



the ABC
of Catholic Action

KENYA

Nyeri Metropolitan

CATHOLIC ACTION



A PARTICULAR LAY VOCATION

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INTRODUCTION

This book is intended for the lay Christian Faithful who desire to devote themselves to the apostolate. It aims, first of all, to make them realize that in Baptism, together with the invaluable gift of God's Life that made them children of God and members of the Church, they received a mandate to co-operate in the duty of the Church to spread the Good News and to make all people followers of Christ. Moreover, it aims at reminding them, that, as lay people directly involved in worldly affairs, they should feel the duty to co-operate in modifying their society from within, to make it more in accordance with the teaching of Christ.

In particular, this book is intended for the Christians Faithful who feel called to perform their apostolic duty in the organization of Catholic Action. Hopefully, it will help them realize the grace they have received with this particular vocation to the apostolate and to reflect on how to respond to it.

This book will then be very useful to the people who are preparing to join Catholic Action, in order to know its aim and its expectations and thus be encouraged to strive to become its valid and zealous members.

But also the Catholic Action members themselves will benefit from the following reflections, in order to be more and more conscious of the level of Christian life they are called to, of what they are and of what they should be in the Church, and of the contribution they are expected to give to its ministry in the world.

May the Holy Spirit inspire many Christians in Kenya to join in this wonderful mission, in close union with the Hierarchy and the ecclesial associations and movements, aiming at making more and more people benefit from the grace of Christ's Redemption and so to improve the standard of our beloved society at all levels.

FIRST PART

THE DIGNITY,

ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY

OF THE LAY FAITHFUL

IN THE CHURCH

Chapter One
Dignity of the lay faithful in the Church

Bible reading: *Galatians* 4: 4–7.

Who are the lay faithful? The laity are all the members of the Church except those who have been ordained as deacons, priests or bishops, and those who belong to religious institutes approved by the Church authority. They share a responsibility for the Church's mission because of the dignity flowing from Baptism,

By virtue of Baptism the lay faithful are children of God and fully members of the Church. In fact, together with the Hierarchy and religious they are the Church. Already the Vatican II had stated this very clearly in chapter IV of the *Constitution on the Church*. Saint John Paul II stressed it even more in N. 10 of *Cristifideles Laici*: “Baptism regenerates us in the life of the Son of God; unites us to Christ and to his Body, the Church; and anoints us in the Holy Spirit, making us spiritual temples.” Then in N. 11, he still elaborates saying: “With Baptism we become children of God in his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Rising from the waters of Baptism, every Christian hears the voice that was once heard on the banks of the Jordan river: ‘*You are my beloved Son: with you I am well pleased*’ (*Luk.3:22*). It is the Holy Spirit who constitute the baptized as children of God and members of Christ's Body. ‘*And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son in our hearts*’ *Galatians* 4: 6).

The dignity of the members of the Church is common to all.

To make the position of the Laity in the Church more and more clear, the Vatican II went further to state that, even though there are different functions in the Church, as the ones of the Hierarchy,

the dignity of the members is one and it comes from the rebirth in Christ which is common to all. In chapter IV, the Constitution on the Church says: “*As a result of his divine institution, the holy Church is remarkably varied in its order and government, ‘As in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have one function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually member of one another’ (Romans 12:4-5).* There is then one chosen people of God: ‘*one faith, one baptism’ (Ephesians 4: 5);* the dignity the members have from their rebirth in Christ is common to all, so too is the grace of sonship and the call to perfection... There is no room in Christ and in the Church for inequality on the ground of race, nationality, social status or sex; for “*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave or free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*” (Galatians 3: 28) In the Church we do not all walk in the same path, yet we are all called to holiness and we have obtained a faith of equal standing in the righteousness of God. (cf. 2 Peter. 1:1). A certain number are appointed by Christ’s will as teachers, stewards of the mysteries and pastors for the sake of the others, yet all are on truly equal footing when it comes to the dignity and action common to all the faithful with regard to the building of Christ’s body”. LG. 32(See also “A Catholic Catechism” N. 155)

Questions

See a) Where does the dignity of the Christian lay faithful come from?

b) Why are all members of the Church basically equal?

Judge a) What is the importance of this doctrine?

b) In general, are Christians aware of their dignity?

Act Thank God for the great grace of Baptism and decide to improve your behaviour to be worthy of it.

Prayer

Dear Jesus, help me to realize more and more the capital importance of my Baptism, so that, conscious of my great

Christian dignity, I will try to be worthy of it and engage myself fully in the apostolate it requires of me

Chapter Two

The lay faithful share in the Threefold Mission of Christ as Priest, Prophet and King

Bible reading: *1 Peter* 2: 9-10.

The *Christifideles Laici* tells us: “The participation of the lay faithful in the Threefold Mission of Christ as Priest, Prophet and King finds its source in the anointing of Baptism, its further development in Confirmation and its realization and dynamic sustenance in the Holy Eucharist. Precisely because it derives from Church communion, the sharing of the faithful in the threefold mission of Christ it requires that it be lived and realized in communion and for the increase of the communion itself”.(No.. 14).

Here we see that the dignity of the lay faithful appears in a new way in the participation in this threefold Mission of Christ. So it will be very helpful to reflect on it.

Sharing in the Priestly Mission of Christ. The Ecumenical Council Vatican II, speaking of the Laity had already told us: “... all their works, prayers and apostolic undertakings, family and married life, daily works, relaxation of mind and body, if they are accomplished in the Spirit -indeed even the hardship of life patiently borne- all these become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Christ (cf. *Peter* 2: 5). In the celebration of the Eucharist they may be most fittingly be offered to the Father along with the body of the Lord. And so, worshipping every where by their holy actions, the laity consecrate the world itself to God”(LG 34).

Sharing in the Prophetic Mission of Christ. By this, says the *Christifideles Laici*, “Lay Faithful are given the ability and responsibility to accept the Gospel in faith and to proclaim it in words and deed, without hesitating to identify and denounce evil courageously. United to Christ, the great prophet (*Lk. 7: 15*) they are called to allow the newness and power of the Gospel to shine out every day in their family and social life , as well as to express courageously in the contradictions of the present age their hope of future glory, even through the framework of their secular life.” (No.14). This is not certainly easy, but in the struggle and hardship in witnessing the Good News, the Faithful will have to remember the high price Jesus had to pay for it.

Sharing in the Kingly Mission of Christ. Jesus did not come to be served but to serve (cf. *Mk. 19: 45*) and it is very clear that his kingly mission is a mission of service. The *Christifideles laici* tells us that the Lay Faithful “exercise their Kingships as Christians above all in their spiritual combat in which they try to overcome in themselves the kingdom of sin (cf. *Romans.6, 12*) and then to make a gift of themselves so as to serve, in justice and charity, Jesus who is himself present in all his brothers and sisters, above all in the very least (cf. *Mathew 2:, 40*). (14)

Questions

- See What does the participation of the lay Christians in the Priestly, Prophetic and Kingly Mission of Christ imply?
- Judge a) Am I aware of the great honour and challenge I received by being anointed in Baptism?
b) In general, do lay people know what they became in Baptism?
- Act Reflect and sometimes share with your friends on how to live up to your sharing in the threefold Mission of Christ

Prayer

God our Father, we praise you for calling us to share in the priestly, prophetic and kingly mission of your Son Jesus Christ. Through the grace of your Spirit, make us fully committed to this great mission. Through Christ our Lord.

Chapter Three

The Vocation of the Lay Faithful to Holiness

Bible reading: *Mathew 5: 48*.

The above quoted short sentence from Scripture is very clear in reminding us that the lay faithful are called to be holy. They should not just aim at being good Christians, but become perfect Christians. In the *Novo Millennium Ineunte*, the Holy Father John Paul II was saying: "...it would be a contradiction to settle for a life of mediocrity, marked by a minimalist ethic and a shallow religiosity." (31)

The universal call to holiness. The Vatican II in the *Constitution on the Church* says: "... all Christians, in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love, and by this holiness a more human manner of life is fostered also in the earthly society" (L.G 40). So all Christians, and of course the lay people are included, are called to sanctity. But what is sanctity / holiness? It is not "a sort of an extraordinary existence possible to a few... but a high standard of ordinary Christian life" (*Novo Millenium Ineunte* 31).

The *A Catholic Catechism* also reminds the lay faithful to "fulfil the call to holiness addressed to all the baptized" (155).

How do we attain sanctity? We find a good answer to this question in *Christy Fideles Laici*: "Life according to the Spirit, whose fruit is holiness (cf. *Romans 6:22, Galatians 5:22*) stirs up every baptized person and requires each to follow and imitate Jesus Christ, in embracing the Beatitudes, in listening and meditating on

the Word of God, in conscious and active participation in the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church, in personal, family or community prayer, in the hunger and thirst for justice, in the practice of the commandment of love in all circumstances of life and service to the brethren, especially the least, the poor and the suffering”. (16)

The particular call to sanctity for the lay faithful. The *Christifideles Laici* explains it in this way: “The vocation of the lay faithful to holiness implies that the life according to the Spirit expresses itself in a particular way in their involvement in temporal affairs and in their participation in earthly activities. Once again the apostle admonishes ‘Whatever you do, in words or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him’ (*Col 3:17*). Applying the apostle’s word to the lay faithful the Council categorically affirms: ‘Neither family concerns nor other secular affairs should be excluded by their religious program of life’ (A, A. 4) Likewise the Synod Fathers have said: ‘The unity of life of the lay faithful is of the greatest importance: indeed they must be sanctified in everyday professional and social life. Therefore, to respond to their vocation, the faithful must see their daily activities as an occasion to join themselves to God, fulfil his will, serve other people and lead them to communion with God in Christ’” (17).

Questions

- See
- a) What is sanctity? How do we achieve it?
 - b) What does “universal call to sanctity” mean? What does the sanctity of the lay faithful imply?
- Judge
- a) Do you think that in general our Christians know what is Sanctity?
 - b) Are they conscious to be called to it?
- Act
- a) Decide on how you will strive for perfection.
 - b) Try to share with some friends about the importance of improving the standard of Christian life.

Prayer

God our Father, in your great love you are calling us to share in your sanctity by living up to a high standard of our ordinary Christian life. As you know our weakness in responding to such a demanding call, be with us with the strength of your Holy Spirit.

Chapter Four **The particular Role and Responsibility of the lay faithful in the Church**

Bibl3 reading: *John 17: 15- 6*

As they live and work among the people, the lay faithful are called upon to follow the way of Christ in their daily lives and so to make present in our society the values, attitudes and actions of Christ. So all their words and actions should witness to Christ and will make the Kingdom of God present among the people as Christ did.

The secular character of the apostolate of the lay faithful. The *Christifideles Laici* says: “To understand properly the position of the lay faithful position in the Church, it is necessary to come to a deeper theological understanding of their secular character in connection with God’s plan of salvation, in connection with the mystery of the Church.... The Church, in fact, lives in the world, even though she is not of the world (cf. *John 17: 16*). She is sent to continue the redemptive work of Jesus Christ which, concerns the salvation of humanity, and involves the renewal of all temporal order. Certainly all members of the Church are shares in this secular dimension, but in different ways. In particular the sharing of the lay faithful has its own manner of realization and function which is properly and particularly theirs. Such a manner is designated with the expression ‘secular character.’”(15)

So the ‘secular character’ of the lay faithful means the particular way in which they are expected to perform their apostolate among the people with whom they live and work. In this connection, the *A Catholic Catechism* says: “One major challenge in today society is the active involvement of the laity in building up a more human society, where justice, peace and solidarity may reign”. (15).

The lay faithful contribute to the sanctification of the world from within. The secular character of the apostolate of the lay faithful can be even better understood by the following part of the same number 15 of the *Christifideles Laici* (15). Here we are called to reflect on the different ways the members of the Hierarchy and the religious on one side and the lay faithful on the other attend to the sanctification of the society. The lay faithful in fact are fully involved in the world and so they are expected to sanctify it from within, by good example as individuals and as families, by sharing their belief in the Christian values with the companions with whom they live and work, by influencing in a Christian way the cultural development of their society and the political trend of their nation etc. Let us listen again to what *Christifideles Laici* is telling us: “The secular world is the place in which the lay faithful receive their call from God. They live in the world, that is in every one of the secular professions and occupations: they study, they work they form relationships and friends, professionals, members of societies, cultures, etc. ... They are not supposed to abandon the position they have in the world. On the contrary, God entrusts a vocation to them that properly concerns their situation in the world. The lay faithful in fact are called by God so that, led by the spirit of the Gospel, may contribute to the sanctification of the world, as from within like leaven. (15)

Questions

See How should the lay faithful transform the world from within?

Judge Are our Christians aware of the apostolate they have in the very social situation in which they live?
Act Decide to do something more to influence in a Christian way the environment in which you live.

Prayer

I am grateful, Jesus for the opportunities you give me to make your Good News known and to influence the people with whom I live. Help me to give always a good example of Christian life, and inspire me with the words that can help my friends to follow it.

Chapter Five

The active participation of the lay faithful in the life of the Church as Communion

Bible reading: *John* 15:1-4.

The Church is a Reality of Communion. The words we have heard from St. John's Gospel reveal "the mystery of communion that serves as a unifying bond between the Lord and his disciples, between Christ and the baptized, a living and life giving communion through which Christians are no longer belonging to themselves, but are the Lord's very own, as the branches are one with the vine".... From the communion that the Christian experiences in Christ there immediately flows the communion that they experience with one another. For this communion Jesus prays: 'that they may be one, even as you Father are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us. (*John* 17:,21)'" (*Christifideles Laic*) N. 18) A *Catholic Catechism* underlines that "God sanctifies us, and calls us to live in union with him and one another in order to be witnesses of the presence of the kingdom through a life of holiness". (56)

The lay faithful live in communion with the Universal Church by participating in the life and mission of the Diocese.

We read in *Christifideles Laici*: “The lay faithful participate in the life of the Church not only in exercising their tasks and charisms, but also in many other ways. Such participation finds its first and necessary expression in the life and mission of the particular church, in the diocese, in which the Church of Christ, one, holy, catholic and apostolic, is truly present and at work” (25)

The same section reminds us that the Vatican II “encourages the lay faithful actively to live out their belonging to the particular church, while at the same time assuming an ever-increasingly ‘catholic’ spirit. Let the faithful constantly foster a feeling for their own diocese, of which the parish is a kind of cell, and be always ready to their bishop’s invitation to participate in diocesan projects.” (25)

The communion and participation of Lay People in Parish Life.

Christifideles Laici says: “The ecclesial community, while always having a universal dimension, finds its most immediate and visible expression in the parish. It is there that the Church is seen locally. In a sense, it is the Church living in the homes of her sons and daughters... The parish is not principally a structure, a territory or building, but rather the family of God, a fellowship with a unifying spirit, a familial and welcoming home, the community of the faithful” (26) In the following section then adds: “The lay faithful ought to be ever more convinced of the special meaning that their commitment to the apostolate takes on in their parish... They should accustom themselves to working in the parish in close union with their priests... The lay faithful have the ability to do very much and, therefore ought to do very much towards the growth of an authentic ecclesial communion in their parishes” (27).

Questions

See How should the lay faithful live up to their communion with the Church.

Judge a) Do many of our Christians feel in communion with the

Church ?

b) Do they participate in the activity of the diocese, of the Parish?

Act Decide on how to be possibly more involved in the activities of the Church, starting with the activities of your parish.

Prayer

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit we praise you for your deep relationship of love. Let it be a challenge to us, to help us to become an expression of your Trinitarian bond in our communion in your Church.

SECOND PART

CATHOLIC ACTION

**IS A PARTICULAR WAY TO RESPOND
TO THE VOCATION
OF ALL LAY FAITHFUL
TO THE APOSTOLATE**

Chapter Six
Catholic Action is a Particular Lay Vocation

Bible reading: *Matthew*. 28:18–20.

In the first part, we dealt with Christian lay faithful in general. Making use of the documents of the Ecumenical Council Vatican II and of the Apostolic Letter of Saint John Paul II on the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful, the *Christifideles Laici*, we saw that they have a position of great dignity in the Church, but, on the other hand, we have realized the very serious challenge posed to them by their role, by the responsibility expected on them in sharing in the Mission of the Church.

Now we are going to deal with Catholic Action in particular, and we ask ourselves:

What is Catholic Action?

First, we can say that

Catholic Action is an association of lay faithful who are in a particular way committed to respond to the general call of all the baptized to participate in the Life of the Church and to share in her Mission.

Catholic Action is a call to sanctity. One who feels called to participate in the Life of the Church is bound to live up to this life, that is life in the Spirit, in abundance. He/she will try more and more to live up to the Christian Initiation's promises, strengthened by listening to the Word of God, by participating in the Eucharist, by the exercise of love and pardon, by doing every thing for the glory of God, by living the Gospel in the normal duties of everyday life.

Catholic Action is vocation with a Charism (a special grace or gift of the Spirit in view of a service expected in the Church) that implies:

- A Missionary Spirit. C. A. fosters in its members the awareness, that they not only belong to the Church, but they are the Church. It helps them to remember that, whether they are in the family or in their place of work or anywhere, they are entrusted with the task

of making Christ known and loved. Through example and word, they are expected to try to elevate the standard of society according to the spirit of the Good News.

- A Diocesan Character. C. A. asks its members to feel fully involved in the Universal Church, but also encourages them to insert themselves practically in the Church through their diocese, by cultivating communion with the bishop and with their priests, by supporting diocesan and parish initiatives, by collaborating in their apostolic or missionary undertakings.

- A Service of Unity. The C. A. members aim at fostering unity in the Church. Being in close communion with their bishop and parish priest, who are the fathers of the diocesan and parish family, they feel one thing with all their children, open to collaboration with all other association and movements.

Questions

See a) What is Catholic Action?

b) What does the Charism of C. A. require?

Judge What is the importance of being a member of C. A.?

Act Think on how to become a zealous member of C. A.

Prayer

God our Father, thank you for inspiring the foundation of C. A.

Thank you for all the good it has already accomplished in the Church and help its members to be worthy of the particular lay call they have received. Through Christ our Lord.

Chapter Seven **Catholic Action is a School of Apostolate**

Bible Reading: 1 *Corinthians* 9: 16-18.

We have seen that the Catholic Action is a particular Lay Vocation. However, a vocation needs to be accepted and followed properly. So, Catholic Action helps its members to respond to their particular vocation. It aims at making them look at the apostolate as part and parcel of their life, so much so that when they neglect it, they should feel like missing something. The C. A. member in fact should even come to the point of saying with Saint Paul, as we have heard above: “*I should be punished if I don’t announce the Good News*” (1 Cor.9,16).

To prepare its members for the apostolate:

1) Catholic Action makes sure that its members have a solid Catechetical Instruction based on the Holy Scripture. Together with the instructions given in the association’s meetings, the members are encouraged to read and study the Bible and the Catechism of their own and to make use of all possible courses that can equip them with the basic ideas of Christian doctrine. It would not be possible, in fact, to announce the Good News without knowing it. Moreover, as we live in a pluralistic society, very often we are faced with objections to our faith by people of other religions and even by Christians who have been misled by other ideologies. So, the apostle should always be ready to answer these objections and to clarify ideas according to Christ’s teaching.

2) Catholic Action trains its members by teaching them the basic principles of the apostolic duties and by involving them in apostolic activities. So it helps them to live up to an apostolic spirit, first of all by reminding them of the passages of Scripture and of the teaching of the Church that refer to the apostolate and their role in the Church.

Moreover, Catholic Action trains its members by organizing apostolic activities in collaboration with the bishop, the parish priest, the parish council and other associations. Furthermore, Catholic Action aims at making its members apostles in the very situation in which they live in society, aiming at transforming it from within by influencing the people they are living with in a Christian way, by example and words.

It is encouraging to realize how effective this training to the apostolate by Catholic Action has been so far. A clear proof of this are many ex-members who, though are now far away from their association, they offer themselves for various Church activity of which they see the need, and they are ready for them when required, prompted by the apostolic spirit of C. A.

Questions

See How are Catholic Action members helped to respond to their particular vocation to the apostolate?

Judge 1) Am I eager to know the Word of God and the teaching of the Church?

2) Am I growing in generously involving myself in the activities organized or suggested by my association?

3) Do I feel the responsibility and joy of the apostolate?

Act Evaluate your Christian life and decide on how to make it more active in response to your call to the apostolate.

Prayer

Thank you, Lord, for calling me to the apostolate. Help me to be worthy of this grace, by determined and eager attentiveness to the teaching of Catholic Action and generous involvement in its activities, so that I respond to your expectations on me.

Chapter Eight

Catholic Action trains its members to Sanctity

1) through the Motto: “Prayer, Action and Sacrifice”

Bible reading: 1st *Thessalonian* 4, 3.

We have seen in chapter 3 that all Christians from any walk of life are called to sanctity, that sanctity fosters a more humane way of life. The C. A. members, on their part, being expected to fully share in the mission of the Church, must respond to the call to sanctity in a particular way. To help them towards this end C. A. proposes to them the Motto: “Prayer, Action and Sacrifice”. C. A. members are expected to become saints by living up to this motto. In it, Prayer comes first, because it is fundamental for a journey towards sanctity.

Prayer is the basis of sanctity. In fact, sanctity is communion, intimacy with God and this. First, can be fostered in prayer. Sanctity then requires perfection that implies growing in virtues and getting rid of bad habits. Therefore, it requires much effort. But, as *Psalms* 127 tells us, “*If the Lord does not build the house, in vain work the mason*”. Therefore, while striving towards perfection we must rely on God’s help, through prayer. That is why Saint John Paul II, in his letter “At the beginning of the New Millennium” was saying: “The training to holiness calls for a Christian life distinguished above all in the art of prayer”. (32):

“Prayer should not be taken for granted”, as Saint John Paul II was saying after the words we have quoted above. He was still saying: “We have to learn to pray”. So, we must improve our prayer, to make it a real conversation with God. To pray is not just to “say” the prayers we know by heart or we read in books. We must be careful that it does not become just a routine, that is something done mechanically, without reflecting on what we are doing, without realising that we are in loving conversation with our

loving Father, together with Christ with the strength of the Holy Spirit. This is real, authentic prayer.

Prayer with the Word of God. The letter to the *Hebrews* tells us “indeed the word of God is living and effective, sharper than any double hedge sword... and able to discern the reflections and thoughts of the heart”. (4: 12). It can be greatly helpful to give time to the word of God so that it touches our hearts and converts us: by reading it, meditating and conversing with God about it. This process can lead us to contemplation, a very deep form of prayer that makes us feel with God, in a mood of complete surrendering to Him. Then, by remembering in our activity the calls that had come up in prayer, we will give a chance to the Spirit to help us improve our Christian life. This ancient form of prayer with the word of God is called “*Lectio Divina*”. It is now strongly recommended by the Church and is certainly very helpful.

Questions

- See Why is prayer necessary to become saints?
When is prayer real, authentic?
How can we pray with the word of God (*Lectio Divina*)?
- Judge Do I need to improve my way of praying?
How will *Lectio Divina* improve my way of life?
- Act Decide on the prayers you will have every day and on how you will improve your way of praying.

Prayer

God our Father, enable me to realise how much you love me and how eagerly you are waiting that I come to you every day for a loving conversation with you. Help me to respond to your expectations, so that, in union with you, with the strength of your

Holy Spirit, I may follow your Son Jesus Christ on the way to sanctity. We ask this through the same Jesus your Son.

Chapter Nine

C. A. trains its Members to Sanctity by Action

Bible reading: *Mathew. 5:14–16.*

Prayer is certainly the basis of a good Christian life. Without it, we cannot aim at sanctity. But the love of God that has been nourished in prayer must be manifested and proved by good deeds. “*For every tree is known by its own fruit*” (Luke 6: 44). In fact, prayer that does not improve our life at large is not authentic. Even if we give enough time to it, and we try to pray well, if we do not see improvement in our behaviour, prayer is still missing something. We still need to bring prayer in our daily life, to make our activity prayer itself and thus a help towards sanctity.

C. A. members are growing towards sanctity by their apostolic action. In fact, we do not become saints by prayer only, but also our work, when it is oriented to the love and glory of God, contributes to our spiritual growth. This is true in particular for the apostolic activity. As is oriented to the coming of the Kingdom of God. So, the C. A. members, by co-operating in work organized by their pastors, and in their personal apostolate to the people among the people they live with, they have very good chances for growth towards sanctity. They become the light of the world by the good works people can see in them, as we have heard from Mathew, but, at the same time, they also improving their relationship with God.

The action performed in communion with the Church has a special value. As we have seen, one of the characteristics of the charisma of C. A. is to work in communion with the Church, in unity with the Hierarchy, aiming at fostering a spirit of collaboration with all associations and movements. The apostolate performed in a

climate of communion responds to the expectations of Jesus who prayed that his followers may be one thing as he is one with the Father. To underline the importance of this unity with him and among ourselves, he gave us the parable of the vine and the branches (See *John* 15: 1 – 10). So the activity performed in unity is certainly effective. First, it can obtain better results, because ‘union is strength’. But there is more than that. It is also more beneficial to the individuals themselves, because, by being performed in communion with the Church, and so in better union with Jesus, it becomes also more beneficial for personal spiritual growth towards sanctity.

Questions

- See 1) When is our activity helping us towards sanctity.
 2) How does a C. A member grow in sanctity by living up to the second part of his motto: “Action”?
- Judge 1) Do I feel the desire to become more and more active in my apostolate?
 2) Do I try to bring prayer in my activity (e.g. by remembering what has touched me in the prayer with the Word of God)?
- Act Decide to improve your apostolate to the benefit of more people and for your personal growth.

Prayer

God our Father, thank you for calling me to the apostolate in C. A., enkindle in me the fire of your love so that I may respond with great enthusiasm and generosity to this call, for my own growth, for the good of my brothers and sisters and for your greater glory. I ask this in the name of Jesus your Son and our Lord.

Chapter Ten
**C. A. trains its Members to Sanctity
through Effort and Sacrifice**

Bible reading: Mark: 8, 34-35

As we have seen, prayer is fundamental for our growth in Christ because it opens us to the work of the Spirit, “the source of all sanctity”, as we hear in the Eucharistic Prayer Two of the Mass. Jesus said. “...*cut out from me you can do nothing*” (John 15: 5). But He also said: “*It is not those who say to me: “Lord, Lord”, who will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but the person who does the will of the Father*” (M 7:21). So, also our action is necessary, and, with it, to grow towards sanctity, sacrifice is required. Jesus said in fact “... *try to enter through the narrow door*” (Luke 13: 24). Nothing is easy in this world and the effort needed to follow the footsteps of Jesus is very demanding it. That is why C. A. together with prayer and action, requires sacrifice of its members.

C. A. motto is a reminder that sacrifice is necessary to follow Christ. Jesus was very clear about this: “*Anyone who does not carry his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple*” (Luke 14: 27) So sacrifice is essential for a Christian journey as well as prayer, it is a way to salvation. Jesus saved us with his cross and we cannot save ourselves without taking up our cross.

C. A. motto is a reminder that effort and sacrifice is required for a fruitful apostolate. Nothing is possible in any field without sacrifice. Nobody can get a good position in society without sacrifice. Even the athletes, to succeed, need to undergo the sacrifice of a long and heavy training. We cannot expect to achieve

anything in the apostolate without the sacrifice required in overtaking the problems and difficulties that it involves.

C. A. motto is a reminder that the fruitfulness of our apostolate depends on our union with the Sacrifice of Christ. We have remembered that sacrifice is needed for any achievement. But in connection with our spiritual growth, and the fruitfulness of our apostolate, we should also remember that our sacrifice should be inspired by the faith that helps us do everything for the love of Jesus, following his footsteps, in union with his Sacrifice that gives worth to our sacrifice. In this perspective we will not only be ready to accept in faith and Jesus' love the difficulties we encounter in the apostolate, but also all crosses, of any sort, we meet in daily life, and to make some spontaneous acts of self denial that will bring us closer to Him and give new efficacy to our apostolate.

Conclusion. Through its threefold motto, C. A. aims at forming active and effective apostles, not only equipped with doctrinal and technical capacity, but also with the most needed strength that comes from their union with God.

Questions

See 1) What does the third part of the motto of C. A.: "sacrifice expect of its members?

. 2) Why is sacrifice needed for a fruitful apostolate?

Judge 1) Do hardships I encounter in my apostolate impede me to perform it?

2) Am I ready to face them and to accept all my crosses for my growth and for the fruitfulness of my apostolate?

Act Bring some of your pains to Jesus, and ask to be able to accept them out of love for Him

Prayer

Father, thank you for calling me to follow the footsteps of your Son Jesus. You know that when it comes to accept my crosses, as He did, I find it difficult. Help me to understand that, by accepting them for your love, I am facing true happiness, I am growing in my friendship with you and I have a chance to bring more people to you. I ask this in the name of the same Jesus.

Chapter Eleven

**Catholic Action is a Charism
approved and recommended by the Church (I)**

Bible Reading: *Ephesians.4:* 11–13

Catholic Action was approved and encouraged by the Vatican II
which also enlisted its characteristics

As we have already noticed, a charism is a special gift of the Spirit to an individual Christian or to a group of them, a gift intended for the growth of the Church. However to make sure of the authenticity of a charism, the discernment and approval of the Church is needed.

The approval of the charism of C. A. came very clearly and strongly by the Vatican II in the Decree on the Lay Apostolate, Chapter 4, N. 20, that it also states

the four characteristics of Catholic Action:

- 1) The apostolic aim of the Church. “The immediate aim of the organization of C. A. is the Church apostolic aim, that is, the evangelisation and sanctification of men and the formation of Christian conscience among them so that they can infuse the spirit of the Gospel into various communities and departments of life.”

- 2) The collaboration with the hierarchy. “Collaborating in their own way with the hierarchy, the laity contribute their experience and assume responsibility in the direction of these organizations, in the investigation of the conditions in which the Church’s pastoral work is to be carried on, in the elaboration and execution of their plan of action.”

- 3) To act as an organic body. “The laity act together in the manner of an organic body so that the community of the Church is more fittingly symbolized and the apostolate made more effective”

- 4) To act under the higher direction of the hierarchy. “Whether they offer themselves spontaneously, or are invited to action and direct co-operation with the hierarchical apostolate, the laity function under the higher direction of the hierarchy.”

The approval and recommendation of C. A. by the Vatican II

N. 20 of the Decree on Lay Apostolate, ends like this: “This council most earnestly recommends these institutions (C. A.) because certainly they meet the requirements of the Church’s apostolate in many countries, it invites the priests and laity working in them to develop more and more the characteristics mentioned above, and always give brotherly co-operation in the Church to other forms of the apostolate.”

Questions

- See What are the characteristics of C. A. required by the Vatican II ?
- Judge Are you behaving and acting according to them?
- Act Put more effort and enthusiasm in your C. A. apostolate

encouraged by the recommendations of the Church.

Prayer

God our Father, we thank you for the inspiration of your Spirit that brought about the foundation of C. A. to provide for the needs of your Church in our modern times. Help us to make good use of this precious Charism. Through Christ your Son and our Lord.

Chapter Twelve

Catholic Action is a Charism approved and recommended by the Church (II)

Bible Reading: *1st Corinthians* 12: 4–7.

Catholic Action was approved and recommended
by the General Synod of the Bishops of 1987

A general synod is an assembly of representatives of the bishops of all the dioceses, all over the world. It is called general to distinguish it from the continental or zone synods limited to a particular area. The general synod takes place every three years to reflect and give directions on a particular theme of Christian doctrine or a particular aspect of the life of the Church.

The general synod, held in 1987 reflected on the teaching of the Ecumenical Council Vatican II on “Lay Apostolate” and, based on the experience of the twenty two years that followed; gave us an elaboration on it with new indications and suggestions.

The Apostolic Exhortation “Christifideles Laici”.

After each general synod, the Holy Father writes an Apostolic Exhortation that presents a summary of the reflections and directions of the same synod and gives new weight to them. Saint John Paul II did it after the above-mentioned synod on the “Lay Apostolate” with the Exhortation “Christifideles Laici”.

Particularly in the first of our booklet, we have already used a lot of its rich teaching on the dignity, role and responsibility of the lay faithful in the Church. However, for the members of the association of *Catholic Action*, it is also important to notice that, after dealing with the general vocation of all lay Christian to the apostolate and its requirements, Pope John Paul II, referring to the conclusion of the synod of the bishops in his Apostolic Exhortation, he renews the approval and recommendation of the Vatican II of Catholic Action.

The renewed approval and recommendation of Catholic Action by the Synod of Bishops.

At N. 31 of the “*Christifideles Laici*”, Saint John Paul II quotes the following conclusion of the Synod: “Among the various forms of apostolate which have particular relationship with the Hierarchy, the Synod Fathers have singled out various movements and associations of *Catholic Action* in which, in this organic and stable form the lay faithful may freely associate under the movement of the Holy Spirit, in communion with their bishop and priests, so that, in a way proper to their vocation and with some special method, they might be of service through their faithfulness and good works to promote the growth of the entire Christian community, pastoral activities and infusing every aspect of life with the gospel spirit.”

Questions

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| See | 1) What is a General Synod of the bishops
2) What was the theme of the General Synod of 1987?
3) What did that Synod say about Catholic Action? |
| Judge | 1) Why is Catholic Action important in the Church?
2) What does the encouragement of Catholic Action by the authority of the Church tell you? |
| Act | Decide on how to respond to the expectations of the |

Church.

Prayer

God, our Heavenly Father, through the guidance of your Holy Spirit you have inspired the Synod of the Bishops to remind us that Catholic Action is expected to promote the growth of the entire Christian community. Enable us to respond generously to these expectations Through Christ our Lord.

Chapter Thirteen
**Catholic Action is a Charism
approved and recommended by the Church (III)**

Bible Reading: *Matthew* 16: 18, 9.

Catholic Action was approved and recommended
by all the Holy Fathers since the time it was started

As a modern organization, Catholic Action started in the 19th Century. It came out spontaneously from a group of generous young Christians that felt that they could not remain idle while the Holy Father and the Hierarchy at large was insulted and denigrated by the anti clericals in Rome.

Pius IX saw in it an inspiration of the Holy Spirit and joyfully welcomed it with the following words: “It has been a cause of great joy to hear that many Christians have gathered in order to defend the freedom of the Church and to oppose the efforts of the impious.” (4th April 1876).

Leo XIII the famous Pope of the “*Rerum Novarum*”, the first Encyclical Letter on social justice, when receiving a group of Catholic Actionists told them “Try your best to establish your associations every where, to see to it that the existing ones may

flourish and develop their action with Christian courage according to your constitutions.” (10th August 1881).

Pius X who is now St. Pius X, said, “Catholic Action has always been helping the Church, and the Church has always accepted and blessed this help that has always been different according to the various needs”. (11th June 1905).

Benedict XV was particularly preoccupied with the young generation and speaking to C. A. members said: “it is important to organize the young in their special sections so that they may prepare for the adults’ form of apostolate”. (7th January 1920).

Pius XI was called the pope of C. A. He gave its definition as “the collaboration of the laity in the hierarchical apostolate”. He added: “C. A. means and signifies catholic life: what makes it precious is that it helps to live the life of the Church in its substance”. (27th July 1938).

Pius XII reminded C. A. that “its aim is very high and it is the very aim of the Church: the continuation of the redemptive work of Christ” (4th September 1940). He also acknowledged that “C. A. is a very efficacious help to the Church in her mission in the world”. (20th April 1941).

Saint John XXIII while going on praising C. A. in general, expressed special concern for its establishment in the mission countries: C. A. was wanted by the Lord to prolong and spread the mission of the Church in the world through the laity” (5th January 1959). He also said: It is a cause of great comfort to see what has been done so far in the Missions by C. A. member as precious collaborators of the bishops and the priests” (29th June 1959).

Saint Paul VI said that C. A. “is something very precious to the Church and to the Holy Father in particular”, and also: “We will be grateful to our children who accept C. A. as the best way to unite themselves to the Church and to share her own aspiration” (7th December 1963). Later on he added: “We like to state again that C. A., as the collaboration of the laity in the hierarchical apostolate of the Church, is still a valid formula. It is a direct, qualified,

responsible and organized collaboration in which the vocation of every Christian to the apostolate is realized in the most binding and thus the most meritorious way” (1st May 1967).

Reflect on what these continuous encouragement for C. A. mean and how they must help you in your determination to be a zealous member of it.

Prayer

Thank you Father for calling me to follow your Son Jesus in his salvation mission in the particular lay vocation of C. A and for reminding me of this call through the representatives of your Son Jesus on earth. Make me generous in my response to it.

Chapter Fourteen

**Catholic Action is a Charism
approved and recommended by the Church (IV)**

The encouragement of the Holy Fathers in recent times.

After the Ecumenical Council Vatican II, many associations and movements have come up and approved by the authority of the Church. This does not mean that CA is not necessary any more. Popes Saint John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis assure us of this.

SAINT JOHN PAULL II, on February 2003, said, “I strongly wish to repeat once more that the Church still needs Catholic Action. The memory of the past must help the consciousness of a precious gift that the Holy Spirit has given to the Church. It is an heritage that now, at the beginning of the third millennium, is called upon to bring up new fruits of sanctity and apostolate, by extending .the establishment of the Association to other Local Churches in different Countries.

Again, on the occasion of the Catholic Action pilgrimage to Loreto in September 2005 he said: “It is your task to show, in close union with your pastors, that the Gospel is still of actuality and that faith does not subtract the faithful from history, but immerses him/her more deeply in it. Courage Catholic Action! May the Lord guide your renewal journey”.

Benedict XVI. On the 4th May 2008, on the remembrance of the 140th anniversary of the Italian C.A, in front of thousand of its members and representatives of the International Forum of Catholic Action from forty Countries, he said: “Dear Children, young people and adults of Catholic Action. It is a great joy to me to welcome you here today in St. Peters Square... Thank you for your visit. I greet with affection all of you. The vocation of yours is still valid to-day. I encourage you, therefore, to persevere with generosity in your service to the Church”.

POPE FRANCIS, on the occasion of the National Assembly, on third May 2014 said: “dear friends of Catholic Action. I welcome all of you who represent this beautiful ecclesial reality. In the present social and ecclesial context, you the laity of Catholic Action, are called to renew the missionary option, open to the horizons that the Spirit points out to the Church and the expression of a rejuvenated lay apostolate.

Questions

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| See | Why are the statements of the Holy Fathers important to us Catholics? |
| Judge | What do you find relevant in what the Popes John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Pope Francis have said about C. A.? |

Act Encouraged by the Popes decide on how you will be more committed as a C. A. member.

Prayer

God our Heavenly Father, in response to your great love in calling me to co-operate in the salvation work of your Son Jesus Christ in the association of C. A., I pledge to endeavour more and more in my determination to live according to its spirit an action. Through the same Christ our Lord

Chapter Fifteen **The Catholic Action Candidates**

Bible Reading: *Mathew. 9, 9.*

The C. A. candidates, Christians who are preparing to join the association, must be aware of having been called by God.

From the passage of the Holy Scripture we have heard at the beginning of this lesson, and from other passages of the Gospel we know that when going around the villages of Palestine, Jesus, now and then would stop and call somebody to follow Him. This is what he still does now a day, though not in the same way, when he wants to call someone to a particular way of life or to a special activity in the Church.

So, the Christians who feel called to C A. should be convinced that after the general call to the apostolate that every Christian has already in Baptism, they have received a particular one to C. A. May be that the idea of joining C. A. had come from an article read in a paper, from a sermon heard in church, from the example

of a friend who was happy with his activity in C. A. or by having been invited by the same to join his/her association. In any way the idea had come up, one thing is certain: that was the way by which the Lord has inspired them to take that decision. Remembering that God calls out of love, the Candidates should feel happy and deeply grateful to Him. They would then be moved by a desire of a generous response to it. Generosity is the fundamental attitude that the Candidates should develop in order that in C. A. they can be fulfilled and enriched, and in turn become the zealous apostles they are expected to be.

The C. A. Candidates need preparation.

The Decree on the lay Apostolate of the Ecumenical Council Vatican II, at N. 28th says: “A training is indispensable if the apostolate is to attain full efficacy”.

So, the C. A. Candidates must be well instructed. First of all, on their position in the Church, on the dignity, role and responsibility they have in it. Then, as they have a particular call, as lay faithful, to the apostolate in C. A., they must then be well acquainted on the nature and requirements of this association. Moreover, as the apostolate requires sound knowledge of the Holy Scripture and of the Catechism of the Catholic Church and of its teaching they will have to be well equipped with it. Moreover, they should be required to start exercising the apostolate because it is not enough to know its theory but one has to learn it by practice.

Finally, remembering the even more than sound doctrine the apostolate needs witness, the Candidates will need moral and spiritual training, in particular training to authentic prayer, prayer with the Word of God that is the first and fundamental part of the motto or aim of C. A. prayer that tends to become contemplation, as the consignment of pope John Paul II asks from its members. In this way the Candidates will be helped towards the life of perfection in sanctity that is expected of them.

Questions

See..... 1) Why do we say that C. A. is a particular lay vocation?

.....2) Are you aware to have been called to C. A. by God ?

Judge.....Do you think you are enough equipped for the the apostolate that is expected of you?

Act Decide to put more effort in being a good apostle.

Prayer

Dear Jesus, thank you so much for having called me to the lay apostolate in C, A. Send me the abundance of your Spirit to enable me to make me a more and more generous worker in your field, to the benefit of many brothers and sisters.

Chapter Sixteen

The short prayer – greeting of Catholic Action: “Jesus your Kingdom come, through Mary”!

Bible Reading John 18, 36 – 37.

There are several ways of greeting each other in a Christian way. They are all good, but the members of C. A. use in particular: “Jesus, your Kingdom come, through Mary”, because by this greeting, that is also a short prayer, they remember the very aim of C. A. In fact, as we well know, that the aim of C.A. is to co-operate so that the Kingdom of God, that Jesus brought to us, may enter in each individual and in the society at large. This short prayer should also be used in personal prayer, in particular when we feel in need of help in the hardship of our apostolate

The Kingdom of God in our life.

The desire for the coming of the Kingdom of God implies first of all that we look for his reigns in ourselves. This implies that we submit to Him our mind, our will, our heart and all our activity. This must be our greatest aspiration. Jesus told us: *“Make it your first care to seek the kingdom of God, and all these things will be given you as well”*. Luke 12, 31.

The Kingdom of God in our society.

Secondly, the zeal for the Kingdom of God requires our dedication to make Him known and loved by the others. Jesus came to earth to conquer our fallen humanity for the eternal Father. To make it a kingdom subjected to Him for ever, “A kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of righteousness, love and peace” (Preface of the H. Mass of the feast of Christ the King). So, it is not a political kingdom, but a spiritual one. A kingdom that Jesus did not come to establish by force but by love. And this is what we are expected to do as Christians. virtue of our Baptism and Confirmation. Prompted by our love for Christ, out of love for our neighbours, we must try to attract them by example and words to the Kingdom. But as with our own means we cannot attain anything, we have to pray for it.

“Through Mary”. Jesus came to us through the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is through her intercession again that his Kingdom will triumph in us and in our society. After the Resurrection of Christ, the spreading of this Kingdom started at Pentecost with the power of the Holy Spirit that He had gained for us with his Paschal Mystery. But the Spirit came down on the apostles when they were praying with Mary in the Upper Room. It is also in trusting in her maternal intercession that our apostolate will obtain the desired outcome. That is why the Immaculate Virgin Mary is the particular Patroness of C.A. This is the reason why we venerate her in a particular way and we trust in her for the fruitfulness of our

apostolate. This explains why, when we meet we greet each other by saying: “Jesus, your Kingdom come, through Mary”.

Questions.

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| See | 1) Why do C. A. members like the greeting:
“Jesus, your Kingdom come, through Mary?” |
| | 2) Why should we use it as a prayer when we
experience the hardship of the apostolate? |
| Judge | Are you relying in God’s help in the difficulties
you encounter in your apostolate? |
| Act | Spend some moments in prayer to ask for more
courage in your apostolate through Mary. |

Prayer

Dear Jesus, thank you again for calling me to co-operate in the spreading of the Kingdom you brought to earth. It is not easy, but with great trust in you and in the Blessed Mary I tell you: “Jesus, your Kingdom come, through Mary”.

Chapter Seventeen

The hardship of the Apostolate.

Bible Reading: *Luke 9, 62.*

In the preceding chapter we have mentioned the hardship of the apostolate. It is worthwhile now to elaborate a bit on this problem, because it is rather common among the members of C. A., or for that matter, for any Christian who feels to offer a service in the Church. It happens in fact that some Christians who had perhaps engaged themselves in the apostolate with enthusiasm, because of some problems arising, from people outside the Church and even from members of our own community, they got discouraged, even

to the point of giving up. They should remember that Jesus said that one who puts his hand to the plough and then turns back is not worthy of Him. However, as prevention is better than cure, it will be helpful to reflect on how to avoid such sad experiences.

The example of Jesus.

We are expected to follow the teaching and the example of Jesus in all aspects of our life. However, as apostles, we should look in particular at his earnest commitment in the announcement of the Good News, and at the way he faced the hardships that he encountered in his ministry. He was confronted by fierce opposition and persecution that had their tragic conclusion on the cross. But what his enemies thought to be his defeat resulted in the triumph of the Resurrection. It is in the perspective of this triumph of Christ that we have to live our Christian life and that we have to struggle in our apostolate. Let us remember that Jesus has promised his triumph for us also. He said in fact: *“I have told you all this so that you may find peace in me. In the world you will have trouble, but be brave, I have defeated the world”* John 16, 33.

Trust in Jesus through the intercession of Mary.

Jesus has promised to be with us always: *“Know that I am with you always, yes till the end of times”* Matthew 28, 20. Let us rejoice at these words with full confidence in Him.

Let us also turn to the Blessed Virgin Mary in our troubles. We were entrusted by Jesus to her care when he was dying on the cross. We can imagine her suffering at that time, and we know of many other troubles she had in her life. So her contribution to the saving work of her Son was not easy and she can then understand our hardships and help us in our effort to co-operate in it.

So, conscious of the value of the apostolate and trusting in the support of the One who called us to it, let us persevere with confidence and courage in our commitment. Then one day we will

be able to say with St. Paul: *“I have fought the good fight...I look forward to the prize that is waiting for me.” II Timothy 7 –8.*

Questions

- See Is the apostolate always easy? Which sort of hardship may one encounter in it?
- Judge How can the difficulties in the apostolate be overcome?
- Act Get the habit of offering your crosses, including the ones you encounter in the apostolate, with the sacrifice of Jesus in the Mass, so that they become a source of strength for you.

Prayer

God, our Father, you know my weakness, you know how I can get discouraged even by small problems I encounter in my apostolate. Send me the light and strength of your Holy Spirit, so that I do not lose sight of the example of your Son Jesus Christ, and after his example I can persevere in the wonderful vocation you have given me to work for the coming of your Kingdom on earth.

THE RECENT HOLY FATHERS HAVE BEEN ENCOURAGING CATHOLIC

John XXIII: While praising Catholic Action in general he expressed concern for the spreading of it in mission Countries: “Catholic Action was wanted by the Lord to proclaim and spread the mission of the Church throughout the world.” (5th January 1959):

Paul VI: Catholic Action is something very precious to the church and to the Holy Father in particular and also “we are grateful to our children who accepted Catholic Action as the best way to unite themselves to the Church and to share her own aspiration.” (7th December 1963).

John Paul II: “**The church still needs Catholic Action** that is caked upon to bring up new fruits of sanctity and apostolate, by extending the establishment of the Association to other local Churches in different countries.” (Feb 2003).

Benedict XVI: Your vocation is still valid today. I encourage you therefore to persevere with generosity to the service in the Church. The broad ecclesial dimension that identifies your association’s Charism is not the sign of an uncertain or outdated identity, rather it attributed a great responsibility to your lay vocation illumined and sustained by the Holy Spirit. (4th May 2008).

Pope Francis, on the occasion of the National Assembly, on third May 2014 said: dear friends of Catholic Action. ***I welcome all of you who present this beautiful ecclesial reality.*** In the present social and ecclesial context, you the laity of Catholic Action, are called to renew the missionary option, open to horizons that the Spirit points out to the Church and the expression of a rejuvenated lay apostolate.

p. Pietro BAUDENA