

Catholicism at the Crossroads

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How the
Laity Can
Save the
Church



Paul
Lakeland



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Try to define a layperson without using the word not "cannot" "preach or say mass, is "not" "a priest, is "not" "in a position of leadership in the church. This generally negative or passive understanding of the laity was epitomized in a statement of Pope Pius X: "The one duty of the multitude [i.e., the laity] is to allow themselves to be led and, like a docile flock, to follow the Pastors." The Second Vatican Council, with its emphasis on the priesthood of all believers rooted in baptism, changed all that. Yet, writes Paul Lakeland, "many of our bishops and not a few of the lay members of the church are attracted to a dangerously incomplete vision of Catholicism...one that sidesteps the major themes and key insights of Vatican II." In "Catholicism at the Crossroads," he teases out themes first developed in a much more formal way in his prize-winning "The Liberation of the Laity." In his new book he is "talking to ordinary Catholics in language that requires no special expertise in theology and does not necessitate constant reference to a dictionary." Baptism, says Lakeland, not priestly ordination, is the basis for all mission and ministry, and the mission of those baptized into Christ is to be the sacrament of God's love in a world rife with violence and brutal inequity. The specific mission of the laity is to the world, whereas the mission of the clergy is to the household of the faith. Yet lay people can't leave "church business" exclusively to the clergy, and the clergy can't leave the church's "worldly mission" exclusively to the laity. The key to resolving these overlapping responsibilities is by becoming an adult church, an open church in an open society. In pursuing this goal, Lakeland develops "ten steps toward a more adult church."

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