



# VATICAN II

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*Celebrating 50 Years*

## Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium

**Dogmatic Constitution on the Church**

*Lumen Gentium*

Promulgated November 21, 1964

*This session is about an hour in length and is designed to introduce the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. This presentation may be accompanied by PowerPoint slides and handouts, both provided.*

**Opening Prayer (PowerPoint Slide 2)**

Welcome to the second session of our series on the documents of Vatican Council II. The first session of this series focused on the Council history and background of the council.

Pope John XXIII wanted to open windows, bring new energy to the church, and make some adaptations so the church could meet present day needs.

**(PowerPoint Slide 3)**

To review the Goals of the Council

- to promote enlightenment, edification and joy of the entire Christian people
- to extend an invitation to separated communities to participate in our quest for unity

Two major documents on church identity and structure in the Documents of Vatican II are:

1. *Lumen Gentium: Light to the Nations* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church)
2. *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World).

This session will focus on *Lumen Gentium*.

All documents of the Roman Catholic Church are named in Latin for the first few words of the document. In this case, the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, in Latin is *Lumen Gentium*. The document begins: “Christ is the *light of humanity . . .*” (PowerPoint Slide 4)

This document is considered by most theologians as the most important or foundational document of the Council. Calling Christ the “Light of nations”, the Council desires to shed the light of Christ who brightens the face of the earth on all. This document gives us the essential focus of all teaching endeavors – Christ.

Although these words were written 50 years ago, they are even more urgent today. The call to evangelization, to draw all together in Christ, is stressed from the beginning.

### **(PowerPoint Slide 5)**

“The condition of the modern world lends greater urgency to this duty of the church, for while men of the present day are drawn ever more closely together by social, technical, and cultural bonds, it still remains for them to achieve full unity in Christ.”

When the bishops voted to put the *people of God* chapter ahead of the hierarchy chapter, they changed everything, and the emphasis on the collegiality of bishops at the world-church level led to parish councils on the parish church level. (Remember the triangle and circle of last session)

Vatican Council II was a council about ecclesiology, about the nature and activities of the church. The first question that comes to mind is: what is the church? **PowerPoint Slide 6**

1. Vatican Council I in 1870 and Vatican Council II have given radically different answers to that question. Before Vatican II the answer would have been that the church is a society. That’s not very spiritually inspiring.
2. It was only in the 1920’s that the biblical understanding of the church began to surface again in the Western church—the church as the body of Christ. This idea of church only gradually gained acceptance.
3. It gained respectability with Pius XII’s encyclical on the Mystical Body in 1943.
4. The Council’s image of the church as sacrament, people of God and servant evoked considerable enthusiasm at first.

5. After Vatican Council II, considerable reflection and discussion was given to the models of the church, especially five named by Avery Dulles, S.J.: mystical, communion, herald, sacrament, servant and institution and later he added community of disciples. He emphasized that the church is irreducible to any single image or model, and that each model is flexible and open and complementary to the other.

*Lumen Gentium* begins with the chapter on “The Mystery of the Church”. The church is at work in the world under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. *Lumen Gentium* offers great strength and trust in the Holy Spirit as guide, source of gifts, and focuses on the church’s unity and unity with God.

### Lumen Gentium

Now we will take the document by chapters. The order of treatment in the document is important: first chapter explores the mystery of Church; the second chapter, the *People of God*—and the subsequent chapters discusses the various groups that make up the people of God. But all the faithful, the whole people, are seen as equal before God in Baptism, though we have various functions in the Church. The document ends with a chapter on Mary, as our model and mother.

#### Chapter 1: The Mystery of the Church as sacrament (PowerPoint Slide 7)

- God assumes our human nature in Jesus who serves as the instrument of our salvation.
- Jesus is the primordial sacrament: the visible sign of the invisible God.
- Jesus sends another but invisible Advocate
- Then in similar fashion the church serves as a visible instrument of the divine to bring about unity. The Church is the visible sign, the instrument of God’s salvation of the whole world.

Here are some questions for our reflection (if time you may want to discuss these) (PowerPoint Slide 8)

1. How is your school or parish a spiritual communion?
2. How could this school or parish become a more authentic instrument for building up the body of Christ?
3. How might you contribute to this mission?

**(PowerPoint Slide 9)** Chapter 1 summarizes other images or models of the church with these images and Scripture passages.

### **Chapter 2: People of God**

At all times and in every race, anyone who fears God and does what is right has been acceptable to him (Acts 10:35).

One of the key portions of *Lumen Gentium* is its second chapter, with its declaration that the Church is “The People of God” remembering that the Church is both an institution and a communion. Of all the images used at Vatican II, the bishops gave pride of place to this image.

The Council teaches that God wills to save people not just as individuals but as a people. For this reason God chose the Israelite people to be his own people and established a covenant with it, as a preparation and figure of the covenant ratified in Christ that constitutes the new People of God, which would be one, not according to the flesh, but in the Spirit and which is called the Church of Christ.

### **PowerPoint Slide 10**

All human beings are called to belong to the Church. Not all are fully incorporated into the Church, but “the Church knows that she is joined in many ways to the baptized who are honored by the name of Christ, but who do not however profess the Catholic faith in its entirety or have not preserved unity or communion under the successor Peter” (LG #15) This is reflected on our next slide (show first part of Slide 11 -- Catholics & Christian Believers)

### **Continue next bullets of PowerPoint Slide 11**

In addition the Church declares the possibility of salvation for non-Christians and even non believers.

The plan of God also acknowledges those who believe in the Creator. In the first place amongst these 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 humankind. Those also will be saved who, through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, yet seek God and strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through their conscience. (LG #16)

All of these belong to the People of God. **(PowerPoint Slide 12)**

The **first quality** that the People of God hold in common is the relationship of each one with Christ. Each Christian is brought into a participation in the mission and ministry of Christ--teaching, preaching, and healing the sick.

The whole People of God participate in the three offices of Christ—priests, prophet and king. All of us are called to mission and to service.

The **second common quality** of God's people is that we have all received gifts from the Holy Spirit. The Spirit gifts each of us with a distinct set of personal qualities, characteristics and talents of which we are stewards.

**PowerPoint Slide 13** reiterates the threefold work of Christ as priest, prophet and king. Discuss what these mean and how we are each called to the same.

Chapter 2 lays out some initial thoughts regarding the universal call to holiness, and then the entire Chapter 5 discusses holiness in greater detail, reminding us that, regardless of our position in life or the church we are all called to holiness. The whole Church is called to be holy.

### **PowerPoint Slide 14**

- “The Church, whose mystery is set forth by this sacred Council, is held, as a matter of faith, to be unfailingly holy.” (LG#9)
- “. . . all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity. . . The classes and duties of life are many, but holiness is one. . . .(LG #41)

Do “ordinary” Catholics believe this, even today? That you and I are called to the same holiness as Pope John XXIII, as Pope Francis and contemplative nuns, parish priests and missionaries in Africa?

### **(PowerPoint Slide 15)**

All are called to holiness. “It is quite clear that all Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love, and by this holiness, a more human manner of life is fostered also in earthly society.”

## Vatican Council II: Hope and Challenge

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**In this teaching every human is meant to be a saint. The Council threw open the doors of holiness to everyone, not just priests and religious. Our challenge is to accept this special vocation to holiness and to unity as a people of God.**

**Chapter 5 –the middle of this document gives us a beautiful description of the life to which all of us are called. Chapters 3, 4 & 6 will outline the role of the clergy, laity and professed religious and how they are called to be holy within the context of their particular vocation.**

### **(PowerPoint Slide 16)**

**Chapter 3 discusses the hierarchical structure of the church.**

**This chapter re-affirms the primacy of the Roman Pontiff and his infallible teaching office, with the bishops, priests, and deacons as helpers to continue to the Mission of Christ so that this divine mission will be carried out to the end of the world. The role and training of the clergy is explored further in some of the Vatican II decrees.**

### **(PowerPoint Slide 17)**

**Chapter 4 quickly asserts that everything that has been said about the people of God is addressed equally to laity, religious and clergy.**

**Before Vatican Council II, lay Catholics were described as cooperating with the hierarchy in the ministry of the Church. Lay people did exercise some visible roles in church life.**

**This, however, exploded with the Second Vatican Council. The council requires a much more active presence of strongly committed laypersons within the Church and beyond. This call of Vatican Council II has lost nothing of its urgency.**

**The laity has a special role that is theirs alone and that is -- to “seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs”. (LG #31) Every aspect of the workplace, the community, the world is the arena for their ministry.**

**In addition to the layperson’s role in the world, many are also called to active ministry in the Church as catechists, youth ministers, liturgical ministers and much more. The document strongly suggests that the laity should bring their skills of administration, technology, finance and management to bear on diocesan and parish church life.**

The laity are not, then, merely what is left over after the pope, the bishops, the priests and the religious. In fact, the laity comprises 99.9% of the Church.

No previous council has ever given lay people so much attention as in *Lumen Gentium*, but also through another Council document called, “*The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*”.

### **Chapter 6: Religious Life**

Most religious congregations (men and women), embraced the opportunities given them at Vatican II. They had been raised in the hierarchical model, and now religious life invited to an appreciation of the communion model.

#### **PowerPoint Slide 18**

*Lumen Gentium* stated that religious life should not be seen “as though it were a kind of middle way between the clerical and lay conditions of life. Rather it should be seen as a form of life to which some Christians, both clerical and lay, are called by God so that they may enjoy a special gift of grace in the life of the Church and may contribute, each in his/her own way, to the saving mission of the Church.”(43)

To assist in an understanding of this chapter on Religious Life, Vatican II issued a decree *Perfectae Caritatis, Decree on the Up-To-Date Renewal of Religious Life* on October 28, 1965.

Religious men and women were drawn into marathons of meetings with a new vocabulary: consultation, collaboration, consensus, charism, subsidiarity. It was an energizing time. New constitutions for the various congregations were being written with all of this in mind.

#### **PowerPoint Slide 19**

“Prescriptions” for renewing religious life were tucked into the decree:

- “Institutes should promote among their members an adequate knowledge of the social conditions of the times they in and of the needs of the Church.”
- “The manner of living, praying and working should be suitably adapted everywhere . . . to the modern physical and psychological circumstances of the members.”
- “The religious habit, an outward mark of consecration to God, should be simple and modest, poor and at the same time becoming.



**In addition it must meet the requirements of health and be suited to the circumstances of time and place and to the needs of the ministry involved.”**

- **“Adaptation and renewal depend greatly on the education of religious. Consequently neither non-clerical religious nor religious women should be assigned to apostolic works immediately after the novitiate.”**

**Religious congregations looked to their origins and the story of their founders to come to a greater appreciation of their role in the Church in the past and for the future.**

**It is only together as lay, clergy and religious that we will be able to fulfill our potential as followers of Christ. The next Chapter moves us to an eternal reality. We are pilgrims here on earth and will only find perfection in Christ.**

### **PowerPoint Slide 20**

#### **Chapter 7: The Pilgrim Church**

**(LG #48) The Church, to which we are all called in Christ Jesus, and in which by the grace of God we acquire holiness, will receive its perfection only in the glory of heaven, when will come the time of the renewal of all things (Acts 3:21).**

**“The promised and hoped for restoration . . . has already begun in Christ. It is carried forward in the sending of the Holy Spirit and through him continues in the Church. . .” (48)**

**As a church we are a pilgrim people making our way together through history. We have many different stories to tell and not all are edifying. The church has known dark times: domination by emperors, co-opting by militarism, colonialism, struggles to control the papacy, heretics, and wars in the name of religion.**

**Still, we as members of the church, journey together in hope that the church may be the visible expression of humanity’s new life in Christ.**

### PowerPoint Slide 21

- 1. One reason Catholics love the church is that it fosters holiness. Here we have companions who are stumbling their way to holiness. “The Church on earth is endowed already with a sanctity that is real though imperfect.” (LG #48)**
- 2. The Pilgrim Church discusses our union in the Communion of Saints. The Church has always venerated the apostles and martyrs “together with the Blessed Virgin Mary and the holy angels, with a special love, and has asked for the help of their intercession. (50) It is in the celebration of the liturgy, “in the fellowship of communion, “that the saints are remembered and honored. (50) Here we keep the company of men and women who have lived the Gospel even as they challenged both secular and religious practices—people like Francis of Assisi, Catherine of Siena, Thomas More, Dorothy Day, and Oscar Romero. In spite of the fact that the Gospel brought them into conflict with the church authorities of their day they witnessed to the Gospel. At the same time they were attached to the visible, hierarchical church in their own paths to holiness.**
- 3. In an age that experiences mostly transitory relationships, the church fosters high ideals and lifelong commitments.**
- 4. We love the church, too, because it embraces the full diversity of humanity: the affluent and the poor, the native-born and the undocumented, conservatives and liberals, the simple and the learned. This is seen in local parishes everywhere. Vatican II was a pastoral council, accepting all Church doctrine, but focusing on living the Church’s teaching and the People of God applying them in the life of the Church in the modern world.**
- 5. We love the church because in every age, but particularly since the Second Vatican Council, it is dedicated to the service of the poor and defense of their human rights.**
- 6. Chief among the reasons that lead us to love the church is the Eucharist. When we gather around the table of the Lord, the whole body of Christ in which we partake is made real. We are united with the risen Lord and with one another. Not only those around the table but also those**

around every altar in the world, along with those who have preceded us in faith and those who will follow us, one great family on the pilgrimage together.

7. Moving the People of God to apostolic activity and bearing witness to Christ while always ‘on the way’ as a Pilgrim Church towards Christ’s heavenly kingdom, is a key exhortation that emerges in *Lumen Gentium*. “Sitting at the right hand of the Father [Jesus] is continually active in the world in order to lead men to the Church, and through it, join them more closely to himself. . .” (48)

Our lifelong journey is going to be a complicated and difficult one. We can’t lose track of our ultimate destination. If we are going to be real pilgrims on the way to fulfillment, we must act as pilgrims, not as tourists. We must enter wholeheartedly into the pilgrimage, leaving behind whatever may hinder our progress, accepting whatever hardship our journey might entail. Jesus admonished us: “Stay awake! Be prepared at all times!”

We are on a pilgrimage to the fulfillment of God’s promises and plans for our salvation. We have a vision of universal peace among nations, among religious groups, among ethnic groups and families. It’s up to us to decide whether or not we wish to join this pilgrimage.

### Chapter 8: Our Lady

52. Wishing in his supreme goodness and wisdom to effect the redemption of the world, “when the fullness of time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman . . . that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Gal. 4:4) “. . . he was incarnated by the Holy Spirit from the Virgin Mary.”

This divine mystery of salvation is revealed to us and continued in the Church . . .”

The Virgin Mary is acknowledged and honored as being truly the Mother of God and of the redeemer. (53)

The major Marian teaching of Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, in Chapter 8 does not stand alone. It has to be studied in terms of the action of the council and the documents that preceded and followed it.

The evolution of the council's understanding of itself in terms of discussion on theological issues to seeing itself as a pastoral council is one factor that determined how Mary was perceived in this document. It did not speak of Mary as separate from its treatment of the Church, but discussed the mystery of Mary in the larger mystery of Christ and his Church (10).

The chapter on Mary was the subject of debate. Original plans had called for a separate document about the role of Mary, keeping the document on the Church "ecumenical," in the sense of "non-offensive" to Protestant Christians, who viewed special veneration of Mary with suspicion. However, the Council Fathers insisted, with the support of the Pope, that, as Mary's place is within the Church, treatment of her should appear within the Constitution on the Church.

The Council spoke of Mary as "Mediatrice" –strengthening confidence in Christ as the one essential Mediator.

From the start, the Council affirms its special love for Mary due to her role in salvation history and her inseparable link to Christ. Mary is admired and exalted because she is the first of the redeemed. This statement places Mary among us, as one of us. The Church looks at Mary as an example of what it means to be a redeemed person.

The Council in speaking about Mary used a biblical approach with strong emphasis on her pilgrimage of faith. They also drew heavily on the writings of the Fathers of the Church which all Christians respect.

### **PowerPoint Slide 23**

“. . . the Mother of Jesus in the glory which she possesses in body and soul in heaven is the image and beginning of the Church as it is to be perfected in the world to come. Likewise she shines forth on earth, until the day of the Lord shall come, a sign of certain hope and comfort to the pilgrim People of God. (68)

With Mary as our best example of one redeemed, we strive with her and all the saints to live a life of holiness in Christ Jesus.

### **PowerPoint Slides 24-26**

Closing Prayer – renewal of baptismal promises to turn away from sin and turn toward a greater intimacy and life in God.