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# **A THEOLOGY OF THE CHURCH FOR THE FUTURE: A PARTICIPATORY CHURCH OF EQUAL DISCIPLESHIP**

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## **Abstract**

Even after fifty years, the Second Vatican Council inspires us to build up a more participatory Church of equal discipleship. This paper, beginning with an overview of the pre-Vatican II ecclesiology, shows how the Second Vatican Council brought about revolutionary changes in the theology of the Church. Following this, the paper points out a few areas where changes might be required for becoming a more participatory Church. It is argued that we need a Church free of clericalism, a Church which is more participatory and democratic. Only if the faithful get the opportunity for active participation in the life of the Church they will have a sense of belongingness. The process undertaken by the two sessions of the Synod on the Family gives the hope that the participatory model can still prevail in the Church. Similarly, the Church of the future should ensure equal discipleship of men and women. In spite of the recognition in theory of the equal dignity of women, in practice, women continue to be discriminated.

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The Church should ensure that women receive equal opportunities to work for the good of the community and glory of God as equal partners.

**Keywords:** Democratic Church, Discipleship of Equals, Laity, Ministerial Priesthood, Participatory Church, Role of Women in the Church, Royal Priesthood, *Sensus Fidei*, *Sensus Fidelium*, Transparency in the Church

## 1. Introduction

Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) which was convoked for the renewal and updating of the Church, continues to invite the Church to renew and update itself, and to look towards the future by “reading the signs of the times” (GS, 4). This is a challenge and a task if the Church’s existence has to be relevant, not only for the faithful, but also for the world at large.

Even after fifty years, the Second Vatican Council inspires us to build up a more participatory Church of equal discipleship. In this paper, we shall begin with an overview of the pre-Vatican II ecclesiology and see how the Second Vatican Council brought about revolutionary changes in the theology of the Church, mainly as we find it in the teaching of *Lumen Gentium*. Based on the vision of the Church presented by Vatican II, we shall consider a few areas where changes might be required for becoming a more participatory Church of equal disciples.

## 2. Second Vatican Council’s Vision of a Participatory Church

The Second Vatican Council’s vision of the Church is mainly presented in *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, which can be said to be the most important and most foundational document of the Council. The basis for most other documents can be found in *Lumen Gentium*. Even after 50 years, this revolutionary document can be the point of departure for visualizing the Church of the present and the future. Let us begin with a very brief overview of the past so that we can appreciate better the paradigm shift brought about by *Lumen Gentium*. However, we shall not discuss in detail the theology of the Church presented by LG, but its vision of a participatory Church, in which every member of the Church is to be actively involved.

Though the Council of Trent is often held responsible for the Pre-Vatican II ecclesiology, Trent did not try to present an integrated vision of the Church. The post-Tridentine ecclesiology, which was prevalent till Vatican II, is said to be the contribution of Robert

Bellarmino (1542-1621).<sup>1</sup> Bellarmine's ecclesiology over-emphasized the visible, juridical and hierarchical aspects of the Church; in its understanding, the Church was primarily the hierarchy and clergy; the laity was generally relegated to the status of passive beneficiary of the pastoral care of the hierarchy. This ecclesiology was conditioned by the needs of the time and gave undue emphasis on the external and juridical aspects of the Church. The general assumption was that the Church was centred on the hierarchy and clergy; the laity was supposed to be passive objects of the pastoral care of the hierarchy and the clergy. Authority was interpreted in terms of power.<sup>2</sup>

For the first session of Vatican II (1962), the Theological Preparatory Commission drafted a working document. It was in line with the vision of the Church that prevailed until then. For almost 400 years since the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic's perspective on the Church was dominated by defensiveness, especially to counter attacks on papacy, the priesthood and the sacramental structure. This defensiveness led to an over-emphasis on the visible structures and hierarchical institutional nature of the Church. The Church was often presented as a "perfect society."<sup>3</sup> Many Fathers of Vatican II wanted to change this concept of the Church.

The Second Draft of LG was basically prepared by the Belgian theologian Gerard Philips. One significant revision was in the title of the first chapter from the "Church Militant" to the Church as a "Mystery". Cardinal Suenens proposed a chapter on the "People of God and the Laity in Particular." Though there was some resistance, this prevailed.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See H. Watrignant, "Bellarmine François Robert Romulus," *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* II, 1, 588-595. Mention should be made of the sacramental, mystical ecclesiology of Peter de Bérulle, also a cardinal, which constitutes an important exception to the mainline model of Bellarmine. See in this regard, P. Cochois, *Bérulle et l'école française*, Paris, 1963.

<sup>2</sup>Dominic Veliath, SDB, "Implications and Impact of *Lumen Gentium* on the Post-Conciliar Scenario," in Shaji George Kochuthara, CMI, ed., *Revisiting Vatican II: 50 Years of Renewal*, Vol. I: *Keynote and Plenary Papers of the DVK International Conference on Vatican II*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2014, 239-241.

<sup>3</sup>Francis Thonippara, CMI, "The Second Vatican Council: Immediate Historical Background," in Shaji George Kochuthara, ed., *Revisiting Vatican II: 50 Years of Renewal*, Vol. I: *Keynote and Plenary Papers of the DVK International Conference on Vatican II*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2014, 95.

<sup>4</sup>Margaret Lavin, *Vatican II: Fifty Years of Evolution and Revolution in the Catholic Church*, Mumbai: St Pauls, 2013, 33-34.

Interesting to note how Cardinal Montini of Milan (later Pope Paul VI), speaking to the people of his diocese, presented the dramatic shift after the first session, in the vision of the Church:

Yesterday the theme of the Church seemed to be confined to the power of the Pope. Today it is extended to the episcopate, religious, the laity and the whole body of the Church. Yesterday we spoke of the rights of the Church by transferring constitutive elements of civil society to the definition of the Church as a perfect society. Today we have discovered other realities in the Church — the charisms of grace and holiness for example — which cannot be defined by purely juridical ideas. Yesterday we were above all interested in the external history of the Church. Today we are equally concerned with its inner life brought to life by the presence of Christ in it.<sup>5</sup>

In light of the above words of Cardinal Montini, let us consider how LG presents the vision of a participatory Church. LG, 10-12 speak about the new dignity of the People of God, as all are called to participate in the kingship, priesthood and prophetic office of Christ. All the faithful, whatever be their state in life, are called by God to perfect holiness.

The baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, in order that through all those works which are those of the Christian man they may offer spiritual sacrifices and proclaim the power of Him who has called them out of darkness into His marvellous light (LG, 10).

There is difference between royal priesthood and ministerial priesthood, but they are integrally related. The faithful exercise their priesthood by participating in the sacraments, especially Eucharist, by prayer, witness, self-sacrifice and acts of love.

The entire People of God shares in Christ's prophetic office. A supernatural instinct of the faith (*sensus fidei*) empowers them and hence the whole body cannot err in matters of faith:

The entire body of the faithful, anointed as they are by the Holy One, cannot err in matters of belief. They manifest this special property by means of the whole peoples' supernatural discernment in matters of faith when 'from the Bishops down to the last of the lay faithful' they show universal agreement in matters of faith and morals. That discernment in matters of faith is aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth. It is exercised under the guidance of the sacred teaching authority, in faithful

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<sup>5</sup>As cited in Margaret Lavin, *Vatican II: Fifty Years of Evolution and Revolution in the Catholic Church*, Mumbai: St Pauls, 2013, 31-32; The text appeared first in *L'Osservatore Romano*, Dec. 10-11, 1962, 6.

and respectful obedience to which the people of God accepts that which is not just the word of men but truly the word of God (LG, 12).

It may be interesting to reflect on this concept of the “instinct of faith” and “infallibility” in comparison with the infallibility of the Pope as defined by the First Vatican Council. The Vatican I teaching on the infallibility of the Pope is not rejected or replaced, but, infallibility is not reserved to the Pope or the bishops or the clergy; it is not a prerogative of a few. It is a gift given to the whole community, in which everyone shares. This again, is a revolutionary concept where the role, responsibility and significance of every Christian, without any discrimination and distinction are recognised.

Chapter IV (numbers 30-38) of LG is on the Laity. Never before had an ecumenical council addressed the Laity! It is affirmed that all that was said about the People of God applies to the clergy, the religious and the laity, but certain things apply to the laity in a particular way. The term “Laity”, negatively, refers to all the faithful who are not in Holy Orders or who do not belong to institutes of religious life. Positively, “Laity” refers to those faithful who are incorporated by baptism into Christ, thereby sharing his priestly, prophetic and kingly office.<sup>6</sup> Although the clergy and religious can involve in secular affairs, it properly and particularly pertains to the laity to seek the Kingdom of God, by engaging in temporal affairs. The Council also points out that in certain places and circumstances, only through the laity the mission of the Church can be carried out.

LG, 35 underscores how the Laity participates in the prophetic function:

Christ, the great Prophet, who proclaimed the Kingdom of His Father both by the testimony of His life and the power of His words, continually fulfils His prophetic office until the complete manifestation of glory. He does this not only through the hierarchy who teach in His name and with His authority, but also through the laity whom He made His witnesses and to whom He gave understanding of the faith (*sensus fidei*) and an attractiveness in speech so that the power of the Gospel might shine forth in their daily social and family life.

Another beautiful insight in the same article (LG, 35) is the relationship between the sacrament of matrimony and the prophetic function of the laity:

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<sup>6</sup>José M. de Mesa, “The Christological Basis of *Apostolicam Actuositatem*,” in Shaji George Kochuthara, ed., *Revisiting Vatican II: 50 Years of Renewal*, Vol. I: *Keynote and Plenary Papers of the DVK International Conference on Vatican II*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2014, 311.

In connection with the prophetic function is that state of life which is sanctified by a special sacrament obviously of great importance, namely, married and family life. For where Christianity pervades the entire mode of family life, and gradually transforms it, one will find there both the practice and an excellent school of the lay apostolate. In such a home husbands and wives find their proper vocation in being witnesses of the faith and love of Christ to one another and to their children.

The role and function of the Laity are further elaborated in *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity. This is further elaborated and developed in the Post-Synodal Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici* (1988, following the Synod on Laity in 1987).

LG Chapter V ("The Universal Call to Holiness in the Church: 39-42) and Chapter VI (Religious: 43-47) are to be understood in the background of the renewed understanding of the holiness of all the members of the Church. These two were originally one chapter, titled, "State of Evangelical Perfection," dealing with religious life. Since the previous chapters treated the whole People of God, this chapter was rewritten to address the call to holiness of the whole Church. Some Council Fathers objected to this decision, pointing out that the call to holiness specific to religious life was ignored. Thus, there is a chapter on the universal call to holiness and another on holiness in consecrated life.

The Council reminds all the People of God of their obligation to strive for holiness: "Therefore, all the faithful of Christ are invited to strive for the holiness and perfection of their own proper state. Indeed they have an obligation to so strive" (LG, 42).

Let us consider some of the implications of this vision of a participatory Church for today as well as for the Church of the future.

### **3. Church of the Future: A Church Free of Clericalism**

Clericalism refers to the policy of maintaining or increasing the power of the hierarchy. The clergy and the hierarchy are seen as the source and centre of power and authority. In spite of the shift into a communion ecclesiology and the conviction that the Church is the People of God, clericalism continues to divide the Church into superior and inferior members, thus promoting unequal discipleship in the Church. Besides making the ordained a centre of power, clericalism in effect distances people from God, by presenting the ordained as the mediators, only through whom God's grace can be obtained and truth can be understood.

We need a Church which is participatory, where the uniqueness and equality in dignity of all the members are recognised and the unique charisms of all are promoted. We need a Church where differences in functions and roles do not lead to differences and divisions, but lead to mutual recognition and appreciation and greater unity. The ordained represents Christ, but he equally represents the community. Clericalism somehow underlines the difference between the ordained and the non-ordained, highlights the authority of the ordained, even to the point of ignoring his basic unity with the community, in which everyone partakes in the priestly function of Christ, by virtue of his/her baptism. It may be worth listening to what Pope Francis told in his homily on December 16, 2013: "Lord, free your people from a spirit of clericalism and aid them with a spirit of prophecy." He continued to say that, in the Gospel, those who met Christ with a spirit of prophecy welcomed him as the Messiah, but without it, "the void that is left is occupied by clericalism; and it is this clericalism that asks Jesus, 'By what authority do you do these things? By what law?'"<sup>7</sup>

Evidently, it has to be still accepted in practice that ministerial priesthood is for service, not for power. It is a privilege — the privilege of serving others following the footsteps of Jesus who served others and emptied himself for them, and not a privilege to dominate over others. In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* Francis points out that excessive clericalism is responsible for keeping the laity away from active involvement and decision-making in the Church.<sup>8</sup> I shall return to this point later. Pope Francis also makes it clear that it can "prove especially divisive if sacramental power is too closely identified with power in general." It must be remembered that when we speak of sacramental power "we are in the realm of function, not that of dignity or holiness." The ministerial priesthood is a means employed by Jesus for the service of his people, yet our great dignity derives from baptism, which is accessible to all. The configuration of the priest to Christ the head — namely, as the principal source of grace — does not imply an exaltation which would set him above others. In the Church, functions "do not favour the superiority of some vis-à-vis the others."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>"Pope Francis Prays for Church to Be 'Free of Clericalism,'" *National Catholic Register* (17-12-2013): <http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/pope-francis-prays-for-church-to-be-free-of-clericalism/>, accessed on 10-01=2014.

<sup>8</sup>Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 102.

<sup>9</sup>Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 104.

#### **4. Church of the Future: A More Participatory and Democratic Church**

That all the faithful equally participate in the priestly function of Christ and that all are called to the same perfection of holiness also points out the need of a more participatory Church. Everyone is responsible for discerning and understanding the faith and living it to its fullness, sharing the fruits of that faith with others. No one can evade this responsibility, nor can anyone be excluded from this responsibility and privilege.

But, this role of all the faithful cannot be limited merely to professing the same faith, but should be extended to participation in the visible structures of the Church. Often, it is repeatedly said that the Church was instituted by Christ and is guided by the Holy Spirit, and hence it cannot be a democratic structure. But, if we believe that all the baptized share in the priestly function of Christ and all are given the same Spirit, by which all have the instinct of faith, how can the vast majority be excluded from the structures of the Church? Moreover, if we hold that ministerial priest is not for power, but for service, why should power and authority in the Church be reserved for the ministerial priests?

By democratic process, I do not mean party politics or craze for power. Though party based politics is the present form of democracy in most of the countries, democracy is not first of all about party politics; rather, what is practised in many countries is a degeneration of democracy. Democracy is first of all about participation of all the members in the decision-making and governance. The Church, in fact, adopts the democratic process in many places and phases. For example, the highest authority in the Church is elected through voting; the decisions of the Ecumenical Councils are taken — in general — through voting; the office bearers of the bishops' conferences are elected through voting; in most religious congregations, the major superiors and councillors are elected through voting. In the first centuries, in many places, the bishops were selected through people's participation. In India, in the Syro-Malabar Church, for more than sixteen centuries, the priests were ordained only with the consent of the Parish Committee (*palliyogam*); only with the authorization letter from the parish council the bishop was authorised to ordain a priest. Moreover, the temporal administration of the Church was entrusted with the laity. Thus, in the Church, democratic process has a long tradition, which was ignored, sidelined and rejected in the process of clericalism and centralization that crept into the Church later.



I do not claim that democracy is a perfect system, or that democracy as it exists today in many places is foolproof. But, “reading the signs of the times,” we can clearly say that people feel that they belong to a community/society only if they are actively involved. Otherwise, knowingly or unknowingly, they distance themselves from that community/society.

Vatican II envisaged new structures in order to facilitate a more participatory Church. Parish pastoral councils, diocesan synods, regional conferences of bishops, the international synod of bishops, are some of them. Many of these existed in different Churches in different forms, but some of them had become ineffective and obsolete in the course of time. At Vatican II we find a stronger determination to ensure dialogue within the Church and thus to make the Church more participatory. However, a truthful self-evaluation will make us aware that many of these structures have been implemented in a half-hearted manner in many places. In the Latin Rite, the parish and diocesan councils are still “facultative,” and their establishment depends upon the discretion of bishops and pastors. Thus they have been often neglected.<sup>10</sup>

Few lay Catholics experience themselves as participating in any conversation that is of consequence for the life of their church today. Their gifts are largely un-received or are squandered when they are not adequately integrated into the common project of the ecclesial community. The synergetic sharing of their gifts remains unrealized. How much more might be accomplished if they were to be placed at the service of the church’s mission! Without genuine dialogue within the church, the episcopate is hampered in its responsibility of attending to the *sensus fidelium*, that discernment and sense of faith that resides in the entire people of God, to whom the Gospel has been entrusted (LG, 12).<sup>11</sup>

Even after 50 years of Vatican II, often the privileges of the laity are these: “to pay, to pray and to obey.” They are practically excluded from the administration of the Church; they remain only passive observers, though there are signs of hope. Let me refer to Pope Francis again. While acknowledging that there has been a growing

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<sup>10</sup>In the Eastern Churches like Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara, parish council (*palliyogam*) is not facultative. Though the powers of the *palliyogam* are much limited compared to what it had in the past, it still exercises a decisive role.

<sup>11</sup>Catherine E. Clifford, “Vatican II and the Challenge of Ongoing Renewal in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” in Shaji George Kochuthara, CMI, ed., *Revisiting Vatican II: 50 Years of Renewal*, Vol. 1: *Keynote and Plenary Papers of the DVK International Conference on Vatican II*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2014, 598-599.

awareness of the identity and mission of the laity in the Church, the Pope clearly points out the following:

At the same time, a clear awareness of this responsibility of the laity, grounded in their baptism and confirmation, does not appear in the same way in all places. In some cases, it is because lay persons have not been given the formation needed to take on important responsibilities. In others, it is because in their particular Churches room has not been made for them to speak and to act, due to an excessive clericalism which keeps them away from decision-making. Even if many are now involved in the lay ministries, this involvement is not reflected in a greater penetration of Christian values in the social, political and economic sectors.<sup>12</sup>

“Participatory Church” does not refer to economic and temporal administration; it refers to the overall life of the Church, including the discernment of the Spirit. The Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of the Family in 2014, and the forthcoming Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod 2015 are noteworthy in this regard. Wider participation of the laity has been encouraged by inviting them to give their opinions and suggestions, especially by respond to the questionnaires. I do not mean that it was the first time that such a procedure was undertaken in the Church. For example, in preparation for the Second Vatican Council, detailed questionnaires were sent to the bishops, religious congregations and others. However, for the two sessions of the Synod on the Family, a much more determined effort could be seen to involve all the faithful in the process of discernment. Pope Francis repeatedly invited the faithful to actively participate in the Synod, giving the message clearly, though technically it is the ‘Synod of Bishops’, he wanted it to be a Synod of the entire Church. On various occasions he has made it clear that he wants to promote this Synodal model in the various levels of the Church. Though oppositions to this model are not insignificant, let us hope that this Synodal model of a participatory Church will prevail.

An important area that is to be urgently taken care of is the theological formation of the laity. Countries like India do not have many lay people who are theologically trained. Many are interested in studying theology, but how can they live just by holding a degree or doctorate in theology? The structures of the Church do not provide any room for lay theologians to work and earn the livelihood. The educational system in India does not envisage teachers only for religion. The dioceses or religious congregations do not provide employment opportunities for lay people who are theologically

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<sup>12</sup>Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 102.

prepared. Often, lay ministers are supposed to offer unpaid services. Some dioceses appoint a few lay people in the offices, but often when the clergy or the religious are not available for such services. Unless the dioceses and institutions run by the religious reserve certain percentage of jobs for lay people who are qualified in theology, even in future the laity in many countries like India will not become theologically trained. The role of the laity should not be seen as that of substitution due to the absence or lack of the clergy, but as members who are called to contribute their unique resources into the common life of the Church. The Church should envisage ways to ensure their active participation in the overall life of the Church.

One important implication of being a participatory Church is the Church becoming more transparent and ensuring justice within its own structures. One of the salient features of today's society is the sense of social justice. There is a thirst for justice and committed action to establish justice is undertaken. Perhaps this was initiated by different political and social movements from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards and was strengthened in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There is a strong sense of equality and freedom of all human beings, the dignity of the human person and the fundamental rights of everyone. The Church has also creatively responded to this thirst for justice, as can be seen in the developments in the social doctrine of the Church in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Church's attempts to ensure justice in society are held in high esteem. However, there is a growing scepticism about the Church's sincerity in ensuring justice. One of the criticisms levelled against the Church in the wake of the recent cases of abuse of minors by the clergy centres on administering justice within the Church. It is pointed out that the Church employs different norms distinguishing those who are in authority from others. Such disparity in dispensing justice imposes a negative image upon the Church's commitment to justice and the Catholics who share this view prefer civil procedure in cases of abuse; they believe that the ecclesiastical system will not ensure justice, especially if the perpetrators include someone from the hierarchy or the clergy.<sup>13</sup> We cannot ignore the concerted efforts from different corners to tarnish the image and to weaken the moral power of the Church. However, loss of trust in Church's administration of justice is a matter of serious concern for us to examine. This scepticism about the administration of justice within the Church is not a new phenomenon. In the recent decades, moral theologians like

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<sup>13</sup>Aaron Milavec, "Reflections on the Sexual Abuse of Minors by Priests," *Asian Horizons* 4 (2010) 179-191.

Charles E. Curran, Richard A. McCormick and many others have pointed out the need of transparency and justice in dealing with theologians who differ from the magisterial stances.<sup>14</sup> Recently, Jim Keenan and others have underscored the need to “practice what you preach.”<sup>15</sup> One of the tasks of a participatory Church will be to ensure justice and transparency in its own administration.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, there are a number of issues which we are not free to discuss within the domains of the Church. For example, Papal Primacy, Papal Infallibility, Communion for the divorced and re-married, contraception, homosexuality, ordination of women, etc. The list will be much longer if we include all such issues on which discussion is not allowed or at least discouraged. Any society may need disciplinary measures and for unity, sometimes even freedom of expression may be limited. But, the greater the freedom of expression, the more people would feel involved.

The Church of the future should be a participatory Church, if it has to be relevant for the life of the people.

## **5. Church of the Future: A Church of Equal Discipleship of Women and Men**

Women and Men — they are equal in dignity. In the Church, they are equally disciples of Christ. The future Church should ensure that equality of women and men becomes a reality.

Despite the tremendous progress achieved towards actualizing equal discipleship in the last 50 years following the Council, in the real life of the Church women continues to be discriminated. Women continue to be viewed as dependent on men. Woman’s personality, her worth is defined in terms of her relationship with men — as daughter, as wife, as mother. Apart from this, often it seems that, she does not have a personality or value. Though changes begin to be

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<sup>14</sup>For example, see Charles Curran and Richard McCormick, ed., *Readings in Moral Theology, No. 3: The Magisterium and Morality*, New York: Paulist Press, 1982.

<sup>15</sup>For example, James F. Keenan, *Practice What You Preach: The Need for Ethics in Church Leadership*, Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2000; M. Shawn Copeland, “Collegiality as a Moral and Ethical Practice,” in *Practice What You Preach. Virtues, Ethics, and Power in the Lives of Pastoral Ministers and Their Congregations*, ed. James F. Keenan and Joseph Kotva, Lanham: Sheed and Ward, 1999, 315-332.

<sup>16</sup>Please note: “The 21st century could well create a ‘boom market’ for movements seeking to foster greater accountability, collaboration and transparency in the church, if activists and entrepreneurs understand how to make the pitch in a global key.” John L. Allen, Jr., “A Global Case for Good Government in the Church,” in *National Catholic Reporter*, 25-06-2010, [www.ncronline.org](http://www.ncronline.org), accessed on 11-07-2010.

visible, this is the predominant perspective on women, especially in countries like India.

I do not want to elaborate upon the long tradition of considering women as inferior or unequal or as 'imperfect males'. Feminist movements, the origin of which may be traced back to 18<sup>th</sup> century and the developments in psychological and sociological sciences had their impact on the Church's recognition of equality and dignity of women. However, as we know, women were not accorded an important role in the first sessions of Vatican II. No woman ever spoke in the Council, but in September 1964 Paul VI appointed 15 women as auditors, by the end of the Council, there were 23 such women. Though they never spoke in the Council, they exerted their influence through their interactions with the Council Fathers.<sup>17</sup> However, the Council does not say much about women. *Gaudium et Spes* speaks about women mainly in the context of marriage and family. Besides, GS, 60 acknowledges that, "Women now work in almost all spheres. It is fitting that they are able to assume their proper role in accordance with their own nature. It will belong to all to acknowledge and favor the proper and necessary participation of women in the cultural life." Paul VI, in his Closing Address acknowledges more explicitly the role of women:

And now it is to you that we address ourselves, women of all states — girls, wives, mothers and widows, to you also, consecrated virgins and women living alone — you constitute half of the immense human family. As you know, the Church is proud to have glorified and liberated woman, and in the course of the centuries, in diversity of characters, to have brought into relief her basic equality with man. But the hour is coming, in fact has come, when the vocation of woman is being achieved in its fullness, the hour in which woman acquires in the world an influence, an effect and a power never hitherto achieved. That is why, at this moment when the human race is under-going so deep a transformation, women impregnated with the spirit of the Gospel can do so much to aid mankind in not falling.<sup>18</sup>

In the official documents of the Church, the first systematic and methodical discussion on women can be found in the Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem: On the Dignity and Vocation of Woman* (1988). John Paul II affirms that there is a fundamental equality and at the same time a basic difference. Women and men are equal partners and

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<sup>17</sup>For women's participation and contribution in the Council, see Adriana Valerio, *Madri del Concilio: Ventitre' Donne al Vaticano II*, Roma: Carocci Editore, 2012.

<sup>18</sup>Paul VI, Second Vatican Council Closing Speech on 8 December 1965, <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Paul06/p6closin.htm>

oriented towards each other. He rejects any form of male domination. He affirms that the statuses of life in which women experience their dignity and vocation are motherhood and virginity. Motherhood is not “one element of what it is to be a woman, but rather that motherhood defines womanhood.”<sup>19</sup>

Pope Francis, in *Evangelii Gaudium* accords a greater recognition to women:

The Church acknowledges the indispensable contribution which women make to society through the sensitivity, intuition and other distinctive skill sets which they, more than men, tend to possess. I think, for example, of the special concern which women show to others, which finds a particular, even if not exclusive, expression in motherhood. I readily acknowledge that many women share pastoral responsibilities with priests, helping to guide people, families and groups and offering new contributions to theological reflection. But we need to create still broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the Church. Because ‘the feminine genius is needed in all expressions in the life of society, the presence of women must also be guaranteed in the workplace’ and in the various other settings where important decisions are made, both in the Church and in social structures.<sup>20</sup>

However, as it may be clear, he says that the reservation of the priesthood to males is not a question open to discussion.<sup>21</sup>

### **A Few Observations**

1. From inferiority of women, the current paradigm is that of complementarity of man and woman. However, it may be worth remembering that feminist theologians like Elizabeth Johnson reject the complementarity model in man-woman relationship, since, as pointed out above, complementarity model does not solve the problem of inequality and discrimination. Instead, they suggest partnership model to facilitate equality.

2. Woman’s vocation continues to be seen mainly in terms of motherhood. Motherhood is a unique vocation of dignity and glory. There is no doubt about it. But, to see motherhood as the only vocation and meaning of the existence of woman is to restrict her

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<sup>19</sup>Pushpa Joseph, “The Past, Present and Future of Women in the Church: A Study in the Light of the Council’s Teachings,” in Shaji George Kochuthara, ed., *Revisiting Vatican II: 50 Years of Renewal*, Vol. 1: *Keynote and Plenary Papers of the DVK International Conference on Vatican II*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2014, 492.

<sup>20</sup>Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 103.

<sup>21</sup>Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 104.

very being and condition her to the domestic role.<sup>22</sup> It may be also said that we do not find an equal emphasis given to the vocation of man to fatherhood. Man's vocation is defined mainly in terms of his role in the society, whereas the woman's vocation is defined in terms of her role in the family. Woman's talents and charisms as a person need to be recognised further, independent of her domestic role.

3. In the family, though changes have taken place, in general, only the husband is considered as the head.<sup>23</sup> Besides, many practices of discrimination against women continue in societies like India. Dowry is a typical example of such practices. Dowry turns marriage into a union between a superior and an inferior partner.<sup>24</sup> Even decades after marriage, the wife's real family is that of her parents. Domestic violence, female foeticide, etc. are expressions of the continuing inequality that women experience in the family. The theology of marriage of the Church hasn't been effective enough to create the awareness that marriage is a partnership of equals. Both marriage preparation courses and renewal programmes offered at parish or diocesan levels are often silent about this.

4. The role of Women Religious in the Church is also to be critically appraised. Often, in the pastoral context, women religious are assigned a subservient role. Though in their independent ministries they have proved their abilities and talents, in the pastoral context their only role is to obey and serve the parish priest or other higher authorities. Their function is limited to catechism classes, cleaning of

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<sup>22</sup>Of course, there are statements in the official documents of the Church which say that the social role of the woman should not be ignored. For example, GS, 52 says, "The active presence of the father is highly beneficial to their formation. The children, especially the younger among them, need the care of their mother at home. This domestic role of hers must be safely preserved, though the legitimate social progress of women should not be underrated on that account." Though this statement points out the domestic role of the father, it is still 'highly beneficial' and not a 'need' as that of the care of the mother. Moreover, in general, what is emphasised in the official documents is only the domestic role of the woman.

<sup>23</sup>It may be interesting to note that even today the 'headship' of the husband is supported with patriarchal interpretations of the symbolism of Christ and Church relationship as found in Eph 5:22-33.

<sup>24</sup>For a detailed discussion on dowry and its implications for marriage and family life, see Shaji George Kochuthara, "Dowry as a Social-Structural Sin," in Linda Hogan and A.E. Orobator, ed., *Feminist Catholic Theological Ethics: Conversations in the World Church*, Maryknoll, New York, 2014, 108-122, and A. Vimal Kumar, MMI, Bala Kiran Vannekuty, Joseph Thambi Gone, M.R. Sharma and Shaji George Kochuthara, CMI, "The Impact of Dowry System in the Christian Communities: Report of the Field Study Conducted in the States of Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Tamil Nadu," *Asian Horizons* 7, 2 (2013) 357-375.

the Church, preparing the altar, assisting the parish organisations often according to the whims and fancies of the parish priests, etc. Many a time, this is the role assigned even to academically or professionally well-prepared and talented sisters. As soon as they disagree with the priest, retaliatory measures are taken, even to the extent of abusing the “sacramental power” of the priest! Often they are not even members of the parish council or part of any decision-making bodies in the parishes where they serve. Surely, in good spirit they are doing all these for the good of the Christian community and for the greater glory of God. But, due to the lack of positive approach in pastoral and administrative policies, the Church is deprived of their creative talents and unique charisms.

5. Women in the Administration of the Church: There are varied opinions regarding the role of women in the administration of the Church. In general, we can say that women are not given equal and active role in Church administration. John L. Allen, Jr., an NCR Vatican journalist, says that the picture is not as bleak as often thought. For example, he points out that 80% of the lay ministers in the US are women. In diocesan-level administration, 48.4% of all positions are held by women. At the senior-most levels in dioceses, 26.8% of executive positions are held by women. However, we know that the top positions in the Catholic Church are reserved to the ordained, and hence only men occupy those positions. John Allen also points out that in the Vatican, women tend to be more conspicuous by their absence. Things have changed in the recent years. By the end of John Paul II’s pontificate women made up 21% of Vatican personnel, even if they rarely broke through to the most senior levels. This is because those positions are held by the ordained.<sup>25</sup>

As far as the Indian Church is concerned, there is a dearth of statistical data regarding the presence and active contributions in the administrative bodies of the Church, both at the parish and diocesan levels. But the involvement of women, both religious and lay, in the administration of the Church seems to be very limited. Even today, the attitude seems to be this: as long as there are priests, the Church administration will be the prerogative of the ordained; if there is a shortage for priests, we shall appoint the religious or the laity. If we believe that the laity, including women, have a unique role in the

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<sup>25</sup>John L. Allen, Jr., *The Future Church: How Ten Trends Are Revolutionizing the Catholic Church*, New York: Doubleday, 2009, 195-199.



Church, are they to be considered merely as substitutes for the ordained, that too only when there is no one to fill the vacancy? Or, do they have a role in the Church even when there are the ordained? The role of the laity, especially of women, is to be urgently recognised by the Church in India.

## **6. Conclusion**

The Second Vatican Council visualizes a participatory Church of equal discipleship: women and men, laity, religious and the clergy, young and old are called to the same Christian perfection. All share equally in the priesthood — in the prophetic, sanctifying and ruling ministry — of Christ by virtue of their baptism. Differences in roles or functions are not justification for claiming superiority; they do not indicate any hierarchy, they are only to serve the community. Claims of superiority and authority over others based on functions and roles are contrary to the basic Christian vocation. All are equal in dignity as the disciples of Christ.

In the 50 years following Vatican II, we can say that a lot has been achieved, but a lot more has to be achieved to become a participatory Church of equal disciples. We need to work together to realize a participatory Church of equal discipleship where the equality of every baptised is recognised and appreciated on the basis of baptism. A Church where ordained ministry is understood in terms of service and not in terms of superiority and domination is yet to be realized. Similarly, a Church which is just and transparent is an urgent need of the present and future. Only if the Church sincerely tries to ensure justice in its internal life, it will be able to convince its own members and others that it is committed to the cause of justice.

A participatory Church demands the recognition of the equal dignity and unique charisms of women and men. The Church has to ensure that men and women are equals, not only in theory but also in practice, and that they have equal opportunities to work together for the good of the community and glory of God as equal partners.