

SIGNPOSTS FOR LAY EMPOWERMENT IN VATICAN II

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INTRODUCTION

Vatican II was a defining moment in the life of the church. It aimed at a transformed identity for the church, one that is rooted in an attempt to make it relevant to our contemporary times. From a primarily introspective and traditionalist church, it became more outward-looking and a forward-thinking church, unafraid to dialogue with the modern world. Vatican II made cutting-edge pronouncements about the church and the role of the laity. This essay tries to revisit some of these pronouncements in order to contribute to the continuing attempts to empower lay people in the church towards building a more participatory church.

The first part discusses the three biblical images used in Vatican II to indicate its community ecclesiology and the consequent part of the laity in it. The second part reinterprets secularity and the *tria munera* from the perspective of a common matrix of discipleship in Jesus of Nazareth as strongly indicated by the council.

OLD MODEL OF THE CHURCH: A HIERARCHICAL/ INSTITUTIONAL MODEL

After Vatican II, we no longer picture the position of lay persons in the Catholic Church as those who just kneel before the altar and pray, those who sit below the pulpit to listen to the sermons of priests and those who put their hands in their purse to donate money to the church. Or as the old joke goes, the bishops “teach, rule and sanctify” while the laity “pray, pay and obey.” This old imagery captures the sense in which the Catholic Church considers the role and mission of the laity before Vatican II as passive members of the church. The members of the hierarchy, that is, those who have the power and authority are considered *the* Church. This basic understanding of the role of the laity in the church was anchored on a particular self-understanding of the church based on the ecclesiology of the Council of Trent (1545-1563) and Vatican I (1869-1870). In this ecclesiology, the church is presented as a perfect yet unequal society. In such a model, the power and functions of the church are divided into three: teaching, sanctifying and governing. This leads to the distinctions between:

The church teaching and the church taught;
The church sanctifying and the church sanctified;
The church governing and the church governed.¹

In these dichotomies, lay persons occupy the lower, inferior, and inactive roles. They are radically excluded from the life of the church. Vatican I described this model of ecclesiology:

But the Church of Christ is not a community of equals in which all the faithful have the same rights. It is a society

1. John Fuellenbach, *Church: Community for the Kingdom* (Manila: Logos, 2001), 171.

of *unequals*, not only because among the faithful some are clerics and some are laymen, but particularly because there is in the Church the power from God whereby to some it is given to sanctify, teach and govern, and to others not.²

In other words, the inequality in this perfect society is divinely instituted or destined by the Creator.³

RENEWAL IN ECCLESIOLOGY IN VATICAN

This self-understanding of the church underwent dramatic changes with Vatican II, resulting in far-reaching transformation in ecclesiology as well as the position of the laity in the church. Vatican II provided an alternative vision of the church that befits modern church people. These changes granted an opportunity to pump in fresh air to an already asphyxiated church. To achieve this, participants of the council had to rediscover several things.⁴ For one, Vatican II rediscovered history.⁵ With this rediscovery came a change in the church's self- image from considering itself an institution unaffected by the dust of history to seeing itself as part and parcel of the vicissitudes of history. It dawned on the council participants that, just like any human institution, the church also succumbed to mistakes. It fell and faltered as it groped to discern the will of God in history.

2. Josef Neuner and Heinrich Roos, *The Teaching of the Catholic Church: As Contained in Her Documents* (New York: Alba House, 1967), 219.

3. The 1943 Code of Canon Law states that the division between the laity and cleric in the church is divinely mandated. The 1983 Code of Canon Law, however, maintains that what are divinely mandated in the church are sacred ministers, i.e., clerics and laity.

4. See Kenan Osborne, *Ministry: Lay Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church: Its History and Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 518-595.

5. Pre-Vatican II maintains a classicist worldview while Vatican II adheres to a modern worldview. The former is ahistorical, absolutist, essentialist and values hierarchical structures. The latter is historical, evolutionary, personalistic, relational and values individual freedom and democratic processes.

Hence, constant conversion and listening to the promptings of the Spirit in its historical praxis were called for.

The rediscovery of history made the triumphant church of earlier times assume a more humble posture towards the world. It realized that it cannot go on unquestioningly attached to structures and formulations of doctrines of the past. So the church as conceived by Vatican II began to open up itself to fresh insights coming from the world. Part of this opening up is its embrace of a more solid historical biblical exegesis initiated in the issuance of the encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* in 1943.⁶ It went back to patristic sources. It unbolted its tightly closed doors to liturgical renewal that was underway. It listened to theological as well as spiritual insights from contemporary theologians, which were previously thought of as unorthodox and heretical.⁷ All put together, this resulted in a more vibrant view of the church. Vatican II's ecclesiology became less rigid, less triumphalistic, less clerical, and less pyramidal in structure.

Having said this, the earlier ecclesiology still managed to influence Vatican II documents. Two contrasting models of the church – the hierarchical and the communitarian – continued to wage battle in different documents particularly in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. George Limbeck is correct when he claims that the significance of Vatican II lies not in its mere repetition of tried and tested dogmatic formulations but rather in its reliance on breaking new grounds.⁸ It is to these novel and ground breaking ideas in the council that we turn our attention.

6. Pius XII in his encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* acknowledged the need for Catholic biblical scholars to read the Bible according to the literary genre in which each book in the bible was written. Accordingly, the biblical researcher should attend to the historical, cultural, anthropological and even sociological situations/contexts of the authors of the bible. This opened the way for a historico-critical approach to the bible.

7. Some of these theologians were De Lubac, Chenu, Danielou, and Congar. Before Vatican II, their ideas were considered unorthodox and even heretical. Vatican II, however, had incorporated their ideas especially in *Lumen Gentium*.

8. See George Limbeck, *The Future of Roman Catholic Theology: Vatican II-Catalyst of Change* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970).

Vatican II draws on three important biblical images to convey the altered identity and mission of the church. In these new biblical images of the church, the face of the laity slowly gained prominence.

1. Church as the People of God

Central to *Lumen Gentium* (LG) or the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church is the image of the church as the People of God. This laid the foundation for the renewal and development of a theology of both the church and the laity. The imagery gave all members a common legal status in the church without any exception.⁹ As People of God, all share in one and the same baptism, faith, vocation, and call to holiness.

There is, therefore, one chosen people of God: ‘One Lord, one faith, one baptism’ (Eph. 4:5); there is a common dignity of members deriving from their rebirth in Christ, a common grace as sons, a common vocation to perfection, one salvation, one hope and undivided charity. In Christ and in the Church there is then no inequality arising from race or nationality, social condition or sex...¹⁰

In the image People of God, the lay persons are constitutive members. They are the faithful who, by virtue of their baptism, are made one body with Christ and are established among the People of God. This definition appears in LG 31:

9. See Jordan Aumann, *On the Frontlines: The Lay Person in the Church After Vatican II* (New York: Alba House, 1990).

10. LG 32. See also *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (AA) 1 or the Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People. All citations from Vatican II documents were taken from Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II, the Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Pasay: St. Paul Publications, 1987).

“The term “laity” is here understood to mean all the faithful ... That is, the faithful who by Baptism are incorporated into Christ, are placed in the People of God, and in their own way share the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ, and to the best of their ability carry on the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world.”¹¹

Our baptism in Christ brings all of us into a radical equality before God. Such basic equality in the People of God gives us the same essential responsibilities of being witnesses of Christ everywhere (LG 10). While clerics are given the function of ministerial priesthood and the lay people the common priesthood of the faithful, all share essentially in the one priesthood of Christ (LG 10). Similarly, the People of God are endowed with the same Holy Spirit. There is also one call to holiness (LG 11, 40, 41). Without exception everyone is called by the Lord to that perfection of sanctity in which the Father himself is perfect (LG 11). This specific statement is an evident admission that the laity has a definitive charge in the church’s work of evangelization and sanctification. The laity, therefore, participates in the whole mission of the church. It does not simply share in the apostolate of the clergy.

In the People of God, differences of functions are recognized yet, “a true equality between all with regard to the dignity and to the activity which is common to all the faithful in the building up of the Body of Christ” exists (LG 32). The People of God demonstrates a community ecclesiology.¹² It is about *koinonia*.

The deliberate choice for the People of God as an image for the church in Vatican II marks a conscious preference for a church that is more egalitarian and democratic in nature. This represents an official shift away from identifying the church’s essence with its

11. Flannery, *Vatican II*, 388.

12. Fuellenbach, *Church Community*, 95.

13. Joseph Komonchak, Mary Collins and Dermot Lane, eds., *The New Dictionary of Theology* (Pasay: St. Paul Publications), 560.

hierarchical element to its relocation in the collective socio-historical experience of the community.¹³ In a more egalitarian church, all members have legitimate rights to participate in the governing power of the church. Primary consideration goes to the basic reality of ecclesial community over structures. The question of who has power or primacy in the church becomes secondary only.

The positive advances in Vatican II outlined above concerning the community ecclesiology and the favorable role of the laity are compromised by certain stress points due to the unresolved tensions between the two contrasting models of ecclesiology that we have cited. For example, the community ecclesiology is maybe at risk in chapter III of *Lumen Gentium* because it relies heavily on Vatican I in giving weight or preference to a hierarchical or institutional model of the church.¹⁴ This section of the document discusses the role of the hierarchy. Following Vatican I, it re-emphasizes the old understanding with regard to the role of the Pope and the bishops as the sole guardians of the deposit of faith.

To avoid the danger of overemphasizing the institutional model, chapter III of *Lumen Gentium* should be read from the perspective of its overall framework. It describes the church as a Mystery in chapter I. By doing this, it lessens the impact of a too hierarchical or institutional understanding of the church. The church should not be identified with the Kingdom of God. The church is a sacrament and a sign of unity and communion of all in Christ in the eschatological future. Furthermore, chapter II, the section that deals with the People of God, comes first before any discussion of the different members of the church, i.e., clerics, lay or religious. This pattern or arrangement of the chapters accentuates what is common to all before it discusses what is distinctive about the various states of life. Whatever then is said of the People of God applies to

14. See Lode Wostyn, ed., *Discipleship in Community: A Workbook for Theology 3* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2003).

everybody. Here again basic equality is maintained (LG 30). Jan Grootaers rightly observes that this schema “meant a fundamental reorientation of ecclesiology that would put an end to the pyramidal vision of the Church”.¹⁵

2. Church as the Mystical Body of Christ

As an image, the Body of Christ evokes an experience of a community that is gathered together on account of shared vision, goals and calling. Its dependence on the same source, i.e., Jesus Christ as the inimitable head of the body, nurtures deep fellowship with one another. Through Christ as the head, “the whole body grows, and with the proper functioning of the members joined firmly together by each supporting ligament, builds itself in love” (Eph. 4:15-16). From another point of view, the image represents the unity of Christians in the local Church, built and strengthened by the breaking of the bread with one another.

In the body of Christ, each has a particular role and function to nourish human solidarity. Ministries are diverse but the overall goal is the same, to be at the service of the Kingdom of God. In other words, there is a unity of mission but a diversity of ministries (AA 2). In this community, unity is expressed not in uniformity. Moreover, diversity or pluralism becomes the cause for richness rather than scandal. LG 7 recaptures the rich meaning of this imagery:

As all members of the human body, though they are many, form one body, so also are the faithful in Christ (cf. 1 Cor 12:12). Also, in the building up of Christ's body there is engaged a diversity of members and functions. There is one Spirit who according to his own

15. Cited in Paul Lakeland, *Liberation of the Laity: In Search of an Accountable Church* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 87.

16. Flannery, *Vatican II*, 355.

richness and the needs of the ministries gives his different gifts for the welfare of the Church (cf. 1Cor. 12; 1-11).¹⁶

The calling to serve comes from our baptismal union with Christ and our participation in the life of grace. The very meaning of our function in the church should be seen in the light of our contribution to bring about its well-being.

LG 10 enlightens us further regarding the common task of both cleric and laity.

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 and offers it to God in the name of all the people. The faithful indeed, by virtue of their royal priesthood, participate in the offering of the Eucharist. They exercise that priesthood, too, by the reception of the sacraments, prayer and thanksgiving, the witness of holy life, abnegation and active charity.¹⁷

The above text informs us that aside from the exclusive sacramental functions of a priest, the rest of the ministries can be shared by all. It is in this line that Paul Lakeland makes the observation that “the limited number of roles truly reserved to the ordained is only the obverse of a healthy realization of how many roles and responsibilities pertain to the laity in virtue of their truly priestly status”.¹⁸ If Lakeland’s observation is true, this opens up the possibility for more ministerial sharing between priests and lay collaborators. More lay involvement can even address the problem of shortage of church personnel. Hence, the “discussion of which roles are proper to the clergy and which to all Christians can obscure

17. *Ibid.*, 361. See also AA 4.

18. Lakeland, *Liberation of the Laity*, 94.

19. *Ibid.*

the more important fact that all are engaged in the one work of building up the body of Christ”.¹⁹

Just like the People of God image, the Mystical Body of Christ image is also fraught with the danger of being interpreted along the lines of a hierarchical model. While LG 7 recognizes the diversity of roles, functions, and gifts in the one body of Christ, it still gives primacy to the hierarchical ministry in the church. Some might attempt to interpret this primacy along ontological lines. When hierarchical functions, roles, and gifts are seen as status or ranks in life, distinctions are necessarily made regarding which role or gift is superior and which one is inferior. If there is one thing that the image gives, it is to assure us that each part of the body is as important as the rest. Each serves according to his or her given talent. Whoever has more should give more “for greater power means greater responsibilities”.²⁰

3. Church as the Temple of the Holy Spirit

The imagery accentuates the reality that the church is a creation of the Holy Spirit. Since the church is born out of the Spirit, the Spirit then dwells in the church. The Holy Spirit gives each member of the church a charisma or gift to edify and help build up the church community (Rom. 12; 1Cor. 12). Therefore, the church is made up of both the hierarchical and the charismatic structures. The dynamic interplay of these structures ensures a healthy church. Office and charisma are two sides of the same coin. The charismatic structure is a clear indication of the active contributions of gifts and talents coming from each individual member of the church. Neglect of the charismatic aspect of the church leads to clericalism, abuse of authority and power in the church, and the depreciation of the role of the laity. LG 4 states:

20. This is a line from the 2002 Spiderman movie.

.... The Spirit dwells in the Church and in the hearts of the faithful as in a temple... Guiding the church in the way of all truth... and unifying her in communion and in the works of ministry he bestows upon her varied hierarchic and charismatic gifts, and in this way directs her; and he adorns her with his fruits.²¹

As the temple of the Spirit, the church is a new church where radical equality exists among its members (Gal 3:28). The great challenge put forward by Vatican II to the church is to involve itself in building communities of disciples where equality and not division becomes the basic ingredient of life. Where division, scorn and condescension characterize the church, the Spirit is absent. For a church where equality, openness and respect for one another is present, the Spirit is also present. A church where the Spirit dwells is a church that is closely in union with the Risen Christ and is truly catholic in character. "In virtue of this catholicity each part contributes its own gift to other parts and to the whole Church, so that the whole and each of the parts are strengthened by the common sharing of all things and by the common effort to attain to fullness in unity".²²

An imminent danger presents itself when priests alone are given the task to regulate and determine the authenticity of the gifts of the laity. While it is important to determine the authenticity of the gifts found in the Christian community, this should apply not only to the gifts of the laity but also to priests and religious as well. The laity, being organic members of the church, should have the right to evaluate the leadership capabilities of those assigned to minister to them. The growth of the church and the kingdom of God is assured only in this mutual appreciation and critique of gifts. This process is needed especially now that some of those who are appointed bishops and

21. Flannery, 352.

22. LG 13, *ibid.*, 365.

cardinals are selected not on the basis of their administrative skills or spiritual maturity. Rather, they are selected on account of their avowed commitment and staunch support to more conservative views on family planning, abortion, homosexuality, etc.²³

Other points to raise here are the decision and discernment processes in the church. The widest consultation possible should be arrived at especially on issues that involve and affect the whole people of God. At times, it might be necessary to include the laity in the deliberation of crucial pronouncements that affect them. In Vatican II, the gift of discernment belongs to the whole People of God. The *sensus fidelium* or instinctive faith is very important for the document.²⁴ The sense of discernment on matters of faith and morals is given to the whole People of God and not only to the leaders in the church.²⁵

In using these three preferred biblical images of Vatican II on the Church we were able to discover a rich ground for giving the laity the dignity accorded them as full-fledged members of the Church. Vatican II conceived a church where members have the same equal dignity brought about by their common baptism in Christ. By their common baptism, the laity “shares in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ; they have therefore, in the Church and in the world their own assignment in the mission of the whole People of God” (AA 2, LG 31).

We shall deal with the participation of the laity in the three-fold mission of Christ or the *tria munera* later on in this article. For now, let us turn our attention to another significant concern, that is, the issue of secularity.

23. See Camilo Macisse, “Violence in the Church,” *Tablet* 22 (November 2003): 8-9. See also John Allen, “Cardinal Paradox,” *Tablet* 18 (September 18, 2004): 4-5.

24. See Emmanuel de Guzman, “Exploring the Terrain of Sensus Fidelium among ‘Root-crops’ Christians,” *MST Review* 6 no. 2 (2004): 1-73.

25. See LG 12 in Flannery, *Vatican II*, 363.

4. Secularity Reconsidered

Vatican II documents especially *Gaudium et Spes* (GS), *Lumen Gentium*, and *Apostolicam Actuositatem* stipulate the distinctive character of the laity. The secular character or what is also known as secularity is peculiar to the lay state (LG 31, AA 2, GS 43). By secularity, these documents refer to two things: first, secularity is the milieu in which a lay person normally finds himself or herself, that is, where s/he is situated in the world. Second, secularity also refers to the expected mission or responsibility that a layperson has in view of his/her being located in the world.

Secularity then speaks about the laity's life that is "led in the midst of the world and secular affairs" (AA 2).²⁶ It also highlights the call to a mission to evangelize and sanctify the world by doing their particular duties in the world, by witnessing to a dedicated life and by being resplendent in faith, hope and charity (LG 31, AA 2, 6). This special vocation challenges the laity to become leaven in the world and salt of the earth. His/her witness to gospel values directs worldly affairs towards God's will. "Thus every layperson, through those gifts given to him, is at once the witness and the living instrument of the mission of the Church itself 'according to the measure of Christ's bestowal'" (LG 33).²⁷

In all they do whether in their daily work, prayer and family when purposely done to make God's will present in the world is itself already an offer of spiritual worship for the glory of God and the salvation of human (LG 34). By the living examples of their lives and the consistency of what they say and do, the laity, according to the documents, are called to be bearers of transformation and hope in the world (LG 35). Finally, through their human labor, technical skill and civil culture, the kingdom of love, justice and peace

26. Ibid., 768.

27. Ibid., 390-391.

is fulfilled in this world. Hence, the laity is called to the ordering of the whole of creation to the praise of God (LG 36).

Gaudium et Spes enhances secularity even more. This particular document challenges the church to undergo a respectful dialogue with the world. It invites the church to a reading of the signs of the times so that in doing so the church can be in solidarity with the joys and hope, the grief and anguish of contemporary men and women. In the same vein, this document calls on the laity to help transform the world so that human freedom and human flourishing or God's destiny for the created world can be realized. The laity should be "convinced that the achievements of the human race are a sign of God's greatness and the fulfillment of his mysterious designs" (GS 33). They should not feel guilty about dedication to secular activities. For God's plan for humanity is for man and woman to be fully alive in their exercise of responsible freedom. *Gaudium et Spes* 43 clarifies our point:

Let there, then, be no such pernicious opposition between professional and social activity on the one hand and religious life on the other. The Christian who shirks his temporal duties shirks his duties towards his neighbors, neglects God himself and endangers his eternal salvation.²⁸

Secularity then is an invitation to seek salvation already in this world. The world is the only home we have and God reveals his self only in this home we have. To fully appreciate the significance of secularity for the laity, we need to understand certain points about secularity.

The secular and sacred spheres are interwoven realities. There is no dichotomy that exists between the sacred and the secular spheres. In a dualistic theology, the sacred sphere, being the higher sphere,

28. *Ibid.*, 943.

gives the secular dimension its ultimate meaning. Such a dualistic frame of mind has been disastrous to Christianity. This has led to a flight from the world mentality. It has led people to hate their very bodies and sexuality in exchange for presumed higher realities such as heaven or the soul. It has also led to a very limited understanding about the role of the laity in the church, typical of very conservative groups. For these groups, lay persons are Christian soldiers in the world who are there to reclaim it back for the Catholic Church. Secular affairs, therefore, must be influenced by Roman Catholic values to achieve its higher call. I do not think that this understanding gives justice to the depth of secularity we are proposing here.

Secularity, we hold, integrates the sacred and secular spheres into an integral whole just like the body with the soul, heaven with earth, light with darkness, or nature with grace. Heaven is already present in this world as we struggle to correct what stifles human creativity. Similarly, the grace of God is already apparent in earthly reality and is not something that drops down from heaven in a form of supernatural occurrence. Grace is everywhere says Bergamos.

Jesus took the human form and lived in human history, which is a clear indication of the value and goodness of the world. The Gospel of John sings a song of praise to the world when it says: God so loved the world that is why he gave his son for us. In short, the temporal world has a value in itself.

We should, like Vatican II, respect the autonomy of the world. In AA 7 it claims:

Far from depriving the temporal order of its autonomy, of its specific ends of its own laws and resources, or its importance for human well being, this design, on the contrary, increases its energy and excellence, raising it at the same time to the level of man's integral vocation here below.²⁹

29. Ibid., 774. See also GS 37.

It is along this line that I will propose a further nuanced interpretation to secularity particularly to ordinary lay people who do not find themselves at all purely involved in church affairs. What I want is “to stress the theological value to secular activity unconnected to any intentional works of evangelization”.³⁰ I am convinced that the rituals of daily mothering to give emotional nourishment to one’s children, the rigors of fathering to provide a decent life for one’s family, the dedication of a professor in transforming students to caring individuals, the zeal and energy students give their studies, even the devotion of an administrator to his/her office, or just plainly the dedication of a vendor so that his/her family can continue to survive – are *acts of fidelity to God’s purpose for the world*.³¹ These very ordinary secular endeavors – to give life, to love the neighbor, to produce future resource for God and nation – are spiritual actions in themselves even without the doer consciously or purposely dedicating it to God. These secular activities are already within God’s purpose for the world. “They are holy by virtue of the fact that they lie within God’s wish for this world.”³² For Edward Schillebeeckx, secular activities of laypersons become visible signs of God’s grace especially when they respond to the call of the suffering humanity.³³ Similarly, Bonaventure Kloppenborg, at one time, proposed the idea that soon we would recognize that when a father or mother blesses the food on their table, or when they bless their home and children they are actually exercising their holy priesthood.³⁴ Yves Congar

30. Lakeland, *Liberation of the Laity*, 139.

31. These acts of fidelity are the acts of faith that we make explicit in our prayers and liturgical celebrations in our Christian communities. These are the stuff of life that make our worship truly meaningful.

32. Lakeland, 139.

33. See Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Laity in the Church and other Essays* (New York: St. Paul, 1963).

34. See Bonaventure Kloppenborg, *The Ecclesiology of Vatican II* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1975).

35. Congar, *Lay People in the Church* (London/Dublin: Geoffrey Chapman, 1965), 201-202.

speaks of the priesthood of fathers and mothers in their families.³⁵ All these examples point to the spirituality of everyday life meant for the laity (AA 4).

5. The *Tria Munera* Reconsidered

The issue of the sharing in the *tria munera* of Christ remains as one of the crucial matters to discuss when dealing with the laity. According to Vatican II, by virtue of our baptism and confirmation, all the members of the People of God share in the priestly, kingly and prophetic functions of Christ (LG 31, AA 2). Traditionally, these three functions are reserved only to clerics. A cultic interpretation of the *tria munera* will emphasize the essential qualitative difference in the sharing of the *tria munera* of priests by virtue of their ordination over those of the laity.³⁶ This interpretation misses the common matrix of discipleship that Vatican II promotes. To frame the *tria munera* based on cultic difference leads to a tendency to define the laity vis-à-vis the cleric. It may be good to be reminded of Edward Schillebeeckx's call to define the laity in its own terms and not merely in its reference to the clergy. To call us non-clergy makes negative creatures of us.³⁷ Similarly, when we define clerics as non-laity, we do not accord them the respect they deserve. Finally, the use of the three titles may not be too attractive to modern day sensibilities.

For these reasons, we should disengage ourselves from a purely cultic reading of the *tria munera*. Yves Congar in his ground-breaking book on the laity shed light on the correct meanings of the threefold functions of Christ. For him, they are really very secular functions meant to focus the vocation of each Christian in living a Christian

36. By cultic interpretation we mean that this threefold function has been seen as fully embodied in priestly ministry in the context of sacramental activities. In such an understanding, the priestly function is tied up with the Eucharist; the kingly function is identified with prerogatives of governance in the church, while the prophetic function is tied up with the teaching office of the church.

37. See Schillebeeckx, *The Laity in the Church and other Essays*.

life to the full. It is actually the spirituality of day-to-day life that we spoke about earlier.

The priesthood of the laity is not to be defined primarily by a relationship to the Eucharist but it is about an offering of a meaningful life. This is a life that is ordered to neighbors and God. Congar agrees that the priesthood of the laity constitutes an offering of a well-lived life for others and God, that is, a real spiritual offering of a righteous life.³⁸ Vatican II agrees with this interpretation (LG 31).

Kingship for Congar is a form of life where one tames one's weaknesses, passions or bodily processes so that one develops a spiritual power and freedom to engage, as well as to be critical of the world in order to fulfill God's plans for it.³⁹ Service to others is a key component of kingship. Kingship is also the consent or the voice of the laity in the church. The laity has a crucial role to play in the church so its opinions need to be heard. Congar's interpretation harmonizes with Vatican II where the kingly function of the laity refers to the power to order God's creation according to the values of the Kingdom (LG 36).

Lastly, the prophetic function of the laity has to do with the laity as a resource for church life. For Congar, the Church is made up of two interrelated elements namely structure and life.⁴⁰ The hierarchy is responsible for regulating the structure of the church. The laity, through their input and experiences meanwhile, give life to a lifeless structure. The prophetic task, then, lies in bringing concerns of life into the church to enrich it and thus enrich also the world by becoming living witnesses. Vatican II describes this prophetic role as being the salt of the earth or leaven of the world (LG 31).

The *tria munera* is a call to a common discipleship in Jesus of Nazareth. It embodies the call for the People of God to offer their

38. Congar, *Lay People in the Church*, 121-233.

39. *Ibid.*, 234-270.

40. *Ibid.*, 271-323.

lives to God by contributing to the well-being of God's people. Perhaps nowadays there are more life-giving titles that we can use to express the real significance of the threefold function of the People of God. Our appropriated titles should always go back to Jesus of Nazareth whose authentic humanity becomes the measure for us. Christ lived a life worth living. The gospels are witnesses to this kind of human life Jesus exemplified. The *tria munera* must be rooted in a call to gospel discipleship.⁴¹ The very meaning or non-meaning of our lives is measured by how close we follow Jesus in the gospels. Hence, gospel discipleship will be the measure of the authenticity of our lives whether we are clerics or lay. It is the way one lives the dangerous and disturbing memory of Jesus of Nazareth in the here and now that is the crucial yardstick. This is a life lived in responsible freedom. This is a life shared to others so that others may fully live. His life is a commitment that led to the cross but the cross also led to the transformation of people. These are the hallmarks of Jesus' story.

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41. Osborne, *Ministry*, 48-113.

