



THE VOCATION OF THE LAITY IN AN ERA OF CHANGE: BEING A WITNESS AND SERVANT FOR THE LOVE OF THE GOSPEL

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Introduction: Postmodern loneliness and the orphanhood of bonds.

We are living through a profound change of era. This premise, setting the pace of our time, places us before an earth that shifts beneath our very feet. The conceptual categories with which the twentieth century interpreted the human drama, structured political debate, and built great ethical and intellectual systems appear today insufficient, if not completely obsolete, amid global complexity.

Today's generations – history's protagonists- are taking the helm of this era, finding themselves in a radically unprecedented existential position. Unlike their parents and grandparents, marked by the tragedy of the great world wars, ideological totalitarianism, and the ruins of industrial civilization, the young people of this century rise free of those catastrophic historical conditions. However, this liberation from the great tragedies that shaped how we perceive and exist in this world has brought a silent paradox. The absence of major problems on the horizon of their experience has left today's generations in a sort of ontological amnesia, placing them without clear points of reference before the new social, ethical, and cultural problems of their time. The

extreme harshness of the last century's suffering forged, paradoxically, an ethical urgency and a titanic intellectual

density. Postwar men and women knew that thought mattered because ideas killed or saved. They understood, with rigor and anguish, that metaphysics and morality were matters of vital survival in avoiding the terrible evils caused by man in his hatred and vain reasoning.

Today, however, in this era of postmodernity—with its promises of a comfortable life and the rewards of technological advances—the value of history, developing values, and respect for others has been anesthetized. We have left behind the twentieth century and, with it, its teachings. Instead, we live in a new nihilism that fragments meaning and consolidates the culture of waste and the ephemeral. This has prevented the transmission and gestation of the robust intellectual and ethical training that characterized the last century's Catholic avant-garde. We find ourselves facing a generation brilliant in technology, but orphaned of solid narratives, called upon to fight cultural battles without possessing the traditional tools of deep thinking. But this has changed.

I. A new time for the laity: Workers in the vineyard of the Lord.

To better and more effectively serve the world at large, and Latin American society in particular, young people are awakening to the imperative of turning their gaze to the Magisterium of the Church, developing their values, respecting and caring for the dignity of others, and paying attention to the signs of their times so they can more faithfully serve the Gospel. St. John Paul II already predicted the awakening of a wave of lay faithful who, committed to this era, would be great, faithful servants of the Lord. In his apostolic exhortation *Christifideles laici*, he called upon them to assume responsibility before the world, overcome clericalism, and reach the place in society that rightfully belongs to them: transformers of the social, political, and cultural world, where consecrated persons could not reach; servants in daily life, faithful to the Word and constant in their actions. And of course, accompanied and guided by the Living Word and by its pastors in full communion of service.

The laity inhabits the heart of the world. Their theological sphere par excellence is the temporal realm, the political arena, the economy, the family, science, and culture. As the Magisterium reminds us, the lay faithful are those who are called to seek the Kingdom of God by engaging with temporal realities and ordering them according to their faith. They are neither external guests within the ecclesial structure nor mere collaborators in

secondary tasks: they are the Church in the heart of the world, and they are the world at the heart of the Church. Pope Francis and Pope Leo XIV have made this tangible through their changes, inviting great laypeople to join the administration that leads the Church toward its ultimate destination: Christ.

Facing the postmodern attempt to confine the faith to the strictly private sphere – reducing it to harmless emotion – the Catholic layperson is called to reject the false dichotomy between faith and public life. To renounce shaping and transforming reality because society is plural or secularized amounts to abdicating the intellectual and political charity to which we are called.

II. The mission of the Academy: to transform structures in the light of Social Doctrine.

It is precisely here that the fundamental mission of our International Academy of Catholic Leaders finds its fullest expression: to form leaders from a Catholic perspective, rooted in the faith of the Church, to transform the social, political, and economic spheres in the light of the Church's Social Doctrine (CSD).

In our Latin America as well as on the global stage, marked by a deep crisis of governance, lacerating inequality, distrust in institutions, and the administrative corruption that devours institutions like a cancer, the Christian response cannot be monastic flight or cynical indifference. If development is the new name for peace, underdevelopment and social decomposition constitute an unjust situation that promotes tensions that conspire against human dignity.

The new laity, living in this time of transition, must overcome the intellectual inferiority complex that has often paralyzed believing communities. The twenty-first century demands leaders capable of navigating the technological labyrinth, financial

globalization, and the democratic crisis with an indisputable moral compass. This does not mean replicating nostalgic formulas but rather embodying the creativity of the Spirit amid unprecedented challenges such as digital dehumanization and the systematic erosion of the common good.

This titanic effort of discernment and transformation cannot be carried out from the heroic isolation of pious individualism, or against the ecclesiastical hierarchy, or by substituting secularized political values for Christian values. The Church summons us today, with absolute firmness, to live synodality: the sacred art of the *common path* (*syn-hodos*).

Synodality is the very way of being the Church, the manner in which the People of God journey together through history. In this shared journey, the layperson plays an irreplaceable role. The sacrament of baptism implies that all members are active participants and co-responsible for the mission. In practice, this radically transforms the layperson's action in society. Beyond the isolated action of a single hero, this entails the collective witness of a community living out social friendship, harmonious plurality, and a passion for transforming the suffering of our peoples into hope. Synodality teaches civil society to engage in dialogue, heal the wounds of polarization, embark on a journey, and rediscover politics as the highest form of charity and as the systematic promotion of the Common Good.

Conclusion: the boldness of following Christ to change the world.

The historic moment we inhabit demands a profound conversion of our perspective. Certainly, new generations of laypeople grow up with many advantages—especially having enjoyed a period of peace—yet they also face significant current and future challenges. However, their great potential lies in that very vulnerability: free from the rigid ideological dogmatisms that stifled the last century, they possess a freshness and adaptability that, when rightly channeled through a personal encounter with Christ and ecclesial communion, can bring about profound spiritual and social renewal.

There is, therefore, an urgent need for a new generation of the laity. A generation that does not shy away from transforming reality, armed with Gospel truth and the strength of the Church's Social Doctrine. Let us embrace this change of era with the boldness of those who know that every crisis is a threshold. Walking together in a genuine spirit of synodality, we laypeople today are called to be the architects of a new spring for our peoples. Let us be bold and courageous in following Christ and His teaching to transform the world, remembering that He is with us until the end.