

## *Lumen Gentium Part I: Mystery and Communion/Session III*

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### **REQUIRED PRE-READING**

*The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council committed the Church to furthering the cause of ecumenism in order to work towards Christian unity. The following is excerpted from Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium, promulgated by His Holiness, Pope Paul VI, on Nov. 21, 1964.*

13. All men are called to belong to the new people of God. Wherefore this people, while remaining one and only one, is to be spread throughout the whole world and must exist in all ages, so that the decree of God's will may be fulfilled. In the beginning God made human nature one and decreed that all His children, scattered as they were, would finally be gathered together as one. It was for this purpose that God sent His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, that he might be teacher, king and priest of all, the head of the new and universal people of the sons of God. For this too God sent the Spirit of His Son as Lord and Life-giver. He it is who brings together the whole Church and each and every one of those who believe, and who is the well-spring of their unity in the teaching of the apostles and in fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayers.

It follows that though there are many nations there is but one people of God, which takes its citizens from every race, making them citizens of a kingdom which is of a heavenly rather than of an earthly nature. All the faithful, scattered though they be throughout the world, are in communion with each other in the Holy Spirit, and so, he who dwells in Rome knows that the people of India are his members." Since the kingdom of Christ is not of this world the Church or people of God in establishing that kingdom takes nothing away from the temporal welfare of any people. On the contrary it fosters and takes to itself, insofar as they are good, the ability, riches and customs in which the genius of each people expresses itself. Taking them to itself it purifies, strengthens, elevates and ennobles them. The Church in this is mindful that she must bring together the nations for that king to whom they were given as an inheritance, and to whose city they bring gifts and offerings. This characteristic of universality which adorns the people of God is a gift from the Lord Himself. By reason of it, the Catholic Church strives constantly and with due effect to bring all humanity and all its possessions back to its source In Christ, with Him as its head and united in His Spirit.

In virtue of this catholicity each individual part contributes through its special gifts to the good of the other parts and of the whole Church. Through the common sharing of gifts and through the common effort to attain fullness in unity, the whole and each of the parts receive increase. Not only, then, is the people of God made up of different peoples but in its inner structure also it is composed of various ranks. This diversity among its members arises either by reason of their duties, as is the case with those who exercise the sacred ministry for the good of their brethren, or by reason of their condition and state of life, as is the case with those many who enter the religious state and, tending toward holiness by a narrower path, stimulate their brethren by their example. Moreover, within the Church particular Churches hold a rightful place; these Churches retain their own traditions, without in any way opposing the primacy of the Chair of Peter, which presides over the whole assembly of charity and protects legitimate differences, while at the same time assuring that such differences do not hinder unity but rather contribute toward it. Between all the parts of the Church there remains a bond of close communion whereby they share spiritual riches, apostolic workers and temporal resources. For the members of the people of God are called to share these goods in common, and of each of the Churches the words of the Apostle hold good: "According to the gift that each has received, administer it to one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

All men are called to be part of this catholic unity of the people of God which in promoting universal peace presages it. And there belong to or are related to it in various ways, the Catholic faithful, all who believe in Christ, and indeed the whole of mankind, for all men are called by the grace of God to salvation.

14. This Sacred Council wishes to turn its attention firstly to the Catholic faithful. Basing itself upon Sacred Scripture and Tradition, it teaches that the Church, now sojourning on earth as an exile, is necessary for salvation. Christ, present to us in His Body, which is the Church, is the one Mediator and the unique way of salvation. In

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explicit terms He Himself affirmed the necessity of faith and baptism and thereby affirmed also the necessity of the Church, for through baptism as through a door men enter the Church. Whosoever, therefore, knowing that the Catholic Church was made necessary by Christ, would refuse to enter or to remain in it, could not be saved.

They are fully incorporated in the society of the Church who, possessing the Spirit of Christ accept her entire system and all the means of salvation given to her, and are united with her as part of her visible bodily structure and through her with Christ, who rules her through the Supreme Pontiff and the bishops. The bonds which bind men to the Church in a visible way are profession of faith, the sacraments, and ecclesiastical government and communion. He is not saved, however, who, though part of the body of the Church, does not persevere in charity. He remains indeed in the bosom of the Church, but, as it were, only in a "bodily" manner and not "in his heart." All the Church's children should remember that their exalted status is to be attributed not to their own merits but to the special grace of Christ. If they fail moreover to respond to that grace in thought, word and deed, not only shall they not be saved but they will be the more severely judged.

Catechumens who, moved by the Holy Spirit, seek with explicit intention to be incorporated into the Church are by that very intention joined with her. With love and solicitude Mother Church already embraces them as her own.

15. The Church recognizes that in many ways she is linked with those who, being baptized, are honored with the name of Christian, though they do not profess the faith in its entirety or do not preserve unity of communion with the successor of Peter. For there are many who honor Sacred Scripture, taking it as a norm of belief and a pattern of life, and who show a sincere zeal. They lovingly believe in God the Father Almighty and in Christ, the Son of God and Saviour. They are consecrated by baptism, in which they are united with Christ. They also recognize and accept other sacraments within their own Churches or ecclesiastical communities. Many of them rejoice in the episcopate, celebrate the Holy Eucharist and cultivate devotion toward the Virgin Mother of God. They also share with us in prayer and other spiritual benefits. Likewise we can say that in some real way they are joined with us in the Holy Spirit, for to them too He gives His gifts and graces whereby He is operative among them with His sanctifying power. Some indeed He has strengthened to the extent of the shedding of their blood. In all of Christ's disciples the Spirit arouses the desire to be peacefully united, in the manner determined by Christ, as one flock under one shepherd, and He prompts them to pursue this end. Mother Church never ceases to pray, hope and work that this may come about. She exhorts her children to purification and renewal so that the sign of Christ may shine more brightly over the face of the earth.

16. Finally, those who have not yet received the Gospel are related in various ways to the people of God. In the first place we must recall the people to whom the testament and the promises were given and from whom Christ was born according to the flesh. On account of their fathers this people remains most dear to God, for God does not repent of the gifts He makes nor of the calls He issues. But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator. In the first place amongst these there are the Muslims, who, professing to hold the faith of Abraham, along with us adore the one and merciful God, who on the last day will judge mankind. Nor is God far distant from those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God, for it is He who gives to all men life and breath and all things, and as Saviour wills that all men be saved. Those also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience. Nor does Divine Providence deny the helps necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God and with His grace strive to live a good life. Whatever good or truth is found amongst them is looked upon by the Church as a preparation for the Gospel. She knows that it is given by Him who enlightens all men so that they may finally have life. But often men, deceived by the Evil One, have become vain in their reasonings and have exchanged the truth of God for a lie, serving the creature rather than the Creator. Or some there are who, living and dying in this world without God, are exposed to final despair. Wherefore to promote the glory of God and procure the salvation of all of these, and mindful of the command of the Lord, "Preach the Gospel to every creature," the Church fosters the missions with care and attention.

**COURSE OUTLINE: The Church and Ecumenism**

- I. INTRODUCTION  
a. Recap discussion

**DISCUSSION**

**Please share your thoughts from last week on the discussion questions. *How do you foster a relationship with God in your students? How do you encourage family Mass participation?***

- II. THE FOUR MARKS OF THE CHURCH
- a. One
    - i. One source = the source of the Church's Oneness is the Oneness of God in the Trinity
    - ii. One soul = the Church is animated by the Holy Spirit
    - iii. One founder = Jesus Christ
    - iv. How we are One = Invisible and Visible Bonds of Communion with the Church
      - 1. Invisible = Life of Grace
      - 2. Visible = Profession of One Faith, Common Celebration of Sacraments, and Apostolic Succession
  - b. Holy
    - i. Holy because of the presence of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Saints
    - ii. The Holiness of the Church on earth is real but imperfect
  - c. Catholic
    - i. Universal = found all over the world
    - ii. Fullness of Salvation = Contains all elements set down by Christ for His Church
  - d. Apostolic
    - i. Built on the foundation of the Apostles
    - ii. Keeps and hands on faithfully the deposit of faith given to the Apostles
    - iii. Taught, sanctified, and governed by the successors to the Apostles

**DISCUSSION**

**Fr. Shenosky explains that the Holiness of the Church on earth is real but imperfect. What does this mean to you? How does this fact affect both your personal faith and the way you hand the faith down to the next generation?**

- III. THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE CHURCH
- a. *"All people are called to belong to the new people of God. [...] All men are called to be part of this catholic unity of the people of God which in promoting universal peace presages it. And there belong to or are related to it in various ways, the Catholic faithful, all who believe in Christ, and indeed the whole of mankind, for all men are called by the grace of God to salvation."* (*Lumen Gentium* II.13)
  - b. Catholics in Relation to the Church (*Lumen Gentium* II.14)
    - i. Visibly bonded with the Church through the profession of faith, the sacraments, and ecclesiastical government and communion
    - ii. Invisibly bonded through a life of grace
  - c. Other Christians in Relation to the Church (*Lumen Gentium* II.15)

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- i. There is a real though imperfect communion with the Catholic Church due to elements of sanctification and truth outside the Church = we are all baptized in Christ, honor Sacred Scripture, belief in the Trinity, etc.

### DISCUSSION

**How can we as Catholics better relate to other Christians in our community based on the precepts set out in *Lumen Gentium* 15?**

- d. Non-Christians in Relation to the Church (*Lumen Gentium* II.16)
  - i. Refers to all those who *“sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience.(19\*) Nor does Divine Providence deny the helps necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God and with His grace strive to live a good life. Whatever good or truth is found amongst them is looked upon by the Church as a preparation for the Gospel.”*
  - ii. The Catholic Church and the Jewish faith maintain a special relationship
    - 1. Revealed faith
    - 2. Expectation of the Messiah
    - 3. Our elder brothers in the faith
  - iii. The Catholic Church and the Muslim faith maintain a relationship founded in our common father, Abraham

#### IV. THE CHURCH'S ECUMENICAL COMMITMENT

- a. Vatican II acknowledged that there are elements of truth and holiness in other religious traditions and committed the Church to the furthering of the ecumenical movement in order to work towards Christian unity.
- b. Spiritual Ecumenism = praying for Christian unity
- c. Ecumenical Dialogue = better understanding of how each Christian community sees the Christian faith
- d. True Ecumenism = honest sharing of beliefs in an atmosphere of mutual respect in order to foster
- e. Interreligious Dialogue = aimed at the unity of humanity and promotion of world peace

#### V. “OUTSIDE THE CHURCH THERE IS NO SALVATION”

- a. The Church is the universal sacrament of salvation (*Lumen Gentium* VII.48)
- b. The Church is Christ's instrument for the salvation of all (*Lumen Gentium* II.9)
- c. All are called to belong to the people of God (*Lumen Gentium* II.13)
- d. Christ affirmed the necessity for faith and baptism = faith and baptism are found in the Church, therefore Christ affirms the necessity for the Church
- e. God offers to all the possibility of being made partakers or sharers in the Paschal mystery = anyone who is saved, no matter what religion they profess, is saved by Jesus Christ in his Paschal mystery
- f. The Church presumes the innocence of those who have not the Gospel or been turned away by poor examples of Christianity

**DISCUSSION**

**How must we live out the Church's ecumenical commitment while still maintaining and promoting the necessity for the Church? For example, what role does ecumenism play in our Catholic schools?**

**What does it mean to be a good ambassador for the Church? How does our personal faith life affect the salvation of others?**

VI. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS WITH FR. SHENOSKY

- a. An emphasis on community can be helpful in diverse settings.
- b. Pray with your students = they learn by example
- c. The sins of the people of the Church, both clergy and laity, call us to great humility and to a life of grace
- d. Ecumenism and interreligious dialogue always strives to focus on unity and what we hold in common rather than what divides us

**DISCUSSION**

**What is the difference between knowing Christ and having heard about Christ? How can we better teach knowledge of Christ to our students?**

**Given the presence of scandals and problems experienced in the Church's life throughout her history, how can Catholics profess that the Church is holy?**