

THE STATUS OF LAYPEOPLE

Our title says that laypeople are the hope of the church. This implies that laypeople are not yet what they could and should be in the church. Few would deny that this is generally true in Philippine churches and elsewhere. The church is not making the impact which it could make in the community in the areas of evangelism and service. The fellowship within local congregations often leaves much to be desired. Christian homes are not the worship centers they should be. With few exceptions, the church is not fulfilling its mission. One reason for this is that the potential of laypeople has hardly been touched. If this "sleeping giant" were aroused, who can foresee what great things might be accomplished for God and country?

In this section we are critical of the status quo. Much of what we say is negative, perhaps even harsh. But deep cuts are sometimes needed to prepare the way for healing and restoration. At the same time, we recognize that for every negative generalization made, there are notable exceptions. Not all laypeople have slept. Not all clergy people have encouraged their sleeping. Without at least some understanding regarding laypeople in the church how could the church have existed or progressed to the present moment?

In Limbo

It has been predicted that in the year 2000 a.d., the population of the Republic of the Philippines will be approximately 100 million. There is a line of reasoning that goes something like this: if Christian churches experience normal growth until that time, there will be a shortage of clergy people and other trained church leaders which will be even more acute than the present one. Therefore, churches must begin now to train more laypeople for pastoral work and other services which the clergy are normally expected to do. We may reason that laypeople are the hope of the future of the church because the clergy will be too few to do the church's work alone.

But this is false reasoning! It betrays a sickness which has plagued many church groups in the past and is crippling many today. It is true that lay activity and leadership will be needed in the year 2000 a.d., but not for the reason stated in our opening paragraph. Church planners and strategists are not wrong in urging us to make greater use of laypeople's services and leadership. But they are wrong if they do so for practical rather than for theological reasons. The status of laypeople in the church is a theological issue based on biblical teaching. Until this is understood we cannot think of "pressing laypeople into service" for other reasons. For practical reasons, we might succeed in increasing the total hours of activity of laypeople in the church, but this is not the hope of which we are speaking.

With notable exceptions, laypeople in our times can be said to be in a state of limbo. In matters of church authority or responsibility, they are neither here nor there. They are expected to "serve" and be "active", but the areas of such service and activity are often undefined or severely limited. They know that they are not clergy, but they do not know what they are. They are in a state of suspension, uninspired and unchallenged to exercise their authority and responsibility as the people of God empowered by his Spirit. It might almost be said that laypeople appear to be in the church but not of the church (if we may be forgiven for adapting the words of Jesus in John 17).

Offensive terms. Perhaps the best way to picture the plights of laypeople in limbo is to see them in relationship to their counterparts, the clergy. The vague and inadequate status of laypeople can be seen by implication, for instance, when we list the terms most frequently applied to the ministry and the ordained leaders of the church. The chart indicates what might be implied by the laypeople's status by the use of several terms:

Perhaps the most offensive term of all those listed in the left hand column is "full-time ministry." What else can this imply than that all who are not in this category are merely part-time Christians? It implies that Juan de la Iglesia is not really serving God at all when he goes about his daily routines, even though he works and lives in the fear and love of God! The term "full-time ministry," as applied to the activities of clergy and other "workers", ignores the biblical teaching that all Christians have a full-time ministry. The fact is, the gifts of the Spirit are different, but none of them are part-time! Similarly, it is not uncommon to hear individuals express a desire to enter a seminary to serve the Lord, as if a layman cannot serve him!

If the clergy's ministry is:	The layperson's appears to be:
holy ministry	unholy, less holy, not so important part-time, limited to certain days or hours
full-time ministry	private ministry, limited to serving individuals or small groups
public ministry	unordained, unauthorized, not commissioned by God
special ministry	ordinary, unimportant ministry
ministry of the Word	ministry not of the Word; of deeds only
"workers"	shirkers, irresponsible, indolent, uncommitted
servants of the Lord	serving self
"man of God"	man without God

We said that we are speaking of the implied status of lay-people. It is possible, therefore that we are guilty of some exaggerations in our effort to picture the plight of laypeople. There is a legitimate usage of at least most of the terms listed in the left hand column. The term "holy ministry" for instance need not necessarily imply that the ministry of others is not also holy before God. But if we should ask what the overall effect of these terms has been, we would have to concede that they have contributed toward a lowering of the layperson's status. His priesthood, and ministry are second-class when compared with those of an ordained clergy.

To press the point further: the supposed inferiority of laypeople frequently comes to the surface through expressions used by laypeople themselves. A man in Pangasinan province was carrying his Bible; when he was asked whether he was the pastor of a certain church, he replied, "No, I am just a layman." "Just a layman!" "An ordinary layman." "Only a layman." Do not these expressions betray a sense of inferiority? Somehow, many laypeople have had this type of feeling instilled into them,

Attitude of superiority. On the side of the clergy, we also hear expressions which betray an attitude of superiority. We hear it said, and we sometimes read in church periodicals, that "we must use our laypeople more effectively." As if they are something to be used for the church, rather than the very essence of the church! Again, individual clergy have been heard to refer to church members as "my followers, "my" laypeople. Granted that their intention may not have been to downgrade the layperson, the insinuation is there. Some laypeople have called attention to the fact that the expression "train the laypeople to serve" also insinuates that they are more like animals than saints. To cite another example, in the Roman Catholic Church the bulk of church members are frequently referred to as the "faithful." While this term is in some ways complimentary, hidden inside the term "faithful" is the idea that the members are to be little more than submissive and obedient followers. It is implied that only the clergy and the hierarchy are gifted with insight and understanding in spiritual matters. Others are merely to be "faithful."

The real culprit in all of this is not the terminology itself, but the concept behind it. The language and expressions we use in reference to the clergy and laypeople are only symptoms of the deep-seated disease that has plagued many churches. We are referring to the concept that authority and responsibility belong to the few rather than to all. According to this concept, the privilege and the duty, the honor and the labor, of the church's work belong to the leaders rather than everyone,

The idea is quite prevalent among both the clergy and the laity that laypeople who serve in the institutional church are helping the pastor do his work. Laypeople are called in to assist only because the pastor cannot possibly do all the work. The reasoning is that if he had time and energy enough to accomplish all of the church's work, the services of lay Christians would not be needed at all. How often have we not heard of a faithful church member making a desperate plea to his co-members: "We must help our pastor; he does not have time to accomplish all of his work?" And out of pity for the pastor, or from some similar motive, volunteer service has often come. But this is not the kind of motivation which is needed in the church. It is not the kind which can turn the world upside down.

State of limbo. All of this leaves the average layperson in a state of limbo. At times he/she feels needed in the church, but at other times it seems that his/her services are not even wanted. At times he/she is expected to share all the burdens and responsibilities of the church, but at others he/she is not even consulted when important decisions are made. He/she is reminded that "all Christians are priests of God," but seldom does anyone provide him/her with an "altar" at which to serve. As a priest, without an altar, he/she may become frustrated, confused, indifferent. At least, he/she remains unchallenged and the great potential of the church remains just that unused potential.

The picture of laypeople in limbo as painted above is not a bright one. Perhaps we have overstated the case in order to make our point. But the kernel of truth remains: the laypeople generally do not know their status in the church of Jesus Christ. They need to be helped to see what they are in Christ and can do through Christ.

In transition

It is often said that the Filipino people of today are seeking for identity. In order to be a strong and truly independent nation, the people need to know how they fit into the modern world. They need to understand their potentialities, strengths, and weaknesses. Their destiny is closely linked with their identity.

There are signs that a parallel development is also taking place in some of our church. Laypeople are also searching for an identity which can lead them to a greater fulfillment of their role in the church. Having been in a state of limbo, or non-identity, for some time, more and more laypeople are beginning to inquire about their actual status in the church. They want to know who they are and where they fit into the entire scheme of God's Church.

Before proceeding further, we should acknowledge that we have no way of measuring the degree of this identity-seeking on the part of laypeople. The number of those laypeople who are actively seeking such identity may not be large. It may still be limited to urban centers where educated persons have been stimulated to more independent thought. But if the number of active "seekers" is small, there are larger numbers of laypeople who are on the verge of an awakening and are ready to accept a new identity or status. If the truth were known, the status quo is probably not so acceptable as it appears to be.

Christian activism. Without condoning all types of activism, especially as it has sometimes led to violence, we must acknowledge the positive contribution it has made toward the liberation of lay people. Activism in the secular world has caused people to think and to inquire about their status in all institutions, including the church. Who can deny that God can use such secular developments to accomplish some good in the spiritual realm? We are not condoning irresponsible rebellion which does not want to recognize any kind of authority. Rather, we are saying that there is a kind of Christian activism which is basically a spirit of inquiry and searching for what is true and sincere. This type of rebellion, coupled with a spirit of humble service, is always needed in the church.

Admittedly, the number of laypeople seeking identity in a manner described in the previous paragraph is probably not large. It is chiefly the younger generation, especially the student population that has been involved. But the seed has been sown and the influence of even a few is significant. It is true that there have been abuses and excesses, but the fact remains that a segment of the youth in many of our churches has made a positive contribution toward the liberation of laypeople. Many clergy people can attest to the fact that there are individual young Christians whose insights and understanding about lay people's rights and duties far surpass that of previous generations.

In the past, church leaders have not always responded positively to laypeople who have been searching for their identity in the church. Their inquiries have been ignored or not taken seriously. Often, also, well-meaning church leaders have kept willing laypeople active by assigning them to tasks or committees with limited authority and responsibility. In the past, laypeople have generally been willing to accept this role without pressing the issue further. In the process, some of them have lapsed into complacency, having lost some of the zeal and enthusiasm which was once rising to the surface. In biblical language, the spirit was quenched. The status quo prevailed.

New awakening. Fortunately, many clergy and church leaders today are welcoming the new awakening of the rank and file in the church. Instead of opposing it as rebellion, they see it as a sign of hope for the future. They agree that if laypeople are really in transition to a status of greater responsibility and authority, they are truly the hope

of the church. In both Catholic and Protestant churches there are leaders who are dedicated to the cause of inspiring and training laypeople for a fuller exercise of their priesthood and ministry.

Some church people object that by granting more authority to the non-professionals in the church we run the risk of abuse and misuse of such authority. We cannot deny that risk is involved, but it may be no greater than when it is entrusted to clergy! Furthermore, progress is seldom made in any area of life without some risk.

In some Protestant circles we hear the expressions, "tyranny of laypeople." It is true that some church members, usually elders or other prominent lay leaders, try to make their influence felt (to "run the show") as much as possible even to the extent of lording it over a congregation's pastor. This happens most easily when a new or young pastor serves in a church where "old-timers" are present. Apparently, Pastor Timothy experienced something of this as we see from St. Paul's advice to him not to let any one despise his youth. These cases of abuse must be expected and dealt with as they arise, but we might again inquire, "Are such abuses not also found among the clergy?" Do we have reason to believe that laypeople are more irresponsible than the clergy when authority is entrusted to them? Abuse is possible in any case, but abuse is never a valid argument against the legitimate use of something. If Laypeople have a ministry to perform and we intend to show in the following chapter that they do the corresponding privilege and responsibilities must be given to them in full.

The spiritually poor. In saying that laypeople are searching for identity and greater responsibility in the church we do not claim that all, or even the majority, are actively making the search. We are aware and God knows it better than we that there are those who are perfectly content with their passive role as followers. There are those who prefer not to be more deeply involved because they know what involvement can cost them in terms of effort, time and money. These spiritually poor we shall probably always have with us. We are aware also that in an authoritarian society, such as we have in the Philippines, we can expect that many who have been trained to be passive in church affairs will not be comfortable with any other role for a long time to come. The task, therefore, of re-educating the whole laity of the church and preparing them for their role as the people of God continues to be a mammoth one.

Still, we are optimistic because of the signs that laypeople are already passing out of limbo into the transition stage. We are optimistic because among both clergy and laity there is a growing number of individuals who are genuinely concerned about the status of laypeople and are actively promoting the universal ministry and priesthood of believers. It is a good sign when Philippine groups, both Catholic and Protestant, consult one another about ways and means of helping laypeople to fulfill their ministry.

Excerpts from the Book, LAYMEN: HOPE OF THE CHURCH by Norbert V. Becker (New Day Publishers, 1974).

LAYPEOPLE: HOPE OF THE CHURCH

In speaking about hope for the church, we are not referring to mere survival. The survival of Christ's church is assured through his promise. From the previous pages it should be clear that our hope is for a living, growing, dynamic church - a church which has a sense of mission, of Having been sent by God to be his agent of salvation, love, and peace in the world. For this kind of church-in-mission, our hope is in the laity energized by God's Spirit.

To say that lay people are the hope of the church is, of course, an oversimplification. Laypeople are not alone in the church. In God's scheme of things, the clergy also has a vital role to play. The full truth is that clergy and laity together are the hope of the church, under the blessing of Christ, the Real Hope of all.

The need of the hour is for leaders who are committed to Christ personally and to the principle that laypeople are the church. So far as each individual reader is concerned, however, the hope of the church does not begin any place but with himself. "Lord, let your kingdom come - beginning with me!"

Clergy committed

Up to this point we have emphasized that laypeople are to assume greater responsibility. That is only half the story. The other half is also true: clergymen and church leaders are normally God's agents for change and revitalization. In this respect the greatest responsibility falls on them. "To whom much is given, of him much is required." This principle of stewardship leaves no room for doubt that the gifted, and trained leaders can be expected to be the key person in any movement toward a renewed laity.

If Laypeople are the hope of the church, the clergy are still the hare of the laity. From the practical standpoint, It is the present church leaders who are in position to do something about lay status and activity. They are in the driver's seat. It is not likely that laypeople will initiate any radical changes on their own. They have been conditioned to be followers rather than innovators. So long as Juan de la Iglesia is merely a passenger in the ecclesiastical jeepney, he is not in a position to steer the vehicle - even if he is capable of doing so. The instigators, the prime movers, the catalysts must be those who are in positions of Leadership. Specifically, the local parish pastor who enjoys the respect of a group of Christians, by virtue of his position, is the key person. He/She is the man of the hour and in one sense the hope for the future of the church.

Leaders' responsibility. The main concern of our present and concluding chapter is that present-day church leaders see the tremendous responsibility and opportunity which is theirs. Church history has shown that it is generally true that "as the pastor goes, so go the people." People generally do not advance beyond their pastors in their thinking. Laypeople are usually quite content with a secondary role as followers when such a role is expected of them.

Students of church history are generally agreed that this is the reason for the development of such evils as clericalism and institutionalism. Laypeople have usually accepted the type of leadership offered. The clergy, through a combination of circumstances and through human weaknesses on the part of the clergy and laity, permitted situations to develop in which undue responsibility was centered in themselves. They found it more convenient to rule and serve directly than to enable and teach others to serve. So the pattern continued and eventually became fixed, although the entire development may have been quite unintentional. The laity is partly to blame for a lack of vigilance on their part, but Church leaders must accept the greater share of the blame. It has been suggested that the cursillo movement, which once engaged a large number of laypeople in the Catholic Church, has weakened seriously because of the lack of proper support from the clergy. Although not disagreeing with this point, others have pointed out that the primary cause for the weakening of the movement has been the misunderstanding of what the Cursillo Movement is all about. Among Protestants also, is it probably true that lay movements have been effective only to the degree to which they have had the support and encouragement of the clergy.

Our point here is that with our present knowledge of Scripture teachings and of church history we are in a position to be on guard against the mistakes of the past and to feel more keenly the responsibility that belongs to leaders in the churches. If the laity can be led like sheep, the shepherds must know where they themselves are going!

Who is capable? At this point leaders who feel the weight of responsibility may be tempted to cry out with St. Paul. "Who, then, is capable for such a task?" The answer is: no one is capable - except a man in Christ! In the post-Pentecost age a disciple of Jesus can do even greater things than the Master did in pentecost days. Any Christian pastor or priest who is convinced that Christ is the light of the world and that his followers are his lights in the world today is capable of leading the way. Where there is commitment to the cause of building the body of Christ, the Lord himself can supply the patience and the courage needed to swim against the stream when necessary. There is no doubt that leading laypeople in the manner we have outlined will in many instances require going against the current as it presently flows.

It should not be forgotten, however, that the Lord, of the church has provided fellowship to meet the needs of just such situations. A Christian leader need not stand alone in a difficult situation. In any Christian group, we can expect to find a few laypeople, or possibly only one, who can give needed support and encouragement. As a matter of policy, in fact, it might be advisable for a pastor to seek out at least one church member who is sympathetic to the new approach of which we have been speaking. The laypeople may or may not be convinced of the idea first. In either case, they can be modern Aarons, holding up the arms of the prophet when he himself seems unable to hold them up. Moses showed us that there is no shame connected with being bolstered up by a brother who is not a prophet. It has sometimes happened, in fact, that a layman has been the moving force behind some important development in Christian congregation and has inspired the pastor and co-members to move forward. Regardless of who is "pusher" or catalyst, it is important that there is mutual support of pastor and people.

Transmission of Spirit. We have spoken a program through which a parish pastor can equip the laity for priesthood and ministry. The program is essential, but we should be aware that there is a part which cannot really be programmed. It cannot be taught; it must be caught. It is transmitted from person to person. It is a vital part of the enabling process which can inspire laypeople to greater service. Together with all the knowledge and training needed, there must be transmitted a spirit of commitment and confidence. Such a spirit ordinarily begins with the enabler.

It is important that laypeople themselves realize that the spirit with which they serve is as important as the service itself. To say to a hungry man, "I love you like a brother," is good. To give him a bowl of rice is better. Best is to speak the word of love, give the bowl of rice, and show by attitude a Christian concern for the hungry man. When word, deed, and attitude are combined, the communication of Christian love is complete. This is the kind of communication of Christian love is complete. This is the kind of communication or teaching which enables and inspires others for service through the working of God's Spirit. It begins with personal commitment to Jesus and his Gospel.

Another rather intangible function of the enabler is that of building up confidence on the part of laypeople - to the end of time. Lack of formal theological training and lack of official status may likewise cause them to have feelings of inferiority. But confidence grows as they see from the example of others that authorization to serve comes basically from a personal relationship to the Lord. A diploma in the hands of one who is in Christ means nothing; but a laypeople in Christ without diploma has the right to priesthood and ministry. Even in the case of Jesus, people recognized that he "taught with authority" not because they understood that he was the real Son of God, but because his words, actions, and attitudes conveyed the idea that he was really in touch with the living God. His teaching was contrasted with that of the scribes, who spoke only Words, but contradicted them by their unholy deeds and attitudes. The scribes were officially authorized and perhaps even ordained to teach, but even the common people could see through their pretense. They realized that the scribes were not really authorized by God to be leaders or teachers in his kingdom. In the same way, people today can generally recognize and are willing to accept one who comes in the name of the Lord rather than in his own name. Confidence to serve, to lead, to teach, to evangelize, and the like, can come to lay people as they realize more and more that personal faith and life in Christ are, in the last analysis, the real marks of authorization. The enabler's continuous telling and demonstrating of this fact is the means for building such confidence.

Objective: narrow the gap. Finally, to help laypeople be the hope of the church, enablers must be committed to another unending struggle - the battle of narrowing the gap between leaders and people. The gap has a tendency to widen; and laypeople tend to be demoted to a corresponding degree. In this matter also, the personal example

of the enabler is perhaps the most powerful influence. The gap narrows as the leader shows the way, demonstrating that he prefers his own ministry to be thought of as within the fellowship, rather than over and above it. All other male-female educated-uneducated - can be narrowed by encouragement and example from leaders who know what it means to be one in Christ, The gaps will never be completely closed this side of heaven; but they can be narrowed. As the gaps narrow, unity grows and the whole body of Christ is built up in love.

Herein lies the hope of the church: that members of the body of Christ, clergy and laity together, allow the one Spirit to lead them to function as one body using their many gifts in being priests and ministers of God,

Plant People

An old Chinese proverb says: "If you are planning for one year, plant a grain. If you are planning for ten years, plant trees. If you are planning for one hundred years, plant people." The future of the church lies in planting people." Clergymen? Certainly. The church has always been conscious of the need for ordained leaders. But it is time to recognize the urgency planting laymen - the hope of the church,.

MINISTRY OF THE LAITY: SOME BIBLICO-THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

By: Rev. Luna L. Dingayan

I. INTRODUCTION:

A. Some Basic Considerations

1. Laity as whole people of God

- * Greek Word - Laos (people of God) both clergy and lay
- * Common Understanding - means lay (non-clergy or mandated organizations: UUM, CWA, CYF)

2. Lay Mandated Organizations as "Lifeblood" of Church

- * Active UCM-CWA-CYF = active church (e.g. church growth)
- * Exemptions: When mandated church organizations are existing outside of the church life and works.

3. Descriptive Not Prescriptive

- * Describe not to prescribe the ministry of the laity
- * Only the laity can discern for themselves what kind of ministry they need to undertake

II. OUR SITUATION: PERSISTENT WIDOW (Luke 18:1-8)

A. We live in a situation under judges who neither fear God nor respect people; Hence, justice is not served,

Context: In Palestine, there were judges appointed by the Romans who decide cases on the basis of money or influence.

* Judges = those who have the authority and power to make decisions on the destiny of the people

Examples:

1. International Politics

Ex. The Gulf War (purpose of the war, involving the name of God in vain, in the name of justice, civilian targets)

2. Domestic Politics

Ex. IMF-WB impositions

3. Judicial System

Ex. Olalia-Alay-ay double murder case
Leandro Alejandro case

4. Militarization

Ex. Salvaging, corruption (illustration: BTR of Military Chaplains)

(Note: Since people could not get justice through legal means, they sometimes resort to illegal means.)

B. In such kind of situation, we need persistent widow; people who keep on struggling no matter how difficult to obtain justice.

- * Widow of the poor and defenseless whose only weapon is persistence
- * One of the problems found by any movement for change is the fact that it loses steam very quickly.
Ex. Mass movement, early church

C. Because of persistence, we obtain justice but only partial. Nevertheless, we accept and celebrate but do not stop

Ex. The Survival of the church through history (Story of St. Francis)
February Event (ouster of dictator, problems remain)

D. Therefore, we look forward to full justice.

- * The church must go on; the movement for change must go on.
- * Crucial Question: "Will the Son of Man find faith on earth when he comes? (v. 8)
- * Its faith that sustains the earth, the world community. Not only faith in God, but most especially faith in each other. The problem of the world is that people have faith in God, but they don't have faith in their fellow human beings.

III. OUR VISION: A NEW CREATION (Isaiah 65:17-25)

* Background: Written by Deutero-Isaiah (Trito-Isaiah) who lived after the Babylonian captivity. He had a new vision for his people who were in depression and those who returned to Jerusalem from Exile.

* Characteristics of the vision:

A. No more weeping, no more calling for help

- * Israelite Experience - weeping, calling for help due to foreign domination and exploitation
- * Our Experience - weeping, calling for help due to foreign domination and exploitation. (Spanish, American, Japanese, total war)
- This is also our vision, most especially of the growing number of internal refugees

B. Babies will no longer die in infancy

- * Israelite Experience - babies die in infancy due to foreign oppression and exploitation (Ex. Exodus I, Lamentations 4)
- * Our Experience - 25 Filipino children die each day of preventable diseases, like pneumonia, diarrhea, and measles. 94,000 die before they reach their first birthday (1990 UNICEF Report).
 - 51 out of 1,000 infants died before their first birthday (1989 Department of Health)
 - Bulihan Resettlement Area, 83% of the children checked by the Medical Team have primary complex.
- This is also our vision, especially the (urban) poor.

C. People will build houses and get to live in them: They will not be used by someone else.

- * Israelite experience - In the hands of foreign powers, they were driven from their homes; they were conscripted to build houses for the powers that be. (Ex. during Exodus, monarchy, exile):
- * Our experience - Those who are building gigantic five star hotels don't have decent houses for their own; no experience staying in those hotels.
- This is also our vision, especially the workers.

D. They will plant vineyards and enjoy the wine; it will not be drunk by others

- * Israelite experience - They plant vineyards for the powers-that-be but never enjoying the fruits of their labor.
- * Our experience - plantations for export, high agricultural import

E. Prayers are Answered

- * Israelite Experience - These sufferings under foreign powers made them feel that God seemed to have forsaken them.

- * Our Experience - The absence of God is felt if those who claim to be believers in God have reduced their faith in mere rituals. (Ex. Death of God theology).

F. "Wolves and Lambs will eat together (picture "Lions will eat straw as Cattle do" of peace)

- Those who are seemingly inconceivable are reconciled. Ex. Cory or Gen. Blazon and Ka Satur will eat together.

Note: Eating together is a symbol of community and acceptance, especially if you eat the same food from a single plate.

We can judge the economy of a nation or economic status of a person by the kind of food he or she eats.

G. Snakes will no longer be dangerous. There is nothing harmful nor evil

- No more traitors nor "informers" or "rebels"
- One of the reasons why the Israelites suffered so much in the hands foreign powers was because of "snakes" or "traitors".
- We also have the same experience as a people. Ex. Philippine History

IV. OUR TASK: THE MAGNIFICAT (Luke 1:46-56)

A. Meaning of Magnificat

- comes from the word Magnify which means to enlarge or to focus in order to see more clearly that which cannot be seen.

B. Question Asked: Where and how do we see God's greatness?

C. Greatness of God is shown in many ways:

1. In Nature:

Ex. nature religions
even Christianity - "How Great Thou Art"

2. In Religious Cult

Ex. religious rites and ceremonies
Liturgy and sacraments

3. In History

- God is the Lord of history
 - distinctly Christian
- Ex. Concom debate on the Preamble

* God 's greatness is shown in history:

- in taking notice of the lovely
- in the rise and fall of the mighty
- in the lifting up of the lowly
- in the sending away of the rich empty
- in the feeding of the hungry

Two Kinds of dialectics in which God's greatness is shown

1. Power - mighty - put down

- lowly - put up
- Ex. Exodus, Babylonian Exile, Maccabean Revolt

2. Wealth - rich - cent away empty

- hungry – fed
- Ex. Manna, Parable of the Kingdom, Feeding of the 5,000, Holy Communion

Note: There is a direct relation between the mighty and the lowly between the rich and the hungry characterized by domination and exploitation. Such relation of domination and exploitation must have to be transformed.

D. Basic Tasks Before Us:

1. Lifting up the lowly

- Bring the mighty from their thrones by lifting up the lowly.
- Past Experience: Mighty brought down, but lowly not lifted up because the structures that perpetuates mighty - lowly relationship remain.
- The task of lifting up the lowly requires a re-examination of our thrust and direction as laypeople.
- People's empowerment needed; address structures that perpetuates mighty-lowly relationship

2. Feeding the Hungry

- Past Experience: Rich are sent away (not necessarily empty) but the hungry are not feed, because the structures that perpetuates hunger remains.
- Hunger for food is not just a biological need; it is also an economic or social need.
- Thus, Jesus said "Man cannot live by bread alone, but by every word that God speaks" (Matt. 4:4) - the Word of love and justice, the word of freedom.
- Again, this task requires a re-examination of our thrust and direction as a church,

V. CONCLUSION:

- In fulfilling this task, there is a need for persistence until full justice is served, and the vision of a new creation is realized.
- This is not an easy task. It reminds me of the funeral service of Fr. Nilo Valerio. Fr. Valerio was a Roman Catholic priest who spent his Life in lifting up the lowly and in feeding the hungry, so to speak, in the hinterlands of Northern Philippines until he was killed and beheaded by the military together with two women workers. During his funeral, Bishop Simon Valerio, his uncle, delivered a sermon wherein he said in effect:

"When we appear before God, the Lord will not ask us whether we are bishop, priest, lay person, or what have you. Rather, the Lord will ask us what have we done to the least of our brothers and sisters. For me, it would be very difficult to answer. But for Fr. Nilo, it would be very easy. He would just say: 'I have given my life.'"

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Reference: Resource Manual for Lay Formation Program
Prepared by:
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