


2015

Extraordinary Love in the Lives of Lay People

Dennis M. Doyle

University of Dayton, ddoyle1@udayton.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.udayton.edu/rel_fac_pub

 Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), [Ethics and Political Philosophy Commons](#), [Other Religion Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

eCommons Citation

Doyle, Dennis M., "Extraordinary Love in the Lives of Lay People" (2015). *Religious Studies Faculty Publications*. 93.
https://ecommons.udayton.edu/rel_fac_pub/93

This Book Chapter is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Religious Studies at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Religious Studies Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of eCommons. For more information, please contact frice1@udayton.edu, mschlangen1@udayton.edu.

Extraordinary Love in the Lives of Lay People

Dennis M. Doyle

The College Theology Society (CTS), initially called the Society of Catholic College Teachers of Sacred Doctrine, was founded mainly by religious and clergy in the early 1950s to support those who taught college-level theology to Catholics in non-seminary settings. Sometimes CTS, in comparison with another group, is said to be relatively more lay-oriented. What this actually means, I think, is that for the CTS, the college classroom, populated mainly by lay people, was the primary locus for carrying out the task of teaching theology. The main goal was to promote the religious formation of Catholic lay people. Given some of the initial statements of purpose, it is not too much of a stretch to say that CTS was founded to support the apostolate of the laity in their mission to transform the world.

Religious orders have had a direct and formative influence in my life. My own Catholic education came from a mixture of clergy, religious, and lay people. Over time I have been taught by Sisters of St. Joseph, Oblates of St. Francis de Sales, and Christian Brothers. I have taught for thirty years at the University of Dayton, which was founded by the Marianists and is imbued with their charism. I once took a month-long sabbatical at the College of St. Benedict in Minnesota, where I ate and prayed with Benedictine Sisters several times a day.

For this essay I have been given an assignment, one that came directly from a religious sister. It is deep in my psyche that I pay special attention to what sister had to say. I have been asked to do several things:

1. to focus on the New Ecclesial Movements, particularly in regard to their relationship to consecrated communities;

2. to speak as a lay theologian who specializes in ecclesiology;
3. to reference works by Brendan Leahy and by Julian Porteous;
4. *not* to focus on any one Ecclesial Movement, but rather to discuss the connections between consecrated communities and New Ecclesial Communities overall.

My main thesis is that the New Ecclesial Movements are a dynamic and significant phenomenon in the Catholic Church today, and that how one understands and evaluates them will be determined to a great extent according to where one stands in relation to the culture wars that are being fought within the Catholic Church as well as in the larger world. Many Catholics are divided into camps today. I will argue that those who see in the Movements the working of the Holy Spirit have many true things to say, but so do those critics who raise alarms about the dangers. Since there are many gifts but the same Spirit, I discern a call for all Catholics to think and act in ways that transcend the camps.

The directory of the Pontifical Council for the Laity currently lists 121 approved international associations. Still, there are many national and regional movements that are not listed. A few of the groups explicitly reject being called a "Movement," a concern that I can accommodate when writing about one group but not when writing about these groups collectively. Each of the groups has a founder who offered a particular charism, an extraordinary gift that motivates and informs the community. Many of the groups were founded by lay people, though a few were founded by priests. Most of these groups are oriented toward supporting the faith of lay people as they live out the mission of the Church. Some of these groups focus more on evangelization—understood as bringing in new members—whereas others focus more on service or social contributions. They are not tied to any particular diocese or bishop, but they express a direct loyalty to the pope. Some of these groups include members of various Christian traditions. There are a few groups that began as lay movements but which have become religious orders.

The word "new" is applied most directly to Movements that were founded after the Council, but practically speaking those

groups founded since the Second World War are also included. In addition, groups founded in the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s which are not "new" when considered individually cannot be ignored when thinking collectively about the New Ecclesial Movements.

There is a great deal of diversity among the New Ecclesial Movements, and many members do not like to have their group lumped in with other groups. Communion and Liberation is very different from Focolare, which is very different from the Neocatechumenal Way, which is very different from the Catholic Worker Movement. Regnum Christi is very different from Sant'Egidio, which is very different from the Legion of Mary, which is very different from the Community of St. John. I will acknowledge that writing in general about the Movements is problematic and am grateful for the studies that exist that explore individual movements. We need more of those. However, the phenomenon of the New Ecclesial Movements does exist, and it is important to address this phenomenon in an overall way.

What do these Movements have to offer? They offer to their members a deep sense of belonging driven by a shared commitment to a mission. Some Catholics may find this experience in a parish, but probably not a large percentage, and usually not with the same level of intensity. The Movements offer their members a network of relationships, a sense of purpose and of self-worth, a sense of being included in something important. Many members believe that they "once were lost and now are found." Many testify to an experience of closeness with God and with each other through Christ and the Holy Spirit. If we are to reflect theologically upon and evaluate these Movements within the context of the larger church, this testimony must be admitted as a major piece of evidence.

The Movements, however, have also come with some problems, a point acknowledged by most members. One of the problems is a tendency toward a spiritual elitism and an exclusivist attitude toward non-members. To demonstrate this point, I will relate a personal experience I had of feeling excluded at a Catholic Charismatic prayer meeting. The Charismatic Renewal does not like to be called a Movement, and I agree that it is something bigger and deeper than any one movement. One can consider this just

Gothic Christ. Joe and I attended one of these services.

There were many people there dressed in black. A few were Christians who liked to dress Goth. Most were non-religious Goths who had seen the service advertised in the program or on flyers and who were curious. I found it to be a brilliant prayer service. The leaders read from Ecclesiastes, from accounts of Christ's passion and death, from Poe's "The Raven," and from John of the Cross's *Dark Night of the Soul*. They were trying to demonstrate that Christians share with the Goths a struggle with despair and temptations toward nihilism. They ended with an account of Christ's Resurrection as an expression of their faith that carries them beyond the darkness.

Joe was perplexed. The group he had traveled to meet was not engaging in hard-sell evangelization. Joe had expected to be out on the streets engaging Goths in debate and possibly converting a few. He spoke of his desire to "hit them with the gospel" and to counter each falsehood they would utter with the truth. But on the few occasions that he actually conversed with Goths, they would reply to him that they are people of peace and that they love and include everyone, even those who hate them. (I wonder where they got that radical idea.) When I saw Joe off on a bus, he was frustrated and confused.

On the one hand, I thought that Joe's faith showed some room for intellectual growth, especially when it came to relating his faith to the secular world. As Bernard Lonergan explains, it is possible, even quite common, to be religiously and morally converted without being intellectually converted.² On the other hand, Joe embodied such authenticity and strength in his religious faith that I felt that I gained more from him each time we met than he did from me with my sophisticated intellectual clarifications. I used to tell him that people like him and I need each other. He needed some clarification of thought. I needed exposure to his faith energy.

I realize that my personal examples do not begin to get at the rich and diverse realities of the wide range of New Ecclesial Movements. I do not want to claim that everyone involved in a Movement is intellectually unconverted. My examples may help, though, in expressing something about where I am coming from and what my main theme is. I think that we all need each other, both religiously and intellectually.

The Movements and Vatican II

Commentators on the New Ecclesial Movements differ in how they see the Movements in relation to the Second Vatican Council. Vatican II significantly developed the meaning and tasks of the three traditional groupings of clergy, religious, and laity. These categories remain very real. Vatican II also offered us, however, a tool for seeing beyond these categories to something deeper: the universal call to holiness. This notion puts us in touch with a fundamental reality that transcends inner-ecclesial boundaries. The universal call to holiness neither erases nor replaces the reality of the groupings of clergy, religious, and laity, but rather helps to contextualize them. Priests, religious, and lay people share a common call to holiness that includes a fundamental equality in spiritual dignity. In various ways, the Council promoted an increase in collaboration between clergy and laity as well as between religious and laity.

The universal call to holiness is also known as Christian discipleship. The mark of the true disciple is love. In the chapter of *Lumen Gentium* on the universal call to holiness, after a general discussion of Christian discipleship and love, two “exceptional” forms of love are introduced. The first is martyrdom. The second is following the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience. “Exceptional” love names forms of Christian discipleship that represent an especially close conformity to the life of Christ. What makes them “exceptional” is that not all Christians are called to follow these paths. To speak of exceptional love, however, does not imply a relative devaluation of some “ordinary” or “regular” Christian love. The language of love does not work well within a zero-sum game. If I have love, and I give you love, I end up not with less love but with more. In the case of Christian discipleship, there is no such thing as plain old ordinary love.

All Christians are called to live out in discipleship the love that originates as an offer from God. Christians experience the love of God through Creation, through the Incarnation, through the life, passion, and death of Christ, through the Resurrection, through Pentecost, through the sacraments, and in many other ways. This love of God is not “exceptional,” in that it is offered

to everyone, but it is no ordinary love. It is an extraordinary love that most Christians most of the time live out within the ordinary circumstances of everyday life.

This love is not simply an individual love, nor is it a love intended to be confined within established Christian communities. This love is directed toward the transformation of the world. One of the main goals of the Second Vatican Council was to awaken the laity to its task of transforming the world. The Church was to become as a leaven in the world. As stated in *Lumen Gentium* (33), "The laity are called in a special way to make the Church present and operative in those places and circumstances where only through them can it become the salt of the earth." This goal of the council is what the late Bishop James Malone of Youngstown meant when he remarked to me many years ago that the biggest disappointment experienced by many bishops after the council has been that the laity have in large part yet to take up their task of transforming the world.

One might almost get the impression that the bishops and the theological experts at Vatican II were conspiring to start a radical Movement; this is because they were. I remember years ago hearing a Marianist brother joke about how when you awaken a sleeping giant, you have to do so very carefully. The sleeping giant he was referring to is the Catholic laity. It is an idea that has strong preconciliar roots not only in theology but also in practice, particularly in Catholic Action. Vatican II conspired to unleash the universal call to holiness—which in its explicitly Christian form dates back to the New Testament—with the intention of instigating the "Mother of all Movements." The biblical movement, the liturgical movement, the patristic movement, and the ecumenical movement all lead into the Movement known as the universal call to holiness. And the task of the laity to transform the world is the main focal point of this Movement.

How are we to understand the meaning of the word "world," that is the "world" that the laity were supposed to transform? They were not talking so much about the world as creation but rather the historical and social, humanly constructed, modern world. In *Gaudium et Spes* and other documents, the world is the sometimes positive, sometimes negative, always ambiguous sphere which provides the historical arena in which Christians

along with all other people are living out their lives. The Church is to read the signs of the times, engage in dialogue, and seek out new forms of collaboration in addressing social ills.

Although Vatican II did not focus on the parish, many Catholics came to envision the call for the laity to transform the world in tandem with parish renewal. Religious education was shifted toward an adult-centered model intended to engage the entire parish population. The Rite of Christian Initiation was to function as a dynamic small faith community that would foster the rise of various types of faith communities that would carry out ministries in the parish and beyond. National programs such as Christ Renews His Parish and Renew were founded to aid such efforts. There was to be more participation in parish governance. Overall, the parish was to become something of a training ground and a support group for Catholics to live out their Christian lives in the areas of family, work, and the larger society. One can find many examples of noteworthy success in living out this vision in particular parishes, but the overall current state of Catholic parishes, for various complex reasons, is itself a mixed bag.

But what a vision this was, especially as it emerged in the 1960s and 70s. The Catholic laity had come of age and was to continually prepare for and engage in its apostolic mission. There was to be a new openness to other Christians and to people of other religions. There was to be a serious engagement of Christian teaching with the natural and human sciences. There was to be a war on poverty that would eliminate it from the planet.

However, a period of some confusion and disorientation followed the Council. Catholics clashed over issues such as authority, sexual morality, and the role of women in the Church. Specifically in the United States, the Catholic subculture collapsed. Many educated and relatively affluent Catholics continued to move to the suburbs. There was a sharp decline in the number of clergy and religious, and also a decline in the number and affordability of Catholic schools. A wave of political conservatism resulted in many Catholic Democrats becoming "Reagan Republicans."

What almost no one envisioned or expected was the rapid growth of the Ecclesial Movements. There are deep connections between the Movements and religious orders. We can see this especially if we approach religious orders with less emphasis on

the taking of vows and more emphasis upon the living out of the gospel in a way shaped by a founder's charism in the context of a community. Somewhat like the martyrs, those in religious orders live out the extraordinary love of Christian discipleship in an exceptional way. I would add that those in the Movements can be said to manifest an exceptional form of love, for not everyone is called to join a Movement that makes such serious and particular demands upon one's beliefs and lifestyle.

As mentioned above, interpretations of how the Movements relate to Vatican II vary. I will focus on two of these interpretations.

Julian Porteous

Julian Porteous, archbishop of Hobart, Tasmania, has had a long involvement in the Charismatic Renewal and in fostering the growth of ecclesial movements, and has written a pastoral and theologically reflective work, *New Wine and Fresh Skins*.³ He examines the New Ecclesial Movements against the background of the history of monastic and mendicant orders and finds many similarities. Many religious orders have historically been founded as movements called forth to face particular challenges in their time. Many of these movements have been founded by lay people and only gradually developed into communities of the vowed. Porteous, who clearly respects the distinction between clergy, religious, and lay, here uses the New Ecclesial Movements as a tool for seeing beyond overly reified versions of these categories. Briefly, he views the rise of monasticism as paralleling the social acceptance of a Christianity that as a result becomes too easy. The Benedictines arose to offer an alternative to rules that were too strict and even oppressive. The Franciscans offered a Catholic alternative to the Waldensians. The Dominicans set out to educate the Catholic faithful in response to the Cathars. Porteous explains how these orders originated as ecclesial movements in their own time.

Porteous draws upon the historical fluidity between lay movements and religious orders in order to see in the New Ecclesial Movements a contemporary version of what Christians have always done. He explains their connection with Vatican II by exploring four conciliar themes: the People of God, the common priesthood of the faithful, the universal call to holiness, and the

importance of charisms.⁴ He judges that these themes express the ecclesiology of Vatican II, and that the New Ecclesial Movements represent a realization of this theology.

Porteous offers a strongly favorable assessment of the New Ecclesial Movements. He spends some time examining standard criticisms concerning recruitment policies, secrecy, and pressuring members, but ultimately he minimizes such difficulties as representing immaturities that are being addressed as these Movements mature. Porteous discerns that the New Ecclesial Movements represent the working of the Holy Spirit in our time to address the problems of our age. Yes, he acknowledges, there are some difficulties within the Movements, but all important developments come with growing pains.

I find much that is true in Porteous' analysis. My only major criticism of his approach (though I think that this one difficulty somewhat colors his entire view) is that Porteous specifically identifies the key problem of our time as "the increasingly secular environment of the world."⁵ He explains: "Our society has deconstructed the human person. The forces of secular feminism and homosexuality, in particular, have sought to propose another way of being human that blurs the true nature of the human person, especially in the character of masculinity and femininity."⁶ This statement reveals a simplistic and one-sided portrayal of the secular world. The secular environment is characterized by the presence of the negative forces of secular feminism and homosexuality. Porteous' final overall evaluation of the New Ecclesial Movements places them squarely on one side of the culture wars. His own judgment as a strong supporter of the Movements lends credence, whether fairly or unfairly, to the stereotype that, despite a certain range of diversity, the Movements on the whole are not only religiously conservative but politically and culturally conservative as well.

Massimo Faggioli

Massimo Faggioli offers a contrasting view. He raises an alarm concerning the problematic nature of the New Ecclesial Movements and their role in the postconciliar church.⁷ Faggioli is somewhat more focused on Europe and some other parts of the

world than on the United States. He portrays the Movements as characterized "by the refusal of the impulse of Vatican II for a new synthesis between tradition and modernity."⁸ He details various negative trends: a nostalgia for a pre-Vatican II or even pre-French Revolution church; more loyalty to the pope and to the church universal than to the bishops and the local churches; a thoroughly negative view of the human social world resulting in a rejection of efforts at inculturation as threats to Christian identity; a basically anti-ecumenical stance despite the fact that some of the movements accept non-Catholic members; a type of clericalist attitude; and a sense that there are "two types of Christians"—those who belong to a Movement and those who do not.

Faggioli thinks that the Movements live out an ecclesial vision that in many ways runs counter to the vision of Vatican II. He finds them to be more connected with reactions against the openness of the council than with the council itself. To the universal call to holiness the Movements add a new emphasis on distinguishing between those who are currently answering that call and those who are not. They are not building up the church as a communion of communions with an emphasis on dioceses and parishes, but rather are functioning as alternative churches within the church, in a way that is parallel to finding a canon within the canon of scripture. Even those few Movements oriented toward dialogue and justice fail to acknowledge the need for any changes regarding the internal structures of the Church or of any Church teaching whatsoever.

I find much truth in Faggioli's analysis. For those of us who either experienced or who have been formed with an understanding of Vatican II as an opening of the church to a new appreciation of the modern world and its possibilities, the New Ecclesial Movements can at least feel as though they represent nothing like the initial dream. I think of a line from T.S. Eliot: "That is not what I meant at all; / That is not it, at all."⁹

The only point of overlap I find between Porteous and Faggioli is that they both generalize about the Movements being culturally conservative. One of them approves of this and the other does not. Can one find much that is true in both of these opposing views? One voice is saying, "Don't worry; be happy." The other voice is crying out, "The Movements are coming! The Movements

are coming!" Still, there can be many frames of reference within which one can find complementary elements. I will briefly draw one such frame of reference from Bernard Lonergan.

Bernard Lonergan

In *Method in Theology*, Lonergan names four realms of meaning: commonsense, theory, interiority, and transcendence.¹⁰ In the commonsense realm of meaning things are understood as they relate to us. The realm of theory represents an attempt to grasp things as they are related to each other.

I acknowledge that the views of Porteous and Faggioli do not fit into these categories in an extremely neat manner. Still, they offer some insight if one considers Porteous as offering an academically informed but still relatively commonsense view, and Faggioli as offering a relatively theoretical view. Porteous, a bishop, is speaking in his role as a church leader, reflecting on the meaning of these Movements for our church. He takes seriously the testimony of the members. How are the Movements related to us? How are they interconnected with earlier Movements as they have related to us? Porteous offers an historical account and considers some critical problems, but without truly breaking out of his commonsense perspective. Within his perspective, he offers a true richness of insights.

Faggioli, in contrast, is a theologian who is trying to approach the New Ecclesial Movements in a more critical and analytical manner. He is trying to offer something like a map of how things are related among themselves. He offers a sophisticated analysis of Vatican II, the history of its reception, and where the Movements can be located in relation to some of the initial trajectories on the council's teaching and implementation.¹¹ Faggioli's theoretical approach is not the only one possible. He has his own biases and speaks from a place that represents a particular spot on the theological spectrum. He could potentially offer some positive acknowledgement of aspects of the Movements without losing the integrity of his theoretical stance. But he offers us a serious analysis that should not be ignored even as we compare it with different views.

Some elements of these two perspectives cannot be reconciled

in any way. Where they are disparate, the views of Porteous and Faggioli reflect the culture wars. Without resolving all differences, however, Lonergan's categories show how commonsense and theoretical expressions of meaning can be read in a complementary way. If we move into the realm of interiority and come to understand some things about how our minds work, we can grasp how the views of Porteous and Faggioli represent two different but complementary ways of human knowing.

With such a discovery, we should be able to recognize the conflict between them as something that exists within ourselves. I continue to experience within myself the tension between favoring an intensely communal Catholicism and a more open, more world-engaging Catholicism. What might it mean for the laity to transform the world? If one's main focus is upon discerning the signs of the times and engaging in dialogue, one vision emerges. If one's main focus is on reinforcing identity in combat against the culture of death, quite a different vision emerges. And if you go far enough down the path of cultural combat, you are no longer interested in transforming the world but rather in finding an alternative to it.

The realm of meaning labelled transcendence helps us to orient ourselves humbly toward the raising of further questions. In this case, I think that the realm of transcendence operates as a call for all of us to transcend the camps into which we are divided. Those highly critical of the Movements need to try harder to discern the work of the Holy Spirit within them. Those in the Movements need often to remind themselves that the working of the Holy Spirit is not limited to their group, and that the continued presence of the Holy Spirit there likely depends upon their openness to engagement with the Spirit's presence in many other places.

Notes

¹See the Pentecostal Resource Page of the Pew Forum: <http://www.pewforum.org/2006/10/05/pentecostal-resource-page/> I also received some figures in private conversation from the Pentecostal theologian Amos Young.

²Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 2d ed. 1973), 237-44.

³Julian Porteous, *New Wine and Fresh Skins: Ecclesial Movements in the Church* (Leominster, Herefordshire: Gracewing, 2010). Two other useful works that are also basically supportive of the movements are Brendan Leahy,

Ecclesial Movements and Communities: Origins, Significance, and Issues (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2011), and Tony Hanna, *New Ecclesial Movements: Communion and Liberation, Neo-Catechumenal Way, Charismatic Renewal . . .* (Edinburgh: Alba House, 2006). See also Joseph Ratzinger, *New Outpourings of the Spirit* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007).

⁴Porteous, *New Wine and Fresh Skins*, 73-76.

⁵Porteous, *New Wine and Fresh Skins*, 165.

⁶Porteous, *New Wine and Fresh Skins*, 168.

⁷Massimo Faggioli, "Between Documents and Spirit: The Case of the 'New Catholic Movements,'" in *After Vatican II: Trajectories and Hermeneutics*, ed. James L. Heft and John W. O'Malley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 1-23. See also "Inclusion and Exclusion in the Ecclesiology of the New Catholic Movements," in *Ecclesiology and Exclusion: Boundaries of Being and Belonging in Postmodern Times*, ed. Dennis M. Doyle, Timothy J. Furry, and Pascal D. Bazzell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012), 199-213. Faggioli's brief history of the movements, *Breve storia dei movimenti cattolici* (Rome: Carocci, 2008) will appear in an expanded edition in English, *Sorting Out Catholicism: A Brief History of the New Ecclesial Movements*, translated by Demetrio S. Yocum, from Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN, in November 2014.

⁸Faggioli, "Inclusion and Exclusion," 201.

⁹From "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," in *Prufrock and Other Observations* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1920).

¹⁰Loneragan, *Method in Theology*, 81-85.

¹¹Massimo Faggioli, *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning* (New York: Paulist Press, 2012).