

## LESSON 8: Christian Paths



<b>FOCUS</b>	Vocation (Evangelical counsels)
<b>REFERENCE</b>	<i>The Christian Story</i> (Chapter 34, p. 133-135)
<b>GLOSSARY</b>	Evangelical counsels, Secular Institutes, Third Orders, New Ecclesial Movements, Priesthood

### TEACHER'S NOTES

1. The reading material for this and the following lessons in Theology are taken from *The Christian Story* (2007) Cluster Publications. The extracts are given below on a separate Lesson Materials page for easy reproduction.
2. Key terms that appear in these extracts are explained in the glossary of the same text and are also given on the Lesson Materials page.

### LESSON SUGGESTIONS [⇒⇒⇒⇒⇒]

#### ⇒ Introduction

- Invite learners to recall their childhood dreams. How did they respond to the question: "What do you want to be when you grow up?"
- Secondly, invite them to reflect on and share (if willing) their present aspirations. Is their dream for their future the same? Different? What has changed?

#### ⇒ Reflection

Read or have read the following scriptural passage: 1 Samuel 3:1-9. Does God have a say in what I should become? Discuss.

#### ⇒ Text

Learners now read the chapter.

#### ⇒ Response

Ask learners to recall again their present aspiration – what they will set out to become after school. Invite them to consider the three signposts offered by the Gospel (p 134) and how they might live these out in their chosen state or profession.

#### ⇒ Exercise

- Refer learners to the table towards the end of the Lesson Materials. Invite learners to name people in their community, and to place them in the 'correct' box in the table. This could be done on a larger copy of the diagram.
- Now, allocate the six different lay/ordained, married/single ways or paths to different learners in equal number. Ask them to identify a person in their given group (e.g. their local diocesan priest, or a person belonging to a community of sisters) and to interview that person with a view to finding out how and why the person came to choose that path.

Some groups may be more difficult to work with because of their small number (e.g. married deacons) so, to be fair, do the allocation by drawing lots.

## Lesson Materials



### Christian Paths

Let's first get an overall picture before we look at particular choices.

*✂ All members of the Church are called to the same journey*

The calling of all Christians is to follow Jesus, so the most basic choice is not *how* to do it, but *whether* to do it at all. Most Christians were baptised as babies, without being asked whether they wanted to be incorporated into Christ's Body. This is fair enough: they were born into a community of Christians, who wanted to welcome them to share the life of the community. But there comes a time when each one has to make a personal choice about whether, and how, to live as a member of Christ's Body. They have a formal opportunity to do this in Confirmation as they enter adulthood. When they ask to be confirmed, they confirm the choice their parents made on their behalf when they had them baptised as babies. It's a choice they are asked to keep confirming in their liturgy and in their living.

All who make this choice to follow Christ find themselves on the same journey, following Jesus on a journey towards holiness. Remember that holiness doesn't mean an escape from life, or a denial of life's good things, but rather wholeness of life, a fullness. Jesus actually said that he had come so that we might have life to the full (John 10:10). And it's not just the privileged few who are called to this. All are called. That's what Baptism and Confirmation mean.

In our journey towards holiness, we are helped by three signposts offered by the Gospel. Very simply stated, these are:

- ❖ LIVE SIMPLY: value and use material things remembering that they are temporary resources entrusted to us by God.
- ❖ LOVE RESPONSIBLY: cultivate and express yourself in ways that harmonise with your love commitments to God and to people.
- ❖ LISTEN TO GOD: listen for guidance, discern its relevance, and take suitable action.

If we follow these signposts, we won't waste our lives journeying up cul-de-sacs. We will be free to get on with the journey that leads to our destination. These three gospel signposts, called the ***evangelical counsels***<sup>1</sup>, are for all Christians, indeed, all people, though they are best known by the names of the three vows by which some Christians promise to observe them in religious life: poverty, chastity, and obedience. These traditional names suggest to some people distorted notions of the cult of shabbiness, fear of human warmth, and blind following of a superior officer's orders. This kind of nonsense is certainly not what the Gospel is recommending! The counsels are strongly positive.

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1 Compare Micah 6:8

## *While the journey is the same, paths differ*

While all Christians are called to the same journey, they travel along different paths. In the Catholic tradition, for example, there are basically three paths that adults choose:

- ❖ The path of lay life, whether in a single or married state
- ❖ The path of religious life, whether as a lay person or as an ordained one
- ❖ The path of priestly life, whether secular or religious.

The diagram depicting these below still has many short-comings: for example, it overlooks **Secular Institutes**, **Third Orders** and **New Ecclesial Movements**. The more factors we introduce into our diagram, the more we find the paths multiplied. Finally, if we introduced the factor of people's individuality, we'd find there are as many Christian paths as there are Christians. This makes sense, because no two people have precisely the same part to play in God's Plan. Each of us is unique and indispensable.

	SECULAR (of the world)		RELIGIOUS (consecrated)
	MARRIED	SINGLE	
LAY	Married Lay People	Single Lay People	Communities of Sisters and Brothers
ORDAINED	Married Deacons	Local Diocesan Priests	Communities of Priests

The big thing to remember about all these different ways of life (marriage, **priesthood**, and so on) is not how they *differ* from each other but how they *complement* each other. Each one needs the others: for example, the laity need priests, and priests need the laity. The ultimate oneness of all the different Christian vocations lies in the fact that they all share the same source and summit: the Reign of God.

### Evangelical Counsels

The evangelical counsels, namely poverty, chastity, and obedience, are so called because they are practiced by those specially called to live, in a special way, what the Gospel (*euangelion*) advocates. Living the counsels is a kind of prophecy in action, which points to the transformation of the world in the fullness of the Kingdom of God. Rather than deny the good things of creation, intimate personal relationships, or the effective use of power, they witness to equitable sharing of the world's goods, to deeper possibilities of human communion, and to the genuine exercise of power of service.

### Secular Institutes

Secular institutes are a relatively new type of religious community whose members are bound together by a common commitment to the gospel and a particular vision of life. They do not seek separation from the world as monastic orders do, but rather strive to live as a transforming presence or leaven in contemporary society. They live in their own residence and engage in the employment of their choice.

### Third Orders

Third Orders signify in general lay members of religious orders - men and women who do not necessarily live in community and yet can claim to wear the habit and participate in the good works of some great order.

### **New Ecclesial Movements**

Particularly since the Second Vatican Council, a number of new movements have sprung up in the Church. Some, such as Communion and Liberation, the Focolare Movement, the Charismatic renewal, the Neo-Catechumenal Way, and the San Egidio Community, are known internationally. Each one is characterised by a particular spirituality and apostolate. These movements are almost exclusively spearheaded by highly motivated and dedicated lay persons. Some see them as a hope for the Church in difficult times, but others see them as being divisive. Looked at positively, these movements are putting before the Church a model of Christian communion which promises to profoundly change the Church of our time for the better.

### **Priesthood**

The priesthood is a religious institution consisting of those who are chosen to exercise the functions of worship and sacrifice on behalf of the community. The priest functions as an intermediary (*sacerdos*) between God and human beings. However, the word 'priest' itself is derived from The Greek *presbyteros* which signifies something quite different – an elder who holds a position of trust and respect, and perhaps even an office. Both of these meanings are relevant in describing the priest in the Catholic Church.

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## LESSON 9: The Laity



<b>FOCUS</b>	Laity (Lay ministry, Mission)
<b>REFERENCE</b>	<i>The Christian Story</i> (Chapter 35, p. 136-138)
<b>GLOSSARY</b>	Laity, Mission

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### LESSON SUGGESTIONS [⇒⇒📖⇒]

#### ⇒ Introduction

- Explore the meaning of the word 'church'. It comes from two Greek words – *kyrios* (Lord or ruler) and *oikos* (household). So the Church is the Lord's household. Note that the emphasis is not on the house as a building, but on household as those who live in it. You could begin this exercise by inviting learners to give synonyms for the word 'church' and putting these up as a mind-map.
- Clarify the meaning of 'laity'. This word also has Greek origins: *laos* means people. Refer learners to the glossary on p. 159. Make the link then between 'church' and 'laity': both words refer to the People of God.

#### ⇒ Presentation

Use the three headings in the chapter to give brief introduction to the reading. You could expand on them in the following way:

- The laity are the Church: they are the People of God
- The laity are called to ministry in the Church: ministry or service builds the people into a community
- The laity are called to mission in the world: they are a community serving humanity

This last phrase 'community serving humanity' is the South African Church's description of itself. See the excerpt from *Community Serving Humanity: Pastoral Plan of the Catholic Church in Southern Africa* (1989) at the end of the Lesson Materials page.

#### 📖 Text

Learners now read the chapter.

#### ⇒ Response

Invite learners to share comments, questions and insights that flow from the reading.

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### QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

- What would you say are the Church's major failings in its attempt to reach young people?
- Is hospitality as a primary African value at risk in your context? If so, in what ways? What can be done?

## Lesson Materials



### The Laity

The most basic Christian path is that of the **laity**. It's the path of the vast majority of Christians. So it's the logical path to look at first.

#### The laity are the Church

It's very common to think that the clergy are the Church and the laity are their followers. This is an upside-down idea! It is basically the laity who are the Church and the clergy who are called from their ranks to serve them in particular ways. Somehow in the past the laity slipped into being a lower-class in the Church. Perhaps it was lay passivity, or clerical power-hunger, or both. We see it in the way the word 'layman' is used to mean 'just an amateur dabbler' (as in "When it comes to electricity, I'm a real layman"). Nowadays the laity are starting to rediscover that they aren't the leftovers after 'vocations' have been creamed off: indeed, they have the vocation to be the mainstream of the Church.

What is the role of the laity? Perhaps this question misses the point. The laity are called to *be* the Church and to carry out its mission. This is not some particular role within the Church; it actually *is* the role of the Church. So everything that has been outlined so far about the role of the Church, applies to the laity. For example<sup>2</sup>:

- ❖ What Jesus was and did in one time and place, the Body of Christ is and does in all times and in all places.
- ❖ Christian life is a *response* to the gifts of faith, hope, and love.
- ❖ The Church's priestly, prophetic, and leadership tasks are three ways of serving humanity.
- ❖ The Church shows humanity *signs* of the difference the Kingdom makes, and effectively makes that difference. That's what we mean when we say the Church is a sacrament to humanity.
- ❖ All are called to follow the gospel signposts of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

In short, the laity have a fully-fledged vocation to live as baptised Christians.

#### The laity are called to ministry in the Church

When we hear the word 'ministry' in the context of the Church, we're inclined to think of people whose full-time job it is to be pastors and priests. But actually ministry simply means service, and all are called to some kind of ministry to their fellow members. Baptism calls them to it, and the Church appoints and prepares them for it. One expression of the laity's emergence from 'second-class citizenship' in the Church – anonymity or a condition of servitude – has been the rediscovery of lay ministry and the expansion of its scope. Look at this list of sample lay ministries:

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapters 13, 23, 30, 31 and 34 from which these ideas are taken.

- ❖ *Worship functions:* participating in the Eucharist and other liturgical celebration; praying.
- ❖ *Liturgical ministries:* Ministers of the Eucharist; Acolytes, Readers, Musicians, Sacristans.
- ❖ *Pastoral ministries:* pastoral care of groups; spiritual direction of individuals and groups; the Church's welfare and social services; counselling and healing; parish visiting and communications.
- ❖ *Educational ministries:* scholarship; teaching, lecturing and catechising; facilitating educational and training programmes.
- ❖ *Administrative functions:* handling Church finances and property; organisation and paper-work.
- ❖ *Leadership functions:* membership of Church com-missions and councils and teams.

Some of these ministries are for all members (prayer, for example), while others require special gifts or expertise, like healing, and financial administration. Some ministries are simple and require only a little training, like the sacristan's job, while others need a great depth of formation and education. Some ministries take up only a corner of one's spare time, while others are full-time jobs. But all of them have the dignity of contributing to the full functioning of the Body of Christ.

### The laity are called to mission in the world

The Church has a **mission** in the world: to permeate every corner of human life with the vision and values of Jesus. Now it stands to reason that the laity carry the bulk of this task. For the most part, it is the laity who are the Church's presence in business and industry, in education and research, in governments and policy-making bodies, in the professions and the sciences, in the media and in the arts, in families and in communities. So it is basically the laity, by their prayer and reflection, by their lifestyle and relationships, by their work and involvement, who are on the spot to see things as Jesus saw them and to act as Jesus acted. Not only do the laity (and their fellow Christians, the clergy) do this as individuals; they do it as communities. Think of the vastly different types of Christian communities: the diocese, the parish, the basic Christian community, the Catholic school, the charismatic renewal group, the Justice-and-Peace group, the family.

In order to stay true to this mission of the Church, both individual Christians and Christian communities need to be constantly re-evangelised. In other words, they need to keep coming face to face with the Gospel so that their vision and values don't become distorted and betray Jesus. Here again, the layperson has a vital role to play, and when it is a layperson who points back to Jesus, fellow Christians listen in a way they don't always listen to preachers.

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### Laity

It is a common misunderstanding that the Church is divided into two groups, the ministers and the laity – the leaders and their subordinates. However, the Church, People of God - in Greek, *laos theou* - are one body from amongst whose members certain ones are called to serve particular functions. It is unfortunate, on the one hand, that this misunderstanding is perpetuated by the Church's use of the word 'laity' to denote the non-ordained, but on the other, much emphasis has been given in Church documents to encourage the participation of all the members through various ministries, thus affirming Paul's understanding that everyone has some specific contribution to make to the community (Romans 12:4-8).

## Mission

A mission is a task one receives from another, since it implies that one is sent. God sends Jesus to announce the Good News of the Kingdom, and Jesus sends the Church to continue proclaiming this message through the centuries.

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## COMMUNITY SERVING HUMANITY

### 18. A serving community

Our God is a serving God. God's Son came to serve, not to be served (Mt 20:28), to wash our feet, not to have his feet washed (Jn 13:3f).

We, his Body, wish to become a serving community. As he has done, so we must do. We must wash each other's feet (Jn 13:14). We must be servants of one another (Mt 20:28).

By each other we mean not only our fellow Christians but all human beings. Jesus died for all (2 Cor 5:15 | 1 Tim 2:5-6). He died that a new world may exist for all. We must die to ourselves, so that a new world may exist for all. :

As the Second Vatican Council put it, "The Church desires nothing more ardently than to develop itself ... in the service of all." (The Church in the Modern World 42)

Serving humanity is not something new for the church. In the past we have done so not only by preaching the message of the Gospel, cultivating prayer and celebrating the sacraments, but also by providing schools and universities, health care for the sick, orphanages for those without family, sustenance for those without food, shelter for those without homes, and other services of a similar nature.

These services will continue. But we must see them as part of a larger vision, the vision of a better world, a more human world, one transformed by the Spirit of love.

Building a more human world is part of our calling as Christians, an important part of our service to humanity.

For our hope is not for the destruction of this world, but its salvation (Rom 8:21). Our hope is for a world where there is no pain or sorrow (Rev 21:4), for a world in which God is glorified by people being fully alive, fully human.