

The Empowerment of the Laity in the Catholic Church in Tanzania

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Introduction

Both lay ministry and lay apostolate are two admirable ways for the Catholic lay people to participate in the mission of the Church. While lay ministry which is building up the Body of Christ, service rendered to the people of God themselves, is carried out in parishes and other ecclesiastical settings like the small Christian communities, the lay apostolate has the entire world as its operational axis.¹ In this article however, we intend to pay our utmost attention on lay apostolate. Before we go further with our topic, we must first understand the type of the laity we intend to focus on here. These are all the baptized (except for those in holy orders or in the religious state) who by the sacrament of baptism, are incorporated into the people of God, share in Christ's threefold office as priest, prophet, and king, and have their own part to play in the Church's mission, especially by directing temporal affairs according to God's will. They must bring God's enlightenment and order to society.²

The problem which we want to address in this article could be expressed this way: There is no doubt that, the influence of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council has brought new life to the Catholic Church in Tanzania which includes the increase of the participation of laypeople in different activities of the Church. Although many of these activities are organised under the 'umbrella' of lay apostolate, but in reality the apostolate of the laity, "*the effort to carry Christ's message into the highways and byways where people live and work*"³ has not yet been given serious emphasis. This is a problem. That is why we see in this article the necessity of empowering the Catholic laypeople in Tanzania by the way of motivating and forming them for lay apostolate in order to help them not to corrode both their will and their ability to respond to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council that the laity's "*special vocation, is to make the Church present and fruitful in those places and circumstances where it is only through them that she can become the salt of the earth.*"⁴

Empowerment is very important and since to "*to empower something means to understand thoroughly the nature of the thing, its personality, its distinctive trait, its uniqueness; doing otherwise is quite not right or improper.*"⁵ In this context then, to empower the laity, will be used to mean to know their real status, the expected life-style, and the proper role as lay men

in the life of the Church; to accept their uniqueness, their distinctive features; and thereby to form them accordingly.⁶ The term empowerment will be used here with reference to the formation of the laity and our study on the empowerment of the laity then shall cover the following main topics: Tanzania: social, political and economic situation; The role and the challenge of the Catholic laity in Tanzania; Contemporary Church teaching and the necessity of formation in empowering the Catholic laity in Tanzania.

Tanzania: Social, Political and Economic situation

In dealing with the issue of the empowerment of the Catholic laity in Tanzania, it is important to have a short account of the social, political and economic situation in Tanzania, because this is the proper place for their apostolate.

Tanzania lies on the east coast of Africa, just south of the equator. It is the United Republic made of a union of the mainland of Tanganyika and the Islands of Zanzibar. The two countries united in 1964 to form Tanzania. Tanzania with an area of 945,090 Sq. Km. has more than 130 tribes with different languages. There is a national language, Swahili, spoken by almost all the Tanzanians.⁷ Tanzania is one of the few countries in Africa which has often attracted attention as an exemplary African nation because of its peacefulness and stability. In part this can be attributed to the gentle leadership and charisma of its first president the late Julius Kambarage Nyerere. Gradually however, Tanzania has started to lose this credibility. The social, political and economic factors, both contribute to this situation.

Just to say briefly on the social, political and economic situation in Tanzania. Since its independence (1961), Tanzania follows “*Ujamaa*” (a blend of African socialism) as its social, economic and political policy. From the time of independence up to the 1990s, Tanzania implemented a one-party political system. Under “*Ujamaa*” policy the Tanzanians managed to live together peacefully as “*Ndugu*” (brothers and sisters) despite their different religious and tribal backgrounds. The rights of all citizens were highly respected and protected. There was a high sense of responsibility and accountability in every aspects of life. To be a leader did not mean anything else than a service to the nation and its people. The natural resources were distributed equally for the well-being of all people. Education and health services were given free by the government. The social difference between the rich and the poor was not so much noticed.

However, the economic crisis of the late 1970s and 1980s weakened “*Ujamaa*” and the 1990s saw the introduction of multipartism and liberal economy. With the introduction of liberal economy, the social, political and economic situation of the Tanzanians has changed as well. The introduction of multipartism has increased the awareness of the people to know their rights and participate in political affairs. On the other side however, politics has become a matter of business. People are using a lot of money to bribe in order to be elected leaders. This means that no matter how good a candidate is, as long as he is poor there is hardly a chance that he gets elected.

Furthermore, with the introduction of liberal economy, privatization has come in. The practise involves the privatisation of the companies and parastatals; organisations formerly owned by the state. Coupled with this, is the withdrawal of government subsidy in sectors of education and medicine; now everybody has to pay for the services that he or she gets. The Structural Adjustment Programme followed by the exercise of privatisation of the former public companies has adverse effects on the life of the common man. The rich become richer while poor people are becoming poorer than before and presently people are suffering as life becomes more expensive than before. The government employees especially those who occupy low position are poorly paid and corruption has become a part and parcel of every aspect of human life.

From what has been said above one may ask, if that is the real social, political and economic situation where are the Catholic laypeople and where do they do their apostolate? Does it mean that nothing has been done by the Catholic laypeople in Tanzania to rescue this situation? If that is the case, what factors hinder them to fulfil their obligation in society? In order to answer these questions well let us now have a look on the Catholic Church in Tanzania with regard to the role and the challenge of the Catholic laity in Tanzania.

The Role and the Challenge of the Catholic Laity in Tanzania

The current statistics on religion in Tanzania are unavailable because religious surveys were eliminated from government census reports after 1967. Religious leaders and sociologists estimate that the Christian and Muslim communities are approximately equal in size, each accounting for 30 to 40 percent of the population, with the remainder consisting of practitioners of other faiths, indigenous religions, and people of no religion.⁸ But according to the statistics of the Catholic Church in Africa, Tanzania has a population of about 40,067,000

million people among whom 10,313,000 million people or 25.74% are Catholics from 34 dioceses which constitute the Catholic Church of Tanzania.⁹

One can not talk about the role of the Catholic laypeople in Tanzania without referring to the National Council of Laity in Tanzania. This is an instrument of the Catholic Church in Tanzania which coordinates all activities of the Catholic laity at national level with the aim of strengthening the apostolate of the laity especially by directing temporal affairs according to God's will. Principally the council fulfils its obligations under the department of the apostolate of the laity of the Episcopal conference of Tanzania. The National Council of the laity was founded between 1969 and 1972. As an instrument of the apostolate of the laity it works hand in hand at all levels with lay organizations and movements. There are many traditional pious organizations as the Legionaries of Mary, Tertiaries of different orders and prayer groups under the patronage of different saints. The major lay movements are the Catholic Women Organization, the Christian Professionals of Tanzania, the Young Christian Workers of Tanzania and the Tanzania Young Catholic Students.

On one hand we appreciate a great role played by the lay council together with lay organizations and movements for spiritual and temporal well being of the Catholic Church in Tanzania. For instance, they have been instrumental in raising the self sufficiency of the local churches financially. Together with the clergy, they prepare the Church programs and the budget, including the maintenance of the clergy and the catechists and engage themselves in raising the funds which is something good. But on the other hand, this one of lay apostolate that means the *“efforts of the laypeople, whether acting individually on their own initiative or together with others, to put the truth of the Gospel into practice in the world through their involvement in marriage, work, political participation, social relationships, and all the other legitimate roles and activities of secular life”*¹⁰ have not yet produced enough fruits.

If this is the case, we may ask ourselves what are problems or challenges which hinder the Catholic laypeople in Tanzania in fulfilling their apostolate in the society? The problems or rather challenges are many but the most fundamental one which has been a cry of every time is a lack of sufficient formation which results in the lack of personal conviction in Christ which should result from total conversion. This is why we see in this article the necessity of formation as a means to empower the Catholic laypeople in Tanzania. But before we come to this important part, we do a brief study on the fundamental teaching of the Church with regard to the role of the laity in the Church and in the world.

Contemporary Church Teaching and the Necessity of Formation in Empowering the Catholic Laity in Tanzania

To begin with the contemporary teaching of the Church, our main focus in this part is to look briefly at the documents and the post document of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) which speak so frequently about the role of the Catholic laity in the Church-especially the Dogmatic constitution of the Church (*Lumen Gentium*), the Decree on the apostolate of the laity (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*), the Pastoral constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*) and the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and Mission of the Lay faithful in the Church and in the World (*Christifideles Laici*). In looking at the mentioned documents we see that, the Catholic laity possess a specific and unique vocation that they must pursue and fulfil for the growth of the Church and the permeation of the world in a special manner befitting their secular character. Although the laity are called to participate actively in various ways within the Church, their central focus must be the temporal world, the culture and the society they live in, of which they are an integral part. This engagement of the laity with the temporal order is not something which is optional, but an appointment given by God, who desires that all men be saved. It is also the way in which the laity fully realize their true place and role in the Church. By bringing the Church to the world, the laity brings the world into contact with the Church, the Body of Christ.¹¹

The Council Fathers insisted that “*the laity must take up the renewal of the temporal orders as their own special obligation*”¹² because this task is not the priority of priests or religious; in the sense that, they are not qualified for, or capable of such activity. Only the laity because of their skills in the marketplace, in the institutions of society and in the everyday activities of men, can properly perform this crucial activity. This means that “*the apostolate in the social milieu, that is, the effort to infuse a Christian spirit into the mentality, customs, laws and structures of the community in which one lives, is so much the duty and responsibility of the laity that it can never be performed properly by others.*”¹³ However, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World makes a further clear and a serious emphasis on the connection between the laity’s life as Catholics in the world and their eternal destination which is our salvation and warn on the danger of separation between the faith which many profess and their daily lives: The Christian who neglect his temporal duties, neglects his duties towards his neighbour and even God, and endangers his eternal salvation.¹⁴

The blessed Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic Exhortation (*Christifideles Laici*) makes more emphasis on the same point. That, there are two temptations which have not been always

known how to avoid: the temptation of being so strongly interested in Church services and tasks that some fail to become actively engaged in their responsibilities in the professional, social, cultural and political world; and the temptation of legitimizing the unnecessary separation of faith from life, that is a, separation of the Gospel's acceptance from the actual living of the Gospel in various situation in the world.¹⁵ These two temptations mentioned by Pope John Paul II remind us of the main problem which we are addressing in this article, that is, the strong engagement of the Catholic laity in Church services and tasks and a failure to become actively engaged in their responsibilities in the professional, social, cultural and political affairs in Tanzania. One of the notable problem which we have outlined as a hindrance in fulfilling their apostolate in the world is insufficient formation which results to a lack of personal conviction in Christ which should result from the total conversion. As a result, many fall into error of separation between faith and life.

If that is the case, what should be done now to help the Tanzanian Catholic laity to become actively engaged in Church services and tasks and particularly in their responsibilities in the professional, social, cultural and political affairs? Here we see the necessity of formation as a means to empower the Catholic laity in Tanzania. But what would a formation look like that seriously tried to prepare them for their part in the mission of the Church? I think that the Catholic laypeople in Tanzania need a formation which will help them in an ever-clearer discovery of their vocation as lay faithful and the ever-greater willingness to live it so as to enable them fulfil well their own mission. That means a formation which will help them recognize their real status, the expected life-style, their proper role as lay men in the life of the Church; to accept their uniqueness, their distinctive features, their rights and obligations which they have to fulfil in the Church and in the society. In other words, they need a formation which will help them to discover and effectively lay claim to the identity which is theirs in order to be able to demand as rightfully their own secular status and dignity with the accompanying rights and obligations, so that to enable them faithfully carry out the mission entrusted to them not only in the Church but also in the society as well.

At last but not the least, the Catholic laypeople in Tanzania should be empowered with a totally integrated formation. This is a kind of formation which should have as its aim bringing about what the Second Vatican Council called the unity of life. This means that, laypeople must not think of themselves as living two separate lives, a 'religious life' life in Church and a 'secular life' in the world. This is what the blessed pope John Paul II in his writings (*Christifideles Laici*) says "every area of the lay faithful's lives, as different as they are,

enters into the plan of God. Every activity, every situation, every precise responsibility-as, for example, skill and solidarity in work, love and dedication in the family and the education of children, service to society and public life and the promotion of truth in the area of culture-are the occasions ordained by providence for continuous exercise of faith, hope and charity."¹⁶ Our hope is to see the Catholic laypeople in Tanzania empowered with such formation as outlined here such that they will be able in a good position in fulfilling well their obligations both in the Church and in the world.

Conclusion

Both lay ministry and lay apostolate are two admirable ways for the Catholic lay people to participate in the mission of the Church. Both of them are important. Any justification on the significance of one of them at the expense of another one, be it either knowingly or unknowingly is wrong. This is what happens to the catholic laypeople in Tanzania. A sense of being interested in Church services and tasks and a failure to take an active role in the apostolate to the world (society), which in fact is theirs by right and obligation. One of a basic problem which we have outlined here as a stumbling block to an active lay participation in their apostolate in the world, is an insufficient formation. That is why we see the necessity of empowering them through formation. It is only then that our catholic laypeople in Tanzania could stand up with dignity, pride and confidence and be on their own area of responsibility, as lay men and lay women both in the Church and in middle of the world.

References

¹ Cf. Shaw, R., *Ministry or Apostolate? What Should the Catholic Laity Be Doing?* Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, U.S.A, 2002, p. 9.

² Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 897-899.

³ Shaw, R., *Ministry or Apostolate? What Should the Catholic Laity Be Doing?* Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, U.S.A, 2002, p. 10.

⁴ Vatican II Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 33.

⁵ <http://medroso.blogspot.com/2005/12/laity-obligations-and-rights.html>, accessed on 23.11.2011.

⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁷ Cf. <http://www.rc.net/tanzania/tec/tzchurch.htm>, accessed on 20.12.2011.

⁸ Cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_Tanzania, accessed on 20.12.2011.

⁹ Cf. <http://www.netzwerkafrika.de/dcms/sites/nad/afrika/kircheafrika/statistiken.html>, accessed on 23.11.2011.

¹⁰ Shaw, R., *Ministry or Apostolate? What Should the Catholic Laity Be Doing?* Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, U.S.A, 2002, p. 15.

¹¹ Cf. Vatican II Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 31.

¹² Vatican II Council, Decree on the Apostolate of the laity, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 7.

¹³ *Ibid.*, no. 13.

¹⁴ Cf. Vatican II Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 43.

¹⁵ Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and Mission of the Lay faithful in the Church and in the World, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 2.

¹⁶ Shaw, R., *Ministry or Apostolate? What Should the Catholic Laity Be Doing?* Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, U.S.A., 2002, p. 104.