

Lumen Gentium Part I: Mystery & Communion/Session II

REQUIRED READING

POPE JOHN XXIII AND VATICAN II

When Pope John XXIII was elected on October 28, 1958, at the age of 77, it was expected that he would be a short-term or stopgap pope. Many were surprised when, less than three months after his election, he called for a new ecumenical council. He was calling for something that would dramatically change the Catholic world with which we were familiar. When asked why the Council was needed, Pope John reportedly opened a window and said, “I want to throw open the windows of the Church so that we can see out and the people can see in.” He wanted to let in an abundance of “fresh air.” The theme of the Council was *aggiornamento*, which literally meant to bring the Church up to date. When the pope opened the Council, he expressed his optimistic spirit and outlook regarding what it could accomplish, saying, “Mother Church rejoices that the Council has finally begun!” He spoke of the benefits and blessings he foresaw flowing from it. He understood, as well, that his optimistic view would not be shared by everyone in the Church. He predicted that “prophets of doom” would appear, but he begged “to disagree” with them. Pope John went on to say, “Nowadays the Spouse of Christ [the Church] prefers to make use of the *medicine of mercy* rather than of severity. She considers that she meets the needs of the present day by demonstrating the validity of her teaching rather than by condemnation.” The pope expounded on the theme of the Church as a *loving Mother*, rather than as a *condemning Father*, saying, “The Catholic Church, raising the torch of religious truth by means of this ecumenical council, desires to show herself the loving mother of all—kind, patient, full of mercy and goodness toward the brothers and sisters who are separated from her.” Finally, the pope’s speech dealt with ecumenism and the need to bring all separated Christians and the whole human family into the *unity of one faith* and one fold. Pope John XXIII died on June 3, 1963, between the first two sessions of the Council. His successor, Pope Paul VI, was elected on June 21, 1963, and immediately called for the Council’s continuation. *NOTE: Pope John XXIII was canonized on April 27, 2014. St. John XXIII, pray for us!*

Four Constitutions of Vatican II: These documents are the most important from a theological perspective.

Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: the foundational document known as ***Lumen Gentium*** (or Christ as the “light of nations,”) teaches it is the radiance of Christ shines through the Church and upon all.

Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum): teaches that God reveals His plan for Salvation History through Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, which together “make up a single sacred deposit of the word of God, which is entrusted to the church.”

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium): was the first document promulgated by Pope Paul VI in 1963. This document addressed “the reform and promotion of the liturgy.”

Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes): the last and lengthiest document deals with the Church’s relationship with the world and all human activity.

Nine Decrees

Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church

Decree on the Up-to-Date Renewal of Religious Life

Decree on the Training of Priests

Decree on Ecumenism

Decree on the Mass Media

Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests

Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People

Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity

Decree on the Catholic Eastern Churches

Three Declarations: *Declaration on Christian Education; Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions;*

Declaration on Religious Liberty

COURSE OUTLINE: The Theology of the Church & Vatican II

I. INTRODUCTION

- a. Introductory remarks followed by short video and group discussion
- b. Pre-Reading discussion

DISCUSSION

St. John XXIII desired the Church to focus on being a *loving Mother*, rather than a *condemning Father*. How can we as Catholics better participate in this effort, especially given the social, moral, and political divisions today?

II. THE CHURCH AS A MYSTERY OF COMMUNION

- a. Vatican II took place from 1962-1965
- b. Authoritatively explained the theology of the Catholic Church to believers of the modern age
- c. *Lumen Gentium* – “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church”
 - i. Presents the Church as the mystery of communion and the people of God, with the ordained hierarchy existing to serve the people of God
 - ii. *“Since the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race, it desires now to unfold more fully to the faithful of the Church and to the whole world its own inner nature and universal mission.” (LG I.1)*
- d. The Church is a visible sign of invisible grace (ie. a sacrament)

III. THE CHURCH AS THE UNIVERSAL SACRAMENT OF SALVATION

- a. The reason the Church exists is to lead people to God
- b. *“Christ, having been lifted up from the earth has drawn all to Himself. Rising from the dead He sent His life-giving Spirit upon His disciples and through Him has established His Body which is the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation. Sitting at the right hand of the Father, He is continually active in the world that He might lead men to the Church and through it join them to Himself and that He might make them partakers of His glorious life by nourishing them with His own Body and Blood. Therefore the promised restoration which we are awaiting has already begun in Christ, is carried forward in the mission of the Holy Spirit and through Him continues in the Church in which we learn the meaning of our terrestrial life through our faith, while we perform with hope in the future the work committed to us in this world by the Father, and thus work out our salvation.” (LG VII.48)*

IV. IMAGES OF THE CHURCH

- a. The People of God
 - i. Everyone *without exception* is called to be a member of the Church
 - ii. A messianic people with a law of love, charity and truth
- b. The Body of Christ
 - i. Brought together as one body with many parts in Baptism
- c. The Bride of Christ

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- i. Christ and the Church are “one flesh” united in a “mystical marriage”
- d. The Temple of the Holy Spirit
 - i. The Holy Spirit is what facilitates the Church’s unity with Christ

DISCUSSION

As a teacher or catechist, how do you function as a visible sign of the invisible grace of the Church?

Of the various images used by Vatican II to describe the Church, which one do you think is the most helpful in understanding the nature of the Church?

V. THE CHURCH AS A COMMUNION OF LOVE

- a. A *communio* of love = “love one another as I have loved you”
- b. A *communio* of prayer = the first image of the Church in the New Testament is the Apostles gathered with Mary in prayer

VI. THE CHURCH AND THE EUCHARIST

- a. The Eucharist and the Paschal Mystery = a central event in the foundation of the Church
- b. The Eucharist is required for the life of the Church
- c. The Eucharist as a memorial of Christ’s death
- d. The Eucharist has always been a part of the Church founded by Christ
 - i. The real presence of Christ is the reason why the Eucharist must be central in the Church
 - ii. “At the Last Supper, on the night when He was betrayed, our Savior instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of His Body and Blood. He did this in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross throughout the centuries until He should come again, and so to entrust to His beloved spouse, the Church, a memorial of His death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a paschal banquet in which Christ is eaten, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us.” (Sacrosanctum Concilium “On Sacred Liturgy” II.47)
 - iii. “Not to go to communion is like someone dying of thirst beside a spring.” St. John Vianney

DISCUSSION

Why is the Eucharist so central to the life of the Church and to the spiritual life of Catholics, and what can be done to help more Catholics today appreciate the importance of this gift?

VII. DISCUSSION WITH FR. SHENOSKY (Part 1)

- a. God’s plan for salvation is perfectly wise and perfectly loving, but is not always easy for us to discern His reason for acting when and where He does.

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- b. God has reasons for what He wills = through our understanding of Natural Law we can discern some of God's reasons (we also have reason)
- c. Mystery = we cannot understand everything completely in this life
- d. Transubstantiation – what something appears to be (its accidental properties) is different than what something actually is (its true substance)

DISCUSSION

**What role does mystery play in both our understanding of and teaching about the Eucharist?
What does the Church mean by “transubstantiation”?**

VIII. DISCUSSION WITH FR. SHENOSKY (Part 2)

- a. The Un-Churched Catholic = Baptized Pagan
- b. Learning to perceive the Eucharist differently
- c. Priests play a key part in drawing the faithful to the Mass, yet no matter what the Eucharist awaits us there
- d. People make time and make sacrifices for what they love = fostering a love of God is key
 - i. Prayer is foundational for a love a God

DISCUSSION

How do you foster a relationship with God in your students and encourage family Mass participation?