

CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT AS A PARADIGM FOR LAY PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS

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Abstract

The laity are tasked with both engaging and improving the temporal sphere as well as evangelizing it. In complex matters, especially political ones, how is this task to be undertaken without compromising either the rightful autonomy of temporal affairs or one's fidelity to the gospel? Furthermore, how is such a task to be undertaken in a world which is increasingly pluralistic and multi-cultural? In this paper, we argue against positions which would either completely unite faith and politics or totally separate them. We argue instead for Robert Benne's model of Critical Engagement which allows the laity to engage temporal matters using secular disciplines without necessarily compromising their religious identity. Particular attention is paid to the situation in the Philippines where recent issues such as Reproductive Health or current issues like the legalization of divorce challenge the laity with the need for such critical engagement.

Keywords: Critical Engagement, Religion and Politics, Lay Apostolate, Vatican II, Reproductive Health Bill, Common Good, Church and Politics

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Introduction

Prior to the Second Vatican Council it could be argued that lay people were basically considered sheep that needed cautious shepherding from their pastors. For instance, a top-down approach in solving moral issues was used where Church authorities would apply universal moral principles to particular situations with minimal consideration of their specific contexts.¹ After having identified how these moral principles were to be applied, they were handed on to the laity whose only role then was to submissively receive the officialdom's predetermined judgments. However, since the Second Vatican Council, a more positive and empowering outlook on the role of the laity has been highlighted. The council ushered in an era of a fresh understanding of the vocation of the lay faithful as having a vital role to play in the overall mission of the Church.

Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church identifies the laity as members of the people of God who are basically characterized by their secularity.² Their special vocation is "to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God" (LG, 31). Vatican II's Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity expresses lay vocation in a more specific manner. "They exercise the apostolate in fact by their activity directed to the evangelization and sanctification of men and to the penetrating and perfecting of the temporal order through the spirit of the Gospel. In this way, their temporal activity openly bears witness to Christ and promotes the salvation of men."³ This underscores that lay vocation bears the serious duty of bringing Christ and his message in the midst of the temporal order. The laity have to act like leaven in the world (AA, 2). They have to actively engage in the social, economic, political, and cultural areas of life and infuse them with Gospel values (AA, 7).

However, being secular and engaged with world while at the same time trying to bring Christ into it is not a simple task. History shows that a number of well-meaning attempts to infuse the world with

¹Cf. Richard Gaillardets and Catherine Clifford, *Keys to the Council: Unlocking the Teaching of Vatican II*, Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2012, 96.

²Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 31 (21 November 1964), accessed at http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html. Hereafter cited as LG with paragraph number.

³Vatican II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 2 (18 November 1965), accessed at http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651118_apostolicam-actuositatem_en.html. Hereafter cited as AA with paragraph number.

Christian principles and values were not always successful. For example, it can be argued that the Prohibition of alcohol in the United States was a good idea. But it failed because people kept drinking alcohol.⁴ It would be ideal if people, especially the poor, could get loans and not have to pay interest. But economic realities eventually changed which led to the Church reversing its position on interest rates on loans.⁵

The laity carries out their mission not in an ideal world but in a world beset by complicated problems. Would we prefer it if prostitution disappeared? Certainly. But the “oldest profession” has been around for most of human history. We cannot seem to get rid of it. So how should the Church, particularly the laity, engage the problem of prostitution? We cannot simply condone such serious problems and resignedly do nothing. On the other hand, we cannot simply quote scripture at these social ills and naively think they will go away. There has to be a fruitful, productive middle ground where the laity can actively engage these problems while maintaining their fidelity to the gospel.

To add to the complexity of the problem, the laity are tasked with bringing gospel values to a world that is increasingly globalized and is characterized as multi-religious, multi-cultural, and pluralistic. The Church may not approve of divorce or contraceptives, but much of the world does. The Church may not allow polygamy, but a number of cultures do. How should the laity carry out its mission in such a complex and diverse world?

This paper proposes “Critical Engagement”⁶ as a paradigm for lay involvement in public life. This paradigm was coined by Robert Benne. Through this paradigm, the lay faithful can actively engage themselves in temporal affairs without compromising their Christian identity and mission. They do this while respecting the autonomy of the temporal affairs, which is itself defended by Vatican II.

If by the autonomy of earthly affairs we mean that created things and societies themselves enjoy their own laws and values which must be gradually deciphered, put to use, and regulated by men, then it is entirely

⁴National Commission on Marihuana and Drug Abuse, “History of Alcohol Prohibition,” <http://www.druglibrary.org/schaffer/library/studies/nc/nc2a.htm>.

⁵Richard McBrien, *Catholicism*, Mumbai: St. Paul, 2008, 986; see also John Noonan, “The Amendment of Papal Teaching by Theologians,” in *Contraception: Authority and Dissent*, Charles E. Curran, ed., New York: Herder & Herder, 1969, 41-75.

⁶Robert Benne, “How Should Religious Convictions be Expressed in Political Life?” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 51, 2 (June 2012) 105-110.

right to demand that autonomy. Such is not merely required by modern man, but harmonizes also with the will of the Creator. For by the very circumstance of their having been created, all things are endowed with their own stability, truth, goodness, proper laws and order. Man must respect these as he isolates them by the appropriate methods of the individual sciences or arts.⁷

Hence, Critical Engagement provides a model of involvement for the laity where both their mission of evangelization of the temporal order (AA, 2) and the integrity of the temporal order's rightful autonomy (GS, 36) are mutually upheld.

The subsequent sections in this paper shall provide a further exposition on how Critical Engagement serves as a more favourable model for lay participation in political affairs. In doing so, particular attention shall be given to the situation of lay participation in Philippine politics.

Lay Participation in Philippine Politics

In the Philippines, the year 2014 was declared by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) as the Year of the Laity. This celebration is part of nine years of intensive evangelization in preparation for the 500th anniversary of the coming of Christianity to the Philippines. But despite the fact that the Philippines has been Christian for almost half a millennium, the country still has a long way to go in becoming a society that truly embraces the values of justice, peace, and integrity which the gospel demands. The CBCP itself made this sad observation.

It is certainly a shameful proof of our failure to evangelize our country that our churches are filled with people, our religious festivities are fervent, our Catholic schools are many, but our country is mired in poverty and in corruption. Many, perhaps the majority of the corrupt people in politics and in business are graduates of our own Catholic schools and are "practicing" Catholics. The majority of those who cheat in elections and those who sell their votes are also baptized Catholics. This is also true of the bribe takers in public offices and the looters of our public coffers.⁸

⁷Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes* 36 (7 December 1965), accessed at http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html). Hereafter cited as GS with paragraph number.

⁸Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), "Pastoral Exhortation of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines for the 2014 Year of the Laity," (December 1, 2013), accessed at <http://www.cbcnews.com/cbcnews/?p=27171>.

How can this happen in a nation that prides itself as one of two predominantly Christian countries in Asia?

Vatican II pointed out that one of the grave errors in the present era is the pervading split between the faith people profess and their daily lives (GS, 43). The Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II) similarly observed this problem in the Philippines. According to PCP II, majority of the Filipinos have centred their faith life on the rites of popular piety instead of the daily living out of the Gospel by participating in the building up of the world unto the image of the kingdom of God.⁹ It is a sad fact that for many Filipinos, faith is limited to the confines of the Church and religion. Faith has become privatized as something that is mainly expressed in religious services and not in daily life. PCP II thus saw the need for a renewed integral evangelization that will hopefully lead to the transformation of Philippine society.¹⁰

One area that urgently needs renewal in Philippine society is politics. It is a distressing fact that politics as it is practiced in the Philippines is considered as a major hindrance to its integral development as a nation.¹¹ In the Pastoral Exhortation of the CBCP on the Year of the Laity, the Philippine Bishops pointed out some concrete illustrations that show how politics in the country remains defective.

Our elections are notoriously noted for their violence and vote-buying and for the lack of proper discernment in the choice of candidates. Recent developments have highlighted the corruption connected with the pork barrel which those in power are loath to give up despite their blatant misuse for political patronage. It is now clear that our people are poor because our leaders have kept them poor by their greed for money and power.¹²

⁹Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, *Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines* 13, Manila: Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, 1992. Hereafter cited as *PCP II* with paragraph number.

¹⁰*PCP II*, 192 says "Evangelization... seeks to transform the whole fabric of society according to the values of the Kingdom and of Christ. That is why the Church has not hesitated to promote total human development, and the integrity of creation. In the Philippines this facet of renewed evangelization needs to be emphasized. For while the majority of our people are Catholics and our churches are filled on Sundays, our society remains a sick society."

¹¹Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, Pastoral Exhortation of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines for the 2014 Year of the Laity.

¹²Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, Pastoral Exhortation of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines for the 2014 Year of the Laity. See

These observations were immediately followed by a series of questions addressed to the lay faithful.

What are you doing to help get worthy people to positions of authority and power? What are you doing to get rid of the politics of patronage, violence and uneducated choices? What are you doing, our dear lay faithful to rid our country of graft and corruption? Do you perhaps participate in corrupt practices by selling your votes, by buying votes, by bribery and acceptance of kickbacks?¹³

It seems that the heavier weight of accountability for what is happening in Philippine society lies in the hands of the lay faithful. The bishops, in a way, have high expectations from the Filipino laity to be actively involved in the various political affairs of the country. PCP II says that it is the laity who have the “competence in active and direct partisan politics” and it is through them that the Church is directly involved in the public sphere.¹⁴ Thus, to be able to perform their duty in the temporal order, by serving persons and society, lay participation in the public life should never be relinquished. It is truly a work that is worthy of praise and consideration.¹⁵

However, there were various instances where the lay faithful involved in politics have gotten into trouble with their pastors because of their position on certain public concerns. In discharging their duty as policy makers and government officials they have created tensions with Church authorities who insist on inserting their religious convictions in political discourse. For example, in the Philippines, some bishops have threatened public officials with excommunication because of their support of the, then, Reproductive Health (RH) Bill.¹⁶ Catholic politicians who were brazen enough to support the bill were considered as Catholics not in good standing.

also Pastoral Exhortation on Philippine Politics, accessible at http://www.cbconline.net/documents/1990s/1997-philippine_politics.html.

¹³Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, Pastoral Exhortation of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines for the 2014 Year of the Laity.

¹⁴PCP II 342, 348.

¹⁵John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 42 (30 December 1988), accessed at http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici.html. Hereafter cited as CL with paragraph number.

¹⁶Today, this bill has been promulgated as the RH Law. Prior to this, lawmakers who supported the bill were threatened with excommunication. The president of the Philippines, himself, was not exempted from criticisms by some Church officials because of his administration's support of the bill. See <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/breakingnews/nation/view/20100930-295226/CBCP-reminds-Aquino-about-excommunication>. See also <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/inquirerheadlines/nation/view/20101001-295320/Aquino-faces-threat-of-excommunication>.

These tensions result from a confusion on whether the lay people involved in politics should be more faithful to their civil obligations or to their mission as Christian evangelizers, as though these were mutually exclusive. We thus face the crucial question: can the laity engage the temporal sphere fruitfully while maintaining their fidelity to Christianity?

Three Models of Engagement

There are three possible models on how Christians are to engage in public life. One is the Fusionist model; second is the Separationist model; and third is the Critical Engagement model.¹⁷

The Fusionist model resolves the tension between civil obligation and Church obligation by treating the two as one similar undertaking. And so, Christian politicians who subscribe to this model will tend to infuse their religious convictions directly into public policies.¹⁸ Thus, there will be no clear distinction between the prescriptions of the moral law and the civil law. The two would be speaking unanimously. The civil laws have to be always in consonance with the moral norms as understood and supplied by religion. In resolving issues even on political matters, appeal to the authority of the Church, revelation, or Church teaching will be the rule. There is little, if any, tolerance for a plurality of positions. It is precisely this model that led to the Church's problems with people like Galileo and Darwin. While these great thinkers arrived at their positions through sound scientific methods, they were countered with scriptural citations.

In the Philippines, some of the followers of this model are, oftentimes, well-intentioned people. They come from both the laity and the clergy alike.¹⁹ But there are some Church leaders, appearing commonly in media, who use this approach to address political issues. They argue against proposed laws on matters like divorce or contraception on the basis of scripture or papal encyclicals as though Philippine society were officially and unanimously Christian.

¹⁷Robert Benne, "How Should Religious Convictions be Expressed...," 105-110.

¹⁸See Robert Benne, "How Should Religious Convictions be Expressed...," 106-108.

¹⁹One example of this would be the news report in <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/inquirerheadlines/nation/view/20110518-337108/Pacquiao-Church-poster-boy-vs-RH-bill> where the famous world boxer and Sarangani province Congressman Manny Pacquiao showed his full support of the Church leaders' move against the passing of the Reproductive Health Bill. Pacquiao even cited a bible passage from Genesis 1:28 where God commanded people to "go forth and multiply." For the Congressman, the RH Bill directly contradicts the teaching of the scriptures.

One problem with the fusionist model is that it basically considers the Church to be the expert on matters like politics on which it is precisely not expert. Since in this model civil policies must be aligned with religious convictions, the pastors who are the authoritative interpreters of faith and morals are thought to have the final say in political matters. The laity's role is simply to listen to what their religious leaders have definitively decided on particular issues.

Therein lies the inherent contradiction in the Fusionist model. Who should really be primarily in charge of matters pertaining to the temporal order? Vatican II clearly says it has to be the laity!²⁰ The council also teaches that "the Church and the political community in their own fields are autonomous and independent from each other" (GS, 76). There has to be a respectful delineation between what is in the scope of religious authority and what is already in the jurisdiction of civil authority. Just recently, Pope Francis reminded the Church leaders of the need for ecclesial sensitivity that reinforces "the indispensable role of the laity willing to take on the responsibilities that belong to them..."²¹ He further added that "Laypeople who have an authentic Christian formation do not need a 'bishop-pilot' or a 'monsignor-pilot' or clerical input to assume their responsibilities at every level from the political to the social, from the economic to the legislative."²² The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines had a similar statement on this. They held that as pastors, they cannot extend their "leadership into the spheres of politics and governance, in business and economics, in the sciences and the mass media, etc."²³ For this will be an over-extension of their sphere of influence beyond their respective jurisdiction. For this reason, the "direct participation in the political order is the special responsibility of the laity in the

²⁰AA, 7 states, "The laity must take up the renewal of the temporal order as their own special obligation... they must act directly and in a definite way in the temporal sphere. As citizens they must cooperate with other citizens with their own particular skill and on their own responsibility."

²¹Catholic News Service, "Be Joyful Shepherds, Trust Your Laity, Be Concrete, Pope Tells Bishops" (May 18, 2015), accessed at <http://cnstopstories.com/2015/05/18/be-joyful-shepherds-trust-your-laity-be-concrete-pope-tells-bishops/>.

²²Catholic News Service, "Be Joyful Shepherds, Trust Your Laity, Be concrete, Pope Tells Bishops."

²³Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, "A Pastoral Exhortation on the Year of the Two Hearts for Peace-Building and Lay Participation in Social Change" (April 19, 2009), accessed at <http://www.cbconline.net/documents/2000s/html/2009-YEAR%20OF%20THE%20TWO%20HEARTS.html>.

Church.”²⁴ If these teachings are really implemented and followed by all Church leaders the laity would hopefully be able to authentically exercise their unique vocation in politics.

The next model of engagement in political affairs is the direct opposite of the Fusionist. This is called the Separationist model. If fusionists want to collapse the boundaries between religion and politics, separationists say that the Church and the state must put an absolute demarcation line between them. People who follow this ideology usually think that the Church has to remain in its religious domain and avoid meddling with political matters because doing so would mean a violation of the principle of separation of the Church and the State.²⁵ A basic slogan for this position would be the scriptural quotation, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Mt 22:21). The intrusion of the Church in politics cannot be justified because Christ himself said to Pilate: “My kingdom is not of this earth!” (Jn 18:36).²⁶ Thus for them, the world of the Church and of politics must operate on “two non-intersecting planes.”²⁷ The Church should absolutely have nothing to do with matters of a political nature. All affairs of the temporal order must be put in the hands of their relevant authorities.²⁸

In the Philippines, one of the primary proponents of this model is the group called Filipino Freethinkers. In their website, they claim that their aim is to “promote secularism” which leads to “a country where religion and governance are clearly and permanently separated.”²⁹ In their several web posts, they adamantly oppose religious undertones in secular discourses, especially in matters that

²⁴Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, “Pastoral Exhortation on Philippine Politics” (16 September 1997), accessed at http://www.cbcponline.net/documents/1990s/1997-philippine_politics.html.

²⁵The 1987 Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines Article II Section 6. See <http://www.gov.ph/constitutions/the-1987-constitution-of-the-republic-of-the-philippines/the-1987-constitution-of-the-republic-of-the-philippines-article-ii/>.

²⁶Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, “Pastoral Exhortation on Philippine Politics.”

²⁷Raymond Aguas, “Agenda for Hope in Democratic Governance: Between Our Faith and Our Politics,” in *Agenda for Hope: Ideas on Building a Nation Democratizing Governance*, ed. Agustin Martin Rodriguez and Teresita Asuncion Lacandola-Rodriguez, Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2009, 101.

²⁸Raymond Aguas, “Agenda for Hope in Democratic Governance: Between Our Faith and Our Politics,” 100-101.

²⁹See <http://filipinofreethinkers.org/2011/07/07/secularism-and-the-filipino-freethinkers/>.

pertain to public policy making.³⁰ This group is a good example of separationists who want to protect politics from a possible threat of theocracy or from the possible “oppressive and destructive effects of religion in public.”³¹

Meanwhile, there is also a group of separationists whose intent is to protect religion from dirty politics.³² These people think that Church members should not involve themselves in politics which is thought to be inherently unclean. They would rather focus on spiritual and religious matters and avoid the pressing issues of today’s world. For them what is more important is heaven or the life to come.

The problem with both groups of separationists is the fundamental untenability of their position. The freethinkers cannot get rid of religion no matter how hard they try. All civil states have adherents of numerous religions living within them and these adherents will bring their religious convictions to bear in various spheres, including the political. The separationists who want to inoculate the Church cannot deny or change the reality that the Church is in the world, and must operate following the rules set by the civil state. They drive on the same roads, and go to the same public schools, and use the same hospitals as the non-religious in the state. Do they really not have any desire to have a say in matters which directly concern them?

A third option, then, needs to be considered. This is the Critical Engagement model.³³ If the Fusionist model leads to a direct infusion of religious convictions to public policy and the Separationist model to an absolute non-relation between religion and politics, the Critical Engagement model offers a middle ground.

Critical Engagement upholds the basic affirmation that God is presently working in all areas of human life whether religious, political, economic, or social. God’s engagement in these areas comes in various ways and is not limited to the confines of a particular religion. For example, in politics God uses the natural human capacity implanted in everyone, like reason and experience, to guide people in their public life. This natural capacity does not discriminate against any religious background. It is a shared capacity that will help people to truly participate in the public sphere since it is

³⁰See <http://filipinofreethinkers.org/>.

³¹Robert Benne, “How Should Religious Convictions be Expressed...,” 106.

³²Robert Benne, “How Should Religious Convictions be Expressed...,” 106.

³³Robert Benne, “How Should Religious Convictions be Expressed...,” 109.

something common to everyone. There is no need to make a direct appeal to revelation, authority, or theological orthodoxy in order to resolve political issues. God's Spirit can be manifested in "political philosophies, empirical assessments, varied ways to rank and order values, and practical judgments."³⁴ It is, thus, through this affirmation and recognition that a critical engagement between the core convictions of the Christian faith and those viewpoints, principles, valuations, and practical judgments by the various field experts is facilitated.³⁵ For truly discerning Christians who are immersed in the temporal order, they do not have to "move in a straight line from the Bible and central theological commitments to specific public policies."³⁶

Critical engagement facilitates a dialogue between the sphere of faith and the sphere of politics not by collapsing the boundaries of the two but by a critical collaboration. Critical collaboration means that the laity involved in politics, together with the Church in general, should support the State in promoting the common good.³⁷ This should be grounded on the principles of defence and promotion of justice, inspired and guided by the spirit of service, imbued with a love of preference for the poor, and carried out as a process and goal of empowering people.³⁸ These principles serve as common grounds where faith and politics may effectively and respectfully dialogue.

It is therefore more fitting that in a multi-religious and pluralistic society, like the Philippines, Critical Engagement be used as a paradigm for public discourse. Since it does not rely upon direct religious jargon, it is accessible to all, even non-religious, and can lead to meaningful dialogue and collaboration. In the process of arriving at the best possible solutions for specific problems, there can be differing opinions among people. As the laity engage and navigate through the core Christian principles to specific public policies, each step towards the possible solution may be an instance where Christians will have to take different positions than their other Christian brethren. Critical engagement provides a venue for

³⁴Robert Benne, "How Should Religious Convictions be Expressed...", 109.

³⁵Robert Benne, "How should Religious Convictions be Expressed...", 109.

³⁶Robert Benne, "How Should Religious Convictions be Expressed...", 109.

³⁷Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, "Catechism on the Church and Politics" (February 1998), accessed at http://www.cbcponline.net/documents/1990s/1998-church_politics.html.

³⁸*PCP II*, 351.

Christians involved in the arena of politics to have a diversity of voices. They may agree on central faith assertions but they may disagree how these will be expressed in particular public policies. They would have common aims but they may disagree on the means of reaching them.³⁹ Nevertheless, the lay faithful who are actively engaged in political affairs must “always try to enlighten one another through honest discussion, preserving mutual charity and caring above all for the common good” (GS, 43).

A Critical Engagement that Promotes the Common Good

The Critical Engagement model may lead the lay people who are actively involved in political affairs to take up seriously “the renewal of the temporal order as their own special obligation” (AA, 7). Through Critical Engagement they can be in the frontiers of evangelization and renewal of public life. They will learn how to live out their distinct role with prudent discernment and exercise their own expertise, skill, and responsibility in their respective disciplines. To critically engage in the world of politics, the lay faithful should learn how to discern and make judgments using their own expertise with the enlightenment of their faith. This calls for a certain kind of maturity that recognizes that the Church does not always bear a ready answer to all question of life, that the pastors are not always the experts in all things, and it is not their mission to always provide a clear solution to every problem (GS, 43).

This means that in finding the best possible solutions for contemporary problems, the Spirit should also be identified as actively working in the different areas of human life however “worldly” they may be. The Spirit working in political, economic, scientific, or social endeavours should also be recognized as legitimate and valid. The Church, therefore, must be open and ready to see, listen, and learn from the school of the Spirit dynamically moving in today’s world. And since the laity are the experts in the area of earthly affairs, the pastors of the Church should let them speak and recognize the voice of the Spirit working in, with, and through them.

On the part of the laity, they have to use their own expertise, knowledge, and skills in the arts, sciences, and in other disciplines in order to contribute to the pursuit for the common good. Vatican II says,

³⁹Robert Benne, “How Should Religious Convictions be Expressed...,” 109.

Therefore, by their competence in secular training and by their activity, elevated from within by the grace of Christ, let them vigorously contribute their effort, so that created goods may be perfected by human labor, technical skill and civic culture for the benefit of all men according to the design of the Creator and the light of His Word. May the goods of this world be more equitably distributed among all men, and may they in their own way be conducive to universal progress in human and Christian freedom (LG, 36).

The expertise and specializations of the lay faithful are gifts to the Church. These can help in carrying out its overall mission. In the letter to the Romans, Christians were reminded,

For as in one body we have many parts, and all the parts do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another. Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us exercise them: if prophecy, in proportion to the faith; if ministry, in ministering; if one is a teacher, in teaching; if one exhorts, in exhortation; if one contributes, in generosity; if one is over others, with diligence; if one does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness (Rom 12:4-8).

All the members of the Church, both pastors and lay faithful, should responsibly use their gifts, talents, and skills for the betterment not only of the Church but also of the world. Through their participation in social institutions and mechanisms and their professional expertise and competence, they would hopefully be able to responsibly make and promote choices that foster the common good.