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THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION OF THE LAITY

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Abstract

This article studies briefly the history, the importance, and the sources for the theological education of the laity. In the first place, delving especially into the work, *Theologia* of Edward Farley, we recall the three stages that 'theology' and 'theological education' has passed through. In the patristic and early medieval period, theology was a salvifically oriented mystical knowledge of God that was available to all Christians through grace. In this sense, all Christians were 'theologians' and had access to theological education. In the second period theology becomes more of a discipline and a science, available in universities, creating thereby a certain separation between those who "studied theology" (clergy) and those who did not (laity). From theology as knowledge *of* God, it devolves into knowledge *about* God. In the third stage, with the establishment of the seminaries, theological education is restricted to the clergy. Farley recovers the original meaning of theology, showing that theological education is meant for all Christians. The article then recalls the new thinking in the 19th and 20th centuries when theologians rediscovered the original meaning of the Church as the People of God and the concept of the common priesthood of all Christians. This teaching was reflected in the various documents of the Vatican II. If the laity have to grow in holiness and influence the world, their theological education is a must. The article then enumerates some concrete means available for the theological education for the laity.

Keywords: Theology, Theological Education, Laity, Second Vatican Council, Edward Farley

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Introduction

Jesus came to us with a message of life and love, and desired that the world would be a “Kingdom of God.” He entrusted his mission to all his followers. Unfortunately, in the history of the Church there has been a strict division between the clergy and the laity, and this for several reasons, the more prominent being the degeneration of the original meaning of theology and a defective understanding of the Church and the place of the laity in it. The article has three sections. In the first section we undertake a rediscovery of the original meaning of ‘theology’ and ‘theological education,’ especially through the important work of Edward Farley, discovering therein that theology is not simply an academic discipline that is reserved for the clergy and for the tasks of their ministry, but that it is the saving knowledge of God attained by grace, which can also be a discipline, and that this saving knowledge is available, and necessary, for *all* Christians, thereby indicating that ‘theological education’ is an absolute necessity for all Christians. In the second part, we see the revised understanding of the Church and the place of the laity in it. Going back to the roots, we see that all Christians, clergy as well as the laity, have a common dignity through their baptism, have the same call to holiness, and have the same mission of “Christianizing” the world. If all Christians are to grow in holiness and fulfil their Christian mission in the world, then their theological education is a must. In the third and final section we enumerate some sources for the theological education of the laity.

1. Rediscovering the Meaning of ‘Theology’ and ‘Theological Education’

To understand what theological education is, and for a proper understanding of its importance for the laity, we first need to undertake a brief historical survey of the term ‘theology,’ and of ‘theological education,’ as it has progressed through the centuries. In one of the most important and respected works on theological education, *Theologia* (1980), Edward Farley, Professor Emeritus of Theology at Vanderbilt Divinity School, Nashville, has traced the historical development of ‘theology’ and of theological education.¹

1.1. The Meaning of Theology

There are two fundamentally different pre-modern senses of the term ‘theology’:

¹See John L. Elias, “Models of Theological Education for the Laity,” *Journal of Adult Theological Education* 3, 2 (2006) 179-193, 183.

1. First, theology is a term for an actual, personal knowledge of God and things related to God, a knowledge which in most treatments attends faith and has eternal happiness as its final goal. In this sense, theology is a habit (*habitus*) of the human soul. Farley refers to this original and most authentic understanding of theology as “Theology/Knowledge.”²

2. Second, theology is a term for a discipline, a self-conscious scholarly enterprise of understanding. In this sense, theology is a discipline, usually occurring in some sort of pedagogical setting. Farley refers to this understanding of theology as “Theology/Discipline.”³

We will see, in what follows, the development of these two understandings, and its subsequent impact on theological education, both for the clergy as well as for the laity.⁴

1.2. Three Periods in the Development of ‘Theology’

1.2.1. *The Patristic and Early Medieval Period*

The first period covers early patristic and early medieval Christendom, i.e., roughly from around the first century till around the eleventh century.⁵

Although they do not use the word ‘theology,’ the early Greek Fathers such as Eusebius, pseudo-Dionysius, and others speak about a true, salvifically-oriented mystical knowledge of the one God that *every Christian* is to seek, i.e., theology is seen as saving “knowledge.”⁶ It was basically a faith seeking understanding.⁷

Since theology in these early centuries designated a saving knowledge of God, all Christians were ‘theologians’ in that they dealt with knowledge of God that would bring about salvation. Their ‘theological education’ took place chiefly thorough participation in the worship of the community and catechetical activities related to it.⁸

At the same time, during this early period, in addition to attaining the saving knowledge of God, efforts were made to discern and set forth the truth given to the world by God through Jesus, by way of exposition and interpretation of the texts of Scripture or Council and

²See Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983, xi, 32. Henceforth, *Theologia*.

³Farley, *Theologia*, 31-32.

⁴See Farley, *Theologia*, xi.

⁵See Farley, *Theologia*, 32-33.

⁶See Farley, *Theologia*, 33.

⁷See Michael J. Sheeran, SJ, “The Church Needs a Theologically Educated Laity,” *Human Development* 26, 3 (Fall 2005) 22–26, 24.

⁸Elias, “Models of Theological Education for the Laity,” 183.

properly formulating its meaning, i.e., theology is also, in a sense, a “discipline.”⁹

1.2.2. *From the Middle Ages (Around 12th c.) to the Enlightenment (17th c.)*

The second period ranges from the origin of the universities in the twelfth century (Bologna, Paris, Oxford, etc.) up to the so-called modern university.¹⁰ During this period, there is a movement from “theology as knowledge” to “theology as a science” or “discipline” “in the distinctive scholastic sense of demonstrating conclusions.” Theology as discipline grows with its new methods of “sentences, *summas*, and introductions,” promoted especially by St Thomas Aquinas and the Scholastics, thereby becoming a discipline.¹¹ There is a subtle passage from *sacra pagina* (teaching based on Scripture), where the knowledge of God is much more immediate, to *sacra doctrina* (an Aristotelian science), i.e, a teaching about God in the commentary-exposition method (*lectio*). In this way, theology as a science/discipline was born.¹² However, there is also opposition from those who see theology as a salvific knowledge, especially from the Augustinian-monastic thought (e.g., Bonaventure), who insist that *theologia* had “to do with the mind’s road to God.”¹³

Thus, during this second period, on the one hand the sense of theology as “knowledge of God which leads to salvation” continues from the first period, but on the other hand it also departs from it. God’s illumining action on the human intellect as a divine gift is affirmed from the time of the Church Fathers, but now with the universities and Aristotelian philosophy, this illumination is understood as a *habitus* of the soul, i.e., a knowledge advanced through human effort. In other words, during this period theology was in one sense wisdom, but it was a wisdom which could be promoted, deepened, and extended by human study and argument.¹⁴

Needless to say, the rise of theology as an Aristotelian, university science had tremendous implications. The very fact that it occurred in universities, and not institutions presided over by bishops or abbots such as the Cathedral and monastic schools, created a certain distance between theology and the church. Since the study occurred in a faculty as an inquiry with its own methods, this meant that theology

⁹See Farley, *Theologia*, 33.

¹⁰Farley, *Theologia*, 32-33.

¹¹See Farley, *Theologia*, 34-35, 37.

¹²Farley, *Theologia*, 37-38.

¹³See Farley, *Theologia*, 34-35.

¹⁴See Farley, *Theologia*, 36-37.

as a discipline became a matter of study and part of one's overall studies, bringing with it new literature, the literature of "the study of theology."¹⁵

Theology as an Aristotelian science continued throughout this second period, and in both Catholic and Protestant universities and schools.¹⁶

1.2.3. From the Enlightenment (17th c.) to the Present

In the third period, we have the rise of seminaries (after Trent in Catholicism, and in the nineteenth century in Protestantism) for the education of the clergy, which modelled themselves on the Enlightenment-type universities of Europe,¹⁷ with "critical ideals of scholarship, specialized faculties, and scholarly inquiries relatively free from confessional restrictions."¹⁸ This, in turn, "revolutionized the human and historical sciences into disciplines (sciences) in a new sense."¹⁹ Theology now becomes one of the specialties along with biblical studies, ethics, pastoral care, etc.²⁰

German theologians and reformers gave a four-fold division to theology: biblical studies, dogmatic theology, church history and practical theology, a division still found in many Protestant seminaries.²¹ "The seed of specialized scholarship had been sown" with the establishment of chairs of divinity in various reputed universities, all unsuspectingly leading away from the earlier meanings of theology to theology "as one technical and specialized scholarly undertaking among others; in other words, as systematic theology" and "theology...as the practical know-how necessary to ministerial work," especially as prevalent in the twentieth-century seminaries.²²

1.3. The Implications for Theological Education

This development had three tremendous implications for theological education.

The most serious outcome was the disappearance of theology as wisdom and as discipline (science), and in its place theology had become a *Kunstlehre* (technique) – a technical, pragmatic discipline,

¹⁵See Farley, *Theologia*, 38.

¹⁶Farley, *Theologia*, 38.

¹⁷Farley, *Theologia*, 32-33.

¹⁸Farley, *Theologia*, 39-40.

¹⁹Farley, *Theologia*, 41.

²⁰Farley, *Theologia*, 42.

²¹See Elias, "Models of Theological Education for the Laity," 184; see P. Joseph Cahill, "Theological Education: Its Fragmentation and Unity," *Theological Studies* 45 (1984) 334-342, 334-335.

²²See Farley, *Theologia*, 39-40; see Cahill, "Theological Education: Its Fragmentation and Unity," 334-335.

especially for the Church ministers, to undertake the tasks of ministry, thereby resulting in “the disappearance of the very thing which is supposed to be its essence, agenda, and telos.”²³ Theology as saving knowledge of God had gradually yielded to theology as knowledge about God, especially as required for the tasks of ministry.²⁴

Secondly, what disappeared from the post-Enlightenment view was the ancient Greek ideal of *paideia*, according to which, education is the “culturing” of a human being in *areté* or virtue. The question which guided this older approach was: what type of education leads to *areté*? This is why their focus was “not on *areté*, but on a sapiential knowledge engendered by grace and divine self-disclosure,” which then led to a virtuous life.²⁵ On the other hand, theological education of the post-Enlightenment era “is not a process affecting and shaping the human being under an ideal, but a grasping of the methods and contents of a plurality of regions of scholarship.”²⁶ Once again, this displacement has had fateful consequences for clergy and church education, since the original understanding of theology has not been operative in the church for many generations.²⁷

Thirdly, and most significantly, there arose a distinction between clergy (ordained priests, ministers) and laity in the history of the church’s conception of theological education. According to the old view, worship, prayer, contemplation, confession, hearing the Word, etc. was all for the laity, whereas education occurring as a special discipline, and in a special institution, seminary, was for church leadership. Because the clerical paradigm defined theology as an undertaking of clergy education, the education left to the laity could not be ‘theological education.’ Putting it quite strongly Farley says: “The laity must, accordingly, eat the crumbs spilling over from the hearty meal enjoyed by the clergy.”²⁸

1.4. The Recovery of the Original Meaning of Theology and of Theological Education

What is the way forward? What is required, therefore, to “restore unity and criteria to theological education” is to recover the original meaning of *theologia*.²⁹

²³See Farley, *Theologia*, 43-44.

²⁴See Farley, *Theologia*, 41, 43.

²⁵See Farley, *Theologia*, 152-153.

²⁶Farley, *Theologia*, 153.

²⁷See Farley, *Theologia*, 156, 159.

²⁸Farley, *Theologia*, 195.

²⁹Farley, *Theologia*, 151.

Theology, in its recovered orthodox meaning – in which all the above three expositions unite – is this: theology is the personal, sapiential knowledge (understanding) which can occur when faith opens itself to reflection and inquiry. The enquiry takes place in the context of faith (a pre-reflective cognitivity) – a “belief-ful knowing,” which “is neither empty of content nor blind hypothesis.” It is a deliberate process of reflection and inquiry so as to reach knowledge of God and of the things of God, “a knowledge whose final and highest instance is the beatific vision.” This pre-reflective cognitivity or insightfulness, when it becomes self-conscious and subjects itself to a deliberate process of reflection and inquiry, and is then successful in reaching understanding, and in the context of one’s own life situation, culture, etc., such understanding is what is called *theologia*.³⁰ It is a personal and existential knowledge that is obtained through mystical discipline or through the means of grace.³¹

At the same time, theology is not simply seeking the final end, God, but it also has to do with all of God’s creation, in which human beings find themselves as creatures of God. Hence, theology is also about God who is “gracefully present among creatures working to fulfil ends which are theirs,” that is, it seeks “the kingdom of God...the situation as God undergirds it, pervades it, disposes it, lures it to its best possibilities” in the context of their own lived situation.³²

What all this leads us to conclude from the (recovered) primary meaning of theology is that theology “is a personal and existential wisdom or understanding” in the context of faith, and as such *it is not tied to any specific course of studies, and is not specifically clerical in nature*, and therefore is open to *all* Christians and not specifically restricted to the clergy or to church professionals.³³ One can undertake theology for personal understanding and growth, or for leadership in a community of faith, or simply for enquiry and scholarship.³⁴

We may note here, however, that although *theologia* in its original meaning is the subject matter and goal of all education in the ecclesial community, there are different ways of service. For instance, the (ordained) leader does things which the ordinary Christian does not do (preach, administer sacraments, manage the organization, counsel, etc.) and must know things the believer need not know (church history, exegesis, pastoral psychology, and so forth). The lay person

³⁰See Farley, *Theologia*, 156-157.

³¹See Farley, *Theologia*, 156, 161.

³²See Farley, *Theologia*, 168-169.

³³See Farley, *Theologia*, 153, 197.

³⁴See Farley, *Theologia*, 157-158.

needs to know how to grow in faith, organize one's life meaningfully, and how to face the world's challenges. The education of the church leader and the education of the believer have utterly different goals and subject matters, and hence the theological education of both will be different.³⁵

2. Why Theological Education is Necessary for the Laity

2.1. The Place of the Laity in the Church Today

For many centuries the laity played a passive role in the life of the Church, and this was because of the defective understanding of theology as we have seen above, and also due to a restricted understanding of the Church and the place of the laity in it.

Historically, as we see in the New Testament and in the early Church, there was no clear-cut separation between the clergy and the laity. Sacred Scripture, the writings of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, all testify that every Christian is a 'priest.'³⁶ What was focused then, based on Scripture (1 Pet 2:5; 1 Pet 2:9, etc.), was the common priesthood of all the believers according to their baptismal dignity. But unfortunately, from around the second century, we have a strict division between the clergy and the laity, who are regarded as inferior to the clergy.³⁷ From the part of the clergy there was a "paternal kind of domination in affairs which are essentially secular," and decisions pertaining to religious and secular matters were made by the clergy and theologians and "the faithful" merely followed the paths laid down for them.³⁸

Through the work of some prominent theologians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, who, going back to the sources, rediscovered the meaning of the Church and the laity's place in it, we have a renewed understanding, an understanding that was then reflected in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), convened as a means for the spiritual renewal of the Church.

In the renewed understanding, the Church is the people of God; *all* believers, in fundamental equality, are the Church, which is the *body of Christ*, and in which "all the members...are important and play

³⁵See Farley, *Theologia*, 176.

³⁶See Timothy McCarthy, OP, *The Postconciliar Christian: The Meaning of the Priesthood of the Laity*, New York: P.J. Kenedy & Sons, 1967, 75.

³⁷ See Leonard Doohan, "Theology of the Laity," in *The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Michael Glazier and Monika K. Hellwig, Newtown, Australia: E.J. Dwyer, 1994, 493.

³⁸See Harry Haas, *Christianity in the Asian Revolution*, London: Sheed and Ward, 1966, 79-80.

their part, having their own dignity and their own functions, on the basis of a fundamental equality."³⁹ Moreover, as Yves Congar, one of the main theologians at the Second Vatican Council, argues, there is only one Christianity, and one obligation to seek union with God in Christ, and so to tend to holiness; it is not the onerous privilege of priests and religious alone, it is the obligation of all Christians in virtue of the one Christianity that is common to them all, although their vocations and actual duties are diverse.⁴⁰ Further, the mission of Christ, from the very beginning of the Church, is given to the whole people of God, and not just to the clergy. As Hans Küng, another prominent theologian during the time of the Council, notes,

all who hold office are primarily not dignitaries but believers, members of the fellowship of believers;...compared with this fundamental Christian fact any office they may hold is of secondary if not tertiary importance. The Church must be seen first and foremost as a fellowship of faith, and only in this light can ecclesiastical office be properly understood.⁴¹

The teaching of Vatican II reflects the baptismal identity and dignity of all Christians.⁴² It stresses the common priesthood of all the faithful in the Church as the people of God.⁴³ It also teaches that the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood "differ essentially and not only in degree," but "each in its proper way shares in the one priesthood of Christ."⁴⁴ Every lay person "is at once the witness and the living instrument of the mission of the Church itself," because "inserted as they are in the Mystical Body of Christ by baptism and strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit in confirmation, it is by the Lord himself that they are assigned to the apostolate."⁴⁵ With this renewed ecclesiology, Vatican II thus gave the lay people their rightful position in the Church.⁴⁶

2.2. The Unique Mission of the Laity in the World Necessitating Theological Education

As Fr John C. Murray notes, today we are no longer living in the Middle Ages, when the ordinary Christian lived in a world which

³⁹See Hans Küng, *The Church*, New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967, 370.

⁴⁰See Yves Congar, *Lay People in the Church*, London: Geoffrey Chapman Ltd., 1965, 400.

⁴¹Küng, *The Church*, 363.

⁴²For instance, see *Lumen Gentium* 11, 32; *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 3.

⁴³Vatican II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 2, 10.

⁴⁴Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 10.

⁴⁵Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 33; see also *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 1, 3; *Christifidelis Laici*, 15, 16.

⁴⁶See Walbert Buhlmann, *The Coming of the Third Church: An Analysis of the Present and Future of the Church*, New York: Orbis Books, 1977, 261.

was pervaded by the spirit of the faith one professed and one could simply take over the ideas, attitudes, customs, and modes of conduct that surrounded him. The ordinary Christian was not greatly called on to direct the thinking, or influence the social institutions of the time, since the temporal order were fashioned from the top down, with the state and the church generally working together in pursuit of the common good.⁴⁷ “Living in Christendom, a man lived in the Church, and was a Christian (if at times a bad one) as a matter of course.”⁴⁸

Our modern world, on the other hand, is a very different picture, a multi-cultural and multi-religious world, where at times, and in certain places, Christians cannot even practice their faith in public. It is a time when there is an open denial of God and the loss of a sense of sin.⁴⁹ The challenge to Christians comes in a radical manner “from rationalism and sentimentalism in the intellectual order, from naturalism in the moral order, from statism in the political order, and, in the social order, from laicism, communism, and national socialism,” with “each making total claims upon, and promising total salvation to, the human person and human society.”⁵⁰ In the same vein, Yves Congar notes, “At our work and in our social life we are in constant contact... with professed atheists, with agnostics, with those who are puzzled, and with many who simply do not care one way or the other.”⁵¹ We all are aware of our own twenty-first century problems, which Pope Francis aptly summarizes, “today we are not only living in a time of changes but are experiencing a true epochal shift, marked by a wide-ranging anthropological and environmental crisis.”⁵²

It is in such a world that Christians are called to live, and to witness to Christ’s charity⁵³ and help build the “Kingdom of God” on earth that Jesus came to establish (Mk 1:15; Mt 3:2).⁵⁴ The Council declared that it is in this regard that the laity have a “special and

⁴⁷See John Courtney Murray SJ, “Towards a Theology for the Layman: The Pedagogical Problem,” *Theological Studies* 5 (September 1944) 340-376, 350.

⁴⁸Murray, “Towards a Theology for the Layman,” 350.

⁴⁹See Pope Pius XII, Address to the United States Catechetical Congress (1946); Pope John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (1984); Pope Francis, Mass at St Martha’s House on December 31, 2014.

⁵⁰See Murray, “Towards a Theology for the Layman,” 352.

⁵¹Yves Congar, *Laity, Church and World*, tr. Donald Attwater, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1960, 55.

⁵²Pope Francis, *Veritatis Gaudium*, 3.

⁵³Congar, *Laity, Church and World*, 55.

⁵⁴Hans Küng, *The Church*, New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967, 45.

indispensable" mission, "which is exclusive to them," and which no one else can discharge,⁵⁵ namely, the mission of influencing the temporal order towards God and in the ways of God.⁵⁶ Christians have a two-fold mission in the world: "the evangelization and sanctification of men and the penetrating and perfecting of the temporal order through the spirit of the Gospel" and in this way bearing witness to Christ.⁵⁷

The world, as we know it, has such important concerns as family life, culture, economic matters, the arts and professions, the laws of the political community, international relations, etc., and God's plan is that this temporal order is to be renewed and constantly perfected so as to ensure human happiness in the world, as well as help them to attain their ultimate goal, the beatific vision.⁵⁸ The Church's mission as a whole, which includes all Christians, is for "promoting the authentic and integral growth of the human family towards its definitive fullness in God."⁵⁹

In a special way, it is the lay people, according to their state of life, who live in the midst of the world and its concerns, and hence it is proper for them to exercise their apostolate in the world, acting like leaven, with the ardour and spirit of Christ, to perfect it.⁶⁰ The laity have the unique obligation "to infuse a Christian spirit into the mentality, customs, laws, and structures of the community in which one lives... the duty and responsibility... which can never be performed properly by others."⁶¹ It is our common obligation as members of the Church for "opening the way to faith at the level of human structures, at work throughout civilization to turn it Christward,"⁶² "infusing the spirit of the Gospel into various communities and departments of life" and striving to form "a Christian conscience" among all.⁶³ The laity serve the world by being "other Christs" in the world.⁶⁴

⁵⁵Vatican II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 7,9; *Lumen Gentium*, 10, 2-3.

⁵⁶See Congar, *Laity, Church and World*, 48.

⁵⁷Vatican II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 2; see also *Lumen Gentium* 3, 31; *Gaudium et spes*, 21.

⁵⁸See Vatican II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 7.

⁵⁹Pope Francis, *Veritate Gaudium*, 1.

⁶⁰Vatican II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 2, 7; see also *Lumen Gentium*, 31.

⁶¹Vatican II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 13.

⁶²Congar, *Lay People in the Church*, 454.

⁶³See Vatican II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 20a.

⁶⁴See Michael De La Bedoyere, *The Layman in the Church*, London: Burns and Oates, 1954, 75.

Why, we might ask, should we focus on Christ and infuse a “Christian spirit” in the world? It is because as *Gaudium et spes* declares, “The most perfect answer to these questions [of human existence] is to be found in God alone, (who created man in his own image and redeemed him from sin,) and this answer is given in the revelation in Christ his Son who became man.”⁶⁵

Jesus, the Son of God, is the most perfect One. Jesus taught by his words and his own life what it really means to live an authentic life according to our true nature, and to focus “on the right ordering of things in this world, always in view of the next.”⁶⁶ Thus, *Gaudium et spes* declares: “Whoever follows Christ, the perfect man, becomes himself more a man.”⁶⁷

This is the important role of all Christians in the world, especially the laity. Harry Haas puts it well:

If Christianity is a continuation of the incarnation of Christ, then every single Christian in the world, because he is a member of Christ’s body, has a vital role to play in the humanization of his environment. The importance of this fact to the laity – traditionally an underestimated force – is inestimable.⁶⁸

There are things that “can be done only by lay people, for they belong to the world and the Church in a way that is true neither of the clergy nor of monks.”⁶⁹ “Concretely,” says John Courtney Murray, “he is the Church’s grip on the temporal order. The responsibility which the Church has for the sanctification of the secular and social life of humanity falls directly and immediately upon him; for he is present in, and a part of, that life in a way that the priest is not, and consequently he can be the creator of its spirit and the artisan of its forms in a way that the priest cannot.”⁷⁰ The human and secular life in all its forms – individual, domestic, civil, professional, political, economic, national and international – is the special field for the sanctifying action of the laity.⁷¹ Christians can be engaged in this transformation of the world either through their simple professions, or as educated laymen who can have a tremendous influence on the world’s order.⁷²

⁶⁵Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes*, 41.

⁶⁶Congar, *Lay People in the Church*, 401.

⁶⁷Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes*, 41.

⁶⁸Haas, *Christianity in the Asian Revolution*, 79.

⁶⁹Congar, *Lay People in the Church*, 455.

⁷⁰Murray, “Towards a Theology for the Layman,” 341; see *Gaudium et spes*, 43.

⁷¹Murray, “Towards a Theology for the Layman,” 341.

⁷²See Haas, *Christianity in the Asian Revolution*, 80.

Cardinal Valerian Gracias of Bombay, India, in one of his sermons to his congregation at the Holy Name Cathedral in the 1950s, spoke of the tremendous influence that the Christian community was making in India. He said:

...even though our numbers be small... Every [Christian] life honestly lived must live its impress on the wider life of the country. The individual citizen is not one grain of sand amongst countless other grains of sand. What we think and say may be but a drop in the ocean; yet the ocean is made up of such drops; and however immense the ocean, we are responsible for whatever we pour into it... the lives and achievements of such as are leaders bring to the Church an increased measure of influence and to the country the inestimable blessings which a Christian way of life can contribute. For it is not merely accidental that Christian public servants – in the Civil Services, Professions, Defence, Business, Municipal Corporation, Local Boards, Legislatures – are so conspicuously successful in important positions. Whether the general public realizes it or not, it is their sound [Christian] principles and the conscientious application of these principles which explain that moral excellence and devotion to duty which cannot but be recognized and admired.⁷³

We see, therefore, how great and how important, the role of the lay person in the world is! And so, if the lay people are to carry on their duty well, they are to be properly formed and guided.

2.3. A Distinct Lay Pedagogy in the Theological Education of the Laity

As Pope Pius XI noted, “In order to participate in an apostolate such as this...(b)efore all else there is a work of formation to be done – a formation of intelligence, will, manner of thinking, active initiative, virtue, and holiness.”⁷⁴ Pope Francis, too, states clearly, “for the whole People of God to be ready to embark upon a new stage of ‘Spirit-filled’ evangelization... the suitable formation of priests, consecrated men and women, and committed lay people” is necessary.⁷⁵

The formation that is called for in case of the laity must be a specialized formation that will result in a “genuine and finished Christian person,” helping one to meet headlong the challenges of

⁷³Valerian Cardinal Gracias, *The Chief Duties of Christians as Citizens*, Bombay: Examiner Press, (no date), 41-42.

⁷⁴Discourse to the Catholic Associations of Rome, April 19, 1931, cited in Murray, “Towards a Theology for the Layman,” 342.

⁷⁵Pope Francis, *Veritatis Gaudium*, 3.

our times.⁷⁶ If this is to happen, there is to be a distinct spirituality and pedagogy for the theological education of the laity.⁷⁷

The formation for the laity should have a different structure and emphasis from that of a course designed for the ministerial priesthood. This is so because, on the one hand, seminary training, generally following the Scholastic methodology, has “only one pedagogic norm, clarity and orderliness in exposition,” with its demands of strictly objective scientific method and a preponderance on intellectual formation and a “growth in Christian intelligence,” while, at the same time, the cleric receives from other sources his complementary religious formation.⁷⁸ On the other hand, “the laity, as members of the Church, have indeed a share in her whole redemptive mission... but they participate in her apostolate as they participate in her priesthood analogously, and in a manner proper to themselves.”⁷⁹ The course for the laity, therefore, should be conceived in function of the specific needs of the laity, helping them to gain “intelligence of faith” so as to be “a complete Christian, and a complete Christian layman,” and thereby forming them for their own special service to the Church.⁸⁰

From my own teaching experience in the seminary I can see how necessary it is to have separate courses for those preparing for the ordained ministry and for the laity, and this for several reasons which we cannot go into here.

3. Various Sources for the Theological Education of The Laity

In one of the latest books on theological education, *The History of Theological Education*, Justo L. González, an expert on the subject of theological education, rightly observes that there is an acute crises in the Church with regard to theological education, both for the Catholic Church and for other Christian denominations, but especially for Catholics due to the severe shortage of vocations to the priesthood for ministering to the needs of the people. The answer, and the best tool we have for the future, he insists, is to focus on the theological education of the laity, adding that “for fifteen centuries the Church

⁷⁶See Pope Pius XII, Discourse to the Ecclesiastical Assistants of the Association of Catholic Youth of Latium, Catholic Action, cited in Murray, “Towards a Theology for the Layman,” 343, 350.

⁷⁷See Michael De La Bedoyere, *The Layman in the Church*, London: Burns and Oates, 1954, 29.

⁷⁸See Murray, 341-344.

⁷⁹Murray, “Towards a Theology for the Layman,” 341.

⁸⁰See Murray, “Towards a Theology for the Layman,” 341, 343, 354.

subsisted, taught its theology, and at times flourished, without a single seminary.”⁸¹

If theological education of the laity is so important, what are the various sources at our disposal for imparting such an education? We list below some main sources (though not in the strict form of a ‘discipline’), which many Catholics and Protestants have already tried to implement in their own way during the past few decades.

3.1. Theology Courses for Lay People

“Theology offers the most perfect preparation possible in the academic environment for the understanding and fulfillment of the vocation of the Christian layman,” says Fr Thomas Donlan.⁸² Such theology courses may be taught to the laity at different educational levels – the college or university level, the various levels in adult life, determined by degrees of culture, by profession, etc.⁸³

Several universities, religious houses, and dioceses have initiated theology courses for lay people. The welcome page of ALBAN University (USA), advertising their theological course for the laity states how they help the laity meet the challenges of the modern world with a good theological education:

In this new world, this global village we inhabit, growing ever more complicated and accessible through science and technology, many of us think daily about the meaning and purpose of our lives... We wonder about God’s role in the universe and our role with God in the ongoing creation and sustaining of the planet. Even as we live in a post-9/11 world, with wars and natural disasters, worldwide economic changes, and climate and environmental issues, the search for meaning continues and each generation shares the universal concerns for life and common good. This is the world to which we in continuing theological education introduce the questions of why and how to provide theological education for laity living into the worthy questions of faith for this time.⁸⁴

3.2. Theological Education through Schools and Colleges

Another way of training the laity in theological education is through our schools and colleges.

⁸¹See Justo L. González, *The History of Theological Education*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015, x-xi. González masterfully traces out the whole history of theological education down through the centuries.

⁸²Thomas C. Donlan, OP, “The Problem of Theology for the Laity,” 120.

⁸³Murray, “Towards a Theology for the Layman,” 341.

⁸⁴ALBAN, “Why Would Laypeople Need Theological Education, Anyway?” Duke Divinity School, (Dec 9, 2009), <https://alban.org/archive/why-would-laypeople-want-theological-education-anyway/>; accessed 30.12.2018.

Donlan states that since the aim of education is to prepare men and women for what they must do to live a fulfilled life and attain ultimate happiness in the next, Christian schooling must therefore aid them adequately in preparing them for such a vocation.⁸⁵ Since a Christian “is to mediate between the spiritual and temporal orders, he must first have a clear understanding of both. This understanding cannot be complete with the wisdom of theology which views and judges all reality in terms of its relation to God” and “according to its objective value in terms of its highest causes.” It is theological education which can help a student to make the necessary discernment and judgement.⁸⁶ The Second Vatican Council’s Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity states that schools, colleges, and other Catholic educational institutions... have the duty to develop a Catholic sense and apostolic activity in young persons,” and that “Teachers and educators... who carry on a distinguished form of the apostolate of the laity by their vocation and office, should be equipped with that learning and pedagogical skill that are needed for imparting such education effectively.”⁸⁷ The document goes on to add that such training should begin with the child’s earliest education and perfected throughout one’s whole life, in keeping with the demands of new responsibilities.⁸⁸

Donlan is of the opinion that it is generally agreed that the most perfect development of theological wisdom is to be found in the Scholastic method. The very name implies the historical truth that this method was developed by schoolmen, in schools, and precisely to fit the needs of schools. Centuries of experience have shown that Scholastic theology fits perfectly into the academic curriculum. Experience likewise shows that when it is lacking in a curriculum, a true Christian wisdom cannot be unfolded to the students by academic means.⁸⁹

We may ask ourselves here: who are those we select to impart theological education, whether in schools, colleges and universities, or even in seminaries? Pope Francis states clearly in *Veritatis Gaudium* that ecclesiastical education “cannot be limited to passing on knowledge, professional competence and experience to the men and women of our time who desire to grow as Christians,” but it has to prepare them intellectually and practically through profound

⁸⁵See Donlan, “The Problem of Theology for the Laity,” 122.

⁸⁶See Donlan, “The Problem of Theology for the Laity,” 122.

⁸⁷Vatican II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 30.

⁸⁸Vatican II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 30.

⁸⁹Donlan, “The Problem of Theology for the Laity,” 121.

theological knowledge so that they can positively influence the world that is marked today by ethical and religious pluralism.⁹⁰

A good teacher to the laity will be one who has “psychological insight, imagination, rhetorical power, a warmth of personality – joined to an interior spirit that is discreetly and unconsciously radiant” and one who constantly updates oneself, having “a wide knowledge of the contemporary situation of the Church and of the world she is to save, a sympathy with the mood of present thought and sentiment, a sense of the aspirations that men have today, a profound grasp of the problems in the field of religion and culture that are vexing them.”⁹¹

Moreover, a good educator is one who leads by personal example.⁹² “Modeling, rather than indoctrinating, is the method of theological education,” asserts Lebron Fairbanks, former President of the Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary.⁹³ Adults are the primary teachers of the young, and if they are to develop a mature faith, then theological education must be imparted by living models.⁹⁴ And John C. Murray has this to say, “Courses in theology will not make dynamic laymen... in the matter of religious formation personal influence is decisive.”⁹⁵

The final goal of all theological education is to lead all to Christ. Pope Francis, referring to Blessed Antonio Rosmini, who in the nineteenth century had called for a decisive reform in the area of Christian education, states that what is essential is that whatever is taught should have its basis in the Word of God and should culminate in Jesus Christ, the “living centre” of all things.⁹⁶ Hence, “[t]he central motivating factor in theological education is commitment to Christ.”⁹⁷

3.3. Good Preaching

Another good source of theological education is the weekly sermon/homily, which, although it does not provide an adequate or comprehensive knowledge of the Christian tradition, nevertheless

⁹⁰Pope Francis, *Veritatis Gaudium*, 5.

⁹¹See Murray, “Towards a Theology for the Layman,” 347.

⁹²See Murray, “Towards a Theology for the Layman,” 346-347.

⁹³Lebron Fairbanks, “Theological Education for a God-Called Ministry,” Inaugural Address on March 7, 1985, (5-19), 5, at https://www.apnts.edu.ph/resourcecenter/mediator/Fairbanks_Theological%285.2%29.pdf, 12; accessed 21.12.18.

⁹⁴See Elias, “Models of Theological Education for the Laity,” 190-191.

⁹⁵Murray, “Towards a Theology for the Layman,” 346-347.

⁹⁶See Pope Francis, *Veritatis Gaudium*, 4c.

⁹⁷Fairbanks, “Theological Education for a God-Called Ministry,” 10.

serves to instruct and edify a large number of the parish community.⁹⁸ In this busy, fast-paced world, most people do not have time for any serious study of the faith, and so the weekly sermon or homily can be a great source of theological instruction for the laity. But whether preachers actually prepare well and deliver an effective homily is another matter.

Dorothy Day observes in this regard:

To read and to study... there should be much of this in the life of every priest so that he can penetrate more deeply into the mystery of the faith, to grow in the knowledge of God... For the priesthood of the laity there is no seminary to which we can go. So the preaching and teaching must take place in homes, on street corners, in store fronts, in every encounter... If the priest from the richness of his own studies would convey to us some of the enthusiasm such studies engender, such light on the things of God, such strength to expect from participating in the Sacrifice, we might begin to "run in the way of His commandments," to love God and our brothers, and gather them with us on our way to God.⁹⁹

3.4. Bible Classes

Besides many online Bible courses available, many parishes and institutions have regular Bible study classes to expound the Scriptures and draw lessons for practical life.¹⁰⁰ Bible study groups and sharing "have many advantages in motivation, broader knowledge, and mutual support."¹⁰¹

This can be quite an effective source of theological education for the laity. In our own seminary here in Bombay, we have the "Ministry of the Word" Bible programme which has been running for the past thirty years or so. About 80 committed lay students attend the 2-year study programme regularly every week (the number has to be restricted for want of space, etc!), which helps them on their personal faith journey, and after the completion of their course they help out in various ways in their parishes.

3.5. Theological Education as Small Group Faith Sharing

Small group learning is a very popular form of adult education according to many authorities in the field, says John L. Elias, who has been actively involved in theological education of the laity for over 40 years, adding "Small faith-sharing groups were the places that

⁹⁸See Elias, "Models of Theological Education for the Laity," 180-182.

⁹⁹Dorothy Day, Foreword, in Timothy McCarthy, O.P., *The Postconciliar Christian: The Meaning of the Priesthood of the Laity*, ix-x.

¹⁰⁰See Elias, "Models of Theological Education for the Laity," 182.

¹⁰¹Elias, "Models of Theological Education for the Laity," 187.

spirituality dramatically arose as a concern in the theological education of adults."¹⁰² From around the 1970s and 1980s, inspired by the 'Theology of Liberation' movement which began in Latin America, Christians have been meeting in small groups (called BCCs or SCCs) where, in the light of their particular situation, the Scriptures are read and reflected upon, and faith is thus translated into practical action in the world.¹⁰³ Here, theology is not about the study of religious literature, history of religious bodies, official church teaching, etc. but deals with the actual pastoral and spiritual needs of the lay people.¹⁰⁴

3.6. Other Efforts at Theological Education for the Laity

There are several other initiatives available, and are being taken, by many, for promoting the theological education of the laity.

➤ Many schools and colleges are offering short courses in theology, online courses, retreats, workshops, etc. to bring Christians up-to-date on theology and practice. Besides, there are also magazines and other literature available for spiritual and psychological growth.¹⁰⁵

➤ Direct training of the laity through live satellite classes, correspondence courses, as well as via television, computers, electronic classrooms, CD ROMs, etc.¹⁰⁶

➤ Wade Berry refers to the many good Christian books available for theological education.¹⁰⁷

➤ Also, Sunday school classes, Confirmation classes, marriage preparation courses, adult catechesis, retreats, novenas, etc. are some other avenues for the theological education of the laity.

Conclusion

We have seen in this article the original meaning of theology and of theological education, the meaning of the Church and the place of the laity in the Church. We have seen the great need for the theological education of the laity, namely, for their own spiritual growth to

¹⁰²See Elias, "Models of Theological Education for the Laity," 187-188.

¹⁰³See Elias, "Models of Theological Education for the Laity," 190.

¹⁰⁴See Elias, "Models of Theological Education for the Laity," 188.

¹⁰⁵Sheeran, "The Church Needs a Theologically Educated Laity," 24.

¹⁰⁶Jack R. Cunningham, "The Future of Seminary Education: Training the Laity," *Review and Expositor* 93 (1996) 63-76, 69, 74.

¹⁰⁷Wade Berry, "The Benefits of Theological Education," B.H. Carroll Theological Institute, Texas, USA, September 19, 2017, at <http://www.bhcarroll.edu/Benefits+of+Theological+Education>; accessed 01.01.2019.

holiness and for their unique role in the world of today. We have also enumerated the various means available to us for the purpose. But, as John J. Elias states, “The gap between rhetoric and reality in theological education is large.”¹⁰⁸ It is not simply the reams of paper and the various talks about theological education that suffices. It is necessary to put all this into action. The laity, living “in the world” with others, has a specific, and unique role in the world – a role that is extremely urgent and necessary especially for today’s world. The need of the hour is for good theological education for every Christian, clergy and laity, especially on account of the grave crises that we face today. The Christian message is still relevant, and with good theological education, may we all have that abundant life which Jesus came to share with us all (Cf. Jn 10:10).

¹⁰⁸Elias, “Models of Theological Education for the Laity,” 191.