



*Cathedral of the Transfiguration*

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## **A Byzantine-Catholic Perspective on the Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the Modern**

### **ABSTRACT**

*A document prepared by the authors on behalf of the Slovak Byzantine Eparchy of Sts. Cyril and Methodius of Canada for submission to the Bishops' Synod on The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and the Modern World held in Rome, September 1987.*

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## **Preface**

The invitation to respond to the topic on *The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the Modern World Twenty Years after the Second Vatican Council*, to be deliberated at the forthcoming Synod of Bishops, was extended to us by our Bishop, His Excellency Michael Rusnak, C.Ss.R., D.D., Eparch of the Slovak Diocese of SS. Cyril and Methodius of the Byzantine-Catholic Rite in Canada.

The consultative group that participated in the discussions prior to the preparation of the document consisted of members of both the Byzantine and Latin Rites. They included: Mary Biason, Anna and Michael Culi, Margaret and John Dvorsky, Eleanor and Albert Fiorino, Mary Grnak, Mary Hosak, Helen and Jerry Lucky, Jerry Lucky, Jr., Helen Shutsa, Mary Seminsky, John Telepcak, and Catherine Ward.

The various discussions we had were lively and provocative. We explored both Latin and Byzantine traditions more deeply and felt enriched by the insights we achieved. And we especially appreciated the freedom of dialogue which Bishop Rusnak encouraged and promoted during the different sessions that we met.

Our lives have certainly been deepened by the experience and we wish to express our respect for the candor and steadfastness of our faithful and humble Bishop.

Eleanor Vojtech Fiorino

## **Preamble**

The Synod on The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and the Modern World has two important tasks to accomplish: one, to find the theological and ecclesiological reasons for the greater involvement of the laity in the life of the Church; and second, to define their proper mission and place within the Mystical Body of Christ. These tasks require us, we believe, to re-examine theologically our notion of *the Church*, a process which might entail its possible revision and/or extension. That is not unusual and is quite faithful and consistent with the view of Catholic dogma as developmental; that is, unchangeable and yet continually revealing itself in its fullness through history according to the needs and exigencies of the times.

For our part, we would like to provide the Synod of Bishops with a brief overview of how the notion of *Church* is understood in Byzantine-Catholic teaching in order to stimulate further reflection on the current understanding of the concept. More importantly, we propose these few theological reflections for the purpose of injecting into the deliberations on the role of the laity in the Church, a conception of *ecclesia* which, in our times, has been much neglected and which constitutes a dynamic element in Byzantine ecclesiology. Finally, it is in light of these reflections on the nature of the Church that we have addressed and considered other pertinent questions impacting on the vocation and mission of the laity.

## **The Nature of the Church**

Within Byzantine theology, the Church is conceived more as a spiritual and permanent dynamism and movement rather than a visible society. The Church lives and acts by two fundamental movements: by sacramental *katabasis*, from Christ to the faithful; and by spiritual *anabasis*, from the faithful back to Christ.

The first movement is sacramental, the second is spiritual. The first one begins in Christ, the second leads to Christ. Both movements are divine and at the same time human, invisible, and visible. The divine sacramental grace, coming from God, is visibly presented, and distributed to the faithful in the form of sacraments by the Church's hierarchy. Such is the sacramental approach of God to man. The function of the faithful, on the other hand, is exercised by spiritual *anabasis* towards God. Their mission in the Church is therefore to become a visible sign of God's presence and to transform everything material into a spiritual gift to be offered to God. This is done through our neighbour. Neighbour thus becomes the medium on our way to God. By these two movements, man is sanctified and thereby simultaneously divinizes the world.

The proper mission and place of the faithful in the Church is therefore not in her sacramental activity, which is reserved for the clergy, but rather in the sanctification of neighbour and the world on their return back to God. Both movements are essential for the Church: the Church must be sanctified by Christ and at the same time must divinize the cosmos. Both activities are one spiritual expression of the mystical unity between Christ and His Church.

Thus the visible Church does not exist primarily for *self-sanctification*, but rather for the *sanctification of the cosmos*. The Church by her very nature is a missionary entity. Consequently, *self-sanctification* must be understood in relation to this universal mission of the Church.

Moreover, the Church is a sacrament of salvation: she is a summary of the whole history of salvation. In the history of God's dealing with His people, He was always selected individuals to deliver His message to the world in order to bring the world back to Him. He Himself sent Christ to us and through His Church, and His all-pervading Spirit, He is luring the cosmos back unto Himself.

## **Orders and Matrimony: The Social Sacraments of the Church**

While all the sacraments unite us to Christ, the sacraments of Holy Orders and Matrimony do it in a very special and particular way. They constitute the social sacraments of the Church and respectively they distinctly reflect her dynamic movements.

The sacrament of Holy Orders confers a special role to that individual being called to the Priesthood of Christ. It virtually transforms that person into a living icon of Christ Himself. Hence, when the laity looks upon the actions of the priest, they should be able to get a glimpse of Christ Himself and in the process become partakers of His very life. For, in accordance with Byzantine theology, the icon is not

simply a picture or an instructional medium, but consists essentially of “a grace and a life.’ ‘Archbishop Joseph Raya tells us that, “It (the icon) is a life that penetrates, purifies, and elevates. From the icon emanates a virtue that inspires the faithful with hope and gives him consolation.”<sup>1</sup> Moreover, it is a channel of God’s divine grace.

Viewed as a living icon, not simply representing but as manifesting Christ Himself to the faithful, the priest thus becomes the most important singular opportunity within the Church whereby the laity should be able to witness and experience the dynamic movement of sacramental *katabasis*, the ever-abiding love and infinitely abundant graces of the Risen Lord.

This encounter between man and Christ occurs in a very special manner in the Liturgy in which the laity gather together with the priest and the entire Church to meet the Risen Lord in His Word and in the Eucharist. It is in that special role as an icon of Christ, that the priest, through the celebration of the Liturgy, can have the effect of empowering the laity to undertake the awesome and humbling task of transforming not only the world but also the entire cosmos.

Complementing Holy Orders is Matrimony which is first of all the sacrament of the whole Church and its purpose is not only to unite two people into one family but all families into one Church with Christ. Holy Matrimony has to be understood in its ecclesiastical dimensions. As such, the sacrament of Matrimony is a root to all the privileges and obligations of lay people’s involvement both in the church and in the world. It is in and through the sacrament of Matrimony that the movement of spiritual *anabasis* begins, is nurtured, and given direction.

### **The Integration of the Gospel into Daily Life**

We believe that the process of integrating the Gospel into our daily lives takes place through understanding, example, and experience. The internalization of a message is best witnessed through the actual behaviour of an individual. Extending that premise to the Gospel, the inference can be made that a Catholic needs to comprehend the essence of Christ’s message, to accept the example He gave us, and to experience His love by extension. While Christ may not be with us in the physical sense, He is ever present with us in His Word, through the Holy Eucharist and the constantly abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. The role of the Holy Spirit is to empower us to integrate Christ into our lives and lifestyles. Our behaviour is what others see and by which we are judged as credible or authentic. It is imperative then that our actions be congruent with our beliefs so that we too can become an extension of Christ’s love for all of mankind. However, in actual life, and especially in our turbulent times, that congruence is not always easy to achieve and remains for the Church and the laity alike a constant challenge to their faith.

The visible Church must therefore ever strive to develop and project a Catholic self-image that is truly Christian through our family life, through our traditions and ceremonies that become inclusive rather than exclusive, and through our priests who serve as role models, emulating the compassion of Christ’s love, mercy, and forgiveness.

The family is an important cell in the Mystical Body of Christ. In recent years, Christian family life has had to endure powerful forces of change characterizing our modern world. Furthermore, the effectiveness of the family unit in performing its sacred function of nurturing life in the physical sense and of maintaining a life of faith in the spiritual sense is being continually undermined by the heterogeneous make-up of our society.

Our contemporary secular culture and its prevailing values of self-interest and competition militate against the transmission, reception, and acceptance of Christ's message. Our secular culture filters out any other competing ideology to the point of rendering it meaningless and thus impotent at affecting any significant change in the lives of individuals, groups, and communities. "It is not the meek who shall inherit the earth," the Christian is told, "but the strong and the fittest; that individual acting most often with self-seeking guile will reap the rewards in the end." What role, then, can we as Christians play within a socio-cultural environment regulated by such values and norms?

On the other hand, as participating members of the Church, it is not too difficult to retreat from the external environment and to become entrenched in the symbolism and pageantry of our religious customs and traditions. There is nothing wrong with that provided that the retreat is temporary and revitalizing, and that we become able to interpret that symbolism knowledgeably and with a real appreciation of the Mystical Reality which we accept through faith.

It is this knowledge and personal experience that must be stressed and shared not only with the Christian community but also with the greater community of human kind.

As alluded to earlier, the priest should be first and foremost a living icon for the people of God, a prime source of Christ's life and graces. Regrettably, that is seldom the case in our modern parishes. For the priest is also human and unquestionably has been adversely affected by the complexity and uncertainty of our modern world. The result has been the emergence of a vacuum in spiritual leadership in our Catholic communities and a concomitant disillusionment of the faithful. At best, the priest has become somewhat of a glossy image of Christ: the general manager of his parish, the social convener of his community, the political broker, the professional social worker, the official representative of the institutional Church-- trying, in many cases unsuccessfully, to strike a balance between the immanent and transcendent dimensions of his vocation. That balance has to be restored and maintained if the priest is to play an effective role in facilitating a greater involvement on the part of the laity in the life of the Church.

### **The Presence of the Institutional Church in the Modern World**

One cannot help but notice the institutional presence of the Church in the modern world. But, in our times, it has been a vacuous presence, one that has been powerless at affecting the day-to-day lives of more men and women in any penetrating way.

The ways of the world are certainly not the ways of God, and it would seem that the institutional Church is at a loss at how to make the latter influence the former.

One could argue, however, that perhaps it is not the mission of the institutional Church to transform the City of Man into a Heavenly Jerusalem. It could be simply to facilitate the unveiling, the manifestation of a most important dimension of human existence to all men and women on our planet. The process of transformation, both at the personal and cosmic levels, is best left to the Holy Spirit operating through the Mystical Body of Christ. The institutional Church is merely an aid to that process.

Perhaps the mission of the institutional Church lies in the establishment of a network of earthly communities wherein individuals can make the kinds of choices that will, in turn, nurture and promote both their personal and spiritual development.

Or alternatively its mission could lie in contributing to the formation of a new global culture that will foster the emergence of a genuine spirit of collaboration for the purpose of reducing: the tremendous tensions that currently exist among nations, the high level of uncertainty and anxiety that seems to have arrested modern man's ability to make clear choices, and the unprecedented turbulence in our socio-economic environment. In addition, this new spirit of collaboration will have the potential of facilitating the visualization as one people, we the inhabitants of earth, of visions of the future that will give our children and future generations a sense of hope and security; thus, confirming for them that man is not alone in this pilgrimage in space and time, that the movement of history is not blind, but that its course is being closely monitored, and that its destiny is reflected in the transcendent dimension of the Church.

If the previously stated goals are valid, then it is imperative that the institutional Church strive to become truly an iconostasis in the world, a reflection, a clear and radiant image of the Mystical Body of Christ. Consequently, it cannot afford the luxury of prioritizing geographical and socio-economic sectors where it should be most present. Through the establishment of a closely knit network of vibrant, dynamic Christian communities encircling the globe; by the radiating example of genuine Christian living personalized in the daily activities of both men and women around the world, the Church, the invisible, transcendent reality that the Mystical Body of Christ denotes, should pervade all aspects of both private and public life.

The realization of the proposed goals, however, cannot be achieved without effort and a deeply renewed sense of mission. For their realization presupposes the emergence of a revitalized institutional Church, a *metanoia* on the part of modern men and women--presuppositions that are being continually countered and challenged by those inherent in the prevailing anthropomorphic views of our contemporary secular culture.

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## **The Need for Institutional Candor**

It has been suggested by certain members of the hierarchy that this call for greater involvement on the part of the laity in the life of the Church and in the world originates from the Holy Spirit. No doubt the Holy Spirit unceasingly permeates the Mystical Body of Christ and is ever prompting and animating its parts to work together for the divinization of the Church and the world. The latter notwithstanding, at best we must be humble to admit the weakness and inability of the institutional Church, with its aging hierarchy and increasingly diminishing clerical and religious population, to deal with a rapidly changing world. In the least, we should therefore be parsimonious in our reasoning when explaining and justifying the Church's current need for the laity's support in carrying out its divine mission. For while the Mystical Reality of the Church, in its glory and transcendence, may be constantly luring the cosmos back to God, the institutional Church remains and will always be a human contrivance, a vehicle that needs to be designed and redesigned so as to become adaptive to the ever-unfolding, changing conditions of history and thus evolve into an effective instrument of Divine Providence.

It behooves us to remind our brothers in Christ, the Bishops of the Church, that the laity's ability for independent and rational thought and spiritual reflection about the nature of religious life and the Church can no longer be taken for granted. And this emergent capacity and consciousness attest in a very concrete way to the efficacious influence of the Holy Spirit on all parts of the Mystical Body of Christ.

## **The Need for an Evaluation of Structural Effectiveness and Relevance**

*The institutional Church must itself be very attentive to the voice and promptings of the Holy Spirit; it too is being called to reflect upon its own structures: their adequacy, appropriateness, and relevance not only in relation to the needs of its members, but also in relation to the requirements of the times. The Synod's deliberations will not be complete unless they include a review and an evaluation of the structural readiness for change on the part of the institutional Church in order to accommodate and facilitate the evolving new roles for the laity in the life of the Church.*

## **The Need for Genuine Laity Participation at the Synod's Deliberations**

*The Synod's deliberations and recommendations will have little credibility among the faithful without genuine laity participation. While we have no problem with the divine prerogatives of the Church's Magisterium in dealing with questions regarding faith and morals, we believe that it will be counterproductive to exclude laity participation in what is basically a policy-making process especially when those very policies and directives will affect their role in the Church. The laity at large, not just the periti among them, are both willing and ready to contribute to such a process. The preclusion of their participation at the Synod is tantamount to a denial of the workings of the Holy Spirit Himself.*



## **A Discernment of the Church's Mission In the Poor and the Alienated**

In preparation for the Synod, the Canadian Bishops have asked the laity as to how the Church can reach out to the poor and alienated in our society.

Our response to our brothers in Christ is quite simple. The institutional Church is very limited in the amount of assistance it can give to the poor and the alienated in any direct manner. Certainly the establishment and nurturing of truly Christian communities will to some extent provide the kind of support systems necessary for the restoration of the poor to a more dignified status and for the reconciliation of the alienated. However, let us not forget that the poor and the alienated will always be with us so long as there is sin in the world. Moreover, let us recall that Christ did not come primarily for the poor and the alienated. He came, however, to redeem human nature from the bondage of original sin and to offer Himself as the way by which to achieve personal salvation and thus a return to the Father.

In light of the above reflections, the poor and the alienated are an ever-clear reminder that sin forms an integral part of the human condition. For that reason, the institutional Church should look to the poor and the alienated as another source through which to discern and reconfirm for itself its own divine mission in the world. For unless the institutional Church begins to truly listen to the cries of the poor, the murmurs of the alienated, the angry voices of the dispossessed and exploited, and the mute anguish of the oppressed, it cannot ever hope to be or even resemble an efficacious sign and instrument of the Mystical Body of Christ.

### **Faith and Culture**

Our prevailing secular culture, driven by self-interest and competition, is incessantly selecting out or co-opting rival cultural forms, thus maintaining its strong hold over the lives of contemporary men and women. The institutional Church is no exception to this process and has had no special immunity to its enticing and overwhelming influence.

Yet it is this same secular culture that has to be justly credited with much of the progress modern man has been able to achieve not only in the area of technology, but also in such fields as the pure and applied sciences. Nevertheless, it is also responsible for an unprecedented high rate of change and comparably high levels of complexity and uncertainty in our society. Moreover, the prime motivators of self-interest and competition have promoted the burgeoning of a diversity of subcultural forms and the maintenance of existing ones resulting in the creation of socio-cultural environments which are extremely heterogeneous in character and hence poor in meaning. The preceding elements have combined to give form to a cultural personality type that is ever questioning, distrustful, insecure, constantly in search of a commonality of meaning, and in deep need of genuine community.

It would appear, then, that over the years the secular culture of which the Church has been so vehemently critical, has planted the seeds of its own demise by fomenting the very conditions necessary for the emergence of new cultural forms that

will infuse the activities of contemporary men and women with a new sense of purpose and meaning.

There is no doubt in our minds that it is one of the prime tasks of the modern Church to help define and articulate that purpose and meaning for which secular men and women thirst and yearn in the very recesses of their souls. There is no question that a living faith permeating and emanating from a renewed Church can greatly contribute to this process of cultural transformation.

### **A Hierarchical Church and Democracy**

We are of the opinion that there should not be any tension between a hierarchical Church and a democratic culture so long as the two concepts are clearly understood within a complementary context. However, if the notion of a hierarchical Church is understood to denote exclusivity and hegemony over the thoughts and actions of the people of God, then it follows that such a conception will naturally clash with a political culture which portends to uphold the values of rule by the people and individual human rights.

Furthermore, we are of the opinion that the monarchical conception of the institutional Church reflects its very own political culture within which it evolved, and which coincidentally affirmed the supremacy of God over all his creation. Thus, it was perfectly natural for the early Church and its leadership to perceive themselves as having been mandated not only to consolidate and safeguard the deposit of faith handed down to them by the Apostles and their disciples, but also to rule over all aspects of what they considered to be religious and sacred. Consequently, the notion of hierarchy became synonymous with the exercise of power and control over the lives of people in everything which was determined to come under the purview of that mandate.

Our political cultures have undergone a great many changes since the formative years of the Church. But more importantly, we believe that the mandate received by the Apostles to evangelize, to bring the Good News to all the nations of the world, transcends any particular type of institutional structure by which to facilitate and exercise that trusteeship. The sacramental activities of the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, the energizing, life-giving activity of the Holy Spirit, cannot be circumscribed by any one political structure. The effusion of the love and grace that Christ continuously lavishes on His Church resists confinement and overflows into the world as an ardent invitation to all men and women to return to His fold.

*The power that the hierarchy received from Christ, their calling to become dispensers of the sacramental life of the Mystical Body of Christ, must be viewed by our Bishops and clergy as a holy trusteeship having no greater nor lesser significance and importance than the trusteeship of the laity, who, as partakers of that life, assume the responsibility and the obligation to sanctify neighbour and the cosmos on their way back to God.*

*In the end, the determination of whatever institutional structures are best suited to facilitate the effective execution of this dual trusteeship in the modern world is a matter that cannot be decided, in our opinion, by decree. It must be accomplished through mutual consultation and collaboration between the hierarchy and the laity. We are confident that the proposed process will be of mutual benefit to the parties in question and in the long term will enhance the Church's effectiveness in discharging its divine mission in the modern world.*

### **The Priesthood, the Laity, and Issues of Governance**

There are many avenues for lay participation in the Church already in place from Eucharistic ministers to lectors, from catechetical instruction to choirs, from parish councils to a myriad of volunteer activities. In some locales, the priest through his parishioners is able to establish an *ethos* within a community which enables them to tend to parish needs as well as to look beyond their parish boundaries. These priests and parishes should be identified and recognized for there is much to be learned from these good examples.

Some other parishes are bound very much by their cultural and ethnic customs and traditions with the Church playing a central role in their sense of nationalism. From these centers too, there is much to learn from such fervour.

Both of these orientations, and there are undoubtedly many others, should be assessed against the significance that the ensuing activities have on the personal and spiritual life of the participants. Does Christ's message become more easily comprehended in these contexts? Does the courage to proclaim their Catholicism increase as a result of these milieus? What is the relationship between priest and laity in these contexts? Is it collaborative or coercive? It is our belief that sociological studies of these phenomena need to be conducted throughout the various jurisdictions of the Church. That in itself could become a focus of study within the educational experience of the novice priest. Both quantitative and qualitative research methods are plentiful and these need to be extended to the study of the institutional processes within the visible Church.

A basic factor of success to whatever form in which the laity participates in fulfilling the Church's mission is one of trust between priest and laity. Within the institutional Church, there is an obvious power structure from Pope to priest, commonly referred to as the hierarchy. The priest being at the base of the pyramid can easily be intimidated by the masses of laity whom he is to serve. At the same time, the laity do not wish to be distanced from their Church. They want an active role. Is it not possible for the vigour of Christ's love to become apparent through the laity themselves? Can the laity not serve as catalyst for priestly endeavour and thus foster a mutuality of purpose, of direction toward Christ?

*The new god of the secular world is power: power over resources, alliances. and people. This power is exercised in many ways, with some being more obvious than others. The power of personal influence is the foremost example. The concepts of truth and merit become lost in a myriad of deceit and self-interest. We need to ask*

*how steeped in power politics is the Church's hierarchy and to what extent this has had a demoralizing effect on the faithful over the years. We will need to turn to other forms of government which will enable both priests and laity to cross the barriers and to empower one another as neighbors in our spiritual movement toward God, the source of all power.*

The notion of *theocracy* is one that depicts God as the ultimate authority for each individual. Each one of us has to develop a relationship with God as One Who is to be adored, glorified, and obeyed. We must grow to recognize that we are each worthy, that we each have potential in His sight. Above all, this is the essence of His empowerment and that needs to be strengthened in each one of us via the example and love we convey to one another.

The only meaningful and important power, then, is that which enables us to approach God through knowing, loving, and respecting His creation without bias and prejudice.

## Married Priests and the Role of Women in the Church

At the outset, we wish to state that in our opinion there is no doctrinal reason for precluding the ordination of women. The question of why Christ called only men is perhaps best answered in the sociological constructs of His time. As for today, the main issues are whether there should be alternatives within the priesthood: a celibate priesthood and/or a married clergy, and ordained women.

*The history of the Byzantine Rite on the question of a married priesthood is well known and there is much that can be learned from both the sociological and economic outcomes. With respect to the ordination of women, tradition will be the stronger influence against its acceptance. The exclusion of women from the altar originates in certain Judaic traditions and practices which today have become somewhat anachronistic.*

However, there are other fundamental considerations that can be brought forward in support of both an exclusively male priesthood and a greater and more significant involvement on the part of women at all levels within Christ's community.

The two movements of sacramental katabasis and spiritual *anabasis* can be viewed in terms of socio-cultural dynamics of cosmic proportion, originating in Christ's Incarnation, by which a complete set of truths, values, beliefs, meanings, and symbols were generated as an integral part of God's plan of salvation. The efficacy of these elements in the execution of this plan in history is very much contingent upon the integrity with which they are transmitted from one generation to the next. What must be underlined in this connection is that Christ, the Messiah, is both God and man and that His masculinity cannot be considered a mere accident in relation to these dynamics. It follows that in order to maintain the semantic and symbolic integrity of the Priesthood of Christ, in which the priest becomes a living icon of Christ Himself, the sacrament of Holy Orders can only be conferred to men.

Nonetheless, central to the same divine dynamics is also the role of Mary, expressed in her compliance with God's will. Thus, God's movement towards man was mediated by Mary; through her collaboration, she became the lowly "handmaiden" of God in effecting His work of redemption among all generations. Hence, in the *Magnificat*, Mary tells her cousin Elizabeth, "Yes, from this day forward all generations will call me blessed..." Why? She continues, "...for the Almighty has done great things for<sup>1</sup>me" (Luke 1:47-48), and through her for all mankind.

Unquestionably, the significance of the role of Mary, a woman, can never be overstated. For through her, "The Word was made flesh, he lived among us, and we saw his glory, the glory that is his as the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). And her response to the angel Gabriel, "...let what you have said be done to me" (Luke 1:38), constitutes the initiation of the movement of spiritual *anabasis* towards God.

The role of Mary in God's divine plan can undoubtedly become the basis in our own times for the development of an entire series of roles at all levels within the Church to complement that of the priest. Whereas the priest is a living icon of Christ, women, through the

exercise of these new complementary roles, can and should become living icons of Mary. How timely it would be during this Marian Year, for our brothers in Christ the Bishops to make some significant progress in this area at the Synod.

Furthermore, the qualities of *collaboration*, *nurturing*, *caring*, and *fidelity* that Mary demonstrated in her own life reflect the very values that are needed to bring about a renewed sense of purpose and mission within the institutional Church and to affect a global process of cultural transformation.

All the rites in the Church share an ardent devotion to Mary, the Mother of God. That must serve as the inspiration and motivation to all women who wish to serve Christ. We do not know the *modern* Mary; we only know the Mary of the Gospels. Mary's place at the *altar* of the Cross is forever etched in our memory. What has faded is our recollection and appreciation of the collaborative role she played and is continually exercising in the execution of God's divine plan for all men and women.

With regard to the issue of reverence for person, inclusive of gender, the patriarchal tradition of the visible Church needs to be re-examined in order to identify a complementarity of role for today's woman. The sexual mores of the world, blatantly exploited by the media, the violence and the degradation that exists in reference to women cannot be ignored. If Mary is the standard against which all women are to be compared, are men not responsible to ensure that the standard is made possible?

The controversy surrounding the ordination of women will not be easily assuaged. But the issue of equality before God is fundamental to the ultimate decision that will be taken on this matter. God made both men and women in His own image and likeness, both to work and suffer, and both are equally entitled to His redeeming grace.

### **Youth as an Integral Part of Christ's Mystical Body**

It is in Baptism that we as individuals first experience the Church's movement of sacramental *katabasis*. It is through the sacrament of Baptism that we undergo a rebirth in the sanctifying life of Christ and become simultaneously incorporated into His Mystical Body.

Through the sacrament of Confirmation, we are empowered by the very same Spirit that descended upon the Apostles at Pentecost to carry out the mission of the Church to sanctify the cosmos via her movement of spiritual *anabasis*.

And through the celebration and participation in the Eucharistic meal, we are being continually sustained and energized through the life and grace of our Risen Lord not only as individuals but also as a community of believers, in our efforts at both personal sanctification and the divinization of the cosmos.

In our Byzantine-Catholic tradition, children become partakers of the newness of life and sustenance made possible through Baptism and the Eucharist, and of the transforming and empowering grace of the Holy Spirit, in and through a concurrently held process of initiation

into the sacramental life of the Church. The end result is twofold: one, a complete de-emphasis on a sequential or graduated access into this dynamic movement of Christ to man; and second, a focus on the full integration into that life at the very moment of the individual's incorporation into Christ's community at Baptism.

As a corollary of the above, it follows that our youth, or any other age group, must not be considered as a distinct subculture within the Church, with their unique set of norms and roles. As full-fledged participants in the Mystical Body of Christ, our youth equally share in the life of the Church as any other age group and are equally called upon to assume their complete responsibility and obligations in the carrying out of the Church's mission in the world.

The youth of today tend to be quite perceptive, critical, and skeptical. Involving them in peripheral activities such as sports, social services, and cultural events will meet the needs of some. There is a voice that needs to be regarded as accountable to their Christian commitment; they are not to be merely tolerated in their restless stages of development.

As to the future of the Church, should youth have been failed in instruction and in information-sharing, the inadequacy of their role models, parents and priests alike, is solely responsible. Consequently, a key issue is the preparation of those who are charged with the responsibility of formal instruction in Church doctrine. If Catholicism is to be nurtured, all Catholics, young and old, must undergo a structured formation in their faith if they are to become effective in their greater involvement in the life of the Church and in the world.

Active dialogue that allows for the free expression of criticism must be part of their educational process. To have doubts, to be tested, and to withstand the surrounding pressures are aspects of growth in faith for youth and they must be expected. Their heroes will not be extraordinary; they will be those individuals who can face these challenges honestly and with compassion, those who have endured the struggle of day-to-day living, those who will not ever be beatified or canonized, but those who can still fervently proclaim their belief in Christ and the values he exemplified.

The issues facing our youth and our young adults are not dissimilar from those that have existed over the centuries when examined as developmental processes. Generational gaps have always existed; these are not new phenomena.

In some societies the need for spiritual sustenance is felt deeply if only to cope with desperate economic situations. But in those comfortable societies, with their higher standard of living and expectations, what does the Church have to offer to facilitate a commitment on the part of youth to a fully integrated Christian life?

The doubts and skepticism of youth are fueled today by the perils of our nuclear age and the rapid change brought about by technology which threatens to deprive them of the possibility of being able to make a meaningful contribution in society. Furthermore, the youth perceive the widening gap between wealth and poverty, rendering them less able to provide an adequate standard of living for themselves and their succeeding generations. The

youth are not to be underestimated in their perception of the deficiencies of the secular world; nor are they to be undervalued for the potential contribution they can make in both areas of Church renewal and cultural change

## **Epilogue**

For women who may wish to have their voice heard in the decision-making arena of the institutional Church, for the youth who have the fullness of life ahead of them, and for those who are endeavouring to find the meaning of God's love for us in their lives, it is imperative that open and honest dialogue take place, with both reverence and humility, to refocus our complete attention to Christ as our hope and prime source of renewal.

With the realization of our spiritual nature and our part within the Mystical Body of Christ, we seek for all Christians of all rites a unity of purpose through the divinizing mission of the Church. As representatives of the laity ourselves, our desire to share the necessary commitment to the Christ-life in opposition to a secular world will be more effective if with the hierarchy there is a sense of mutuality of purpose and direction. The distance between the hierarchy and the laity must be reduced if there is to be any hope of success in transforming those cultural values which threaten the institutional Church's vitality.

## **Notes**

<sup>1</sup>Archbishop Joseph Raya, "Introduction to the Byzantine Rite," in *Byzantine Book of Prayer*, Allendale, N.J.: Alleluia Press, 1976, 645f.

\*While this document originated from a series of consultative discussions held by His Excellency Michael Rusnak and its authors tried to reflect the salient themes which were considered, the actual content went beyond these deliberations in order to present innovative ideas and perspectives on the critical issues which were going to be treated by the Synod. We prepared this document for the Eparchy *pro bono* under the auspices of the then operating Metamode Inc., an organization consulting service of which its authors were directors.

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