

REV. CARL-MARIO SULTANA

## ĠORĠ PRECA – A CHAMPION OF THE LAITY

**A b s t r a c t.** St George Preca, a Maltese priest who lived between 1880 and 1962, was canonised in 2007. Preca dedicated himself to the teaching of the catechism in Malta. Being aware that he could not undertake this endeavour all by himself, he embarked on the project of teaching the catechism with lay people. This was not a simple task prior to Vatican Council II. Notwithstanding this, George Preca was able to overcome all obstacles and give lay people the front positions. This was something that Vatican Council II was to do some years after Preca's death. This paper seeks to show how Preca was a pioneer in the apostolate of the laity. This will be done by showing how Preca not only recognised the laity's right to the apostolate, but how he united them as a group for a far-reaching apostolate, which while remaining obedient to the hierarchy, had a very deep impact because they had an adequate formation for the apostolate.

**Key words:** Ġorġ Preca; laity; apostolate of the laity.

St George Preca<sup>1</sup> or Dun Ġorġ Preca (1880-1962) as he is locally known was a Maltese priest whose ministry before the Second Vatican Council seems to have foreseen the importance which was to be given to the lay

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Rev. Dr CARL-MARIO SULTANA – Faculty of Theology, University of Malta, Msida;  
address: e-mail: [carl.m.sultana@um.edu.mt](mailto:carl.m.sultana@um.edu.mt)

<sup>1</sup> For more details and biography, one can see: Aleksander BONNICI, *Dun Ġorġ Preca (1880-1962). Ғajja-Xhieda-Dokumenti*, vol. 1. *Żmien ta' Prova (1880-1916)*; vol. 2. *L-Inkjesta tal-Knisja (1916-1917)*; vol. 3. *Il-Bniedem t'Alla (1918-1962)* (Blata l-Bajda: Soċjetà Duttrina Nisranija M.U.S.E.U.M., 1980-1989) [*Dun Ġorġ Preca (1880-1962). Life-Witnesses-Documents*; vol. 1. *A Time of Trial (1880-1916)*; vol. 2. *The Inquiry of the Church (1916-1917)*; vol. 3. *A Man of God (1918-1962)*]; Angelo MONTONATI, *Coraggio e profezia. Un pioniere del Vaticano II. Il beato Giorgio Preca [Malta 1880-1962]* (Cinisello Balsamo [Milano]: Edizioni San Paolo, 2003); Aleksander BONNICI, *Dun Ġorġ Preca (1880-1962). Apostle for the Spreading of the Word of God and Founder of the Society of Christian Doctrine* (Malta: The Society [of] Christian Doctrine, 1985). In much more concise versions we find: Roberto DARMANIN, "La Società della Dottrina Cristiana

apostolate in the succeeding years<sup>2</sup>. Preca was born on the 12<sup>th</sup> February 1880. He was ordained a priest in 1906, and founded a society of celibate men and women who dedicated themselves to the teaching of the Catechism in Malta. Preca himself claims that he was inspired to found the Society of Christian Doctrine in 1907 by the words of St Paul in his Second Letter to Timothy: “and what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well” (2 Tim 2:2).<sup>3</sup> It was for this reason that he empowered the lay faithful to take the Bible as their most useful resource book and to go and teach to all categories of Maltese people who at that time were not much learned in the faith.

Ġorġ Preca spent most of his life writing, teaching and acting as a support for the Society which he founded, the running of which he totally entrusted to its lay faithful members. He died on the 26<sup>th</sup> July 1962, was beatified in 2001 and canonised in 2007. During the homily on his day of beatification, Pope John Paul II referred to Ġorġ Preca as: “a pioneer in the field of catechetics and on promoting the role of the laity in the apostolate, which the Council was to stress in a particular way.”<sup>4</sup>

In the following paragraphs, I would like to demonstrate how through his endeavours, Ġorġ Preca was a pioneer and a precursor of Vatican Council II. I will be doing this by referring to the active role which he gave to the laity as catechists, in the light of what the Second Vatican Council was to promulgate in *Apostolicam Actuositatem*<sup>5</sup> after his death. This will lead me to state that Dun Ġorġ was truly a precursor and pioneer in the lay apostolate.

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e il suo fondatore, Don Giorgio Preca”, *Civiltà Cattolica* 141(1990), 2: 256-260; Lorenzo GATT, “Don Giorgio Preca: pioniere dell’apostolato dei laici”, *Rogate Ergo* 50(1987), 2: 45-47; L. GATT. “Don Giorgio Preca: generoso apostolo della Chiesa Maltese”, *L’Osservatore Romano* (Marzo 6, 1987): 4; N[azzareno] CAMILLERI, “Il Servo di Dio Mons. Giorgio Preca apostolo delle isole di Malta e Gozo”, *L’Osservatore Romano* (Luglio 31–Agosto 1 1972): 2.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Dun’ is the Maltese equivalent for ‘Father’, when this is used to refer to a priest.

<sup>3</sup> All biblical references are taken from the online NRSV Catholic Edition. Cf. [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com), accessed on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2016.

<sup>4</sup> IOANNES PAULUS PP. II, “Homiliae II. Melitae in beatificatione trium servorum Dei” (9<sup>th</sup> May 2001), *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 93(2001): 594-595. One may also consult the official online translation in English which can be found at: [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/homilies/2001/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_20010509\\_malta-beatification\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/homilies/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_20010509_malta-beatification_en.html).

<sup>5</sup> “Sacrosanctum Concilium Oecumenicum Vaticanum II. Decretum de apostolatu laicorum” (18<sup>th</sup> November 1965), *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 58(1966): 837-864. One may also consult the official online translation in English which can be found at: [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19651118\\_apostolicam-actuositatem\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651118_apostolicam-actuositatem_en.html).

## 1. DUN ĠORĠ PRECA AND THE LAY APOSTOLATE

One of the most positive things which emerge from the documents promulgated at the end of the Second Vatican Council, is the new way in which the Church began to consider and look at the lay faithful. In the eras preceding this Council, the lay faithful were considered as *children* having *child-like* attitudes in the eyes of the hierarchy and Church Authorities. The laity existed to be taught by the Teaching Authority only. They were considered as spectators who should also be blind followers of what the hierarchy decided, said and taught, without even daring to question.<sup>6</sup> However, the Second Vatican Council changed the prevailing idea by considering the faithful as adults and as responsible persons in a Church made up of different ministries and charismas, all having a role to play in the Church.<sup>7</sup> This was what Dun Ġorġ Preca did with the members of the Society which he founded.<sup>8</sup> The lay person became a responsible person with the ability of lending a helping hand in the mission of the Church during the pilgrimage to the Promised Land.<sup>9</sup>

Angelo Montonati, when speaking about Preca's endeavours in relation to the lay apostolate, claims that Preca can be considered as a precursor of the teaching of Vatican Council II with regards to the role and to the importance of the laity in the ministry of evangelisation.<sup>10</sup> We can consider Preca as a precursor of the vision for the apostolate of the laity outlined in *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, and thus also a pioneer in the apostolate of the laity in Malta.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Emilio ALBERICH, Jerome VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms. A Handbook of Fundamental Catechetics* (Bangalore: Kristu Jyoti Publications, 2004), 164-166; Emilio ALBERICH, *La catechesi oggi. Manuale di catechetica fondamentale* (Leumann (To): Editrice Elledici, 2001), 170-172.

<sup>7</sup> E. ALBERICH, J. VALLABARAJ, *Communicating*, 166-168; E. ALBERICH, *La catechesi oggi*, 172-175.

<sup>8</sup> Lawrenz CACHIA, "L-Ispirtu Profetiku f'Dun Ġorġ" [The Prophetic Spirit in Dun Ġorġ], *Dun Ġorġ* 4(1973): 4.

<sup>9</sup> Carlo CARRETTO, "Vari modi di apostolato", in *Commento al decreto sull'apostolato dei laici*, ed. G. Ceriani (Milano: Massimo – Didascaleion, 1966), 95.

<sup>10</sup> A. MONTONATI, *Coraggio e profezia*, 62.

<sup>11</sup> L. GATT, "Don Giorgio Preca: pioniere dell'apostolato dei laici", 45.

## 2. THE LAITY'S RIGHT TO THE APOSTOLATE

*Apostolicam Actuositatem* states that the laity share in the mission of the entire Church by virtue of their participation in the priestly, kingly and prophetic offices of Christ himself.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, bishops, parish priests and all ordained ministers are to remember that the laity have a role to play in the Church and that they have a right to this role.<sup>13</sup>

It is in virtue of the sacraments of Baptism and of Confirmation that the Christian is called to the lay apostolate. *Apostolicam Actuositatem* affirms that not only is the nature of the apostolate proper to the laity but they also have the duty to exercise this apostolic activity, and that nobody can be a Christian and at the same time decline from being an apostle. Thus, the laity have had a role to play in the mission of evangelisation of the Church ever since. They received this role when they were baptised and confirmed.<sup>14</sup>

Ġorġ Preca not only anticipated this new vision of the apostolate of the laity in his ministry and in the Society of Christian Doctrine which he founded, but he also put it into practice. This is one of the novelties of his ministry.<sup>15</sup> This already renders Dun Ġorġ Preca a precursor of the apostolate of the laity as laid out in Vatican Council II. Moreover, the history of Malta during the period in which Dun Ġorġ lived attests that during this time there was no lack of priests in Malta. Consequently, he did not found the Society of Christian Doctrine in order to supply for a lack of priests, but because he really believed that the laity had a very important role in the Church which they were to live in their daily lives and endeavours. Dun Ġorġ foresaw and put into practice what the Second Vatican Council would proclaim more than fifty years later: that the apostolate of the laity should not be considered as parallel to the apostolate of the Church, nor as opposed to it, but as an extension and a continuation of the mission of the Church itself, and that the

<sup>12</sup> Sacrosanctum Concilium Oecumenicum Vaticanum II, *Decretum de apostolatu laicorum*, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Sacrosanctum Concilium Oecumenicum Vaticanum II, *Decretum de apostolatu laicorum*, 25.

<sup>14</sup> Santo QUADRI, "I fini dell'apostolato", in *Il decreto sull'apostolato dei laici. Genesi storico-dottrinale. Testo latino e traduzione italiana. Esposizione e commento* (Leumann [Torino]: Elle Di Ci, [1966]), 184; Sebastiano LENTINI, "La vocazione all'apostolato", in *Il decreto sull'apostolato dei laici. Genesi storico-dottrinale. Testo latino e traduzione italiana. Esposizione e commento* (Leumann [Torino]: Elle Di Ci, [1966]), 141-143; Sandro MAGGIOLINI, "La formazione all'apostolato", in *Commento al decreto sull'apostolato dei laici*, ed. G. Ceriani (Milano: Massimo – Didascalieon, 1966), 120; C. CARRETTO, "Vari modi di apostolato", 97.

<sup>15</sup> Joe FENECH, "Emmen fil-Lajċi" [He Believed in the Laity], *Dun Ġorġ* 28(1989), 1: 13.

apostolate of the lay is not a way of making good for the lack of priests or to substitute priests.<sup>16</sup>

### 3. A GROUP APOSTOLATE DIRECTED BY THE LAITY

The human being is by nature a social being. Therefore, the tendency to form groups with a particular and specific aim is natural. Furthermore, God wanted to save the world by sending his Son who became a human being, socialising with the men and women of his times and uniting them in one Church.<sup>17</sup> The lay apostolate in associations responds to this natural social tendency within the human being's nature to form groups. It is also a sign of the unity and of the communion of the Church with Christ.<sup>18</sup>

The fact that a number of lay persons group together in order to perform some particular form of apostolate has a particular advantage: they can offer support, formation and direction to each other in such a way that a very plentiful harvest is not only expected, but actually achieved.<sup>19</sup> The secret of groups of persons who work together in a particular apostolate lies in that they can help each other, thus rendering their apostolate much more fecund. This is necessary in our contemporary world.<sup>20</sup>

Preca anticipated the recommendation of forming associations for the lay apostolate made by *Apostolicam Actuositatem* around fifty years prior, when he thought of forming an *association* for teaching the catechism which was to be spread all-over Malta. He did not just limit himself to train some

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<sup>16</sup> Oliver FRIGGIERI, “Dun Ġorġ: Ir-Rabta bejn il-Kelma u l-Azzjoni” [Dun Ġorġ: The Link between Word and Action], *Dun Ġorġ* 29(1990): 11. This article has also been translated and published in Italian: O. FRIGGIERI, “Dun Gorg: Il legame fra la parola e l'azione”, in *Meliten. Beatificationis et Canonizationis Servi Dei Georgii Preca Sacerdotis et Fundatoris Societatis Doctrinae Christianae (M.U.S.E.U.M) (1880-1962). Positio super vita, virtutibus et fama sanctitatis*, ed. Congregatio de Causis Sanctorum (Roma: Tipografia Guerra s.r.l., 1997), 151-163. See also Dionigi TETTAMANZI, “I fini dell'apostolato dei laici”, in *Commento al decreto sull'apostolato dei laici*, ed. G. Ceriani (Milano: Massimo – Didascaleion, 1966), 57; S. QUARDRI, “I fini dell'apostolato”, 184.

<sup>17</sup> Sacrosanctum Concilium Oecumenicum Vaticanum II, *Decretum de apostolatu laicorum*, 18.

<sup>18</sup> Aldo DEL MONTE, “Vari modi dell'apostolato”, in *Il decreto sull'apostolato dei laici. Genesi storico-dottrinale. Testo latino e traduzione italiana. Esposizione e commento*, (Leumann [Torino]: Elle Di Ci, [1966]), 256.

<sup>19</sup> Sacrosanctum Concilium Oecumenicum Vaticanum II, *Decretum de apostolatu laicorum*, 18.

<sup>20</sup> A. DEL MONTE. “Vari modi dell'apostolato”, 257.

youths or adults who could act as catechists in his parish only. Moreover, Preca insisted that the Society of Christian Doctrine was to be directed by the laity, while remaining entirely at the service of the local Church.<sup>21</sup>

In this respect, we also see that Dun Ġorġ Preca, besides being a pioneer of the lay apostolate in Malta, was also a precursor of what *Apostolicam Actuositatem* states in paragraph 24 about the foundation and the running of institutes of lay apostolate by the laity themselves in communion with the Church.<sup>22</sup>

#### 4. A FAR REACHING APOSTOLATE

The laity have the special vocation of living a Christian life in normal daily-life situations and contexts wherever they may be, thus rendering the world holy, be it at work, at home or during relaxation time.<sup>23</sup> It is for this reason that Preca founded the Society of Christian Doctrine as a lay association where the members live their daily life within their families, go to their places of work, and then in the evening gather to teach and to be taught. Ġorġ Preca founded a society of celibates, both male and female, dedicated to the teaching of the catechism.<sup>24</sup>

In line with the ideas found in *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, Dun Ġorġ anticipated the fact that to be active in the apostolate where one lives and works, one does not require any extraordinary competencies which are impossible to achieve. All that is needed is to be present within the society and give witness to the Christian faith through word and deed.<sup>25</sup> Dun Ġorġ was ahead of his time in this bestowal of responsibility on the laity.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Lawrence GATT. "Il-Lajċità ta' Dun Ġorġ" [Dun Ġorġ's Laicism], *Dun Ġorġ* 41(2001): 23.

<sup>22</sup> Sacrosanctum Concilium Oecumenicum Vaticanum II, *Decretum de apostolatu laicorum*, 24.

<sup>23</sup> Sacrosanctum Concilium Oecumenicum Vaticanum II, *Decretum de apostolatu laicorum*, 2; Sacrosanctum Concilium Oecumenicum Vaticanum II, *Constitutio apostolica de ecclesia* (21<sup>th</sup> November 1964) *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 57(1965): 33. One may also consult the official online translation in English: [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html)

<sup>24</sup> A. MONTONATI, *Coraggio e profezia*, 8.

<sup>25</sup> Luigi BOGLIOLO, "Vari campi di apostolato", in *Il decreto sull'apostolato dei laici. Genesi storico-dottrinale. Testo latino e traduzione italiana. Esposizione e commento* (Leumann [Torino]: Elle Di Ci, [1966]), 240.

<sup>26</sup> Joseph ABDILLA, "Dun Ġorġ: Żejt Ġdid għas-Seklu" [Dun Ġorġ: New Oil for the Century], *Dun Ġorġ* 27(1987): 21-22.

When Dun Ġorġ Preca founded the Society of Christian Doctrine he also predicted the process of secularisation which the Church in Malta was to undergo, even though this process would commence decades later. Before the process of secularisation started, everything revolved around the Church. Thus it was easy to reach all the faithful. However, with secularisation, the centre point of all life became the world of work. Consequently, the lay apostolate became a very important instrument in order to reach everybody.<sup>27</sup> In this Dun Ġorġ was also a precursor of *Apostolicam Actuositatem* which states that the laity have to take the Christian spirit to those places where priests and ordained ministers find it very difficult to reach.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, Dun Ġorġ was always convinced that the laity were not to be considered as reserves for situations where priests lacked, but that they were also to be protagonists in those places where it was very difficult for priests to penetrate, especially places of work.<sup>29</sup>

The Society of Christian Doctrine founded by Dun Ġorġ Preca was primarily aimed at teaching the catechism. However Dun Ġorġ also envisaged that the members of the Society could become true witnesses of the Gospel by living exemplary lives. These two characteristics of the Society of Christian Doctrine and of the members who form a part of it are also a foretaste of the objectives of the apostolate of the laity as laid out in *Apostolicam Actuositatem*: direct verbal proclamation, and witness through one's life.<sup>30</sup>

By living a truly Christian life wherever they are, the laity become a living message and a proclamation of Christ because they develop life-styles and ways of life which are attractive and vibrant, thus inducing other individuals to love the truth, to adhere to it and to live according to it.<sup>31</sup> However, the lay apostolate is not limited to personal witness only; the laity are called to insert themselves in the mission of the Church, even by verbal proclamation.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>27</sup> L. BOGLIOLO, "Vari campi di apostolato", 238-239.

<sup>28</sup> Sacrosanctum Concilium Oecumenicum Vaticanum II, *Decretum de apostolatu laicorum*, 13.

<sup>29</sup> A. BONNICI. *Dun Ġorġ Preca (1880-1962). Ħajja-Xhieda-Dokumenti*, vol. 3, 420.

<sup>30</sup> Sacrosanctum Concilium Oecumenicum Vaticanum II, *Decretum de apostolatu laicorum*, 5-7; D. TETTAMANZI, "I fini dell'apostolato dei laici", 63-64. These two modes of evangelisation were later on taken up by Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and explained further. PAULUS PP. VI, "Adhortatio Apostolica ad episcopos, sacerdotes et christifideles totius catholicae ecclesiae: de evangelizatione in mundo huius" (8<sup>th</sup> December 1975), *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 76(1976): 21-24.

<sup>31</sup> D. TETTAMANZI, "I fini dell'apostolato dei laici", 63.

<sup>32</sup> Sacrosanctum Concilium Oecumenicum Vaticanum II, *Decretum de apostolatu laicorum*, 6.

*Apostolicam Actuositatem* posits that the lay apostolate is very important within the parochial setting. This is so much so that the action of ordained ministers within the parish setting can at times not reach its goals if the laity do not give them a helping hand.<sup>33</sup> The parish priest, who co-ordinates the pastoral ministry within his parish, can be helped by the laity who collaborate in the catechetical ministry. In this way the lay faithful would be continuing and extending the formation imparted by ordained ministers.<sup>34</sup>

When analysing the origins of the Society of Christian Doctrine one can see that the association was actually founded by Preca to help parish priests within different parishes in their duty of teaching the catechism to their parishioners. Preca commenced this enterprise long before *Apostolicam Actuositatem* proposed it. Furthermore, in anticipation of *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, Preca also involved female lay faithful in the Society of Christian Doctrine by establishing a female section for teaching the catechism. This section was to be run in a totally independent way from the male section.<sup>35</sup>

## 5. OBEDIENCE TO THE HIERARCHY

*Apostolicam Actuositatem* exalts the lay apostolate carried out by individuals.<sup>36</sup> However, it neither encourages nor supports an individualistic apostolate in which the lay person is estranged from Church Authority and from the respect which such Authority calls for.<sup>37</sup> The right to the lay apostolate is one which carries particular duties with it, the most important of which is obedience to the hierarchy. *Apostolicam Actuositatem* is particularly clear about this.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Sacrosanctum Concilium Oecumenicum Vaticanum II, *Decretum de apostolatu laicorum*, 10.

<sup>34</sup> Luigi GEDDA, "Vari campi di apostolato", in *Commento al decreto sull'apostolato dei laici*, ed. G. Ceriani (Milano: Massimo – Didascaleion, 1966), 87.

<sup>35</sup> Sacrosanctum Concilium Oecumenicum Vaticanum II, *Decretum de apostolatu laicorum*, 9; A. BONNICI, *Dun Ġorġ Preca (1880-1962). Ғajja-Xhieda-Dokumenti*, vol. 1, 223-227; A. MONTONATI, *Coraggio e profezia*, 76.

<sup>36</sup> Sacrosanctum Concilium Oecumenicum Vaticanum II, *Decretum de apostolatu laicorum*, 16-17.

<sup>37</sup> Vittorio BACHELET, "L'ordine da osservare nell'apostolato", in *Commento al decreto sull'apostolato dei laici*, ed. G. Ceriani (Milano: Massimo – Didascaleion, 1966), 105-106.

<sup>38</sup> Sacrosanctum Concilium Oecumenicum Vaticanum II, *Decretum de apostolatu laicorum*, 23.

All forms of apostolate are called *ecclesial* and *Catholic* if they are within the mission of the entire Church. However, consonance and co-operation with the mission of the Church alone are not enough. Obedience to Church Authorities is not only recommended but a necessary factor. The fact that a particular association or initiative of lay apostolate is praised and recommended by the hierarchy does not mean that it has been canonically approved. It only means that the apostolate being carried out by the laity is useful in the light of the particular circumstances of the Church in the contemporary situation.<sup>39</sup>

Ġorġ Preca not only considered Church Authorities as the supreme authority with regards to the lay apostolate but he was able to show that the Society which he had just founded was truly at the service of the Church, and that without the ‘go-ahead’ of the hierarchy he would not continue with his endeavour. When the Vicar General called him and ordered him to close all the institutes that he had opened, he reiterated that since they were his superiors, he would obey them, not reluctantly but wholeheartedly because he respected their decision. Moreover, during the formal enquiry conducted by the Church during 1916-1917, Dun Ġorġ Preca co-operated and when asked to present the statutes for approval he did this, even though quite some time later.<sup>40</sup> Moreover the members of the Society which he founded show a profound respect to the hierarchy.<sup>41</sup>

However, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* does not only speak about the obedience who those engaged in the lay apostolate are to show to Church Authorities. It also elaborates upon the duties of the hierarchy, amongst which we find that the latter are in duty bound to offer spiritual assistance («*piritualia praeberere*») to those engaged in any form of lay apostolate.<sup>42</sup> Even *Lumen Gentium* speaks about the spiritual assistance which the hierarchy in general, and ordained ministers are to offer to the laity, especially those engaged in the lay apostolate.<sup>43</sup> Ġorġ Preca foresaw this when he originally created

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<sup>39</sup> Ismaele M. CASTELLANO. “L’ordine da osservare nell’apostolato”, in *Il decreto sull’apostolato dei laici. Genesi storico-dottrinale. Testo latino e traduzione italiana. Esposizione e commento*, (Leumann [Torino]: Elle Di Ci, [1966]), 298-299, 307-308.

<sup>40</sup> A. BONNICI, *Dun Ġorġ Preca (1880-1962). Ħajja-Xhieda-Dokumenti*, vol. 3, 240-241.

<sup>41</sup> “Dun Ġorġ: Fundatur tat-Teologi bil-Boilersuits” [Dun Ġorġ: Founder of Theologians Wearing Boilersuits], *L-Orizzont* (July 27<sup>th</sup> 1987): 9.

<sup>42</sup> Sacrosanctum Concilium Oecumenicum Vaticanum II, *Decretum de apostolatu laicorum*, 24.

<sup>43</sup> Sacrosanctum Concilium Oecumenicum Vaticanum II, *Constitutio apostolica de ecclesia*, 37; I.M. CASTELLANO. “L’ordine da osservare nell’apostolato”, 315.

Priest Inspectors, with a particular function and mission within the Society of Christian Doctrine.<sup>44</sup>

## 6. THE NEED OF FORMATION

*Apostolicam Actuositatem* dedicates a whole chapter to elaborate upon the necessity of formation and to the different dimensions of formation for the lay apostolate.<sup>45</sup> Reading these paragraphs today, it may seem obvious that for every different ministry within the Church, be it a lay ministry or an ordained ministry, different forms and grades of formation are necessary. However, this was not the case during the time in which Ġorġ Preca lived and worked. To start with, the formation of the laity was inexistent because they were not given any important role within the Church. However, Preca overcame this weakness and while giving the laity an apostolate of evangelisation, he also formed them as much as possible for this lay apostolate. When speaking about the formation which Ġorġ Preca gave to the members of the Society in his contemporary times, one must keep in mind that he was limited as well, primarily in the techniques available for the formation of the laity, which were limited to the spoken word and to the printed word.

The formation of the laity should strive to form the person:

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<sup>44</sup> Priest Inspectors were Diocesan priests in charge of monitoring whether the members of the Society were faithful to the teachings of the Church. There were two types of Priest Inspectors: the General Inspector and the Particular Inspectors. The General Inspector had to know the Society well and to observe some of the regulations which the members of the Society observed. The major duty of the General Inspector was to oversee the teaching that was given in the Society and certify that this is correct. In this respect, the General Inspector had to prepare the examination for the choice of the *Major Theologian* of the Society. The General Inspector was also to teach the members of the Society not only by word of mouth but also through writing. Finally, the General Inspector had to choose and to give his approval for the Particular Inspectors chosen for other centres. The Particular Inspectors were responsible for hearing the confessions of the members and of the children who attend the centre where they were assigned. The Particular Inspectors were also responsible for seeing that the teaching which was being taught was correct, and to teach the members themselves in such a way that they could respond to as many theological questions as possible. Moreover Particular Inspectors were responsible for the method which was used for the teaching of the catechism. A. BONNICI, *Dun Ġorġ Preca (1880-1962). Ĥajja-Xhieda-Dokumenti*, vol. 1, 318; A. BONNICI, *Dun Ġorġ Preca (1880-1962). Ĥajja-Xhieda-Dokumenti*, vol. 2, 37-39, 67-68, 70-71, 83-84, 88-92, 94-104, 159, 167, 170-175.

<sup>45</sup> Sacrosanctum Concilium Oecumenicum Vaticanum II, *Decretum de apostolatu laicorum*, 28-32.

- to give his/her life entirely;
- to profess a solid faith;
- to pray;
- to have a profound sense of obedience;
- to love authentic human values;
- to have the courage to proclaim the Gospel by words and through personal witness.<sup>46</sup>

Moreover, formation is necessary for a fecund apostolate since the lay person is called to act as leaven in the world. Formation thus becomes the *sine qua non* condition for a fecund and positive apostolate.<sup>47</sup>

*Apostolicam Actuositatem* mentions three dimensions of formation in preparation and in sustenance of the lay apostolate: spiritual, doctrinal and technical formation.<sup>48</sup> The formation of the laity engaged in the lay apostolate is primarily spiritual because their role consists of collaborating in Christ's plan for the salvation of everyone.<sup>49</sup> Theological or doctrinal formation are necessary because the laity are called to consider and read the signs of the times in the light of a solid and stable faith. Furthermore, the theology which the laity are called to study is at the service of their particular apostolate. Consequently, it must neither be too generic on the one hand, nor render them professors of theology on the other. Formation must be tailor made for their apostolate. This theological knowledge ultimately helps them to develop their spiritual life. The technical aspect, also referred to as the *savoir-faire* dimension helps them to be effective in their apostolate with different categories of people in different situations.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*

<sup>46</sup> S. MAGGIOLINI, "La formazione all'apostolato", 119.

<sup>47</sup> S. MAGGIOLINI, "La formazione all'apostolato", 121; Tommaso DEMARIA, "La formazione all'apostolato", in *Il decreto sull'apostolato dei laici. Genesi storico-dottrinale. Testo latino e traduzione italiana. Esposizione e commento* (Leumann [Torino]: Elle Di Ci, [1966]), 333-334.

<sup>48</sup> Sacrosanctum Concilium Oecumenicum Vaticanum II, *Decretum de apostolatu laicorum*, 29. These three dimensions have also been taken up in the 1997 General Directory for Catechesis and explained in much more detail with respect to the formation of catechists. CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, *General Directory for Catechesis* (15<sup>th</sup> August 1997) (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), 233-252.

<sup>49</sup> T. DEMARIA, "La formazione all'apostolato", 343.

<sup>50</sup> T. DEMARIA, "La formazione all'apostolato", 343-347; S. MAGGIOLINI, "La formazione all'apostolato", 131.

*tem* mentions several aids and instruments for formation: congresses, meetings, books, reviews, periodicals, conferences, and retreats.<sup>51</sup>

All the three dimensions of formation, together with some of the different aids for the formation of the laity mentioned by *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, were anticipated by Ġorġ Preca during the first decades of the Society of Christian Doctrine.<sup>52</sup> Ġorġ Preca wanted each member of the society have a sponsor – *parrinu/a* who was to help the member in making right choices in the light of their vocation as catechists within the Society of Christian Doctrine. Moreover, Ġorġ Preca desired that the members of the Society have a monthly retreat in which they reflect upon their spiritual life and take resolutions to enable them to live a better Christian life.

Ġorġ Preca also tried to give the members of the Society of Christian Doctrine a solid theological formation. He treated the laity as adults by writing scripts for them which were to be published as books, pamphlets, leaflets or handbills. The reason why Preca wrote a lot was that writing was one of the strongest instruments with which to form the members of the Society of Christian Doctrine during his time.<sup>53</sup>

The technical formation was met by Ġorġ Preca through some of his writings in which particular methods seem to be prevalent.<sup>54</sup> Among the repertoire of Ġorġ Preca's writings, we also find a particular writing entitled *Gwida Għal min Jgħallem it-Tfal – A Handbook for Those Who Teach Children*. This writing was to be a directory for his catechists in their endeavours with children.<sup>55</sup> The publication of the monthly periodical *Kalendarju Museumin – Museum Calendar* – for the members of the Society was also intended as a methodological aid.

Dun Ġorġ Preca did not consider the formation for the lay apostolate as a one time occasion, but as a form of on-going formation for the lay ministry. Consequently, he wanted the members of the Society of Christian Doctrine to meet daily for a one-hour formation meeting known as *assenjatur* – the Assignment. This meeting is a form of on-going formation in which

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<sup>51</sup> Sacrosanctum Concilium Oecumenicum Vaticanum II, *Decretum de apostolatu laicorum*, 32.

<sup>52</sup> Emanuel CURMI, “Dun Ġorġ u l-Lajċi” [Dun Ġorġ and the Laity], *Dun Ġorġ* 34(1994), 19.

<sup>53</sup> L. CACHIA, “L-Ispirtu Profetiku f’Dun Ġorġ”, 4.

<sup>54</sup> For more detailed information, see: Carl-Mario SULTANA, *The Presence and the use of the Bible in the Ministry and in the Works of Dun Ġorġ Preca*, S.Th.D. Thesis (Università Pontificia Salesiana, 2007).

<sup>55</sup> Ġorġ PRECA, *Gwida Għal min Jgħallem it-Tfal* (Żabbar [Malta]: Veritas Press, [1970]). [A Handbook for Those Who Teach Children].

several topics and themes are discussed and studied after being assigned to the members of the Society of Christian Doctrine; hence the term *assenjatur*. One can rightly claim that in this respect, Preca also anticipated *Apostolicam Actuositatem*.<sup>56</sup>

## 7. CONCLUSION

The arguments discussed above demonstrate that Ġorġ Preca was truly a pioneer in the apostolate of the laity in Malta, and a precursor of the vision for the apostolate of the laity which *Apostolicam Actuositatem* was to elaborate upon. It was Dun Ġorġ Preca who valued the apostolate of the laity in the form of a group and in communion with the entire Church in its mission of evangelisation.<sup>57</sup>

Dun Ġorġ was a precursor of what was to be the vision for the apostolate of the laity which was to be outlined decades later during the Second Vatican Council and promulgated in *Apostolicam Actuositatem*. He can truly be considered as a pioneer of the apostolate of the laity in Malta through the foundation of the Society of Christian Doctrine.

The study leads us to acknowledge and to affirm that Dun Ġorġ Preca was truly a pioneer in the lay apostolate within the catechetical ministry in Malta, and that he was a precursor of what *Apostolicam Actuositatem* would promulgate decades later on the lay apostolate. Thus we can safely and clearly say that Dun Ġorġ Preca was truly a pioneer and a precursor of the Second Vatican Council.

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<sup>56</sup> Sacrosanctum Concilium Oecumenicum Vaticanum II, *Decretum de apostolatu laicorum*, 30.

<sup>57</sup> A. BONNICI, *Dun Ġorġ Preca (1880-1962)*. *Ĥajja-Xhieda-Dokumenti*, vol. 3, 324.

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## ĠORĠ PRECA – MISTRZ LAIKATU

## S t r e s z c z e n i e

Święty George Preca to maltański ksiądz, który żył w latach 1880-1962, a kanonizowany został w 2007 r. Ks. Preca poświęcił się nauczaniu katechizmu na Malcie. Mając świadomość, że nie zdoła przeprowadzić tego sam, rozpoczął projekt nauczania katechizmu ze świeckimi. Przed Soborem Watykańskim II nie była to sprawa prosta. Mimo wszystko ks. Preca zdołał pokonać wszelkie przeszkody i znacznie uprzywilejować świeckich. Sobór Watykański II miał to zrobić kilka lat po jego śmierci. Niniejszy artykuł jest próbą pokazania, w jaki sposób ks. Preca został pionierem apostołstwa świeckich – nie tylko uznał prawo świeckich do apostołstwa, ale także zjednoczył ich jako grupę do perspektywicznego apostołatu, w posłuszeństwie hierarchii i z adekwatną do niego formacją.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Ġorġ Preca; laikat; apostołstwo świeckich.