



Empowered as King, Priest and Prophet: The Identity of Roman Catholic Laity in the People of God

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Abstract

The language of “People of God,” which exemplifies the radical shift in ecclesiology found in the documents of the Second Vatican Council, not only has gained a predominance of use in contemporary Roman Catholic theology, it provides a vocabulary with which to explore the identity of the Roman Catholic laity, particularly as they relate to the scripturally-grounded titles of “King,” “Priest,” and “Prophet.” This article considers the implications of this identity in contrast to the Institutional ecclesiology with which it competes in the conciliar documents as well as in many official statements since Vatican II. Viewing these titles from their roots in Hebrew and Christian Scripture opens new avenues of empowerment for the laity and for transforming the whole Church.

Keywords

Catholic Identity, Ecclesiology, People of God, Roman Catholicism, Laity

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“There is . . . one chosen People of God,” the Second Vatican Council writes in its *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)*.¹ It further asserts:

there is a common dignity of members deriving from their rebirth in Christ, a common grace as [heirs], a common vocation to perfection,

¹ *Lumen Gentium*, no. 32. I am using Austin Flannery, O.P., ed., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, new revised ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992). Hereafter *Lumen Gentium* will be referred to as *LG*.

one salvation, one hope and undivided charity.² . . . *Everything* that has been said of the People of God is addressed equally to laity, religious and clergy. Because of their situation and mission, however, certain things pertain particularly to the laity, both men and women, the foundations of which must be more fully examined owing to the special circumstances of our time. The pastors, indeed, know well how much the laity contribute to the welfare of the whole Church.³

For many, “People of God” comes immediately to mind when reflecting on the identity of the laity, not only because of its preeminence in *Lumen Gentium’s* section on the laity, but also because of the growing use of this vocabulary in the forty-plus years of Roman Catholic theology since the Council. Indeed, one can scarcely pick up a contemporary Roman Catholic text that does not employ the ecclesiology of the People of God.⁴ Granted, clergy are just as much included in the People of God as laity. The *Dogmatic Constitution* makes it clear that all baptized Christians are members, not just Roman Catholics, and it goes further to include non-Christians as well, because – given that humanity itself is formed in the divine image – God intends that all persons come to belong to the People of God.⁵ In fact, this ecclesiology was adopted from the Hebrew Bible’s notion of Israel as God’s chosen people, and so it may well be argued that the Christian use of this title is already an expansion of membership well beyond its original intention; in any case, certainly the Jewish faith itself must be considered the foundation of the People of God.⁶ However, *Lumen Gentium’s* retrieval of the church as People of God has opened new and empowering avenues of development specifically for Roman Catholic laity, who, for many prior centuries have been seen by others outside of Roman Catholicism (Protestant and non-Christian perspectives alike) – and indeed have understood themselves – as passive recipients of grace mediated by the hierarchically-structured clergy rather than as active agents of transformation within and outside of the faith community.

Lumen Gentium’s extension to the laity of functions previously only reserved for the ordained – namely a sharing in Jesus Christ’s three-part ministry as king, priest and prophet – means that Roman Catholic lay persons can, and should, speak of and identify

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., no. 30; emphasis added.

⁴ This includes official documents as well as theological works. Indeed, the vocabulary of the People of God is found often in liturgical music and prayer as well.

⁵ This idea is interspersed throughout chapter 2 of *Lumen Gentium*, and is continued in other documents, for example in *Nostra Aetate*.

⁶ As it will be shown later, unfortunately some early Christian writers saw Christianity replacing Israel as the “new” People of God, an understanding that is subject to increasing criticism in light of post Vatican II Jewish-Christian dialog. This issue will be considered later in this paper.

themselves as fully participating members of the Church, both in its internal governing and in its ultimate mission, as it is stated in the very opening of *Lumen Gentium*, to bring humanity into union with itself and into communion with God. This extension, however, has at times been met with considerable resistance from members of the institution. Nevertheless, not only society but also the very institution of the Church is transformed through the participation of the laity.

In this essay I will outline some implications the People of God model has for the identity of Roman Catholic laity. I will begin by discussing the characteristics of the People of God as rooted in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, and then move to the relationship of the People of God to the competing model of Institution as it operates within *Lumen Gentium*. Drawing upon the Council's extension to the laity of Jesus Christ's kingly, priestly and prophetic functions derived from Scripture, I will explore the challenges and transformative possibilities Roman Catholic laity face in finding its own voice within the Roman Catholic tradition.

From the first page of the Hebrew Scriptures, which introduces a God who directly, intentionally and personally creates the universe out of unformed chaos, the model of the People of God is implicated with its prefiguring in humanity: male and female made in the divine image. To create, in both Genesis creation stories, is to put things into a personal and intimately interdependent relationship – that is, a *covenant* relationship. Further, to image something in the ancient world is to represent, to *re-presence* the source. Women and men together are created to re-presence God in the world. From out of this divinely-inspired creation, a people will be formed and designated as God's special representative: Israel, the Chosen People, the Son of God. Through its communal life, which is based on covenantal relations, this people is to represent God to humanity and, further, they are to represent humanity as the image of God to and within God's world.

It is important to take note that Genesis, chapter 1, is written during or perhaps in the chaotic aftermath of the Exile. In portraying God as divinely creating by bringing order to chaos, the priestly source is expressing the whole history of the Israelite people. This is a people who are always trying to understand the meaning of covenant as well as their identity in relation to God and with each other in the midst of an ever-changing world: in their transformation from loosely associated tribes to a unified monarchy, to a divided kingdom that eventually falls to its enemies, and into the face of the disorganization and chaos of Exile. Through this history, they maintain the enduring conviction that they are a people – even now – designated by God, despite their ever-changing political and social circumstances. They are a people despite everything because, in Daniel Harrington's

words, they are “divinely initiated and covenantal in structure, and a response to God’s gracious love.”⁷

The Israelites in the Hebrew Scriptures are a people of hope, though, who long for the clarity of identity they once had in the traditional arrangement where they were politically ruled by a king and religiously directed by the priests, and kept in check by the prophets. Out of this longing for the days of the Davidic Empire comes the messianic expectation of a divinely-sent king under whom they will someday be so re-unified.

For his followers, this messiah is the Jewish man, Jesus of Nazareth, who exemplifies the image of God intended for humanity and represented by Israel, and whose life reiterates the journey of the People of God taken by the Israelites: from his unusual birth, recognition by God as God’s Son, journey of preparation through the desert and appointment to ministry through baptism, and profound suffering at the hands of his enemies.⁸ As recounted in the Christian Gospels, Jesus’ life takes the same journey as God’s Son Israel, who was, first of all – being of lowly status and means – an unusual choice for a divine people, and whose journey through the desert brought them to mount Sinai where they were recognized and appointed as God’s people, a people who later suffered greatly at the hands of its enemies. As a people chosen to re-present God, that is to reveal that God is present and *how* God is present, in their suffering the people reveal a God, not of retribution, but a God who is at-one-with and present to the lowly, the sinful, the marginal. By so identifying with and bonding – not with the powerful, but with the weak – humanity is lifted up as the image of a God who puts aside omniscience and omnipotence to be present to and to suffer with and on behalf of others.

In order to understand how Jesus came to be associated as the Son of God and how his followers began to associate themselves communally as the new People of God, Jesus must be seen in his Jewish context, and as a faithful Jewish man. Following his faith rooted in Jewish Scripture and Tradition, Jesus consistently proclaimed that it is not those who are high of status politically *or religiously* who reveal the nature and character of God, but those who are compassionate, self-giving and who companion and empower those who have

⁷ Daniel Harrington, “Why is the Church the People of God?,” in *Vatican II: The Unfinished Agenda*, eds. Lucien Richard, Daniel Harrington and John O’Malley (New York/Mahway: Paulist Press, 1987), p. 48.

⁸ By “enemies” here, it is intended to mean those individuals [e.g., Sadducees and Pharisees] who, being threatened by Jesus’ preaching, conspired to put him to death, not the Jewish faith nor the Jewish population at large. It is to be assumed throughout this paper that historically Jesus did not desire to begin a new religious tradition, but like the prophets before him, to reform those elements within his tradition that went against what God intended for the Chosen People.

no power. Jesus' death, resurrection and continuation of life through the community of faith is a proclamation of what it means to be the People of God who endure, *not only* as a response to God's gracious love, *but* as a concrete, active and living symbol of it.

The designation of the Christian community as the People of God is found explicitly in the First Letter of Peter, written probably very late in the first century C.E. or early in the second:

But you are "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises" of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were "no people" but now you are God's people, you "had not received mercy" but now you have received mercy.⁹

Although drawing heavily upon Hebrew Scripture passages, this Christian letter espouses a "replacement" view of the People of God, according to Harrington,¹⁰ rather than a perspective wherein the Christian community also belongs – along with the Jews – to the People of God. The replacement position is clearly rejected by the Second Vatican Council, however, who asserts that since all humans are created in God's image, all forms of religious and racial discrimination are to be rejected.¹¹ It is important to make note of this criticism which has continued to grow with the advancement of Jewish-Christian dialog, because the replacement perspective not only discriminates against its elder sibling, Judaism, it fails to learn from its history and is thus fated to fall into the very same vices decried by the Israelite prophets, namely: exclusiveness, legalism and hypocrisy. In other words, the replacement view tends to put Christianity above the lessons of its own history. I shall return to this point later with regard to the function of the laity in relation to the hierarchical leadership structure of the Roman Catholic Church.

According to Howard Clark Kee, the foundations for a Christian adoption of the notion of "People of God" can also be found in the Gospels, in Paul's letters and in the Acts of the Apostles, although these passages also often express a replacement view. For example, Matthew uses John the Baptist's activity as an essential preparation (completed by Jesus) to "redefine the new covenant community, which is not limited to the Israelites pious by traditional standards."¹² And Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, contrasts the new community of God with the traditional definitions of Israel, when he asserts that

⁹ 1 Pet 2:9–10. All biblical quotes are taken from the NAB, unless quoted by a secondary source.

¹⁰ Harrington, "Why is the Church the People of God?," p. 52. In the replacement view, the Christian community has replaced Israel as the People of God.

¹¹ *LG*, no. 16.

¹² Howard Clark Kee, *Who are the People of God: Early Christian Models of Community* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 99.

“[t]here is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (3:28); later in 1st Corinthians, Paul talks about the Christian community as “God’s temple,” where “God’s Spirit dwells”(3:16–17).

The hallmark of the People of God in the Hebrew Scriptures is that of a covenant community, one who must be guided by the “spirit of the law” or as the prophet Jeremiah would say, the law written on the heart (31:31–33). To be ruled by the heart means to follow the law of relationality: the People of God’s human relationships are to echo and manifest its relationship with God and serve as a symbol of humanity’s imaging of God. This covenantal constitution endures despite its political structures, which, at its height for Israel, was a fairly short-lived monarchy.¹³ In the Christian Scriptures, this covenant community, which is the new People of God, is characterized additionally by a radical equality among the members as illustrated by the way Jesus lived among the people and preached about the kingdom of God.

At its core, when speaking of the Christian community as the People of God all members are equal and participate fully in the life of the community.

According to Richard Gaillardetz, the “People of God” metaphor “stresses the commonality of the baptized, clergy and lay. Through baptism we are all constituted as God’s people.”¹⁴ Gaillardetz reminds us, too, that the People of God is eschatological in nature. It is a community that still awaits consummation. This implies that, although it may be more compatible with egalitarian structures than hierarchical ones, the People of God transcends any human form of political or social system and, in turn, transforms all political and social establishments with which it engages – both within and outside of its church walls.¹⁵

¹³ It should be understood, of course, that Israel’s covenant with God is modeled on the notion of a “vassal covenant.”

¹⁴ Richard Gaillardetz, *Teaching with Authority: A Theology of the Magisterium in the Church* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1997), p. 19.

¹⁵ The idea that baptism constitutes membership into the People of God can be traced back to Christianity’s Jewish roots as well. Several years ago, Monika Hellwig wrote a nice piece on Christian baptism in relation to the ancient Israelite’s baptism rite: Israel has, though the ages, baptized converts who have come from among the nations seeking membership in Israel as the People of God. In such a baptism, the newcomer recapitulates in his person, in a dramatic reenactment, the sacred history of Israel. He is immersed bodily in waters symbolizing the primeval chaos, the flood-time wickedness of men, the bondage of Egypt, and the river Jordan that bars the way to the promised land. Symbolically, he goes through the passage from death to life which the people have made so many times. . . . By passing through the waters in the ceremony he also accepts the conditions of the Sinai Covenant in addition to those of the covenant God made with Noah. *The Meaning of the Sacraments* (Ohio: Pflaum Press, 1981), p.8.

In the Vatican II documents, and specifically within *Lumen Gentium*, it is ground-breaking that the structure of church leadership is explored *within the context of the People of God*, which opens unprecedented space for discussing collegiality and including the roles of the laity. Although the framework for this discussion is the People of God, however, the *political structure* is still envisioned in terms of the church as Institution. Throughout the document the language vacillates back and forth between the hierarchical vocabulary of obedience and submission and the People of God vocabulary of collegiality and collaboration, of which even the laity are a part. Of course we should not be surprised at the strong presence of hierarchical language here, as the Institution has dominated for so many of the preceding centuries, and it is typical of Church councils to try to create the effect that anything new being said is entirely in line with previous councils.

But we must also recognize that these two leading models are not, in reality, especially compatible with each other. The most that can be said in the documents is that they create an uneasy counter-balance to each other. For example, no. 37 of *Lumen Gentium* states that, “By reason of the knowledge, competence or pre-eminence which they have the laity are empowered – indeed sometimes obliged — to manifest their opinion on those things which pertain to the good of the Church.” However, in the next breath, the laity should “promptly accept in Christian obedience what is decided by the pastors, who, as teachers and rulers of the Church, represent Christ.” And in the section on the hierarchy preceding the section on the laity, lay members are obliged to submit to the bishops and adhere to their authority without reservation.

Indeed this kind of ambivalence is present in the discussion of the kingly, priestly and prophetic roles of the laity that are interwoven throughout *Lumen Gentium*. Perhaps in terms of the identity of the laity, Vatican II’s inclusion of the laity in the three-fold offices of Jesus Christ has had the most fundamental effect and has the most far-reaching potential; however, not only in the conciliar documents, but in the forty-plus years since the Council, the ambivalence produced by juxtaposing the hierarchical language of the Institution with the inter-relational language of the People of God has hindered progress in the Roman Catholic laity’s appropriation of their identity as fully participating members of the Church.

Certainly, the titles “king,” “priest” and “prophet” are familiar to the People of God, as they are an integral part of the Chosen People Israel’s journey of faith. However, these titles have been commandeered by the Roman Catholic institution over the centuries with its own set of implications, especially regarding the relationship of the laity to the Church’s ordained leaders, often in contradiction to their scriptural meaning. For example, after Constantine legitimized

Christianity as a state-sanctioned religion, bishops began to take on the political and social status of kings, thus adopting the conventional political structure of monarchy. But the concept of kingship in the Hebrew Scriptures totally reverses the conventional notion of kingship. The scriptural notion of kingship, exemplified by King David, and who for Christians Jesus embodies, is profoundly tied to the notion of justice, mercy and service rather than dominance and coercive power. In the Christian model, the type of “kingship” in which all members of the People of God participate is that of a servant-king. The kingship of the People of God is best symbolized by those members who use their power to empower others rather than those members who require reverence and submission to validate their authority.

This is indicated in *Lumen Gentium* with regard to the laity, who is charged to work to remedy those conditions of the world that are an inducement to sin.¹⁶ The laity’s leadership role constitutes transforming the world by bringing the values of Christ – and by extension the Church – into it. As Giuseppe Alberigo notes, however, although lay members are charged with active engagement in terms of leadership in the world, often they are treated as “a sort of assault battalion, the Church’s shock troops [in the world]. The Church’s dependence on them in this role, however, still exclude[s] them from any share in the theological or thinking function of the Church.”¹⁷ The laity, to a great extent, is still expected to be passive with regard to leadership roles within the Church, but active within the world. The laity is the clergy’s strong arm of morality in the world.¹⁸

This is due, in large part, to the institutional separation of the clergy and laity, not only with regard to their respective realms of operation, but ontologically as well. The title of priest is the most familiar title for Roman Catholics linked to the ministry of Jesus, although this has very little direct substantiation with regard to Scripture. Jesus is only explicitly referred to as priest in the Letter to the Hebrews. As Kenan Osborne notes, “the early Church did not use the liturgical or sacred

¹⁶ *LG*, no. 36.

¹⁷ Giuseppe Alberigo, “The People of God in the Experience of Faith,” in *La Iglesia Popular: Between Fear and Hope*, ed. Leonardo Boff and Virgil Elizondo (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, Ltd., 1984), pp. 29–30.

¹⁸ Alberigo uses the group, “Catholic Action” to illustrate this point: “Catholic Action as a form of collaboration in the hierarchical apostolate was the reassertion of the total dependence of any lay movement on the clerical caste: lay people were accepted as indispensable collaborators from the moment when the shortage of vocations meant that the clergy could no longer be self-sufficient, and from the moment when society seemed to refuse to give ever greater devotion to and place ever greater trust in the clerical habit. . . . Catholic action is not guiding action in the theoretical sphere, but an executive branch in the practical sphere. So action became widely seen as the way, virtually the only way open to lay people, of expressing their Christian fervour.” *Ibid.*, 29.

title of priest for Church ministers, and it was evidently shunned by the early Church for designation of its ministers.”¹⁹ This makes sense because of Jesus’ strong criticism of some members of the Jewish priesthood of his time. The nascent Christian use of the term attempts to retrieve its ancient covenantal meaning, however, regarding the priestly nature of the People of God – which the religious leaders who were criticized by Jesus obviously did not exemplify.

In time, the understanding of Jesus as priest introduced in the Letter to the Hebrews gains theological dominance, and by the Middle Ages the priesthood of Christ, which now only the clergy represent, is associated with the power of eucharistic consecration. And, as the later Tridentine Mass clearly illustrates, the laity is totally left out of this function, for the eucharistic sacrifice is complete when the ordained presider consumes the consecrated bread and wine; the assembly is then urged to receive, but it is not necessary for the effectiveness of the sacrament, because the priest – acting as Christ – has accomplished the sacrifice for all of the assembly.²⁰

Vatican II extends the priestly role to the laity, and in so doing, re-orientes the understanding of the priesthood of the clergy from power to service:²¹ if priesthood originates in Jesus himself, then it must embrace the ministry of Jesus’ whole life, a life of service to and in the world. Thus the laity also shares in the priestly role of Jesus. However, not only in the Vatican II documents, but still in many official documents, the division between the clergy and laity pertains not only to what particular types of priestly service each provides, but differs essentially as well. This is apparent even in *Lumen Gentium*’s introduction:

Though they differ essentially and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are none the less ordered one to another . . . The ministerial priest, by the sacred power that he has, forms and rules the priestly people; in the person of Christ he effects the eucharistic sacrifice. . . The faithful indeed, by virtue of their royal priesthood, participate in the offering of the Eucharist . . . and in the reception of the sacraments [and] the witness of a holy life. . . .²²

¹⁹ Kenan Osborne, *Priesthood: A History of the Ordained Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church* (New York/Mahwah, N.J: Paulist Press,1988), p. 83.

²⁰ Note that I have intentionally changed the language here from “Jesus” to “Christ” – indicating the change in Christology from a more ascending approach where all Christians represent Jesus in both his humanity and his divinity, to a decidedly descending approach that is characteristic of the type of theology where only those in exalted positions represent Jesus in his exalted state, as Lord over all.

²¹ See Osborne’s discussion in *Priesthood* on the movement of ordained ministry understood as service to ordination as power which found official articulation in Trent (see ch.9) and the retrieval of the language of ministry as service in the documents of Vatican II (ch.11).

²² *LG*, no.10.

This “essential difference,” between the ordained and non-ordained, a distinction which arose in the Middle Ages, is not spelled out by Vatican II, and although still used in official Church documents, has yet to be clarified.

Further, the clergy’s realm is still understood to be within the confines of the Church, whereas the laity’s proper sphere is the world – the laity is sanctified by the clergy and in turn goes out and sanctifies the world by their witness. This Institutional dichotomy between the religious realm of the clergy and the secular realm of the laity poses serious questions for the identity of ordained persons as well as for the internal relationship between ordained and non-ordained priesthood. This returns us again to the questions, “how was Jesus a priest?” and “does our ordained priesthood in fact resemble Jesus?” Given Vatican II’s retrieval of the priesthood of all believers and specific extension of the priestly function to the laity, perhaps it is the laity who will eventually re-define the roles and functions of the ordained, instead of the other way around, for Jesus certainly spent more time ministering in the world than in the temple.

The potential for the future relationship between the ordained and the non-ordained – and for future practices of leadership – rests, I believe, on retrieving a truer *covenantal* understanding of priesthood, which inheres in the model of the church as the People of God, and here the prophetic function of the laity is undeniable. The basis for priesthood in the Institutional model rests on the conviction that the hierarchical structure of the church is divinely ordained by God, a point that is reiterated in *Lumen Gentium*.²³ Therefore, according to this model, the division between the ordained and the non-ordained priesthood must never be blurred: it is ontologically set. However, the basis for priesthood in the model of the People of God rests on the covenant relationship, which transcends and transforms any and all political and social structures. Instead, the People of God is ultimately governed by the relationships between people who image the compassionate and self-giving God. Leadership is rooted in the spirit of the law and not in the letter of the law, and therefore ministry – be it pastoral, liturgical or otherwise – must always be dynamic and somewhat fluid.

The Israelite prophets are known for criticizing their own political leaders who ruled unjustly²⁴ – without mercy and compassion, – and their religious leaders, who overlooked and even participated in flagrant moral violations while holding believers hostage to religious rituals and rules having little to do with the inter-relationship upon

²³ *LG*, no.18. The divinely-ordained nature of the hierarchy is asserted at the onset of ch.3 of the section on the People of God, prior to discussion of the laity.

²⁴ See, e.g., J. David Pleins, *The Social Visions of the Hebrew Bible*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), p. 285.

which the covenant is based.²⁵ Religious leaders were just as much the target as the political leaders. By the time of Jesus, church and state become separate, and it is, interestingly, not the state that Jesus goes after, but certain religious leaders, particularly for their exclusiveness, legalism and hypocrisy. If all of the members of the church share in the prophetic role of Jesus Christ, then internal reform falls on the laity as well as the clergy, and in fact, since the laity do not (as of yet) hold official power and thus stand outside of it privy to a more objective view, reform is more likely if it comes from the “bottom up.”

The laity’s function in the internal governing of the Church is indicated – albeit very tentatively – in *Lumen Gentium*, and since Vatican II the prophetic role of the laity has surely been gaining ground – albeit not without institutional resistance. This prophetic role in the internal affairs of the Church is particularly related to the laity’s reception, non-reception and dissent in matters relating to all areas of Church life. No. 12 of *Lumen Gentium*, states that

the holy People of God shares also in Christ’s prophetic office . . . The whole body of the faithful who have an anointing that comes from the holy one cannot err in matters of belief. This characteristic is shown in the supernatural appreciation of the faith of the whole people, when, “from the bishops to the last of the faithful, they manifest a universal consent in matters of faith and morals.”

As Gaillardetz remarks, “divine revelation, the word of God, has been given to the whole Christian community *qua* community.”²⁶ The whole community of faith receives God’s word through a process of active appropriation. The reception, non-reception and dissent of the laity are indispensable in this process. He continues,

The process is itself one of transformation: reception is not concerned with the juridical validity or even veracity of a teaching but with its efficacy. A teaching that has not been “received” is not, for that reason, necessarily false. The claim is, in fact, more empirical in character. A teaching that is not received is not efficacious; it has no transformative power within the community. In short, a nonreceived teaching becomes irrelevant to the life of the community.²⁷

The key here is *transformative power*. Doctrines and practices that are not transformative are not covenantal, because they do not engage the inter-personal depth of the community and therefore do not image the God of Genesis, who creates by bringing beings into intimate and

²⁵ For example, this condemnation is particularly sharp in Hosea 4:4–19.

²⁶ Gaillardetz, *Teaching with Authority*, p. 227.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 235.

inter-dependent relations with each other. Transformation – conversion – does not only extend outward to the world, but must first and foremost come from within, and permeate throughout: vertically as well as horizontally and everywhere in between. A faith community that is not transforming from within cannot be transformative without. The laity is indispensable in this process precisely because it consists of fully participating members who are themselves responsible for the transformation of church structure through their active and freely-given responses to their leaders, who in turn actively and genuinely receive them.

The identity of Roman Catholic laity is thus being shaped through an appropriation of its kingly, priestly, and most especially prophetic functions as directed by the church as the People of God. Ironically, this identity is given its particularly Roman Catholic flavor precisely because it is unfolding in contrast to the monopolizing Institutional understanding of church which has had a stranglehold on Roman Catholicism for too many centuries. I am not here supporting the eradication of the Institution or demise of church hierarchy, but rather (as are many others) a transformation of its leaders and its leadership structure through active engagement and integration of the laity at every level and in every dimension of church life. If the truly authentic Roman Catholic identity of the laity is to be realized, the Institution itself must be converted into a more covenantal organization, one which learns from its history: a history grounded in Israel's journey of faith which unfolds throughout the Hebrew Scriptures and which is guided, as was Jesus, by inclusivity, the spirit of law over the letter of the law, and most especially integrity – a daunting task for all persons, lay members and ordained alike. Only as a true People of God can the Church extend outward in its sacramental mission to bring humanity together in unity and into communion with God, as *Lumen Gentium* so hopefully envisions.

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