



## The Church as the Family of Trinity: The Identity and Mission of the Laity

**Author:** Negussie Andre Domnic

St. Augustine University of Tanzania. Website: [www.saut.ac.tz](http://www.saut.ac.tz)

**Corresponding author:** Negussie Andre Domnic **Email:** [gnad2010@yahoo.com](mailto:gnad2010@yahoo.com)

**Cite as:** Domnic, N. A. (2023). *The Church as the Family of Trinity: The Identity and Mission of the Laity [Data set]*. In *International Journal of Social and Development Concerns (APA, Vol. 18, Number Post COVID-19 Recovery and Sustainable Development, pp. 116–130)*. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10130522>

**Chief Editor**

Web:

[www.ijfdc.org](http://www.ijfdc.org)

Email:

[info@ijfdc.org](mailto:info@ijfdc.org)

**Editing Oversight**

Impericals

Consultants

International

Limited

**Abstract:** *The Church as a communion of believers is rooted in Jesus Christ, the founder. The Holy Trinity is the source of the communion of the Church. The Church grows through missionary activities conducted by different ministries (clergy, laity and other ministries). Important questions arise from this premise; what is the role and place of the lay people in the Church's missionary activities? Is the presence of the lay people recognized in the Church? If yes, in what ways? By virtue of the sacrament of baptism all faithful share a responsibility for the Church's mission. All baptized faithful share common priesthood through baptism. However, what is the limitation between the lay faithful and the Orders by the Holy Spirit in terms of participating in missionary activities? Upon this reflection, it is anticipated that it is better to balance and harmonize this problem by researching on the Church as the Family of Trinity. This paper therefore discusses the identity and mission of the laity in the Church by showing the position of the lay faithful to the Church's apostolate. In this paper, I recognize that, the common priesthood of the faithful and that of ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless interrelated. This implies that, each of them in its own special way participates in one priesthood of Christ. Therefore, equality does not cancel the diversity in the ministries. This diversity is due to the Holy Spirit through which the Church is ordered and governed by a wonderful diversity. The model taken is of the Church as the Family of Trinity. That is, the communion of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as the model to the earthly Church. The aim of the Church as family of Trinity is to restore the correct balance and relationship between the institutional aspects of the Church and mystical. The two realities are inseparable and need each other. However, the whole purpose of the visible society is to proclaim and draw its members into the mystery of communion. This paper is primarily contextual to Africa. Its reflection is that; because of pyramidal Catholic Church in Africa, many lay Catholic faithful do not feel at home in the Catholic Church. The researcher believes that, fraternity has been wiped away because of the institutional model. Basing on the Trinitarian ecclesiology therefore, the Church as family of Trinity places all faithful as equal despite the hierarchical organization of the Church. Ultimately, this will lead to a life of brotherhood and sisterhood. The recognition and the awareness of the laity of their mission in the Church and in the world, makes the lay people to witness their believe in words and deeds especially in the education of the young generation.*

**Key words:** Church, Trinity, Family, Africa, Laity and Identity

## 1.1 Study Background

In his Encyclical, *Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis reminds us that “there has been a growing awareness of the identity and mission of the laity in the Church,” but that “a clear awareness of this responsibility of the laity, grounded in their baptism and confirmation, does not appear in the same way in all places” (n. 102). Pope Francis’s reminder is an eye opener to the Church as whole and particularly in Africa to rethink on the effective ways to improve the active participation of the laity in the Church ministerial affairs and in our case in the education of the young generation. As Christians, to give students merely knowledge of books is not the purpose of the Catholic institution.

It has been a custom to use the word ministries not only for the offices and functions exercised by pastors in virtue of the sacrament of orders, but also for those exercised by the lay faithful in virtue of their baptismal priesthood. The terminological question becomes even more complex and delicate when all the faithful are recognized as having the possibility of supplying - by official deputation given by the pastor’s certain functions more proper to clerics, which, nevertheless, do not require the character of orders. It must be admitted that the language becomes doubtful, confused, and hence not helpful for expressing the doctrine of the faith whenever the difference ‘of essence and not merely of degree’ between the baptismal priesthood and the ordained priesthood is in any way obscured (John Paul II, 1994). *Gaudium et Spes* states: “Split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age” (n. 43). This split is a serious problem, even after six decades since Vatican II, it is not solved. In some ways it might even have grown worse. A true Christian is both a believer and a follower. It is matter of the mind and of life. The aim of the Church as family of Trinity is to restore the correct balance and relationship between the institutional and the mystical aspects of the Church. The two realities are inseparable and interrelated. The whole purpose of the visible society is to proclaim and draw its members into the mystery of communion.

Even though the African Bishops say the Church as Family has a meaning in Africa, and John Paul II wrote Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation ‘*Ecclesia in Africa*’ highlighting the Church as Family in Africa. In my opinion, this has not been fully realized due to what I refer as pyramidal Catholic Church structure in Africa where many lay Catholic faithful do not feel at home in the Catholic Church. The fraternity is not fully effective because of the institutional model. Elochukwu comments that: “for a truly African Church in an independent Africa was more of an exception than a rule. Church leaders who operated in a feudalistic institution were much concerned with power and authority. It seems that this current situation inherited pre Vatican II feudal image of the Church constitutes even today the greatest obstacle to the emergence of dynamic local Churches in Africa.” (Elochukwu, 1996: 3). Basing on the Trinitarian ecclesiology, the Church as family of Trinity will therefore help us to live the brotherhood life. The unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is not only the source, but also the model of the unity of the Church and of all the large and small communities. The Holy Trinity is the greatest mystery in the Christian faith.

This article has three parts. The first part presents the Church as an institution in light of the Trinity. In this part, I argue that Trinity is the foundation of the Church and its mission. That is to say, the mission of the Church is the mission of the Trinity. This introduces the second part which presents the subjectivity of the lay faithful to the Church apostolate. By baptism, all the faithful are entrusted with

missionary responsibility. When each one plays his/her responsibility, it helps to form authentic community in the family of Trinitarian God. This is presented in the third part of this article which presents the missiological characteristic of the Church as Family of Trinitarian God. At the end I highlight the traditional/informal way of African education systems, which invite the lay faithful to take this into consideration and to overcome the current challenges by educating the young generation by word and deeds.

### **1.2 The Church: institution and mystery of the Trinitarian communion**

The Church is mystery of communion. This is an indication that the Church is a human and divine reality. The Church is a visible society in the world and mystery of our communion with God in Christ through the bonding of the Holy Spirit. The Church as community was established by Jesus Christ. Jesus still sustains this Holy Church. It is the community of faith, hope and charity. It is an entity with visible delineation through which Jesus communicated truth and grace to all. However, the Church is structured with hierarchical organs and the Mystical Body of Christ. Both the hierarchical organs and the Mystical Body of Christ are neither to be considered as two realities, nor the visible assembly and the spiritual community, nor the earthly Church and the Church enriched with heavenly things. Rather they form one complex reality which coalesces from a divine and a human element<sup>1</sup>.

Throughout the centuries, for various historical and theological reasons, the emphasis has been increasingly placed on the institutional aspects of the Church, on its nature as a perfect society in the world alongside and superior to civil society. These institutional aspects most stressed were the teaching and ruling authority of the Church, vested especially in priests and bishops through ordination. The summit of authority was in the Pope. Indeed, most people came to think of the Church as the Pope, Bishops and Priests (McGarry et al, 1993:100-101). Priesthood is viewed primarily in terms of power. The threefold power of teaching, sanctifying and ruling is concentrated at the top, in the Pope and Bishops. The Bishop is given the fullness of hierarchical power, and the presbyterate is seen as a participation in the priesthood of the episcopacy. All the functions of the bishop or priest are juridicized. When he teaches, people are obliged to accept his doctrine not because of his knowledge or personal gifts but because of the office he holds. When he celebrates the sacraments, the priest exercises sacred powers that others do not have. When the priest commands, he does so as one set over the faithful by Christ, in that resisting his orders is equivalent to rebelling against God himself (Dulles, 2002: 154).

Basing on this institutional model of the Church, the lay faithful understood as collaborating in the mission of the bishops. They were delegated or mandated to the apostolate by the bishops, who were understood to be responsible for the mission of the Church. This idea is not something in the past even today it is still evident. During the Special Synod of Africa, Mons Anthony Mayala Archbishop of Mwanza (Tanzania) said: “The ingrained institutional and hierarchical model of the Church and the pre-Vatican II mentality are still a great obstacle for many of the people of God in the understanding and affirming the role of the lay faithful as being agents of proclamation. Even this Synod seems to imply this way of thinking when it says: The apostolic mission of the bishop is shared by priests, men and women religious and lay persons, each with his or her own sphere.” (*Intrumentum Laboris*, 1993,

<sup>1</sup> VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* (21 November 1964), n. 8. From here on wards I will use the abbreviation ‘LG’.

n. 26). According to Vatican II, it is not the Apostolic mission of the bishops of which other share, but the mission of Christ, of which the bishops also share; for the Church is a communion in which all are anointed by the Lord himself for the mission of the Church, carried out through many ministries<sup>2</sup>.

Brian Hearne argues that in many areas, the clergy are still dominant in the leadership structures. This becomes an ineffective in real community building. The laity ought to be given leadership positions in the initiatives of community building. The lay faithful ought to be given opportunities to exercise their gifts. If this is not taken seriously, the Church will never reach maturity. The laity are generally seen as mere adjuncts of the clergy. The hierarchy and the clergy are challenged to resist their temptation to control, and thereby to stifle every initiative in the Church that comes from below. The Spirit of God does not restrict Himself to the Hierarchy, and a spirit of mutual trust and co-responsibility must be established if the Christian community is to have any real meaning. The role of the clergy is to foster and to encourage initiative, not to suppress it. The Church is a communion, not a monarchy (Hearne, 1976:281).

The Triune God wants to share divine life with human beings. The Christian journey enters into and imitates the union, communion and relationships of the Three Divine Persons. The pyramidal Church might not help us to understand the Trinity, but it could be the communion, the brotherhood, the family which might help us to understand the mystery of Trinity. We have difficulties in understanding the Holy Trinity because we approach the mystery from the wrong direction. The intellectual side is not the best side to start with. The right approach to the mystery is to imitate the life of the Trinity which is a life of sharing (Healey & Sybertz, 1995, 132-133). Therefore, the Church as Trinitarian family cannot be institutional, because it is not rooted on the biological kinship, nationalism, and officialism, but in the Trinity. Joseph Healey cited Waliggo that, the family of God should not be a patriarchal structure in which bishops, priests and religious are the parents and the laity are children. He said the family of God in Africa has to be redesigned in order to give the laity and especially lay women their rightful responsibility. The theology of Church-As-Family is a two-edged sword. It can be profitably used, but may also lead to the beginning of paternalism. Before it is applied, the image of the family must be fully liberated. We should not once again end up with a pyramid structure of the Church but rather a circular one of communion (Healey & Sybertz, 1995: 146-147). The Mystery of the Trinitarian communion restores the balance between the Church as an institution and the Church as a mystery, between the visible society and the Trinitarian community, between the authority and role of the hierarchy and the responsibility of all the faithful for the life and mission of the Church. It is above all the recognition of the role of the Holy Spirit in the family.

### **1.3 The subjectivity of the lay faithful to the Church apostolate**

Christ is the Head of the Church and we are the members of one Body, living in deep communion with one another. In this way, the Church is the mystical body of Christ, prolonging his presence in the world. Like a true family of God in Christ, in which we are all the children of God and brothers, it bears witness to the world the love of God and attracts all to him. The Church is the “sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race” (LG n. 1). We can further say that, the Church is a mystery in which “communion and mission are

<sup>2</sup> VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (18 November 1965), nn. 2,3. From here on wards I will use the abbreviation ‘AA’.

profoundly connected with each other. They interpenetrate and mutually imply each other, to the point that communion represents both the source and the fruit of mission, communion gives rise to mission and mission is accomplished in communion”<sup>3</sup>.

Everyone who is baptized participates in the life and holiness of the Church, benefiting from, as well as contributing to the communion of the saints (CFL n. 17; 1Cor. 12: 12-27). In the Church the various vocations are like so many rays of the one light of Christ. The laity reflect the mystery of the Incarnate Word particularly in so far as He is the Alpha and the Omega of the world; sacred ministers are living images of Christ who is the Head and Shepherd, who guides his people during this time, of already, and not yet<sup>4</sup>. All the faithful share a common dignity; all are called to holiness; all cooperate in the building up of the one Body of Christ, each in accordance with the proper vocation and gift which he or she receives from the Holy Spirit. These vocations are at the service of one another, for the growth of the Body of Christ in history and for its mission in the world. Everyone in the Church is consecrated in Baptism and Confirmation (VC n. 31).

The lay faithful participate in the threefold mission of Christ as a Priest, Prophet and King. The mission of Christ as a priest is seen in the celebration of the Eucharist incorporated in Jesus Christ, the baptized are united to him and to his sacrifice in the offering of their daily activities. These sacrifices are most lovingly offered to the Father along with the Lord’s body. Thus as worshipers, the lay faithful consecrate the world itself to God. As a prophet the lay faithful are given the ability and responsibility to accept the gospel in faith and to proclaim it in word and deeds. In the last mission of Christ as a King, the lay faithful belong to Christ, Lord and King of the Universe, they share in his kingly mission and are called by him to spread that Kingdom in history. The participation of the lay faithful in the threefold mission of Christ as Priest, Prophet and King finds its source in the anointing of Baptism. It further develops in Confirmation and its realization and dynamic sustenance in the Holy Eucharist. The sharing of the lay faithful in the threefold mission of Christ requires that it is to be lived and realized in communion and for the increase of communion itself (CFL n. 14).

In the Church as family of Trinity, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are active. The bishop or priest does not take over the whole responsibility for the life of the family of Trinity. For all lay faithful are appointed to the apostolate by the Lord himself, in the sacraments of Baptism and confirmation (LG n. 33). The Holy Spirit sanctifies and gives the faithful special gifts as He wills, so that each and all put at the service of others in the grace received. From the acceptance of these charisms, for each believer arise the right and duty to use them in the Church and in the world for the good of men and the building up of the Church. This should be done in communion with their brothers and sisters in Christ (AA n. 3). The Holy Spirit is linked to the new and the alternative way. We always have to deal with laws, habits, and institutions; because they give us security and assure us of a direction but the human spirit is always open upward and forward; it is insatiable. From time to time, identity crises occur. Societies feel that new paths are needed. Revolutions occur and leave behind venerable institutions and well-worn paths. New paths open up; a new order is created. The Holy Spirit is always present in these

---

<sup>3</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (25 December 1988), n. 32. From here on ward I will use the abbreviation ‘CFL’.

<sup>4</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata* (25 March 1996), n. 16. From here on ward I will use the abbreviation ‘VC’.



usually painful processes of structural change. It is the Holy Spirit who inaugurates the new heaven and new earth (Boff, 2000, 94). In this way the ability and the duty to announce the Gospel primarily is not the juridical mandate from outside, but to know ecclesiologicaly the gift that the Father for the Holy Spirit in Jesus Christ gives to every single man and its Church. (Gianfranco, 2000, 214) Leonardo Boff said: “The Holy Spirit makes present the message of Jesus and does not let the spirit of authoritarianism prevail in the community, or ritualism dominate in celebrations, or Christian thinking fall into boring repetition of formulas.” (95). In virtue of baptism, all Christians receive the Holy Spirit, who distributes his gifts and charismas as He pleases. As John Paul II said: “The call is a concern not only for pastors, the clergy, and religious men and women. The call is addressed to everyone: lay people as well are personally called by the Lord from whom they receive a mission on behalf of the Church and the world.” (CFL n. 2).

The Holy Spirit produces freedom always (2Cor 3:17), self-surrender to others, and love. The Holy Spirit is the creative power of difference and communion across differences. This stirs up the most diverse gifts within people and the widest range of services and ministries in communities. This is well captured in the epistles of St. Paul to the Romans chapter 12 and Corinthians chapter 12 as they teach that this diversity does not fall into inequality and discrimination. We all drink of the same Spirit (1Cor 12:13). The gifts are not given for self-promotion but for the good of the community (1Cor 12:7). The Holy Spirit has been poured forth over us and dwells in the hearts of people, granting them enthusiasm, courage, and determination (CFL n. 87). The Holy Spirit is the ultimate guarantee that we will remain basically faithful to the gospel preached by Christ. We can remain faithful to the Holy Spirit only by truly discerning. It’s will in the signs of the times; there is no “hot line” from her to the world beyond (Fuellenbach, 2002, 106).

#### **1.4 The authentic community in the family of Trinitarian God**

All Christians and their pastors are brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ because by the divine choice the lay faithful are Christ’s brothers. Additionally, the pastors are the brothers of Jesus Christ. Our brotherhood as Christians does not depend on race or nationality, social condition or sexual orientation, but in Jesus Christ (LG n. 32). Jesus said: “you are all my brothers” (Mathew. 23: 8). Therefore, we have to avoid all ethnocentrism and excessive particularism<sup>5</sup>. During the Holy Mass in the penitential rite the priest says: “My brothers and sisters, to prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries, let us call to mind our sins.” (Primavesi, 1992). All of us are therefore brothers and sisters. Secondly, all of us have equal dignity. This equality in dignity is driven from the rebirth in Jesus Christ through baptism. Thus, a common grace as sons, a common vocation to perfection, one salvation, one hope and undivided charity. In Christ and in the Church there is then no inequality arising from race or nationality, social condition or sex. For “there is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor freeman; there is neither male nor female. For you all are ‘one’ in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11). Therefore “The common priesthood of the faithful and ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless interrelated: each of them in its own special way in participation in the one priesthood of Christ.” (LG n. 10).

---

<sup>5</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, (14 September 1995), n. 63. From here on ward I will use the abbreviation ‘EIA’.

This equality does not eliminate the diversity in the ministries. There is a diversity because the Holy Spirit makes the People of God fit and ready to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the Church (LG n. 12). By divine institution, the Holy Church is ordered and governed by a wonderful diversity. Just as each of us has various parts in one body, and the parts do not all have the same function: in the same way, all of us, though there are so many of us, make up one body in Christ, and as different parts we are all joined to one another (Rom. 12: 4-5). There is therefore the diversity in the ministries always; however, this diversity will not deny the dignity of everyone. As outlined above no one is above and no one is below the other rather than “the ministerial priest, by the sacred power that he has, forms and rules the priestly people; in the person of Christ. The priest effects the Eucharistic sacrifice and offers it to God in the name of all the people.” (LG n. 10). “The faithful indeed, by virtue of their royal priesthood, participate in the offering of the Eucharist. They exercise this priesthood too, by the reception of the sacraments, prayer and thanksgiving, the witness of a holy life, abnegation and active charity.” (LG n. 10). Even if there is diversity but in the organism of a living body no member plays a purely passive part, sharing in the life of the body, it shares at the same time in its activity (AA n. 2).

The pastors and the lay faithful are working for the glory of God through the coming of His kingdom and for the communication of eternal life to all men, that they may know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent (AA n. 3; Jn. 17:3). Therefore, in the Church as Family of Trinitarian God there is the authentic communion. First, all Christians and their pastors are brothers and sisters (LG nn. 13, 32); all are equal in dignity (LG nn. 10-12, 32); all have different ministries (LG nn. 10, 32-33; AA n. 2); all are sharing responsibilities in solidarity (LG nn. 30, 32, 35) and all are working for the life and mission of the Church (LG nn. 30-31, 34; AA n. 3). “In the Church there is diversity of ministry but unity of mission” (AA n. 2).

The baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit are consecrated to be a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, that through all the works of Christian men they may offer spiritual sacrifices and proclaim the perfection of Him who has called them out of darkness into His marvellous light (1Pet. 1: 4-10). Therefore, all the Disciples of Christ, persevering in prayer and praising God (Acts 2: 42-47), should present themselves as a sacrifice, living, holy and pleasing life to God (Rom. 12:1). They should bear witness to Christ everywhere on the earth and give an answer to everyone who asks about reason for the hope of an eternal life which is theirs (1Pet. 3:15; LG n. 10).

Then, in a true *koinonia* all enjoy the same dignity as children of God. All are truly brothers and sisters, and each will be the ‘first and ‘greatest’ by making himself or herself last of all and servant of all (McGarry & Ryan, 2001: 147). In the Church as family of Trinity, if we call one as ‘father’, he still remains a ‘brother’; his fatherly office is a form of brotherly service. It is from this point of view that we have to build the Church as a Family, not by dividing the hierarchy, every responsibility is for brotherly service. You are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. It is, however, clear that the content this sentence implies the end of rabbinism. The Christian revolution, the lessening of all worldly distinctions in the face of the encounter with the one who is truly great, truly different: Christ. Thus in these words which formally represent rabbinical usage, there are breaks through the new Christian idea of brotherhood (Ratzinger, 1993, 24). Therefore, every member of the Church is a Church.

This part is concluded by a narration of what father Joseph Healey said in Tanzania: During seminars and workshops on small Christian communities in Musoma diocese -Tanzania, they posed the following situation: a stranger comes up to you on the street in Musoma town and says: “I am a visitor here”. Would you please tell me where the nearest Catholic Church is? What would you tell the person? Usually there is a wide variety of answers like “The cathedral is over there, near the high school”; “I will be glad to walk to the Church with you.” Participants would always be surprised to hear that, one answer to the question “where is the Church?” is to point to oneself and say: “I am the Church” (Healey & Sybertz, 1995:135).

### **1.5 The missiological characteristics of the Church as Family of Trinitarian God**

I choose to use the “Trinitarian God” instead of “God” to only emphasize on the Trinity aspect. The other reason is because it is not in theoretical, but practical in our missiological and pastoral view. By concentrating on the word ‘God’ we are inclining towards the pyramidal structure of the Church, these views paralyze the dynamite of many Christians. We cannot solve this problem by saying to the lay faithful ‘you are one family of God,’ even for the bishops, priests, religious men and women, catechists etc. It is necessary to pass from the pyramidal Church to the communion Church. This becomes a shift from pyramidal Church to the brotherhood Church; from monarchical Church to the Trinitarian God of Family. Here, Trinity is a designer of the Church (Father), Trinity is a founder and foundation of the Church (Jesus Christ) and the Trinity is a fountain and sanctifier of the Church (Holy Spirit) (LG nn. 1-4).

Basing on the Trinity the first characteristic of the Church as the Family of Trinitarian God is love. To begin with, we will present the Church as a missionary of the Trinitarian love. Jesus Christ gave us the commandment of love. Loving one another invites a dialogue. Therefore, the second characteristic of the Church as the Family of Trinity is a dialogue. Love and dialogue are the basic characteristics for holistic development of the human being. If someone doesn’t love his/her students and his/her subject, he/she cannot be effective in education. The same if someone is not ready to dialogue the evolution of knowledge cannot be effective.

***The Church is missionary of the Trinitarian love:*** “Whoever fails to love does not know God, because God is love” (1Jn. 4:8). “We have recognised for ourselves, and put our faith in, the love God has for us. God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him” (1Jn. 4:16). In the Bible, love is the unique definition of God that we can find. As Christians, we are familiar with the statement of God being love. However, what it means may not be very obvious at all. The difficulty arises not only because of the alleged incomprehensibility of God, but also due to our inadequate grasp of the nature of love (Karuvellil, 2006:326-327) in addition; speaking about love is at once an inviting and discouraging prospect. It is inviting because everyone speaks about love. Love is a driving force in human life, as everyone knows. However, speaking about love is also discouraging because the word has so many different meanings (Schüssler, 2005: 27). Benedict XVI said that the term “love” has become one of the most frequently used and misused. It is attached to different meanings, love of a



country, love of one's profession, love between friends, love of work, love between parents and children, love between family members, love of neighbour and love of God<sup>6</sup>.

*Lumen Gentium* underlines each individual being part of the Church as he/she contributes through his/her special gifts to the good of the other parts and of the whole Church (LG nn. 3, 13). This return to an ecclesiology of communion and co-equal discipleship; it is linked to the Council's affirmation of the universal call to holiness (LG nn. 3, 40), and its declaration on the autonomy of earthly realities<sup>7</sup>. These three (Priest, Prophet and King) core convictions are united in the Council's theological evaluation of the lay life (LG n. 31) which avoids any split between clergy and laity. This is an acknowledgment that; the laity share in the responsibility for the entire Church while not holding office in the organization, and affirms that; the earthly ordering of temporal society is the specific way in which a lay person seeks the kingdom of God.

The special vocation of Christianity is baptism which makes each one a disciple of the Lord and a member of the community. Through the resulting gifts of the Spirit and participation in the threefold mission of Jesus's priesthood, prophetic, and servant. The lay faithful become active, responsible members of the Church. Jesus Christ shows us the love of God through incarnation, His death and resurrection. Jesus not only shows us the love of God but He is asking us to participate in this love. This indicates that all human beings, with all their differences and divisions, cannot be united immediately among themselves. They will become brothers and sisters only by reference to a common Father. This fact means that, the Church is precisely the family of God. Only through revelation are the three divine persons known; only through grace is communion with them bestowed (McGarry & Ryan, 2001, 145).

The Church on earth is by its very nature missionary since, according to the plan of the Father, it has its origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit. This plain flows from "fountain-like love, the love of God the Father. As the principle without principle from whom the Son is generated and from whom the Holy Spirit proceeds through the Son, God is His great and merciful kindness freely creates us and moreover, graciously calls us to share in His life and glory."<sup>8</sup> The Church by its nature is missionary. It is an indication that the missionary nature of the Church is not by juridical command, but it is based on the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Jesus who is sent by the Father and calls us to share in his life and glory. The Church is collocated in the dynamic love of the Trinity. Therefore, the missionary nature of the Church is revealed through its actions, words by living the communion of the Trinity (AG nn. 2-4). However, Christ is the absolute and supreme Sign that reveals the Father and shows to us His love. Likewise, the Church that serves Christ, lives that love and becomes testimony of this love. Through testimony the Church introduces the fullness of God and the divine love.

***The new commandment of love:*** The Church established by Christ is a communion of life, love, and truth (LG n. 9). This truth can help us to surpass our denomination and tribal barriers, but to love one another we need the spirit of God because the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of love. Love unites, and brings

<sup>6</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical letter *Deus Caritas Est* (25 December 2005), n. 2. From here on ward I will use the abbreviation 'DC'.

<sup>7</sup> VATICAN COUNCIL II, Pastoral Constitution, *Gaudium et Spes* (7 December 1965), n. 36. From here on ward I will use the abbreviation 'GS'.

<sup>8</sup> VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decree, *Ad Gentes* (7 December 1965), n. 2. From here on ward I will use the abbreviation 'AG'.

communion among people. The Holy Spirit unites the Christians as members of the family of God. Saint Paul, writes this: “it is the Spirit of adoption, the spirit who enables us to cry out ‘Abba’ Father. The Spirit himself joins our spirit to bear witness that we are children of God” (Rom. 8: 14-15). The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of love who draws people together, builds up fraternity, solidarity, and communion among them.

Jesus said “Just as the Father loves me, remain in my love” (Jn. 15:9). These words express a Trinitarian relationship and from this relationship springs the new commandment of love. By handing over his Son to death, God manifests himself as a God of love and mercy. Love is God’s very nature. When Jesus called the twelve apostles to share His way of life, He first showed them His love. In order to follow him; men must unite and form a community of brothers. At the last supper He gave them the new commandment of love. “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (Jn. 15: 12). Without brotherly love, it is impossible to please God. By observing the new commandment of love the apostles became one. Jesus wants us not only to love each other like brothers, but we must be brothers. We must form one single family. The children of God have an obligation to treat each other as brothers. This is a sign and an instrument of communion with God and of unity among all men (LG n. 1; GS n. 32).

Therefore, the announcement of the Gospel from the community of the believers should create the spirit of family hood. If we continue to love one another, all of us will form one family in Christ (Heb. 3:6), and we will be faithful to the deepest vocation of the Church (LG n. 51). This prospective helps us to understand that the Church as family follows in foot step of the life of communion with the Trinity. A true disciple of Christ is marked by love, both of God and neighbour (LG n. 42). In the constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, the life of love is presented as the fruits of the sacraments<sup>9</sup>. In fact, love is the only reality through which two separate human beings can become one without losing their individual identity. Love has a unifying character. It is from this perspective that, the synod of Bishops of Africa considered love as the foundation of the Church as family, (Synod of Bishops, 1993, n. 9) which grows into a genuine child of God, and one becomes brother and sister to each other. Horizontal relations in the Church are grounded on vertical relations.<sup>10</sup> The statement that horizontal relations in the Church are entirely based on vertical relations, means that love of neighbour presupposes love of God and is measured by it (McGarry & Ryan, 2001: 146).

John explains well this dynamics of the horizontal relations being grounded on the vertical one “Anyone who says ‘I love God’ and hates his brother, is a liar, since no one who fails to love the brother whom he can see can love God whom he has not seen” (1Jn. 4: 20-21). From this we can understand that without helping your brothers, to say that “I love God is completely misplaced”. This means we have to be concrete in our life, especially pastors who have to be concrete, before preaching they have to show others practically that they love them. Jesus Christ did not explain to us how God loved us, but He showed us through actions. This family ecclesiology must therefore promote care for

<sup>9</sup> VATICAN COUNCIL II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (4 December 1963), n. 59. From here on ward to indicated this document I will use the abbreviation ‘SC’.

<sup>10</sup> Without our vertical relations we cannot establish horizontal relations base on love, especially when this requires “love your enemy” (Matt 5:44). Divine grace can make the impossible and the unthinkable come true because it effects a momentous transformation in the person, a radical reorientation from selfishness to love.

others, solidarity, relationships, acceptance, dialogue and trust. It must emphasize reconciliation and true communion between different ethnic groups. It should also foster solidarity and the sharing of personnel and resources among the particular Churches without undue ethnic considerations (Nyamiti, 1999:82).

**Dialogue: understanding within the family:** “Dialogue is to be practised first of all within the family of the Church” (EIA n. 65). Dialogue is the basis of good relations and understanding within the family. Misunderstandings thrive where there is absence of dialogue. Dialogue, even more than a pastoral strategy, is an entering into the way in which God has related with His human family from the beginning. Revelation is itself dialogic and dialogue is constitutive of our relationship with God and with each other. God’s revelation of himself in many different ways and our human response in the faith are themselves a dialogue. As all human being are one family in God, it is necessary to cooperate actively and in a positive manner with all Christian denominations and with all men thirsting for true peace (GS n. 90).

All human families have their origins in the family of God, in which God speaks His word, resulting in the third Trinitarian person, who is the Holy Spirit. The life of the Blessed Trinity is an eternal dialogue of love. The Church, on its part, is necessarily modelled on the life of the Trinity, for it is people who are brought into unity from the unity of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit (LG nn. 1-4). The Church is a communion of people with God and with one another in the power of the Spirit. It is a sign and an instrument of communion with God and the unity of the whole human race. Dialogue is a necessary instrument of communion with God and among people. Dialogue, therefore, is constitutive of the Church and of its mission to foster unity of the whole human race.

As the synod fathers said “the attitude of dialogue is the way of being for the Christian within the community and with other believers and men and women of good will.” (Synod of Bishops, 1994, n. 38) The dialogue has to be at all levels, as it is mentioned in the document. Dialogue is to be practised first of all within the family of the Church at all levels: between Bishops. It should also be carried out between Episcopal Conferences or Hierarchical Assemblies and the Apostolic See, between Conferences or Episcopal Assemblies of the different nations of the same continent and those of other continents. Dialogue is also important within each particular Church between the Bishop, the presbyterate, consecrated persons, pastoral workers and the lay faithful. Dialogue is as well crucial between different rites within the same Church. Therefore, it is necessary to develop an ecumenical dialogue with all their baptized brothers and sisters of other Christian denominations. Moreover, dialogue should be in position to embrace all Muslims and African traditional religions (EIA nn. 65-67).

*Gaudium et Spes*, indicates that it is necessary to build the Church as one family of God in Jesus Christ in order to create harmony in the Church. The document acknowledges diversities, and it calls for a dialogue with everyone. Thus, through dialogue the Church presents herself as a symbol of unity and fraternity. If we accept the diversity of the people of God in the brotherhood and sisterhood, we will be able to engage in an ever more fruitful dialogue. Whether they will be pastors or other members of the faithful, since the ties which unite the faithful together are stronger than those which separate them (GS n. 92). *Gaudium et Spes* contends that: “Let us, join our forces and modify our methods in a way

suitable and effective today for achieving this lofty goal, and let us pattern ourselves daily more and more after the spirit of the Gospel and work together in a spirit of brotherhood to serve the human family which has been called to become in Christ Jesus the family of the sons of God” (n. 92). This invitation is relevant even in 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **1.6 African Traditional/Informal way of education and laity**

The lay Christians working in the education field have to live their Christian values. As a more comprehensive education is needed, an education which will demand from teachers and principals such thorough and effort as mere instruction in the sciences does not require. The character must receive proper discipline for its fullest and noblest development. In Africa, a person is not simply good or bad, instead he/she may act in a good or bad way depending on the consequences of his/her action as viewed by the community. One’s act may be good in certain circumstances, while it is evil in other circumstances, depending on its impact upon the relation of the parties involved (Mbiti, 1980:22). According African Traditions, a principal reason for education is concerned with the maintenance of good relationship with others as opposed to the maintenance of justice and individual rights in the other cultures. In Africa what is right is what connects people together; what separates people is wrong. The African Traditional/informal way of education is essentially socially oriented and attached on the wellbeing of social beings, it puts emphasis on the goodness of character that promotes a good life of the community. Therefore, the important point is ethical values. African ethics is a character based ethics that maintains that the quality of the individual’s character is most fundamental (Gbadegesin, 1991:4). Education is imparting moral knowledge to its members, making them aware of the ethical values and principles of the society. The ability to act in accordance with the ethical principles and rules of the society requires the possession of a good character. As a result of this; the African maxims are explicit about the formation of character. The African proverb “*it takes a whole village to raise a child*” is all about character formation, because an individual person has to be educated by the whole community, for the good of the community. The strong sense of brotherhood, solidarity and hospitality is the product of this system of education.

However, the problem is the modern education system does not take in consideration African traditional/informal way of education. As unthinkable as it sounds, it is quite tangible and tragically so, that many of educated Africans view African customs and traditions as barbaric, because of too westernized education system. The current education system does not take in consideration the formation of the character, on the contrary the Africans are subjected into thinking of everything traditional/informal education system as barbaric.

Africa lost the target the moment it abandoned the traditional/informal way of education which underlined on the character of the person for the good of the community. Truly, to be educated in the western way is good. The science, medicine, technology and the rest are amazing. It is one thing to be educated in the western way without leaving the formation of the character and it is another to acquire the western education and completely forget about the essence of the totality of the human person. Education comprises more than knowledge of books. Proper education includes not only mental discipline, but that training which will secure sound moral and correct deportment. In this age of the world the young generation should have strict watch-care. This is where the responsibility of the lay Christian becomes relevant; witness the word of God in words and in deeds. Whatever subject they

teach, they must help in the acquirement of a good character. The traditional/informal way of education must be interfaced with the modern way of education by shaping the children's character for life.

### **1.7 Conclusion and recommendation**

In this the new understanding of the Church as family of Trinity, the mission of the Church is not only the mission of the Church members that is; the bishops, priests or lay people, but also it is the mission of God committed to the members of the Church in which the chief agent in every ministry is the Holy Spirit. It becomes active through the gifts that He never ceases to give, sometimes in the sacraments, sometimes freely as He wills. Therefore, it is not only through the sacraments and the ministries of the Church that the Holy Spirit sanctifies and leads the people of God and enriches them with virtues, but also, allotting His gifts to everyone according to His will (1Cor. 12:11). The faithful receive special graces by the power of the Holy Spirit. Through these gifts, the Holy Spirit makes them fit and ready to undertake the various tasks and offices which contribute towards the renewal and building up of the Church (LG n. 12) Thus, the clergy exercises some offices on account of the sacrament of Order. Though, there are other functions<sup>11</sup> which are more closely related to the clerics but do not necessarily require the sacrament of Order. The lay people are entrusted with responsibilities to participate and collaborate in the missionary activities of the Church by exercising certain functions based on their baptismal priesthood (Cherian, 2010, 65).

Though, the Catholic Church has a strong theology of orders, clear and distinct ordained ministry, we can easily overlook the fact that baptism is a call to ministry. All baptized Catholics have the obligation to explore the ways in which they might serve the mission of the Church. All baptized are members of a priestly people. In a certain sense, priesthood by ordination is to serve the Church. The ordained clergy are called to the ministry twice; on the one hand in their ordination to diaconate or priesthood and on the other hand, by their baptism.

Therefore, in the Church Family of Trinity each one has his/her responsibility to fulfill the mission. Indeed, this is the mission of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. In this perspective, God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. We love because He first loves us. (1 John 4: 16-19). The life of a Christian is first of all a response to the love of God. When we hear the word 'responsibility' we often think of obligations and duties. Nevertheless, Christian responsibility ultimately means a response to that original love of God offered to us in Jesus Christ. Christ expresses this love by incorporating us into his Body by Baptism (Episcopal Commission, 2016, n. 1). We were baptized into one body in a single Spirit, Jews as well as Greeks, slaves as well as free men, and we were all given the same Spirit to drink (1Corn. 12: 12-13).

As we read in *Christifideles Laici* "because of the one dignity flowing from Baptism, each member of the lay faithful, together with ordained ministers and men and women religious, shares a responsibility for the Church's mission" (n. 15). The challenge is that the co-responsibility demands a change in mindset especially concerning the role of lay people in the Church. The lay people are not 'collaborators' of the clergy, but rather people who are really 'co-responsible' for the Church's being and acting (Benedict XVI, 2012). The lay vocation is always devalued when clericalization takes place,

---

<sup>11</sup> Example: exercising the ministry of the word, preside over liturgical prayers, confer baptism etc.. (The Code of Canon Law 230, n. 3)



whether by treating lay people as inferior or by charging them with tasks and characteristics proper to the clergy. The great call of the laity, however, is fundamental to the Church's mission and cannot be abrogated: it is to bring Christ to the world from within; to evangelize it from the inside and outside (Episcopal Commission, 2016, n. 7). Thus, Bishops along with their priests are to preach the message of Christ in such a way that the light of the Gospel will shine on all activities of the faithful. They also give guidance to the lay sisters and brothers so that they may shoulder their responsibility. Thus, working together as co-disciples, all members both ordained and non-ordained carry out the Church's mission in the world. Jesus Christ in His preaching He clearly taught the sons and daughter of God to treat one another as brothers and sisters, and He commanded His Apostles to preach to all peoples the Gospel's message that the human race was to become the Family of God, in which the fullness of the Law would be love (GS n. 32). Therefore, the human being is called to become a member in a single Family of Trinity based on love.

To overcome the problems of today in the Church particularly clericalism, fundamentalism, legalism and papalism which paralyzes the lay Christians, it is necessary to concentrate on the foundation of the Church; that is the Trinitarian God. In this way the ordained and non-ordained Christians by their Baptism will participate in Christ's Priestly, Prophetic and Kingly nature.

If lecturers and people charged with responsibilities in the university recognize, in their participation of Christ's priestly, prophetic and kingly nature and ready to witness, they will feel the necessity of having an equal interest in the physical, mental, moral and spiritual education of his/her students. In order to exert the right influence, he/she should have perfect control over himself/herself, and his/her heart should be richly imbued with love for his/her pupils, which will be seen in his/her looks, words and acts. Paul said: "Whatever you eat or drink and whatever else you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1Cor. 10:31). In the Biblical view there are no secular disciplines nor secular subjects. Setting up a spiritual/secular dualism would in fact, create a false dichotomy. A baptized educator has to recognize and affirm that "Yahweh Himself is the giver of wisdom; from his mouth he issues knowledge and understanding" (Proverbs 2:6). Therefore, truth begins with God, not with man. God is the source of truth.

Therefore, the baptized educators have to form the character of the students. It is insufficient to simply convey knowledge, promote understanding, or impart skills and competencies. Teaching/lecturing is not merely a job, a career, nor a profession. As a Christian it is a vocation, a divine calling. Lecturer/teachers are certainly disqualified to educate properly, if they have not first learned the lessons of self-control, patience, gentleness and love.

## References

- BENEDICT XVI (2005), Encyclical letter *Deus Caritas Est*.  
 BENEDICT XVI (2012), "Message on the Occasion of the Sixth Ordinary Assembly of the International Forum of Catholic Action".  
 BOFF LEONARDO (2000), *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community*, Maryknoll (NY), Orbis Books.  
 CHERIAN THUNDUPARAMPIL (2010), "Rights and Obligations of the Laity in the Mission of the Church," in *IUSTITIA*, 1(1&2), 59-83.  
 DULLES AVERY (2002), *Models of the Church*, New York, Doubleday.

- ELOCHUKWU E. UZUKWU (1996), “The Birth and Development of a Local Church, difficulties and Signs of Hope,” in *The African Synod Documents, Reflections, Perspectives*, Maryknoll (NY), Orbis Book, 3-8.
- EPISCOPAL COMMISSION FOR DOCTRINE CANADIAN CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS, September 8, 2016.
- FRANCEIS (2013), Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*.
- FUELLENBACH JOHN (2002), *Church community for the Kingdom*, Maryknoll (NY), Orbis Books.
- GBADEGESIN, SEGUN, *African Philosophy: Traditional Yoruba Philosophy and Contemporary African Realities*, New York: Peter Lang, 1991.
- GIANFRANCO CALABRESE (2000), *Per un'Ecclesiologia Trinitaria. Il Mistero di Dio e il Mistero della Chiesa per la Salvezza dell'uomo*, Bologna, EDB.
- HEALEY JOSEPH – SYBERTZ DONALD (1995), *Towards an African narrative theology*, Nairobi, Paulines.
- HEARNE BRIAN (1976), “Theological reflections on the objectives of Christian community,” in *African Ecclesiastical Review*, 18 (5), 277-285.
- JOHN PAUL II (1988), Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*.
- JOHN PAUL II (1994), Discourse at the Symposium, *The Participation of the lay faithful in the Priestly Ministry*.
- JOHN PAUL II (1995), Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*.
- JOHN PAUL II (1996), Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*.
- JOHN S. MBITI (1980), *African Religion and Philosophy*, London, Heinemann.
- JOSEPH RATZINGER (1993), *The meaning of Christian brotherhood*, San Francisco, Ignatius.
- KARUVELIL GEORGE (2006), “Love and God-Talk,” in *Vidyajyoti journal of theological reflection*, 70(5), 326-341.
- Mayala Anthony (1994), “Ninth General Congregation,” in *Synodus Episcoporum Bulletin Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Nishops*, 6-7.
- MCGARRY CECIL – RODRIGO MEJIA – VALERIAN SHIRIMA (1993), *A light on our path a pastoral contribution to the Synod for Africa*, Nairobi, St. Paul Publications.
- MCGARRY CECILL - RYAN PATRICK (2001), *Inculturating the Church in Africa, theological and practical perspectives*, Limuru, Kolbe Press.
- NYAMITI CHARLES (1999), “The Trinity as source and soul of African Family Ecclesiology,” in *African Christian Studies*, 15(1), 34-92.
- PRIMAVESI ANNE (1992), *The weekday missal*, London, Harper Collins Publishers.
- SCHÜSSLER WERNER (2005), “Eros and agape,” in *Theology digest*, 52(1), 27-34.
- SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL (1963), Constitution on the Sacred liturgy *Sacrosanctum concilium*.
- SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL (1965), Decree, *Ad Gentes*.
- SYNOD OF BISHOPS (1993), Special Assembly for Africa, *Istrumentum Laboris*.
- SYNOD OF BISHOPS (1994), Special Assembly for Africa, *Message of the Synod*.
- VATICAN COUNCIL II (1964), Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*.
- VATICAN COUNCIL II (1965), Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*.
- VATICAN COUNCIL II (1965), Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium Et Spes*.