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## **The Church as the “People of God”**

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## Abstract

The Church as “*People of God*” is a term that has gained prominence since the Vatican II Council although the term has been in use since the times of the Old Testament (OT). In the OT the Israelites were referred to as People of Yahweh, In Exodus Moses conducts a covenant between the “*People of God*” and God himself; “You shall be my people and I will be your God” (Deut 32:9). Today we have some theologians who argue that all humankind is indeed the “*People of God*” (Osei-Bonsu) since they were created by the same God who is our Father. Others think that the term “*People of God*” refers to all Christians in the NT context where it involves the community of believers (1 Peter 2:9) “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a people set apart to sing God’s Praises.” The limitations of the image “*Populi Dei*” (or People of God) arises in two ways; first, that of understanding the unity that is demanded by core concepts such as ‘Body of Christ,’ and secondly, the more sociological meaning that risks the mystery aspect of Christ’s mission in the world. In comparing the Catholic and evangelical conceptualization about the image of the Church, the evangelicals often tend to focus more on the virtual or spiritual unity, while the Catholic understanding refers to both physical and spiritual unity of the Church. Therefore, the term “*People of God*” is greatly accepted among evangelicals than *Corpus Christ* that is often more popular in the Catholic circles. *Lumen Gentium* (Vat. II) used the term “*People of God*” in direct reference to the Church as an image hence giving it a deeper meaning. The second chapter of *Lumen Gentium* bears the title ““*People of God*”.” This title does not refer to the laity in contradistinction to the “hierarchy,” but rather it applies to all members of the Church. First it was used to refer to the Church as a body of the *New covenant* in Christ’s blood and in the sense of *Koinonia* or communion of the Christ’s faithful. Therefore the “*People of God*” refers to the *Corpus Christi* (i.e., Body of Christ) that is united in one faith and one love and moving towards the soteriological calling by Christ their head. The aim of this paper is to shed light on the *Populi Dei* concept that underscores the practical implications of the term *Populi Dei* in continuous self-awareness of the Church in the increasing roles to be taken up by the lay faithful.

**Keywords:** Church, People of God, Lumen Gentium, Body of Christ

### 1.1 Introduction

This paper is an exposition on the image of Church as “*People of God*.” This phrase has been applied in various contexts and with nuances of meanings. The word ‘Church’ refers to the ‘body of Christ’ or a community of believers in Christ initiated through baptism. The word Church also has an institutional implication in it. But the adoption of the title *Populi Dei* by Vatican II in the description of the Church gives it a distinct character in reference to the Church as a community of believers.

This paper will explore the various meanings attributed to the Church as the “*People of God*.” It will do this by discussing the official usage in Church documents as well as arguments put forward by theologians on the same. It will briefly treat the challenges of the understanding of *Populi Dei* and give the comparison between Catholic and Protestant views. The conclusion aims at creating clarity on the image *Populi Dei* and emphasize the inclusive nature that this image intends to bring to the Catholic Church as far as relationship and participation of the lay faithful is concerned.

### The Term People of God

The term “*People of God*”, is a broad-based concept that runs through the Bible from the Old and through the New Testament that comes to mean all humankind as children of the same Father or the chosen people of Israel. Osei-Bonsu in his discussions looks at the various uses of the terminology.<sup>1</sup> He combs through the various Biblical uses of the term “*People of God*” and the different images of the Church and the common designation into the “*People of God*” (Judge 20:2; Heb 4:9). He captures the different views that have been expressed by scholars in relation to the meaning of the phrase “*People of God*”. He states that some scholars hold that “*People of God*” implies to some extent people who can only be called God’s people excluding others. To some consider all humanity as belonging to the “*People of God*” while others think that only those who do the will of God can be truly be called the “*People of God*”. Some Christians also are of the view that Old Testament (OT) promises to Israel will be fulfilled literally, therefore, just as the “*People of God*” refers to Israel in the OT (Deut 32:9; cf. Heb 11:25), in the New Testament (NT) it also applies to Israel (2 Pet 2:1). He explains that the image of the Church as the “*People of God*” is integral to an understanding that the Church is the new Israel.

The term *Koinonia* is also closely linked to the description of the church as a people. In the NT, Paul uses *koinonia* to refer to religious fellowship or participation of believers in Christ. It denotes mutual fellowship among the “*People of God*”. While the “*People of God*” cannot be defined as *koinonia*, it characterizes the Church. The Church as the “*People of God*” gives it an identity as truly the “people who belong to the Lord.”<sup>2</sup>

## 2.0 THE Church Official Documents on “Populi Dei”

### 2.1 The Church as “People of God”

One of the innovative teachings of the Constitution on the Church is its depiction of the Church as “*People of God*” (*Christifideles*), a community called to be a sign and agent of “intimate union with God and of the unity of all humanity”.<sup>3</sup> The title “*People of God*” was chosen by the Council Fathers to designate both the laity and the clergy as that which constitutes the Church.

Believers in Christ... have been finally set up as a ‘chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people... once no people but now God’s People’ (1 Pt 2, 9-10).

The Church is God's new people because "Christ instituted a new and eternal covenant in his blood of Cross and Eucharist."<sup>5</sup> For this reason, the second chapter of *Lumen Gentium* bears the title "'People of God'." This title does not refer to the laity in contradistinction to the "hierarchy," but rather it applies to all members of the Church. The image of the Church as "People of God" has double ramifications: first, is grounded in the idea of Covenant and thus brings out more clearly the love of God to humankind. Secondly, the image embraces and best expresses the notion of **communion** (*koinonia*). This image of the Church, which is considered less metaphorical image that brings out "a deeper grasp of this notion can give an impulse to a deeper realization of the *communio* within the Church itself both now and in the future."<sup>6</sup> The rediscovery of this profoundly biblical image of the Church is an attempt to go beyond the pre-conciliar juridical conception of the Church. The image of the Church as "People of God" best captures the continuity between Israel and the Church; an understanding of the Church in the light of the major movements of the history of salvation and the messianic promises. It also re-discovers the historical dimensions of revelation and of a situation in redemption, whose climax is eschatology.

The main thought in this article brings out salvation as a form of the constitution of a community of believers in God's saving actions in history who directs at formation of community of salvation whose destiny consists in eschatology.

The election of the people of Israel, served as the first stage of the formation of the "'People of God'." The history of the election of Israel serves as a medium of revelation and the realization of God's salvific decree, which already embraced the whole of humanity. Hence, a close association with this particular nation, namely Israel obscures the universality of salvation. However, the new covenant in Christ, the head of all humanity, places the community of salvation on a new basis. The new "community of salvation" is not based on natural decent or common nationality, but rather in covenant instituted by Jesus Christ and humble acceptance of the word of God, which we receive in baptism and re-birth in the Holy Spirit. Through the merits of Christ, acceptance of the word of God with faith and rebirth constitutes one as Child of God, hence, and a community as "New 'People of God'."

The special character of the new messianic people can be summed up in four points: 1) The most distinctive feature of the new people is given it by Christ, who is its head and whose incarnation, suffering and exaltation are equally significant for it. 2) Belonging to this people brings with it the freedom as children of God, in contrast to the slavery of those who have not been renewed in Christ. 3) The governing of this people that is determined by the love which is in its proper constitution. 4) The history of the messianic people is a preparation for the full realization of the reign of God at the end of time. The election of the "People of God" was an instrument and figure for the realization of the Kingdom of God. It follows therefore, that the image of the "People of God" has a universal significance for all humankind.

At this stage one question arises: do this new "People of God" stand on the same level as the ancient Israel? This "new 'People of God'" without breach of continuity, is not on the same level as the old Israel. There is something new here, namely, these new people are constituted by the new covenant in the blood of Christ.<sup>7</sup>

Articles 10-12 deals with the "People of God" and which need to be read together, reflecting on the new status of the "new 'People of God'." The new "People of God" are called to participate in the kingship, priesthood and prophetic office of Christ (*tria munera Christi*). The term kingship is mentioned briefly, however, the notion of priesthood is extensively dealt with. Each time, however,



the fathers were keen to distinguish it from the ministerial priesthood.<sup>8</sup>

In article 10 it becomes clear that the new “*People of God*” is the “royal realm” of God, in fact his property. The Council fathers affirmed with the same breadth that these “new “*People of God*”” is a co-operative agent in God’s salvific work. In this sense, the Church is a place of true worship and through her celebration of the sacraments bears testimony to works of God and particularly the redemption of Christ.

In the first part of the article 11, the sacramental structure of the “*People of God*” is described under two aspects, namely, *sacramental* life and *personal* life. The priestly character of the “*People of God*” brings the sacramental aspect to the fore. In her sacramental life, the Church mediates salvation on behalf of humankind. This sacramental sign, which is proper to the Church as a whole is a commemorative sign (*signum rememorativum*) as regards the past, the sufferings of Christ. It also points to something present, which is given us through the passion of Christ, the sacramental grace (*signum demonstrativum*); and is presage (*signum prognosticum, praenuntiativum*) of the coming. Through baptism (*Porta fidei*) and confirmation which binds one more perfectly to the Church and to Christ and the celebration of the Eucharist which is “the summit and source of the whole Christian life,” the Church expresses ever more fully its new status. In the context of the ““*People of God*”,” the Eucharist occupies a preeminent place as the integrating and constructive principle of the mystical body of Christ. Besides, the image of the Church as “*People of God*” portrays the nature of the Church as communion more clearly. That the Church is a people shows the *horizontal* dimension of communion. The *vertical* dimension lies on the fact that it is not any type of people but a “*People of God*”.<sup>10</sup> This is the vertical relationship between God and the whole Church.

In article LG 12, the role of Christ and the Holy Spirit in relation to the “*People of God*” is emphasized. Christ the bearer of salvation shares in two ways his mission with his Church. Firstly, Christ shares his mission with the Church through the testimony, which the Church with the help of ‘infallible instinct of faith’ gives. Secondly, Christ shares his mission with the Church through the special gifts of grace which are related to the sacraments. In this regard, “the reality of revelation and salvation has been planted forever among men by Christ, the true witness of God, as the living and imperishable possession of the “*People of God*”.” For this reason, the Church cannot error in faith (*in credendo*).

## 2.2 The Image of the “*People of God*” and the New Theology of Catholicity

Article 13 of the Dogmatic Constitution, which deals with the notion ““*People of God*”,” presents a very systematic account of the notion catholicity. The nature of this catholicity is determined by the tension between the call to unity and unicity, and the divine command to embrace all men and ages in this unity.

This paragraph occurred for the first time in the Schema *De ecclesia, textus propositus post discussions.*” (mart, 1964) and received as its title: “*De universalitate seu catholicitate unius Populi Dei.*” In the time of the Council the two concepts were believed to be interchangeable. Luckily, the Council fathers decided that the paragraph titles would be omitted from the official version of the conciliar documents. We will see that the text will first focus on the Church’s universality and, thereafter, on her catholicity. The paragraph forms the transition between the first part of chapter 2 which spoke of the kingly, priestly and prophetic vocation of the entire “*People of God*”, and the second part which speaks of different groups of people, the Catholic faithful, the other Christian churches, the other Christian religions and all “*People of God*” will who all find themselves in communion, albeit not always in full communion with the “*People of God*”.

Before developing the notion of catholicity in a new sense, the Council Fathers first reminded the reader of the traditional view of Catholicity as maintained in the pre-conciliar ecclesiology. The pre-conciliar understanding of Catholicity referred specifically to geographical extension of the Church of Christ or what many scholars refer to as “quantitative catholicity.” In other words, this pre-conciliar understanding of catholicity pertained to the extension of the Church in time and place. In paragraph 13, and indeed in the whole Dogmatic Constitution, the geographical and temporal dimensions of the Church’s catholicity remain valid. It was not the intention of the fathers to change or substitute it in any way. On the contrary, this concept was complemented by the new theology of catholicity. In this regard, the opening line of paragraph 13 reads: All human beings are called to the new “*People of God*”. Therefore this people, while remaining one and unique, is to be spread throughout the whole world and through every age to fulfil the design of the will of God, who in the beginning made one human nature and decreed that his children who had been scattered should at last be gathered together into one.

The Fathers ended their description of the first dimension of “the unique “*People of God*”” by giving a definition of the notion of universality:

This note of universality (*hic universalitatis character*), which adorns the “*People of God*”, is a gift of the Lord himself by which the catholic church effectively and continually tries to recapitulate the whole of humanity, with all its riches, under Christ the head in the unity of the Spirit.

The paragraph pursues with giving a definition of the catholicity of the Church, and, therefore, the term *catholicitas* is employed. The catholicity of the Church is the *communio* between her constitutive parts, which all are characterized by a variety of indispensable gifts. This *communio* is enriching both for the parts that are involved in it and for the universal Church.

By virtue of this catholicity (*vi huius catholicitate*)<sup>11</sup>, the individual parts (*singulae partes*) bring their own gifts to the other parts and to the whole church, in such a way that the whole and individual parts grow greater through the mutual communication (*communicantibus*) of all and their united efforts towards fullness in unity. (*ad plenitudinem in unitate conspirantibus*).

According to LG 13, the relationship between the parts and the whole can be conceived at least in three ways: It can pertain to the interrelation between different peoples, different functions<sup>12</sup>, but also between different particular Churches with their legitimate variety of traditions.<sup>13</sup>

The final words form the transition towards the second part of chapter 2. It subsumes the two characteristics of the “*People of God*” mentioned in paragraph 13 under the category “catholic unity.” This term was considered to be a good summary of the conciliar teaching of catholicity and, therefore, when it occurs elsewhere in the documents of Vatican II, it mostly reflects the new understanding of catholicity. Even if the Catholic believers potentially belong already to the “*People of God*” in so far as they have realized the plenitude of catholicity in their lives, adherents of other churches or religions are not deprived of the same catholicity. The Catholic Church hopes that they will, therefore, once also belong to the “*People of God*”:

Therefore to this catholic unity of the “*People of God*” (*catholicam unitatem Populi Dei*), which prefigures and promotes universal peace, all are called, and they belong to it or are ordered to it in various ways, whether they be catholic faithful or others who believe in Christ or finally all people everywhere who by the grace of God are called to salvation.

The Fathers were introduced to the teaching in this paragraph by means of a *relatio* which reminded them of their desire that the Council should not only emphasize the unity, but also the diversity within the “*People of God*”. Therefore, this universality or catholicity is not does not imply uniformity but rather promotes unity in diversity.

*Lumen Gentium* 23 deals with the collegial relations among bishops in the Catholic Church. The first subsection states that “[t]he individual bishops, however, are the visible principle and foundation of unity in their own particular churches, formed in the likeness of the universal church; in and form these particular churches there exists the one unique catholic church.” Here, it is clear that the text deals in the first instance with the mutual relationship between the universal and the local levels within the Roman Catholic Church. If one reads chapter 3 after chapter 2, however, one knows – on the basis of the teaching in *LG* 13 – that the text implies that all particular churches out of which the Catholic Church exists, are characterized by a legitimate diversity.

The main reason why we pay particular attention to this paragraph is, because its final subsection was added during the preparation of the schema of March 1964. By using the term “catholicity,” the text makes it clear that it constitutes in fact the sequel of the passage we studied before. The text recalls the theological, spiritual, liturgical and disciplinary variety which exists between the patriarchal churches, all local Churches and episcopal conferences and relates it to “the catholicity of the undivided Church.”

By divine providence it has come about that various churches, founded in various places by the apostles and by their successors, have in the course of time become joined together into several groups organically united, which, while maintaining the unity of faith and the unique divine constitution of the universal church, enjoy their own discipline, their own liturgical usage and their own theological and spiritual patrimony. Among these there are some, especially the ancient patriarchal churches, like matrices of the faith, which have given birth to others as daughters; and right down to our own times they are more closely bound to these churches by the bond of charity in sacramental life and in mutual respect for rights and duties. This variety of local churches, in harmony among themselves, demonstrates with greater clarity the catholicity of the undivided church. In a similar way episcopal conferences can today make a manifold and fruitful contribution to the concrete application of the spirit of collegiality.

Moreover, the famous *subsist in* clause in *LG* 8 contributes to the new understanding of the Catholicity of the Church. The whole passage uses three times the adjective “catholic.” When the text states that the Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church, then clearly **the Roman Catholic Church** is meant. In the same sentence, however, the text also states “although outside its structure many elements of sanctification and of truth are to be found which, as proper gifts to the church of Christ, impel towards catholic unity.” By pointing to the common origin of the plurality of traditions that are present in the Catholic Church and the ecclesial elements that are present in the other.

Christian churches – both go back to the Church of Christ – the Council fathers make it clear that

the gift of catholicity has not been exclusively offered to the Catholic Church alone. The other churches, however, still have to work towards the fullness of catholicity, which LG 8, in line with LG 13, qualifies as **“the catholic unity.”** The same passage started in a very solemn way: “This is the unique church of Christ, which in the creed we profess to be one, catholic and apostolic.” Undoubtedly, the fathers had their entire theology of catholicity in mind when they reminded the believers of the four characteristics of the Church of Christ.

### **2.3 The Reception of the Image of the Church as ‘People of God’**

According to many commentators, the extraordinary Synod of Bishops of 1985 deliberately intended to call a halt to the opinion of many bishops and theologians in the Church, that the conciliar ecclesiology of ‘Church as *“People of God”*’ had to be translated pastorally into a stronger consciousness of the common responsibility of all believers and into a more democratic process of decision-making in the Church. Given that the Church is not a democratic society but rather a divine human reality, it was for some commentators difficult to conceive the Church as *“People of God”*.

Just before and right at the outset of the Synod objections to the concept *“People of God”* “had been raised in an influential lecture of Cardinal Ratzinger<sup>14</sup> and in the *relatio* by Cardinal Danneels.<sup>15</sup> In the Final Report the concept *“People of God”* “has been mentioned only once, in an enumeration of the Council’s multiple images for the Church.<sup>16</sup>

By preferring the concept ‘communion’ to *“People of God”* “the synod has opted for an equally biblical term, which remains also faithful to the priority attached by *Lumen Gentium* to discussions of the entire body of the Church. But the real reason for this preference seems to be that the communion ecclesiology, according to the synod fathers, is also “the foundation for order in the Church and especially for a correct relationship between unity and pluriformity in the Church.”<sup>17</sup> Hence, the image ‘communion’ has a strong ecumenical potential which is yet to be exhausted.

### **2.4 Challenges of the Church as ‘Populi Dei’**

The image of the Church as *“People of God”* although ideologically and pastorally fruitful, it does not have the ability to bring out in full the complete reality of the Church of Christ. A full reality of the Church of Christ cannot be fully presented without recourse to the image of the “Body of Christ.” This is the case since, through the incarnation and the outpouring of the gift of the Spirit the *“People of God”* was given a new status. In the context of the Second Vatican Council, however, the fathers identified the image of the *“People of God”* with that of “Body of Christ.” It is important to note that the notion of *“People of God”* must not be one-sidedly stressed so as to overshadow the New Testament notion of “Church” as the “Body of Christ.”

Another limitation of the image of the Church as *“People of God”* is that the concept is open to sociological interpretations. This image of the Church is subject to an interpretation, which attributes democratic rights to the *““People of God”*.” This has far-reaching consequences, bearing in mind the fact that the Church is human and divine, holy and sinful Church.

### **3. Comparison between Catholic and Evangelical Understanding of ‘Populi dei’**

In a brief article in Deutsche Welle, Kramer<sup>18</sup> discusses the main differences between the Catholic and Protestant church. However, of interest to this paper was the point on understanding the church. He asserts that Catholics and Protestants have a different view on the nature of the church; with the word “catholic” denoting “all- embracing,” universality, it gives the Catholic church the claim that it



is the only true church worldwide, under the leadership of the pope.

Kramer contrasts with the Protestant Churches' understanding of themselves as "Evangelical," which means "according to the Gospel," who in turn are also not united under any one umbrella. Officially, all of these many churches are considered equal.

Pelikan adds some insights to Kramer<sup>19</sup> when he explains the Augustinian distinction between the Church as visible (*corpus permixtum*) and the Church as invisible (*corpus fidelium*). This distinction was made use of by the Protestant reformers to explain the church as an organism and as an organization. The concept of *Corpus Fidelium* or 'Body of Believers' perhaps is the closest the Protestants come to an image of church as *Populi Dei*. The World Council of Churches aspire to the unity of the church "which is both God's will and His gift to His Church". Of course, unity has always been an attribute of the Church in Christian theology; the Ephesian letter and the Nicene Creed were too explicit to evade. But in conflict with a Post-Tridentine theology that could not always distinguish between the Church and the Kingdom of God. But whereas St. Augustine invoked this distinction against the Donatists in order to summon them back to Catholic unity in a Church whose spotted actuality seemed to believe the affirmation of *una sancta Ecclesia* (*One Holy Church*), the Reformers found in the distinction a device for affirming the essential unity of the Church amid its existential divisions.

The Catholic theologian Yves Congar<sup>20</sup> asserts the concept of Church as 'Communion of believers' and not just a communion but a Catholic communion. He explains that Catholic theology has given little consideration to Christian realities as experienced by religious subjects. It has considered the Church as an institution with an objective existence. Theology has given little consideration to the Church as an assembly of faithful people and a community with a life that springs from their activity. It has considered the Church according to its unchangeable essence, it has given little consideration to it as something existing in time. Congar explains that to study the Church according to its life as a communion, the insights of history as well as those of experience must be integrated along with insights from doctrinal sources.

From these discussions delved in so far, it emerges that the image of Church as "*People of God*" is more of a catholic concept than protestant and has acquired more distinct meaning since the Vatican II. The protestant view of 'Body of Believers' (*Corpus Fidelium*) is the closest we can get to the image of *Populi Dei*.

#### **4. The Pastoral-Theological Implications of the Church as the People of God**

Some pastoral-theological implications can be made from the image of church as the people of God. This is even more so in the context of Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium* where the church fathers seemed to eradicate the classification of hierarchies in the church and bring out the oneness of the church community with an emphasis on the lay participation. This must have been important for Vat II where the church was emerging from the clericalist tendencies of the council of Trent.

Therefore, this paper would like to highlight the importance of increased lay participation in the life of the church. The laity as a topic is much a central in contemporary theology and more especially in post-Vatican II council. According to Hagstrom<sup>21</sup>, before Vatican II, the laity were considered incapable making substantive initiatives mainly in parish or diocesan life. The voice of the laity was not appreciated in discussions concerning Church policies, teaching, or practice.<sup>22</sup> It is from this background that the laity had only to fulfil three duties: pay, pray and obey their pastor since the pastor was their shepherd.<sup>23</sup>

In recent decades the laity have been participating actively in the three-fold mission of the church that is; teaching, sanctifying and governing. The teaching office of the laity involves preaching the Word of God during liturgical celebrations, bible reflections in small Christian communities or in any parish group, teaching the catechumens, running religious education programs in schools.<sup>25</sup> some of these lay people are serving as lay theologians who are teaching in colleges and universities.

The Church is a communion of the people of God and if so, we are all called for discipleship which Jesus calls each one “follow me.” This means that each one has the task to accept the call to follow Christ and by doing so then the gospel is to reach all the ends of the world. Hence discipleship is for all who form the body of Christ, the Church.

Cardinal Newman has been quoted by Bitole that “the laity or ordinary Christians are responsible for the growth of the Church... even in the technical theological sense the laity have the right to be consulted.”<sup>26</sup> From this statement, Newman defended the mission and vocation carried by the laity. For him, the Church cannot be imagined without the lay people and also their position cannot be ignored if the mission of the Church is to be realized and as they continue to execute their mission, they are called to collaborate with the clergy.<sup>27</sup> All members of the Church bear equal task of building up the body of Christ.

In view of these positions, the question that begs is ‘How the lay participation could be enhanced? A theological symposium<sup>28</sup> on “Mission *Ad Gentes*: 50 Years and Beyond” pointed out that lay people by nature of being baptized are missionaries. Hence, they qualify as strong participants in Mission *Ad Gentes* (“mission to all people”) and more so within the Catholic Church’s pastoral priorities such as promoting Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Africa. In this cue, the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa (AMECEA)<sup>29</sup> proposed the establishment of the ‘local churches’ under the parish umbrella that were to be headed by the laity. This gave birth to the now famous Small Christian Communities (SCCs) as a new way of being church in Eastern Africa. Healey asserts that the period after the Second Vatican Council initiated a strong movement towards a renewed ecclesiology for the church in the AMECEA region. It was understood that for the church, which the sacrament of salvation is.

## 4.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

### 4.1 Conclusion

As we come to the conclusion of this survey of looking into the Church as “*People of God*,” we find that the term has had a variety of interpretations from the OT, the NT and among theologians. The protestants have used the term to loosely refer to the “body of believers” while the Catholic usage has been more defined especially since Vatican II, as indicated in *Lumen Gentium* to refer to the Church as *Corpus Christi* (Body of Christ) which tries to move away from the internal distinctions of members as lay and clergy, ordained and non-ordained and just brings them together as family that is chosen to play a special role in the mission of Christ in the world. Therefore, in the opinion of this paper, the word *Populi Dei* is a deliberate reference of the Church to herself as a united entity where different members play roles according to their calling. *Lumen Gentium* seems to allay the previous (apparent or real) divisions among Christ’s faithful where the church was perceived to be more clerical than lay.

## 4.2 Recommendation

From this discussion this paper is coming up with some few practical proposals and outlooks in integrating further the image of *Populi Dei* in the Church today.

1. The lay people are called to share in the mission of Christ in the Church which includes proclaiming the Gospel and bringing about the Kingdom of God that also includes living lives of witnessing.
2. The laity have a role of exercising the charisms given to them by the Holy Spirit in service to the Church and society. There are a variety of gifts that include, teaching, healing, serving and leadership (Rom. 12.6-8). Therefore, the recognition and promotion of various gifts especially among lay people and the creating of space for their increased service in the Church creates a unified Church closely knit together as a family of God. As Henry Newman says; "The church would look foolish without the laity."
3. In the African context the local Church especially the 'home church' (small Christian community) ought to be strengthened in its role in self- propagating and self-ministering.
4. There must be concrete efforts made to bring the clergy and the laity into closer collaboration. The laity have a role to collaborate with the clergy in the presiding over the affairs of the Church.
5. The Church has to promote peace, "The major commissions that Jesus Christ, the founder of the church gave his disciples is peace". Therefore, the church has to play its role in promoting social justice now and for all where justice is not preached.

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