laity may present for its consideration and deliberation, while always respecting the procedures laid down in this regard in the Code of Canon Law.

6.3. *The participation of the laity in the life of the ecclesial community*

The dicastery encourages the participation of the lay faithful in the life of the local Christian community in communion with their pastors. This brings about a deep sense of belonging to the Church that is enhanced by recognition of the diversity and complementarity of vocations, ministries, charisms, states of life and obligations in the Church. The participation of the laity – sustained above all by their liturgical and sacramental life which is the source of the vocation and mission of the faithful – is expres-

sed in the dimensions of community, charity, catechesis, education and missionary work. The Pontifical Council for the Laity is convinced of the importance of Christian initiation and the sacraments in the life of faith of the lay faithful, and therefore it has devoted much attention and study to the sacraments of Christian initiation: Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist, this last being the source and summit of Christian life.⁵¹

The dicastery affirms the important role of the parish and the need for this role to be rediscovered in our times. It supports efforts that are directed to parish renewal.⁵² There is an important role for the lay faithful to play in this process with their sense of shared responsibility and active engagement in the life and mission of the parish community. This calls for permanent and integral programmes of comprehensive Christian education.

The Pontifical Council for the Laity is very attentive to small communities and ecclesial base communities. Many of the lay faithful give expression to their Christian commitment within these communities. There are forms of traditional piety to be found here through which a great number of lay people express their attachment to the faith.

⁵¹ Cf. the following: *Rediscovering Baptism*, edited by *Pontificium Consilium pro Laicis*, Vatican City 1998; *Rediscovering Confirmation*, edited by *Pontificium Consilium pro Laicis*, Vatican City 2000; *Rediscovering the Eucharist*, edited by *Pontificium Consilium pro Laicis*, Vatican City 2004.

⁵² Cf. the following: *Riscoprire il vero volto della parrocchia*, edited by *Pontificium Consilium pro Laicis*, Vatican City 2005; *La parrocchia ritrovata. Percorsi di rinnovamento*, edited by *Pontificium Consilium pro Laicis*, Vatican City 2007.

6.4. *Lay commitment in the world*

There is need for a consistent and effective presence of lay Christians in sectors of vital importance for society, and that means that priority must be given to adequate Christian instruction and pastoral accompaniment for lay people who have posts of responsibility in public life. Special emphasis is given to the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church in this educational process.⁵³ The Pontifical Council for the Laity takes particular interest in programmes and initiatives that are directed towards the dissemination and concrete implementation of the social teaching of the Church in political life, in work and industry, in trade unions, in culture, etc. Benedict XVI said in this regard: “Bring Christ’s light to all the social and cultural milieus in which you live. [...] Wherever love is expressed as a passion for the life and destiny of others, wherever love shines forth in emotions and in work and becomes a force for the construction of a more just social order, then a civilization is built there that can withstand the advance of barbaric inhumanity. Become builders of a better world according to the *ordo amoris* in which the beauty of human life is expressed”.⁵⁴

⁵³ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Vatican City 2004.

⁵⁴ BENEDICT XVI, Message to the participants of the Second World Congress on ecclesial movements and new communities, 22 May 2006.

The dicastery regularly holds symposia, conferences and international congresses that deal with the responsibilities of the lay faithful with regard to the challenges of the contemporary world. One example is a congress held in 1995 that was organised together with the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, thirty years after the promulgation of the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* on the Church in the Modern World.⁵⁵ Another example is the Congress of Catholic Laity that was held during the Jubilee Year of 2000 on the theme “Witnessing to Christ in the new millennium”.⁵⁶ Also on these occasions, in addition to topics more closely related to the identity and vocation of the lay faithful, there were also discussions on how lay people can give effective witness in the world today. This was an issue discussed in several plenary assemblies, in particular the assembly that took place twenty years after *Christifideles Laici* (2008).⁵⁷ On that occasion, Pope Benedict XVI entrusted the Pontifical Council for the Laity with an important task: “to follow with diligent pastoral care the formation, witness and collaboration of lay faithful in the most varied situations, in which the authentic nature of human life in society is at risk”.⁵⁸ The Holy Father emphasised “the necessity and urgency of

⁵⁵ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes: thirty years later*, Loreto 1995, edited by the Pontifical Council for the Laity, Vatican City 1996.

⁵⁶ *The Congress of Catholic Laity - Rome 2000*, edited by *Pontificium Consilium pro Laicis*, Vatican City 2002.

⁵⁷ Cf. *Christifideles laici. Bilancio e prospettive*, op. cit.

⁵⁸ BENEDICT XVI, Address to participants in the 23rd Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, 15 November 2008.

the evangelical formation and pastoral accompaniment of a new generation of Catholics working in politics, that they be coherent with the professed faith, that they have moral firmness, a capacity for educated judgment, professional competence and a passion for service to the common good”.⁵⁹ The plenary assembly following this was devoted to the subject of Christian witness in the political community (2010).⁶⁰

On that occasion, Benedict XVI said to the members and consultors of the dicastery: “It is up to the lay faithful to demonstrate concretely in their personal and family life, in social, cultural and political life that faith enables them to see reality in a new and profound way and to transform it; that Christian hope broadens the limited horizon of mankind, expanding it towards the true loftiness of their being, towards God; that charity in truth is the most effective force that is capable of changing the world; that the Gospel gives a guarantee of freedom and a message of liberation; that the fundamental principles of the social doctrine of the Church such as the dignity of the human person, subsidiarity and solidarity are extremely relevant and valuable in order to support new paths of development in service to the whole person and to all of humanity”.⁶¹

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Cf. *Testimoni di Cristo nella comunità politica*, a cura del Pontificium Consilium pro Laicis, Città del Vaticano 2011.

⁶¹ BENEDICT XVI, Address to participants in the 24th Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, 21 May 2010.

The topics that are always present in dicastery programmes and in conversations with bishops from around the world are the following: the Christian education of the lay faithful so that they may witness to Christ wherever they are; their knowledge of the social doctrine of the Church; their commitment to peace, to the building of a more humane and just society and to the defence of creation; the need for the laity to be supported and accompanied by the Christian community and the pastors.

6.5. *The vocation and mission of women in the Church and in society*

The Pontifical Council for the Laity is very aware of the great cultural shifts that are taking place in our times, and of the impact that this is having on women's issues and the very concept of femininity. The dicastery closely follows whatever is happening at the cultural, social and political levels with regard to women. At the same time it encourages reflection on the man-woman relationship in their respective specificity, reciprocity and complementarity, as this is a central anthropological issue. The dicastery also contributes to ecclesial reflection on the identity and mission of women in the Church and in society.

The Pontifical Council for the Laity has always helped to organise ecclesial events on this topic. It was involved in a Study Commission on Women in Church and Society that was set

up by Paul VI in 1973 and concluded its mandate in 1976. Systematic study and research in this field began in 1975, a year proclaimed by the United Nations to be “International Women’s Year”. The Council contributed actively to the contribution made by the Holy See during that year.⁶² It continued to lend its collaboration at UN world conferences on the theme in Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995).

The attention shown by John Paul II towards respect for women’s dignity and his stress on the identity of the human person – created man and woman – encouraged the Pontifical Council for the Laity to make these two principles the focus of some of its initiatives. In this perspective, seminars and congresses were held on the anthropological and theological foundations of the dignity and mission of women in society and in the Church. Studies have also been carried out on other issues of particular relevance in our times, including those discussed at the Beijing Conference.⁶³ Reflection in these areas continued at a seminar entitled “Men and women. Diversity and mutual complementarity” (2004).⁶⁴ Discussions dealt with the nature and

⁶² Cf. *The Church and the International Women’s Year 1975*, edited by *Pontificium Consilium pro Laicis*, Vatican City.

⁶³ Cf. *The Logic of Self-giving*, Women’s International Meeting, Rome 1996, edited by The Pontifical Council for the Laity, Vatican City 1997.

⁶⁴ Cf. *Men and Women: Diversity and Mutual Complementarity*, edited by *Pontificium Consilium pro Laicis*, Vatican City 2005.

sexual identity of human beings and the man-woman relationship.

New initiatives have been taking place in the light of the teachings of Benedict XVI. There have been opportunities to discuss the active presence of women in the Church and in society. A high point in this study was an international conference on “Woman and man: the *humanum* in its entirety” (2008).⁶⁵ It was held to mark the twentieth anniversary of the apostolic letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*.

The Pontifical Council for the Laity strives to carry out its mission of encouraging initiatives to study and attempt to bring about greater general understanding of the vocation, dignity and mission of women in the Church and in the world. It appreciates the “feminine genius”, and is conscious, as is Benedict XVI, that “enough cannot be said for how much the Church recognizes, appreciates and values women’s participation in the Church’s mission of service to the spreading of the Gospel”.⁶⁶ For its work in this field, the Council – as it is always ready to collaborate with other departments of the Roman Curia, with associations, ecclesial movements, new communities and non-governmental organizations – is assisted by an *ad hoc* consultative group composed mainly of women.

⁶⁵ Cf. *Woman and Man: the humanum in its entirety*, edited by Pontificium Consilium pro Laicis, Vatican City 2010.

⁶⁶ BENEDICT XVI, Address to participants in the 24th Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, 21 May 2010.

6.6. *Youth and youth ministry*

The younger generations are a priority in the mission of the Church. Blessed John Paul II showed his great pastoral concern for them and gave them much of his attention. A high point is seen in his institution of World Youth Day. In his address to the Roman Curia in 1985, he said: “All young people must feel that the Church is paying attention to them. That is why the whole Church at world level, in union with the Successor of Peter, must feel more and more committed to youth, and share their cares and anxieties, and aspirations and hopes, in order to respond to their expectations by communicating the certainty that is Christ, the Truth that is Christ, the love that is Christ”.⁶⁷

This attention to young people is shared and continued with great conviction by Benedict XVI who said: “The new generations are not only the preferred audience of this transmission and sharing [of Catholic tradition] but also those whose hearts await truth and happiness in order to be able to give Christian witness”.⁶⁸

The Youth Section of the Pontifical Council for the Laity was established by John Paul II in 1986. It promulgates the Holy Father’s initiatives for youth and offers its services to bishops’

⁶⁷ JOHN PAUL II, Address to the Roman Curia, 20 December 1985.

⁶⁸ BENEDICT XVI, Address to participants in the 23rd Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, 15 November 2008.

conferences in the field of youth ministry. It maintains contact with international youth movements and associations, and it fosters cooperation between the various communities. It occasionally organises international youth forums and youth ministry meetings

A significant part of its work is the preparation of World Youth Day, an event which Benedict XVI called a “remedy against faith fatigue”, “new evangelization put into practice”, “a new, more youthful form of Christianity”, and “a new experience of catholicity, of the Church’s universality”.⁶⁹ The international celebrations of the event are held every three years in different countries each time. They are attended by the Holy Father. It is normally held every year in the local Churches where it is organised autonomously.

The foundational documents of the Youth Section include the apostolic letter addressed to young people by John Paul II in 1985 on the occasion of the United Nations International Year of Youth, and the annual message by the Holy Father for World Youth Day.

The Youth Section edits the *Youth* collection and compiles *WYD Magazine* which is published by the John Paul II Youth Foundation. It also gathers documentation on youth ministry, on youth associations and movements, on the activity of major international organizations that

⁶⁹ IDEM, Address to the Roman Curia, 22 December 2011.

work with young people, and on significant publications dealing with youth pastoral work, education, sociology and psychology.

On behalf of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, the Youth Section encourages and coordinates the activities of the San Lorenzo International Youth Centre. This Centre, according to the wishes of John Paul II, was set up in Rome to welcome young pilgrims and to share with them the Message of the Gospel. The Cross of the Holy Year of the Redemption is kept there. The Pope gave this cross to young people at the end of the Jubilee Year in 1984, with the mandate to take it throughout the world “as a symbol of Christ’s love for humanity”.⁷⁰ Thus began the pilgrimage of the Cross under the supervision of the Youth Section. It has travelled to all the continents, spending more time in countries hosting World Youth Day. In fact, it has come to be known as the “WYD Cross”. In 2003, by the express wish of John Paul II, the Cross began to be accompanied on its pilgrimage by a copy of the icon of Our Lady *Salus Populi Romani*, an icon that was at the centre of World Youth Day 2000 in Rome.

The activities of the Youth Section are financed by the John Paul II Youth Foundation, previously the Youth Church Hope Foundation which was erected with public juridical personality on 29 June 1991 by the President of the

⁷⁰ JOHN PAUL II, Words to young people, 22 April 1984.

Pontifical Council for the Laity. Its purpose is “to contribute to the implementation of the teaching of the magisterium of the Catholic Church regarding the priority of youth ministry, as particularly expressed in the World Youth Days”; and “to promote the evangelization of young people and support youth ministry throughout the world” (Statutes, art. 1, 2.1).

6.7. *The world of sport and its educational and ethical challenges*

Sport is an important dimension of contemporary mass culture. The Church cannot remain indifferent to this fact. John Paul II once said that “the Church must be at the vanguard in studying the reality of the practice of sport. There must be dedicated pastoral ministry that can respond to the demands of sports-people and that can help sport to create the conditions to live life full of hope”.⁷¹ Benedict XVI followed up on this idea when he said that “sport is one of the human activities which is also waiting to be enlightened by God through Christ, so that the values it expresses may be purified and elevated at both the individual and the collective levels”.⁷²

The Church and Sport Section of the Pontifical Council for the Laity was instituted by

⁷¹ IDEM, Address to the participants in the National Convention of the Italian Episcopal Conference, 25 November 1989.

⁷² BENEDICT XVI, Letter to the archbishop of Turin on the occasion of the opening of the 20th Winter Olympic Games, 29 November 2005.

Pope John Paul II in 2004 in order to ensure that more organised and incisive attention is given by the Holy See to the vast world of sport. It could be described as an “observatory” of the world of sport. It is intended to be a point of reference for sports organisations at international and national level, to encourage local Churches in their pastoral care of those involved in sport, and to foster synergy among sporting associations in the Church. Furthermore, it is engaged in encouraging a sports culture that is receptive and willing to encourage the integral development of young people as part of their regular education. It encourages and provides information about specific studies in the area of sport, particularly those with an ethical emphasis and that are related to issues of particular importance and topicality. It also encourages other useful initiatives that can give rise to and sustain witness of Christian life among sports-people.

The Church and Sport Section of the Pontifical Council for the Laity arranges seminars and conferences and publishes the proceedings. These meetings provide opportunities to make acquaintances and to advance the study of the main issues regarding the world of sport and its relationship with the Catholic Church.

With the help of academics and experts, the Section endeavours to present sport as a field of Christian engagement.⁷³ It fosters mature scien-

⁷³ Cf. *The World of Sport Today: a Field of Christian Mission*, edited by *Pontificium Consilium pro Laicis*, Vatican City 2006.

tific reflection on the educational and pastoral challenges of sport, with particular attention given to the role of sports' chaplains.⁷⁴ It highlights the importance of Catholic sports associations and their contribution to the educational and evangelising mission of the Church.⁷⁵ Benedict XVI spoke of how “through sports, the ecclesial community contributes to the formation of youth by providing a suitable environment for their human and spiritual growth”.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Cf. *Sport: an Educational and Pastoral Challenge*, edited by *Pontificium Consilium pro Laicis*, Vatican City 2008.

⁷⁵ Cf. *Sport, Education, Faith: Towards a New Season for Catholic Sports Associations*, edited by *Pontificium Consilium pro Laicis*, Vatican City 2011.

⁷⁶ BENEDICT XVI, Message to the President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity on the occasion of the Study Seminar entitled “Sport, Education, Faith” [Rome 6-7 November], 3 November 2009.

II A GLANCE AT HISTORY

1. A SIGNIFICANT CURRENT IN HISTORY

On the occasion of the first plenary assembly of the newly constituted *Consilium de Laicis*, Paul VI received the members and consultors in audience, and he reminded them that “the lay apostolate is no new thing: you are the heirs of a generous effort which now permits new developments. We lack the time to retrace the varied history of the lay apostolate, but after all, it is present in your minds and hearts. Let us be content with thanking the Lord with you, and give a thought of gratitude to all those who sowed in the past what we are happily harvesting today”.⁷⁷ John Paul II also expressed gratitude when commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the promulgation of the conciliar decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem* on the lay apostolate: “How can we not include in all that we remember with gratitude the many personalities, associations and Christian individuals who have been active agents, at different moments in history, in the long process of ‘advancement of the laity’. This process gained special impetus in the last century, and it then proved to be one of the most fruitful and lively currents in the renewal of the Church during the present century”⁷⁸

⁷⁷ PAUL VI, in: *Insegnamenti V* (1967), 160.

⁷⁸ JOHN PAUL II, Address on the 20th anniversary of the Conciliar Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 18 November 1985.

It is quite true to say that “this historical trend of the advancement of the laity – one of the most important developments of the 20th century – resulted from the gradual maturing in the Church of deeper self-awareness, not only of the mystery of the Church, but also of the mission of the Church in our time. There has been much study and research on the historical origins of this preparation for the Second Vatican Council, both proximate and remote and going back to the second half of the last century. New demands and forms of lay participation emerged in Europe with the progressive disintegration of traditional rural Christian communities, the break between ‘throne’ and ‘altar’, the hostility and persecution of the Church due to the new secularism of political and intellectual elites, and also the profound social and cultural repercussions caused by the industrial revolution [...]. Biblical and patristic studies at the end of the century, ecclesiological renewal, new charisms, new communities for the mission ‘*ad gentes*’, and the rebirth of Catholic associations, opened up new paths and reinforced the trends that brought about an active role for the laity”.⁷⁹

2. FACTS AND DATES

It will be useful to recall certain facts that could be considered precursors of the *Consilium de Laicis*:

⁷⁹ G. CARRIQUIRY, *Consacrazione, santità, missione*, Pontificia Unione Missionaria, Roma 1993, 4.

– The widespread development of Catholic Action, particularly from the time of the pontificate of Pius XI, is an important factor in the revival of lay associations. It brought about consolidation of “a juridical entity different from that contemplated in the Code of Canon Law of 1917, and one over whose nature there was no lack of discussion [...]. It prompted the Roman Pontiff to intervene on many occasions, and it raised questions on how to relate this kind of organisation – not only diocesan, but also national and international in extension – to the structures of the Curia”.⁸⁰ In 1938 Pius XI set up the *Actio Catholica* Office, with a cardinal as president. In a note of 1955, it was still defined as a body of the Holy See at the service of the episcopate, a point of reference for organizations working at international level, and a stimulus for the creation of Catholic Action in other countries and for exchange of experiences, etc.⁸¹

– A series of organizations emerged which came to be called International Catholic Organizations (ICO). From 1927 several of these collaborated with one another through a “Conference of Presidents”.⁸² After the League of Nations crisis in 1939 and the events of the Second World War (1939-1945), they came to-

⁸⁰ J.L. ILLANES, *op. cit.*, 495.

⁸¹ Cf. R. GOLDIE, *Le Conseil Pontifical pour les Laïcs: une “préhistoire”*, manuscript, Roma 1996.

⁸² Cf. A. MATTIAZZO, *La Conferenza dei Presidenti delle Organizzazioni Internazionali Cattoliche – Una pagina inedita di storia*, in: *Studia Patavina*, Rivista di Scienze Religiose, 24 (1977), 2, 335-367.

gether again in the 1950s as the Conference of International Catholic Organizations (CICO).

– There was growth in the number of institutions and movements that were “new ways of advancing Christian holiness in the world”.⁸³ Some of these took the new form of secular institutes and came within the competence of what was to be the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, while others were connected to the Congregation of the Council.

– Lastly, there were the World Congresses for the Lay Apostolate (1951, 1957, 1967). On 23 January 1952, in order “to give lasting fruit” to the First World Congress, Pius XII instituted the Permanent Committee for International Congresses of the Lay Apostolate (COPECIAL), which gradually took over from the former Office of *Actio Catholica*. Later Paul VI was to see the Permanent Committee as having a triple task: “to stimulate lay people to apostolic activity” – “to choose, in agreement with the Hierarchy, the guiding ideas” – “to coordinate the efforts made”.⁸⁴ COPECIAL, in fact, facilitated collaboration between movements for the lay apostolate throughout the world by organising, not only world congresses, but also national, international and regional meetings; by circulating the results of these meetings; by studying que-

⁸³ J.L. ILLANES, *op. cit.*, 495.

⁸⁴ R. GOLDIE, *op. cit.*; cf. CONSILIUM DE LAICIS, *A short history of the Laity Council and its action during the experimental period*, manuscript, Roma 1974, 6.

stions concerning the lay apostolate; by gathering and disseminating relevant documentation; and by promoting a series of experts meetings on the *status quaestionis* of theology of the laity.⁸⁵

In the restructuring of the Roman Curia that resulted from the reform put into effect by Pius X with the apostolic constitution *Sapienti Consilio* of 29 June 1908, and confirmed by the Code of Canon Law of 1917, the Sacred Congregation of the Council had competence over “the discipline of the secular clergy and of the Christian people”, including the laity. It seems that there does not exist “a specific study indicating to what extent and degree the Sacred Congregation of the Council did in practice concern itself with matters relating to the laity. The general impression is that, in fact, its attention was directed rather to other matters, even if some subjects – as, for instance, the associations of the faithful, were really given considerable attention”.⁸⁶ The increasing participation of the laity in the life of the Church, the new and varied forms of association that went beyond the categories of the Code, the new bodies created in Rome to accompany, channel and promote this “historical current”, were all signs of “a new era in the age-old process of integrating the laity into the qualified organs and activities of the Church”.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ R. GOLDIE, *op. cit.*; cf. COPECIAL documentation and publications, especially the proceedings of the three World Congresses of the Lay Apostolate, Archives of the Pontifical Council for the Laity.

⁸⁶ J.L. ILLANES, *op. cit.*, 494.

⁸⁷ PAUL VI, in: *Insegnamenti V* (1967), 160.

3. THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

“The Council has ratified and extended the contribution that the movements of the Catholic laity have been offering to our pilgrim and militant Church for more than a century”, Paul VI affirmed at the *Angelus* on Sunday, 21 March 1971.⁸⁸ John Paul II also stressed this point in one of the first meetings of his pontificate with the active forces of organized laity. “You know very well how the Second Vatican Council received this great historical current of our day, the promotion of the laity; going more deeply into its theological foundations, completing and thoroughly enlightening it with the ecclesiology of *Lumen Gentium*, inviting and stimulating the active participation of the laity in the life and mission of the Church”.⁸⁹

Benedict XVI recently said that “the luminous pages which the Council dedicated to the laity”,⁹⁰ “demands a change in mindset, particularly concerning lay people. They must no longer be viewed as ‘collaborators’ of the clergy but genuinely recognised as ‘co-responsible’ for the nature and action of the Church, thereby fostering the consolidation of a mature and committed laity.”⁹¹

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, IX (1971), 210.

⁸⁹ JOHN PAUL II, Address to the representatives of the Catholic organizations, Mexico City, 29 January 1979.

⁹⁰ BENEDICT XVI, Address at the inauguration of the Ecclesial Convention of the diocese of Rome at the Basilica of Saint John Lateran, 26 May 2009.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

In the “vast, complex and rich scenario of preparatory work, study and consultation, of spoken and written interventions, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit”,⁹² many people, including a great number of lay people, collaborated in various ways in the preparation and final drafting of the decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*. We cannot fail to recall, for instance, the participation of a significant and very active group of lay “auditors” appointed by the Pope to take part in the Council.

On the initiative of the Sacred Congregation of the Council, important work was done in the Ante-preparatory Commission *De laicatu catholico*. Already at this stage (1959) the question was raised about the need for a “Roman body” for the promotion of the lay apostolate.⁹³ The draft prepared in 1962 by the Preparatory Commission for the Lay Apostolate – set up, together with the other preparatory commissions by the ‘motu proprio’ *Superno Dei Nutu* of 4 June 1960 – speaks in “general” terms of a possible Roman “secretariat”.⁹⁴ The question

⁹² JOHN PAUL II, Address on the 20th anniversary of the Conciliar Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, op. cit.; see also: A. GLORIEUX, *Histoire du Décret*, in: *L’Apostolat des laïcs. Décret Apostolicam actuositatem*, Mame, Paris 1966; CONSILIJUM DE LAICIS, *A short history*, op. cit., 2-5; R. GOLDIE, op. cit. 11-12.

⁹³ Various opinions are expressed in the “antepreparatory” report on the lay apostolate, published in: *Acta et documenta Concilio Oecumenico Vaticano II apparando*, series I, vol. III, 157-214.

⁹⁴ See: documentation on the work of the Commission and the various drafts of the decree in: *Acta Commissionum de Apostolatu Laicorum* and in: *Schema Constitutionis de Apostolatu Laicorum*, archives of the Pontifical Council for the Laity.

was raised again in the Conciliar Commission, set up in October 1962. From February 1963, the new draft on the lay apostolate was submitted for consultation – through the bishops – to leaders of associations for the apostolate and to the International Catholic Organizations. The Directing Board of COPECIAL was also consulted. The draft presented in 1964 stated: “It seems very opportune that a ‘special office’ (*sui iuris*) of the laity should be set up within the Holy See (*apud Sanctam Sedem*)”. For those drafting the text, “*apud*” was intended to mean “of” the Holy See, not an office of the lay organizations close to the Holy See; the expression “*sui iuris*” meant, an independent office with a Cardinal President.⁹⁵ The same year (1964), the Holy Father approved the setting up of a “small group” to study the question of the “body”. The Group, presided over by a Cardinal, was composed of bishops, “experts” and lay auditors. It drew up a plan for a “Lay Apostolate Secretariat”, that would absorb COPECIAL and the *Actio Catholica* Office. The Bishops’ Conferences (and through them the national lay bodies) were consulted worldwide, as well as the ICO, as to the aims and composition of the proposed “Secretariat”, its relations with the bishops, with the bodies of the Roman Curia, the International Catholic Organizations, etc. A synthesis of the findings of the consultation was studied in another meeting of the “small group” (25-26 June 1965). The final re-

⁹⁵ Cf. R. GOLDIE, *op. cit.*, 9.

port sent to the Secretariat of State stressed the quasi-unanimity found in favour of the creation of the "Secretariat". The final text of the decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem* reflects this whole process in number 26.⁹⁶ It encourages the establishment of councils as far as possible on the parochial, inter-parochial, and inter-diocesan level as well as in the national and international sphere. It also recommends that: "a special secretariat should be established at the Holy See for the service and promotion of the lay apostolate. It should serve as a well-equipped centre, supplying information about the various apostolic programmes of the laity, promoting research into modern problems arising in this field and assisting the Hierarchy and the laity in their apostolic works with its advice. The various movements and projects of the lay apostolate should be represented in this secretariat; and clergy and religious should co-operate also with the laity".⁹⁷

A study on this topic says: "As we can see, the conciliar decree has a consultative body in mind, if not mainly for information and study. It is a body that circulates news, promotes activities and meetings, that studies issues of general interest, etc. It is rather similar to COPECIAL, and therefore, it is for coordination, consultation and promotion, but without any strictly juridical competence".⁹⁸

⁹⁶ In: *AAS* 58 (1966), 858.

⁹⁷ Cf. J.M. CASTELLANO, *L'ordine da osservare nell'apostolato*, in: AA.VV., *Il Decreto sull'Apostolato dei Laici*, Torino 1966, 324-326.

⁹⁸ J.L. ILLANES, *op. cit.*, 499.

4. THE CREATION OF THE *CONSILIUM DE LAICIS*

4.1. *Preliminary steps*

On 18 November 1965, Paul VI together with the conciliar assembly promulgated the decree on the lay apostolate. It had been previously approved in plenary session by almost all the Fathers present. There were 2,340 votes in favour and 2 against.

The next step was the constitution of a post-conciliar commission. On 3 January 1966, with the ‘*motu proprio*’ *Finis Concilio*,⁹⁹ the Pope set up five post-conciliar commissions. Each commission had, in addition to its members, consultors chosen from among the “experts” of the Council. For the lay apostolate Commission the consultors included lay “auditors”, men and women, from the Council. The Commission worked until June 1966. There were three sub-commissions for the following issues:

- the preparation of a papal document;
- the question of the “Roman secretariat”;
- the consequences of the decree for the revision of the Code of Canon Law.¹⁰⁰

“The last stage was the creation by the Holy Father, on 7 July 1966, of the ‘Provisional Committee (*Coetus*)’ mentioned in the ‘*motu pro-*

⁹⁹ PAUL VI, *Motu Proprio Finis Concilio Oecumenico Vaticano II*, *AAS* 58 (1966), 37ff.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. R. GOLDIE, *op. cit.* 11-12.

prio' *Catholicam Christi Ecclesiam*, for the implementation (*ad exsequendos*) of the recommendations made in no. 26 of *Apostolicam Actuositatem* and no. 90 of *Gaudium et Spes* concerning the creation of new bodies within the Roman Curia (or a single body, as some suggested)".¹⁰¹ The "Coetus" was composed of a cardinal president, a bishop vice-president, a monsignor as secretary and four lay people.

4.2. *The motu proprio Catholicam Christi Ecclesiam*

Paul VI announced the creation of the *Consilium de Laicis* on the Feast of the Epiphany, 6 January 1967, with the 'motu proprio' *Catholicam Christi Ecclesiam*. A bishop who was later vice-president of the *Consilium* wrote that the document "repeats terms used by the Council. Among other things, it speaks of the newly-created Council as a 'place of meeting and dialogue in the Church'". What kind of dialogue? "The very essential dialogue that lay people must initiate and pursue among themselves, and also with those to whom the Spirit of Christ has entrusted the task of pastor".¹⁰² This is a dialogue that is at the centre of Paul VI's encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*. "A place of meeting and dialogue" is an expression that has the force and the weight of an assignment. It would become the primary vocation of the Council for the Laity.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² L. MOREIRA NEVES, "Un luogo di incontro e di dialogo", in: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 10 gennaio 1975, 1.

Paul VI's *motu proprio* is focused on the lay apostolate, and it directs all the activity of the Council. Another study points out that "this reference to apostolic activity is strengthened still more by a decision that was taken during the preparation of the *motu proprio* and finally confirmed by Paul VI himself. It was the decision to bring together two proposals made during the Council in different documents: the creation of a secretariat for the laity and that of a council, secretariat or committee for the promotion of justice in the world. In view of the fact that one aspect of the lay apostolate consists in sanctifying the world from within by bringing the Christian spirit into its customs and institutions, it was thought to unite, in some way, the *Consilium de Laicis* and what was to be called the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace. In fact, the two bodies were not only created by the same document and one juridical act; they were also structurally linked". According to the *motu proprio*, they were to have the same president, a cardinal, and the same vice-president, a bishop.¹⁰³ In this way, they could be called "twin bodies".

On 15 August 1967, with the apostolic constitution *Regimini Ecclesiae Universae*, the *Consilium de Laicis* was included among the bodies of the Curia.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ J.L. ILLANES, *op. cit.*, 499-500.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. PAUL VI, Apostolic Constitution *Regimini Ecclesiae Universae*, *AAS* 59 (1967), 920.

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

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

– To promote the lay apostolate at the international level and provide for its coordination and increasing integration in the general apostolate of the Church; to maintain contact with the apostolate at the national level; to act as a place of meeting and dialogue in the Church between the hierarchy and the laity, and between the different forms of lay activity, in the spirit of the final pages of the encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*; to promote international congresses for the lay apostolate; to give advice and assistance to the hierarchy and the laity in their apostolic work (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 26).

– To promote studies for the further doctrinal clarification of questions concerning the laity, in particular as regards apostolate issues, with special reference to the role of the laity in sharing overall pastoral activity. Studies may be published on these matters.

– To establish a documentation centre for the giving and receiving of information related to the apostolate of the laity, to provide materials for guidance in the faith education of the laity, and to render an important service to the Church”.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ IDEM, *Motu Proprio Catholicam Christi Ecclesiam*, AAS 59 (1967), 25-28.

These functions indicate that the dicastery is intended to encourage, coordinate and animate, as well as to collect documentation and to study matters related to the lay apostolate. It is also specified that the Council must “foster the faithful observance of the ecclesiastical laws concerning the laity”. This opens the way to jurisdictional functions and “it will continue to influence the further history of the Council”.¹⁰⁶

4.4. *The experimental period*

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

The president (a cardinal) and the vice-president (a bishop) had, as collaborators, the secretary (a monsignor), two lay undersecretaries – a man and a woman – and other staff-members.

Sectors were set up within the secretariat for the Family, for Youth, and for Catholic International Organizations (ICOS); and also services (theological, juridical, publications). In the first five-year period, plenary assemblies were held twice a year; later, once a year. The ICOS and their Conference maintained close contact.

On 3 December 1971, the *Consilium de Laicis* published the document, “Guidelines

¹⁰⁶ J.L. ILLANES, *op. cit.*, 500.

for the Definition of Catholic International Organizations”, which was the fruit of intense dialogue with the Secretariat of State and of consultations with the organizations concerned. This period was marked also by pastoral and ecumenical activities, studies and documentation, services for the laity in various regions, etc.¹⁰⁷

5. FROM *CONSILIIUM DE LAICIS* TO PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE LAITY

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

“We acknowledge that this *Consilium* has diligently fulfilled the tasks entrusted to it, by fostering, methodically organising and coordinating the apostolate of the laity on national levels and within the Church itself, by assisting the hierarchy and the laity with advice, by engaging in studies in this area, and by undertaking other initiatives”.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ For the activity of the *Consilium de Laicis* during the experimental period, see: R. GOLDIE, *op. cit.*; *CONSILIIUM DE LAICIS*, *op.cit.* 6-8; *Laity Today* bulletin (English, French, Spanish), from June 1968, Library of the Pontifical Council for the Laity.

¹⁰⁸ PAUL VI, *Motu Proprio Apostolatus Peragendi*, *AAS* 68 (1976), 697.

5.1. *The new name*

The vice-president of the dicastery at the time noted an “essential continuity” between the *Consilium de Laicis* and the Pontifical Council for the Laity, as well as “signs of discontinuity and newness”¹⁰⁹ The first and most evident was the change of name. The title “Pontifical” was clearly intended to express the “higher form” given to the Council. Furthermore, “*de laicis*” was changed to “*pro laicis*” because, at least in some languages, the term “*de laicis*” (concerning the Laity) had caused confusion, being wrongly translated as “*des laïcs*”, “*de los laicos*”, etc., so that the less informed could see in the “*Consilium*” almost a body laying claim to represent the laity of the whole world, a “parliament of the laity” at the Holy See. On the other hand, the term “*pro laicis*” (for the laity) could also create confusion which must be avoided. Some, for instance, might see in it a hidden intention of domination, guardianship or paternalism. The real meaning here of the preposition “*pro*” is very different: it indicates a desire and readiness to serve. The Council exists and has meaning only in relation to the laity. The title “*pro laicis*” was also intended to bring the Council closer to the congregations: “*pro Episcopis*”, “*pro Clero*”, “*pro Religiosis*”, etc.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ L. MOREIRA NEVES, “*Un anniversario che ci impegna*”, in: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 20 gennaio 1977, 1.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*; see also: G. CARRIQUIRY, “*Il Pontificio Consiglio per i Laici?*”, in: *Tabor*, Roma 1981, 5-7; G. LOBINA, “*Il giorno che Paolo VI ci regalò un Consiglio*”, in: *I laici nella Chiesa*, Milano 1986, 61ff; O. ROSSI, “*Paolo*

5.2. *Area of responsibility*

The new profile of the Pontifical Council for the Laity gives particular emphasis to the responsibilities indicated in *Apostolatus Peragendi*. The title of the document already reflects the pastoral and missionary vision which was at the origin of the Council. Its competence now embraces not only “the apostolate of the laity in the Church”, but also “the discipline of the laity as such”.¹¹¹ However, an “Internal Commentary to the *motu proprio*”, analyses the term “discipline” in the context of the document and concludes that, here also, “it has much more than a purely juridical connotation (giving rules and norms, setting limits, imposing sanctions). There is a pastoral dimension (in offering guidelines for Christian living, in helping to live out a vocation, etc.)”.¹¹² In other words, the Pontifical Council for the Laity “must be concerned about each and every lay person, not only because he or she is carrying out an activity, but because this is a baptized person, a member of the Church who needs to be educated in the faith, spiritually nourished and encouraged to take action. This vision immensely extends that which was the scope and action of the *Consilium*”.¹¹³

VI e il Pontificio Consiglio per i Laici”, in: *Lateranum*, Roma 1978, no. 2, 373-383.

¹¹¹ PAUL VI, *Motu Proprio Apostolatus Peragendi*, AAS 68 (1976), 698.

¹¹² PONTIFICIO CONSIGLIO PER I LAICI, *Commentario interno al motu proprio “Apostolatus peragendi”*, Roma 1977, 3.

¹¹³ L. MOREIRA NEVES, “*Un anniversario che ci impegna*”, op. cit.

5.3. *Specific responsibilities*

The specific responsibilities of the Pontifical Council for the Laity are:

– to “encourage the laity to participate in the Church’s life and mission”, both as members of associations for the apostolate and as individual Christians;¹¹⁴

– to “evaluate, guide and foster initiatives regarding the apostolate of lay people in the various spheres of society”¹¹⁵ and to foster on its own initiative active participation by the laity in such fields as catechetics, liturgy, the sacraments and education, in collaboration with the various Departments of the Roman Curia dealing with these matters”;¹¹⁶

– “in agreement with the Congregation for the Clergy, to deal with questions concerning pastoral councils, whether on the parish or diocesan level, in order to encourage lay people to take part in joint pastoral action”;¹¹⁷

– to follow attentively the associative life of the lay faithful. In the second half of the 1970’s there were signs of a particularly vigorous renewal of associative life. In the audiences for the Pontifical Council for the Laity, John Paul II often stressed “the surprising growth of charisms and of missionary vitality in the ecclesial movements”.¹¹⁸ Moreover, *Apostolatus*

¹¹⁴ PAUL VI, Motu Proprio *Apostolatus Peragendi*, AAS 68 (1976), 698.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 699.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ JOHN PAUL II, Address at a meeting organized by the Pontifi-

Peragendi extends the competence of the Council in this field, quoting a wide range of associations: “international and national organizations of the lay apostolate”, “Catholic societies for the promotion of the apostolate and the spiritual life and activity of the laity”, “pious associations”, “lay Third Orders” with regard to questions concerning their apostolic activity, “associations of both clerics and lay people”, with due regard for the competence of other dicasteries.¹¹⁹ Within the competence of the Pontifical Council, *Apostolatus Peragendi* includes all questions regarding these associations according to the *Normae* given by the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signature for “the competence of dicasteries of the Roman Curia with regard to associations of the faithful”, and communicated to the *Consilium de Laicis* on 27 January 1969.¹²⁰ In a letter of 2 June 1969, the Secretariat of State further explained: “The *Consilium de Laicis* is the dicastery of the Roman Curia to which these associations must refer for approval and modification of their Statutes (when this calls for an intervention of the Holy See), for watchfulness with regard to their various apostolic activities, for examination of appeals and the solution of controversies involving their members...”,¹²¹

cal Council for the Laity, 23 May 1987.

¹¹⁹ Cf. PAUL VI, Motu Proprio *Apostolatus Peragendi*, AAS 68 (1976), 698f; S. CARMIGNANI CARIDI, “*Sviluppo, competenze e strutture del Pontificium Consilium pro Laicis*”, in: AA.VV., *Scritti in memoria di Pietro Gismondi*, Milano 1987, 255-281.

¹²⁰ PONTIFICIO CONSIGLIO PER I LAICI, *Commentario interno*, op. cit., 4-5.

¹²¹ Archives of the Pontifical Council for the Laity.

– to “see that the Church’s laws regarding the laity are strictly observed (as was already within the competence of the *Consilium de Laicis*), and to examine by administrative means disputes involving lay people”.¹²²

5.4. *Structural renewal*

The new configuration of the Pontifical Council for the Laity is seen in the restructuring of the dicastery. The essential features remain the same today. The cardinal president – assisted by a presidential committee – works with the collaboration of a secretary, undersecretary and staff members. The members of the Council were twelve to fifteen in number (all lay people) in the experimental period. The number was increased to over thirty (for the most part lay people, but also cardinals, bishops and priests). The consultors include bishops, priests, men and women religious and lay people with special competence and experience in fields related to the activity of the Pontifical Council for the Laity.

5.5. *The Committee for the Family*

A final provision of *Apostolatus Peragendi* refers to a fundamental aspect of the human and Christian vocation of the laity: their presence in a family and their action in favour of the family.

¹²² PAUL VI, Motu Proprio *Apostolatus Peragendi*, AAS 68 (1976), 699.

It was written at the time that “Paul VI, on 11 January 1973, created the Committee for the Family to be an effective instrument in the field of family ministry. The Pontifical Council for the Laity was the terrain in which the Committee was nurtured and brought to maturity. There were many links at the level of personal relations and also of pastoral concerns and activities that have always united these two institutions of the Roman Curia. The Pope has now decided to make this link more tangible. For this purpose, *Apostolatus Peregrandi* rules that the Committee should be attached to the Pontifical Council for the Laity, while keeping its own form and identity, through several of the personnel including the cardinal who presides over both institutions, and also through a communion of apostolic concern and pastoral activity”.¹²³

John Paul II, on 9 May 1981, with the ‘*motu proprio*’ *Familia a Deo instituta*, created the Pontifical Council for the Family, which would take the place of the former Committee and operate as an autonomous dicastery. There continue to be links between the two pontifical councils.

6. THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE LAITY TODAY

The apostolic constitution *Pastor Bonus* on the Roman Curia (1988) confirmed, with few changes, the norms established for the Pontifical

¹²³ L. MOREIRA NEVES, “*Un anniversario che ci impegna*”, *op. cit.*

Council for the Laity by the ‘motu proprio’ *Apostolatus Peragendi*. In the preparation of the Constitution the particular nature and profile of the dicastery were taken into account. Some attentive observers, analysing the text of the ‘motu proprio’, had argued that “*pro laicis*” in the title, the creation of a “*coetus*” (however limited) of cardinals to assist the president, the “*potestas iurisdictionis*” of the dicastery, as well as the vast scope of its attributions, were all evident indications of a status that was more equivalent to that of the congregations.¹²⁴ However, in the final drafting of *Pastor Bonus*, it was found preferable to maintain the profile of a dicastery “*sui generis*”. While sharing some features essential to the congregations of the Roman Curia, the Pontifical Council, not being bound by the requirements of the *Sacrae Congregationes Cardinalium*, would still be able to have a majority of lay people among its members.

In line with the tradition and style of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, the option was to stress its pastoral character, expressed in animation, promotion and coordination in relation to the life and apostolate of the laity. The functions of the Council therefore continue to be those indicated in *Apostolatus Peragendi*, with particular emphasis on:

– animation and support of the lay faithful for their special task of “filling the realm of

¹²⁴ Cf. *ibid.*

temporal things with the spirit of the Gospel”.¹²⁵ Both the 7th Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the “vocation and mission of the laity in the Church and in the world” and the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Christifideles Laici* had, in fact, pointed out the risks involved in separating faith from life, in an ecclesiastical style of withdrawal and in a “clericalisation” of the laity. The laity were called instead to “serve the person and society”¹²⁶ on the basis of their involvement with “temporal realities”,¹²⁷ and with the strength that comes from the Gospel of Jesus Christ;

– the importance of following up and directing international meetings and other initiatives pertaining to the lay apostolate,¹²⁸ even though, as in the past, these may only correspond in a wide sense to the activities normally undertaken by the Pontifical Council for the Laity,¹²⁹

– the Council’s competence to deal with all matters regarding “lay associations of the Christian faithful”. The Constitution follows

¹²⁵ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, art. 133 § 1, *AAS* 80 (1988), 894.

¹²⁶ IDEM, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 36, *AAS* 81 (1989), 459.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 15, *AAS* 81 (1989), 416.

¹²⁸ IDEM, Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, art. 133 § 3, *AAS* 80 (1988), 894.

¹²⁹ The experience of the world congresses for the lay apostolate was followed up in new ways by the *Consilium de Laicis* and the Pontifical Council for the Laity. See the proceedings of the World Consultation of the Laity (7-15 October 1975); the World Consultation before the Synod on “The vocation and mission of the laity” (20-24 May 1987); the meeting of representatives of international associations and movements of the laity (10-12 May 1992).

Apostolatus Peragendi regarding this general competence, and this is confirmed by the practice of the dicastery. It reaffirms that the Council “erects associations of an international character and provides approval or *recognitio* for their statutes, saving the competence of the Secretariat of State. As for secular Third Orders, the Council deals only with those matters concerning their apostolic activity”.¹³⁰ The text requires that the new norms laid down in the current Code of Canon Law regarding associations of the faithful should be taken well into account.¹³¹ In view of these new norms, it is important to note the ongoing reformulation of the canonical status of the International Catholic Organisations as they are now international associations of the faithful.¹³²

The structure of the Pontifical Council for the Laity was confirmed by the constitution *Pastor Bonus* and the Code of Canon Law. Some specific aspects were enhanced by the 7th Assembly of the Synod of Bishops and the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Christifideles Laici* – a providential gift in view of the service that the

¹³⁰ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, art. 134, *AAS* 80 (1988), 895; see also M. DELGADO GALINDO, *La competencia del Consejo Pontificio para los Laicos en relación con el reconocimiento de las asociaciones internacionales de fieles, Associações de Fiéis na Igreja*, Col. Lusitania Canonica, no. 10, 2005, 61-70.

¹³¹ Cf. *The Code of Canon Law*, “Associations of Christ’s Faithful”, Book II, Part I, Title V.

¹³² Cf. G. FELICIANI, “Il Pontificio Consiglio per i Laici”, in: *Ephemerides Iuris Canonici*, 50/2 (2010), 234-236.

dicastery is asked to render. Today, this service is directed towards recognizing, discerning and encouraging all the signs and fruits of truth and goodness that the Spirit of God calls forth in the hearts of individuals and in the life of people everywhere now at this “great and dramatic moment of history”,¹³³ so that the glory of Christ may shine forth in the third millennium.

¹³³ JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 3, *AAS* 81 (1989), 398.

III INSTITUTIONAL DOCUMENTS

1. THE “MOTU PROPRIO” *CATHOLICAM CHRISTI ECCLESIAM*¹³⁴

The Catholic Church continues to renew and update structures in conformity with the times, and realises “how much she should continually mature in the light of experience, in her relations with the world” (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 43), because it was for the salvation of the world that the Church was founded by Christ. According to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, all Christians, as they belong to the People of God, must fulfil this mission of salvation to the best of their ability (*Lumen Gentium*, nos. 17 and 31). The Council spoke of the position of the laity within the People of God in several documents. This was a particular feature of the Council. It then devoted a special decree to the activity of the laity in the Church. This decree provided for the institution of a body “for the service and promotion of the lay apostolate” (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 26).

At the same time, the Council, in order to establish a dialogue with the modern world, gave due attention to some of the major aspirations of the contemporary world, such as the issues

¹³⁴ In: *AAS* 59 (1967), 25-28.

of development, promotion of justice among nations and the cause of peace. It proposed the institution of a body in the Church with the mandate to make the Catholic world more aware of these problems (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 90).

After the Council, a post-conciliar Commission, with Our mandate, studied the best way to implement the conciliar decisions concerning no. 26 of *Apostolicam actuositatem*, while a special group, similarly mandated by Us, undertook study of the body proposed in no. 90 of *Gaudium et Spes*.

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

The fact that the two questions were studied together, made it possible to see both the specific and common aspects. Thus it became clear that there should be two different bodies, united however at the summit by the same leadership: the *Consilium de Laicis* and the Pontifical Commission of Studies for Promoting Justice and Peace.

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

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

In particular it shall:

1. Promote the lay apostolate at the international level and provide for its coordination

and increasing integration in the general apostolate of the Church; maintain contact with the apostolate at the national level; act as a place of meeting and dialogue in the Church between the hierarchy and the laity, and between the different forms of lay activity, in the spirit of the last pages of the Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*; promote international Congresses for the lay apostolate; foster the faithful observance of the ecclesiastical laws concerning the laity.

2. Assist with its advice the hierarchy and the laity in their apostolic work (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 26).

3. Promote studies for the further doctrinal clarification of questions concerning the laity, in particular as regards problems of the apostolate with special reference to the sharing of the laity in overall pastoral activity. Studies may be published on these matters.

4. Establish a documentation centre that will receive and give information on issues concerning the lay apostolate, in order to provide material for guidance in the formation of the laity and render an important service to the Church.

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

Its aim shall be to awaken the People of God to full awareness of their mission at the present time, in order to, on the one hand, promote the

progress of poor nations and encourage international social justice, and on the other, to help underdeveloped nations to work for their own development.

In particular the Pontifical Commission shall:

1. Gather and synthesize documentation on the major scientific and technical studies in the field of development in all its aspects: educational and cultural, economic and social, etc., and also concerning peace, in so far as it raises issues which go beyond those of development.

2. Contribute to the study of issues related to development and peace, particularly under their doctrinal, pastoral and apostolic aspects.

3. Communicate the results of this study to all bodies of the Church interested in those issues.

4. Establish contact between all the bodies of the Church working for similar purposes, in order to facilitate a coordination of efforts, to give support to more important endeavours and to avoid overlapping.

III. *Structure of the two bodies*

1. The *Consilium de Laicis* and the Pontifical Commission of Studies for Promoting Justice and Peace shall have the same president, a cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church.

2. Similarly they shall have in common the vice-president, who shall be a bishop.

3. The *Consilium de Laicis* and the Pontifical Commission of Studies for Promoting Justice and Peace shall each have its own secretary.

4. The secretary of the *Consilium de Laicis* shall be assisted by two assistant-secretaries.

5. Both bodies shall be further composed of members and consultors selected on appropriate criteria. The appointments shall be made by the Holy See.

6. The term of office of the president, vice-president, secretaries and assistant-secretaries shall be five years. At the end of the five year period the Holy See shall however be able to renew the appointment of any officer.

7. The *Consilium de Laicis* and the Pontifical Commission of Studies for Promoting Justice and Peace are erected *ad experimentum* for five years. Practical experience may suggest suitable changes in their aims and final structure.

8. The two bodies shall have their headquarters in Rome.

9. We hereby declare ended, as from today, the *vacatio legis* concerning the conciliar decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*. The bishops and episcopal conferences shall provide for the implementation of the decree in their dioceses and nations.

We have confidently established the two bodies in the firm hope that the lay members of the People of God, to whom We are giving a to-

ken of Our esteem and benevolence by this official organisation, may feel themselves more closely associated with the action of this Apostolic See and, in future, dedicate to Holy Church with ever greater generosity their efforts, their energies and their activity.

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

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

PAOLO PP. VI

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2. THE "MOTU PROPRIO" *APOSTOLATUS PERAGENDI*¹³⁵

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

¹³⁵ In: *AAS* 68 (1976), 696-700.

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

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

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

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

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

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

I. *The "Consilium de Laicis" will henceforth be called the "Pontifical Council for the Laity".*

II. This Council is headed and directed by a cardinal president, who is assisted by a presidential committee composed of three cardinals resident in Rome and the secretary of the Council.

The presidential committee meets every two months and as often as the cardinal president decides, in order to deal with more important questions.

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

III. The members of this Pontifical Council are mostly lay people, selected from different parts of the world, and involved in different

forms of the apostolate of the laity, with a suitable proportion between men and women. Among the members are also some bishops and priests.

Unless particular circumstances suggest otherwise, the members are convoked once a year to a meeting with the presidential committee, under the chairmanship of the cardinal president, assisted by the secretary.

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

V. The consultors form a group which is called the "*Consulta*". Its purpose is to study in depth all questions to be decided by the members of the Council and to perform faithfully the tasks entrusted to it by the superiors.

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

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

1. encouraging the laity to participate in the Church's life and mission, both – and this is the principal way – as members of associations for the apostolate and as individual Christians;

2. evaluating, guiding, and, if necessary, fostering initiatives regarding the apostolate of lay people in the various spheres of society, with due regard for the competence of other bodies of the Roman Curia in this matter;

3. dealing with all questions concerning:

– international and national organizations of the lay apostolate, with due regard for the competence of the Secretariat of State or Papal Secretariat;

– Catholic societies for the promotion of the apostolate and the spiritual life and activity of the laity, without interference in the rights of the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples regarding societies fostering missionary cooperation exclusively;

– pious associations (i.e. archconfraternities, confraternities, pious unions, sodalities of all kinds), in consultation with the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes whenever it is a case of an association erected by a Religious Family or a Secular Institute;

– lay Third Orders, with regard only to questions concerning the activity of their apostolate, and thus without interference in the competence of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes for other questions;

– associations of both clerics and lay people, with due regard for the competence of the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy in the matter of the observance of the general laws of the Church (cf. the norms of the Apostolic Signatura);

4. fostering on its own initiative active participation by the laity in such fields as catechetics, liturgy, the sacraments, and education, in collaboration with the various Departments of the Roman Curia dealing with these matters;

5. seeing that the Church's laws regarding the laity are strictly observed, and examining by administrative means disputes involving lay people;

6. in agreement with the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, dealing with questions concerning pastoral councils, whether on the parish or diocesan level, in order to encourage lay people to take part in joint pastoral action.

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

The cardinal president of the Pontifical Council for the Laity presides over this committee and in this matter he is assisted in a special way by the secretary of the same Council.

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

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

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

PAOLO PP. VI

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3. THE APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTION
PASTOR BONUS (ARTS 131-134)¹³⁶

THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE LAITY

Art. 131

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

¹³⁶ In: *AAS* 80 (1988), 841-923. We quote only the articles concerning the Pontifical Council for the Laity in this Constitution, issued by John Paul II on the 28 June 1988 (894-895).

Art. 132

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

Art. 133

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

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

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

Art. 134

Within the parameters of its own competence, the Council performs all activities respecting lay associations of the Christian faithful; it erects associations of an international character and provides approval or *recognitio* for their statutes, saving the competence of the Secretariat of State. As for secular third orders, the Council

deals only with those matters concerning their apostolic activities.

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

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