

REVIEW OF THE ORIGINAL SLOVAK VERSION BY MGR. Z. VASKOVA

The resolutions of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) constitute a new era in the life of the Catholic Church. The Council did not deal with the inner problems of the Church only but opened itself also to non-Christian religions and to the whole mankind. It identified itself with all problems of today's world.

One of the most important questions Council dealt with was the laity question.

Council declared laity's position in the Church and their calling and mission in the secularized world in three documents:

1. APOSTOLICAM ACTUOSITATEM (AA),
2. LUMEN GENTIUM (LG),
3. GAUDIUM ET SPES (GS).

Despite an unequivocal language in these documents (AA, LG, GS) many unclearnesses exist until today. In the daily practise the Council documents are often interpreted differently by priest and by competent lay-people. This sometimes leads to misinterpretations and even to tensions. In such a situation many Christians, both priests and lay-people, welcomed an original and top present-day book on laity problems.

The book title THE LAITY AS CHRISTIANS BY PROFESSION attracted already at first sight attention and curiosity. Author of this book is Dr. med. Jan Guncaga, president of the national FEDERATION OF SLOVAK CHRISTIAN INTELLECTUALS (USKI), with its seat in Bratislava.

Dr. Guncaga is well known as a firm advocate of the Second Vatican Council ideas. In his work he concentrates with all strength on the laity problems. He sacrificed the greatest part of his life to lay apostolate as Christian worker, student, political prisoner, physician and scientist. His lifelong experience in the lay apostolate sphere is written down in the following works:

1. UNCONVENTIONAL CHRISTIAN, Luc, Bratislava 1997,
2. UNCONVENTIONAL POLITICS AND SLOVAK IDENTITY, M. Vasko, Presov 1998,
3. THE LAITY AS CHRISTIANS BY PROFESSION, M. Vasko, Presov 1999.

I shall concentrate myself on the third book. In my brief review I would like to emphasize the essential ideas and their originality.

The content of the book is divided in three parts:

1. ORIGINAL CHRISTIAN IN TODAY'S WORLD,
2. CHRISTIANIZATION OF THE PROFANE WORLD,
3. BRIEF INFORMATION ABOUT THE FEDERATION OF SLOVAK CHRISTIAN INTELLECTUALS (USKI).

• The first part consists of the following chapters:

1. Today's world, 2. Christian in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, 3. Secular and spiritual sphere in Christian's life.

• The second part contains six chapters:

1. The Christianity of secular professions, 2. The Christianity of human work, 3. The Christianity of secular profession, 4. The Christianity of various secular professions, 5. The Christianity in politics, 6. The Christianity in economy.

• The third part describes briefly the activities of the national FEDERATION OF SLOVAK CHRISTIAN INTELLECTUALS (USKI) with regard to 1. education and formation of committed Christians and 2. Christianization of secular professions in the spirit of the Council.

I.

- In the first chapter of the first part - TODAY'S WORLD - the author analyses the contemporary situation as an era of secularization, neoliberalism, utilitarian consumerism, pluralism, social contrasts and as post-Conciliar and post-totalitarian era.
- In the second chapter CHRISTIAN IN THE SPIRIT OF THE SECOND

VATICAN COUNCIL the author characterizes the committed Christian in detail:

„A committed Christian works consciously and wisely but also with pleasure and confidence not only for his own integral well-being but also for his neighbour's good, for the world's integral well-being in all profane spheres: in politics, economy, art, science, culture, ecology.

A committed Christian is an active Christian who perceives his Christianity in everyday life as God's calling.

A committed Christian is a conscious Christian who bears witness to Christ by his profession or job and by his life style.

A committed Christian develops his faith consciously, creative and in harmony with all his daily activities.

A committed Christian inspires for Christ also the others - starting with the very most neighbours in family and colleagues in occupation.

A committed Christian cultivates his professional spirituality by systematic self-formation.

A committed Christian educates himself systematically in theology in order to bring faith and science in harmony."

In the same chapter Guncaga draws reader's attention to

1. the different attitude of the Church towards the laity before and after the Council on the one hand and
2. the different position of the laity towards the Church before and after the Council on the other hand.

BEFORE THE COUNCIL

the laity regarded the Church as a „solicitous mother".

From her one can always expect everything.

In the view of the PRE-CONCILLIAR LAITY there are active Church members, i. e. clergy and order members who are responsible for the PASSIVE CHURCH MEMBERS, i. e. laity.

These passive lay-people are content with their SECONDARY ROLE of a well „served flock". Their daily, profane work dispense them from the apostolic joint responsibility for the mission of the whole Church in the secular world.

According to these passive Church members the Church is a community of the „spiritual state" people, i. e. priests, bishops, cardinals and the pope.

And such a Church is regarded by many believers even after the Council as a „service station" where they „carry out" their sacraments and fulfil their duties.

The POST-CONCILIAR ATTITUDE OF THE COMMITTED CHRISTIANS towards the Church on the one hand and the ATTITUDE OF THE CHURCH towards the laity on the other hand constitute a literal revolution.

The active Christians, committed Christians see themselves as equivalent and responsible Church members. They see their *primary sphere of activity in the everyday, secularized world*. In this world they bear the responsibility for the Church mission as Christ's missionaries in various secular spheres, i. e. in their respective secular professions.

The real problem regarding the committed Christians is the fact that there are only very few of them. They represent, unfortunately, an absolute minority of the Church members - only few per mil (in contrast to the 90% passive members!).

According to Guncaga the education and formation of committed Christians is one of the highest Church priorities for the new evangelization.

- In the third chapter Guncaga stresses the UNITY OF EVERYDAY LIFE AND FAITH. He describes the spirituality of everyday life impressively: „The spirituality of everyday life begins in the Christian marriage and family." According to the author, the marriage is a form of God's calling: „As a sacrament the marriage is a lifelong process of mutual self-cognition, self-giving, self-perfection and self-sanctification.

The Christian family as the home Church is the place where the education and formation of God's children starts quite naturally."

II.

The entire second part of the book with its six original chapters represents the core of the book. It is dedicated to the CHRISTIANIZATION OF SECULAR PROFESSIONS. The author underlines two most important prerequisites for an effective Christianization of secular professions:

1. An authentic Christian attitude towards human life,
2. Active Christians, committed Christians, Christians by profession.

According to Guncaga, the authentic *Christian attitude towards human life* is based on the unity of faith and everyday life:

„The authentic Christian faith refers to the whole, everyday, secular life -to everything about which man thinks, to everything what he plans and undertakes. The authentic Christian view understands man not only as an individual soul-body unity but also as a social creature."

Regarding the committed Christians, Christians by profession, the author does not stop repeating how necessary it is to educate and form them:

„Committed Christians are not born. They have to be educated and formed. This education and formation is by no means less important than the education and formation of clerics."

Guncaga describes also quite unequivocally the *primary and secondary tasks of committed Christians*:

„According to the conventional, current view, the *Church professions of lay-people*, as for example catechists, pastoral assistants, lay theologians, deacons, organists, sextons and members of various Church bodies, are esteemed much higher than the *secular professions of ordinary lay-believers*. Such an attitude corresponds to an anachronistic, dualistic attitude.

The primary sphere of activity of committed Christians (Christifideles laici) is the concrete, material world with all spheres of human life (culture, science, politics, economy).

The profane sphere with its secular professions is the sphere where the clergy cannot replace the laity (*irreplaceable position of the laity*), in contrast to the above mentioned Church professions where the laity can be replaced by the clergy (*replaceable position of the laity*)."

On the basis of the author's own experience as president of a national federation of Christian intellectuals, Guncaga presents also the METHOD OF CHRISTIANIZATION OF SECULAR PROFESSIONS:

„In principle it is a question of *systematic meetings* of committed Christians of the same profession (e. g. jurists, teachers, politicians, physicians, historians, artists, entrepreneurs) at local, regional, national and international levels.

The programme of these meetings concerns two areas: 1. professional Christian spirituality and 2. professional Christian morals.

PROFESSIONAL CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY concentrates on spiritual life, on personal spirituality - *asceticism* and professional common spirituality.

PROFESSIONAL CHRISTIAN MORALS makes an effort to *characterize*, define the Christianity of the respective profession.

The elaboration and description of individual characteristics, properties and behavioural patterns takes place in small or bigger group communities.

The efficacy of such common group formation is magnified through common motivation and common control."

The author stresses the fact that „the individual signs of Christianity or a set of signs representing the Christianity of the respective profession as well as the stand-points of committed Christians of various professions towards current issues should be published and adequately promoted in public life.

The promotion takes place first at local, later at regional, national and international levels.

For the time being there is not much experience with such a common group formation."

In Guncaga's view, „self-formation" is the *core* of the process of adult education generally and the *heart* in the process of formation of committed Christians particularly."

The author closes this central chapter with the section the OBJECTIVE OF THE CHRISTIANIZATION OF SECULAR PROFESSIONS: „To penetrate, to impregnate all spheres of life with the Christian spirit, with the spirit of unity of faith and life. This penetration means the *harmonization of today's civilization with Christianity.*”

- In the second chapter Guncaga characterizes the CHRISTIANITY OF HUMAN WORK. In his view work should be seen „ 1. as a vocation from God, 2. as participation in the creative God's work, 3. as a participation in Christ's messianic work.”

- In the third chapter the author unconventionally analyses the CHRISTIANITY OF THE SECULAR PROFESSION. According to him „the secular profession constitutes a threefold service: 1. service to God, Creator of life, 2. service to mankind's and the world's development, 3. service to a neighbour in combating pain and sufferings”.

- The fourth chapter contains interesting positions of several respondents to the question WHERE DO YOU SEE THE CHRISTIANITY OF YOUR PROFESSION?

- The fifth chapter deals with the CHRISTIANITY IN POLITICS.

On an admirable scanty room the author tackles the most important questions of Christian's position to politics. He stresses the fact that „there is not a specific Christian politics but only politics in the Christian spirit”.

Two points are particularly emphasized in this chapter: 1. distinct comparison between the conventional and the unconventional politics and 2. the difference between the morals of an individual and the political morals which relates to questions and solutions of the whole society.

- In the sixth chapter Guncaga analyses the CHRISTIANITY IN ECONOMY.

He draws attention to the contemporary neo-liberalism on the one hand and outlines a new movement in economy - *communitarianism* as a way out of *individualistic economism* on the other hand.

As a SUMMARY of my review I would like to point out the essential distinguishing originality marks of the book, they are:

1. The term Committed Christian,
2. The term Laity as Christians by profession,
3. The term The Christianity,
4. The term Committed Christians as Christ's missionaries in the secular sphere,
5. The term Christianization of secular professions,
6. Unconventional politics, the Christianity in politics,
7. Unconventional economy, the Christianity in economy.

In my view Guncaga's work should be recommended to:

1. all Christians.
2. committed Christians,
3. priests and members of religious orders,
4. theology students,
5. catechists,
6. teachers,
7. politicians,
8. entrepreneurs,
9. all who are involved in adult education,
10. all who are interested in today's authentic Christianity.