

The Relevance of Christian Education for Clergy and Laity

“Christian education as an internal activity of the church is concerned to prepare and sustain the community in the life of faith. Such Christian education is not only an education about Christian faith, but also education in the Christian faith. Through the ages of Christian education in the church may be said to have had three characteristic features:

1. The acceptance that a direct experience of the Christian life is a necessary precursor to any education aiming to support persons in living the life themselves.
2. The focused and continuous nature of the provision of education.
3. Both teacher and taught are held together in a relationship that is personal and reflects their common positions as members of the community of faith.”¹

The basis for a Christian education program is given by Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20: making disciples, baptizing them, and “teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” R. B. Kuiper has observed, “A noteworthy feature of the great commission is that it bids the apostles and the church of all ages to *teach*. In fact, *teaching* is spoken of as their chief missionary task. They are to go in order to *teach*. *Going* is but a means to the end of *teaching*. And they are to *baptize* those who accept their *teaching*. But they must *teach*, whether or not men give heed. And, significantly, they are told not once, but twice, to *teach*”²

The Holy Bible provides scriptural support for one to believe; that our survival in this world is dependent on Christian education for clergy and laity. The author believes Hosea 4:6 states it best, My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy

1 John Bowden, *Encyclopedia of Christianity* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2005), 369.

2 Rienk Bouke Kuiper, *The doctrine of Biblical church: the glorious body of Christ* (Seoul: Sung Kwang Pub. Co., 1978), 45.

God, I will also forget thy children. Therefore, she believes that Christian education will always be relevant for the entire Body of Christ.

Biblical View of Clergy and Laity

“The term *laity* has often been used in contrast to the term *clergy*. The first denotes the role of church members who are not employed by the church; the second defines the role of those who are employed in the services of the church. This cannot help but lead to the idea that the primary responsibility for the work of the church rests upon the clergy. However, the Biblical view of the laity is quite different. In the New Testament, the singular form of the word *laos* is used almost exclusively when referring to the church as God's people. (See [Hebrews 4:9](#); [11:25](#); [1 Peter 2:10](#).)

This points to a very important characteristic of the Biblical view of the laity. It does not refer to a group within the church but to the entire church itself. *Laos*, used in the context of the church, literally means "God's own people." It is nowhere used in contrast to others within the church.”³

Gottfried Oosterwal develops this point clearly, stating: "The terms laity and clergy in the Bible are used for one and the same people. These are not each other's opposites, or even distinct from one another. The laity is clergy. As God's chosen people, they are called laity." He goes on to show the proper distinction between the terms, leading us to see more clearly the intended role of the entire membership of the church: "One might also say that the term laity stresses in particular the privileges of being chosen by God from among the many others to the *exalted status of God's own people*, separated and different from the world; while the term clergy

³ "What Is the Biblical View of the Laity?" Ministry Magazine accessed October 1, 2017, <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/1977/12/what-is-the-biblical-view-of-the-laity>.

emphasizes in particular the function and role of the laity, namely to share their gift of grace with others. Laity stands for the status of God's people. Ministry is their function."⁴

Martin Luther wrote: "Every Christian man is a priest, and every Christian woman is a priestess, whether they be young or old, master or servant, mistress or maid, scholar or illiterate. All Christians are, properly speaking, members of the ecclesiastical order, and there is no difference between them except as they hold different offices."⁵

"The Greek word translated "clergy" is *kleros*, which refers to the inheritance laid up for all the saints ([Colossians 1:12](#); [Acts 26:18](#)). Believers as a whole make up the *kleros*, inheriting forgiveness of sins and the power of the Holy Spirit. Biblically speaking, the clergy are not a special group of elite leaders. Paul considered himself a "brother" and "fellow servant" with Tychicus ([Colossians 4:7](#)), Epaphras ([Colossians 1:7](#)), Epaphroditus ([Philippians 2:25](#)), and Silvanus ([1 Peter 5:12](#)). The apostles never talked in terms of "us" and "them" in the context of serving Christ. They considered themselves to be fellow laborers with all believers in the church.

It was not until the third century that "clergy" was employed to designate a limited number of persons who functioned in the church. Gradually, the professional, full-time ministers were seen as a special, separate class instead of as fellow servants of Jesus Christ. Out of this mindset grew the hierarchical system in which the distance between clergy and laity increased, seen in the use

4 Oosterwal, "The Role of the Laity," *Andrews University Focus*, vol. 9, no. 3, supplement (July, August 1973).

5 Home Missionary Department - General Conference Of S. D. A, *The lay preacher and his work* (Tennessee, 1940), 9

of titles such as "Pastor Smith," "Reverend Jones," and "Father Brown." Such a distance is not biblical."⁶



⁶ "Does the Bible make a distinction between clergy and laity?" CompellingTruth.org, , accessed October 1, 2017, <https://www.compellingtruth.org/clergy-laity.html>.