

THE PEOPLE OF GOD AS PILGRIM

An Interpretation on Constitution of *Lumen Gentium*

KORNELUS SIPAYUNG*

Abstraksi

Konstitusi Dogmatik Konsili Vatikan II, *Lumen Gentium*, secara jelas menguraikan bahwa Gereja sebagai umat Allah, Israel baru adalah peziarah dan musafir yang masih dalam perjalanan, belum sampai ke tempat tujuan yang definitif. Gereja masih harus berjuang untuk mencapai kota abadi. Statusnya sebagai peziarah dan musafir yang masih dalam perjalanan dan belum sampai pada tujuan final, mengharuskan Gereja untuk senantiasa membaharui diri, mengevaluasi diri, dan melakukan pertobatan terus-menerus, baik dalam ajaran maupun dalam hidup, untuk dapat semakin mendekati pendirinya, yakni Yesus Kristus, Sang Guru.

Key words: Church, people of God, pilgrim, struggle, council, Jerusalem from high, reformation.

Introduction

*Ecclesia Dei, quid dicis de te ipso?*¹ This is the question of the council about the Church. During the period of the great ecumenical councils, no council made an explicit statement on the nature of the Church. Even though the council did not make an explicit treatment of the Church in the course of its history there were lots of non systematic statements of ecclesiology. The explicit statement of the nature of the Church has begun since the Vatican Council I and has been continued in the Vatican Council II.

We can find in the New Testament many images of the Church, such as sheepfold, flock, field, family of God, the temple, the Jerusalem from high, the Israel of God, salt of the earth, light of the world, leaven in the dough, column of truth, fullness of Christ.

Before The first Vatican Council there were much non systematic treatments about the Church, for example: Church as the first sacrament, Church is a place where the Word of God is preached and the sacraments are

*Kornelus Sipayung, lulusan program S-2 bidang Teologi Universitas Gregoriana-Roma, dosen Teologi di Fakultas Filsafat dan Teologi Unika St. Thomas – Sumatera Utara.

¹Cf. G.H.TAVARD, *A Theology for Ministry. Theology and Life* 6, Wilmington 1983, 10. (This is the question of the Cardinal Lèon Suenens when he was invited to the church's bishops and theologians to undertake self-criticism); See also M. LORRAINE, ed., "Constitution of the Church", *The Sixteen Documents of Council Vatican II*, Boston 1999, 89.

administered according to the Gospel. Between the Reformation and the Vatican Council II the problem of the identity of the Church and its visible sign marked and dominated ecclesiological reflection, Church is the community of people brought together by the same Christian faith and united in the communion of the same sacraments under the government of the legitimate pastor; the church is mystery.

Perhaps the Constitution of the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, becomes the answer on the question of the Church. All of the chapters of *Lumen Gentium* give us the complete meaning of the Church. The Church can and must speak of herself first as Mystery. The first sentences of *Lumen Gentium* make a statement about Jesus Christ. The Church can understand herself only through the light of Christ. She must first proclaim Christ as her head. Chapter two establishes the unifying that the Church is the messianic people of God. Then the following chapters present the role of apostolic authority as a divine gift, the role of laity in the Church, the universal call to holiness, the role of religious order in the Church, the role of the communion of the saints, and conclude with the role of Blessed Virgin Mary in the Church. This article deals with the second chapter of the *Lumen Gentium*, the People of God.

The Meaning of the People of God

One of the great contributions of the Second Vatican Council is its emphasis on the Church as the people of God. What is the base of this idea in the Old Testament and New Testament? Can we find the continuity between the people of God in Old Testament and the Church in the New Testament?

The idea of 'the people of God' could be found both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. The history of salvation in the Old Testament begins with God's call to Abraham. God called Abraham and promised to make of him a great nation and that in him all the families of the earth shall be blessed. From the beginning of the Israel's history there is the twofold conviction that God has chosen Israel to be a special people and that this special people have significance for all the nations of the world. In the Old Testament, especially in the Deuteronomy 26: 5-11, we can see Israel's description of herself as the people of God. The context of this description is the offering of the first fruits of crops to God. The confession in the Deuteronomy 26:5-11 can be taken as a reflection of Israel's core belief in her identity as God's People.²

The Israel's profession of faith in Deuteronomy shows that she recognizes herself as a special people gifted by God. This profession began with the journey of the patriarch Jacob to Egypt to escape the famine in Canaan ('my father was a wandering Aramean') and the growth of his descendants in Egypt where he became a great nation, mighty and populous. Then the text depicts the Israel's harsh treatment at the hands of the Egyptians, and her cry for help based

²Cf. D.J. HARRINGTON, *The Church. According to the New Testament*, Chicago 2001, 70.

on the belief that God hears her prayer and does intervene in history. God answered Israel's prayer in two mighty acts: the exodus from Egypt and giving Israel the land of Canaan. So the offering of the first fruits of the spring harvest at the Feast of Weeks is a symbolic acknowledgement of God's gracious activity.³

The status of Israel as the people of God is by God's gracious choice. The meditation on Israel as God's elected people comes between God's promise to clear the land of seven nations mightier and more numerous and an appeal to observe God's commandments. Israel is addressed as "a people holy to the Lord God" because "the Lord your God has chosen you out of all peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession." Her status as God's people was not because Israel were more numerous than any other people, but because God's love for and fidelity to Israel.⁴

Similar to these ideas of Israel's confessions of faith in Deuteronomy (v.26), the concepts of covenant are also central in the Old Testament. In the context of covenant Israel is asked to reaffirm the servant-master relationship with God and to put away all other gods. When Joshua asserted that he and his household would serve the Lord, the people made the same response: "We also will serve the Lord, for he is our God (Joshua 24:18). The biblical God of Israel is the God of covenant. Israel renews her covenant relationship with God and chooses once again to revere the Lord and serve him in sincerity and faithfulness.⁵

The God whom Israel confesses is the Lord, a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for a thousand generations. Israel can recognize herself as a people of God because God himself has taken the initiative and remained faithful to his promises. Having come to know and love this God in the great events of her national history, Israel, as a people of God, promises to respond in steadfast love by keeping the commandments of God.

Having seen the idea of the people of God in the Old Testament we direct our attention to the idea in the New Testament. With his Hebrew background St. Paul has the concept of Israel as the God's people who have received the statement and the promises, the knowledge and worship of the true God, and finally, his presence. St. Peter notices too that Christians are the new People, profoundly linked with Israel; and their assembly, just like that of Israel, is called the church of God⁶ as we find in 1 Peter 2:10, "Now you are God's people." Can the Church call herself the people of God? The statement about the Church's identity as the people of God appears in this text. In this passage,

³Cf. HARRINGTON, *The Church...*, 70.

⁴Cf. HARRINGTON, *The Church...*, 70.

⁵Cf. HARRINGTON, *The Church...*, 72.

⁶Cf. Y. CONGAR, "The Church. The People of God", *Concilium 1*, (1965), 8.

titles such as chosen race, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation are applied to the Church. The effect of this application to the Christian community is that in Christ Jews and Gentiles are found together. In Christ the Church becomes suffused with the holiness of God, and through Jesus, himself a Jew, the Church has become God's own people.

Insofar as Jesus has fulfilled the hopes of his people Israel (the Old Testament people of God), the people who gathered around him, whether they be of Jewish or Gentile origin, constitute the people of God. The Jewishness of Jesus is the link between the two Testaments and the base of the biblical claims to be the people of God. Moreover, as the people of God, the Church has been given the prerogatives of biblical Israel and the structure of its faith. Its election has been initiated by God; its mission is carried out in the course of salvation history; and its existence is lived out in the context of covenant.⁷

Galatians 3: 1-29 is very important for considering the Church as the people of God. This text explains how Jews and Gentiles constitute God's people in and through Jesus. This text also reflects upon the relationship between Israel as God's people and the Church as God's people in Christ. Paul's position is summarised in Galatians 3:29, "And if you belong to Christ then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promises." It is clear that the real children of Abraham are those who display faith after the pattern of Abraham.⁸

From this text we can see how non-Jews also can be part of the people of God in which the opponents are other Jewish-Christian missionaries, and that contends that the baptism in Christ makes one part of people of God and heirs to the promises made to Abraham. From long Paul's argument in Galatians emerges the conviction that belonging to Christ by faith and baptism makes one part of the people of God. Christ is the key to unlocking the mystery of Scripture. Christ does what the Law of Moses cannot do or bring right relationship with God. Christ makes it possible for non Jews to become children of Abraham and so members of the people of God.⁹

The idea of the people of God enables us to express the continuity of the Church with Israel. It at once invites us to consider the Church inserted in a history dominated and defined by God's plan for man. This plan is one of two folds, covenant and salvation. 'People of God' connotes the plan of God, and therefore secret history. We know that this plan and this history are translated into a positive and gracious historical intervention. The relationship between the Mystery of Israel to the Mystery of the Church can be envisaged adequately only in the perspective of the history of salvation. This includes the question of

⁷HARRINGTON, *The Church...*, 73.

⁸Cf. HARRINGTON, *The Church...*, 75.

⁹Cf. HARRINGTON, *The Church...*, 77.

the Church's roots in Israel and the destiny of the Jewish people in its eschatological context.¹⁰

The God of Israel is a covenant God. In *Lumen Gentium* the covenant is essentially collective. The Council's treatment of the theme 'People of God' begins with a reference to theology:

At all times and in every race God has given welcome to whosoever fears him and does what is right. God, however, does not make men holy and does not save them merely as individuals, without bond and link between one another. Rather it has pleased him to bring men together as one people, a people who acknowledges him in truth and serves him in holiness. He therefore chose the race of Israel as a people unto himself.¹¹

The covenant creates the messianic people, namely Israel, according to the flesh, and called the Church of God after the coming of Christ. The covenant is not done for a man or for a multitude of men. Covenant does not concern individuals directly, but a people, Israel, the Church, a visible and social union, a communion of life, charity and truth.

What is a people? A people, a nation, a race, is a group of men and women who live and die, who work and rest, who eat and drink, who build, who love, who bear children, who are happy and unhappy. To be a people means to live side by side within one tradition. It implies sharing a common past out of which we look forward to a common future. A people have its habits, customs, or art. What is it that distinguishes the people of God from other peoples? The distinctive feature is not their habits, customs, or art, but their faith.

What distinguishes the people of the faithful is their faith, the fact so simple and yet so incomprehensible - that alone in the universe they know that the mystery of life and death was manifested on earth, on a hill near Jerusalem, when the author of life was put to death. They know that this manifestation was completed in a nearby cave, when the Lord Jesus, having tasted death, triumphed over it. The Church is the people that live in the hope of sharing this triumph. Out of its past, known by faith, it looks to the future with hope, and it lives the present with love.

This people is comprised of individuals. These are those who believe in Christ, who are reborn not from a perishable but from an imperishable seed through the word of the living God, not from flesh but from water and the Holy Spirit. They are all those who in faith look upon Jesus as the author of salvation and the source of unity and peace. The stress lies on their unity and cohesiveness. They are gathered together as one. They are established as the Church. They are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people which called now the people of God.¹²

¹⁰Cf. CONGAR, "The Church...", 9.

¹¹TAVARD, *A Theology...*, 65.

¹²Cf. TAVARD, *A Theology...*, 66-67.

The people of God is a royal priesthood. The Old Testament has seen the Saviour as a Royal Priest. The Royal Priesthood was an attribute of the Saviour. The use of this messianic title implies that Christians should manifest the royal priesthood of Christ in themselves. In Tavad own words:

His messiahship is to shine through us, not so much in what we do as in what we are. To live with Christ and let him shape us as he wishes is to share in his messiahship or royal priesthood. But priesthood is a liturgical function. In his high-priestly function, Christ saves his disciples by including them in the eternal offering of the Logos to the Father. Christ as the Royal Priest cannot therefore be disassociated from those in whom his priesthood is at work. In a very profound sense, Christians are the royal priesthood of Christ: they are what can be seen of it on earth. The Messiah was seen by the apostles. Today, however, men can know him only through his presence among the Christian people, in that they love one another. It is through today's people of God that Christ approaches our contemporaries as their Messiah, their Royal Priest, and their Saviour. This defines the being of the people of God, 'The baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood...'.¹³

The spiritual status of the people of God is intimately connected with the sacraments of the Catholic tradition. Baptism marks the start of the common priesthood. It associates the faithful to the death and resurrection of Christ. Reborn as a son of God, Christians must confess before men the faith they have received from God through the Church. Confirmation marks the renewal of the Pentecostal life. The Holy Spirit endows them with special strength so that they are more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith, both by word and by deed, as true witnesses of Christ. The sacrament of the Holy Eucharist occupies a special place among the constitutive elements of the people of God. To receive the body of Christ is to revitalize our union with Christ in the Holy Spirit. The Eucharistic presence of Christ is real, for Christ really transforms bread and wine into his body and blood.¹⁴

Three Qualities of the People of God

From the New Testament we can find and distinguish between the priesthood of Christ and the royal priesthood of the Church. Various texts of the New Testament present the death of Christ as a sacrifice and these texts attribute priesthood to Him. The Letter to the Hebrews is the high-point of the appeal to the notions of mediation, priesthood, and sacrifice and it is this work which has exercised the primary influence in Christian literature in this area of thought. The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews had the intention to encourage believers and disciples in communities that suffer and endure persecution. The Letter's focus is on the mediation of a new covenant, according to the eternal

¹³TAVARD, *A Theology...*, 67-68.

¹⁴Cf. TAVARD, *A Theology...*, 69-72.

plan of God, whose intention is to save humanity and all of creation from servitude to the devil and to subject them in obedience to his own will and role.¹⁵ Citing the Letter to the Hebrews, Power writes:

Jesus Christ is a perfect high priest, who, being the Son of God has taken on our human weakness. He is declared so by divine oath from all eternity (5:5-10). He is the mediator of a new and more perfect covenant in which the forgiveness of sins shown to be impossible under the old covenant is brought about. His priesthood is unlike that of old covenant, or that of Aaron, but the priesthood according to the order of Melchizedek, for it has no human origin but only a divine one. The sacrifice of this mediator and high-priest is made once and for all, and his priesthood is now exercised in priestly intercession at the right hand of God in heaven.¹⁶

The idea of the Christian community as a royal priesthood may in fact predate the elaboration of the theme of Christ's priesthood. This idea comes from 1 Peter 2:4-10. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews calls the disciples a royal priesthood. Evoking the scene of the Covenant narrated in Exodus 19, the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews applies the royal priesthood to Christ's disciples. Exodus 19:5-6 describes the scene of election and covenant: "If you will obey my voice indeed and keep my Covenant, then you shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people; for all the earth is mine; and you shall be unto me a kingdom of priest and a holy nation." Israel is a chosen people, a people with whom Yahweh makes covenant, that is, the Israelites were a royal priesthood. Israel is a nation which has dominance over its enemies through God and which can engage in true worship. Indeed in this people all may be seen as kings and priests, unlike their Gentile neighbours.¹⁷

Christ's disciples are a royal priesthood. They are a chosen in Christ, redeemed by his blood. They are the people that have spiritual dominance and which can announce the good news of salvation to their neighbour. They are the people in which each and all are kings and priests, all anointed by the Spirit in the building up of the one household of God.¹⁸

The themes of mediation, priesthood, and sacrifice were developed in the School of Alexandria, with mediation as the key term. Origen relates the royal priesthood of the Church to the priesthood and kingship of Christ. He says that the true Jerusalem is the Church, built of living stones, a royal priesthood in which spiritual sacrifices are offered. The royal priesthood of the Church arises from the priesthood of Christ, the Word made flesh, which is both heavenly and earthly. Athanasius and Cyril, using various biblical metaphors, relate Christ's

¹⁵Cf. D. N. POWER, "Priesthood in Christian Tradition," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Washington 1976, 691.

¹⁶POWER, "Priesthood...", 691-692.

¹⁷Cf. TAVARD, *A Theology...*, 73.

¹⁸Cf. POWER, "Priesthood...", 695.

role as mediator to his genealogy, priesthood and kingship - all combined in the one person. Commenting on Hebrews and on the Psalms they contrast the priesthood of Aaron and the priesthood according to Melchizedek. They show the distinctive character of the priesthood of Christ through which cultic priesthood is not only replaced but surpassed. Jesus is priest according to the order of Melchizedek because his priesthood had no origin in this world but comes from the eternity of the Word's communion with the Father. Athanasius relates Christ's priesthood to the life of the Church. Having acted as High Priest in the sacrifice of his death, Christ became an eternal High Priest who entered through his death into heavenly sanctuary. Now he acts as High Priest in the Church by sanctifying it through communion with his life giving-flesh, bringing believers near to God and offering to the Father those who in faith approach him.¹⁹

John Chrysostom associates the priesthood of Christ and of his Body in a special way with the Eucharist. For Chrysostom the Eucharist is the sacrament and representation of Christ's mysteries. Through baptism, the faithful are made kings, priests, and prophets. They are kings because they have been given victory over sin. They are priests because they immolate their bodies in offering a sacrifice to God. They are prophets because they are given an understanding of what is to come. Their royal priesthood is founded in the communion with Christ, priest and victim, given through the eating and drinking of his sacramental body and blood.²⁰

The most important phases in the development of tradition on priesthood is the teaching of Augustine. For Augustine Christ is a mediator between God and a sinful humanity. Augustine relates the mediation of Christ to the notion of him as the principle or source of life and grace. The Principle is the Word who assumed human nature. The flesh of Christ purifies men and gives them life because it is the flesh of the Word. Augustine says that this Word, who is the Son, assumed humanity and thus gave humanity the hope of his love, bringing men near to God the Father, since men had been far away. The priesthood is of the people itself, of which Christ is the Priest - he who is the Mediator between God and men. The people are the priesthood and a sacrifice because they eat of the flesh of Priest himself.²¹

The question which we want to answer in this context is how these biblical and traditional categories of kingship, priesthood and prophecy relate to the concrete functions of the Christian.

¹⁹Cf. POWER, "Priesthood...", 695.

²⁰Cf. POWER, "Priesthood...", 696.

²¹Cf. POWER, "Priesthood...", 697.

The Kingship

The council explained ecclesial people-hood as a collective participation in kingship. Kingship means that we are to enter the world, with its dominating powers, and reinterpret this world with the power of the Gospel. Tavad writes:

To say that the Christian People is 'king' amounts to saying that it has been given dominion over all things. 'The spiritual man judges all things and he is judged by no one' (1Cor. 2:15). He has been given Lordship over the universe. The dominion which the Creator entrusted to Adam and which was embodied in the Noachic Covenant belongs to the People of God as the spiritual representative of mankind. In other words, the function of the People of God is to enter the world of dominion and mastery over nature, the world of science, of engineering, of planning and of government, with the interpretation of creation as sacrament of the divine, as channel and instrument of God's communication to man, as vehicle of awesome and numinous power, which is implied in the Christian Gospel.²²

Tavad recognizes that this wide field is primarily the domain to the layman, who, by his technical knowledge, belongs to this world and, by his commitment to the Gospel, can interpret it in a way which no other technical person knows.

The Priesthood

All Christian believers are closely associated to the high priesthood of Christ. The priesthood of the People of God is made concrete by relating it to liturgical worship. Tavad writes:

The common priesthood is exercised first of all by taking part in liturgical worship. Liturgical participation means precisely that the liturgy is not performed by the clergy and witnessed by the laity sitting as spectators in the pews; it is celebrated rather by the entire People of God, each member fulfilling his task in the hierarchical order of the supper. All Christians need to recover and restore the sense of organic action, of corporate prayer, of collective praise, thanksgiving and adoration, which is the heart of worship.²³

In his book 'The Church, Community of Salvation, an Ecumenical Ecclesiology', Tavad speaks about ministry and writes that the priesthood of the People of God is corporate.

The notion of priesthood is appropriate here since all the faithful take part together in the Eucharist meal and offering that is at the heart of Christian worship. Given the formula of the New Testament and the nature of the Eucharist experience, it is manifest that this priesthood is not individual. Not any one of the faithful has priestly status in isolation from the others. It is the

²²TAVARD, *A Theology...*, 76; Cf. M.A. ALEXANDER, *Church and Ministry in the Works of G.H. Tavad*, Leuven 1994, 53.

²³TAVARD, *A Theology...*, 77.

collectiveness that is priestly in its doxological worship of God through Christ the High Priest. The priesthood of the people is corporate. It is communicated virtually to all believers through their baptism and is actuated in them by their Eucharistic participation.²⁴

Prophecy

The function of prophet may be understood in terms of bearing witness to the faith, the salvation which Christ has gained for us. In Tavad's own words,

The prophetic function of the People of God is simply to bear witness to Christ, to be ready at all times to 'give an account of the faith that is in us,' to offer oneself to the Holy Spirit as a willing instrument of apostolate and evangelism.²⁵

Tavad concludes that Kingship, priesthood and prophecy may be translated as a service, worship and witness. The priesthood of the People of God is a service to the world where we live; a worship of God, Creator and Redeemer; and a witness to Christ, the First and the Last.²⁶ Tavad uses these three elements of service, worship and witness as the basis for his typological approach to a theology for ministry. Tavad finds four types or structures of ministry correspond to several requirements of basic Christian belief. First is the minister-function within the structure of mediation. The minister is a practitioner of prayer who prays for the people and leads the people in prayer. The second, the minister acts with the structures of proclamation. A fundamental ministerial task is to announce the good news, to preach the gospel, to address the people from a pulpit or an altar, or in the course of house visitations, or in the privacy of an office or a confessional. The minister speaks with the people of God who are thus kept in more or less constant dialogue with both the consolation and the demands of Christian faith. The third, ministry has also a structure of service. Within the structures of service one is called on to serve in order to help people in areas that are not already covered by mediation and proclamation. Structures of service largely depend on needs, which are themselves controlled by the level of civilization of society, by the degree of education in individuals, by collective habits, social convention, customs, by the extend of socialization, by the contemporary problem of neighbourhood deterioration and the deterioration of our ecology. Fourth, ministry is also involved in structures of education. Education may be indeed service, as when it is fighting illiteracy. Education in the church may be a kind of proclamation to announce the gospel to those who do not know it, is both preaching and

²⁴TAVARD, *A Theology...*, 136.

²⁵Cf. TAVARD, *A Theology...*, 78.

²⁶Cf. TAVARD, *A Theology...*, 78.

teaching. However, education is a precondition for mediation, proclamation and service.²⁷

These ministries are not only the responsibility of the clergy. Each Christian shares in this responsibility. For Tavad the laity should partake in all forms of ministry in their life of prayer and witness; they are more actively involved with service, while education needs the active commitment of all.²⁸ Tavad considers the ministry of the laity and writes a similar reflection in his book 'The Church, Community of Salvation, an Ecumenical Ecclesiology':

The laity's ministry is commensurate with the general priesthood of the Christian people that is given by Christ, the author of salvation, in baptism. The tradition sums it up in such expressions as offering to God the sacrifice of praise through the pursuit of a good life in obedience to God's commandments and the demands of conscience. In normal circumstances, this includes the internal offering of one's life to God in prayer; the outside witness to the Lordship of Christ; solidarity with the Church at large by the observance of its regulations; the practice of love for the neighbour; the fulfilment of duties in regard to family, to profession, and to country, in whatever way country may be defined at the different levels of civilization (tribe, clan, province, or nation).²⁹

The People of God Belongs to the Church

After considering the meaning of the people of God and the qualities of the people of God, we can ask the question "Who belongs to the Church?" This question concerns the necessity of the Church for salvation. God granted the world salvation in Christ. Christ confirms this salvation by founding a Church community. The union and the communion of Church is salvation because this community of Christians is precisely the communion of and with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. If Church is necessary for salvation, how can non-Catholic Christians have the salvation?

Bonifac Willems in his article 'Who Belongs to the Church' gives this reply. He says that to achieve a clear understanding a dogmatic formula needs, apart from the correct reconstruction of its historical origin, the study of its scriptural basis and the teaching of the *magisterium*. Study of Scripture and the teaching of the *magisterium* show the clear teaching of Scripture on the necessity of the faith and baptism on the one hand, and the other hand the universality of God's will to save. The condemnation of new-Jews and non-Christians in the Bible, however, usually refers to those who have consciously rejected God's call. Within this scriptural framework there is room for saintly Gentiles.³⁰

²⁷Cf. TAVARD, *A Theology...*, 80-82.

²⁸Cf. TAVARD, *A Theology...*, 86.

²⁹TAVARD, *A Theology...*, 148-149.

³⁰Cf. B. WILLEMS, "Who Belongs to the Church", *Concilium 1*, (1965), 62-63.

The attitude of the *magisterium* on the necessity of the Church for salvation has been more extensively examined by many scholars. Since Pius IX the arguments used against indifferentism are no longer limited to the necessity of the Church but include a more positive reference to the possible salvation of those who live in invincible ignorance of the Christians religion. The preparatory documents for the unpublished second constitution on the church for the First Vatican Council also referred to the possibility of an invincible ignorance about the Church. There were, more ever, objections to the distinction between belonging to the Church in actual fact and in desire, just as there were objections to the distinction between belonging to the 'soul' and to the 'soul-and-body' of the Church. One can find this distinction more clearly expressed in the encyclical of Pope Pius XII *Mystici Corporis Christi* (June 29, 1943.) According to the encyclical one cannot hold in the present phase of salvation history that somebody can be a member of the Mystical Body without being a member of the Church.³¹ A distinction is made between those who are members of the church and those who are, so to speak, oriented towards the church.

Human nature is, in its very root, called to a supernatural participation in the life of God himself. This is a factual aspect of human nature, a definite, real, and ontological dimension given to the nature of every human person. Every free, concrete human action is therefore an acceptance or denial of this directive, engraved in his being. In this way the concept becomes acceptable that there is a 'people of God' co-extensive with mankind as a whole. This people of God underlines the juridical and social organization of what we call the Church, people underlies a given organized state just as a given historical. Radically, therefore, every human being is already in the Church because membership of this people of God is already a factual aspect of human nature. Whenever a human being accepts the fact of his concrete human nature in his free actions, then his free action becomes at the same time the expression of God's salvific will in grace.³² Accordingly, the second chapter of *Lumen Gentium* considers three successive levels of those who belong to the People of God, firstly 'the Catholic faithful.'

They are fully incorporated in the society of the Church who, possessing the Spirit of Christ, accept her entire system and all the means of salvation given to her, and are united with her as part of her visible bodily structure and through her with Christ, who rules her through the Supreme Pontiff and the bishops. The bonds which bind men to the Church in a visible way are profession of faith, the sacraments, and ecclesiastical government and communion. He is not saved, however, who, through part of the body of the Church, does not persevere in charity.³³

³¹Cf. WILLEMS, "Who Belongs...", 63-64.

³²Cf. WILLEMS, "Who Belongs...", 63-64.

³³LORRAINE, "Constitution...", 139.

The second level – ‘all those who, being baptized, bear the name of Christian, yet do not profess the faith in its integrity and do not keep the unity of communion with the successor of Peter.’ They lovingly believe in God the Father Almighty and in Christ, the Son of God and Saviour. They are consecrated by baptism, in which they are united with Christ. They also recognize and accept others sacraments within their own Churches or ecclesiastical communities. Many of them rejoice in the episcopate, celebrate the Holy Eucharist and cultivated devotion toward the Virgin Mother of God. They also share with us in prayer and other spiritual benefits...³⁴

The third level – ‘those who have not yet received the Gospel’. The Council explain those who have not yet received the Gospel, in the first place we must recall the people to whom the testament and the promises were given and from whom Christ was born according to the flesh (cf. Rm 9: 4-5). On account of their fathers this people remains most dear to God, for God does not repent of the gifts he makes nor of the calls he issues (cf. Rm 11:28-29). But the plant of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator. In the first place among this there are the Mohammedans, who professing to hold the faith of Abraham, along with us adore the one and merciful God, who on the last day will judge mankind...³⁵

The People of God is on a Pilgrimage

Tavard recognizes that the idea of a pilgrim Church returns time and again in the Constitution on the Church. He finds two notions on the pilgrim Church in the chapter ‘On the People of God.’ ‘So likewise the new Israel, which while living in this present age goes in search of a future and abiding city (cf. Heb. 13:14), is called the Church of Christ’ (cf. Mt 16:18), and ‘Moving forward through trial and tribulation, the Church is strengthened by the power of God’s grace...’³⁶ This idea is clearer when the Council formulates the meaning of ‘catholicity.’ One can read, ‘This mark of universality, which adorns the people of God, is the gift from the Lord himself, by which the Catholic Church is effectively and always oriented toward the recapitulation of all mankind with all its goods, under its Head, Christ, in the unity of His Spirit.’³⁷ Tavard distinguishes between the internal and external catholicity of the Church. The internal catholicity of the Church is the unity and unanimity of her members, the individual members ‘gathered from many peoples’ into the people of God, and what the Council calls the ‘particular Churches enjoying their own tradition without detriment to the primacy of chair of Peter which presides over the universal assembly of love.’ The external catholicity of the Church is seen

³⁴LORRAINE, “Constitution..., 140.

³⁵LORRAINE, “Constitution..., 140.

³⁶TAVARD, *A Theology...*, 78.

³⁷TAVARD, *A Theology...*, 79.

when this catholicity turns outside, open upon the world around. She is never closed but always prepared to welcome new members in the Body of Christ and new aspects of creation to the fullness of the *pleroma*, so that God may be all in all in his People.³⁸

Interpreting the Constitution of the Church, Tavad considers that all men are called and they are thus, even unknowingly, to belong to the People of God, Catholics; other Christians; the Jewish people 'in its election, most dear on account of the patriarchs (art. 16), the 'sons of Ishmael, who, acknowledging Abraham as their Father, believe also in the God of Abraham (art. 16), all those also 'who with no fault of their own have not yet reached an express acknowledgement of God', all are turned toward the church, if not in faith, at least in the hope which is implicit in their nearness to God, who in the words of the Council, 'is not far from them, for he gives life, inspiration and all things to all men, and the Saviour wants all men to be saved'. Thus the men in some way belong to the church, being essentially oriented toward communion with the People of God. On the other hand the Church is also existentially turned toward all men. This is the mission transmitted by the apostles in terms of announcing the saving truth keep alive by the Holy Spirit.³⁹

All these expressions imply the classical opposition between the state of the believer in *via*, the *viator*, as opposed to the *comprehensor* in heaven. The pilgrim way is the way of faith, in which we march slowly toward the vision that will make us *comprehensores*, when faith will give way to sight and we may see God face to face.

Conclusion

From the beginning of the Israel's history there is twofold conviction that God has chosen Israel to be a special people and that this special people have significance for all the nations of the world. The status of Israel as the People of God is by God's gracious choice. The God of biblical Israel is the God of covenant. Israel can recognize herself as a People of God because God himself has taken the initiative and remained faithful to his promises.

Christians are the new People of God, profoundly linked with Israel; and their assembly, just like that of Israel, is called the Church of God. Christ makes it possible for non Jews to become children of Abraham and so members of the People of God. The covenant creates the messianic people, namely Israel according to the flesh, and called the Church of God after the coming of Christ. Christ is the high-priest, messiah, and the Saviour. This messiahship is to shine through the Church as the People of God. The Christians as the member of the Church should manifest the royal priesthood of Christ in themselves. So

³⁸Cf. TAVARD, *A Theology...*, 80.

³⁹TAVARD, *A Theology...*, 80-81.

Christ's disciples are a royal priesthood. They are a people that have spiritual dominance and which can announce the good news of salvation to their neighbour. They are the people in which each and all are kings and priests, all anointed by the Spirit in building up of the one household of God. These are the qualities of Christ's disciples.

Three qualities of kingship, priesthood and prophecy are applied to the People of God. The kingship function of the People of God is service; enter to the world of dominion and mastery over nature with the interpretation of creation as sacrament of divine, as channel and instrument of God's communication with man, as vehicle of awesome and numinous power, which implied in the Christian Gospel. The priesthood function of the People of God is worship. The prophecy function of the People of God is to bear witness to Christ to be ready at all time to offer oneself to the Holy Spirit as a willing instrument of apostolate and evangelism.

The People of God belong to: First, the catholic faithful; Second, all those who being baptized, bear the name of Christian, yet do not profess the faith in its integrity or do not keep the unity of communion with the successor of Peter; Third, they who have not yet received the Gospel. All of The People of God is on a pilgrimage. These expressions imply the classical opposition between the status of the believer in via, the viator, as opposed to the *comprehensor* in heaven. The pilgrim way is the way of faith in which we march slowly toward the vision that will make us *comprehensores*, when faith will give way to sight and we may see God face to face.

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