

DECREE ON THE APOSTOLATE OF LAY PEOPLE

(Apostolicum Actuositatem, Vatican II)

November 18, 1965

5. The work of Christ's redemption concerns essentially the salvation of men: it takes in also, however, the renewal of the whole temporal order. The mission of the Church, consequently, is not only to bring men the message and grace of Christ but also to permeate and improve the whole range of the temporal. The laity, carrying out this mission of the Church, exercise their apostolate therefore in the world as well as in the Church, in the temporal order as well as in the spiritual. These orders are distinct; they are nevertheless so closely linked that God's plan is, in Christ, to take the whole world up again and make of it a new creation, in an initial way here on earth, in full realization at the end of time.

THE RENEWAL OF THE TEMPORAL ORDER

7. That men, working in harmony, should renew the temporal order and make it increasingly more perfect: such is God's design for the world.

All that goes to make up the temporal order: personal and family values, culture, economic interests, the trades and professions, institutions of the political community, international relations, and so on, as well as their gradual development - all these are not merely helps to man's last end; they possess a value of their own, placed in them by God, whether considered individually or as parts of the integral temporal structure: "And God saw all that he had made and found it very good" (Gen. 1:31). This natural goodness of things receives an added dignity from their relation with the human person, for whose use they have been created. And the, too, God has willed to gather together all that was natural, all that was supernatural, into a single whole in Christ "so that in everything he would have primacy" (Col. 1:18) Far from depriving the temporal order of its autonomy, of its specific ends, of its own laws and resources, or its importance for human well-being, this design, on the contrary, increases its energy and excellence, raising it at the same time to the level of man's integral vocation here below.

In the course of history the use of temporal things has been tarnished by serious defects. Under the influence of original sin men have often fallen into very many errors about the nature of God, human nature and the principles of morality. As a consequence human conduct and institutions became corrupted, the human person itself held in contempt. Again in our own days not a few, putting an immoderate trust in the conquests of science and technology, turn off into a kind of idolatry of the temporal; they become the slaves of it rather than the masters.

It is the work of the entire Church to fashion men able to establish the proper scale of values on the temporal order and direct it towards God through Christ. Pastors have the duty to set forth clearly the principles concerning the purpose of

creation and the use to be made of the world, and to provide moral and spiritual helps for the renewal of the temporal order in Christ.

Laymen ought to take on themselves as their distinctive task this renewal of the temporal order. Guided by the light of the Gospel and the mind of the Church, prompted by Christian love, they should act in this domain in a direct way and in their own specific manner. As citizens among citizens they must bring to their cooperation with others their won special competence, and act on their own responsibility; everywhere and always they have to seek the justice of the kingdom of God. The temporal order is to be renewed in such a way that, while its own principles are fully respected, it is harmonized with the principles of the Christian life and adapted to the various conditions of times, places and peoples. Among the tasks of this apostolate social action is preeminent. The Council desires to see it extended today to every sector of life, not forgetting the cultural sphere.