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Spirituality of Lay People after the Second Vatican Council

Abstract: The subject of our reflection will be the contemporary research priorities in the field of the spirituality of the laity. As this spirituality is inseparably connected with the theology of the laity, it will also be necessary to discuss the validity of the division into three states in life in the Church, the identity of lay persons and the various interpretations of the nature and the mission of the laity in the Church. This will enable us to establish the main priority in the development of the theology of the laity and then consider the issue of the specific spirituality of lay people. From the methodological point of view, it can be said that some authors behave in a more deductive way and try to derive their basic theses from the teaching of the Church. Others use a more reductive method and begin with a phenomenological description of the life context and the experience of lay people. However, most frequently both approaches are necessary. This also applies to the proposed relational concept of the theology and the spirituality of the laity as the most suitable vision of the Church community.

Keywords: spirituality, laity, Vatican II, communion, Church, state in life

Povzetek: **Duhovnost laikov po drugem vatikanskem koncilu**

V prispevku si bomo ogledali sodobne raziskave na področju duhovnosti laikov. Ker je duhovnost neločljivo povezana s teologijo, bomo obravnavali tudi različne interpretacije o razdelitvi življenja v Cerkvi v tri stanove, zlasti v zvezi z laičnim stanom in s poslanstvom laikov v Cerkvi. Na tej podlagi bomo razvijali teologijo laikov in razmišljali o tem, kaj je v njihovi duhovnosti specifičnega. Glede metode opazimo, da nekateri avtorji uporabljajo deduktivni način razmišljanja, ko teologijo laikov izločijo iz nauka Cerkve. Drugi uporabljajo reduktivno metodo, ko se odmikajo od fenomenološkega opisa konteksta življenja in izkušenj laikov. Najpogosteje sta potrebna oba pristopa. Glede razumevanja teologije in duhovnosti laikov je to najprimernejša vizija cerkvene skupnosti.

Ključne besede: duhovnost, laiki, drugi vatikanski koncil, občestvo, Cerkev, življenjski stanovi

Since the Second Vatican Council we have seen a revival of interest in the theology of the laity and also in the spirituality of lay people. A sign of this interest is the numerous publications, of which the most important, and crucial to conciliar theology, is the work by Yves Congar, *Jalons pour une théologie du laïcat* (Paris 1954) and later works entitled »Laïc et Laïcat«, included in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* (t. 9, Paris 1976, col. 103n), Pietro Brugnoli, *La spiritualità dei laici* (Brescia 1965), Alfons Auer, *Weltoffener Christ: Grundsätzliches und Geschichtliches zur Laienfrömmigkeit* (Düsseldorf 1966), Gustave Thils, *Les laïcs et l'enjeu des temps »post-modernes«* (Louvain-la-Neuve 1988), Hans Urs von Balthazar, *Gottberaites Leben: Der Laie und der Rätstand; Nachfolge Christi in der heutigen Welt* (Freiburg 1993) may also be added to the widely quoted list of sources. In Spanish, a very accessible text book edition of *Espiritualidad de los laicos* by Ciro García (Burgos 2004) is worth noting. Also in 2004, a new approach to the subject by Kees Waaijman in *Handbuch der Spiritualität* (vol. 1, Mainz 2004) should be mentioned. The spirituality of the lay has at last lived to see its own dictionary in the form of *Dizionario di spiritualità dei laici* (vol. 1 and 2, ed. Ermanno Ancilli, Milano 1981).

These rich materials will be for us a source of reflection on the directions of the research of theology of the lay people. The subject of our reflection is the validity of the division into three states of life in the Church, the question of the lay person's identity, different interpretations of his/her nature and mission in the Church, directions of development of theology of the laity and the issue of the lay person's specific spirituality. We also present the relational conception of the theology and spirituality of the lay as the most corresponding to the communion vision of the Church.

1. Validity of the division into three states of life in the Church

Throughout the ages, the lay have been differentiated from the religious with regards to their form of life and from the clergy due to functions and competences (Congar 1954, 28). Thus the traditional division into three states of life in the Church was formed, which was worded in both the Council's documents and in the exhortations of John Paul II: *Pastores dabo vobis, Christifideles laici* and *Vita consecrata* (García 2004, 71–73).

This traditional division requires deepening, as in the theological discussions which have taken place since the Second Vatican Council, an objection has been raised with regard to the exclusive treatment in theology of particular states of life of such issues as: relation to the world, the role of the evangelical counsels and participation in jurisdiction of the Church. Quintessential to these matters is the discussion concerning the status of members of secular institutes (Congar 1954, 36; Brugnoli 1965, 82–83; Beyer 1987, 158–159, 169–175; Rahner 1964, 340–342).

According to Jean Beyer, the division into clergy, religious and lay is a false perspective, because all Christians live in the world and contribute to its consecrati-

on. His reflections lead to the search for new interpretations of the states of life in the Church. The fact that an individual state (French: *ordre*) for spouses is lacking, whilst a state for consecrated virgins and widows exists, induces him to differentiate between the states of life (*état*) and the states in the sense of levels or groups (*ordres*). In the case of the last groups, he is pertaining to a special group of people, such as: priest, deacon, acolyte, lector, monk or layman which are not always covered by the states of life. Differentiating »*ordres de personnes et états de vie*« is, for him, fundamental. In Beyer's opinion, groups of people are not established by the state of life itself, since a religious may belong to the group of bishops, priests, deacons or laymen. The states of life are not »public« in the same way as »*ordres*«, as can be seen in the case of consecrated lay people. The state of life in marriage, unlike the state of life in celibacy, may be experienced in various groups (*ordres*), such as in the case of priests and deacons in Eastern Churches, or the diaconate as a permanent order in the West. Therefore, Beyer believes that it is necessary to distinguish the state of life from ecclesiastical categories, groups and levels (*ordres*). In his opinion, consecrated, religious life constitutes a public testimony, whilst consecrated lay life is the presence and action in a given environment. This strengthens his thesis about the need to distinguish »categories of people« in the public life of the Church and the world from »states of life« which may be not well known and do not change the canonical and social form of the people engaged. Taking this into consideration, the author, Beyer, proposes that the number of levels (*ordres sacrés*) be increased in order to better organize the structure of God's people (Beyer 1987, 176–183).

Despite the fact that this is an original concept, it is better, in my opinion, to stay with the traditional division of states of life in the Church, accepting their complementarity and specific osmosis, which allows for the mutual use of individual charism. In this matter, it is worth referring to the concept put forward by Pietro Brugnoli, according to which, every Christian experiencing a theandric dimension of Christ should be in this world and not of this world. However, the fullness of this theandric life may be realised in the Church only by distinguishing different states of life: existence and the transcendental-eschatological mission in the state of evangelical counsels, transcendental-intermediary in the priestly state and incarnational-recapitulative in the lay state (Brugnoli 1965, 65–69). Full »osmosis« of various states of life in the Church is observed in the case of lay institutes in which members are priests. In a sense, in their lives both the dimension of being leaven in the world and the eschatological sign of consecrated life unite with the priestly dimension of mediation.

2. Issue of the Identity of Lay People

According to most authors, the specific relation with the world is a specific characteristic for the lay people. This assertion is based on the teaching of the Council, which in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*

(31), proffered a positive definition of a lay person for the first time, which, although it is not strictly ontological, constitutes a particular »typological description« . This description is made up of many elements shared by all faithful. We can also find that the specific feature of the laity is its lay character (*indoles saecularis*). This consists in the fact that on the grounds of God's calling, lay people remain in the world and sanctify it from the inside. According to Ciro García, the specific apostolate of the lay person consists in love in the interior of the world's situation (García 2004, 21).

Similar thoughts can be found expressed by Yves Congar and many other authors, who base their definitions of the identity of the laity on documents of the Council (Congar 1954, 39). There are, however, theologians who, like Klaus Mörsdorf, consider that the concept of a lay faithful may be established only in opposition to the concept of a priest and not by relations to other realities (Illanes 1990, 777). Also in the interpretation of Kees Waaijman, »the lay character« of the laity falls into the background, since clergy and religious are also connected to various relations with the world. For the author, secularity is not distinctive enough for the laity. In his opinion, the spirituality of the lay is determined by the following characteristics: it has its own environment in the family context; the time dimension of this family context is measured by generations and not by the official liturgical calendar; the spatial dimension concentrates on the living; the basic content of this spirituality is created by the personal course of life (Waaijman 2004, 19). From this position, the author criticizes *Dizionario di spiritualità dei laici* as it does not include such significant entries for the lay person as apartment, home or place (33). These differences directly show that alongside an analysis of documents of the Church, theologians are trying, in a phenomenological way, to start their analysis from a description of specific conditions of the life of the lay.

The word »lay« has a pejorative meaning in many languages, although its Greek etymology indicates that it originates from the word *λαός* – people (Congar 1976, 79). In this sense, it is the highest honour which can be given to a Christian who, as a layperson, belongs to the people of God, believes in Christ and is called by Him. Besides this fundamental meaning, the word *λαός* is used in the New Testament to also refer to simple people, and constitutes a basis for the further distinctions between common believers and members of community holding an office (Neuner 1987, 35–36). In this context, it is necessary to remember that with time the word in its Latin form, »*laicus*«, became very close in meaning and even synonymous with »*saecularis*« and »*plebeius*« (Gaudemet 1987, 63). Notably, in the Middle Ages, the word »layman« began to mean an uneducated person (*idiotus, illiteratus*). Sometimes the word »*laicus*« is derived from »*lapis*« (stone), in order to emphasize that the lay person is »hard-headed«, not knowing science. Paradoxically, as an example, in German nomenclature, »lay« (*Laie*) has recently taken on the character of a privileged »state« in the Church. It is concerned with the lay people engaged in pastoral ministry, as, for example, a clerk (*Referent*) or a pastoral and parish assistant (Neuner 1987, 34). This reveals a second direction of research to us, emphasizing that the faithful lay do not only have a specific

bond with the world, but above all they have their own place and duty in the internal community of the Church. This constitutes a source of discussion about the identity of the lay people, as Pietro Brugnoli claims, the lay people are directly and formally caught in their own modality in relation to their situation in the world (Brugnoli 1965, 33–35), but Ciro García states that the layperson is defined not so much by what he or she does in the world, but more by what he or she is in the Church on the strength of baptism (García 2004, 91–92).

3. Three Visions of the Lay in the Church

In the context of the aforementioned considerations, it is worth mentioning the theological reflections on the subject of the place and role of the lay faithful in the Church. For example, Jan Grootaers showed three fundamental images of the laity. He started with the former vision of the passive and receptive faithful, which is still upheld in some environments. In this vision, the faithful is the subject of pastoral care, understood as an auditor and observer of the Eucharistic celebration, belonging to the profane sphere and not knowing the sacred language of the Church and neither understanding the Bible. In Grootaers' opinion, such faithful, defined in canon law by what he is not, has at his disposal spirituality of a second category, unless he decides on a monastic style of life, which is impossible to realize in his natural conditions of existence. In this vision the lay person is excluded from influence on the theology of the Church because of undervalued »*sensus fidelium*« and baptismal dignity, in comparison to the role of the teaching of the Church and ministerial priesthood. He is also excluded from real participation in liturgical life by the conversion of the Psalter to the rosary and Eucharistic communion to adoration in an exclusive sense. The author admits, however, that such faithful excluded from all decisive instances, deprived of adequate marital spirituality, professional and social spirituality, practically excluded from the canonisation processes, made before the Second Vatican Council a place for the classic picture of a modern laity. This new picture, based on specific bipolarity, defines the lay as a person of worldliness, as opposed to a priest who is a person of ecclesiastical sphere. In this view, the role of the priest is celebration of the liturgy and formation of Christians and the role of the lay is transformation of the world. The lay person is one who treats worldliness seriously. In this approach, the lay person differs from the priest and religious in the Church, since his or her own territory is worldliness, although they are simultaneously called to an active contribution in the internal life of the Church. The spirituality of the lay is primarily distinguished here by the married and family life, and engagement in professional activity and social relations. This vision is not sufficient for the author as he searches for a »new face« of the lay people who, remaining in normal life circumstances, which have been given to them, do not take specific initiatives in order to modify their way of existence relating to their Christian life. It can be seen, at this point, the influence of Yves Congar, who wrote that the lay is a Christian *sine addito*. On this

occasion the priesthood and religious are excluded from the definition. This confrontational approach of the author combines futuristic solutions on the subject of celibacy and the lack of a lay profession for priests which, in his opinion, are transient historical phenomena. This induces him to the thesis that the classic depiction of the lay and its spirituality based on married and family life and the professional engagement will lose its specific character in the future and will require new working (Grootaers 1970, 232–236).

4. Five forms of practicing theology of the lay

The different approaches of the laity can find their reflection in the various theological concepts. Leonard Doohan in the book *The Lay-Centred Church* mentioned five models of post-conciliar theological reflection on the subject of the laity, together with their merits and deficiencies. At first, theology of service, understood as an instrument, is found there in the form of the Catholic's Action's canonical mandate, or in the lay's services, created by establishment. This type of reflection may lead to clericalization and to a certain constraint in understanding the laity, since the lay people, before the obtained mission from the hierarchy, are already vested with a mission by Christ himself from the moment of baptism. The second trend is theology of ecclesiastical presence in the world, which determines a specific, and sometimes an exclusive mission of the lay person in the area of the secularity. This conception may lead to an inadequate and superficial distinguishing of that which is sacred from that which is worldly and secular. Very often this conception does not take into account the practices of the lay people inside the community of the Church. It is a similar case with the theology of change of the world, in which lay people not only operate in the world, but also for the world, seeking to »consecrate« the world to God. The author also notes a certain risk here by excluding other aspects of the life and mission of the lay, especially inside the community of the Church, and also forgetting about the need of God's grace for the positive changing of the world. The next form of reflection on the lay, motivated by doing justice to the laity, is ecclesial restructuring, with the object of a deeper and deeper passage from institution to community, from an accented hierarchy to the idea of God's people, from exclusive mission of the hierarchy to the mission of the whole Church, which emerges from the fundamental priestly dignity, received at baptism. Primarily, this is about de-clericalization, but sometimes democratization of the Church as well. Apart from the danger of the devaluation of the role of common Christians who do not belong to the elite and the tendency to neglect engagement in the world, as a result of concentrating on the tasks and roles within the Church, it is necessary to remember that the idea of democracy is alien to the structure of the Church and may cause unnecessary tension. The same danger is hidden in the last form of theology, which is set on discovering the identity of the lay through the lay themselves, claiming that a mature theology of the lay will eventually emerge and will be the result of serio-

us thought of the lay people themselves. The danger of a lack of feeling of belonging to the structure and institution of the Church can clearly be seen here (Dupuis 1987, 363–365).

It appears that in contemporary theological discussions, the real trouble spot is the participation of the lay in »*munus regendi*«. Hans Küng criticized *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* because it does not mention anything about the participation of the lay in the decisions undertaken in the Church (Küng 1979, 285). In the opinion of some authors, a return to the sources in Church reforms, did not take into consideration, for example, the fact that in Christian Ancient times, the laity had an influence on the choice of bishop. St. Leo the Great expressed this rule with the words: »*Qui praefuturus est omnibus ab omnibus eligatur*«. However, it is necessary to remember that looking for influences, abuse and mixing with politics meant that the Church, quite rightly, began to avoid the participation of the laity in the elections of bishops (Congar 1954, 329–333). It is worth quoting here, the opinion of the Polish layman, Jerzy Turowicz, who referred to the English distinction between decision-taking and decision-making. Taking a decision is an act of power which, in the Church, belongs to the hierarchy. However, making a decision should also be with the participation of the lay people, especially if that decision concerns them (Turowicz 1990, 70). On the other hand, the warning of Walter Kasper is not meaningless here: a new form of escape from the world is a temptation, that the tasks for lay people be seen primarily within the area of the Church (Kasper 1987, 587–588).

5. The issue of specific spirituality of the lay people

The discussions above on the subject of the identity of the lay person, are reflected in the issue concerning the specific spirituality of the laity. Some authors, such as Yves Congar, claim that there is not a specific spirituality of the laity as their spirituality is a common Christian spirituality (Congar 1954, 559–560). Others consider that there are as many different kinds of spirituality as there are different callings in the Church and the world. Here, it is worth remembering that, when considering the calling and mission of the laity in 1987, the *Lineamenta* of the Bishops' Synod recommended the development of the spirituality of the lay people (according to Dupuis 1987, 387). It is a fact that, among the various criteria of the specification of different spirituality, the anthropological-psychological criterion can be found, which takes into consideration the different spirituality in specific states in the Church (Matanić 1990, 47–49). In relation to lay people, the incarnation spirituality which suits them is more and more often talked about. One may repeat the opinion of Brugnoli, that the Church fulfills the task of the extension and realisation of the two-directional love of Christ, in other words, transcendental-eschatological and recapitulative-cosmic love through the differentiated church states. Since the Church, in the state of evangelical counsels, indicates its transcendental-eschatological existence and mission, in the state of

the priesthood, its transcendental-intermediary, and in the state of the laity the incarnation-recapitulative existence. In spirituality thus understood, incarnation is not about avoiding the cross, as the lay person is also obliged to adhere to the evangelical counsels. The difference between the incarnation and the eschatological spirituality consists in shifting the emphases and no spirituality may be based upon one individual mystery of Christ's life, with the omission of other Christian truths. Thus, it is not possible to put matters in this way, as if the spirituality of the lay were based on the incarnation of the Word, and the religious and priesthood on the mystery of the salvific death of Christ on the cross. It is not permissible to disconnect these two mysteries from each other.

Attempts at a suitable balance of the element of incarnation and eschatological in the spirituality of the lay person can be clearly seen here. The spirituality of the lay after the Second Vatican Council is no longer the spirituality of the monastic or clerical type, neither an escape from the world, but an immersion in it with the willingness of changing it in accordance to God's plan. The world is a place of sanctification and meeting with God. The incarnation spirituality does not only concern the sociological aspect, but develops itself on the common ground of the input of the Church in the world in accordance with the mystery of incarnation. This does not mean forgetting that the Church is not of this world. The laity must also remember about transcendence, distance towards the world, which is not a lack of interest, but an intimacy with the world from a redemption perspective, liberating the world from sinful structure and promoting the value of the Kingdom of God (García 2004, 169–170).

The discussion on the subject of the calling to the mystic in the life of the lay combines with the aforementioned issues. Another significant question is the relation of prayer to work. Together with this, the concept of asceticism is widely spoken of, and which concept is more suited to life conditions in the world (Larkin 1966, 703–707). A different area of discussion is the place and role of the evangelical counsels in the life of the laity. In this matter Brugnoli seems to present the most well balanced position, engaging the difference between the essence of evangelical counsels and the form of their realisation. On the basis of the analysis of different views of such authors as Hans Urs von Balthasar, Giuseppe Lazzati, Alfons Auer, Karl Rahner or Bernhard Häring, Brugnoli emphasized the right to mutual normativity and complementarity of the state of the evangelical counsels and the state of life of the lay person. In his opinion, the religious does not represent the eschatological grace of Jesus, but only typologically the eschatological-transcendental aspects of this grace, and the lay do not represent the incarnation-recapitulative grace, but only the recapitulative-cosmic aspects of the same grace, which significantly is both transcending as well as redeeming the world (Brugnoli 1965, 251–277). It is also necessary to remember that discussions about the role of the evangelical counsels find use in the disputable matter of the establishment of the suitable spirituality of secular institutes. Here we have a wide range of opinions, starting with the questioning of the true secularity of its members, through the emphasizing of their lives in the world, to the position granting

them the tasks developing both lay and consecrated spirituality (von Balthasar 1993, 114–115; Beyer 1987, 158–169; Thils 1988, 10–12; Rahner 1964, 342; Brugnoli 1965, 69–81).

6. Relational interpretation of the nature and spirituality of the lay

The multitude of problems related to the nature and spirituality of the lay people induces them to be expressed in the framework of the Church-communion reality, which is characterised by the simultaneous presence of the variety and complementarity of the callings and conditions of life, services, charisms and responsibilities (García 2004, 92–95). Related to this is the attempt to present the lay person in his or her various relations. After deep study, the very concept of the relation of spirituality shows that it may be developed in three directions. As early as in the first chapters of the Book of Genesis, (Gen. 1) God entrusted man with a threefold mission: protecting the image of God in oneself, procreation and domination over all the earth. For Edith Stein, this was the basis for particularizing the threefold relation of man, namely, the relation to God, to other people and to the world (Stein 2000, 58).

The deductions of Ciro García on the subject of the council renewal may be inspiring here. In his opinion, a true layman, in the transcendental dimension, opens him/herself up to God and develops this openness in the form of contemplation and searching for the mystery. In the dimension of brotherly communion, he/she opens up to meetings with other faithful, accepting the life of the Church and developing it as a space of free meeting with people, and in the mission dimension he or she feels called to expressing before others the message and reality of the love which he or she has personally received. Thus the apostolic exhortation of John Paul II, *Christifideles laici*, 1988 expresses likewise, speaking about the dignity of the lay in the Church-mystery in the first chapter, and in the second, about the participation of the lay in the life of the Church-communion, and in the third about the co-responsibility of the lay in the Church-Mission. Similarly, in the remaining two exhortations, directed towards the particular states of life in the Church, *Pastores dabo vobis*, 1992 and *Vita consecrata*, 1996, the pope maintains this same threefold division of relations to the mystery, communion and mission (García 2004, 119–120). From the point of view of the relation to God, this threefold bond has been already expressed by Catherine of Siena when she begged for mercy for herself, the Church and for the world (Congar 1954, 132).

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